

POLICY ANALYSIS OF HUMAN FACTORS AND SOCIAL INNOVATION IN EU EASI PROGRAMME REPORTS (2015-2022)

Anca Parmena Olimid¹, Cătălina Maria Georgescu², Daniel Alin Olimid³

Abstract. *Purpose.* The Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), launched by the EU (European Union), represents a financial instrument with the objective of addressing a range of policy analysis areas, as follows: (I) social protection and innovation; (II) social exclusion and social policies; (III) living and working conditions; and (IV) employment, job conditions, mobility, and social entrepreneurship settings under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). *Objectives.* Therefore, the current research aims to structure and analyse in a comparative framework a wide range of EU policies and governance applied to the EaSI reports launched in the period 2015-2022, considering the policy context, key actors, policy content, legal instruments, implementation and governance structures and impact assessment of societal challenges, the role of human factors and the need for social innovation. *Methodology.* The analysis utilises both quantitative and qualitative methods, building on the comparative legal analysis and developing a triple evaluation: social, economic and political. In order to monitor and review the policy outcomes contained in the EaSI reports, the current study will use the Text-Based Diagramming of the programme Mermaid v10.9.0 Live Editor. *Results and findings.* The results of the analysis will evaluate and measure the extent to which the three EaSI reports launched in the period 2015-2022 have met the requirements of social innovation by assessing the policy and governance implementation mechanisms and tracking the relevance of two determinants: EU societal challenges and human factors. *Conclusion.* The framework of the EaSI reports provides the evaluation findings on multi-level policy and strategy approaches and summarises the findings and broader perspectives of the three reports on the effectiveness of social innovation governance. The research findings highlight the societal challenges in the EU, the interdisciplinary circumstances and the evidence-based interplay between the policy framework and the adaptability of multi-level governance.

Keywords: society, EU, human factors, social innovation, policies.

JEL Classification: O20, O30, E24, J24, O15

1. Introduction

The interconnection between societal challenges, human factors and social innovation requires both policy analysis of evidence-based objectives and policy implementation at the level of the EU's multi-level governance, with a focus on the adaptability of legislation and administration. In this context, the research design involves six stages of analysis:

- (1) Indication of the objectives and areas of research;
- (2) analysis of EU legal framework by mapping EU reports and period for evaluation;

- (3) formulating methodological requirements, collecting data, namely sources and methods;

- (4) discussion of the results of the comparative analysis using Mermaid v10.9.0 Live Editor and benchmarking of the relevant topics of the selected reports;

- (5) formulation of a multidimensional assessment and monitoring framework based on the requirements for governance, policy implementation and consideration of the report's findings from different perspectives: social aspects, human factors, policy effectiveness and its broader social impact;

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Craiova, Romania (*corresponding author*)

E-mail: anca.olimid@edu.ucv.ro

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7546-9845>

² Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Craiova, Romania

E-mail: catalina.georgescu@edu.ucv.ro

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4462-4689>

³ University of Craiova, Romania

E-mail: daniel.olimid@edu.ucv.ro

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5583-668X>



(6) conclusions and recommendations for further research (Fig. 1a and Fig. 1b). Based on the latest data from the scientific literature, in the first part of the study, the authors will thoroughly analyse the following: (a) theoretical findings and conceptual frameworks of social innovations that point to a number of themes related to such concepts as "citizen participation" and "open government" (Schmidhuber, Piller, Bogers, & Hilgers, 2019: 343-355), "urban transformation" (Thompson, 2019: 1168-1192) and "responsible innovation" (Voegtlin, Scherer, Stahl & Hawn, 2022: 1-28); (b) the recent results of social innovations aimed at inclusive innovation (Sánchez Rodríguez, MacLachlan & Brus 2021: 833-850); (c) the regulatory framework for social innovation launched by the EU's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion over the last decade in the EaSI Report (2015-2016) (2017), EaSI Report (2017-2018) (2020) and EaSI Report (2019-2020) (2022); (d) the processes related to policy frameworks for innovation systems and ecosystems, citizen engagement involving institutions, organisations, public networks and social actors (Meister Broekema, Horlings & Bulder, 2022: 68-86; Tagliapietra, 2024: 1-10); (e) the social impact of digital social innovations and the development of new areas of the information society and digital platforms with the involvement of the triple context: (e.1.) social impact, community and communication (von Jacobi, Chiappero-Martinetti, Maestripietri & Giroletti, 2023: 1-26; Ballie, Bruce, McGowan & Johnstone, 2022: 65-75); (e.2) the correlation between the information society, human determinants and social data in the context of the study of relations between the state and society at the EU level; (e.3.) recognition of the role of data and information in addressing sustainability and resilience issues in different social and geographical contexts (Peiró-Palomino, 2019: 53-73; Olimid, D.A. & Olimid, A.P., 2023: 49-61; Caridà, Colurcio & Melia, 2022: 755-771).

