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PART 15/21

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

EVALUATION

Interim Evaluation of the Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021 - 2024)

Accompanying the document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council

Horizon Europe: Research and Innovation at the heart of competitiveness

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Annex 23: Evaluation of EIT Food

Annex to the Commission's interim evaluation of Horizon Europe

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1. Effectiveness

The EIT Food Knowledge and Innovation Community (the KIC or EIT Food) was established in 2017 as part of the third wave of EIT KICs and in accordance with Article 9 of the EIT Regulation, Regulation (EU) 2021/819¹. Its first operational activities and calls were launched in 2018. Its main goal is to accelerate the transformation of food production, distribution and consumption in order to build a future-fit, healthy and sustainable food system in which Europe becomes the leading engine for food innovation. To achieve its mission, EIT Food received a EUR 305 million grant from the EIT for 2017-2023.

In 2023, EIT Food had over 340 strategic partners, including businesses, higher education institutions and research organisations. EIT Food has collaborated with 4 720 stakeholders overall, has brought together more beneficiaries than other EIT KICs² and has supported more than 60 000 participants in its educational programmes. Data on the participation of stakeholders in EIT Food activities reveals that it has become the world's largest food innovation community and makes a significant contribution to the EU's food system³.

Objectives and achievements

EIT Food's 2021-2027 Strategic Agenda⁴ contains the following strategic objectives: (1) to address low consumer trust in food; (2) to enable healthier and more sustainable individual consumer choice; (3) to build a consumer-centric connected food system across the EU; (4) to enhance sustainability through resource stewardship; (5) to educate, engage, innovate and advance; and (6) to catalyse food sector entrepreneurship and innovation across the EU. EIT Food has made steps in reaching these objectives, with a focus on enhancing consumer trust, promoting sustainability, driving innovation and advancing entrepreneurship in the food sector across the EU while also building a consumer-centric food system.

EIT Food has also contributed to achieving the objectives of the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programmes and particularly when it comes to the creation of innovative technologies and solutions, their deployment on the market as well as training and skills development.

All these strategic objectives are implemented and the results are delivered by applying the concept of integrating the knowledge triangle, which brings together education, science and business. In the EIT Impact Framework, the EIT has defined several key performance indicators (KPIs) for the KIC's innovation, business creation and education activities. Table 1 shows EIT Food's achievements in terms of its KPIs in 2020-2023.

¹ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/819 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology](#) replaced the original regulation, Regulation (EC) No 294/2008.

² European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Schwarz, A. and Wydra, S., *Partnership evaluation report – 'EIT Food' – Horizon Europe and the Green Transition – Interim evaluation support study*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, p. 26, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/3661526>.

³ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 10, <https://eit.europa.eu/library/seven-year-comprehensive-assessment-report-eit-food>.

⁴ [EIT Food Strategic Agenda 2021-2027](#). Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 72.

Table 1: EIT Food KPI 2018-2023; targets (T) and achieved results (A)

	2018		2019		2020		2021-2022		2023		Total	
	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A
Innovations launched on the market	6	7	30	21	35	31	63	76	65	39	199	174
Designed/Tested innovations*							86	620	100	1	186	621
KIC Supported Start-ups/Scale-ups	33	90	133	127	128	179	392	894	120	239	806	1529
Start-ups created of/for innovation	1	1	2	4	5	1	32	37	18	25	58	68
Start-ups created of EIT labelled MSc/PhD programmes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	8	15	8
Investment attracted by KIC supported start-ups/scale-ups (EUR mil)	5	21,8	12,5	91	26,5	170	113	632	50	208	207	1123
Graduates from EIT labelled MSc/PhD programmes	0	0	0	0	0	0	220	92	165	32	385	124
Participants in (non-degree) education and training*							9163	22672	6900	9508	16063	32180

* Reported from 2021 (KPI on designed/tested innovations reports on IPR applications)

Source: EIT administrative and monitoring data (reported by KIC and verified by EIT); data for some years/KPIs not reported/collected due to changes in the KPI system / impact framework.

The figures reported for 2018-2023 show that EIT Food has been continuously on track to achieve the KPIs set in its Strategic Agenda and the related business plans⁵, and that it has achieved most of its targets. EIT Food reported overachievements for most of its indicators for 2021-2022.

As regards education activities, the assessment of the KPIs indicates a combination of accomplishments and areas that demand additional effort⁶. EIT Food has been effective in attracting students to non-degree education and training initiatives, overachieving its target with some 32 000 participants in 2021-2023. However, the low number of start-ups created from EIT-labelled MSc/PhD programmes raises concerns about their effectiveness in fostering entrepreneurship. It is crucial for the KIC to make swift improvements in these areas.

As for innovation activities, EIT Food demonstrated success in marketed innovations, overachieving its target for 2021-2022. In 2018-2022, 135 innovations were launched on the market (including 34 in EIT RIS (Regional Innovation Scheme) countries⁷) but there was a slight decrease in the number of launches in 2023. 621 innovations were designed and tested in 2021-2022 – far more than the target set for that period of 186. The results reveal a positive trend for the creation of start-ups and that the 2021-2023 targets were met.

EIT Food has excelled in supporting entrepreneurial and business creation activities, demonstrating a strong performance in this area. It has notably surpassed the target set for the number of supported start-ups/scale-ups, reaching a total of over 1 500 start-ups in 2018-2023 (almost twice the target number). Similarly, KIC-supported start-ups/scale-ups attracted about five times more private funding than expected (EUR 1 123 million in 2018-2023). This included the creation of 10 new start-ups through the SeedBed incubator as well as support for 280 start-ups in incubation, acceleration and scaling programmes. The KIC provided them with access to the EIT Food network, access to the market through pilot projects with corporate partners, financial support through activities like FoodSparks and connections with

⁵ <https://www.eitfood.eu/businessplan2023-2025>.

⁶ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 69.

⁷ The indicators/numbers for EIT RIS countries refer only to 2021-2022.

the investor community⁸. In 2024, the Financial Times ranked EIT Food (together with four other KICs) among the leading 125 European start-up hubs⁹.

