

European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation OPEN CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Ref.: EaSI-BE/2016/01

Identification and selection of EaSI Technical Assistance Beneficiaries 2016 – 2017

1 INTRODUCTION

Given the positive impact of Joint Action to Support Microfinance Institutions in Europe (JASMINE) 2008-2013 on the European microcredit sector, JASMINE-type activities have been prolonged in the framework of the 2014-2020 programming period. To ensure coherent continuation of these activities to microcredit providers, the initiative is integrated under *fi-compass*, which is a platform for advisory services on financial instruments under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and microfinance under the EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). *fi-compass* is implemented by the European Investment Bank (EIB) and funded by the European Commission (EC). Under *fi-compass*, the JASMINE activities of 2008-2013 are continued to support European microcredit providers under a dedicated work stream named EaSI Technical Assistance (EaSI TA) which is implemented by Service Providers who have the sole responsibility for the provision of the services that EIB has entrusted them.

The technical assistance to be provided under EaSI TA is also established to facilitate future access to funding from existing and forthcoming EU programmes even though being selected to receive technical assistance under EaSI does not give any right to access to funding. Applicants to the following Open Call for EoI, irrespective of their selection, may also present funding demands to EIF.

The EaSI TA is launching its second Call for Expression of Interest (Call for EoI) to identify and select up to thirty four (34) European microcredit providers (Beneficiaries) that will benefit from EaSI Technical Assistance services. Applicants that have passed the eligibility and selection criteria but will not reach the list of 34, will be included in a reserve list in case additional budget will be available and informed accordingly. The assessment of the Applications will be processed at suitable intervals within the one year period of the Open Call for EoI. Thus, approved Beneficiaries could benefit from EaSI Technical Assistance services in 2016 already.

The objective of this Call for EoI is to continue improving the institutional capacity of European microcredit providers for the promotion of financial inclusion and employment and to support these microcredit providers to release their potential.

All applications for such technical assistance submitted to the EaSI TA shall conform to this Open Call for EoI.

Interested European Microcredit Providers are requested to apply by completing and submitting an Expression of Interest as per the template (Annex 1) included in the Call for EoI. You will need to fill in, sign and return to the EaSI TA all the documents listed in Annex 1. More detail is provided in Sections 5 and 6 of this Call for EoI.

Applications can be sent during a one year period from 20 May 2016 to 19 May 2017.
First Call Beneficiaries from 21 November 2016 to 19 May 2017

NB: This Call for Expression of interest does not represent a public procurement procedure in the sense of Directive 2014/24/EU.

2 DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION

In this Call for Expression of Interest, capitalised terms and expressions shall have the meaning attributed to them below or as elsewhere defined in this document and its Annexes, unless the context requires otherwise.

Applicant	means a Microcredit Provider applying to the Call for Expression of Interest EaSI-BE/2016/01 as a potential future Beneficiary.
Call for Eol	means Call for Expression of Interest.
Deadline	means 19 May 2017.
EaSI	means EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation
Beneficiary(ies) of EaSI Technical Assistance	means eligible financial intermediary Applicant(s) selected to receive Technical Assistance in the framework of EaSI.
Eligibility Criteria	means the minimum criteria with which the Expression of Interest and the Applicants must comply and which are listed in Annex 2 hereof.
Exclusion Criteria	means the exclusion list as detailed in Annex 1, appendix 3 hereof.
Expression of Interest	means an application to this Call for Expression of Interest submitted to EaSI TA within the deadline, conforming to the provisions of Annex 1 to this Call for Expression of Interest.
Microcredit	means any loan up to EUR 25,000 disbursed to support primarily income generating activities to a population having no or limited access to mainstream financial services, in particular to loan services.
Microcredit Provider	means an institutional provider of microcredit. In the framework of the Call for Expression of Interest, microcredit providers are: - greenfield MFIs; - non-bank microcredit Providers; - licensed Banks; - guarantee granting Entities.
Pre-qualification Criteria	means the Exclusion, the Eligibility, and the Selection Criteria altogether.
Selection Criteria	means the criteria used for the selection of Beneficiaries and which are listed in Annex 2 hereof.
Service Provider	means the services providers appointed by the EaSI TA who will carry out the technical assistance services outlined under Section 4 of the present Call for Expression of Interest.
Technical Assistance	means Technical Assistance provided in the framework of the EaSI Technical Assistance under <i>fi-compass</i> . Technical Assistance support takes the form described in Section 4 below.

3 ELIGIBLE FINANCIAL INTERMEDIARIES

This Call for Eol is addressed and restricted to:

- (i) Greenfield MFIs with less than three years of existence willing to improve their internal processes through an assessment of their institution and tailored training/coaching to the staff and management;
- (ii) Non-bank microcredit providers with at least three years of existence willing to increase the quality of their operations through an institutional assessment or a microfinance institutional rating and tailored consulting services to the staff and the management team;
- (iii) Licensed banks, means financial intermediaries having a bank license and disbursing microcredits, that were never rated by specialised microfinance rating agencies prior to the *fi-compass* initiative and willing to receive an independent opinion on their microcredit

operations as well as tailored training/coaching to increase the staff knowledge in microfinance; and

- (iv) Guarantee granting entities: Guarantee schemes, guarantee institutions or other institutions authorised to provide microfinance guarantees or risk-sharing structures and willing to receive an independent opinion on their microcredit operations as well as tailored training/coaching to increase the staff knowledge in microfinance.

in each case established and operating in one or more Participating Countries¹ and subject to compliance with all applicable selection criteria.