2. Literature Review

The literature on human factors and social innovation is broad and diverse, contributing to a deeper understanding of the changes and challenges of recent decades. Thus, the complexity in supporting and assisting institutional and informal social arrangements became a focused object of study (Jalonen, 2021: 356-359), starting from theoretical aspects of social innovation to reach the results of social interactions and the intricacies in planning, policy making and policy implementation in different settings and industries (Schartinger, Rehfeld, Weber, & Rhomberg, 2019: 1 026-1045; Gallouj, Rubalcaba, Toivonen, & Windrum, 2018: 551-569). On the one hand, the literature

deployed the EU policy-making process, in particular outlining the policy tools designed to promote social innovation and act as a link to different social groups within the process (von Jacobi, Edmiston, & Ziegler, 2017: 148-162; Eseonu, 2021: 306-313). The methodologies developed to overtake the scope and multiple directions of social development also focused on the "bottom-up" forces, processes and "social practices" that outline social innovation and "human development", a field of research in which "social capabilities" are key (Pellicer-Sifres, Belda-Miquel, López-Fogués, & Boni Aristizábal, 2017: 258-274; Howaldt, & Schwarz, 2017: 163-180).

However, studies have also managed to bring different methodologies to the public sector in search of tools to maximise citizens' access and promote social development (El-Haddadeh, Irani, Millard, & Schröder, 2014: 250-258). Some research advances the thesis of exploring entire "social innovation ecosystems" by analysing intertwined social policies, institutional arrangements and organisational processes and constraints in different national policy contexts (Unceta, Luna, Castro, & Wintjes, 2019: 906-924; Silva-Flores, & Murillo, 2022).

Various indicators have been developed to assess the results of social innovation (Unceta, Castro-Spila, & García Fronti, 2016: 192-204). Another theme is the study of "change agencies" and the identification of actors responsible for the multiplication of social innovations (Wirth, Tschumi, Mayer, & Bandi Tanner, 2023: 33-51). This dimension of analysis has positioned the interactions between multiple levels of governance and nodes or modules of social innovation that act as multipliers for societal change and social entrepreneurship and public management (Terstriep, Rehfeld, & Kleverbeck, 2020: 881-905; Moore, Westley, & Brodhead, 2012: 184-205; Terstriep & Rehfeld, 2020: 853-863), but also at the micro-level of programme design (Cairns, 2017: 725-734). Public-private modes of governing social innovation were also inserted into scrutiny (Klievink, & Janssen, 2014: 240-249).

The impact of social networks and social media on social innovation policy has also been analysed within embedded formal institutional contexts (Charalabidis, Loukis & Androutsopoulou, 2014: 225-239), as well as at the macro-level of security and institutional resilience (Georgescu, Olimid & Gherghe, 2022: 82-96). Moreover, the literature on societal change, human factors and social innovation has benefited greatly from various strands of research that have analysed the multiplier effects of "social psychology" and resilience to social innovation (Avelino, Dumitru, Cipolla, Kunze & Wittmayer, 2019: 955-977; Olimid, Georgescu & Gherghe, 2022: 38-51).

3. Methodology

(a) Methods and data collection

The analysis employs both quantitative and qualitative methods using Mermaid v10.9.0 Live Editor, an analytical tool available for creating web browser-based charts (Figure 1a and Figure 1b). Therefore, Figures 2, 3 and 4 present the results of the analysis of the three monitoring reports [EaSI Report (2015-2016) (2017); EaSI Report (2017-2018) (2020) and EaSI Report (2019-2020) (2022)], focusing on the input and output indicators of the analytical framework and highlighting the main mechanisms and policies observed and revealed during the research. The programme integrates key concepts and syntaxes that allow for a triple assessment: social, economic and environmental, providing a systematic basis for the evaluation of the EASI programme monitoring reports during the period 2015-2022. In addition, the research methodology is based on mixed methods:

(a) The *case study* approach, pointing to the monitoring reports on the link between the role of human factors and the social innovation framework, was examined using three documents retrieved from the official EU website as follows the EaSI Report (2015-2016) (2017), the EaSI Report (2017-2018) (2020) and the EaSI Report (2019-2020) (2022) (Figure 1a);

(b) the *analysis of the context and conceptual background* of human determinants and social sustainability,

linking social development to access to information and learning, social innovation and dialogue, and placing performance indicators (e.g., access to finance, policies for vulnerable groups) as a central axis for assessing institutional capacity, institutional support and organisational management (Figure 1a).

