



18th EMN ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021

EVALUATION REPORT

On 15th October 2021, the European Microfinance Network (EMN) held its 18th Annual Conference in Brussels, Belgium. First physical event of this dimension for the microfinance sector since the pandemic began, EMN and partners/members were keen to hold an in person event to focus on the essential: networking and bringing people back together.

As in every year, a report is drafted looking at the key bits of information gathered during the conference period. This report will firstly look at the main characteristics of the participant list in terms of membership, gender parity, geography etc. and will then evaluate the feedback received from participants to gauge their level of satisfaction with the conference. The aim is to continuously improve the services and organisation of future editions. This year feedback on the conference as a whole was gathered via a Google Form survey sent to participants in Thank You email following the conference.

Originally, EMN only received 19 overall evaluations, but following a dedicated follow up with participants individually the number of evaluations increased substantially. At the end of the period, the secretariat had received **59 completed feedback forms** from a potential 134 (participants excluding EMN secretariat) – 44%. This is the highest return on feedback forms in over 7 years of EMN conferences – highlighting that one-to-one communications with people bear more fruit than anonymous mailings.

The four workshops in the conference were also surveyed and a paper form was handed out and collected after each session, these results will be looked at separately. This report will look at the feedback from individual sessions, though the instances of returned feedback forms were lower than the total number of participants in the session.

This year, a total of **142 people*** attended the Conference, including EMN staff, sponsors, investors and more. This number was higher than expected for the conference, given that the event was taking place during the COVID pandemic and given that travel restrictions and entry requirements made international travel more complicated for EMN members and participants.

* This number excludes the conference organisers and service providers, e.g. interpreters, photographer, whose roles in the conference were more of a facilitative nature than participative (9 people).

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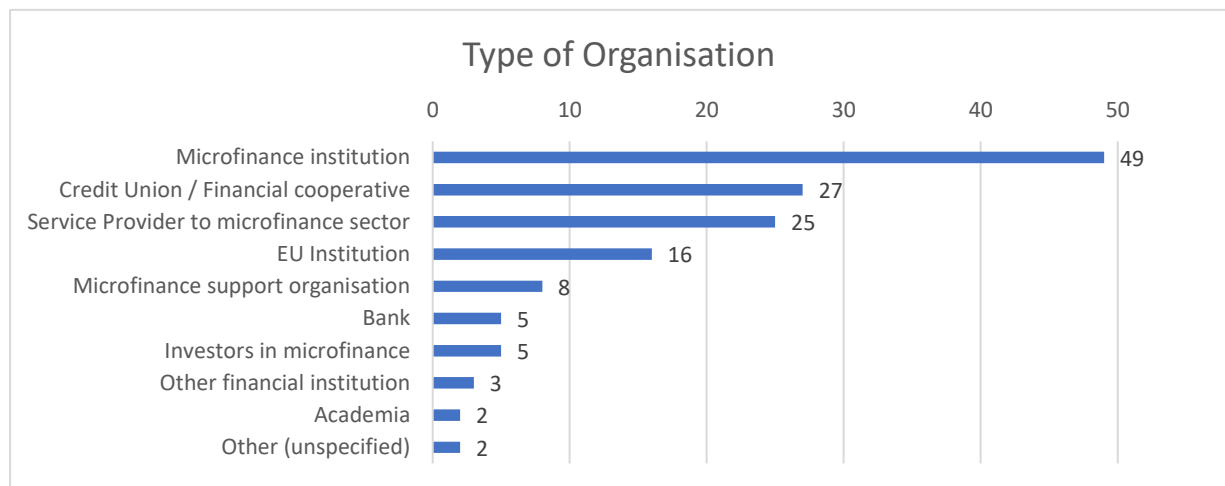
Participant Profile

EMN Members

Of 142 participants, 98 (69%) were representatives of EMN member organisations. 36 (25%) represented Non-member organisations, and 8 were EMN staff.