As regards support for businesses and entrepreneurs, EIT Food has been successful due to the composition of the partnership and the comparatively easier access that smaller companies and start-ups have to the KIC¹⁰. EIT Food has been particularly successful in bringing together organisations from higher education (56) and businesses (119)¹¹, considering the number of cross-actor participations compared with the total number of participations by each type of actor. In addition, EIT Food also proved very successful in relative terms in linking cities, regions and NGOs with higher education organisations (146 connections). Conversely, the lowest degree of linkages was between cities, regions and NGOs and businesses (97 connections)¹².

According to the external evaluation report¹³, most KPI targets were achieved during the 2018-2023 period and the KIC is therefore expected to achieve its objectives over the seven-year period outlined in its 2021-2027 Strategic Agenda. However, certain KPIs (particularly those related to financial sustainability and participants in (non-degree) education and training) have not been meeting their intended targets and could improve. One should nevertheless note that EIT Food is making efforts to invest in projects that provide room for equity return and financial return over the long term. This can be seen as a good start and a strong indicator of the KIC's aim to achieve financial sustainability.

Long-term scientific, societal, economic and technological impacts

The following societal impact goals have been identified in the EIT Impact Framework 2022-2027 for the KIC's activities:

- 1) increased public engagement in the food system;
- 2) increased adoption and uptake of innovation in the food system;
- 3) increased intake of foods with healthier nutritional profile;
- 4) reduction in the relative risk (R) of obesity and non-communicable disease (NCD) prevalence in target populations due to known dietary factors;
- 5) improved food safety and security;
- 6) improved environmental impact of agri-food systems;
- 7) products on the market derived from alternative sources;
- 8) reduced food waste and food loss;
- 9) alumni retained in the food system;
- 10) new skills and professions developed in the food sector;

⁸ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 72.

⁹ [Ranking – Europe's leading start-up hubs | Incubator Accelerator Programmes Europe \(ft.com\)](https://ft.com/ranking-europe-start-up-hubs-incubator-accelerator-programmes).

¹⁰ In 2019, 79.5% of businesses in the sector were microcompanies, 16.2% were small companies and 3.4% were medium-sized companies. These three groups together accounted for 41.5% of sectoral value added and 57.7% of sectoral employment, <https://www.fooddrinkurope.eu/resource/data-trends-of-the-european-food-and-drink-industry-2022/>.

¹¹ European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Dinges, M. and Coatanroch, G., *Horizon Europe and the Green Transition – Interim evaluation support study – Final report ('Phase 2' study)*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/67934>.

¹² Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 26.

¹³ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 80.

11) improvement in the food system's contribution to outcomes under the EU Circular Economy Monitoring Framework;

12) improved efficiency and sustainability of food systems ¹⁴.

The indicators were only introduced in 2021. The assessment therefore focuses on the relevance of the KIC's activities in contributing to achieving these goals rather than on the extent of the impact already achieved.

Based on the external evaluation report ¹⁵, EIT Food has increased public engagement in the food system through a range of initiatives, such as online fora, thematic storytelling and collaboration with the European Commission and the United Nations. The number of participants in promotion activities in 2021-2023 was 56 780 according to the KIC's data – so the targets set in the KIC's Strategic Agenda of 12 000 by 2024 and 20 000 by 2027 ¹⁶ were more than met. In addition, the KIC has engaged 212 000 individuals in initiatives to promote healthier and more sustainable behaviours, with 20 000 additional participants in co-creation activities. The KIC has also established an education team, which achieved 6.3 million engagements in social media and 13 925 followers on LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. As described in the 2022 KIC report, EIT Food's consumer engagement activities included the expansion of the Citizen Participation Forum, as well as the organisation of FoodUnfolded dialogues during the 2021 United Nations food System Summit and the 2022 Future of food conference in Brussels. The KIC's communication efforts in 2021-22 led to 14 million engagements in social media and 1.5 million website visits. FoodUnfolded generated over 1 million visits to social media and 13.5 million interactions in social media. The Future of Food Conference gathered over 1 000 policymakers, EIT Food partners, research, and innovation stakeholders and agri-food experts. EIT Food's public engagement portfolio facilitated the engagement of over 40 000 citizens through surveys and focus groups. These efforts indicate a proactive approach to involving the public ¹⁷.

EIT Food has promoted innovation in the food system by offering comprehensive support to innovators and promoting new initiatives. According to data from Dealroom ¹⁸, 34 digital solutions were already achieved in 2023, thus clearly more than meeting the targets of 10 by 2024 and 20 by 2027. EIT Food's overall performance is consistent with its agenda, even if partner survey results ¹⁹ suggest that there is still further room for improvement (especially in product commercialisation). These innovations have been further mapped to six impact indicators in order to track progress towards meeting the targets in the 2021-27 Strategic Agenda. Table 1A shows the progress made to date:

¹⁴ [EIT Impact Framework 2022-2027](#), pp. 14-16.

¹⁵ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, pp. 47-49.

¹⁶ This section uses data from Dealroom, an open-access platform that tracks start-ups supported by EIT Health. These data were last updated in November 2024.

¹⁷ EIT Food TrustTracker® is an annual evidence-based questionnaire that measures consumer trust in the EU's food system. The data have been tracked since 2018 in order to monitor developments and compare trust levels over time. It provides valuable insights that are used to enhance consumer trust in the food value chain. The KIC's Consumer Observatory studies and other targeted interventions add to this base number every year. More information regarding the TrustTracker® and Consumer Observatory reports can be found [here](#). For details on the participants, see [Citizen Participation Forum – EIT Food](#) and the [Food Expert Advisory Board – EIT Food](#).

¹⁸ The data are extracted from the start-up database DealRoom and are used to track investment and employment at start-ups supported by the KIC.

¹⁹ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food Final Report*, 2024, p. 47.

Table 1A

	Use of guidance	Improved nutritional profile	Reduction in CO ₂	Use of waste / side streams	Alternative sources of protein	Digital tools for supply chain
2018-23	63 120 people	30	41	20	26	34
Target by 2024	20 000 people	12	15	15	15	10

As regards the goal of increasing the intake of healthier foods, EIT Food supported 63 120 consumers in 2023 and launched 26 innovations on the market to improve dietary choices. Systemic barriers in consumer behaviour nevertheless remain challenging.