Therefore, the current research involves a legal and systematic analysis of the three monitoring reports launched by the EU for the employment and social innovation sector, as follows: (a) the EaSI Report (2015-2016) (2017); (b) the EaSI Report (2017-2018) (2020); (c) the EaSI Report (2019-2020) (2022).

(b) Analytical framework

In addition, the analytical framework of the study includes five key components: (1) key elements of the monitoring report, policy objectives and impact; (2) assessment of policy objectives and mechanisms for their implementation; (3) selection of policy instruments and mechanisms; (4) review analysis involving civil society, organisations, Member States, society, communities, citizens; (5) analysis of policy implementation with a focus on social challenges, human factor and social sustainability. In addition, the general framework also points to the quadrants of elements (as follows: Quadrant 1 – Human factors, upper left part of Figure 1b; Quadrant 2 – Social sustainability, upper right part of Figure 1b; Quadrant 3 – Institutional mechanisms, lower left part of Figure 1b; Quadrant 4 – Policy reforms and



Figure 1a. Develop a flowchart for policy and framework analysis
Source: authors' own compilation

General framing for policy analysis using Mermaid Live Editor (v10.9.0 - mermaid.live)

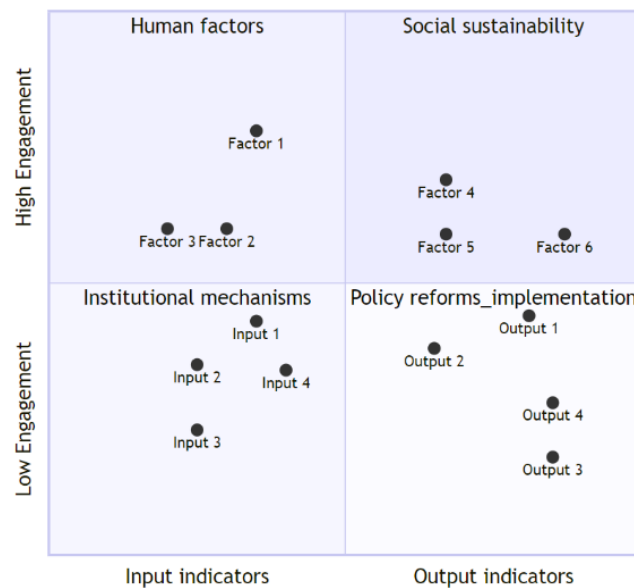


Figure 1b. General framework for analysis

Source: authors' own compilation

implementation, lower right part of Figure 1b). The quadrants presented in Figure 1b, also measure input and output factors, as well as topics of high and low relevance in Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4.

(c) Key indicators and sampling monitoring reports

In addition, the data collection for the legal analysis of the monitoring report for the EaSI programmes focuses on the assessment of indicators for key elements, namely (1) human development and social capabilities (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016); (2) governance mechanisms and social innovation (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018); and (3) policy reforms and systemic resilience space (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020).

4. Results and Findings

(a) The monitoring report of the EaSI programme for the period 2015-2016 (2017)

The Performance Monitoring Report (2015-2016) on the EaSI programme, launched and published in 2017, covers the institutional governance of the EaSI network and illustrates the vital importance of the policy area for social innovation and sustainability by promoting key priorities, including:

1. Place human development in a social and historical context by summarising key conceptual insights and key areas and actions, including: "human resources" (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: p. 63), "human health" (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: p. 74), "human beings" (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: p. 75), "human sources" (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: p. 37), "human rights" (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: p. 41). Other specific targets are based on the social objectives, funding mechanisms from the EaSI programme, economic and financial

inputs and outputs, the role of social enterprises and the timeline of policy reforms for social innovation, inclusive initiatives and stakeholder participation and awareness.

2. Identification of how institutions manage social sustainability by monitoring financial and social capabilities (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: p. 63), organisational resources and policy options (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: pp. 63-67).

