



**EU PROGRAMME FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL
INNOVATION**

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

VP/2015/010

**Open to EU-level NGO networks having
signed a**

Framework Partnership Agreement

for 2014-2017

**BEING ACTIVE IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AND
POVERTY REDUCTION or MICROFINANCE AND SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE FINANCE**

FOR OPERATING GRANTS

Period covered: 01.01.2016 – 31.12.2016

EU PROGRAMME FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR OPERATING GRANTS OPEN TO EU-LEVEL NGO NETWORKS HAVING SIGNED A FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT FOR 2014-2017 AND BEING ACTIVE IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AND POVERTY REDUCTION or MICROFINANCE AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE FINANCE

I BACKGROUND: EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)¹

The European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" 2014-2020² is a European-level financing instrument managed directly by the European Commission to contribute to the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, by providing financial support for the Union's objectives in terms of promoting a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty and improving working conditions.

II PURPOSE OF THE CALL AND AREA OF ACTIVITIES COVERED BY THE CALL

This call for proposals aims to provide operating grants for 2016 under the Framework Partnership Agreements concluded for the period 2014-2017 to provide for long term cooperation between the European Commission and EU level NGO networks.

The Framework Partnership Agreements were signed at the end of the 2013 following the call for proposals VP/2013/006 for framework partners. They set out the framework conditions governing potential operating grants and encompass a quadrennial strategic action plan proposed by the EU-level NGO Networks and accepted by the EC.

Framework Partnership Agreements have been concluded with

- 1. European level networks active in the promotion of social inclusion and poverty reduction**
- 2. European level networks active in the promotion of access to finance (microfinance and social enterprise finance).**

This call refers to these two groups of networks separately with regard to the description of the policy context, the definition of priorities and potential specific agreements for operating grants.

¹ REGULATION (EU) No 1296/2013

² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1081>

III POLICY CONTEXT AND MAIN OBJECTIVES

1. European level networks active in the promotion of social inclusion and poverty reduction

As outlined in the agenda for "Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change"³ and taken up by the Annual Growth Survey 2015⁴, modernising social protection systems and supporting the development of adequate social protection schemes throughout Europe will be among the key initiatives in the area of social policies in the next years. Social protection mechanisms should be efficient and adequate at all stages of a person's life; there is a need for simplified and better targeted social policies to address the current challenges. Another focus will be on the monitoring of social progress and the impact of reforms over time and the reinforcement of the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union.

The Europe 2020 Strategy set ambitious goals to cope with the long term challenges of globalisation, resource efficiency, demographic and technological change. With its target on reducing poverty and social exclusion, it aims to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. The economic crisis triggered an ongoing social crisis and slow recovery is hampering efforts to reduce the high levels of unemployment. The EU and its Member States must deal with a range of long-term trends affecting strongly the employment and social situation of many European citizens.

The primary responsibility for delivering on the Europe 2020 targets is in the hands of the Member States; in the field of social protection and social investment, the EU supports and complements the activities of the Member States in form of policy guidance, knowledge sharing, expertise, data and analysis, and financial support.

The European Semester is the main policy process to coordinate European and national policies and efforts to reach the Europe 2020 targets. The EU semester allows for integrated monitoring of progress on the 2020 targets and has offered EU-wide and country-by-country guidance to Member States on priority reforms, giving country specific recommendations. Introducing employment and social indicators into the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) allows for a better understanding of the labour market and social developments and risks and increases its relevance in the Semester process. The reinforced link between the European Semester and the EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in the new funding period 2014 – 2020 will also help Member States in addressing major employment and social problems.

Involvement and close association of parliaments, social partners and representatives of civil society is essential to ensure ownership and facilitate implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, ESIF and the SIP. In particular, the Social NGO Networks have the potential to support active inclusion and modernisation of social protection at national and local level while also shedding light on social developments and policy challenges in the different countries. Also Member States are invited to involve national parliaments, social partners and representatives of civil society more strongly in the preparation of the National Reform Programmes, the implementation of country-specific recommendations and the implementation of ESIF.

