



EU Programme for Employment and  
Social Innovation (EaSI)

# Sustainability at the heart of EaSI

Report of the Annual Conference 2019



# **EaSI Annual Conference**

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Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion  
EaSI Annual conference

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## Executive summary

The EaSI 2019 Annual Conference 'From EaSI to ESF+: supporting the sustainability of social and employment projects' was held in Brussels on 30 September 2019. The event was 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 post-2020 financial instrument to strengthen the EU's social dimension.

### *Ensuring sustainability in the current programme*

The EaSI programme contributes to achieving sustainable outcomes in employment, social inclusion, social protection, mobility and working conditions. It also creates space for social innovation to respond to current or emerging social needs, and provides catalyst funding for field testing innovative solutions with EU added value and a multiplier effect.

Sustainability should become an integral part of all stages of the programme's cycle, from its design and programming through to implementation and follow-up. Some calls already ask project promoters to plan and describe sustainability measures at the application phase. Monitoring and evaluation of the sustainability of EaSI results similarly form part of the programme. Often, experiences of ensuring sustainability are shared and discussed during the implementation phase, while dissemination, mainstreaming and follow-up activities take place after the project funding has ended. In the follow-up phase, sustainability is often ensured through subsequent EU or other funding.

### *Challenges and success factors in ensuring sustainability in EaSI*

Project beneficiaries face a number of challenges in their efforts to ensure the sustainability of their actions:

- The main barrier in many projects is the political pressure to obtain positive effects in a short period of time.
- The implementation period for some calls is too short and does not allow for more tangible results and a more lasting impact.
- Time lags mean that some projects may have difficulty in measuring their positive outcomes and impacts adequately at the end of the funding period.
- Although project promoters are required to co-finance their action, EU funding criteria often do not allow them to access funding from other EU programmes. This makes it hard in particular for private and non-profit organisations to provide their share of co-financing, discouraging them from applying to certain calls.
- Securing funding for the follow-up period may be difficult due to the lack of political interest or will, or limited national financing.
- Projects may experience a lack of synergies with other actions.
- There is a limited scaling up of social experiments nationally and transnationally.

The success factors identified by project beneficiaries include:

- Strong political will to implement the action and subsequently use its results.
- Strategic composition of the partnerships and the involvement of core stakeholders in the partnerships.
- Established cooperation, mutual trust, exchange of information and competence among the project partners, at both national and transnational level.
- Assistance in building partnerships, in particular transnationally, through contact points, networking activities and online platforms.
- Effective use of local and national stakeholders and resources.
- Involvement of the local communities at various levels and stages of project implementation.
- Access to more than one funding source in order to co-finance the action without interruptions.

- Timely planning and sequential implementation that leads to continuity (transition) without interruption.
- Effectiveness and replicability of tested services.
- Incremental innovation rather than radical/disruptive measures.
- Financial support and capacity-building to increase visibility and disseminate results.
- Sharing success stories of beneficiaries and organising transnational mutual learning activities.

*Looking forward: recommendations for the EaSI strand within ESF+*

A clear message from the conference is that sustainability is and should continue to be an important aspect of the new ESF+ structure. The participants made a number of recommendations:

- A win-win approach for all participating stakeholders is fundamental to ensuring the sustainability of the programme and the funded actions.
- Sustainability must be supported in all project phases: design, programming, implementation and follow-up.
- The quality of the partnerships should be guaranteed through bringing together public, civil society and private organisations, as well as organisations with a transnational perspective. They should have the human resources and financial capacity to implement and sustain the action and take ownership of the initiative from the beginning of the action, during its implementation, and after the funding has ended. Strategic partners that can co-finance and/or provide subsequent funding are an asset.
- There should be shared responsibilities and clear roles for the partners involved, continuous sharing of information among project partners, funding organisations and target groups, as well as ongoing capacity-building through mutual learning activities at national and transnational level.
- The duration and timing of project implementation should be in line with its objectives. Compressed review and allocation of funding times would allow beneficiaries to start/continue their action and meet risk changes in the policy measures and structures they want to address. Longer implementation periods are more suitable for some types of policy interventions and innovations, in order to better measure their impacts.
- Internal and external monitoring and evaluation of projects would support their efforts to ensure sustainability.
- More flexibility is necessary to react to potential changes in the policy landscape and to respond in innovative ways to issues arising during project implementation. Flexibility would also widen the scope for the application of innovative measures not foreseen during the design phase.
- Sustainability requires a 'reflective policy approach' based on independent evaluation of the governance, implementation, outcomes and impact of the programme. This approach is especially important because the EaSI programme funds social experimentation and mutual learning activities.

## Introduction

Implemented by the European Commission under direct and indirect management modes, the EaSI programme 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<sup>i</sup>.

The programme is composed of three axes, each supporting different objectives<sup>ii</sup>:

- > **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.

An important goal of EaSI is to provide space for social policy innovation to respond to social needs that are not met or are met insufficiently. 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.

In 2019, the European Commission organised the first EaSI annual conference, 'From EaSI to ESF+: supporting the sustainability of social and employment projects', held in Brussels on 30 September 2019. The conference brought together 157 representatives of the European Commission, EaSI Committee, ESF Committee, national public authorities and public employment services (PES), national and EU non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as project beneficiaries of the PROGRESS, EURES and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axes.