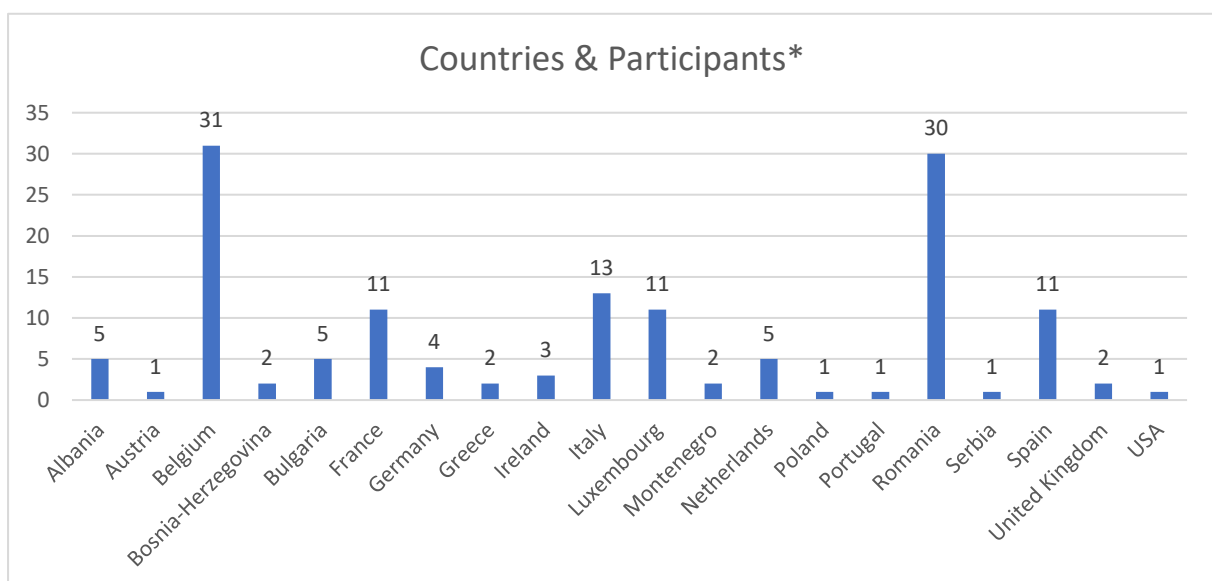
Type of Organisation

The organisations that participants represented at the conference can be grouped according to different types. Unsurprisingly, just over 59% of participants represented some type of *Financial Intermediary* (e.g. Bank, MFI, Credit Union). The remaining 41 % is spread among support organisations to the sector.



Geographic Scope

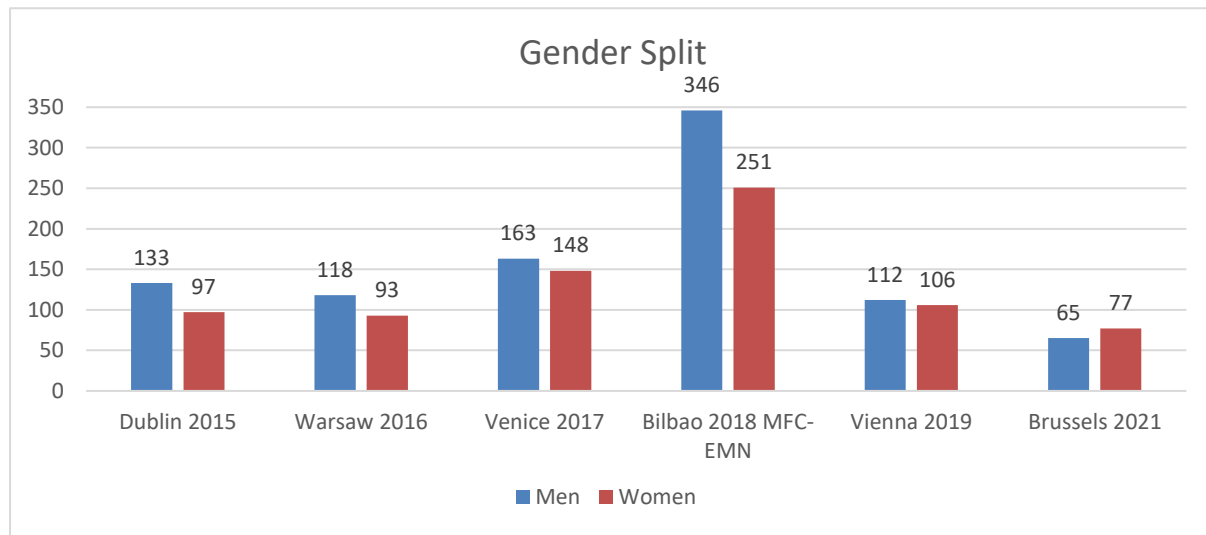
Participants at the conference came from a total of 20 different countries. The highest total number of participants came from organisations based in the EU-27 (129). All the rest of the countries, bar one, are located in geographic Europe.



*Based on the country of work not nationality.

Gender Split

EMN is required, as a beneficiary of European Union grant funding, to ask for the sex of participants to events during registration, in order to analyse gender parity. As such, only M/F are asked and it is not possible to decline to answer. For the first time in over 5 past in-person conferences, the gender split is reversed and more women than men attended the conference. 54% (77) indicated female during registration and 46% (65) indicated male.



Overall Feedback

Total returned feedback forms

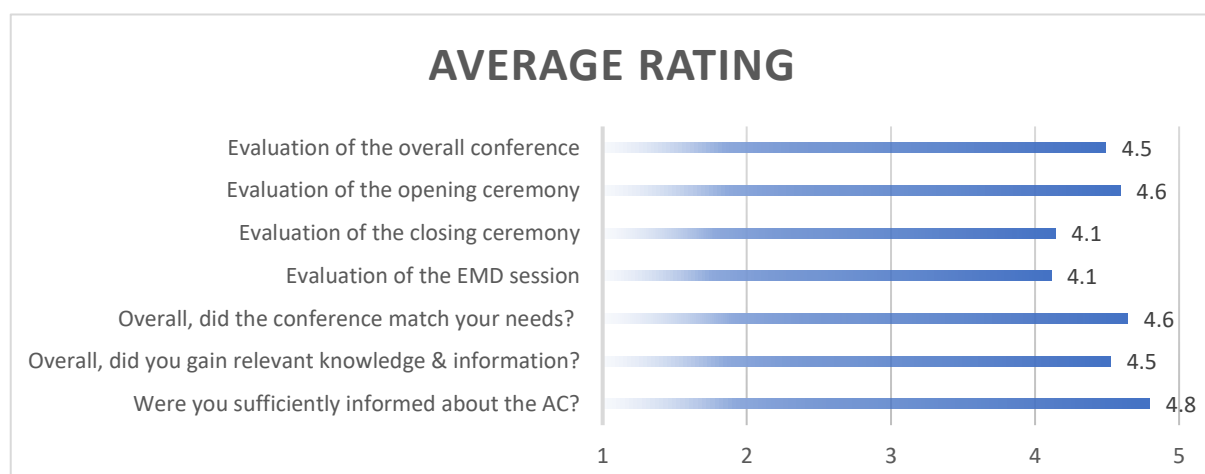
Participants were asked to fill in an online evaluation form about their overall experience at the conference, as well as their thoughts on the main plenary sessions.