3. Implementing a development and innovation agenda by operationalising different policy areas (public social services, local services, social inclusion, equal opportunities, health services, social policy, human rights, rehabilitation services, social investment, social enterprises, sustainability, and resilience) (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: pp. 57-62) by processing two types of impact analysis perspectives as follows:

(1) The short-term impact, which delivers immediate results in the areas of social inclusion and public participation, and (2) the medium- and long-term impact, which generates results for institutional governance, policy reform and financing (Figure 2).

In this context, the analysis of mechanisms and strategies such as social entrepreneurship and social innovation relate to the complex areas of social sustainability, namely: citizen participation, quality of life, civic engagement and equal opportunities (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: pp. 57-62), community participation and citizen initiatives. Considering the results of the impact analysis, the research also points to the challenges and feedback from stakeholders following a two-dimensional engagement (1) beneficiary experience and participation

Analysis of the monitoring report of the EaSI programme 2015-2016

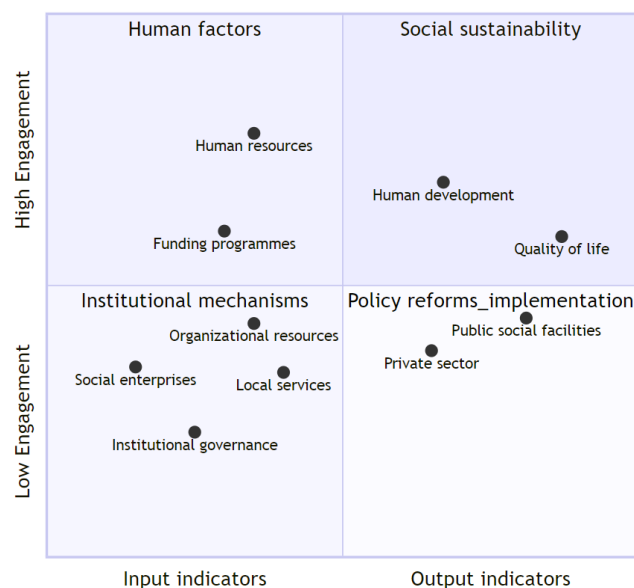


Figure 2. Quadrant chart for the monitoring report of the EU EaSI programme for the period 2015-2016 (2017) using Mermaid Live Editor (v10.9.0 – mermaid.live)

Source: authors' own compilation

(e.g., vulnerable groups) (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: pp. 87-92) and (2) institutional support, civil society feedback and private sector partnership (PMR_EASI, 2015-2016: pp. 13, 18, 30-34, 40107, 115, 130-131).

In Figure 2, the topics of "human resources" and "funding programmes" are highlighted in Quadrant 1 (shown in the upper left), which is associated with a high level of commitment, while "public social facilities" and "private sector" are highlighted for the outcome indicators in Quadrant 4 (shown in the lower right). Moreover, in the area of input indicators, for institutional mechanisms, the 2015-2016 monitoring report prioritises in Quadrant 3 (shown in the lower left section) four top topics in the area of "organisational resources", "social enterprises", "local services" and "institutional governance", and for the area of "social sustainability" (shown in the upper right section), two topics are mentioned with increased relevance, namely "human development" and "quality of life".

(b) The monitoring report of the EaSI programme for the period 2017-2018 (2020)

The purpose of the monitoring report of the EaSI programme for the period 2017-2018, launched in 2020, is to identify the analytical framework of policy innovation and social sustainability by providing an overview of the main outcomes of dialogue, learning and policy developments. Based on the main outcomes and findings of the EaSI programme, the monitoring report contributes to linking the social dimension to EU policies and governance mechanisms of labour market mechanisms (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: p. 11). Furthermore, the social and legal

context of the 2017-2018 performance report discusses (a) the performance evaluation and indicators; (b) the determinants and indicators focusing on the input and output data and information on the EURES framework; (c) the general and specific objectives reflecting the labour market mechanisms and the axis and the improvement of policy reforms (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: pp. 12-17). The context of the general objectives describes the social context, referring to social sustainability (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: pp. 64-65), social innovation (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: pp. 18-19, 35-43, 47, 72), social inclusion and equal opportunities (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: pp. 77, 93-95, 123-125). The data collection also samples specific indicators to measure performance progress, namely: policy evidence, employment statistics and services, statistics on market policies and working conditions. In addition, the assessment of key indicators uses an evidence-based framework that examines the monitoring information on quality of life, social networks and social conditions (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: pp. 74-75), social engagement and community cohesion and resilience (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: pp. 26, 76), decision-making processes and social innovation indices (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: pp. 10-35), community participation and institutional processes (PMR_EASI, 2017-2018: pp. 36, 76).