The event included presentations from selected project beneficiaries and the European Commission, addressing the issue of sustainability in the EaSI programme. There was also an exchange of practical experiences related to the sustainability of projects, and a discussion of lessons learned and ideas on how best to integrate those lessons into the future ESF+.

This report reflects on the discussions during the plenary sessions and the workshops, and identifies the challenges and lessons to date in ensuring sustainability within the EaSI programme.

## Setting the scene: EaSI as ambassador of social Europe

The conference was opened by **Mr Joost Korte (Director-General, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission)**, who outlined the valuable contribution of the EaSI and its predecessor programmes to EU policy in the last 15 years. He noted examples such as the renewed Social Agenda in 2008, the Active Inclusion Recommendation in 2019, and the rollout of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its accompanying initiatives since 2018 (such as the Work-Life Balance Directive or the Recommendation on Social Protection).

In the multi-annual financial framework post-2020, the EaSI programme will become part of the new ESF+ architecture, providing more opportunities for synergies and cooperation with the other ESF+ strands. Turning to the issue of sustainability, Mr Korte

highlighted the presence of sustainability issues on the agenda of the next Commission, first within the move to a climate-neutral economy, accompanied by the need to address the issues of digitalisation, new forms of work, the use of artificial intelligence and platform working in European labour markets. In this context, EaSI can provide valuable ideas on how to ensure that the future economic transitions are social, as evidenced by the valuable contribution of the EaSI programme so far. Mr Korte highlighted that by the end of 2018:

- EaSI supported 1200 beneficiaries and co-beneficiaries and 569 organisations in EU Member States and other participating countries.
- PROGRESS axis supported 96 projects, including 28 projects promoting social innovation on themes such as integrated social and employment services, support for the integration of migrants and, in 2018, the issue of access to social protection.
- EURES funds 13 cross-border partnerships that become more ambitious each year, delivering larger scale of actions. The EURES Portal is now among the top five most visited europa.eu websites, with more than 10 million visitors in 2018. The creation of the European Labour Authority (ELA) will take cross-border cooperation to a higher level.
- In the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis, EUR 920 million has been distributed through 62,500 loans to micro and social enterprises that have helped to create and sustain over 127,000 jobs across participating countries and represent a real success story. In the future, this will be reflected in the social window of the InvestEU programme (with an overall envelope of EUR 4 billion).

Thus, the results of EaSI are lasting. This is also true in the context of the programme delivering activities as an amplifier and multiplier of EU legislation. EaSI-funded activities have been used to prepare EU legislative initiatives on the ground, analyse their potential effects, collect evidence and discuss their potential at events organised at national level. This has contributed to building a considerable expert consensus between the core stakeholders in the Member States. EaSI funds also complemented the EUR 1.7 billion of investment in social innovation funded by the ESF in the 2014-2020 programming period. In addition, it has helped to fund exchanges of good practices and the identification of evidence for the public employment service (PES) network and the Social Policy network. In other words, EaSI beneficiaries have been the ambassadors and ears on the ground of social Europe.