The secretariat received **59 completed feedback forms** from a potential 134 (participants excluding EMN secretariat) – 44%.

Participants were asked to rate various statements on a sliding scale of 1-5, indicating two possibilities:

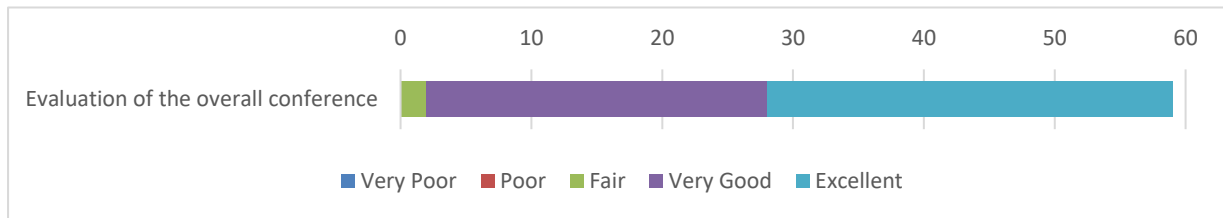
- 1 – Very Poor
- 2 – Poor
- 3 – Fair
- 4 – Very Good
- 5 – Excellent

- 1 – No, not at all
- 2 – No, not really
- 3 – Passably
- 4 – Yes, somewhat
- 5 – Yes, absolutely



The conference as a whole fared rather well for a first in-person edition since the beginning of the pandemic.

Overall Conference



Overall, the conference received a rating of 4.5 out of 5 indicating very good to excellent. Feedback was very generally very positive about the overall conference:

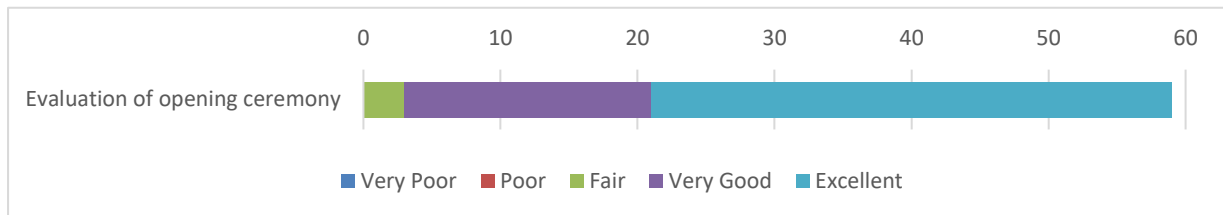
- It was a great seeing everybody again, being able to exchange. There is a very positive energy in this network, among the members and the EMN Team, which motivates also personally to continue striving to improve people's life through financial inclusion!
- Everything was very well organized, we felt safe, and the fact that we met again was very pleasant for us.
- It was a fantastic opportunity to reinforce the network of services providers in microfinance and to shed a light on usury prevention as an important topic in the redefinition of personal microcredit.
- Good for the spirit and dynamic to gather again in physical mode and not online; interesting talks and speakers.
- Considering the historical moment and the complexities over the pandemic, I think the conference was greatly organised. I particularly appreciated the presence of a microfinance customer: it brought concreteness to the discussions and represented the sector to its core.
- It was a great event after Covid 19 period. All participants want to share experience and would like to understand how to help and provide financing to micro clients.
- It was really great! Super well organized, all the measures respected, great content...totally great!
- Very well organised, relevant topics and speakers; very complete, all subjects were discussed.
- It was a pleasure being present at the first physical event of this dimension for the microfinance sector since the pandemic began. The EMN annual conference in Brussels was a success, thank you very much.
- All expectations personal and professional were covered
- Super good occasion to meet all actors in our European network again! Very good vibe and superb location, well-structured programme!

A few respondents were less positive overall, though still rated the event well, and indicated the following comments and recommendations for improvement:

- Average for the number of participants
- Low for the premises, especially in consideration of a larger number of participants
- I would prefer it to be more interactive and include more inspirational speeches from people outside the industry
- On the 15th, late morning and afternoon, there was a bit of confusion about the events taking place in parallel
- Too short, but well it was the first conference in 2 years and when the programme was built there were still a lot of uncertainty about whether it would be possible to organize on site. The 1.5 format is definitely better though.

