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Subject:	REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on the interim evaluation of the Single Market Programme 2021-2027
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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE  
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE  
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**on the interim evaluation of the Single Market Programme 2021-2027**

{SEC(2025) 195 final} - {SWD(2025) 172 final}

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The single market programme ('the programme' or 'SMP') is the EU funding programme designed to help the single market reach its full potential and ensure Europe's long-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The SMP was **established by Regulation (EU) 2021/690** for the period of the 2021-2027 EU long-term budget (known as the multiannual financial framework)<sup>1</sup>.

Article 3.1 of the SMP Regulation sets out two **general objectives**:

- 'to improve the functioning of the internal market, and especially to protect and empower citizens, consumers and businesses, in particular SMEs, by enforcing Union law, facilitating market access, setting standards and promoting human, animal and plant health and animal welfare, whilst respecting the principles of sustainable development and ensuring a high level of consumer protection, as well as by enhancing cooperation between the competent authorities of Member States and between the competent authorities of Member States and the Commission and the decentralised Union agencies;
- to develop, produce and disseminate high-quality, comparable, timely and reliable European statistics which underpin the design, monitoring and evaluation of all Union policies and help citizens, policymakers, authorities, businesses, academia and the media to make informed decisions and to actively participate in the democratic process.'

The Regulation (Article 3.2) also sets out specific objectives, which are the foundation of the programme's pillar structure:

- Pillar 1: Making the internal market more effective.
- Pillar 2: Strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- Pillar 3: Ensuring effective European standards and international financial and non-financial reporting and auditing standards.
- Pillar 4: Promoting the interests of consumers and ensuring a high level of consumer protection and product safety.
- Pillar 5: Contributing to a high level of health and safety for humans, animals and plants in plant, animal, food and feed areas.
- Pillar 6: Developing, producing, disseminating, and communicating high-quality European statistics.

Under **Article 18** of the SMP Regulation, the Commission must carry out perform an interim evaluation within four years after the start of its implementation, which will be used in the decision-making process. The interim evaluation covers the 2021-2023 implementation period.

The evaluation assesses the programme against its **general and specific objectives**. In line with the **Better Regulation Guidelines**, the evaluation is based on the analysis of five evaluation criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value, relevance). The evaluation also assesses three additional criteria on the design of the programme (flexibility, synergies, simplification). Due to the complex design of the SMP, a bottom-

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<sup>1</sup> [SMP Regulation - 2021/690 - EN - EUR-Lex](#).

up approach, pillar by pillar, was adopted for this evaluation. The Commission first analysed the performance of each pillar against its specific objectives to assess how they contributed to the general objectives of the SMP and draw conclusions for the programme as a whole. **This approach is reflected in this report.**

The findings, conclusions and lessons learnt will help the Commission to plan its work for the remaining period of the multiannual financial framework. This will serve as a solid basis to design future programmes and actions for the single market in the post-2027 financial period.

This report is based on an evaluation **staff working document**, produced by the Commission, which accompanies the report. The staff working document provides more details on the evaluation process and the results. The exercise has been supported by an external contractor, tasked to deliver an **independent study** that has been used to support the findings of the evaluation. The evaluation also uses evidence stemming from consultation activities, the impact assessment, monitoring reports, including annual reports, and other relevant data.

The evaluation methodology included analysis of data and triangulation of findings from the various sources used. A number of **challenges and limitations** were faced during the evaluation that can be grouped in two categories. The first category includes challenges related to the lack of a common reporting structure and a system of indicators that would capture the complexity of the SMP's architecture and the diverse nature of its pillar activities and reflect the progress and cumulative impact of the programme. The second category concerns insufficient primary and secondary data due to a limited number of responses to the public consultation, modest feedback to the call for evidence, and insufficient statistical data to quantify the costs and benefits of the programme and the results produced.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Single Market Programme consolidates predecessor budget lines and six major programmes from the previous financial period (2014-2020). It integrates initiatives such as COSME, the Consumer Programme, and the Food Chain Programme into a single framework.