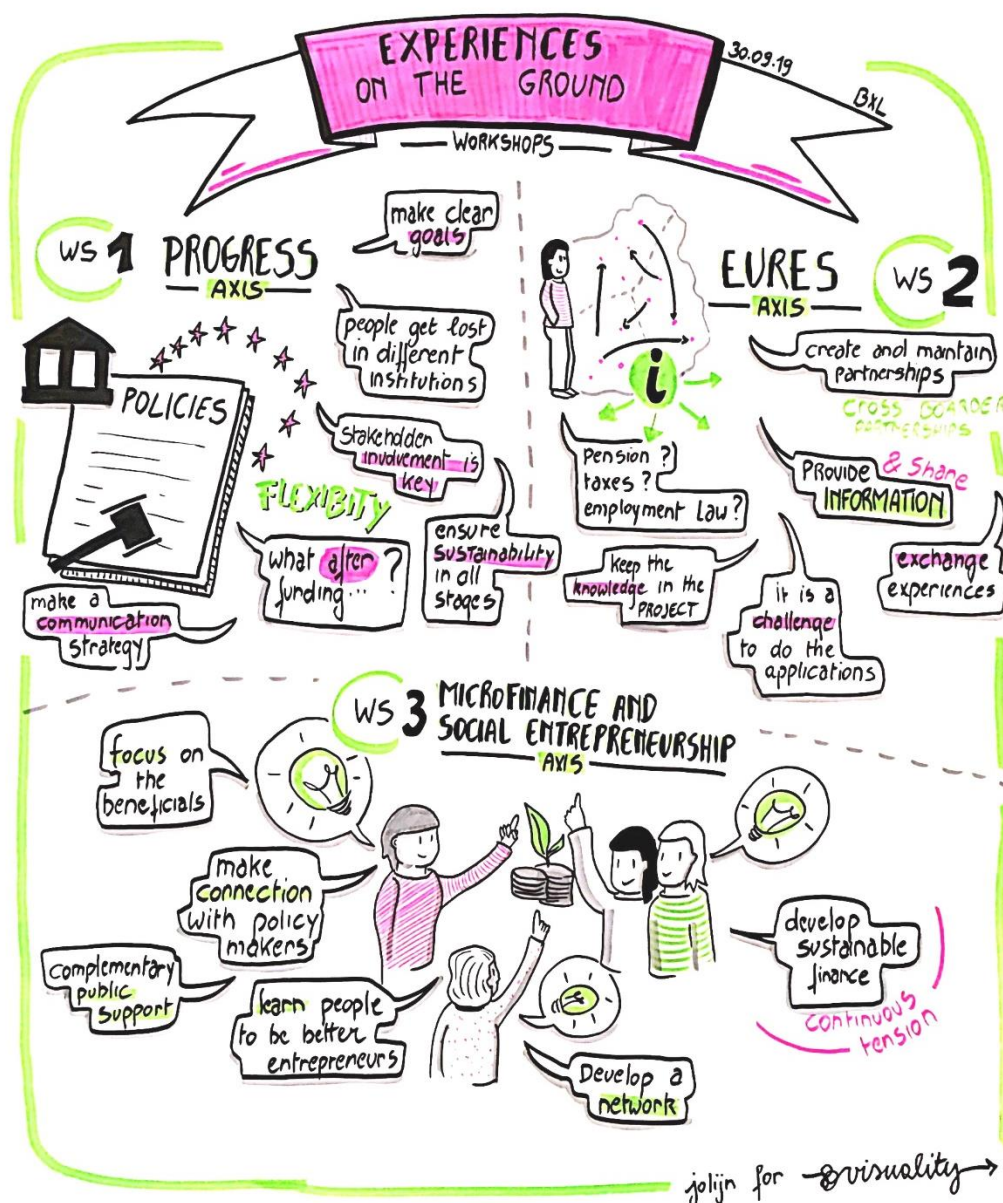


This inspiring introduction was followed by the keynote speech from **Prof. Dr. Gerhard Bosch (Director of the Institute for Work, Skills and Training at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany)**. Prof. Dr. Bosch outlined the core idea of the need to consciously support sustainability as it is not an automatic outcome of EaSI. Instead, it requires reflection and the ability to learn from the outcomes of past implementation. The contribution of EaSI is critical in delivering the social dimension of the single market, and addressing increasing economic and social divergence within the EU.

In this context, EaSI has funded cooperation, networks and exchanges of experiences that have influenced political decisions at EU and national level (e.g. the Posted Workers Directive). Sustainability must, in turn, be supported in all project phases. Sustainable effects can be both intentional and unintentional, which requires a certain openness to unexpected results. Attention to sustainability also means the consideration of outcomes from EaSI activities in the long-term, as sufficient time is very important for the impacts to become visible.

Equally critical is the willingness to take risks in the implementation and piloting of new activities that can achieve sustained outcomes. The ownership of results is critical to sustainability, as is the quality of the partnerships and networks that implement

activities. Finally, the actions in the follow-up phase of EaSI projects are crucial, as this is the site of mainstreaming or scaling-up of activities.



### Experiences on the ground: PROGRESS axis

The workshop focused on experiences of achieving sustainability in the PROGRESS axis of the EaSI programme and looked at the lessons learned and the way forward<sup>iii</sup>. The workshop was chaired by **Ms Brigitte Fellahi-Brognaux, Head of Unit for Programming and Planning, DG EMPL**. The workshop was opened by contributions from four projects:



- **Ms Hanne Denoo, 'MISSION - Mobile Integrated Social Services Increasing employment Outcomes for people in need'** (VP/2015/011 - Integrated social services for integration in the labour market)<sup>iv</sup> presented the project's experience of working with local providers to test new approaches to increase the take-up of social services. Scaling-up project activities is an explicit aim of the project and stakeholder engagement at different levels has been key (through a local stakeholder platform of all service providers, a steering group with different levels of government and experts, and an EU

advisory committee).

- **Mr Pietro Ruffolo, 'RAISE UP - grass Root Actions, Innovative approaches and Stakeholders Engagement to tackle Undeclared work Propensity'** (VP/2017/005 - Activities in the field of undeclared work) presented the project that engaged key stakeholders in strategic discussions to develop more responsive policies and measures to tackle undeclared



work in agriculture, using a holistic approach. Transnational actions included joint outreach education and awareness campaigns, transnational cooperative actions, fostering a high trust and high commitment culture, masterplans and roadmaps for future actions, and an online learning platform. The project focused on the sustainability of results in all project phases (planning, design and delivery).



- **Mr Claudio Vitali, 'EQUAL - Enhancing Qualification of Adult Learners through the implementation of Upskilling pathways'** (VP/2017/011 - Awareness-raising activities on 'Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults')<sup>v</sup> addressed the issue of sustainability through a rigorous analysis of the problems, with the project as a 'founding act'. A scenario exercise helped to choose project implementation strategies and relevant indicators. Taking stock of existing policies, approaches and the most recent evaluation of achievements and results was also helpful. Finally, the project ensured the

relevance and representativeness of partnership members.

- **Ms Sonila Danaj, 'POOSH - Occupational Safety and Health of Posted Workers'**<sup>vi</sup>: **Depicting the existing and future challenges in assuring decent working conditions and wellbeing of workers in hazardous sectors'** (VP/2016/006 - Posting of workers: enhancing administrative cooperation and access to information) explained how the sustainability of results was achieved during and after the project. Measures taken included the





establishment of a strong transnational multi-stakeholder network, a thorough review of the existing literature, the publication of results in multiple free access formats for various audiences, and information dissemination through a Transnational OSH e-Observatory ([www.poosh.eu](http://www.poosh.eu)) and other channels of communication in multiple languages. Since the project ended, the e-Observatory has been maintained by the lead partner, with new initiatives and follow-up projects implemented. Further publications are also underway.

