

Work Plan

FUND FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS

PORTUGAL

1. Background

In the previous European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) 2009-2014 was agreed to have as overall objective the strengthening of bilateral relations between the Donor and Beneficiaries' States and specific tools were in place to support the successful achievement of that common aim, such as partnerships at Programme level and specific funds for bilateral relations to support projects to set up bilateral partnerships.

The bilateral cooperation promoted and achieved with donor countries was highly valued and used by Portugal with 50% of the total 8 programmes with Donor Programme Partners (DPP) and 29% of the contracted projects with Donor Project Partners.

Although some areas are naturally more prone for bilateral cooperation between Portugal and the Donor States, such as sea and environment, other areas of cooperation were successfully open for fruitful cooperation, such as arts and cultural heritage, public health and gender equality.

On the final report, released in June 2016¹, on the FMO contracted mid-term evaluation of the bilateral relations under the FM EEA 2009-2014, conducted by COWI, the main lessons learned identified referred to take into account in the bilateral support to Programmes simplified and flexible procedures and an early start on the support to initiatives that can foster potential partnerships.

In the beginning of 2018, the National Focal Point (NFP) contracted an ex-post evaluation of results for the EEA FM 2009-2014 that concluded, among others issues, that Bilateral cooperation between Portuguese and Donor states entities was an important factor for the success of the funded projects. One of the findings stated that, in bilateral partnerships, not always the match between objectives and areas of work between organizations was the most suitable and recommendations was issued to implement of match making mechanisms that enhance better bilateral partnerships and collaborations.

At a more strategic and national level, taking into account the limited resources available and the aim of the Fund for Bilateral Relations (FBR), the granting of support should follow a concentrated approach to identified priority areas of bilateral interest in order to achieve the highest impact and avoid the dispersion of support.

¹ <http://eeagrants.org/Results-data/Documents/Evaluations-and-reviews>

2. Main objective

According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed on the 22th May 2017 between Portugal and the Donor States, a Fund for Bilateral Relations (FBR) with the amount of € 2,054,000 was established for the whole implementation period (until 2024).

The FBR is regulated by the applicable provisions of the Regulation of Implementation of the EEA Grants for 2014-2021 (Regulation), the Agreement on Fund for Bilateral Relations, signed on the 21th September 2017 between the Portuguese National Focal Point (NFP) and the Financial Mechanism Office (FMC), and by the *Bilateral Guideline 2014-2021*.

The Work Plan constitutes a brief description of the proposed implementation and activities for the duration of the Financial Mechanism and has been prepared considering recommendations to (i) be flexible, open for positive ideas and initiatives from relevant stakeholders and (ii) create synergies with the bilateral funds allocated at programme level. This document should be amended based on lessons learned and needs identified at a later stage.

The MoU reflects the desire of strengthening bilateral cooperation as it identifies the existence of Donor Programme Partners in all Programmatic Areas. Therefore, the Work Plan should focus on extending opportunities to other stakeholders and other activities where bilateral contacts are considered to be important opportunities.

According to these new opportunities and bearing in mind the experience from the previous Financial Mechanism, there are two relevant levels of ambition for the FBR at National Level of the EEA FM 2014-2021 in order to develop a Strategic Vision: i) promote bilateral relations and set the pillars for long-term cooperation in areas that have recently risen to the socio-economic and political agendas and (ii) consolidate and strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation in areas where synergies may exist or that have proven effective.

To build on such approach, the following different main areas of information have been considered:

- Focus on areas with potential on bilateral relations that can be highlighted, such as Business Development; Joint Research; Disaster Prevention and Preparedness; Employment; Public Health; Justice System; Children and Youth at Risk, without prejudice of other identified in a later stage;
- Support to bilateral cooperation generated under the previous EEA FM 2009-2014;
- Support to bilateral cooperation under the current EEA FM 2014-2021 agreed Programmes.

Complementarity with the agreed Programmes under EEA FM 2014-2021 should be promoted while avoiding any overlaps.