³ Cf. Political Guidelines for the new Commission of 15 July 2014: http://ec.europa.eu/about/junckercommission/docs/pg_en.pdf

⁴ Annual Growth Survey 2015 COM(2014) 902 final

2. European level networks active in the promotion of access to finance (microfinance and social enterprise finance).

Boosting Jobs, Growth and Investment is one of the main priorities of the Juncker Commission. In line with this goal, entrepreneurship and self-employment can be powerful tools in getting Europe growing again and increase the number of jobs without creating new debt. Access to finance however, remains one of the most important problems faced by business starters across Europe, in particular from vulnerable groups.

Social enterprises devote their activities and reinvest their surpluses to achieving a wider social or community objective either in their members' or a wider interest. As such their activities may have a significant impact on achieving the above mentioned targets. However, social enterprises also face numerous obstacles in accessing finance.

The Commission is intensifying its efforts to promote access to microfinance and as such is responsible for multiple related activities including the provision of funding under the European Progress Microfinance Facility as well as the third axis of EaSI and the technical assistance to microcredit providers. The Code of Good Conduct developed by the Commission aims to play a role in bringing common standards to the developing microfinance market in Europe.

The Social Business Initiative (SBI) provides an EU level action plan to stimulate the creation, development and growth of social enterprises, by creating an ecosystem conducive to developing social businesses and to facilitating their access to funding. Member States and regions are asked to increase their efforts to promote social enterprises on the basis of an integrated strategy - and make full use of the ESF in implementing it. Social enterprises will have access to funding from the social entrepreneurship strand of EaSI's third axis.

IV ADDITIONAL CONDITION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIFIC ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The applicant is invited to take note of the following implementation requirements which have to be respected by all specific work programmes funded under the EaSI programme.

General requirements on issues to consider for the activities funded under EaSI

The EaSI Programme shall, in all its axes and actions, aim to:

- (a) pay particular attention to vulnerable groups, such as young people;
- (b) promote equality between women and men,
- (c) combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation;
- (d) promote a high-level of quality and sustainable employment, guarantee adequate and decent social protection, combat long-term unemployment and fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Hence, in designing, implementing and reporting on the activity, beneficiaries/contractors must address the issues noted above and will be required to provide detail, in the final activity

report on the steps and achievements made towards addressing those aims.

Publicity and information requirements

Beneficiaries must acknowledge in writing that the project has been supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") 2014-2020. In practice, all products (publications, brochures, press releases, videos, CDs, posters and banners, and especially those associated with conferences, seminars and information campaigns) must state the following:

This (publication, conference, video, xxx) has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>

The European emblem must appear on every publication or other material produced. Please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/services/visual_identity/pdf/use-emblem_en.pdf

<http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/flag/>

Every publication must include the following:

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.

Monitoring information

The Commission, with the support of an external contractor, will monitor regularly the EaSI Programme. Therefore, beneficiaries will have to transmit qualitative and quantitative monitoring data on the results of the activities. These will include the extent to which the principles of equality between women and men has been applied, as well as how anti-discrimination considerations, including accessibility issues, have been addressed through the activities. Related templates are attached or will be provided.

In setting up the action, beneficiaries must foresee the necessary funding for monitoring and reporting to the Commission.

Reporting information

In addition to the reporting requirements applicable to grants awarded under the EaSI programme, beneficiaries will have to use a supplementary final reporting template annexed to this call for demonstrating how the objectives planned in the Annual Work Programme have been reached.

V CONTENT OF THE ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

Specific objectives, Priorities, Types of activities

The 2016 operating grant will be awarded under the Framework Partnership Agreement 2014-2017 (FPA) signed between the European Commission and each EU level network at the end of the 2013. In the quadrennial strategic plan linked to the Framework Partnership Agreement, four main priorities for actions have been identified.

This section describes the main activities which can be supported under the operating grant 2016 in relation to the priorities defined in the FPA. The activities listed in this section serve as example and should not prevent the applicant from presenting others in line with the priorities and the quadrennial strategic plan linked to the Framework Partnership Agreement.

The proposed work programme should not contradict the quadrennial strategic plan; it can develop it further and describe its implementation in more detail. Minor adaptations due to changes in the overall context or unforeseeable new organisational developments are possible and should be marked.

