

# Applicants Handbook

## Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy

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## Glossary

- **Audit Authority (IGF):** A national public entity , functionally independent of the National Focal Point, the Certifying Authority and the Programme Operator, designated by the Beneficiary State and responsible for verifying the effective functioning of the management and control system.
- **Beneficiary Countries:** 15 Member States of the European Union with the largest deviations from the European average of GDP per capita, eligible as beneficiaries of the EEA Financial Mechanism.
- **Certifying Authority (AdC):** a national public entity, functionally independent of the Audit Authority and the Programme Operator, designated by the Beneficiary State to certify financial information.
- **Donor States:** Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, countries belonging to the EFTA, and which contribute funding for the EEA Financial Mechanism.
- **EEA Financial Mechanism:** Financial Mechanism established under the Agreement of the European Economic Area in which Donor Countries finance, in 15 Beneficiary Countries, initiatives and projects in a number of programme areas, to reduce economic and social disparities and strengthening bilateral relations between Donor Countries and Beneficiary Countries.
- **Expenses certification:** Formal procedure by which the Certifying Authority declares to the FMO that the submitted expenses for reimbursement are eligible, and justified by paid invoices, or other accounting documents of equivalent probative value, or physical indicators for simplified costs, and which were carried out within the scope of approved activities for financing.

- **Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC):** The committee established by the Standing Committee of the EFTA States to manage the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, composed by representatives of the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs.
- **Financing rate:** Contribution of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 for the implementation of approved programmes, projects and initiatives, corresponding to a percentage of the total eligible cost.
- **Financial Mechanism Office (FMO):** The office assisting the FMC in managing the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021. The FMO, which is administratively a part of the European Free Trade Association, is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 on behalf of the FMC and serves as a contact point.
- **Irregularities Authority (IGF):** A national public entity designated by the Beneficiary State to be responsible for the preparation and submission of irregularities reports on behalf of the Beneficiary State.
- **Irregularity:** Violation of the legal framework of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, and of other applicable legislations, in particular, with respect to public procurement.
- **Legal Framework of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021:** Composed by the Regulation on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, Protocol 38c to the EEA Agreement on the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, the Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 (hereinafter referred to as the MoU), entered into between the Donor States and the Beneficiary State, the programme agreements and any guidelines adopted by the FMC after consultation with the Beneficiary States.
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):** Framework for cooperation containing the designation of national entities involved in the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 and identification of their functions in the national management

and control structures and an implementation framework consisting of financial and substantive parameters.

- **National Focal Point (UNG):** A National public entity designated by the Beneficiary State to have the overall responsibility for reaching the objectives of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 and implementing the MoU.

- **National Management Unit of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (UNG - EEAFM):** The National Management Unit was created by Council of Ministers Resolution N<sup>o</sup>. 39/2017 of March 10th, rectified by the Rectification Declaration No. 14/2017 of April 24th and is under the supervision of the Minister of Planning and Infrastructures, as established in paragraph N<sup>o</sup>. 6 of article 24 of Decree-Law No. 251-A /2015 of December 17th, which approved the organization and functioning regime of the XXI Constitutional Government. As the National Focal Point, has the overall responsibility to ensure that the Programmes contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the EEAFM 2014-2021 in Portugal and to ensure its implementation in accordance with the established implementation principles.

- **Partner Entities:** a natural or legal person actively involved in, and effectively contributing to, the implementation of a project. It shares with the Project Promoter a common economic or social goal which is to be realised through the implementation of that project.

- **Partnership Agreement:** Agreement between the Project Promoter and its partners for the development of the partnership, regulating both roles and responsibilities of the parties, as well as the budget and the allocated expenses of the partners' participation.

- **Programme Operator (PO):** A public or private entity, commercial or non-commercial, as well as non-governmental organisations, having the responsibility for preparing and implementing the Programme.

- **Project Contract:** an agreement between the Programme Operator and the Project Promoter regulating the implementation of a particular project.

## Introduction

The Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy was created following the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between Portugal, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein for the implementation in Portugal of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) 2014-2021 in the Programme areas Environment and Ecosystems (PA11), Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation (PA13). The Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy – Programme Environment - contributes to the priorities of the Environment Policy in Portugal: transition to a circular, resilient and carbon neutral economy and valorisation of the territory.

The purpose of the Programme Environment Applicants Handbook is to support the potential applicants in the preparation of his / her application, completing the forms and collecting the documents attached to it, as well as guiding the promoter of an approved project in all procedures and rules to in order to ensure good performance and project success.