All in all very good family reunion like atmosphere. I think this we should cater, to pursue a community not only an association

Opening Ceremony



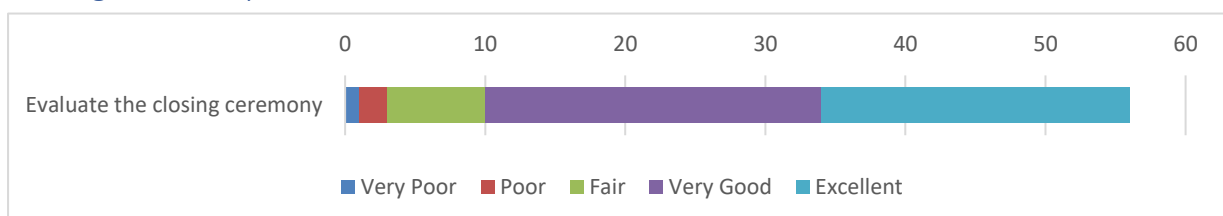
Positive Feedback, included:

- The MEP was good and EMN needs to follow-up this contact
- I appreciated the farewell speech of the former EMN president, and I wish him success in the activity of the new president
- Very good client story
- Sally was great!
- I liked the speeches because they sent concrete messages
- The testimonial story was to my liking. Congratulations, Sally Ghannoum!
- There were a lot of ideas and opportunities that were shared in the opening ceremony
- The client testimony was so inspiring and connected to what we were all gathered for.
- It was different, it was fresh, it was modern...I really enjoyed it!
- The story of the entrepreneur from microStart + interview was amazing
- I especially enjoyed the interview to Sally Ghannoum: amazing woman and entrepreneur, her intervention really connected me to the core values of our work as microfinance practitioners.
- Loved the inspirational story by Sally.
- I liked this mix of small presentations from policy-makers point of view and from the customer point of view. Both speakers were great!
- The live testimonial was great – if she had also performed (singing) it would have been even more amazing.

A few participants added some dissenting opinions:

- A bit self-celebrating among pals but ok
- It wasn't that much of an interview though. Sally spoke more.

Closing Ceremony

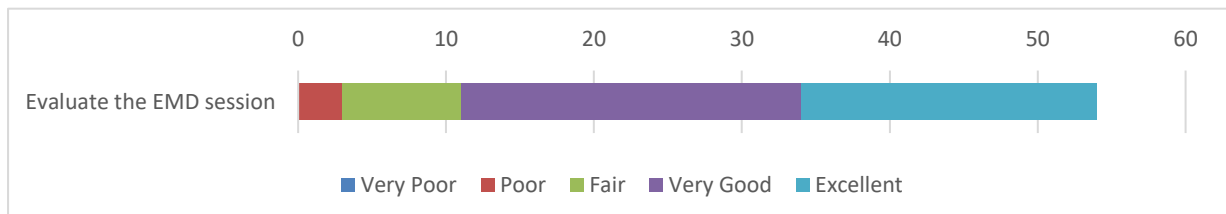


The Closing Ceremony received only two written positive comment from participants (“There was very interesting findings for me. High quality speakers”; “closing note speech was interesting and it was a pleasure for me to listen and be a part of the meeting”), even though it was rated well. The rest of the comments were decidedly negative about this activity.

- [EIB Group] delivered the usual bureaucratic empty speech. We need to have something punchier and newer

- A bit long
- At the end of the conference it's hard to listen to such a dry speech that is read aloud. Can't remember much of it.
- Not very inspiring; probably better to end with a motivational speaker so everyone will leave with great enthusiasm. A speaker outside Microfinance sector could also be very inspirational.

European Microfinance Day Session



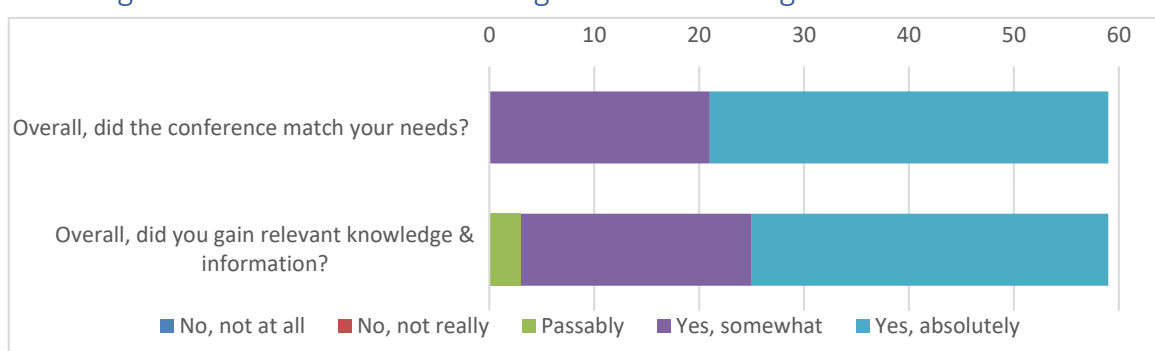
Comments ranged from:

- Very inspired by the [visual identity of the EMD]. Congratulations to those who received the certification on the Code of Good Practice!
- The award ceremony, from which we also benefited, creates a huge feeling of satisfaction, a professional recognition of the results
- Everything was organized perfectly
- Unless I missed something, which is also very likely, I missed a bit of context about this award ceremony. I am well aware of the "code" itself, but I did not really understand on what basis the MFIs received this award : is it because they were granted "the code" within the last 2 years or for the first time, because they had a certain score, other reasons ?
- The subjects were very interesting and relevant. We came back with a lot of new information. Thank you
- Excellent speakers
- Local organizations had a positive feedback for receiving recognition of their work, in particular two organisations who were awarded the Code during the EMD session commented "this was a very important and exciting moment for us [as new practitioners of the ECoGC]" and "we were really glad to participate in the ceremony and to meet and feel the support of the EU institutions and other MFIs".