EIT Food has reduced the risk of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by involving 9 000 consumers in personalised diet initiatives, and has also introduced 25 digital solutions for supply chain improvement. It has thus more exceeded the 2024 and 2027 targets of 2 000 and 4 000 consumers. EIT Food has supported 30 products launched on the market through EIT Food's support (2018-23) with improved nutritional profiles. EIT Food has also surpassed its Strategic Agenda targets of 12 products launched on the market by 2024 and 20 by 2027. The supported products include products with reduced saturated fat and/or levels of salt/sugar, products that use alternative sources of protein, and products that comply with the recommended Food-Based Dietary Guidelines for Europe ²⁰.

EIT Food has successfully improved food safety and security by exceeding its KPI target of 10 products and services placed on the market by 2024 with 34 new digital tools enhancing supply chain efficiency, integrity and transparency in 2018-2023 (as shown in the table 1A). The KIC has also used a comprehensive approach that includes end-to-end food chain modelling, and a global food security initiative to promote collaboration and information exchange.

In relation to the goal of improving the environmental impact of agri-food systems, EIT Food has developed guidelines and focused on circular bio-economy solutions. As part of the impact indicator targets, EIT Food include innovations launched on market that mitigate or reduce CO₂e emissions and innovations that use waste or side streams. EIT Food has so far launched over 41 innovations onto the market that mitigate CO₂e emissions and has supported over 800 start-ups in assessing their contribution to CO₂e emissions mitigation. Completed impact assessments show that EIT Food has so far mitigated 323.9 metric tonnes of CO₂e contributions ²¹. This is already much more than the target of reducing CO₂ emissions by 18 metric tonnes by 2027. It would be equivalent to 40 innovations launched on the market, which was already achieved in 2023 (as stated above). By 2025, we estimate that evidence for mitigation of over 500 metric tonnes of CO₂e emissions will be available and that the KIC will have supported innovations contributing over 1 000 metric tonnes of CO₂e emission mitigation. Looking forward, there are more assessments to complete. For example, one of the KIC's supported start-ups – Mimica – has predicted that emissions of over 1 000 000 metric tonnes of CO₂e will be mitigated.

²⁰ See, for example, the [Salus Optima impact case study](#).

²¹ Initial assessments have identified 1 project of 5.9 metric tonnes and 1 start-up of 5 300 metric tonnes (EIT can claim 318 of this), making a proven total of 323.9 metric tonnes.

EIT Food has made progress in promoting products derived from alternative sources and has exceeded its target, with 26 products on the market (the 2024 target was 15).

EIT Food's initiatives to reduce food waste and food loss have also made progress; 20 new products use revalorised and/or reintegrated food system side streams and waste streams. This already meets the 2024 target of 15 products and is a substantial improvement. However, partner survey results show a need for increased impact and broader participation in addressing food waste and loss. According to the results of the external evaluation survey²², 46% of respondents who participated in activities related to the reduction of food waste and food loss reported a strong to medium impact. This emphasises the importance of initiatives to promote healthier eating. 36% reported a weak to zero impact in their efforts. 18% stated that their activities are unrelated to this area.

The results of the graduate survey conducted for the external evaluation²³ show that 65% of alumni are presently working within the food sector, 32% are not working in the agricultural sector and 3% were uncertain as to whether or not they were working in the food sector. By 2024, the aim would be to retain 85% of alumni of the KIC's education activities in the food sector. An AI tool is being developed to carry out data scraping and determine the career destinations of the over 100 000 education student alumni. The assessment of this exercise will be used to create robust data for this indicator.

EIT Food aims to enhance skills and entrepreneurship in the agriculture sector by offering food system skills to over 10 000 individuals through advanced training programmes and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). As a result, 8 new skills and professions were developed in 2023, thus achieving the 2024 target of 8. Much of the core skills development focuses on entrepreneurial skills and the mindset of those currently in the education system. However, the KIC also facilitates MOOC programmes aimed at the general public through the Futurelearn platform²⁴, which can encourage participants to move into nutrition-related careers. In addition, EIT Food offers professional training to promote skills for those already working in the sector²⁵. Some of the KIC's supported start-ups and funded projects are supporting the move from manual labour (e.g. weeding) on farms to more focused tech-based and digital-based careers, such as those shown in the [Digital Agriculture for Sustainable Food Systems](#).

EIT Food's 'FoodConnects Assistant' programme aims to promote the contribution of the food system to the EU Circular Economy Monitoring Framework. Progress has been made in developing products from food system side streams and waste streams. 20 products (5 more than the targeted 15) were available on the market by 2023. No data are available for new entrepreneurs and start-ups.

EIT Food's focus on improving the efficiency and sustainability of food systems is shown through the completion of the first in a planned series of SROI assessments that provide evidence that, for every EUR 1 invested by EIT Food in its core business creation programmes, EUR 13 is created within a 15-year period²⁶. The target by 2024 was a SROI greater than or equal to 1:1.

²² Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 43.

²³ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 44.

²⁴ Further information on the courses offered via FutureLearn can be found [here](#).

²⁵ [EIT Food launches new Learning Services to support food sector employers – EIT Food](#).

²⁶ In 2024, EIT Food commissioned an independent impact assessment of its three key entrepreneurship programmes: the Seedbed Incubator Programme (SEED), the EIT Food Accelerator Network (FAN) and

The external evaluation report²⁷ concluded that EIT Food had taken steps to address the societal challenges it was designated to address. Through support for initiatives like EU Skills for the Future, Connecting Food, and Great Taste, Zero Waste allows development by engaging people and increasing transparency in the food supply chain in order to improve public health and global food systems in the long term. EIT Food's activities have contributed to a more sustainable and healthier food system that addresses the critical challenges faced by society.