The chapters of this monitoring report examine four facets of the EaSI programme: (a) community engagement and EU policies; (b) mobility, learning and social dialogue; (c) the configuration of cooperation at the level of the Member States of the European Union and the institutional role of EURES in the

Analysis of the monitoring report of the EaSI programme 2017-2018

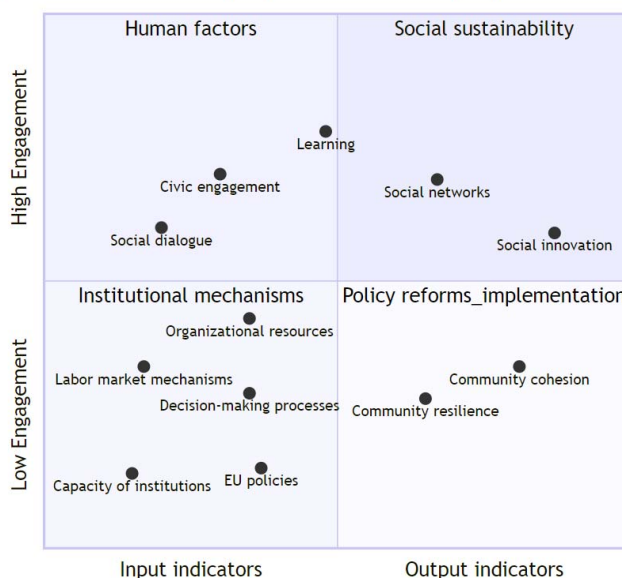


Figure 3. Quadrant chart for the monitoring report of the EU EaSI programme for the period 2017-2018 (2020) using Mermaid Live Editor (v10.9.0 – mermaid.live)
 Source: Authors' own compilation

space of EU institutional governance; (d) the role of information for the European market and the improvement of institutional capacity.

In this context, the research data available in Figure 3 identifies in the sphere of "human factors" and "social sustainability" (Quadrant 1-section 1, upper left of Figure 3 and Quadrant 2-section 2, upper right of Figure 3) five topics with increased relevance: "learning", "civic engagement", "social dialogue", "social networks" and "social innovation" and more concepts in the area of the *institutional mechanisms* (input factors) such as: "labour market mechanisms", "organisational resources", "decision-making processes", "capacity of institutions" and "EU policies" and the *implementation of political reforms* (output factors) namely: "community cohesion" and "community resilience".

(c) The monitoring report of the EaSI programme for the period 2019-2020 (2022)

The EaSI programme monitoring report for the period 2019-2020 develops a framework of policies and initiatives centred on two complementary development axes: (1) the development of policies and initiatives and (2) the development of a monitoring system and the quantification of progress directions in the field of governance, institutional and capacity building, social entrepreneurship and social action, as often described and analysed in the recent scientific literature (Baranowski, 2013), focusing on the role of public governance and public services, social and democratic governance and public reforms (Olimid, Georgescu, Gherghe, 2023: 126-138), health and healthcare services.

In this context, the monitoring report uses data, statistics and recent trends in social entrepreneurship, human development and social innovation, deepening the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the principle of free movement (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: p. 118) and the legal provisions and principles of gender equality (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: p. 125).

Each of the above-mentioned sectors has strengthened the public services sector by promoting and perfecting new practices and opportunities in the field of public services and EU organisational management (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: pp. 37, 102-104). Another essential aspect at the centre of the monitoring report concerns the human factor and the need for a multidisciplinary approach as an essential element to assess the development, mobility, stability and systemic resilience of the community space (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: p. 37).

In fact, the report shows that the human factor is the essential element of this multidisciplinary approach that aligns competences, skills and institutional and organisational flexibility (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: pp. 13, 51, 76, 101, 103, 116).

In addition, a conceptual consensus is emerging around the concept of "human" factors, placing "human health" (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: pp. 101, 116), "human resources" (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: p. 103), and "people" (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: p. 51) at the centre of the monitoring report.

Therefore, the monitoring report also underlines the effective application of EU legislation in the fields of social innovation, social protection and human

development, which is linked to good governance that influences mobility, workers' rights, recruitment facilities and services (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: pp. 115-121). In this context, the monitoring report fills the gap between incoming factors and indicators for social inclusion, enabling two components of the policy network:

(1) The analytical framework for the baseline levels of vulnerable groups (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: p. 124), stakeholder participation and involvement (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: p. 64-66).

(2) the framework structure and functions of the social partners in designing policy areas and measures, enabling drivers of capacity building and involving local and national administrations, working groups, authorities and organisations (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: pp. 71-73).