First Call Beneficiaries are not allowed to submit a new application before 19 November 2016.

4 DESCRIPTION OF THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

The selected Microcredit Providers are entitled to receive a set of Technical Assistance services free of charge. The Technical Assistance is designed to help European Microcredit Providers aligning to common standards and possibly facilitate access to funding at a later stage.

The technical assistance provided to the selected Microcredit Providers, subject to contract, in the framework of EaSI TA consists of the following:

- (i) An Institutional Assessment or Microfinance Institutional Rating by an independent specialised Service Provider and provision of an assessment or rating report of the main findings. For more details refer to Annex 3; and/or
- (ii) Tailored training/consulting to the Beneficiaries' staff and management to be provided by technical assistance experts. The training/consulting will be provided by the technical assistance experts of the Service Providers for up to 12 days of on-site training/consulting to the staff and management of the selected Beneficiary. The training/ consulting are to be provided based on a jointly agreed plan, ideally after the Assessment or Rating but are not limited to this requirement. Training/consulting targets weaknesses known or identified during the assessment or rating exercise and focuses on the following topics²: Good Governance, Management Information Systems, Strategic Planning, Risk Management, implementation of the European Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit Provision and Legal training.

Once the Applicant has passed the selection and received a written approval to become a Beneficiary of the EaSI TA, a contact will be established with the Service Provider.

5 APPLICATION

5.1 How application may be submitted

Microcredit Providers interested in applying to this Call for EoI shall submit an Expression of Interest as scanned copy by email on or before the final deadline date followed by the original in hardcopy by registered mail or professional courier service. The Application has to include all mandatory documents as set out in Section 5.4.

Applicants may send questions regarding the Call for EoI or the nature of the Technical Assistance. Such requests must indicate the Call for EoI reference number and the name of the Applicant and shall be submitted in English by e-mail to: easi.ta@fi-compass.eu. Answers to all questions will be provided to the Applicant not later than 10 calendar days after their submission, on the Applicant's e-mail address used to submit the questions. An analysis of such incoming questions will be made and the resulting answers may be published from time to time in the form of FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) documents posted at the EaSI fi-compass website <https://www.fi-compass.eu/easi/eu-programme-employment-and-social-innovation-easi>. EaSI TA reserves the right to update the FAQ documents from time to time as and when it regards appropriate.

¹ As at the date of publication of this Call for EoI, the countries covered by the EaSI programme comprise EU Member States, Albania, FYROM, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Turkey.

² Training topics to be confirmed at start of the Technical Assistance. Training topics can include other areas than those of 4(ii) if they respond to identified weaknesses.

EaSI TA will not contact any Applicant prior to the selection decision, unless it considers it necessary to clarify issues of a mere technical nature. However, should EaSI TA come across any errors, inaccuracies, omissions or any type of clerical defect in the text of the Call for EoI before the Deadline, or in case of additional or other documentation or clarifications requirements EaSI TA will correct the text and inform the Applicant accordingly.

5.2 Language of the Application

The Expression of Interest, including related documents, shall be prepared in English. Applications in other languages will not be accepted.

5.3 Deadline of receipt of applications

Applications can be sent from 20 May 2016 to 19 May 2017 (in case of First Call Beneficiaries from 21 November 2016 to 19 May 2017). The applications must be received by EaSI TA no later than 17:00 hrs. (GMT+01:00) on 19 May 2017. Any application received after this deadline will not be considered.

The Deadline applies (i) in case of e-mails to the date of receipt by EaSI TA and (ii) in case of registered mail or professional courier service to the date of dispatch indicated on the post office stamp or a dispatch receipt.

5.4 Application format and details

The template of the Expression of Interest to be submitted duly filled in and signed is attached hereto as Annex 1 and is composed of four appendixes. In order to be valid and assessed, the Expression of Interest has to include:

1. Information about the Applicant (template available under Appendix 1 to the Expression of Interest);
2. Declaration of absence of conflict of interest (template available under Appendix 2 to the Expression of Interest);
3. Statement regarding situations of exclusion (template available under Appendix 3 to the Expression of Interest); and,
4. Requested supporting documents (listed under Appendix 4 to the Expression of Interest).

5.5 Submitting the application

Please submit your Expression of Interest, prepared in accordance with the instructions in this document to the following addresses:

- **E-mail Address**

easi.ta@fi-compass.eu

Starting in the subject of the email, as appropriate “EaSI-BE/2016/01 – Expression of Interest: [name of the Applicant] ”

Reference also the tracking code of the original in hardcopy in your email.