To:

- It feels like the award ceremony is always a little rushed. I miss hearing about the type of organization that receives the award, where they are from, what they offer.
- Not exciting but probably needed in our programme :)
- I do not believe in MF Day
- It was ok, but a bit "[redone]" with the very standard and usual handshakes and pictures. Something livelier would be better in the future. Why not a vote from the audience on a 1 minute presentation or something of this kind.

Matching needs and relevant knowledge & information gained



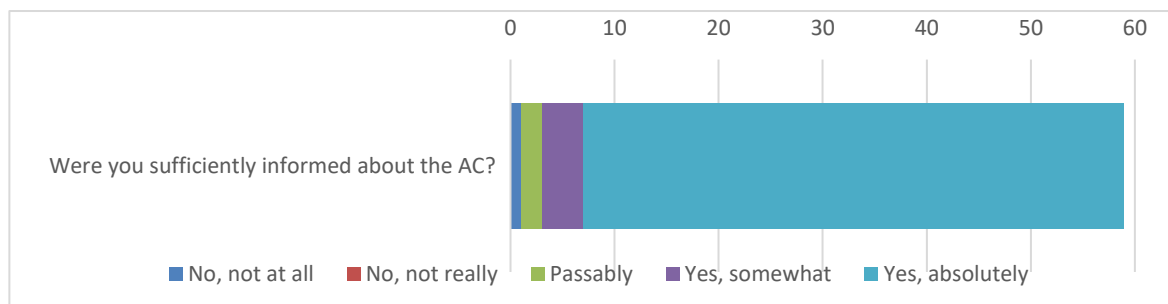
For the most part, participants indicated that the conference matched their needs and they gained relevant knowledge & information. Comments ranged from:

- Good networking, important information acquired
- I had an opportunity to listen and be a part of the meeting where I received relevant information about financing market in Europe and also share and exchange study cases and real business analysis about Covid 19 and micro financing
- As usual, the EMN Conference allows MFIs to gather knowledge about institutional/public policies and trends, as well as get knowledge/relevant contacts to deal with daily challenges (i.e. digitalisation, funding, best practices, etc.).
- I was focused on doing Networking and it worked.
- Everything was perfect. Thank you!
- It may seem too enthusiastic an approach from me since I was there for the very first time. But I would like to underline that you made me felt at ease and that I came to know very competent people and very interesting MFIs.

To:

- I wish I didn't have to choose between digital transformation and InvestEU and speed dating.
- Due to the contraction of the format, speed meeting / networking and workshops were overlapping forcing us to choose and since I was engaged in a workshop I could not make the most out of it, so I left a bit frustrated. I did not have time to meet / discuss with all the people I wanted to talk to.
- A little bit short in time for one to one discussions and networking.

Communications



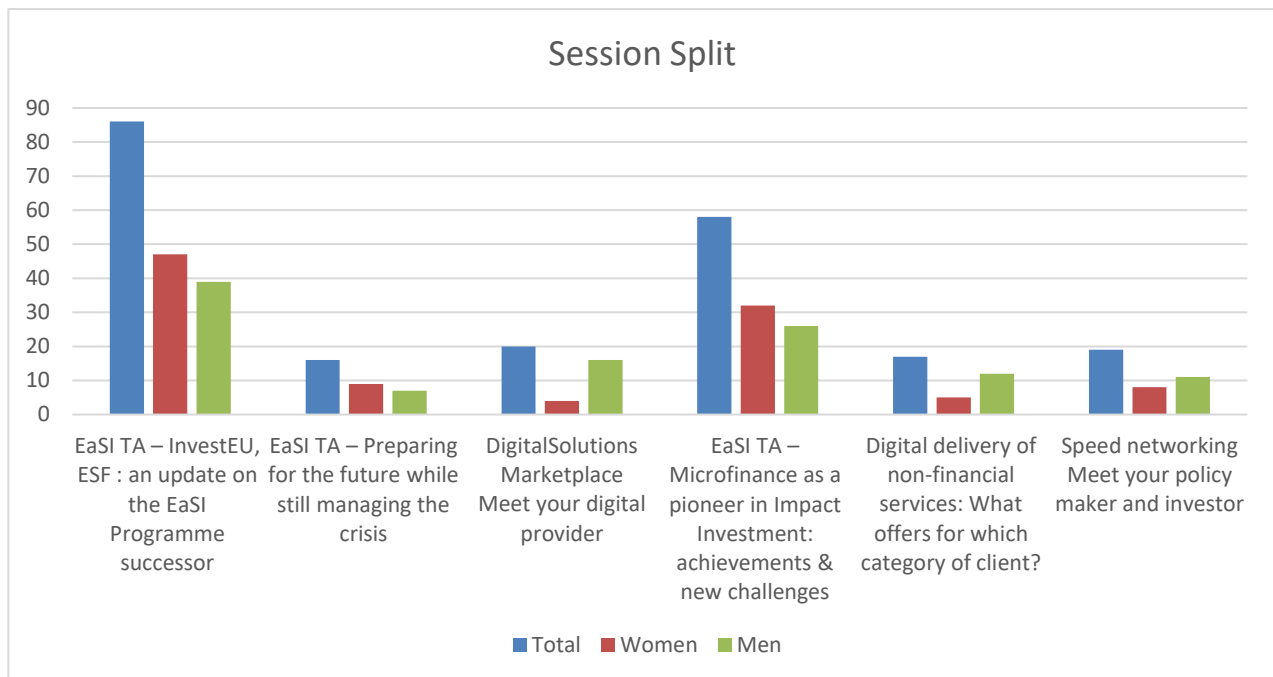
Most participants indicated that the communication campaign for the conference was well executed:

- We appreciate all the messages we received through which we were informed about the Conference, but also about the conditions.
- Really professionally run, thank you!

One participant learnt of the conference via EMN's partners in the sector, "I was made aware of the conference via the EMP (European Microfinance Program) Alumni network and MFR", though another "did not receive anything", which was potentially down to a miscommunication of email addresses.

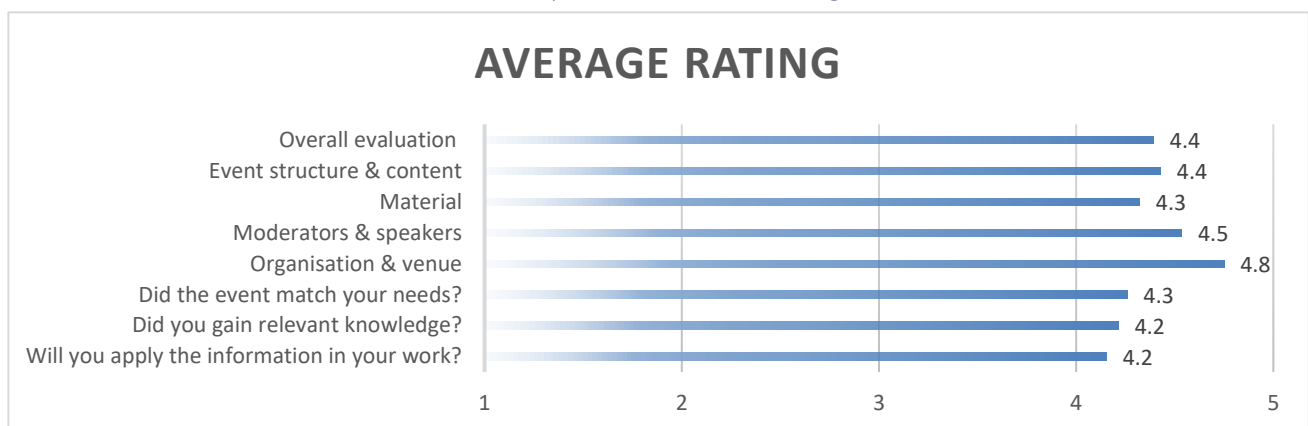
Session Feedback

Total number of participants per session



Feedback from particular sessions

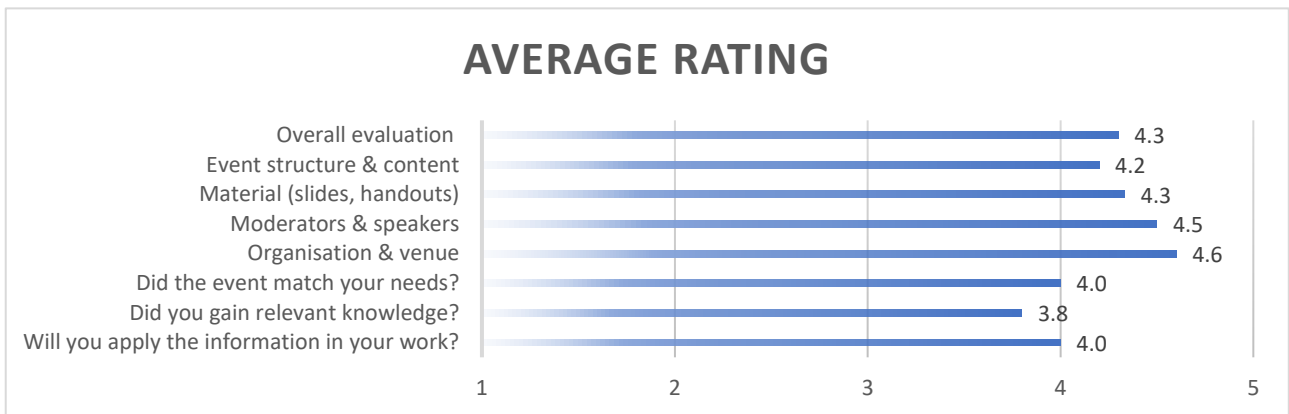
Session 1: EaSI TA – InvestEU, ESF: an update on the EaSI Programme Successor



Comments:

- A positive experience but would however be better to focus on [fewer] topics in one session with [fewer] speakers
- Good balance on background to programmes together with experiences of practitioners. [The speaker from EIF and the speaker on ESF from the EC] could have done better use of slides and bullet points
- Not an easy subject to present but speakers did well
- Interesting topics and great networking chance
- Far too much bureaucratic speech and not enough actual and precise info on EU funds.