In the group discussions, workshop participants reflected on their experiences to date and developed the following recommendations on how sustainability can be taken into account in the EaSI programme:



### Planning stage

- > Planning should reflect a win-win situation for all parties involved.
- > Consideration should be given to the potential transferability of project outputs.
- > Facilitating clustering and cross-area linkages could be beneficial in boosting sustainability efforts.
- > Setting up partnerships informed by a stakeholder analysis at all levels (national/regional/local and/or transnational, public-private partnerships) to support the implementation, dissemination and mainstreaming of results. Including policy makers and key stakeholders from the outset helps to inform the process and facilitate engagement.
- > Organising regular meetings/events helps to raise visibility and to establish contact with potential partners.
- > Allow room for flexibility and innovation in terms of adapting the partnership, methods and activities during the implementation phase.
- > Address incompatibility of co-financing sources in order to be able to include other funders in the project.
- > Resources should be allocated to dissemination and visibility activities that must be clearly indicated in the workplan.



### Implementation stage

- > Flexibility is required to experiment and adapt innovations to changing circumstances, not only at project level but also for the European Commission.
- > Increased collaboration between the European Commission and the projects is useful as part of the monitoring process. Ongoing communication and visits create a better understanding of the projects and could help to maximise their impact.
- > At EU level, mutual learning activities and meetings should be supported and organised to facilitate exchanges of information, knowledge and experience with projects and partners of current and past projects. Efforts should be made to share innovation with other programmes.
- > Support at EU level is required to build the capacity of projects to ensure sustainable results, particularly in relation to policy relevance and addressing barriers to sustainability.

- > Better cooperation between beneficiaries and stakeholders is required during implementation. This will also help projects to adapt to changing needs and contexts.
- > Projects should be encouraged to develop a clear communication strategy to underpin their dissemination and visibility efforts.
- > Ongoing and final evaluations are important to provide evidence on those project activities that can be scaled up and transferred.



### Follow-up stage

- > Better monitoring of success and achievements would help to understand which activities are worth scaling up.
- > A mutual learning platform to exchange project experiences could be helpful to promote sustainability.
- > Greater emphasis on monitoring rather than auditing would help to support sustainability at all stages.
- > Mutual learning should be supported on an ongoing basis.
- > Increased focus on transferability of practices and experiences.
- > Project results need to be actively disseminated, knocking on the 'right doors' to share project results.
- > Encourage stakeholders to build on project results.
- > Suggestions made to policy makers can lead to improvements in the planning of national resources (e.g. upscaling) thus the EaSI project should be seen as a laboratory for innovation.
- > Mainstreaming results requires clear strategies, engagement and consultation with policy makers and key stakeholders, as well as active lobbying.

## Experiences on the ground: EURES axis

The workshop took stock of the progress to date in achieving sustainability in the EURES axis of the EaSI programme, looking at the lessons learned and the way forward<sup>vii</sup>. The workshop was chaired **by Mr Denis Genton, Head of Unit for Free movement of workers, EURES, DG EMPL**. Mr Genton noted that the EURES axis has undergone ambitious reform since 2016, with an improved network and new projects. The establishment of the European Labour Authority (ELA) is an important recent development for the EURES network.

The workshop was opened by contributions from three projects:

- **Ms Teresa Ventin, 'EURES Cross-Border Partnership Galicia-North Portugal'**<sup>viii</sup> (VP/2016/005 - Cross-border partnerships and support to



cooperation on intra-EU mobility for EEA countries and social partners). This is one of the oldest EURES projects and shows the experience of many years of cooperation across two regions with similar economic structures. The project works to make the cross-border labour market transparent and to provide all of the necessary information to workers and companies about the working and living conditions. This one-stop-shop approach has been very

successful. The project's partnership structure is large and is facilitated by a clear division of roles and responsibilities. The partnership's success is chiefly due to adding the cross-border aspect to their normal services and activities. Without the economic support of EURES, carrying out such activities in the partnership would be difficult.

- **Ms Gisela Sarri, 'Targeted Mobility Scheme - Your first EURES job - Sweden'** (VP/2018/009 - Targeted mobility scheme 'Your first EURES job') presented the implementation of the fifth EURES project addressing the needs of employers to fill vacancies and



those of jobseekers looking for jobs. The project places considerable emphasis on quality over quantity in its outcomes. Without EaSI funding, it would be difficult to sustain the level and range of supports provided, which now include a comprehensive package of language training, integration support and other measures. The success of the project stems from good cooperation among the partners, which has been built up over time. Additional success factors are effective collaboration with quality employers, an emphasis on fair and transparent mobility, and good marketing (including a strong online presence). The main challenges relate to labour market fluctuations (vacancies available), different regulations for traineeships in the participating countries, and some participants lack of access to digitalised services. The project has developed tools that could be used in other countries, such as the 'speed interview' self-service tool to undertake job interviews faster.

- **Ms Sarah O'Brien, 'EURES Cross-Border Partnership Scheldemond'**<sup>ix</sup> (VP/2016/005 - Cross-border partnerships and support to cooperation on intra-EU mobility for EEA countries and social partners) outlined the experience of delivering a project in the border region between Belgium and the Netherlands. The project is delivered by a partnership composed of the PES, trade unions, municipalities and private recruitment agencies, as well as social security institutions. The project has recently developed an IT application for employers, which could also be used in other contexts.