The Single Market Programme serves as the EU's principal funding instrument for maintaining and advancing the single market. The SMP's strategic focus on fostering economic growth, reducing barriers and boosting cooperation aligns with its overarching objectives of ensuring a robust and integrated single market.

The SMP's total budget is EUR 4 353 million for 2021-2027. The SMP allocated EUR 1 909 million during its first three years, which is 44% of the total budget. The SMP funds have been allocated over the first three years of implementation (2021-2023) in line with the indicated amounts in the Regulation. The allocation of funds across the various pillars has remained aligned with the framework set out in the SMP Regulation<sup>2</sup>.

The programme is **structured around six pillars**, each targeting specific objectives. The SMP Regulation allocated indicative shares of the total budget to each pillar. The

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<sup>2</sup> Article 4 of the SMP Regulation indicates specific funding amounts for each pillar in euro.

programme's funds are distributed through various mechanisms tailored to the specific needs of each pillar.

The **core activities** supported by the SMP encompass:

- data collection, analysis, European official statistics, studies, and evaluations to support the effective enforcement and modernisation of the EU legal framework;
- capacity-building initiatives and the facilitation of joint actions among Member States, their relevant authorities, the Commission and decentralised EU agencies;
- financial support for mechanisms that enable individuals, consumers and business representatives to engage in decision-making processes;
- improving the exchange and dissemination of expertise and knowledge;
- drawing up common European standards.

**Pillar 1** supports the internal market, for example, by the effective enforcement of **competition policies and robust market surveillance mechanisms**, and was allocated EUR 557 million (13%). Procurement contracts funded activities like the development of digital platforms, including CASE@EC and Safety Gate, which improved competition enforcement and facilitated safer market practices. These activities directly addressed the objective of maintaining a well-functioning internal market.

**Pillar 2** supports **SMEs by fostering competitiveness, facilitating access to markets and enabling the digital and green transitions** and was allocated EUR 1 billion (24%). Grants supported the delivery of tailored advisory services and international networking opportunities through flagships initiatives, such as: (i) Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), enabling SMEs to expand into new markets and adopt digital and green technologies; and (ii) Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, which facilitated cross-border exchanges, fostering innovation and entrepreneurial growth.

**Pillar 3** strengthens **standardisation processes** and reporting frameworks to ensure harmonised market practices and was allocated EUR 221 million (5%). Contributions to European standardisation organisations and specific grants supported the development and implementation of harmonised standards, ensuring compatibility and facilitating trade within the EU and helping maintain the EU's global competitiveness.

**Pillar 4** advances **consumer protection and product safety** through coordinated enforcement and capacity-building initiatives and was allocated EUR 189.5 million (4%). Grants and procurement financed capacity-building programmes for national authorities and strengthened consumer redress mechanisms. Examples include the European Consumer Centres (ECCs), which resolved thousands of cross-border disputes, and the Safety Gate platform, which enabled faster identification and removal of unsafe products, safeguarding consumer interests.

**Pillar 5** addresses **health and safety challenges** in the food and agricultural sectors by promoting preventative measures, disease control and sustainable practices and was allocated EUR 1.68 billion (40%). Grants supported veterinary and phytosanitary emergency measures and programmes and antimicrobial resistance and food waste prevention activities. In addition, procurement contracts financed training initiatives under the Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) programme. These activities strengthened disease prevention measures, improved compliance with EU rules, strengthened public health safety and helped make the food supply chain more sustainable.

**Pillar 6** delivers **high-quality European statistics**, providing a robust evidence base for policymaking and decision-making and was allocated EUR 552 million (13%). Procurement contracts and grants to national statistical offices enabled the production of robust datasets, including timely updates on economic, social and environmental indicators. These activities ensured policymakers had access to reliable and relevant data to address emerging challenges and opportunities effectively.

