



EaSI Technical Assistance

NEWSLETTER #4

Quarterly Project Newsletter – Fourth Edition – December 2017

Dear Readers,

This is our last project newsletter for the year and before we give you a summary of the most important points covered below, we would like to take some time to express our gratitude for all new partnerships, which allowed us to work with you to benefit your institution, your clients, and the whole microfinance sector in Europe. We wish you a season of joy and peace, and look forward to continued success and mutual collaborations in 2018.

We are pleased to present all key project milestones achieved during 2017 in a longer segment called “The Year in Numbers”. Here we detail all initiatives organised to promote best practice and knowledge sharing in the microfinance sector, as well as the success of capacity building and Code trainings, rating, assessment and Code evaluation services, as well as the Helpdesk tool. We’re also happy to share some feedback and impressions from the two highly interactive EaSI TA events that took place in the Netherlands and Portugal in November. Below you will also find feedback from beneficiaries of the project, as well as attendees from past EaSI TA events. Finally, we conclude with the segment introducing the key organisations involved in EaSI TA called “Who’s Who?”, a short introduction to the project and key links. For questions related to microfinance in Europe, send your inquiries through the [Helpdesk](#).

We wish you a happy holiday season!

Your EaSI TA team

EaSI TA in 2017 – The Year in Numbers

Over the past year, the [Employment and Social Innovation \(EaSI\) Programme](#) continued its commitment to addressing financial exclusion by supporting microfinance initiatives in Europe, making funds and technical assistance available and accessible for vulnerable groups, through micro and social enterprises. In fact, since the beginning of the project 63 microcredit providers (MCPs) from 24 European countries have benefitted from the free services offered by EaSI TA. You can watch the EaSI TA video presenting all services available and featuring testimonials that demonstrate the impact and the success of the programme [here](#).

In 2017 alone, 14 MCPs took part in capacity building trainings, 10 in compliance with the Code for microcredit provision trainings, and 12 benefited from both type of TA services in the same year. Our EaSI TA experts helped the microfinance institutions (MFIs) improve their operations in a large array of areas such as Credit and Risk Management, Strategic Planning, Good Governance and Social Performance, Management Information System (MIS), and many more.





Throughout the year, many European MCPs also received institutional assessments, ratings and Code compliance evaluations, which helped determine the institutions level of development, their main opportunities and weaknesses, as well as long-term sustainability and creditworthiness, which helped determine future training needs. In 2017 alone, the Rating consortium performed 41 appraisal exercises, from which 21 Code evaluations, 15 institutional assessments and 5 institutional ratings.

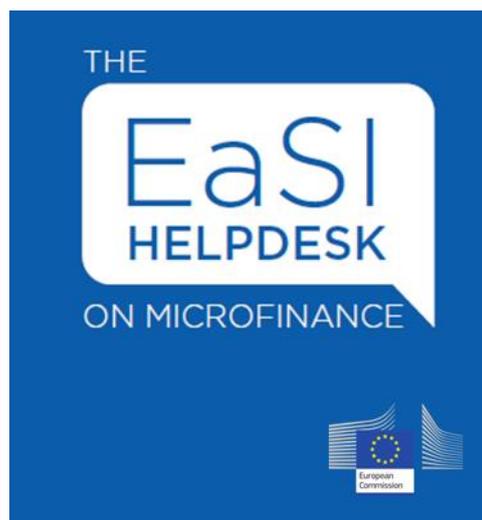
As a result of the Code compliance trainings and the efforts of the MFIs to improve their operations, 2017 saw the first seven organisations being recognised as compliant with the European Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit Provision. [Qredits](#) (the Netherlands), [ADIE](#) (France), [Microfinance Ireland](#), [PerMicro](#) (Italy), [AFI](#) (Greece), [good.bee Credit](#) (Romania) and [TISE](#) (Poland) were all awarded a Certificate for Compliance, which underlines that they are operating according to best practice in the European microfinance market and gives them access to guarantees and TA programmes available through the European Commission.