In the group discussions, workshop participants reflected on their experiences so far and developed the following recommendations on how sustainability can be taken into account in the EaSI programme:



### Planning stage

- > The desired impact of the project activities should be considered from the outset of project planning. For example, clear objectives should be set, including the number of people to be targeted. This requires a longer-term strategy for the project and a vision of how to take forward the results after the project ends.
- > Dissemination and visibility activities should be encompassed in the project plan.
- > The use of partnerships and clear allocation of specific roles and responsibilities in respect of sustainability should be identified from the outset. This requires careful financial planning and allocation of appropriate resources to support sustainability activities.



### Implementation stage

- > All partners must work in the same direction to achieve common goals. This can be achieved through regular meetings, close monitoring of activities and sharing implementation information.
- > The partnership also needs to be proactive in identifying opportunities to follow-up project results.



### Follow-up stage

- > The challenge in integrating EaSI results into regular/mainstream national services is compounded by the difficulties in maintaining institutional knowledge of the project, given the fluctuation of project staff and the short project duration (1-2 years).
- > Efforts must be made to disseminate project results at regional and national levels, backed by statistics on the project's success.
- > Direct management of Targeted Mobility Scheme (TMS) projects by the ELA is one potential way forward, backed by multinational project teams or a permanent TMS programme.
- > Several suggestions were made to safeguard the project's financial sustainability: 1) the project could be moved to the ESF; 2) EU funding could be replaced with national funding; or 3) partner contributions could be increased, thereby reducing reliance on EU funding.
- > European Commission support for the communication and dissemination of project results is helpful here.

## Experiences on the ground: Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis

The workshop took stock of the progress so far in achieving sustainability in the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis of the EaSI programme, together with the lessons learned and the way forward<sup>x</sup>. The workshop was chaired by **Ms Ann Branch, Head of Unit for Job Creation, DG EMPL**. This axis provides funding to help promote social enterprises. It entails different types of support, including financial instruments in the form of loans and equity, as well as transaction cost support and support to the work of European networks in this area. Three projects were introduced to set the scene for the workshop discussions:

- **Ms Priscilla Boiardi, European Venture Philanthropy Association' (EVPA),**



'Strengthening and supporting a European ecosystem for social enterprise finance' (VP/2018/016 - Operating grants to EU level networks active in the areas of social inclusion and poverty reduction) presented a project that started in 2014. The partnership is composed of organisations that are willing to take risks and support innovative projects, with the key aim of providing an open channel

between the supply chain of capital and EVPA members. One of the key outcomes reported is that 80% of members' work has been improved, thanks to the support from the EVPA.

- **Mr Elwin Groenevelt, Qredits Microfinanciering Nederland** (microfinance provider benefitting from the EaSI guarantee instrument) provided an overview of a project that receives financial support from the national government and commercial banks. This project aimed to be financially sustainable after three years, to, use sophisticated IT applications to make the back-office efficient, and to cooperate actively with banks. The loan organisation is based on a credit system, availability of a fast-track procedure and online applications, supported by loan officers. EaSI funding helped to provide more loans (an estimated additional 15%) and to decrease the risk taken by financial intermediaries.



- **Mr Xavier Pont Martin, Fundacion SHIP2B, 'EaSI Transaction Cost Support Project'** (VP/2017/013 -

Transaction cost support for social enterprise finance) discussed a project that addressed the need to develop the initial stages of social enterprise development. Priority was given to developing an acceleration programme.

Sustainability is achieved through supporting entrepreneurs and investors. The project successfully developed the first impact investors' network in Spain. EaSI funding was helpful in addressing transaction costs and building a strong investment team.



In the group discussions, workshop participants reflected on their experiences and developed the following recommendations on how sustainability can be taken into account in the EaSI programme:



### Planning stage

- > It is important to develop activities whose results will interest and attract further funders. Having the European Commission on board as



a partner and funder increases the project's credibility at national and local level. This should be accompanied by actions to seek cooperation with relevant stakeholders, such as managing authorities and credit unions.

- > Project design should pay close attention to the whole eco-system and regulatory framework for microfinance and social enterprise, as these are likely to be important factors affecting sustainability.
- > Projects should develop a business model for intermediaries relying on both public funding sources and other contributions. There is a continuous need for complementary public support.