### 3. KEY FINDINGS

Due to the unique structure of the SMP and because activities are carried out through the programme pillars, the analysis focuses on the specific objectives as a basis to provide findings for the programme as a whole. The interim evaluation of the programme shows **positive conclusions for the first three years of implementation (2021-2023)**. The evaluation demonstrated that the key funded actions have contributed to achieving the SMP's general and specific objectives. Despite the overall positive conclusions at this mid-term stage of implementation, there is further room for improvement.

#### 3.1. Effectiveness

The SMP has shown effectiveness in achieving its objectives, **although** there can be some improvements as the effectiveness varies across the different pillars.

The SMP-funded activities under **Pillar 1** effectively supported the improvement of digital tools across various policy areas, including competition policy, market surveillance, financial services and consumer information. These tools improved the enforcement of competition rules by deploying specific digital solutions, enhancing cooperation with national competition authorities (NCAs) and Member States. Examples such as CASE@EC, a tool for case management, and eRFI, the Commission's electronic investigative platform, demonstrate progress, although the deployment of CASE@EC across competition policy instruments is only partially completed and the legacy case management tools still need to be phased out. Additionally, tools like Your Europe and the Internal Market Information System (IMI) have significantly supported administrative cooperation and public access to EU information. However, the evaluation underscores the importance of regularly collecting user feedback to better assess these tools' broader impact.

**Pillar 2** demonstrates effectiveness in achieving its objectives, with flagship initiatives such as the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) delivering strong results. EEN clients report very high satisfaction rates and tangible effects on business performance, and EYE exchanges show high success rates and confirmed learning impacts. Euroclusters have effectively used cascade funding to support SME resilience, digitalisation and greening. Actions supporting internationalisation, including Intellectual Property (IP) Helpdesks and the EU-Japan Centre, have achieved substantial results, with high satisfaction rates and significant numbers of SMEs supported.

**Pillar 3** has effectively boosted stakeholder involvement in European standardisation processes and increased the adoption of European standards, supporting harmonisation and key policy objectives. While organisations like the European Committee for standardisation (CEN) and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation (CENELEC) achieved strong national adoption rates, challenges remain in ensuring EU representation at international level and improving ETSI's performance. The pillar has also effectively supported the development of high-quality standards for financial and non-

financial reporting and auditing. Through SMP funding, EFRAG successfully developed the first set of ESRS and promoted EU views in financial reporting, and the PIOB strengthened oversight of auditing standards, improving multi-stakeholder representation and addressing issues of public interest.

**Pillar 4** has been instrumental in effectively maintaining and strengthening consumer protection across the EU and boosting consumer participation in policymaking. In particular, this is thanks to the work of the CPC network, the Safety Gate alert system, ECCs and the CASP product safety initiative, as well as advocacy by consumer organisations at EU level through BEUC. The pillar has also effectively strengthened consumer involvement in financial services policymaking. Finance Watch and Better Finance have significantly contributed to policy debates, raising awareness and representing consumer interests. However, survey results indicate a need for more visibility and better communication of these organisation's activities.

**Pillar 5** has effectively contributed to improving health and safety across the EU. It has supported the eradication and containment of animal diseases, like African swine fever (ASF) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), and reduced cases of brucellosis, rabies and *Salmonella* infection in poultry populations. The co-financed measures have helped Member States to eradicate or contain plant pests, such as *Xylella fastidiosa*, long-horn beetle and pinewood nematode. Member States and stakeholders report positive impacts though quantitative data; however, it is not clear to which extent the SMP contributed to these results. The flexibility in veterinary and phytosanitary work programmes allowed resources to be reallocated to urgent challenges, boosting effectiveness. However, reduced co-financing rates have posed budgetary challenges for several Member State authorities. Pillar 5 has effectively contributed to improving skills and knowledge sharing between stakeholders through the BTSF programme, the EU reference laboratory and reference centre networks. It also effectively helped fight antimicrobial resistance, prevent food waste and improve animal welfare standards.