According to Article 8.8 of the EEA FM 2014-2021 Regulation on eligible expenditures, the support under the FBR at national level, can be directed to the following type of activities:

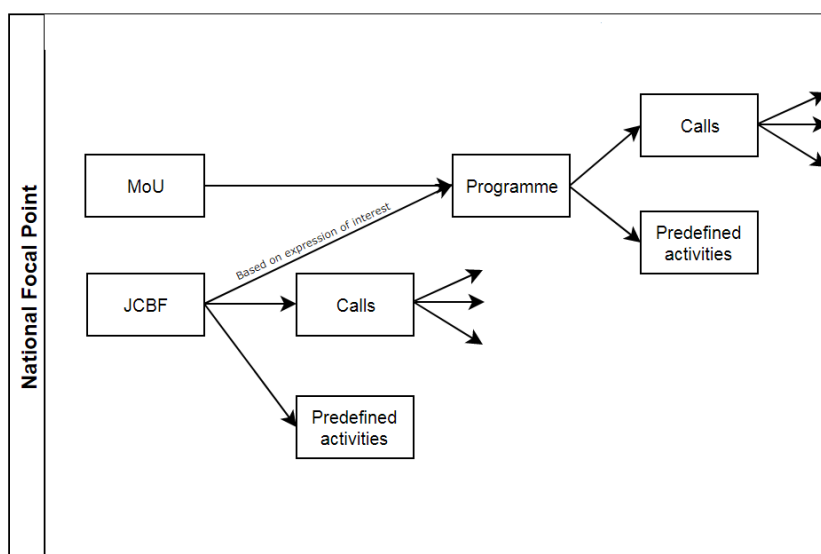
- activities aiming at strengthening bilateral relations between the Donor States and the Beneficiary States;
- the search for partners for donor partnership projects prior to or during the preparation of a project application, the development of such partnerships and the preparation of an application for a donor partnership project;
- networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, technology, experience and best practice between entities in Beneficiary States and entities in the Donor States and/or international organisations;
- activities aiming at strengthening cooperation and exchanging experiences and best practices between the Programme Operators and similar entities within the Beneficiary States and Donor States, as well as international organisations, provided at least one entity within the Donor States is involved in the activity. Activities in the programme preparation phase to strengthen bilateral aspects of the programmes (such as meetings with potential donor programme or project partners or outreach event to potential stakeholders in the donor states);

3. Implementation system

As National Focal Point (NFP), the National Management Unit (UNG) is in charge of the management of the FBR. Part of the FBR should be made available to the POs through pre-established allocations set in the MoU to which other allocations decided by the Joint Committee for the Bilateral Funds (JCBF) may be added, based on the evaluation of expressions of interest made by the POs to finance activities organized under the Programmes.

The funds may be distributed through activities of pre-defined bilateral interest or open calls.

Predefined activities are considered activities that have been previously agreed in the JCBF based on demonstrated bilateral interest between entities from Portugal and from the Donor States, in compliance with the applicable national and European law on public procurement. After a positive assessment from the JCBF on proposed pre-defined initiatives, the UNG shall collect a



detailed proposal from the respective beneficiary promoter, including an outlined activity plan and a detailed budget to be approved by the JCBF through written procedure. Comments from the JCBF appointed members

on the proposed activity plan and detailed budget shall be taken into account in the contracting of the grants by the UNG.

In cases where a bilateral initiative is identified and agreed upon by the JCBF but no direct promoter is identified to carry it out, the NFP can act as beneficiary promoter. Direct costs of the NFP, Audit Authority and Certifying Authority resulting from the participation in bilateral activities or initiatives promoted under the EEA GRANTS shall be eligible under the FBR provided that the JCBF has given prior approval. This approval can be delivered by written procedure by the appointed members.

The **granting of the FBR through open calls**² shall be promoted by the NFP in accordance with the directions approved by the JCBF. The NFP will propose to the JCBF the call text for the support under the FBR. The adoption of the call text by the JCBF can be made by written procedure. Once the call text is adopted by the JCBF, the NFP shall promote a widely advertisement of the open call, in Portuguese and English, namely in the websites of international and national EEA Grants, of the Norway Embassy in Portugal, the Portuguese Embassy in Oslo, the POs and any other websites or media relevant for the open call. The NFP is responsible for the call text to meet the Regulation requirements.