2017 was also a great year for the European microfinance sector in terms of best practise sharing, peer learning and exchange of expertise. Overall, 8 EaSI TA events took place in Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Serbia. These events contained nine workshops on microfinance topics and three thematic seminars on mutual learning, which attracted more than 400 participants, representing both microfinance practitioners, as well as the wider public, such as NGOs, governmental bodies and others. The events covered both wider topics such as access to financial instruments, empowerment of entrepreneurs via microfinance or creating favourable regulatory frameworks for microfinance, as well as more detailed sessions on product development and distribution channels in rural areas or risk and credit management.

In addition to workshops and seminars, beneficiaries of the project can also take part in tailored exchange visits for peer learning within the EU. Three such exchanges took place since the start of 2017. The first one was between microSTARS / KEPA from Greece, who visited Seed Capital Bizkaia from Spain in January. Another visit was between Karditsa Cooperative Bank from Greece and Crédal, Belgium and the third one between Action Finance Initiative (AFI), Greece who visited Microlux in Luxembourg and Adie in France.

In 2017 the EaSI TA consortium also launched the Helpdesk – a free online tool dedicated to microfinance. The tool aims to assist institutions and individuals interested in European microfinance and can answer questions on a multitude of topics, including: EaSI Financial Instruments or Technical Assistance, the Code of Good Conduct and many more. Since the launch in 2017, numerous questions were submitted from users from 13 European countries.



What Did our Beneficiaries Say About the EaSI TA in 2017?

Gabriella Sedon, Managing Director of Heves, Hungary: *“The capacity training was far above our expectations. It gave us useful knowledge and skills that will help us in the future to do our job even more professionally and to fulfil the requirements of the EaSI TA programme. Both trainers were very experienced, gave us very useful advice in the areas of Good Governance, Social Performance, Investors’ Relations and Strategic Planning. In addition, they noted our weaknesses and helped us specify additional areas of improvement for our organization.”*

Plamen Yonchev, Director General of SIS Credit Bulgaria: *“The Institutional rating received by MicroFinanza Rating was a really valuable experience for SIS, which gave us guidelines for improvement and thus made our plans for sustainable growth more achievable.”*

Marcel Abbad, Director General of Fundación Oportunitas, Spain: *“We started to work with EaSI TA in the implementation of the European Code of Good Conduct. This provided us with good practice guidelines for investor and client relations, governance, risk management, and reporting standards. We’ll also be able to use this for our newly set-up finance company.”*

Laura Gabriela David, Head of Business Development for good.bee Credit, Romania: *“EaSI TA was very useful for good.bee Credit and it addressed a series of areas that need improvement from which, we and our clients will benefit in the long run. These areas included Good Governance, Social Performance, Improvement of staff operational efficiency, Sales skills for loan officers and Credit analysis for micro-clients in the agro sector. We considered it to be a success and as a proof of that good.bee Credit applied for the second Call as well.”*

Joanna Wardzińska, Vice President, TISE, Poland: *“By obtaining a Code of Good Practice certificate, we can increase our credibility to our clients and partners, which also strengthens our market position. I encourage other entities to complete this process. This allows a comprehensive review of your organisation and applied procedures and processes, as well as a self-evaluation as to its compliance with the principles of the Code. Furthermore, this brings your employees together around the company’s values and mission.”*

EaSI TA Seminar in Almelo



In November this year, [fi-compass](#) together with [Qredits](#) organised a full day thematic seminar on mutual learning aiming to promote good practice in the microfinance sector related to strategy, business models and business development services (BDS). [The event](#) took place in Almelo, the Netherlands and attracted 27 participants from Greenfield MFIs and other microcredit providers looking to improve their business model and reach sustainability by further embracing technology into their operations. The overall seminar was very interactive and was positively received by all participants as it closely matched their needs and expectations from the sessions.

The presentation of Qredits’ business model and e-learning services sparked a lot of interest from the audience and demand to organise future similar events focusing on the adoption of such tools. The session on IT innovation also raised many questions, in particular with regards to the CRM/MIS system adopted by Qredits. Participants were particularly interested in the set of clients’ data gathered and elaborated by the IT system including compliance with national privacy practices. The presentation on the IT system also provided an overview of overall credit risk management practices and their evolution over time thanks to technological innovation.





