

Fourth Annual Meeting
Financial Mechanism 2014-2021
EEA GRANTS PORTUGAL
Lisbon, October 26th 2021

Adopted by November 19th 2021

According to Article 2.7 of the Regulation on the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) 2014-2021, the fourth Annual Meeting between the **Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC)** and the **National Focal Point (NFP)** was held in Lisbon, on October 26th 2021.

On behalf of the Portuguese delegation the meeting was chaired by Ms **Susana Ramos**, Coordinator of the National Management Unit, appointed as **NFP**.

Ms **Torill Johansen**, Deputy Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, co-chaired the meeting on behalf of the **FMC**.

The meeting was also attended by Ms **Tove Bruvik Westberg**, Ambassador of Norway to Portugal and Mr. **Pétur Skúlason Waldorff**, Counsellor at Iceland Embassy in Paris and by Mr. **Árni Páll Árnason**, Deputy Director and Head of Country and Bilateral Cooperation of the FMO, as well as, other representatives from the FMO, the Norwegian and Portuguese Ministries for Foreign Affairs, the Certifying Authority, the Programme Operators (PO) and the Active Citizens Fund (ACF) manager.

A full list of participants is attached to the present minutes. These minutes summarize the main issues discussed.

Opening statements by NFP and FMC

Susana Ramos, opened the meeting with a welcome address to all participants acknowledging the importance to meet again in person and briefly reviewed the side Programme to the Annual Meeting that entails presentations and visits to projects in all 5 Programmes.

Torill Johansen, on behalf of the Donors, thanked the NFP for hosting the Annual Meeting and the organization of the project presentations and visits on-site. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought new challenges, but the Donors acknowledge that Beneficiary States adapted well to the changing circumstances. The strong cooperation through the JCBF was noted.

Tove Bruvik Westberg, appreciated the good cooperation and the active role of NFP in supporting implementation and communication from Programmes. The good work on the JCBF was also noted.

Pétur Skúlason Waldorff thanked the NFP and the FMO for organizing the meeting highlighting the good cooperation and the good work of JCBF as a strong tool for strengthening bilateral relations. Iceland share interests with Portugal in areas such as Blue Growth and Renewable Energy and looks forward to strengthening the cooperation further.

Strategic Report 2020/2021 – Presentations and Discussions

On the topics of the Agenda of the Annual Meeting **Susana Ramos** started by highlighting the main milestones over the reporting period such as the completion of the Mid-term Review (in 2020) and the allocation of the Reserve through the Amendment of the MoU and Grants contracts (2021) and the completion of the launching of all the open calls under the Programmes (except for ACF), as well as the completion of first projects (2021).

Susana Ramos underlined the significant demand registered under the open calls (4.2 times higher) and the rate of near 60% of selected projects in partnerships with entities from the Donor States in the so far 287 selected projects with a total amount awarded estimated at about 68 M€.

a) Status of the Programmes and ACF

At this stage **Susana Ramos** gave the floor to the representatives of each Programme Operator (PO) and the ACF Manager to present a brief status on the progress of the Programmes. All Programmes reported the main milestones achieved on the implementation of the programmes.

Torill Johansen noted the good progress and that past delays were overcome with the good adaptation to the pandemic context and highlighted the high number of projects with project partners from the donor states that surely were promoted by the matchmaking events promoted in cooperation with the DPPs. She reminded that the projects will have to be concluded before 30th April 2024 and that this could be a challenge. The good communication from Programmes was also noted and commended, in particular the highly appreciated video from the Blue Growth Programme with the participation of the Norwegian Prime Minister.

Then **Árni Páll Arnason** provided a brief status on the regional funds directly managed by the FMO, since it is important to highlight this support beyond the programmes operated in the Beneficiary countries - Fund for Youth Employment (60,61M€) and Fund for Regional Cooperation (31,89M€), highlighting the presence of Portuguese in the selected projects.

Susana Ramos thanked the useful information provided by the FMO.

b) Status of the Fund for Bilateral Relations

On the use of the Fund for Bilateral Relations (FBR) it was highlighted that the implementation of this fund was particularly affected by the **pandemic COVID-19 context** since the traveling for physical meetings and matchmakings were suspended for a significant period of time. However, bilateral initiatives have continued and promoters have shown the **capacity to adapt** and continue the planned activities.

A brief updated status on the open calls, pre-defined initiatives and allocations to Programmes was provided.

On the **works of the JCBF** it was noted the agenda for the 15th meeting to be held the next day and that will profit by the presence of the Donors and FMO representatives as observers, that will discuss the revision proposal of the Work Plan for 2021-2022 to accommodate the recent allocation from the reserve and the new Open Call. Possible Bilateral activities will be also addressed.

Torill Johansen commended the good work of JCBF and the good cooperation through the Embassies.

c) Communication

On Communication **Susana Ramos** stated that the NFP has continued to actively promote the communication aiming to broaden the knowledge of the EEA Grants in Portugal and that the current pandemic context did not hinder the extensive outreach of communication of the EEA Grants in Portugal.

The NFP intends to revise the **Communication Strategy** in a more actual, structured and global way, in order to accommodate new contributions and new challenges, when around 90% of the indicators have been fulfilled already. To achieve this, a **Strategic Marketing Plan** was developed to serve as a preparatory study for the renewed communication strategy. With the analysis and assessment of this broader framework, the NFP is now in a privileged condition for a more complete definition of the redefinition of the communication strategy.

The structured planning for the social media implemented show a continuous increase of the number of followers in the updated results.