The open call will be launched for a period of 12 to 24 months, with cut-off dates for the selection of applications every 4 months. The timing of the launching and cut-off dates for selection of activities for funding will be detailed on the agreed open call text. Natural persons are not considered eligible to ensure that support is given to meaningful partnerships with strong potential for sustainability for the future. Similar to a small grant scheme the open call shall aim at a minimum grant amount of 5.000€ and maximum 15.000€ at the first stage of implementation, subject to different thresholds to be decided by the JCBF based on the level of interest received.

The open call in a first stage should be considered as a means to assess the potential bilateral interest from which conclusions shall be drawn by the JCBF for latter implementation stages. A preliminary allocation of 200.000€ is considered for the first implementation period and will not condition granting decisions that demand additional funds.

The UNG will carry out a formal analysis of the applications. If, following the formal analysis of the applications an essential element is missing, the UNG will notify the entities, within 10 working days, to eliminate the detected deficiency, under penalty of immediate exclusion. Upon completion of the formal analysis of the application, the UNG will promote the merit assessment following the procedures agreed by the JCBF and taking into account the selection criteria and sub criteria published in the call text. The JCBF will recommend the entities for funding, their maximum allocations and the excluded entities, taking into account the evaluation of the merit carried out and the amounts available. The entities will be notified by the UNG of the final decision on the application. In the case of the entities whose applications are not approved, they will be given the deadline set in the Code of Administrative Procedure to appeal/express their comments.

The **allocation of the FBR to Programmes** included in the MoU is not subject to any further approval by the JCBF or the NFP, therefore the NFP shall, upon request from the PO, ensure timely disbursement of bilateral funds appropriate to cover the POs needs, not exceeding the MoU allocation. In case the NFP is prevented from making

² The minimum and maximum amounts under the open calls shall be determined in the respective open call text in order to reach a broad set of potential beneficiaries.

the above funding available, the FMC can make an advance payment directly to the PO not exceeding € 50.000 as pursuant to Article 4.6.4. This advance payment shall be considered included in the MoU allocation and the request from the PO should follow the Annex 5 template of the bilateral guideline. Additional allocations from the FBR to POs beyond those made in the MoU shall be based on the expression of interest following the template of Annex 4 of the bilateral guideline submitted by the PO with an outline on the use and intended results from the funds requested and following the assessment by the JCBF. Payments under the additional allocations to POs shall be dependent on a minimum of 70% of reported and validated expenditure by the UNG regarding the previous payments.

FBR payments may take the form of advance payment, interim payment or final balance payment.

All funds transfers shall be preceded by the signature of the beneficiary, including the POs, of an Acceptance Agreement, which shall define, namely: the scope, funding conditions, eligible expenditures, timeline, amount of the financial support and the co-financing rate, the payment method, beneficiaries bank account, the obligations of the beneficiary and the situations of suspension and/or reimbursement of the payment of the financial support in case of non-compliance.

The **report on the use of the FBR at national level** shall be delivered in each JCBF meeting and annually on the Strategic Report. The POs shall report regularly to the UNG on the use of the FBR allocated to its programme and the UNG shall compile aggregated Interim Financial Reports (IFRs) based on input from POs and other promoters under the FBR. The IFRs shall be certified by the CA before the submission to the FMO. The POs and the beneficiaries shall report to the UNG on initiatives completed under the FBR allocated to the programmes. These reports shall include, beyond the financial information, a detailed description of the initiative, the results achieved and what was the contribution to reach the overall objectives of the EEA Grants.

A more detailed description of the implementation system of the FBR can be found in the description of the management and control systems at national level.