The Regulation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 and the Applicants Guide for Financing Environment Projects, on Climate Change and the Low Carbon Economy define the criteria for access financing. Applicants must comply with these rules, not only in the preparation of applications, but also in the implementation of the projects, report of information and evaluation of results. In this sense, the Handbook aims to help promoters clarify the concepts and procedures for a better understanding of the content of the Guide and to guarantee applications with a higher success rate in the selection process.

This Handbook aims to make the Program more accessible to potential beneficiaries. However, its use does not waive or replace the consultation of the Call, Application Forms, Memorandum of Understanding and the EEA Financial Mechanism Regulation 2014-2021 which are available on the website [www.eeagrants.gov.pt](http://www.eeagrants.gov.pt).

## Programme Presentation

The Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action (SG - MAAC) was appointed as Programme Operator of the Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy under the EEA Grants Memorandum of Understanding 2014 - 2021, signed in Lisbon on May 22th of 2017, with a total financial allocation of € 28 235 294 (€ 24 000 000 from the EEA Grants and €4 235 294 from National Contribution). The Partner Entity from the Donor Countries is Innovation Norway.

### Outcomes and Objectives

This Handbook is intended for projects that address the following outcomes and objectives:

**Outcome 1:** Increased application of Circular Economy principles in target sectors.

**Objective:** promote the application of circular economy principles by reducing the use of materials and waste generation, in particular by means of a deposit return system for plastic and aluminum beverage containers and with the implementation of efficiency and innovation measures in the value chain of the construction sector.

**Outcome 2:** Promotion of sustainable development models in Biosphere Reserves.

**Objective:** support the management and sustainability of territories classified as Biosphere Reserves, enabling (or creating tools) for the development of their economy and promoting the local population involvement while attracting visitors.

**Outcome 3:** Improved resilience and responsiveness to climate change in selected areas.

**Objective:** increase resilience to climate change, through adaptation measures at local level, low-carbon technology solutions and mitigation measures in cities.

### **Financing rate**

The eligible costs of the selected project will be financed up to a maximum rate of 100%, except in cases where the project promoters are non-governmental organizations or social partners, which, according to the EEA FM Regulation 2014-2021, cost financing will be 90%.

### **Project Promoters and Project Partners Eligibility**

Participation as an eligible candidate in projects funded under the Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy may include any public or private, for-profit or nonprofit organizations and legally established nongovernmental organizations or intergovernmental organizations active in Portugal.

### **Project Promoter Specific Attributions**

The project promoter is responsible to the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action for the application, coordination and execution of the project and fulfillment of the proposed objectives, as well as for strict compliance with the conditions of the project contract, in particular with regard to compliance with National and European Union legislation.

When the project is implemented in partnership, the promoter is responsible to the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action:

- Representing, coordinating and communicating with the other members of the Partnership;
- For the presentation and previous validation of all documents and information provided in the project contract;
- For the communication of any verified changes regarding the promoter or any of the project partners, namely in their names, addresses and legal statutes;



- By centralizing the entire communication, exchange within the scope of the project, in particular with regard to the technical and financial follow-up of the project.

Each project is carried out under the responsibility of a coordinator hired by the project promoter, whose identification, or modification must be communicated to the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action.

The coordinator is the preferred interlocutor of the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action and other management and monitoring institutions of the Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy.

### **Partnership Agreements**

It is considered as a project partner any public or private entity, commercial or non-commercial, as well as non-governmental organizations established as a legal person in a Donor Country, Beneficiary Countries or in a country outside the European Economic Area provided it has a common border with its beneficiary State, or any international organization actively involved in the implementation of the proposed project.

It is possible to implement a partnership project, provided it is formalized through a partnership agreement between the project promoter and the project partners.

The partnership agreement must contain the following information:

- Provisions on the rights, duties and responsibilities of the parties, including the responsibility of the Project Promoter for the financial flows to the project partners;
- The budget allocated to each member of the partnership, including indirect costs;
- Provisions on the method of calculation of indirect costs and their maximum amount;

- Exchange rule applicable to expenses and reimbursements, when partners outside the Eurozone are involved;
- Detailed budget, explaining costs and prices;
- Identification of the project promoter and coordinator;
- Provisions and audits of project partners;
- Dispute Resolution Provisions.

All provisions contained in this Guide apply *mutatis mutandis* to all project partners.

The partnership agreement will be drafted in English where at least one of the project partners comes from one of the donor countries. The project team should be clearly identified, including summarized curricula from each of the key stakeholders.

Applications are encouraged:

- Partnerships with donor countries of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism: Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein;
- With equal participation of men and women;
- Against *Mobbing*;
- With the inclusion of minorities;
- And that demonstrate a clear message against hate speech, extremism, racism, homophobia and anti-semitism.