Session 2: EaSI TA – Preparing for the future while still managing the crisis.



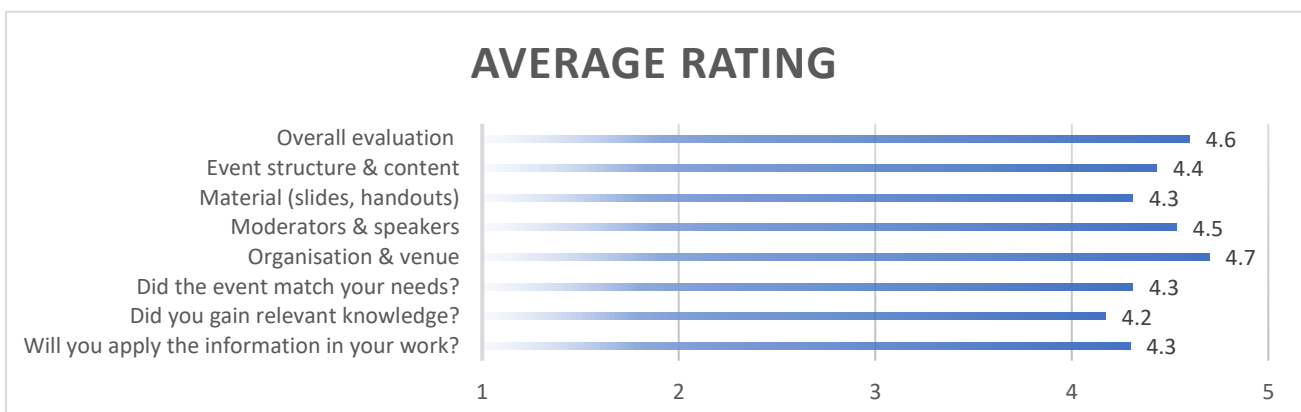
- The [workshop] is very impressive, multicultural, different views which makes it interesting and motivating to think differently in terms of business and social life during crisis
- Very interesting workshop. Gave the opportunity to interact and network.

Session 3: DigitalSolutions Marketplace: Meet your digital provider

No official feedback was gathered from the DigitalSolutions Marketplace but some of the providers gave feedback via email:

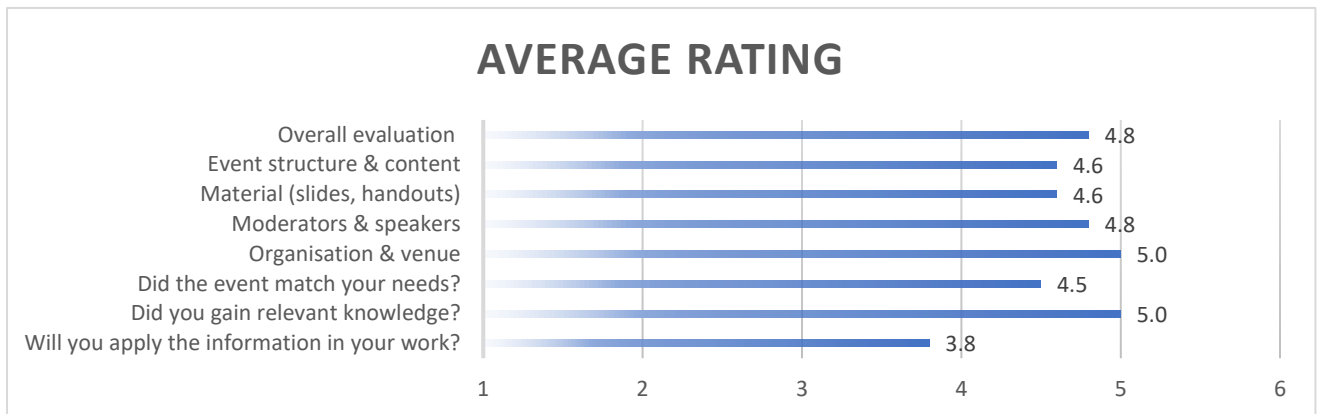
- "The DSMP was small but effective, the practitioners enjoyed meeting each other to see how they complemented each other or where they overlapped. We should repeat it next year."
- "Thank you for organising the DSMP. We would love to be a part of further collaboration by contributing to the knowledge about digitization as well as working with individual members."

Session 4: EaSI TA – Microfinance as a pioneer in Impact Investment: achievements & new challenges



- Sometimes too far from practical implementation and reality
- They were all very interesting
- An interesting panel with open discussion between quite different positions on impact ESG, measurement x demonstration.

Session 5: Digital delivery of non-financial services: What offers for which category of client?



- Great content, I am particularly impressed by the features offered by ADIE to their clients through the implementation of digital services
- A bit too short/[not enough] time to exchange though.