EIT Food has also identified a number of long-term economic impact goals. These are defined in the EIT Impact Framework 2022-2027 as follows:

- the contribution to the revenue growth of organisations trading in or employing innovations developed with KIC support;
- the number and revenue of start-ups and scale-ups supported by KICs trading three years after KIC support ceases;
- new jobs created in start-ups/scale-ups;
- the impact on employment growth as a result of the company being engaged with KICs;
- the number and type of jobs in existing businesses that are sustained through innovations;
- the number and type of skill gaps and/or skill shortages filled, by KIC sector;
- new visible innovation ecosystems;
- the share of indicated innovation ecosystems that covers RIS countries²⁸.

The currently available evidence²⁹ indicates that EIT Food's impact on revenue growth has not been significant enough for most start-ups. 28% of respondents reported an influence between 5% and 50%; and 30% of respondents reported that EIT Food's support had a less than 5% influence on their revenue growth. This may indicate a continuing need for a re-evaluation of EIT Food's funding approach to start-ups (e.g. a greater emphasis on companies' product commercialisation efforts). It is important to take into account the considerable variance between the programmes and start-ups in terms of technology readiness level, and thus the availability of revenues through new innovations launched to market. The 2023 entrepreneurship impact report included³⁰ a revenue uplift assessment.

As regards job creation, 42% of the survey respondents reported that at least one new job had been created due to their participation in EIT Food initiatives³¹. Regarding the number of employees, the supported enterprises created around six new jobs on average in the analysed period, while enterprises from the control group created only one³². This is a huge difference and shows that the EIT KIC's support has relevant job-creating effects. Overall, while it is evident that EIT Food's engagement has boosted employment opportunities for many of the entities involved, it is also apparent that many opportunities for improvement and further

RisingFoodStars (RFS). These programmes have supported 549 promising start-ups and scale-ups since 2018, [Entrepreneurship Impact Report – EIT Food](#).

²⁷ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 35.

²⁸ EIT Impact Framework 2022-2027, pp. 7-11.

²⁹ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 49.

³⁰ [Entrepreneurship Impact Report – EIT Food](#).

³¹ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 54.

³² Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 54.

development remain. The survey responses reveal that 29 entities did not maintain any jobs as a direct outcome of their involvement with EIT Food but that 31 succeeded in preserving jobs and a smaller share increased the number of jobs. The data collected during the start-up survey³³ indicate that a significant number of respondents (50%) believed that their involvement with EIT Food had helped them fill skill gaps and/or skill shortages (particularly in entrepreneurship, innovation, technical expertise, sustainability, creativity and leadership roles). The 2023 entrepreneurship impact assessment estimated that 1 130 new jobs had been created by start-ups supported by EIT Food and that 227 of these were entirely attributable to EIT Food's support (the 2024 and 2027 targets were 149 and 339 respectively).

When it comes to the long-term educational impact on the career growth of participants in EIT-labelled education, the findings³⁴ reflect the diverse career journeys of graduates, and highlight the challenges and opportunities they have encountered in navigating their respective fields. Some graduates in entry-level roles face challenges in advancing to more senior positions, while mid-management positions have seen a constant growth. The number of graduates in senior roles and reaching executive levels indicates a potential shift towards more responsible roles or exploring self-employment. The equal representation of graduates in self-employment in both their current and highest achieved positions reflects differing preferences when it comes to pursuing entrepreneurial careers or transitioning to traditional employment roles at different career stages. Educational impact stories can be found [here](#). In order to evaluate the long-term retention of skills and capacity in the agri-food sector, EIT Food's Education team has hired an AI consultant to examine the career paths of over 9 000 alumni. The sheer number of participants and the time that has elapsed since their participation mean that it was not possible to individually track retention and start-up creation. These data will be available in 2025 and will greatly improve the understanding of the KIC's contribution in this area.

2. Additionality

Table 2 provides the basic financial figures for EIT Food since it started operating in 2017. EIT Food was able to achieve a direct leverage factor³⁵ of 0.23 in 2017-2023 (if one only takes co-funding from partners related to the EIT grant into consideration) and 0.34 (if one adds revenues created through KIC activities (EUR 104 million vs the EIT grant of EUR 305 million)). The direct leverage factor increased to 0.45 in the 2021-2022 Horizon Europe period.

Table 2: EIT Food financial figures (in EUR million)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
EIT grant	3,3	21,0	39,3	66,1	46,0	57,2	71,7	304,5
Co-funding	1,1	9,7	8,8	12,2	10,4	22,0	6,6	70,8
Revenues		4,3	4,6	5,3	6,8	7,0	4,8	32,9
Activities not funded by EIT		68,1	99,8	116,6	0,0	0,9	1,1	286,4
Co-investment, i.e. investments attracted by start-ups		21,8	91,0	169,7	407,0	224,8	208,3	1122,6

Source: EIT financial data reported by KICs and validated by the EIT (also available in Corda). EIT Grant 2023 figures are derived from three-year business plans.

³³ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 55.

³⁴ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 57.

³⁵ Ratio of the direct leverage to the EU contribution. This is calculated as: direct leverage factor = (1/(Funding rate))-1.

In terms of leverage effects for the EIT KICs, the specificity of the EIT model requires the monitoring of additional leverage not only through co-funding and the revenues of the EIT KICs that are directly reinvested back into the KICs activities, but also through the activities not funded by the EIT ³⁶ as well as the co-investments attracted by the companies supported through the EIT.

When the activities funded by direct contributions by partners and affiliated entities (activities not funded by the EIT) are considered, EIT Food achieved a leverage factor of 1.28 in 2017-2023. When the co-investments (i.e. investments attracted by start-ups of EUR 1 122 million) are also included, the leverage factor rises to 4.97 over the period of the EIT Food lifecycle to date. This means that, for every euro of EIT funding spent, EIT Food activities have helped to attract close to five EUR in external investment.

3. Transparency and openness

According to the external evaluation report ³⁷, EIT Food has made considerable progress in building up a diverse partner community. Its significant efforts to make calls more open and accessible have resulted in clearer criteria for partners.