## Elegible Expenses

### General Principles of Expenses Eligibility

Eligible expenses of the project are those effectively incurred within the project and comply with the following criteria:

- Those related to the object of the project contract and which are indicated in the overall project estimate budget;
- All expenses incurred between the first and the last project day, as specified in the project contract;

- Those that are proportional and necessary within the scope of project implementation;
- They should be used for the sole purpose of achieving the project objective (s) and expected results, consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- They must be identifiable and verifiable, in particular through their accounting, and determined in accordance with national accounting standards and general accounting principles;
- Must comply with applicable social legislation and tax rates in their country of origin.

Expenses incurred are all whose costs have been invoiced, paid and delivered (in case of goods) or realization (in the case of services or work). The amount of eligible expenditure to be taken into account is the amount shown in the expenditure document, including VAT at the current rate.

### **Elegible Direct Expenses**

The expenses identified and proven by the project promoter or project partners, exclusively and directly related to the execution of the project and complying with the general principles established as Eligible Expenses, are eligible, namely:

- Staff costs related to the project, including salary, social contributions, workplace insurance and other compulsory costs;
- Travel and subsistence allowance of the team members assigned to the project, under the same conditions and up to the maximum limit applicable to civil servants in their respective countries;
- Costs of new or second-hand equipment during the execution of the project. In case that the equipment is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project, the entire purchase price of that equipment may, by exception of the rule contained in paragraph 4 of Article 8.2 of the 'Regulation', be eligible;

- Costs of consumables and supplies that can be identified and allocated to the project;
- Costs of contracting services by the "project promoter" or "project partners" for the purpose of implementing the project;
- Costs entailed by other contracts awarded by the Project Promoter for the purposes of carrying out the project, provided that the awarding complies with the applicable rules on public procurement and this Guide;

### **Eligible Indirect Costs**

Indirect costs are those that can not be directly attributed to a project, but are indispensable to its realization.

A fixed percentage, up to 20%, of total direct eligible expenditure, is eligible as indirect costs (overheads), excluding eligible costs with subcontracting and imputed costs of resources made available by third parties and not used at the premises of the project sponsor or partner.

The fixed percentage is calculated at the beginning of each project from the actual costs of each organization and according to the methodology defined in the Call.

### **Ineligible expenses**

The following expenses are considered ineligible:

- Interest on debt or bank loans, charges related to debts or bank loans;
- Charges for financial transactions and other financial costs, except those related to financial services costs imposed by the project contract;
- Reserves for losses or potential future liabilities;
- Value Added Tax (VAT), when recoverable;
- Costs covered by other sources of financing;
- Fines, penalties and litigation costs;
- Excessive or inappropriate expenses for previously established purposes;

- Expenses with acquisition of land and real estate.

## Project Application

### Application Process

Applications are submitted following the opening of the Call through a notice posted on the Secretary General's website (<http://www.sg.maac.gov.pt/>) on the EEA Grants Portugal website (<https://www.eeagrants.gov.pt/en/programmes/environment/>), on the EEA Grants International website (eeagrants.org) and in national media.

Application forms will be made available on the opening date of the Call on the website of the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action.

Only those applications that are duly completed will be accepted, delivered within the established deadlines and that meet the requirements expressed in the Guide and in the Call.

The application process must take into account the ancillary regulations or restrictions to the general conditions advertised in the annex of the Call.

The applications are formalized with the delivery of the form containing:

- Part A – Administrative Information;
- Part B – Description and Project Public Summary;
- Part C – Detailed Technical Description;
- Part D – Financial Information.

All elements are treated as confidential, with all persons and entities involved in the selection process being bound by the duty of confidentiality. Applications may be submitted in Portuguese or English, with the exception of Part B, which must be submitted in both languages. The interpretation given in the general language of the application prevails.

### **Project Partners**

Proposed institutions and participants must demonstrate to the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action the access to their information, during the application phase and validity of the Project Contract, to have their tax situation regularized before Social Security and Administration Supervisor.

Regarding the duration of the Projects, all projects must be completed by the deadline of April 30, 2024 and projects with a duration of less than 12 months will not be accepted.

### **Applications Process**

The application process takes place in three stages:

- Verification of the admissibility and eligibility of applications;
- Technical evaluation of applications;
- Selection decision.

### **Selection Committee**

The selection process of the applications is carried out by a Selection Committee appointed by the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action.

The Selection Committee will be composed of two members appointed by the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action and a member of the Donor Programme Partner, Innovation Norway, under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 between Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Kingdom of Norway and the Portuguese Republic).