**Pillar 6** has effectively improved the quality and timeliness of European statistics, providing a strong evidence base for policymaking across the single market and key areas such as the green and digital transitions and social rights. Eurostat data played a critical role in shaping major EU strategies, including the NextGenerationEU, the European Green Deal and RePowerEU, while also facilitating effective responses to crises like the energy crisis and COVID-19. The European Statistical Programme (ESP) expanded statistical coverage and introduced methodological improvements, new data sources and better validation processes, significantly boosting data reliability. High levels of user trust in European statistics, with 95% of respondents in 2024 expressing confidence, underscores the pillar's success in meeting policymaker and stakeholder needs.

### 3.2. Efficiency

The implementation of the programme has been **efficient**, with an efficient allocation of resources and signs of cost-effectiveness. Beneficiaries generally consider costs and benefits to be proportionate, without disproportionate administrative burden. However, there is room to make pillar activities more efficient, for instance with regards to the eGrants tool.

The SMP's efficiency in **Pillar 1** was bolstered by allocating funds to procurement activities managed through the Commission's tendering process, allowing targeted and resource-efficient service delivery. Digital tools such as eRFI and IMI were developed and maintained at low cost, replacing redundant systems and improving information sharing

among national authorities, businesses and the public. Despite these achievements, limited efficiency gains were noted in consolidating budget lines, with only minor administrative simplifications and improved budgetary transfer mechanisms observed compared to the previous financing period. Efforts to maximise efficiency through training and peer-learning activities, such as simplifying cost options for grants, remain areas for improvement.

**Pillar 2's** Financial Support for Third Parties (FSTP) is an efficient tool for supporting small businesses but can result in administrative burdens placed on smaller and less experienced consortia receiving SMP funding. Beneficiaries generally find the administrative requirements reasonable, and SME clients of the EEN report that services are efficiently aligned with business needs. Simplifying processes, such as by developing standard templates, a central management platform and better payment conditions are means to improve efficiency while smaller programme actions are best reserved for cases with a clear justification, such as piloting innovative approaches.

**Pillar 3** has improved financial reporting transparency, which has been streamlined by the introduction of unit costs. However, the initial transition created administrative burden, including duplicate eGrants processes and insufficient travel reimbursements during periods of inflation. Beneficiaries efficiently managed funds to ensure value for money and actively worked to diversify funding sources, but progress varies across organisations like the International Financial Reporting Standards Foundation (IFRS Foundation), European Financial Reporting Advisory Group (EFRAG) and the Public Interest Oversight Board (PIOB). Ensuring sufficient public funding for EFRAG and securing a sustainable funding model for the PIOB are critical to maintaining independence and supporting high-quality corporate and sustainability reporting, which are essential for investors and capital markets.

In **Pillar 4**, the shift toward procurement has improved efficiency in addressing evolving consumer issues, like digital rights and product safety, and this is supported by evidence gathered through surveys and studies. Better Finance demonstrated high productivity and effectiveness, achieving significant outputs per person and excelling compared to similarly sized organisations. Similarly, Finance Watch maintained a high level of efficiency, producing extensive outputs, particularly in communication activities, while delivering high-quality work on financial malpractice, finance for green SMEs and over-indebtedness.

**Pillar 5** has supported veterinary and phytosanitary programmes efficiently, effectively reallocating resources to priority diseases, like ASF and HPAI, while co-financing measures to mitigate plant pest outbreaks, such as *Xylella fastidiosa* and pinewood nematode. Cost-effectiveness analyses of SMP-funded responses to HPAI and *Xylella fastidiosa* highlight the programme's role in alleviating the financial burden on Member States. The support for WOA's Animal Welfare Platform has strengthened the implementation of animal welfare standards and enforcement across Europe. The BTSF programme also recorded a significant decrease in unit costs per training and per participant, mainly due to the move to online formats.

**Pillar 6** has demonstrated efficiency in resource allocation, with stakeholders recognising the ESP's cost-effectiveness and the proportionate benefits it delivers. Automation and streamlined statistical processes have contributed to efficiency gains, linked with a reduction in human resources within the European Statistical System (ESS). However, stakeholders warn that any further reductions of staff could hinder the ESP's ability to meet growing demands for detailed and timely statistics and invest in new technologies.