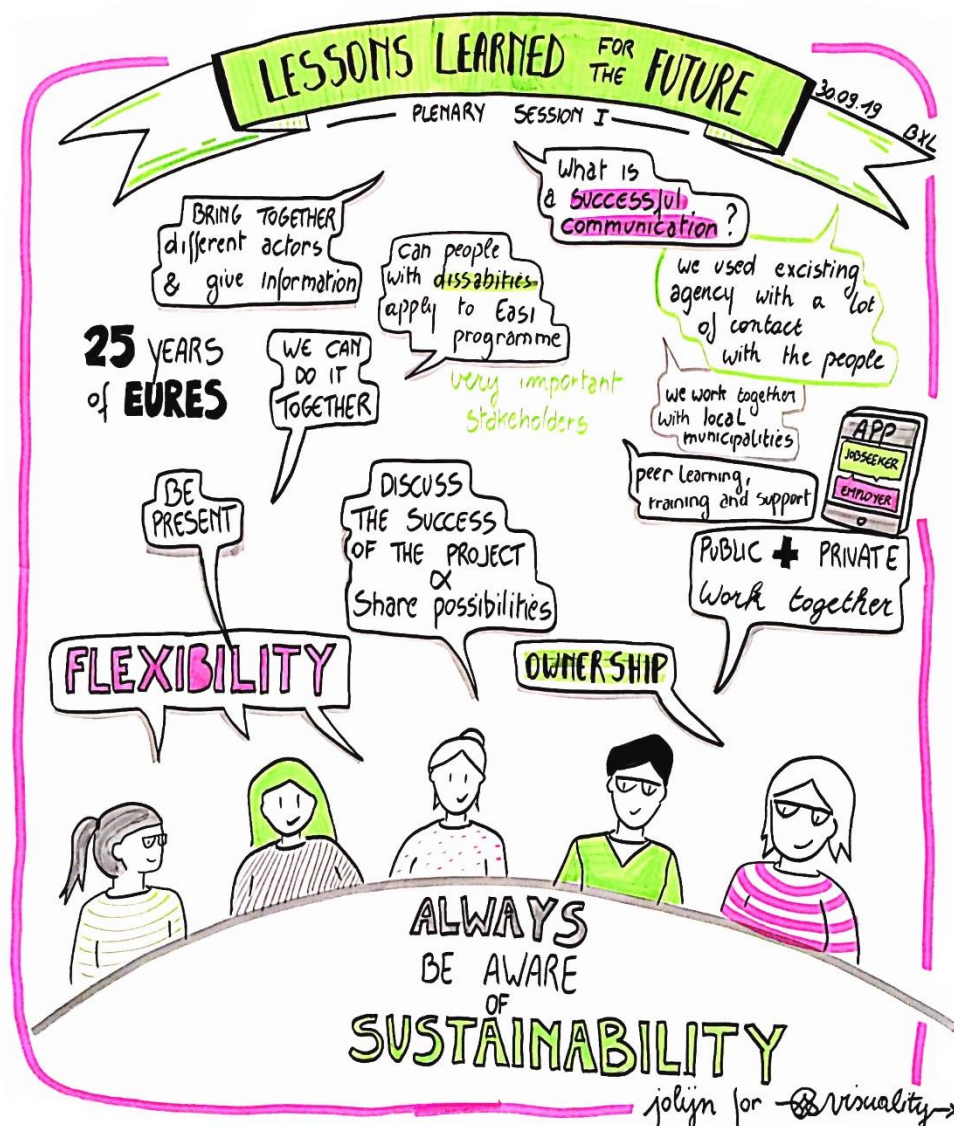
### **Implementation stage**

- > Visibility activities are important to ensure awareness of EaSI-funded activities.
- > Continuous training to financial intermediaries is essential, as is strong cooperation between the project partners and stakeholders.
- > Strengthening the capacity-building of financial intermediaries is important.



### **Follow up stage**

- > It is critical to measure results and impacts to determine which loans and activities have worked best to produce the intended outcomes. Demonstrating impact is key when the projects discuss further steps with government representatives and/or private investors.
- > Sustainability is a challenge, as developing an ecosystem supporting microfinance/social enterprise is complicated and requires holistic support.



## Lessons learned

During the afternoon panel discussion, the workshop speakers articulated the key lessons from their EaSI project experiences. The panel was moderated by **Ms Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic, Director Social Affairs, DG EMPL** and featured the following speakers:

- **Mr Gauthier Cocle**, EaSI Committee member for Belgium.
- **Ms Hanne Denoo** (reporting on the discussions from the PROGRESS workshop).
- **Ms Sarah O'Brien** (reporting on the discussions from the EURES workshop).
- **Ms Priscilla Boiardi** (reporting on the discussions from the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship workshop).

Reflecting on the exchange of EaSI project experiences so far, the panel shared the following lessons:

- Sustainability requires attention and critical reflection at all stages of the project lifecycle.

- The quality of the project partnership is key to supporting sustainability. Clear wins and roles for all participating partners should be visible right at the start of implementation.
- Longer implementation periods tend to support the planned activities better and allow more time for the dissemination and visibility of results. Achieving sustainable impacts often takes time and project timeframes should allow for that.
- Supporting policy and practice innovations involves risk and accepting that a certain proportion of results might not be successful. There should be clear monitoring of results and impacts (including over the longer term), together with the flexibility to adjust project activities to changing needs on the ground.
- Sharing results at national, regional and local level is key to promoting their sustainability. Projects should have clear communication and outreach strategies, using all available tools, local and national channels and stakeholders, as well as identifying the 'unusual' suspects who might not be the first port of call. This has different implications in various EaSI axes. In the EURES axis for example, it is substantially easier to use the existing live register of jobseekers at the PES level. Employer outreach is much more difficult and it is here that a host of approaches, such as business-to-business events or work with local municipalities, can be applied. In the social entrepreneurship area, it is challenging to reach beyond the standard networks to those investors who may be unfamiliar with the concept of social investment to start with.
- EaSI Committee members at national level play an important role in assisting the European Commission in the development of the programme, and making links between the concrete projects and implementation of the annual work programme. Creating strong partnerships with the EaSI Committee can help to bring together the broad range of stakeholders needed to disseminate the results of EaSI projects effectively.
- The EU-level EaSI website could be enriched to bring together and highlight the range of successes and impacts achieved, as well as approaches implemented by the various EaSI projects. The current and planned large communication campaigns (such as the current campaign on 25 years of EURES or 'Week of Action to tackle undeclared work' in 2020) could also be used to highlight results of specific EaSI projects.