Area 1: European level networks active in promoting social inclusion and poverty reduction

Priority 1 of the FPA: *Support the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives undertaken towards the policy objectives of Europe 2020 Strategy, the Social Investment Package⁵ and the Political Guidelines of the new Commission⁶. Support the main EU driven processes such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)⁷ on social protection and social inclusion and the European semester.*

This priority is strictly linked to the policy context described in section III. The activities shall aim at advancing the policy debate and the support of structural reforms in the area of social protection and investment, monitoring and evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of existing policies and practices, supporting the development and the dissemination of innovative policies and helping their implementation.

Especially with regard to the European Semester and the OMC, activities could help to enrich the knowledge about current social trends and policy developments at national, regional and local level. They could also support the dissemination of policy guidance to decision-makers and practitioners at different levels (national, regional, local).

This can mainly be done through policy analyses and the development of policy recommendations, studies and mapping exercises, exchange of good practices, peer learning activities, seminars, conferences or other events at EU, national, regional or local level.

Priority 2 of the FPA: *Support stakeholders' involvement in the policy process: activities should in particular directly relate to the support of national member organisations in their involvement in the implementation of the main political EU-driven processes. In addition, EU-level networks should encourage cooperation with other civil society organisations and social partners' organisations both at EU, national, regional and local levels.*

⁵ The Social Investment Package comprises a Communication on "Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion" (COM(2013)83), a Recommendation on 'Investing in Children' (C(2013)778), and staff working documents covering different areas of social policy. The Social Investment Package (SIP) supports MS in their implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy and achievement of its targets and gives guidance on making their social policies more efficient and effective in response to the significant challenges they currently face. The Communication sets out a policy framework, concrete actions to be taken by Member States and the Commission, and guidance on the use of EU funds to support reforms.

⁶ Jean-Claude Juncker: A new Start for Europe: My agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change. Political Guidelines for the next Commission, Strasbourg 2014.

⁷ The integration of the social OMC into the Europe 2020 strategy provides a stronger basis for the EU to meet its social goals. The instruments and tools that have been developed under the Social OMC are being adapted to the governance architecture of Europe 2020, to best serve the purposes of the new strategy. The EU-level networks supported under this call would be expected to engage with the OMC and the relevant strands of the Europe2020 strategy.

This priority is closely linked to priority 1, but focusses more on developing tools and mechanisms at national, regional and local level to support and to enable member organisations in getting involved in European policy processes and especially the European Semester and SIP implementation. Creating and supporting opportunities for cooperation among national members and with relevant stakeholders could be an efficient vehicle for supporting member organisations.

This can mainly be done through training activities and seminars for member organisations, regular information on EU social policy issues (e.g. newsletters and mailings), mutual learning activities, and exchange of good practices.

Priority 3 of the FPA: *Strengthen the capacity of EU-level NGO networks and their national members, to support implementation of EU priorities as indicated under point III (Policy Context) including their knowledge of relevant EU matters.*

In comparison to priority 2, this priority refers to develop the knowledge and capacity of the networks and their member organisations in supporting the implementation of EU policies. This also includes improving the sustainability of their work, their organisational functioning and their cooperation mechanisms.

This can mainly be done through organising training for staff on EU policy initiatives and their possible translation into national, regional policies. It also includes implementing measures to improve managerial capacities as well as coverage.

Priority 4 of the FPA: *Providing data and strong evidence base on policy developments and trends as well as collection of relevant information about citizens' concerns and good practices in the social policy field in the Member States, so as to contribute to better policy making.*

This priority refers to one of the main added-value NGO Networks can provide in EU policy processes: providing data and information from different levels and sectors of European societies. This includes also information on the impact of different policies on citizens and their social situation.

This can mainly be done through collecting relevant information on citizens' situation and concerns in relation to social inclusion and poverty at national and local level through studies, survey, research development of statistics and indicators. Monitor and assess the implementation of relevant legislation, policies and practices.

Area 2: European level networks active in the promotion of access to finance (microfinance or social enterprise finance).

Priority 1 of the FPA: *Support the Commission in its outreach activities at EU, national and local level with the aim of ensuring the implementation of European policies in the relevant area (e.g. Programme for Employment and Social Innovation, European Social Fund, Social Business Initiative etc.)*

In line with the Policy context identified in section III, a clear link between multiple activities of the Commission in the field of access to finance shall be envisaged. In particular, the focus should be on the Commission activities in building microfinance and social investment

markets in Europe (including through EaSI financial instruments and via the call on Supporting the demand and supply side of the market for social enterprise finance) and any follow-up action thereof.