In 2022, EIT Food had over 340 network partners from all areas of the knowledge triangle (i.e. businesses, universities and research organisations). The network connected 34 countries, including EU Member States, associated countries and third countries. EIT Food especially brought together actors from Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy and Poland, but also left room for diversifying its partner base to ensure a more balanced representation. According to the external evaluation report ³⁸, initiatives to attract partners from countries with lower levels of representation should be implemented with a special focus on Central and Eastern Europe (where the average number of partners is 2 – compared with 40 in Spain and 24 in Germany). In 2022, approximately 120 of the 340 EIT Food partners were SMEs (35% of the total). In terms of financial support, about 30% of the total 2021-2022 EIT Food grant of EUR 103 million was directed to SMEs ³⁹. By October 2024, the number of active participations of SMEs under the 2023-2025 EIT grant agreement had increased to 41%, with 11% of the EIT grant going to SMEs ⁴⁰.

The transition to the current EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda (2021-2027) saw a major change in EIT Food's partnership model towards greater openness ⁴¹. Since 2021, efforts have been made to achieve full inclusivity, maximise engagement and open up opportunities for external organisations to participate in projects ⁴². The new membership model also changed

³⁶ Non-EIT financed activities (NEFA) are fully implemented without an EIT grant but must contribute to the KIC's Strategic Agenda and must be based on the EIT Knowledge Triangle Integration concept. They replaced the former KIC complementary activities (KCAs) applied in 2014-2020 under Horizon 2020.

³⁷ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, pp. 19-20.

³⁸ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 110.

³⁹ European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, SME participation in Horizon Europe – Key figures (and key issues) in the first three years, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/576670>.

⁴⁰ During the implementation of EIT grant agreement 2023-2025, the grant committed to SMEs and the number of SMEs and their participation can still increase in the upcoming months and next year as EIT Food have still calls to open and sign new projects.

⁴¹ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 14.

⁴² Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, pp. 19-20.

the membership fees model to avoid it becoming a barrier to valuable new EIT Food members⁴³.

As regards the measures to expand the KIC's network, EIT Food has created a task force on partnership management that identifies network development needs, and the co-location centres look out for potential new members. The growth of the partnership is continuously monitored⁴⁴. The administrative data as well as interview results nevertheless suggest that EIT Food could do more promotion in order to attract new members.

When it comes to transparency, EIT Food's strategic partners can engage in the KIC's leadership and shape its Strategic Agenda as well as its flagship programmes through voting powers in the partners' assembly. In order to ensure transparency, EIT Food shares information about its activities, procedures, governance, strategy, membership and opportunities through partner briefings, open emails and a public website. The partnership also consults and briefs its members through a variety of channels and methods, such as 'town hall' briefings, co-location centres partner groupings and special interest groups on its Food HIVE platform⁴⁵, which is open to members and other stakeholders⁴⁶.

4. Efficiency

Table 3 sets out EIT Food's operational budget and administrative expenditures (or running costs). The running costs include the management, governance, coordination, organisation and overhead expenditures paid from the EIT grant. This does not include the contribution from EIT Food's partners.

Table 3: EIT Food operational and administrative expenditure

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Operational Expenditures	28 986 982 €	42 531 449 €	71 178 084 €	51 780 142 €	63 038 873 €
Running Costs	2 902 383 €	6 443 434 €	7 864 896 €	5 773 006 €	7 945 758 €
Total budget	31 889 365 €	48 974 882 €	79 042 980 €	57 553 148 €	70 984 631 €

Source: EIT financial data (reported by KICs and validated by EIT); also available in Corda.

Table 3 indicates that the running costs for EIT Food's headquarters and co-location centres (CLCs) for 2018-2022 ranged between 8.6% and 13.1%, at an average of 10.4%. When only the period of Horizon Europe (2021-2022) is considered, these costs constituted 10.75% of the overall operational costs. Taking into account only the administrative costs of EIT Food's headquarters, the average ratio of administrative costs to EIT Food's overall operational budget dropped to 9.94% for the Horizon Europe period.

The EIT KICs are pan-European networks with many offices across Europe. These offices are an operational activity carried out by the KICs at a corresponding administrative cost. The EIT, in order to keep these administrative costs at an acceptable level, has, in its guidelines to the KICs, set maximum thresholds for the EIT-funded share of the KICs' administrative costs, depending on the KICs' maturity. The values range from 18% and 15% in the first and second years of a KIC respectively to a constant of 12% from the third year until the end of the partnership lifecycle. If the EIT KICs were, as beneficiaries of EIT grants, to follow the rules

⁴³ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 33.

⁴⁴ EIT Food Partnership policy,

https://www.eitfood.eu/media/documents/20211108_EIT_Partnership_Policy_Booklet_update_V1.pdf, p. 7.

⁴⁵ FoodHIVE is an online membership community platform where individuals and organisations in the broader EIT Food community can connect (EIT Food 2020).

⁴⁶ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 32.

of EU public entities, the expenses related to CLCs would be treated as operational expenditure related to ground operations rather than as administrative expenditure. In such circumstances and considering that one of the core operational aspects of the EIT model is to support location-based innovation locally and in regions, it would be more appropriate to take only the administrative expenses of the EIT KICs' headquarters into account.

In addition to its headquarters in Leuven in Belgium, EIT Food comprises five CLCs: Central, North-East, North-West, South and West. Each CLC caters to a specific set of constituent countries. Moreover, CLC South and CLC North-East have specific responsibility for implementing the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS), which has involved a further network of 15 EIT Food hubs since 2023. CLC North-West and CLC West were amalgamated as CLC Central in 2023 as part of an organisational restructuring initiative to simplify external engagement and realise business efficiencies.

A recent evaluation considered that the KIC's community, with its geographic core locations in several EU Member States, is an important efficiency factor, particularly for business creation support. The EIT KICs' pan-EU *modus operandi* means that companies have direct access to the EU market and research infrastructures⁴⁷.

2023 data indicate that the average time-to-grant for calls launched by EIT Food was two months.

5. Coherence and synergies

According to the external evaluation report⁴⁸, EIT Food has developed partnerships and connections with other relevant education, research and innovation initiatives to enhance synergies at regional, national and EU levels. It has set up a range of mechanisms to enhance collaboration with the regional and national authorities as well as with EU programmes and networks, in order to better exploit synergies and complementarities.