- **Postal Address**

Frankfurt School of Finance & Management
Attention: fi-compass / EaSI Technical Assistance Office
Ref.: EaSI-BE/2016/01
Sonnemannstr. 9-11
D-60314 Frankfurt/Main
GERMANY

The outer envelope should be marked with:

<p style="text-align: center;">DO NOT OPEN Except In Presence Of The Official Appointed Ref.: EaSI-BE/2016/01 Subject: Identification and selection of EaSI Technical Assistance Beneficiaries 2016-2017</p>

After the submission of the application, EaSI TA sends out an acknowledgement of receipt to the relevant Applicants via e-mail which shall state the confirmation that the EoI was received before the Deadline. The acknowledgement of receipt is not to be considered confirmation of completeness of the Expression of Interest and the documents submitted therewith, nor any kind of assessment to this effect.

6 SELECTION PROCEDURE

All Applications received at any time on or before the deadline of the Open Call of EoI will be evaluated as soon as possible against the Eligibility Criteria mentioned before. Selected will be only those MCPs that will get more than 60 points in the Selection Criteria and will be ranked among the first 34 selected MCPs. EaSI TA will process all "pre-selected" applications chronologically, with the date of application receipt being the principal criterion. Reserve listed applications are taken forward depending on, inter alia, budget availability and geographical coverage criteria. However, EaSI TA maintains the right to fast track applications that have been received on a later date, or are on the reserve list, in order to ensure a wide geographical cover and/or to maximize the reach of the EaSI programme. EaSI TA may suspend or abandon the pre-selection process at any time and no Applicant may claim any right to be pre-selected or included on the reserve list as described above.

Further, the EaSI TA may reject incomplete or unsigned Applications, as well as those Applications not complying with the Eligibility Criteria. Applicants whose Application is rejected because of non-compliance with any of the elements reflected in the statement regarding situations of exclusion (Annex 1, Appendix 3) may not present themselves for consideration in subsequent Calls for Expression of Interest unless it is specifically evidenced that the reason for exclusion no longer exists.

First Call Beneficiaries are not allowed to submit a new application within the period of the first six months of this Open Call. Applications received of First Call Beneficiaries before 21 November 2016 will be rejected and disregarded.

Applicants which are not excluded in accordance with the Exclusion Criteria will be assessed on the basis of the Eligibility and Selection Criteria. Detailed Eligibility and Selection Criteria are presented in Annex 2 thereof. Applicants that meet the Eligibility Criteria will be further assessed on the basis of the Selection Criteria as further detailed in Annex 2.

The EaSI TA reserves the right to verify the correctness of the information received. The EaSI TA may, on its own initiative, inform applicants of any error, inaccuracy, omission or any other error in their application. If clarification is required or if obvious clerical errors in the application need to be corrected, the EaSI TA may request the applicant to provide clarifications and/or additional information provided the terms of the Expression of Interest are not modified as a result. In addition, EaSI TA may request missing documents of administrative nature requested in this Call for EoI.

Selection of Microcredit Providers for the Technical Assistance will be made at the sole discretion of the EaSI TA following appropriate assessment. Applicants should by no means consider that simple submission of a complete application will give rise to any claims, or other rights, or legitimate expectations to be ultimately selected for Technical Assistance under this Call for EoI. No costs incurred by the Applicant in preparing and submitting the EoI shall be reimbursable. All such costs shall be borne by the Applicant. EaSI TA can cancel the Call for EoI without notice at any stage of the procedure. Applicants should only participate in the selection procedure on the understanding that they would not be entitled to any form compensation, should the EaSI TA decide to interrupt or cancel the Call for EoI.

Participation in the Call for EoI shall be taken as acceptance of all the terms and conditions mentioned in the Call for EoI and the conditions of the specifications.

The selection shall be deemed complete upon written confirmation by the EaSI TA to the Applicant.

Applicants in the framework of the present Call for EoI no. EaSI-BE/2016/01 will be informed accordingly of the outcome of their applications. Upon request, Applicants not selected may ask for further information to EaSI TA on the reasons for their non-selection. The rejected Applicant shall not be entitled to any further rights or remedies.

Disclaimer

The EIB and EC make no representation or warranties (whether explicitly or implicitly) as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided in, or in connection with, this Call for EoI and the identification and selection of EaSI TA Beneficiaries (hereinafter the "Information").

Neither the EIB nor the EC will be liable or responsible to any person in relation to any inaccuracy, error, omission or misleading statements contained in the Information. Neither the EIB nor the EC will be liable or responsible to any person in relation to any failure to inform any person of inaccuracy, error, omission or misleading statement contained in such Information of which it becomes aware after the date of release of that Information. Neither the EIB nor the EC shall be liable to any person for any damages, losses, costs, liabilities or expenses of any kind which it may suffer as a consequence of relying upon such Information.

Only the expressed terms of any written contract (as and when it is executed) shall have any contractual effect.

For the purposes of the selection process, all advisors and service providers of the EIB are acting exclusively as the advisors to the EIB and will not be responsible or owe any duty of care to anyone other than the EIB in respect of the selection process.

ANNEXES

- Annex 1. **Template for Expression of Interest****
- Annex 2. **Eligibility and Selection Criteria****
- Annex 3. **Description of the Institutional Assessment and Rating Services****