Legislative simplification and the adoption of electronic tools have successfully reduced the administrative burden, with stakeholders reporting moderate to high success in this area. The ESP's reliance on diverse financing sources, including subdelegated funds, has supported the development of tailored statistics. However, stakeholders emphasise the importance of a funding structure that ensures autonomy and long-term efficiency.

### 3.3. Coherence

The evaluation finds that the SMP demonstrates **internal coherence**. There are no overlaps between its pillars and areas of action, each pillar focusing on different policy fields with distinct regulatory frameworks. Alignment with other multiannual financial framework programmes, whose activities are not duplicated by the SMP, and the EU regulatory framework, EU strategies and broader objectives highlight its consistency (external coherence). However, some nuance must be noted as the cross-thematic and diverse nature of the SMP can add more complexity to the overall coordination of the programme which in turn might impact the coherence of activities.

**Pillar 1** showcases coherence both internally and externally. Its activities are aligned with one another in pursuing the objectives set out in the SMP Regulation and match the Commission's overall strategies and priorities. However, the consolidation of activities within the pillar has not produced the expected synergies or joint actions of an integrated financial instrument.

**Pillar 2** shows internal and external coherence through improved synergies and cooperation among flagship actions like the IP Helpdesks. However, smaller or less continuous actions have weaker connections to other activities. While stakeholders acknowledge the complexity of coordination within the SMP's cross-thematic structure, the pillar benefits from the SMP's broader reach and stronger positioning. Examples of synergies with other SMP pillars and EU programmes (such as Horizon Europe and national and regional initiatives) highlights how the pillar aligns with and complements broader support frameworks, particularly the EEN.

**Pillar 3** demonstrates internal and external coherence; the merging of budget lines for European standardisation and financial reporting did not result in inconsistencies. The specific nature of its activities minimises the risk of overlap or conflict, both within the pillar itself and with other pillars. The SMP's operational support for standardisation aligns seamlessly with project-specific funding from programmes like Horizon Europe and LIFE. This strengthens synergies and advances EU priorities, such as the European Green Deal and the digital transition. EFRAG's new mandate to develop ESRS fills a critical gap in sustainability reporting, with careful attention paid to interoperability with global standards to ensure consistency with international frameworks.

**Pillar 4** exhibits strong internal and external coherence, aligning its activities with the objectives of the SMP Regulation and complementing broader EU initiatives, such as the New Consumer Agenda. The work of beneficiaries, including BEUC, Better Finance and Finance Watch, reflects a collaborative approach, addressing both general consumer concerns and financial services issues. Additionally, the pillar complements other SMP pillars, such as Pillar 1 on market surveillance and Pillar 3 on setting standards. The pillar also complements the Horizon Europe and Digital Europe programmes, ensuring alignment with key EU priorities in sustainability, digitalisation and consumer protection.

**Pillar 5** demonstrates strong internal coherence in its parts on food safety, with animal and plant health complementing one another to ensure safety across the food chain. Externally,

it aligns well with EU priorities, including the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork strategy and common agricultural policy (CAP) measures through initiatives like reducing food waste, minimising pesticide use and combating antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The pillar clearly complements other programmes, particularly Horizon Europe and EU4Health: each programme focuses on distinct yet coordinated aspects of sustainable agriculture, AMR mitigation and environmental sustainability. This maximises impact and avoids duplicating efforts.

**Pillar 6's** objectives and activities demonstrate strong internal and external coherence, supported by legal frameworks ensuring consistent and comparable statistics across Member States. It ensures coherence through legal frameworks, governance bodies and alignment with EU strategies. Collaboration with the ECB and international organisations improves efficiency and consistency with global standards.