Other key findings of the monitoring report focus on the links between "development" and "health", reflecting links to health equity, health systems, human health and security. These approaches promote cohesion, inclusion, sustainability and resilience. More broadly, the context of "development" and "health" linkages includes two overarching actions and directions: (1) understanding the performance and management of the monitoring framework and system (PMR_EASI, 2019-2020: pp. 38-194); (2) articulating the links between taxonomy legislation and social sustainability.

Moreover, Figure 4 focuses on the complexity of institutional mechanisms in the area of input

indicators (quadrant 3, lower left part of Figure 4) by concentrating on five themes, namely "public services", "labour market mechanisms", "local and national administration", "EU organisational management" and "democratic governance". Quadrant 1 (upper left part of Figure 4) points to the human factors sector with high relevance for the content of the monitoring report for the period 2019-2020, focusing on four dimensions of social engagement and participation as follows: "social action", "social protection", "social entrepreneurship" and "social rights". Quadrant 2 (upper right part of Figure 4) emphasises the importance of social sustainability and the two central concepts: "stability" and "human mobility and participation".

5. Conclusions

Summarising the main findings of the research, the evaluation of the EaSI reports reinforces the pathways of reflective analysis of societal challenges, the role of human factors and the needs of the social innovation sector, taking into account the specific themes of EU policy approaches focused on collective action, sustainability and development.

Further research is needed to develop inclusive EU policies that take into account the adaptability of the complex national contexts of EU Member States, which call for collaborative governance and increased engagement.

In anticipation of the evaluation process, the monitoring report focuses on transformational

Analysis of the monitoring report of the EaSI programme 2019-2020

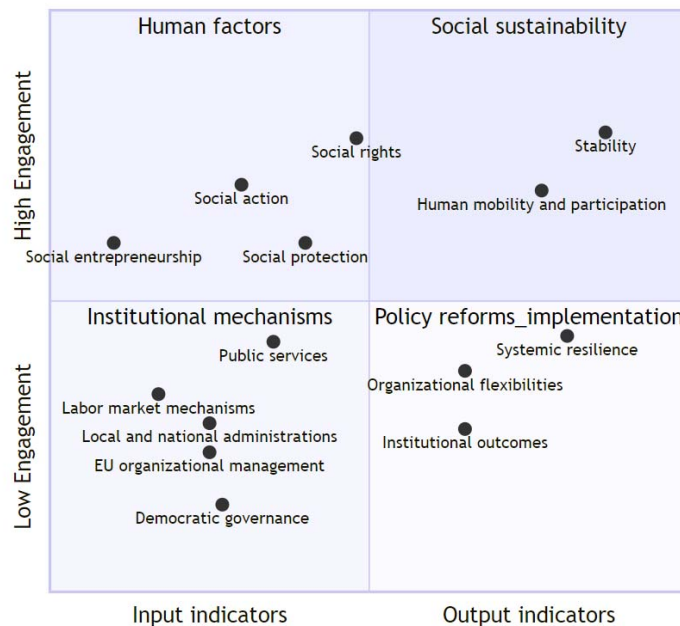


Figure 4. Quadrant chart for the monitoring report of the EU EaSI programme for the period 2019-2020 (2022) using Mermaid Live Editor (v10.9.0 – mermaid.live)

Source: authors' own compilation

development in terms of public engagement and policy-making, focusing both on the analytical dimension and on practical results. In this sense, the performance monitoring reports launched during the period 2015-2022 address both alternatives: EU governance and public policies, and the practice of local and national authorities and organisations reporting on sustainability and resilience.

The research has outlined the inputs and outputs of social innovation within a complex analytical matrix that maximises understanding of the intertwined levels of governance, political, social and economic mechanisms and policy instruments of societal challenges, the involvement of human factors and the implications for social innovation for both the public and private sectors.

The research instruments the linkages between societal transformation and human development

within an input-output matrix multiplier structure combining human factors, social sustainability, institutional mechanisms and policy making and implementation in the European Union's EaSI programmes. The dynamism of social innovation in Europe in the last decades has created a pioneering research environment for social innovation policy, societal transformation and human development, while instrumenting new ways for citizen participation frameworks, governance multipliers and societal development. Within this line of thinking, research on national, regional and European policy frameworks adds to the understanding of the different forces, practices, environments, challenges, constraints and patterns that configure, generate, multiply and impede social innovation, in a broader knowledge of the multiple governance system that this process implies.

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