### **Verification of Admissibility and Eligibility of Applications**

The Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action, as the managing entity of the Programme, is responsible for opening Calls, receiving applications and verifying the formal requirements for admissibility and eligibility.

Verification of the formal requirements for admissibility and eligibility will include:

- Analysis of all documentation submitted by applicants within the scope of the Call, assessing their legality and full compliance with the advertised administrative prerequisites;
- Analysis and proof of all documentation submitted by the project promoters regarding the financial capacity of their execution, as well as the absence of any debts to the Portuguese State, namely in tax offices and social security contributions;
- Compliance with the applicable legislation, as well as the framework of the project in the state aid rules, first checking whether the support to be granted falls within the definition of State Aid in relation to the characterization criteria in paragraph 1 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (ex-Article 87 TEC);
- If support is included in the definition of State Aid, only then, the framework, compliance and enforcement of the other relevant Community legislation will be verified, among others that apply, on a case-by-case basis.

The coordinators of the applications will be notified by e-mail of admission for evaluation or exclusion of their projects within 20 working days.

### **Technical Evaluation of Applications**

The merit evaluation of each application is carried out independently by two experts appointed by the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action. In the event that expert evaluations differ by more than 30% from the highest ranking, SG\_MAAC will select a third independent expert to evaluate the application.

The final classification of the applications is the result of the simple average of the evaluations.

The evaluation process will be based on the following criteria:

- Technical Ability of the Promoter and Team (CTPE), scored from a minimum of 0 points to a maximum of 100 points;
- Technical Quality of the Proposal (QTP), scored from a minimum of 0 points to a maximum of 100 points;
- Project Structure and General Objectives (EPOG), scored from a minimum of 0 points to a maximum of 100 points;

The defined criteria will be detailed in a differentiated way in each Call. The evaluation grid will be published on the website of the Secretary General for Environment and Cli

Action.

### **Decision of Selection**

Applications to be excluded on the basis of the verification of the formal requirements for admissibility and eligibility shall be informed, in fact and in law, of the reasons which led to such a rejection proposal, duly justified and substantiated and may appeal against the decision within the time limit of 10 working days.

The Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action will appreciate this reasoning, after which it will issue a final and definitive opinion on the admissibility of the applications. After the technical evaluation of the applications is accepted, the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action will make the project classification list available to the Selection Committee and to the Committee of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism.

The Selection Committee will review the project classification list and may modify it in a reasoned manner in order to present to the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action a list of recommended projects.



It is the responsibility of the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action to verify if the selection process was conducted in accordance with the Regulation of the EEA FM 2014-2021 and that the recommendations of the Selection Committee comply with the rules and objectives of the Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy.

After verification, the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action will prepare and publicize to the candidates an interim report of the project evaluation, duly substantiated and reasoned, for holding a prior hearing of interested parties.

Project promoters may, at a prior hearing, make such comments, as they deem appropriate, within 10 working days of notification of the proposed decision.

The Selection Committee will assess the respective reasons, after which will issue a final and definitive classification of the applications.

Within 20 working days of receipt of the opinions and reports resulting from the evaluation process, the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action will notify project promoters of the proposed project financing decision and the opinion of the Selection Committee.

Project promoters who wish to exercise the rights provided in the previous paragraphs must do so through the electronic address: [ambiente.eeagrants@sg.maac.gov.pt](mailto:ambiente.eeagrants@sg.maac.gov.pt).

The final decision on applications is the responsibility of the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action, informed by the selection committee's report, containing the proposals for decisions on:

- List of excluded applications based on the criteria for admissibility and eligibility of applications or for the classification being less than 50 points;
- List of accepted applications and ranked by grade level, including project(s) proposal and amounts to be supported or a list of applications with a positive rating but not selected due to insufficient funding.

### **Communication of Final Decision for Financing**

After the final decision has been taken, the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action will notify the project promoters by electronic mail and registered mail, within a maximum period of 15 working days.

The final list and scores of approved projects will be made public on the website of the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action.

### **Project Contract**

The financing decision is formalized in a written contract to be signed between the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action, as Programme Operator, and the Project Promotor.