Session 6: Speed Networking

Feedback was gathered from Investors as well as participants. Investors indicated they had many meetings lined up where they could deep dive into the topics of interest to the MFIs. The activity was rated with an average of **4.6 out of 5** by participants, who also gave the following feedback:

- This is a very good initiative! Only suggestion: it would be good for the next time not to organise the speed networking while other sessions take place.
- Clearer description of people's responsibilities / organisation. Propose questions as ice-breaker. Send a reminder before the event to avoid people not coming.
- First of all, we would like to congratulate the whole team for the initiative. As [our organisation] is currently implementing the Code of Good Conduct, the Speed Networking allowed us, in a few minutes, to clarify some questions related to the implementation process of the Code of Good Conduct. Thank you very much.
- It would be useful to have an EMN guidance service in order to match the participants of Speed Networking with the right investors/policy makers relevant to them, since the title representing the topic for each time slot might be too general or vague.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that overall the conference was well appreciated, and participants were “grateful” for the risk that EMN took to hold this event in person. Networking and meeting peers is more important than ever, and the participants took the most out of this conference.

19th EMN Annual Conference 2022 – topics, ideas, recommendations

Participants were asked to indicate what would interest them the most for next year’s event, the 19th EMN Annual Conference. They provided topics of interest as well as some ideas and recommendations for the next edition.

Topics, organised by similar threads:

- **EU:** Progress/update of InvestEU programme; A more concrete outlook of EaSI TA under InvestEU, with focus on novelties; more details about the InvestEU programme and more successful examples of microcredit providers; the future of microfinance institutions referring to EU directives and regulations; Precise data about future EU programmes; European projects partnerships.

- **Funds:** More opportunities for financing; Guarantee programmes; EIF Guarantees How to access InvestEU Guarantee Funds; fundraising; funds and assistance available/in the pipeline from EU entities or others; EU Grant resources for BDS; funding options for MFIs; other financing providers including TA programmes.
- **Advocacy:** An update upon the advocacy work for personal loans; How to convince authorities to support MFIs; how to convey a stronger message about the value of BDS to relevant parties ("monetisation" of BDS value, social impact of BDS, etc.).
- **Green microfinance** (mentioned multiple times); Credit and non-financial products for environmental protection; Ecological transition of MFIs and inclusive finance in general; EU funding of green products.
- **Digitalisation** tools, services, products, platforms + demos of these; digitalisation of MFIs; technological innovations & digital entrepreneurship; Digital Transformation & preservation of traditions; Digitalisation vs personal touch; the digital risk; digitalisation as a tool for recruiting new clients; how to educate clients to adopt digital products.
- **Crisis/Risk:** Managing during/post-Covid crisis; How can we manage future crises; post-pandemic BDS; Drivers/challenges for microfinance; the risk in financial activities.
- **Social** impact measurement; Social Impact Speakers - Best Practices in MFI and social attention; Social Mission of loans; social finance; links/collaboration between microfinance and social entrepreneurship.
- **Experience/best practice** of those who grant loans in disadvantaged areas (people without education, without bank accounts, without internet); Exchanging experiences and best practices of MFIs to reach out to the most fragile, the "underserved" (the ones who do not knock on our door, the one who do not know us, our services nor micro-financing); sharing ideas and information on how to support social and start-up businesses to grow.
- **EMN:** The future and the strategy of the European Microfinance Network; benefits for being an EMN member.
- **Miscellaneous:** Human capital in the future; Migrant entrepreneurship; female entrepreneurship; microinsurance; Innovative microfinance; information on sectorial distribution of microfinance; How to -very practically- implement new impact KPIs into the organization; rural microfinance; Microcredit as a chance to fulfil human rights by enabling people to become ""free from fear"; hot topics but difficult ones to discuss such as attracting / retaining talents vs. salaries in microfinance, how to finance the digital transformation of MFI, why impact investors are not looking at microfinance / what sectors needs to change, how to compete /differentiate from commercial on-line lenders.

Ideas/recommendations for improvement:

- A change ! Something different, lively and imaginative e.g. Have the President of the EC deliver a speech, organise something "out of the box" like the orchestra conductor in Vienna etc.
- Smaller interactive workshops; use of participation tools.
- A (more focused but closed) session oriented to investors in a club format; bring more/new investors or people from other networks that bring together investors.
- Inspiring speeches by people outside the industry
- More speed networking sessions and networking opportunities to meet other partners and to know their work within microfinance.
- Re-do the DigitalSolutions Marketplace but with pitches/intros from the main stage to assure attendance.
- More active sessions like the speed networking and the DigitalSolutions marketplace
- Announce and promote the topics and locations of other workshops/sessions during the plenaries to maximise attendance.
- Do not programme networking activities at the same time as workshops

- Avoid panels with many people in the workshops (not 6 people behind a desk) to allow for more interaction.
- For plenaries, interview style or panel with the official speakers from EIB/EIF/DG Employment would be nicer than them reading their individual speeches out loud but we should avoid having too many people seated on one panel. Do not allow slides during plenary speeches.
- Moments to share different experiences and knowledge, co-working, bringing more actors together in one event.
- We should keep the successful case testimonials from clients and do it in every conference we could even maybe combine with some arts.