### 3.4. EU added value

The SMP generates **added value** that funding at national level could not have achieved. The financed activities allow the Commission to fulfil its legal obligations to address issues falling within its remit. Action at EU level is also required due to the nature of the challenges and needs pertaining to the functioning of the single market. In doing so, the SMP delivers cross-border benefits and economies of scale that action at national level alone could not match, underscoring its added value.

**Pillar 1** delivers EU added value by enabling the Commission to fulfil its legal responsibilities, which cannot be delegated to Member States, and by achieving economies of scale. The programme's support for cross-border services, such as coordination among national authorities, enforcement of EU law and shared IT tools, provides benefits that cannot be replicated at national level. These activities are critical for deepening the single market, boosting competitiveness and ensuring the effective development and monitoring of EU law and policies. Additionally, the evaluation highlights that without SMP funding, alternative EU funding sources would be required to meet these obligations.

**Pillar 2** demonstrates significant EU added value by fostering cross-border cooperation, enabling mutual learning and providing benchmarking and guidance on SME policy that national programmes cannot achieve. Stakeholder consultations consistently confirmed the unique value of EU-level initiatives in harmonising regulation and frameworks for the single market. To tackle uneven participation in calls and projects, promotion efforts and consortium requirements now target under-represented countries, ensuring broader inclusivity and sustained EU added value.

**Pillar 3** provides great EU added value by ensuring sustained support for Annex III organisations (Organisations representing SMEs, consumers, environmental and social interests in European standardisation<sup>3</sup>), which depend on SMP funding to remain active and inclusive in the standardisation process. Without EU funding, there is a risk of renationalisation, which risks undermining the EU's unified voice in international economic and financial forums, reducing coherence and effectiveness. EU action is essential for oversight and coordination, aligning standardisation efforts with EU legislation and public interests, preventing market fragmentation and ensuring high-quality, applicable standards.

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<sup>3</sup> [Standardisation Regulation - 1025/2012 - EN - EUR-Lex.](#)

**Pillar 4** provides significant EU added value by funding studies and data collection on consumer issues, enabling policymakers to address emerging risks, benchmark Member State performance and shape coordinated enforcement action. The SMP supports consumer advocacy at EU level, ensuring representation in areas like financial services that would be insufficiently addressed at national level. Additionally, cooperation with international organisations and non-EU countries strengthens the scope and impact of EU consumer policy, which relies on coordinated, data-driven actions to tackle cross-border challenges and promote consumer interests effectively.

**Pillar 5** actions have a positive impact on protecting human, animal and plant health, empowering the public through consumer awareness and knowledge sharing and providing greater sustainability for food systems. It delivers significant EU added value by enabling coordinated actions in animal and plant health that Member States could not achieve alone or would struggle to finance. SMP funding supports veterinary and phytosanitary emergency measures and programmes, vaccine banks (which are critical for addressing cross-border animal diseases and plant pests), and essential tools like EU reference laboratories and BTSF trainings. These efforts contribute greatly to improving the official control capacities of Member States, harmonising enforcement and ensuring a consistent approach necessary for the smooth functioning of the single market.

**Pillar 6** delivers strong EU added value to EU data through its impartiality, reliability and harmonised comparability across Member States. The centralised framework and methodological advancements have significantly improved data quality and timeliness, enabling informed decision-making. Initiatives like the European Statistical Recovery Dashboard show they can adapt to emerging needs, while grants and collaborative efforts strengthen Member State capacity. Stakeholders universally value the ESP for its critical role in providing unified, standardised statistics that are essential for policymaking – something which Member States could not achieve on their own. Eurostat’s alignment with global standards further underscores the importance of their activities.

### 3.5. Relevance

The objectives of the SMP and the activities implemented within all its pillars remain **relevant** to the needs of the single market and prove some degree of adaptability to respond to emerging and unforeseen challenges (e.g. COVID-19, Ukraine), even with a comparatively modest budget that did not anticipate the inflationary pressure or these events during the implementation of the programme. The programme's relevance increases when considering emerging political challenges reflected in the new Political Guidelines<sup>4</sup> and recent reports from Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi<sup>5</sup>. However, the programme’s modest budget and the need for better visibility and communication of certain activities suggest areas for improvement to ensure it remains relevant to the needs of the public, businesses and the political challenges of the EU in general.