The activities of the network may focus on organisation of meetings and events with a number of relevant stakeholders as well as include other communication means such as newsletters, web pages or a helpdesk for members. Cooperation with other relevant networks should also be of interest to networks. This is not an exhaustive list of possible activities: networks are invited to propose other activities as well.

Priority 2 of the FPA: *Reinforcing the capacity of the network's members, including through offering a platform for the exchange of good practices in the relevant field, and raising awareness about relevant EU policies.*

Working with its members in an efficient and effective manner represents an important task for a network.

In order to achieve this, the network is expected, among other things, to organise exchange visits, workshops and peer-to-peer learning activities. In 2016, this could include activities promoting the approaches to social impact measurement developed by the GECES subgroup as well as exchanging and collecting experiences on implementing these approaches in practice.

Growth of membership will be considered as important in enabling the network to deliver on these activities.

Priority 3 of the FPA: *Voicing the concerns and expectations of organisations facilitating access to finance to (potential) entrepreneurs from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups / social enterprises.*

Funded networks represent a platform for the Commission to be able to better understand and exchange information with the sector. That is why communicating with its members is important for the networks.

Annual conferences, hearings and similar events proved to be valuable for networks in liaising with its member base and other stakeholders. Providing feedback to the Commission is an essential part of this priority.

Priority 4 of the FPA: *Providing data / research on developments in the field and on priority topics.*

Given the lack of data and information in the areas of microfinance / social enterprise finance, funded networks remain an important source for the Commission as well as for the whole sector.

Their activities can focus on broad overviews as well as on specific niche topics related to the field. In the field of microfinance, youth entrepreneurship (especially the contribution of microcredit providers to a successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee), the role of microfinance for start-ups and their impact on employability and skills, and the job creation potential of green jobs and circular economy continue to be of particular relevance for the Commission.

In the area of social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship as an option for young people, scaling of social enterprises, employability, skills and the job creation potential of the green/circular economy are priority topics for 2016.

Networks are encouraged to develop their activities in these areas, but may also suggest additional topics that are identified as important.

Expected outputs (for area 1 and 2)

The European Commission supports an output oriented approach, looking at the quality, relevance and sustainability of outputs reached. Applicants are therefore invited to clearly identify the main outputs and their contribution to European policy processes and to demonstrate the added value of their activities and their concrete contribution to policy development in the thematic areas identified by this call. They are also invited to describe their monitoring system and the way they use monitoring and external evaluations to assess their overall performance, but also the relevance and impact of their outputs.

VI ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL PROVISION

Operating grants awarded under this call for proposals will cover the period from 01/01/2016 to 31/12/2016

For 2016 the indicative available budget for the call is:

- Area 1: EUR 9.000.000
- Area 2: EUR 1.200.000

The maximum rate of EU support under this call is 80% of the total eligible costs of the work programme.

VII CONDITION FOR PARTICIPATION

This call for proposals is open to the EU-level NGO networks active in the promotion of social inclusion and poverty reduction or active in the promotion of microfinance or social enterprise finance which have signed a Framework Partnership Agreement covering the period 2014-2017 following the call for proposals VP/2013/006.

VIII SELECTION PROCEDURE

The proposals submitted by Framework Partners must comply with the following criteria:

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility of the application:

- a) Proposals can only be submitted by organisations that have signed a framework partnership agreement with the Commission following the 2013 call for Framework Partners⁸.
- b) The grant application must have been submitted no later than the deadline set out under IX of this call for proposal.
- c) The grant application should be submitted using the online application "SWIM" and be accompanied by all the compulsory documents and annexes requested in section XI.
- d) The grant amount requested for applicants should be between EUR 100.000 and EUR 1.000.000

Only applications which meet the above eligibility criteria will be further processed.