The project contract shall include, among others, the following elements:

- An explicit reference to the Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy, to the EEA FM Regulation 2014-2021 and the Applicants Guide;
- The designation of the project;
- The objectives, deadlines for carrying out the operation and the performance indicators, when applicable;
- The total cost of the project, the amount of the contribution from the Programme Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy and the applicable co-financing rate;
- Identification of the promoter's bank account for payments;
- The responsibilities formally assumed by the contracting parties in complying with applicable National and Community rules and regulations;
- The periodicity of submitting requests for validation of expenditure or the minimum percentage of expenditure to be presented in each validation request in relation to the amount of the approved contribution;
- The deadlines for payment to the project promoter;

- The terms and other conditions of payment of the final balance of the operation;
- The content and periodicity of the project implementation reports to be presented by the promoter to the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action;
- The obligation of the project promoter to ensure the creation of a separate accounting system or accounting code suitable for all transactions related to the operation;
- The obligation of the project promoter to fully comply with the applicable public procurement rules and clearly demonstrate the articulation between the declared expenditure and the respective public procurement process, when applicable;
- The obligation of the project promoter not to make cash payments under the transactions underlying the operation, except in situations where this is the most frequent mean of payment, depending on the nature of the expenses and provided that is less than € 100;
- Specifying the consequences of any non-compliance, including termination;
- Provisions for the recovery of amounts unduly paid, including, where applicable, the application of default interest and compensatory interest;
- The procedures to be observed with project changes;
- The obligation of the project promoter to comply with the provisions applicable to it;
- Compliance with the communication and image obligations, respecting the Annex 3 of the EEA FM 2014-2021 Regulation.

Additional elements of the contract may be requested from the project promoter, should the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action, as Program Operator, deem it as useful.

After receiving the draft, the Project Contract must be returned to the Secretary General for Environment and Climate Action within 20 working days, duly signed and initialed by those who, under legal terms, obligate the entity or institution.

The term of execution of the Project Contract may be extended for the same period as long as it is submitted and properly justification is accepted.

Failure to return the Project Contract duly signed within the deadlines mentioned in the Calls, for reasons attributable to the project promoter, determines the expiration of the financing decision.

## Communication

### EEA Grants Communication Objectives

Communication is an important part of the implementation of the EEA FM 2014-2021. All communication material and information must be in line with the defined objectives.

The Project Promoters will have to follow the EEA Grants Communication requirements and guidelines regarding the implementation of their projects. The document entitled "Manual of Communication and Graphic Standards - EEA Grants Portugal 2014-2021" was prepared by UNG in close coordination with all Program Operators and is available on the EEA Grants Portugal website: [www.eeagrants.gov.pt](http://www.eeagrants.gov.pt).

The general Communication objectives for the EEA Grants:

- Make the EEA Grants and its priorities known to the general public in a clear and engaging way;
- Increase the visibility and recognition of the EEA Grants brand in Portugal;
- Inform current and potential partners and beneficiaries;
- Publicize the results and impacts of projects and initiatives;
- Convey a message of assurance and transparency.

The specific Communication objectives for the Programme Environment are:

- Increase public **Awareness** and inform the public about Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy Programme contribution and role played by the Donors.
- Ensure **Visibility** and a coherent picture of Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy Programme in Portugal and of the Donor States.

- **Inform** potential and actual beneficiaries, as well as potential and actual partners about Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy Programme opportunities.
- **Communicate** the impact and results of the Programme and Donors' contribution in Portugal.

### **EEA Grants Communication Model**

The Project Promoter will report to the Programme Environment all communication activities and the PO in turn will articulate with the UNG - EEA FM.

### **Communication Responsibilities**

- Highlight the contribution of EEA Grants;
- Highlight bilateral relations;
- Provide information to Programme Operators (example: the Promoter must inform the Programme Operator of all public events related to the project, at least 5 working days in advance);
- Include in all the publicity materials the logo of the EEA Grants in accordance with the graphic standards of the Manual;
- Create a website or web page with project information;
- Provide information on a page integrated in a website;
- Create a digital communication dossier;
- Produce a commemorative plaque if the funding has a physical component;
- Develop a communication plan;
- Organize at least 3 communication activities.

### **Digital Communication Dossier**

All entities involved in the EEA FM 2014-2021 must design a digital communication dossier.

In the project dossier or initiative, there must be at least the following elements:

- Full name of the project / initiative (PT / EN). If applicable, the name to be used for communicational purposes (PT / EN);
- Name of the promoter entity and its partners;
- Names of the responsables of the project communication team;
- Contacts (address, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, @usernames created for the different social network);
- Small summary of the project / initiative in PT and EN;
- Communication Plan;
- News of projects / initiatives in PT and EN> at least two - one referring to the beginning of the project or initiative and another concerning the results;
- Photographic registration of the project / initiative > mandatory to identify and indicate the respective rights (if applicable).

All films / videos, photographs and other material considered relevant by the promoters will have to be sent to Programme Operator for the e-mail: [ambiente.eeagrants@sq.maac.gov.pt](mailto:ambiente.eeagrants@sq.maac.gov.pt).