4. Bilateral Priority Programmes

All Programmes are considered of bilateral priority and the partnerships at Programme level will ensure that close cooperation is promoted in the implementation. All Programmes have anticipated high bilateral ambitions in the concept notes prepared for submission to the Donors States and bilateral initiatives have already been promoted or planned by the Programme Operators with the respective DPPs, in particular initiatives that aim to facilitate partnerships at project level by bringing together potential partners in the agreed pre-defined projects and in future open calls.

The NFP will work closely with PO to support the effective use of the FBR allocations to PO. The NFP will promote meetings with PO in order to operate the support to PO on the use of FBR and among other measures will demand that POs adopt together with respective(s) DPP(s) a Work Plan with the programme of the agreed bilateral initiatives and estimated budgets in order to allow POs to have a timely estimation on future possible request for allocations of additional funds to be considered by the JCBF.

Programme	DPP(s)	Funds allocated in MoU	Estimative budget by PO on future expression of interest	JCBF Allocations Of Additional Funds	Total allocation	Comments
PT - Blue Growth Innovation and SMEs	Innovation Norway (IN) Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU) Icelandic Centre for Research (RANNIS) Research Council of Norway (NFR)	200.000€	TBD	TBD	200.000€	€50.000 extraordinary advance payment Article 4.6.4
PT – Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy	Innovation Norway (IN)	100.000€	TBD	TBD	100.000€	€50.000 extraordinary advance payment Article 4.6.4

EEA grants Portugal

Mecanismo Financeiro do Espaço Económico Europeu
European Economic Area Financial Mechanism
 Unidade Nacional de Gestão
National Focal Point

PT - Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation	Directorate for Cultural Heritage (RA) The Arts Council of Norway (ACN)	100.000€	TBD	TBD	100.000€	
PT - Work-life Balance and Gender Equality	The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO)	100.000€	TBD	TBD	100.000€	€50.000 extraordinary advance payment Article 4.6.4
Total		500.000€	TBD	TBD	500.000€	

5. Major activities

In order to achieve a significant impact in strengthening the bilateral relations Funds to pre-defined bilateral activities shall be mainly granted to agreed priority areas in order to achieve focused and targeted outcomes, without prejudice of any priority area of interest identified by the JCBF in order to allow support where significant bilateral interest can be identified.

Priority areas for support by the FBR have been identified for the first implementation period (2 years) in order to concentrate the support and achieve a more focused intervention and ensure visible impact with the limited funds available. These priority areas are considered of high bilateral interest, either by existing successful cooperation or by common interests in working in current challenges. Further priority areas for promoting bilateral activities may be agreed upon over the life cycle of the Financial Mechanism.

Therefore, on the first implementation period (2018/2019) it is considered important that **pre-defined initiatives** should give priority mainly to the following agreed priority areas with high potential bilateral interest: A) Business Development, B) Joint Research and Innovation, C) Disaster Prevention and Preparedness, D) Employment, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, E) Public Health and F) Justice System and Correctional Services.

On the other hand, the scope of support by **open calls** shall be broad and used to identify existent bilateral interests and actively stimulate bilateral partnerships.

The dissemination of the open call is of crucial importance and the NFP is urged to plan well this matter, considering any target audiences and the adequate promotion channels.

6. Budget

Considering the above mentioned approach and aims for the implementation of the FBR the proposed budget for the first years of support are distribute as follows:

Title	Budget	Comments
Call for proposals (1 st tranche)	200.000€	This amount can be further increased considering the level of interest generated in the FBR Open Call
Pre-defined activities	500.000€	Possible initiatives agreed in the 2 nd meeting of the JCBF >400.000€ Further pre-defined initiatives can be identified for the first phase of implementation 2018/2019
Bilateral funds for Blue Growth an Innovation Programme	200.000€	€50.000 extraordinary advance payment Article 4.6.4
Bilateral funds for Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy Programme	100.000€	€50.000 extraordinary advance payment Article 4.6.4
Bilateral funds for Work-Life Balance Programme	100.000€	€50.000 extraordinary advance payment Article 4.6.4
Bilateral funds for Culture Programme	100.000€	-----
Funds still to be allocated	854.000€	-----
TOTAL	2.054.000€	