**Pillar 1** remains highly relevant as it supports EU law enforcement, competition rules, IT systems and coordination groups that are aligned with the Commission’s strategies and priorities. The pillar's relevance is set to grow further by contributing to growth, investments and the completion of the single market, including the creation of a Savings and Investment Union under the 2024-2029 Political Guidelines.

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<sup>4</sup> [European Commission political guidelines for 2024-2029](#).

<sup>5</sup> Draghi Report’, [EU competitiveness: Looking ahead - European Commission](#). ‘Letta Report’, [Enrico Letta - Much more than a market \(April 2024\)](#).

**Pillar 2's** objectives and actions are highly relevant. They are closely aligned with EU strategies and priorities and with work programmes developed based on extensive stakeholder consultations to ensure they address the evolving needs of SMEs and the single market. However, improvements could be made by explicitly linking actions to objectives in work programmes and by avoiding overwhelming beneficiaries with too many demands.

**Pillar 3** remains relevant as it is well-aligned with market needs, supporting the free movement of capital within the single market, boosting EU companies' competitiveness in global capital markets, and ensuring EU interests are represented in the standard-setting process. Activities, such as EFRAG's development of sustainability reporting standards under the CSRD are critical to implementing EU law, influencing global standardisation and addressing the growing importance of sustainability reporting.

**Pillar 4** remains highly relevant, addressing consumer protection and financial services through activities aligned with the New Consumer Agenda and EU priorities. Initiatives, such as Consumer PRO, ADR grants, and IT tools, like Safety Gate and e-surveillance web crawlers, effectively support enforcement authorities, empower consumers and ensure product safety. The beneficiaries Better Finance and Finance Watch play a crucial role in representing financial services consumers. Their expertise is set to grow in importance alongside the EU's focus on the Savings and Investment Union and financial literacy although greater visibility and resources may be required in the future.

**Pillar 5** contributes to a stronger, more coherent single market and is highly relevant to the evolving needs of the EU food chain. The pillar tackles key issues such as emerging diseases, antimicrobial resistance, food safety and sustainable practices. The co-financed emergency measures for animal and plant diseases helped alleviate the burden on farmers. Activities focusing on surveillance, laboratory inspections and sustainable food production align with broader EU policies like the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy, ensuring continued relevance in tackling public health and sustainability challenges.

**Pillar 6** remains highly relevant. It aligns closely with the needs of the ESS and other stakeholders by addressing changing policy priorities and data requirements. While the ESS has demonstrated adaptability, particularly during crises like COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, gaps in regional data granularity, timeliness and the integration of new data sources highlight the need for continued innovation and improvements to meet emerging policy demands.

### 3.6. Flexibility

The SMP has partially delivered on the expected benefits of an integrated programme. The potential of the SMP for **flexibility** has brought some positive results, but its full potential remains untapped. Budgetary transfers have been relatively small amounts and occurred between budget lines managed by the same Commission department.

### 3.7. Simplification

Although there is some evidence from the interim evaluation, overall **simplification** at programme level is not at the expected level. Some simplification has resulted from having a single legal basis for the programme: the Commission only had to prepare one proposal, and Parliament and the Council only had to adopt one regulation. However, evidence of other simplification is limited as multiple committees and work programmes are still required to cover different policy areas.

### 3.8. Synergies

The expected **synergies** from consolidating activities into a single financing instrument have not fully materialised, despite cooperation across policy areas, implying sound collaboration between Commission departments. Joint activities across multiple pillars have been carried out but more could be developed.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Despite the overall positive conclusions at this mid-term stage of implementation, there is room for improvement.** Taking into account the limited budget of the programme and its fixed programming schedule, accommodating new policy priorities without a substantially increased budget is a challenge. In particular, higher-than-expected inflation has reduced the number and scope of actions that could be carried out.