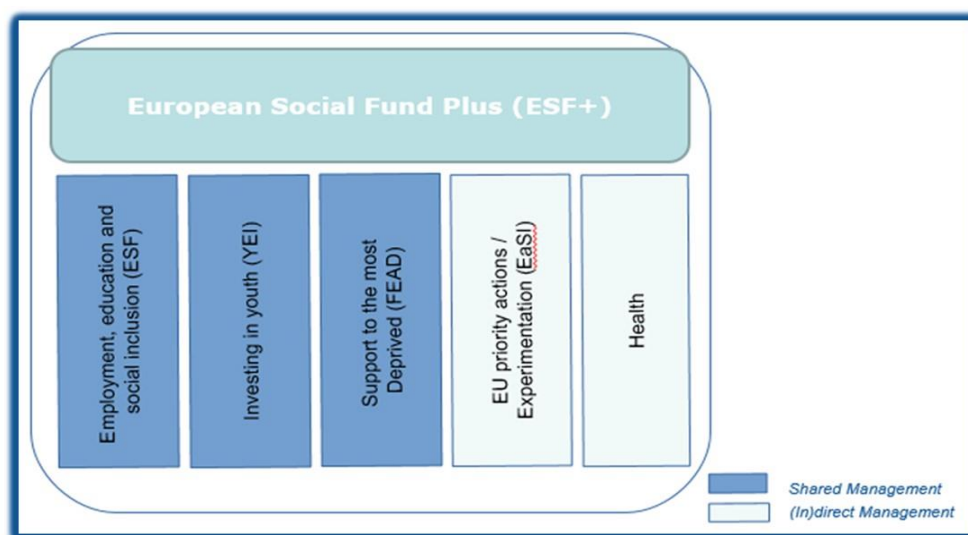


## From EaSI to ESF+: key steps for a successful transition

This session explored how the synergies offered by the single ESF+ Regulation could be used in practice.

**Mr Loris Di Pietrantonio, Head of Unit ESF and FEAD<sup>1</sup>, DG EMPL** opened the session with a presentation on the future ESF+ design. Mr Di Pietrantonio explained that the integration of EaSI and other EU funds into the future ESF+ is not an objective *per se*, but a means to change the lives of European citizens and strengthen the EU's social dimension.

<sup>1</sup> Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.



The 2021-2027 funding period will see an ESF+ budget of over EUR 101 billion, representing 27% of the overall Cohesion Policy envelope. The new ESF+ offers strong alignment with the European Semester process and the implementation of Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs), and requires 25% of national allocations to be earmarked for social inclusion. Around EUR 200 million will be provided for transnational cooperation, and the cross fertilisation of ideas and exchanges between national and regional stakeholders. This should offer a social European response to the current and future challenges facing European workforces and societies.

The new programme will increase the opportunities for good results from EaSI projects to be scaled up, as well as simplifying the process. However, substantially greater effort is required to ensure that scaling-up and synergies are implemented in practice. More structured support for social innovation is needed, as well as deliberate planning to translate successful pilot projects into mainstream policies and practices.

Other speakers in the session offered their experiences of ensuring transferability and sustainability of projects:

**Mr Vjačeslavs Makarovs** described **the Latvian experience** of transferability, where the results of an EaSI-funded project '**Developing a Comprehensive Active Ageing Strategy for Longer and Better Working Lives**' (VP/2013/009 – Support the development of comprehensive active ageing strategies) were used to develop a national strategy. The project developed an evidence-based and comprehensive active ageing strategy in Latvia to facilitate longer and better working lives, taking into account the considerable demographic challenges facing the country. The



Ministry of Welfare  
Republic of Latvia

decision to use the PROGRESS project's results as an input for the Conceptual Report and ESF project was perfectly timed, as it coincided with the start of the 2014-2020 programming period.



**Ms Cristina Imbroglini** presented the approach of the EaSI-funded project '**INSPIRE – INovative Services for fragile People IN Rome**' (VP/2014/008 - Social policy innovations supporting reforms in social services)<sup>xi</sup>. Its specific goals were to develop systemic actions, test innovative services and use innovative design criteria for the reuse of abandoned space for social activities. According to this experience, the key



success factors were the involvement of local communities and dissemination of detailed results. The project toolkit was key to its transferability to ESF, as it includes useful documents, an intervention model, and an assessment of experimental services and guidelines. The project is also closely aligned with ESF+ priorities.

Experiences of EU Member State support for scaling-up/mainstreaming were presented by **Ms Jill Everaerd, Europe for Citizens Programme Contact Point**. She shared the work experience of national contact points for the programme, whose objective is to share information and support projects to develop dissemination strategies.

**Ms Andriana Sukova, Deputy Director General, DG EMPL** closed the conference with some concluding remarks. She highlighted that 'impact' was the key word in the rich and participatory conference discussions. The impact of activities funded is critical for the results-oriented EU budget. Achieving sustainability is not only a question of funding but also requires a strong commitment and involvement of key stakeholders, as well as wide dissemination and sharing of experiences. Looking forward, ESF+ will offer opportunities for smaller scale projects to innovate, and it is important that different project ideas find the most appropriate funding. Cooperation and exchange of project ideas and experiences is key to ensuring that the funding provided through different means and instruments addresses the diverse needs of Europe's citizens.