Building the MFI Industry in Portugal

The EaSI TA project had its first initiative in Portugal with three workshops organised during [the “Ethical and Solidarity Finance Forum \(FFES III\)”](#) in Lisbon. The event was co-organised by fi-compass, the Catholic University of Portugal and the Cooperative for the Development of Ethical and Solidarity Finance (FESCOOP) and brought together the Portuguese ecosystem dealing with ethical and solidarity financing. The [three EaSI TA workshops](#) focused on raising awareness for the ethical and solidarity financing environment status and main gaps in Portugal in order to set a New Social Deal for the development of the ethical and solidarity-financing environment.

The workshops also familiarised the audience with mechanisms and entities at European level that promote and support the implementation of microfinance, such as the EaSI Programme with its Technical Assistance and Financial Instruments components. In addition, the participants enjoyed a presentation of best practices from different European microfinance institutions, which together with a discussion around the legal and regulatory framework for microfinance in Europe gave many examples to the local actors of the future direction for the development of a microfinance industry in Portugal.



What did Event Attendees Say About the EaSI TA Events in November 2017

Pavel Velev, CEO of USTOI JSC, attended the EaSI TA Thematic Seminar in Almelo, the Netherlands: *“The differential factor of Microfinance is the personal approach. Technology should help us in enriching this approach and not dilute it.”*

Marco Medos, AgrolInvest, attended the EaSI TA Thematic Seminar in Almelo, the Netherlands: *“Digitalization is fundamental in order to increase the efficiency of the MFIs.”*

Kim Kreilgaard, Head of the EIB Group office in Lisbon, attended the Ethical and Solidarity Finance Forum (FFES III) in Lisbon: *“Great initiative, which gave us the chance to have an exchange with very different stakeholders about how to build the Portuguese microfinance ecosystem.”*

Teresa Cordeiro, Freelancer, attended the Ethical and Solidarity Finance Forum (FFES III) in Lisbon: *“It was very interesting specially because it was completely out of my “zone of comfort” and I’ve learnt a lot.”*

What is EaSI TA?

[EaSI Technical Assistance \(TA\)](#) is the primary source of capacity building support for microcredit providers (MCPs) operating in the EU and other eligible European countries. It offers a suite of professional services including institutional assessment or rating of the MCP, consulting services to strengthen institutional capacity and eliminate operational weaknesses, and support for the implementation of the [EU Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit Provision \(CoGC\)](#). In addition, the programme organises and implements tailored events designed to spread good practice in the wider European microcredit sector, as well as a dedicated helpdesk.



Who's Who? - Featuring MicroFinanza Rating

[MicroFinanza Rating](#) is leading the partnership with [ECORYS](#) to provide CoGC evaluation, institutional assessment or rating services to microcredit providers, selected under the EaSI TA project.

MicroFinanza Rating (MFR) is a private and independent international rating agency specialised in microfinance, founded in 2000. It offers a range of rating products to microfinance institutions (MFIs), investors, regulators and networks. The rating methodology is constantly reviewed and upgraded to respond to the ever changing features of the microfinance industry. In the frame of the EaSI project MFR analyses relevant aspects of operations, performance and governance of the financial institutions, with the goal to identifying their strengths and weaknesses and improve their institutional capacity. The institutional assessment or rating is followed by tailored technical assistance, in line with the main findings, in order to increase the quality of internal processes of the selected MCPs.



Useful EaSI Links

More information about [EaSI TA](#)
Sign up to the [EU Code](#)
[The EaSI Programme](#)

[EaSI financial instruments](#)
[EaSI TA Helpdesk](#)
Support for [microfinance](#) & [social enterprises](#)

For further questions about:

EaSI TA and Code TA, please contact easi.ta@fs.de

EaSI Financial Instruments, please contact easi@eif.org

EaSI Rating, Assessments & Code Evaluations, please contact easi.ta@microfinanzarating.com