Award criteria

Specific grant agreement for an operating grant for 2016, based upon the framework partnership agreements, will be signed following an assessment of the eligible proposals based on the below-mentioned criteria:

- Coherence of the annual work programme with the Framework Partnership Agreement; (10 points)
- The extent to which the proposed programme takes into consideration the objectives laid down in the PROGRESS axis under the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) and respond to actual needs relevant for the period concerned (20 points);
- The added value and relevance at European level of the programme proposed as well its dissemination and availability to all countries involved in the EaSI Programme (20 points);
- The clarity and feasibility of the programme and each of its modules, including timetable and methodology and in particular its capacity to achieve the planned objectives (20 points);
- The quality, efficiency and feasibility of the work organisation including a clear description of the allocation of human resources in relation to the individual tasks or activities (15 points);
- The financial quality of the programme, including the existence of a clear, detailed, and reasonable budget which is coherent with the actions proposed (15 points).

⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=629&langId=en&callId=383&furtherCalls=yes>

In order to be considered for funding and signing a Specific Agreement, the proposal must obtain a minimum of 70% of the total available points, taking into account the limits of the available budget.

IX TIMETABLE

The indicative timetable for the various stages of the procedure is:

Stages	Date or indicative period
Publication of the call	May 2015
Deadline for submitting applications	Monday 24 th August 2015
Results-Information to applicants	October 2015
Signature of the grant agreements	November 2015

X HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION

1. Application form

The compulsory online application form is an electronic form which must be filled by using the Internet Web System SWIM at the following address:

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/swim>

This system allows the introduction, editing, validation, printing and submission of the application form. Once the application is submitted electronically, a print out of a copy has to be signed by the legal representative of the organisation submitting the proposal and be sent to the Commission as explained below. After submission of the application electronically, no changes are possible.

2. Submission formalities

1) All the required documents as listed in the check-list (section XI) must be submitted via the SWIM application

http://applicationsservers.cc.cec.eu.int:8085/employment_social/swim/displayWelcome.do

2) Please send your **cover letter of application together with all required documents in one original and two copies to the address below by Monday 24th of August 2015** (their submission date will be taken as the date of dispatch, as evidenced by the postmark or the express courier receipt date).

a) by **post** to the following **postal address**:

European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (Unit D-2)
Call for Proposals VP/2015/010
Application for Area (see point II): 1 or 2
EMPL-CAD Service
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

b) or by **express courier service** to the following **delivery address**:

European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (Unit D-2)
Call for proposals VP/2015/010
Application for Area (see point II): 1 or 2
Central Courier Service
Avenue du Bourget, 1
B-1140 Brussels
Belgium

Proposals may **also be delivered personally against a signed and dated receipt to address (b) above, at the latest by 16h00, on Monday 24th of August 2015.**

The reference of the call for proposals and relevant area must be indicated on the envelope.

In case of hand-delivery, please keep the receipt signed and dated by the official in the Commission's central mail department who took delivery as proof of submission. This department is open from 08:00 to 17:00 from Monday to Thursday, from 08:00 to 16:00 on Friday, it is closed on Saturdays, Sundays and on Commission holidays.

Failure to submit the application by post and via SWIM application by the submission deadline to the Commission will render the application inadmissible.

Complementary documents sent by fax will not be considered for evaluation unless requested by the European Commission. Any document sent after the deadline will not be accepted unless requested by the European Commission.

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that incomplete or unsigned forms, hand-written forms and those sent by fax or e-mail will not be taken into consideration.

3) Questions related to the current call

Questions concerning the present Call shall be addressed to the following mail-box:

Questions of general nature: EMPL-VP-2015-010@ec.europa.eu

XI Check-list of the documents to accompany your application

After submission of the application electronically via SWIM, please number the documents as shown in the table below and send them **in duplicate (original + one copy or two copies where original is not required)** before the submission deadline.

Order	Document	Download SWIM
1	Original cover letter formally submitting the application for funding (please quote the call VP/2015/010 and the area for which you are applying for) duly signed and dated by the legal representative of the applicant organisation.	
2	Print-out of the duly completed and submitted on-line application form – dated and signed by the legal representative. Note: The on-line form must be electronically submitted before printing. After the electronic submission no further changes to the application are possible.	YES
3	Original of the document "Annual work programme 2016" by using the mandatory structure for proposals. The legal representative must sign and date the form.	YES
4	Original signed letter of commitment from each applicant stating its financial contribution to the work programme following the template provided to the on-line application form.	YES
5	Where applicable ⁹ , the original of the document "Contract for implementing the action" following the template provided to the on-line application form.	YES

⁹ Implementing contracts for subcontracting which exceed the threshold of 5000€