The **potential for flexibility, synergies and simplification** should be further harnessed to make the most of the SMP's unique design. The Commission departments responsible for each SMP pillar could investigate the feasibility of initiating more joint actions, such as cross-pillar training, shared procurement activities, common purchases of databases, joint studies, Eurobarometer surveys, framework contracts and shared IT projects. Simplification should be considered with regards to the eGrants tool.

**Data collection** in relation to the achievement of indicators could be more streamlined. A more systematic gathering of data across all pillars would better inform the assessment of the programme's implementation. It would allow the Commission to adopt corrective measures to ensure that the activities effectively and efficiently serve the achievement of the objectives and remain relevant and coherent within the SMP and with the EU's broader priorities.

Certain indicators in the **monitoring and evaluation framework** could be updated and refined to be more tailored to the SMP and better reflect programme performance. This would also improve data collection, align the framework closer with the intervention logic, and ultimately improve the assessment of the programme's implementation, in particular during the final evaluation.

**Pillar 1:** More frequent feedback collection, where relevant, from users of services like Your Europe Advice (YEA) and the EU Taxonomy Compass, would improve monitoring user satisfaction and service delivery<sup>6</sup>. Introducing a unified reporting system across all budget lines would streamline the tracking of activities, outputs and results. This could reveal opportunities for synergies in areas like joint procurement, training and coordinated enforcement across multiple domains.

**Pillar 2:** Systematic monitoring of output and result indicators in project reports would identify all SMEs supported under the SMP. Explicitly linking these indicators to the specific objectives would bring more clarity on the programme's impact. Result indicators could be improved by linking SME satisfaction with the support received and any follow-up action they take. A harmonised survey should try to gather data on the impact on, for example, growth, digitalisation, and internationalisation.

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<sup>6</sup> Your Europe includes a feedback mechanism and runs an annual user feedback survey.

**Pillar 3:** Creating clearer monitoring and feedback mechanisms for participation in standardisation processes would improve the understanding of how EU funding (particularly Annex III organisations) impacts stakeholder involvement. Some organisations that are financed to support the development of financial and non-financial reporting standards would be severely impacted if they received no funding, risking their ability to continue their activities that are instrumental to EU policy objectives. Increasing the funding base of these organisations is also necessary.

**Pillar 4:** Experience with the programme has shown that, while indicators need to be in place to measure the quantitative outputs of the beneficiaries, there are challenges in measuring the quality or impact of the activities using quantitative indicators. Financial difficulties have also been encountered by some beneficiaries due to increased inflation that was not covered by the amounts in the SMP's initial programme design. Product compliance and safety would be improved by ensuring more market surveillance officers, better cooperation with customs authorities, faster dissemination of research findings, and more frequent calls for funding. Varying level of resources among grant participants may have affected the level of achievements for these actions particularly where matching funding is required.

**Pillar 5:** Improving the monitoring framework of the programme by setting indicators would help better measure the effectiveness and efficiency of financed activities, for instance to monitor the progress and impact of European Union Reference Centres' (EURCs) activities on animal welfare. This would also help better assess to what extent these activities contribute to the smooth functioning of the internal market. Access to an emergency aid reserve is needed to secure the efficient implementation of veterinary and phytosanitary emergency measures and programmes.

**Pillar 6:** There is a need to continue investing in new technologies and innovative data sources. Improving adaptability to rapid technological developments is crucial, and continuous efforts are needed to improve timeliness, reduce publication delays and strengthen capacity-building initiatives among Member States. Prioritising statistical outputs and continued coordination with other EU bodies is needed to ensure that the most critical and high-impact data needs are efficiently addressed. To achieve this, stronger mechanisms to boost user engagement and better understand their needs and priorities should be developed, including more timely and inclusive feedback. It is considered important to continue delineating the European Statistics Pillar, including its activities and budget, within the future MFF architecture, in order to highlight its independent and impartial nature.