EIT Food has ensured consistency and complementarity with EU policies and has been constantly involved in the most relevant policy areas⁴⁹. EIT Food's objectives are aligned with the two most relevant policy frameworks in the field of sustainable food systems (i.e. the EU's Farm-to-Fork Strategy and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs))⁵⁰.

The alignment with EU priorities and the commitment to encouraging research and innovation make EIT Food an essential player in addressing societal challenges. The EIT Food Policy Advisory Board facilitates close cooperation with various services of the Commission in order to coordinate EIT Food's activities and contribute to the most relevant political initiatives (including Food 2030).

EIT Food has sought synergies with other EU programmes (particularly the European Innovation Council (EIC)) in order to help scale up companies with societal and economic impact. 20 of the 65 successful companies in the 2021 EIC Accelerator call had previously been supported by EIT KICs⁵¹.

⁴⁷ PPMI et al., *Evaluation study H2020*, 2023, <https://op.europa.eu/s/zXjR>.

⁴⁸ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 34.

⁵¹ EIT Food, *Horizon Europe and the Green Transition: interim evaluation support study: partnership evaluation report*, p. 25; <https://op.europa.eu/s/zXjV>.

When it comes to synergies with other EU partnerships and Missions within Horizon Europe, the EIT KICs community is clearly the most active – as highlighted in the Biennial Monitoring Report 2024⁵². EIT Food contributes to Horizon Europe’s work, particularly through missions. It has signed the EU Mission Soil Manifesto, underlining the need to increase soil protection and restoration globally and demonstrating its ongoing commitment to working to improve soil health and the importance of future-proofing the food system. EIT Food runs a range of programmes focused on training, resources and farming practices that prioritise soil regeneration by minimising artificial production inputs and working in harmony with nature⁵³. EIT Food also works with the Horizon Europe Mission on cancer. EIT Food and the Partnership on Circular bio-based Europe have carried out joint activities to help SMEs overcome the challenge of finding sufficient investment for ideas to evolve into business⁵⁴.

In addition to exchanges with policymakers, EIT Food also reaches out to other stakeholders, such as consumers, national innovation agencies, local authorities, farm networks, European technology platforms and international organisations⁵⁵. The EIT Food Consumer Observatory regularly prepares research reports and studies on consumer perceptions on food. Platforms such as Agri Marketplace and Get Wasted are already facilitating the matching of supply and demand for specific agri-food markets in order to make the process of buying and selling agri-food products easier, more efficient and more transparent – reducing waste in the process. As highlighted in the external evaluation report⁵⁶, the fact that EIT Food has a dedicated pillar for engaging with its audience indicates the significance that EIT Food attributes to fertile exchanges with a wide range and large number of stakeholders.

As regards internal coherence, EIT Food’s shift towards greater impact orientation (particularly via its mission-led approach) has helped to better connect their different activity pillars.

The EIT KICs have established a number of EIT Community initiatives, thereby fostering synergies with other KICs. EIT Food has actively participated in EIT Community activities, leading the Water Scarcity and Food for Health projects, and participating in 10 other EIT Community projects⁵⁷. Structural collaboration between EIT Food and EIT Health is ensured through the Food4Health initiative. Its main objective is to establish a sustainable connection between the two EIT KICs, leveraging the strengths of both partnerships, building on their core activities and developing an innovation programme in citizen-oriented health and well-being through improved nutrition and behavioural support. The EIT Food Strategic Agenda identifies a range of thematic crossovers with other EIT KICs, including in health systems (EIT Health), urban food systems (EIT Urban Mobility), digital solutions systems (EIT Digital), environmental systems (EIT Climate-KIC) and resilient systems (EIT Raw Materials).

⁵² European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *Performance of European partnerships – Biennial monitoring report 2024 on partnerships in Horizon Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/991766>, p. 56.

⁵³ <https://www.eitfood.eu/news/signature-eu-mission-soil-manifesto>.

⁵⁴ <https://www.eitfood.eu/projects/mpowerbio-online-platform-to-help-smes-in-the-bio-based-industry-overcome-the-challenge-to-find-investment>.

⁵⁵ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 23.

⁵⁷ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 23.

6. EU added value

According to the external evaluation report⁵⁸, EIT Food has made significant strides in creating EU added value, particularly with regard to building a pan-EU sustainable innovation ecosystem through the integration of the knowledge triangle. The KIC has also proved its ability to address the overarching societal challenges (particularly in the domain of food sustainability) by building a resilient and sustainable food system that is consistent with Europe 2020's objectives and its climate, energy, employment, innovation and education targets⁵⁹.

EIT Food's CLCs enable not only the emergence of R&I networks on an EU scale, but also the tailoring of activities to regional needs. The evidence from the external evaluation⁶⁰ indicates that EIT Food's regional outreach mechanisms enabled the transfer and upscaling of successful solutions that emerged in one particular region to and in other regions (e.g. through the transfer of successful business models or innovation platforms). The evaluation also indicates that this transfer potential has tended to be overlooked and that EIT Food should vigorously promote success stories as well as the solutions developed, so that they can better complement EU structural funds at regional level and link their services accordingly⁶¹.

EIT Food provides clear added value in terms of shaping R&I policy at EU level – not only through its main activities, but also thanks to its regional anchoring and its food-systemic and people-centric perspective. This is particularly relevant in the EU agri-food sector, where the proportion of private R&I investments is negligible (see also Chapter 7). This indicates a general need for public investment in future-proof food systems⁶². EU funding is best placed to help overcome the focus of national R&I funding on primary production and thus help bring in a truly systemic and pan-EU perspective, which is still largely missing⁶³. EIT Food's activities are more market-oriented than R&I funding under Horizon Europe's Pillar II. They are also tailored at earlier stages of the innovation lifecycle (lower Technology Readiness Levels – TRLs) than the funding from the European Innovation Council (EIC) under Pillar III. This is particularly relevant to the activities of EIT Food, because the EU agri-food sector is dominated by micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that have limited resources to conduct R&I, adopt innovations on a large scale and drive transitions in general. The EU agri-food sector's average ratio of private R&I investment to total output is only 0.23% and access to finance is a major bottleneck for innovative EU-based firms that are active in food technology⁶⁴. In this context, the external evaluation findings⁶⁵ confirm EIT Food's significant added value by providing EU-wide funding for innovation activities in the underinvested agri-food business sector. However, further reflection on the added value for academic partners of engaging with EIT Food is necessary because its financial attractiveness

⁵⁸ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 59.