## Conclusions and recommendations



### Challenges

- > The main barrier for many projects is **political pressure** to obtain positive effects in a short period of time.
- > The **implementation period** for some calls is too short and does not allow for more tangible results or longer lasting impact.
- > **Time lags** mean that some projects may have difficulty in measuring their positive outcomes and impacts adequately at the end of the funding period.
- > Although project promoters are required to co-finance their action, **EU funding criteria** often do not allow them to access funding from other EU programmes. This makes it hard for private non-profit organisations to provide their share of co-financing, discouraging them from applying for certain calls.
- > **Securing funding for the follow-up** period may be difficult due to a lack of political interest or will, limited national financing or lack of synergies with other actions.
- > **Limited scaling-up** of social experiments nationally and transnationally during the project duration.



### Solutions

- > **Strong political** will to implement the action and subsequently use its results.
- > **Strategic composition of the partnerships** and the involvement of core stakeholders in those partnerships.
- > **Established cooperation, mutual trust, exchange of information** and competence among the project partners, at both national and transnational level.
- > **Assistance in building partnerships**, in particular transnationally, through contact points, networking activities and online platforms.

- > Effective use of **existing local and national stakeholders and resources**. Involvement of local communities at various levels and stages of project implementation.
- > **Access to more than one funding source** in order to co-finance the action without interruption.
- > **Timely planning and sequential implementation** that leads to continuity (transition) without interruption.
- > **Effectiveness and replicability** of tested services.
- > **Incremental innovation** rather than radical/disruptive measures.
- > **Financial support** and capacity-building to increase visibility and disseminate results.
- > **Sharing success stories** of beneficiaries and organising transnational mutual learning activities.



## Recommendations

- > **A win-win approach** for all participating stakeholders is fundamental to ensuring the sustainability of the programme and the funded actions.
- > Sustainability has to be supported in **all project phases**: design, programming, implementation and follow-up.
- > **The quality of the partnerships** should be guaranteed by bringing together public, civil society and private organisations, as well as organisations with a transnational perspective. They should have the human resources and financial capacity to implement and sustain the action, and take ownership of the initiative from planning through to implementation and after the funding has ended. Strategic partners that can co-finance and/or provide subsequent funding are an asset.
- > There should be **shared responsibilities and clear roles** for the partners involved, continuous sharing of information among project partners, funding organisations and target groups, as well as ongoing capacity-building through mutual learning activities at national and transnational level.
- > The **duration and timing of project** implementation should be in line with its objectives. Compressed review and allocation of funding times would allow beneficiaries to start/continue their action and meet the risk of changes in the policy measures and structures they want to address. Longer implementation periods are more suitable for some types of policy interventions and innovations in order to better measure their impacts.
- > **Internal and external monitoring and evaluation** of projects would support their efforts to ensure sustainability.
- > **More flexibility** is necessary to react to potential changes in the policy landscape and respond in innovative ways to issues arising during project implementation. Flexibility would also widen the scope for the application of innovative measures that were not foreseen during the design phase.

## Annex 1: Conference agenda

30 September 2019, Brussels, Belgium

| Time               | Session  |
|--------------------|--|
| 09.30-10:00        | <b>Opening &amp; welcome</b>   |
| 10.00-11:00        | <b>Setting the scene</b>   |
| 11.00-12:45        | <b>Group discussions: experiences on the ground (parallel workshops)</b><br>Workshop 1 – PROGRESS axis, Palace Ballroom I&II<br>Workshop 2 – EURES axis, Creativity & Exploration Room<br>Workshop 3 – Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis, Klimt Room |
| <b>12.45-14:30</b> | <b>Lunch break, Palace Lobby</b>   |
| 14.30-15:30        | Afternoon plenary session I, Palace Ballroom I&II<br><b>Panel discussions on lessons learned for the future</b>  |
| <b>15.30-15:45</b> | <b>Coffee break, Palace Lobby</b>  |
| 15.45-16:45        | Afternoon plenary session II, Palace Ballroom I&II<br><b>From EaSI to ESF+: key steps for a successful transition</b>  |
| 16.45-17:30        | <b>Concluding remarks</b>  |
| <b>17.30</b>       | <b>Networking cocktail</b>   |



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<sup>i</sup>See EaSI legal text at:

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

<sup>iii</sup> Information about other axes is available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081>

<sup>iii</sup> The workshop background note provides further information about sustainability within the axes:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1081&eventsId=1484&furtherEvents=yes>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://missionprojectsite.wordpress.com/>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.upskillingitaly.eu>

<sup>vi</sup> [www.poosh.eu](http://www.poosh.eu)

<sup>vii</sup> The workshop background note provides further information about sustainability within the axes:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1081&eventsId=1484&furtherEvents=yes>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.eures-norteportugal-galicia.org/>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.euresscheldemond.info/home/>

<sup>x</sup> The workshop background note provides further information about sustainability within the axes:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1081&eventsId=1484&furtherEvents=yes>

<sup>xi</sup> [https://www.comune.roma.it/pcr/it/dip\\_pr\\_srv\\_soc\\_sal\\_enspirNadiae.page](https://www.comune.roma.it/pcr/it/dip_pr_srv_soc_sal_enspirNadiae.page)