⁵⁹ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 60.

⁶⁰ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 29.

⁶¹ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 29.

⁶² Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 28.

⁶³ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 28. See also European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Chandler, C., Figueiredo, D., Francisco, I., Franke, J. et al., *Food systems – Research and innovation investment gap study – Policy report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/888905>.

⁶⁴ Food system policy report, 2023.

⁶⁵ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 21.

seems to be limited for them because they are likely to be more interested in other types of R&I than in the higher TRL activities linked to bringing new technologies to the market ⁶⁶.

7. Relevance

The external evaluation findings ⁶⁷ show that EIT Food has been relevant to achieving the objectives of Horizon Europe as well as to EU priorities – particularly boosting economic growth, strengthening the Member States’ innovation capacity, and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship through initiatives such as EU Skills for the Future, Connecting Food and the Great Taste Zero Waste project. EIT Food has focused on building innovation capacity, but has also contributed to the sustainable growth of supported start-ups and entrepreneurs ⁶⁸ (see Chapter 1) and entered into active collaboration with international partners in order to achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture, good health and well-being, as well as responsible production and consumption ⁶⁹. EIT Food has also contributed to meeting the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is consistent with the EU’s overarching objective of improving education, creating job opportunities and fostering global cooperation ⁷⁰.

The Commission’s Food 2030 policy and Farm-to-Fork Strategy have set the stage for addressing the most relevant challenges in the agri-food area. These challenges include greenhouse gas emissions, decreasing biodiversity and soil erosion. The fact that EIT Food’s six strategic objectives are very closely aligned with the Farm-to-Fork Strategy’s goals (see Chapter 5) shows the high relevance of EIT Food’s objectives to the EU’s ambitions under the green transition. This alignment is significant because the EIT KICs’ primary objective is to build a successful innovation ecosystem ⁷¹.

EIT Food has proven to be flexible in improving its organisational structures and in adapting to changing political and economic requirements. For example, at the start of Horizon Europe, EIT Food developed an intervention logic with a set of specific impact pathways that are aligned with Horizon Europe’s. It also limited its calls accordingly, tailoring them to the identified needs and objectives and thus increasing effectiveness. The external evaluation interviews ⁷² suggested that EIT Food quickly reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic by adapting its activities (e.g. via its COVID-19 Bridge Fund).

8. Directionality

EIT Food has demonstrated its commitment to delivering results for the EU and its citizens. As the Biennial Monitoring Report (BMR) survey data of 2023 indicate, EIT Food plans to spend 100% of its total partnership budget on activities linked to the Green Deal objectives. The partnership has taken up the challenge to contribute to the fundamental need to future-proof the EU’s food system. Partners are asked to innovate within the EU context of strategic

⁶⁶ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Enterprises supported by EIT Food generated an average of three more jobs than the control group companies.

⁶⁹ EIT Food serves as secretariat for the Food System Pavilions at the UN Climate Change Conference’s COP27 and COP28. Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 15.

⁷⁰ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 34.

⁷¹ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 20.

⁷² <https://www.eitfood.eu/projects/covid-19-bridge-fund>. Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 21.

autonomy and technological sovereignty. In the agri-food sector, this means tackling key issues like food security⁷³.

EIT Food activities are implemented systemically. This means that people's needs as well as the planet's are put at the centre stage of their activities. In order to facilitate a food system transition, EIT Food explicitly seeks to achieve multistakeholder engagement through the principle of knowledge triangle integration. EIT Food occupies a crucial niche in the Horizon Europe programme, because it seeks to use existing knowledge, technology and know-how to develop a vibrant ecosystem that is composed of different types of stakeholders. EIT Food thereby facilitates types of cooperation that typically do not occur under the other Horizon Europe R&I instruments. The KIC thus complements other Horizon Europe instruments, which tend to focus on lower TRLs or on start-ups at a later stage. In line with this, EIT Food makes it possible for beneficiaries to apply to other EU funding schemes (e.g. for the EIC funds)⁷⁴.

EIT Food's success in supporting entrepreneurs is particularly relevant to the agri-food system, due to its weakness in private R&I investment (see Chapter 6)⁷⁵.

9. International positioning

The intrinsic nature of the globalised food system means that many of EIT Food's activities have a global dimension. EIT Food seeks to tap into markets for EIT Food innovations abroad, as well as to allow new ideas from around the world to stimulate innovation in the EU⁷⁶.

EIT Food participates in the EIT Global Outreach Programme's⁷⁷ activities and the Strategic Regional Innovations (SRI)⁷⁸. The Programme was established in 2018 and links the EIT's innovation ecosystem with innovation valleys worldwide, forging synergies with global innovation leaders and creating significant value for the EU economy as well as local ecosystems. The Programme currently comprises established and successful EIT Hubs in Silicon Valley (USA)⁷⁹, Tel Aviv (Israel)⁸⁰ and London (UK)⁸¹. Under the SRI, activities are currently being developed in the Western Balkans, Türkiye and Ukraine. These will in future expand into Moldova and potentially Georgia, in line with the EU's enlargement policy priorities.

EIT Food is working to internationalise its activities, because this is another way of creating revenue, and thus helping to achieve EIT Food's objective of reaching financial sustainability (e.g. via franchising, partnerships or direct delivery models). EIT Food is seeking to improve its chances of successfully internationalising by becoming more visible outside Europe and presenting itself as a technology bridge, which provides know-how that is also relevant to other parts of the world⁸².

⁷³ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 31.

⁷⁴ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 31.

⁷⁵ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 31.

⁷⁶ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 31

⁷⁷ <https://go-eit.eu/>.

⁷⁸ <https://eit-ris.eu/>.

⁷⁹ <https://go-eit.eu/eit-silicon-valley-hub/>.

⁸⁰ <https://go-eit.eu/eit-israel-hub/>.

⁸¹ <https://go-eit.eu/eit-uk-hub/>.

⁸² European Commission, *Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food*, 2024, p. 31.

In order to attain international status and visibility, EIT Food participates in relevant international events, such as the UN Climate Change Conference's COPs. It also engages abroad with the support of partners who have overseas offices, for example organising high-level business meetings with government agencies or engaging in activities with a political dimension. EIT Food works with the EU's institutions and international organisations to identify and exploit innovation opportunities in food-critical regions and countries such as Ukraine, Africa, the Americas and major Asian markets⁸³. It is also involved in innovation labs throughout South Asia and has already involved a Brazilian partner in an EU project. EIT Food has established collaboration with key international organisations, such as the United Nations, as well as with international donors to attract new business partner organisations, researchers and students from all over the world and to develop cooperation with third-country organisations⁸⁴. According to BMR data, 5% of the overall budget is planned for collaboration with non-European actors⁸⁵.

EIT Food acknowledges that cooperation with international partners and associated countries has proven crucial because it adds valuable know-how. It also provides EIT Food partners with valuable chances to develop their own capabilities.

⁸³ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food (2024) p. 31

⁸⁴ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food (2024) p. 31

⁸⁵ EIT Food BMR-Survey Data, 2023.

10. Phasing-out preparedness

The EIT Regulation⁸⁶ defines ‘financial sustainability’ as the EIT KICs’ capacity to finance their knowledge triangle activities independently from the EIT contributions. It asks the EIT KICs to pursue this goal by implementing an effective financial sustainability strategy that involves mobilising funds from other public and private sources before the end of the 15-year period of EIT funding. The closer an EIT KIC gets to the end of its EIT funding period, the less EIT funding it receives and the more alternative funding sources it has to find. The emphasis is on encouraging KICs to secure a larger share of their funding from external sources in order to ensure their long-term viability and continue their activities effectively. The challenge is for the KICs to secure adequate co-funding from other sources.

EIT Food’s co-funding rates and financial sustainability measures demonstrate its clear commitment to operate sustainably and despite the EIT grant gradually reducing over time⁸⁷.

EIT Food started to address the issue of financial sustainability relatively early on, with the aim of developing into a multifunding organisation that draws on diverse global budget sources, such as investments, foundations or NGOs⁸⁸. Since 2021, financial sustainability has played an increased role both in EIT Food’s Strategic Agenda and in its multiannual business plans. Each EIT Food project has a financial sustainability clause that includes a clarification on financial remuneration to be paid back to the KIC by partners participating in a project. EIT Food has introduced financial sustainability agreements for its various activities to ensure that the concept is embedded in all its core activities.

EIT Food has demonstrated steady revenue growth over the years⁸⁹. Membership fees have been a primary source of income. EIT Food has also succeeded in attracting alternative funding from both the public and the private sectors. Its financial performance has consistently met or exceeded expectations. It has overperformed in several revenue areas, such as membership fees, alternative funding sources, and service and consulting fees. EIT Food is facing challenges in generating revenue from equity investments and recognises the need to structure its equity portfolio for future revenue streams. The recruitment of venture capital specialists should address this issue.

Evidence from the external evaluation suggests⁹⁰ that EIT Food scored well overall in terms of financial sustainability, with some revenue streams developing better than others. In particular, EIT Food’s extensive investment in entrepreneurship support has started to take effect. The partnership creates significant equity value through its support to start-ups with prospects of making a profit through a sale at a later stage. At the end of 2023, its investment portfolio included investments acquisitions of equity in 26 companies to a total value of EUR 11.2 million. EIT Food had also concluded 10 revenue-sharing agreements and implemented 10 educational investments, and both of these groups were generating revenues. Moreover, for 2023 it reported that it had accumulated substantial financial reserves which could provide a solid basis for sustaining its activities in the future.

⁸⁶ In particular, Articles 2(16) and 6(i) of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/819 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology](#).

⁸⁷ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 24.

⁸⁸ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 34.

⁸⁹ Deloitte and White Research, *7-Year Review of EIT Food – Final Report*, 2024, p. 125.

⁹⁰ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 35.

Conversely, EIT Food's annual reports⁹¹ state that EIT Food did not generate sufficient revenues from its innovation and business creation activities. One reason for this was a mismatch with the relevant KPI. Whereas the KPI looks at continuous streams of income from many different innovation activities, EIT Food tends to generate income from a small number of highly successful food innovations. Similarly, the partnership's strategy of monetising its start-up equity rather late in order to maximise profit runs counter to the constant returns principle – but does fit the specificities of start-up financing. In addition to entrepreneurial returns, EIT Food is also working on a 'Membership Plus' model with chargeable added value services, such as access to EIT Food core capabilities and features⁹².

In 2021-2022, EIT Food's biggest share (over 70%) of revenue came from membership fees. The partnership nonetheless reported a financial sustainability coefficient⁹³ for the same period of 12-13%, which was slightly above the target. In 2023, the KIC already presented a much more diversified revenue composition and the share of membership fees was only at 33%, while the revenues from services and consulting had increased significantly and had already contributed 25%. In addition, already in 2019, the partnership reported an overachievement in terms of financial sustainability⁹⁴.

The interviews carried out as part of the external evaluation⁹⁵ indicated possible trade-offs between the goals of (1) making KICs financially sustainable and (2) maintaining the public-good character of some of its activities. For example, reaching out to citizens and involving them in the food system transformation is desirable from a political and public-good perspective, but the related activities may create cost rather than generate income for EIT Food. This means that if the partnership were to become fully financially sustainable, there would be an incentive to cut back on public-good activities that are not commercially beneficial⁹⁶.

In sum, EIT Food has diversified its revenue sources and has created a solid basis to achieve financial sustainability beyond the 15 years of EIT funding.

⁹¹ <https://reporting.eitfood.eu/annual-reporting-data-2022>.

⁹² Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 35.

⁹³ Financial sustainability coefficient (FS coefficient) is the ratio of KICs own revenues to its EIT grant in a given year.

⁹⁴ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 35.

⁹⁵ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 36.

⁹⁶ Interim evaluation support study – EIT Food, 2024, p. 36.