On the **main activities for the next 12 months** it was highlighted the continuous support through capacity building activities for project and initiative promoters in different areas and initiatives aimed to the presentation of the first results of the EEA Grants 2014-2021.

Torill Johansen noted the strategic approach on Communication and encouraged further cooperation between the FMO and the NFP .

c) Implementation Issues

On general **implementation issues** it was highlighted the Development of Information and reporting IT System EEA Grants in Portugal with the first deliverables received in September 2021 and the absence of relevant changes in relation to the National Level Management and Control Systems or in the setup or staffing of the national authorities involved in the implementation of the EEA Grants was observed in the reporting period.

On **monitoring activities**, it was highlighted:

- Shorter reporting periods (Quarter Reports) from Programme Operators was considered necessary and implemented;
- A particular outlook on the results framework on Programmes promoted with the contribution from the FMO;
- Monthly reports from new projects selected/contracted in 2021.

Susana Ramos underlined that the NFP continues to actively promote joint training sessions involving the POs and the ACF Managers and highlighted the joint training sessions promoted in the reporting period, covering aspects from integrity to communication issues, to project management.

Torill Johansen noted the efficient functioning of Management and Control Systems and the good cooperation established between the Certifying and Audit Authorities' and the FMO. She reminded the meeting about the importance of accurate and realistic forecasts. The Donors rely on this information in order to be able to plan the annual budget and to communicate the budget needs to the National Parliaments. The Donors are happy to see no irregularities so far in the Financial Mechanism.

Susana Ramos continue the works stating that on the **issues for the Annual Meeting** these will be discusses under the restricted part of the Annual Meeting, together with the Risk Assessment.

Issues for the Annual Meeting

The discussion on **how to improve collaborative work between the FMO team and the POs** to mitigate impacts on the Programme implementation was open and a more informal and regular contact between PO and Programme Managers was encouraged.

Árni Páll Árnason noted that Portugal is not seen as a high risk beneficiary country and that FMO Programme Managers sometimes need to prioritize work with riskier countries, which was a sign of confidence in the capacity of the Programme Operators in Portugal. He also stated that FMO was looking into simplification of internal procedures that could speed up certain processes such as low-impact Programme Agreement modifications. The FMO will promote regular monthly meetings with PO.

On the **Evaluation Plan** it was stated by **Susana Ramos** that the framework of the EEA FM 2014-2021 evaluation is being prepared to launch the public procurement procedure by early 2022 with a total amount available €50.000 (Technical Assistance + National Budget) and an Ex-Post Evaluation on the 4 Programmes.

For the FMO the main comment is on the budget allocated compared with the average amount allocated by Programme in other beneficiary countries. Although costs vary from country to country it is possible to question the possible performance under such short budget.

Susana Ramos noted that the TA budget is allocated to the functioning of the NFP as a dedicated structure specially created for the management of the EEA Grants which has proven to be a good choice. Limited resources to Evaluation are available from the TA (40K€). For the future it would be important to ensure that a reference baseline assessment would be made before any evaluation is carried out, an aspect to reflect for the next funding period.

On the **next funding period 2021-2027** it was stated by **Susana Ramos** that after the approval on last May 2021 of the negotiation's mandate for the European Union to start negotiations it would be good to understand the next steps for any contributions.

Torill Johansen noted that negotiations with the EU had not yet started and there was currently no clarity regarding the timeline. She stated Beneficiary States would be consulted once the Protocol with the EU was signed and work on content started.

Any Other Business

Susana Ramos noted the issue of small savings under the Programmes' for which would like to jointly reflect with the Donors on use possibilities that could enhance the visibility or performance of the programmes.

Torill Johansen referred that the FMO will follow-up on this.

Sum-up and conclusions

Torill Johansen thanked the NFP for hosting this Annual Meeting and confirmed the formal approval of the Strategic Report 2020.

The meeting was closed by 13.30.

List of Participants

Entity	Representative	Position at the Entity
Portugal NFP	Susana Ramos	Head Coordinator of the National Focal Point (NFP)
	Maria João Lois	Deputy at the NFP
	Rita Soares	Communication Officer
	Filipa Rodrigues	Financial Officer
	Mónica Angelo	Programme and Bilateral Officer
	Ricardo Perdigão	Adviser
Norway	Torill Johansen	Deputy Director, Section for Central Europe and EEA and Norway Grants, NMFA
	Birgit Anette Kleven	Senior Adviser for Portugal, NMFA
	Tove Bruvik Westberg	Norwegian Ambassador to Portugal
	Ms Ellen Aabø	Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Norway to Portugal
Iceland	Pétur Skúlason Waldorff	Counsellor, Embassy of Iceland in Paris
FMO	Árni Páll Árnason	Deputy Director and Head of Country and Bilateral Cooperation Department
	Mualla Cirakli	Country Officer for Portugal
	Roger Bymolt	Results & Evaluation Officer
	Hjördís Lára Hlidberg	Country and Bilateral Cooperation Trainee
Portugal MFA	Luísa Fragoso Almeida	Officer at Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Audit Authority	Ivone Abreu	Inspector at General Inspectorate of Finance
Certifying Authority	Rogério Martins	Director at AD&C
Blue Growth	Sandra Silva	Head of Programming Department
Environment	Alexandra Carvalho	Secretary General for Environment Ministry
	Susana Escária	Director at Secretary General for Environment Ministry
Culture	Rui Santos	Subdirector at Directorate General for Cultural Heritage
	Helena Martelo	Director at Directorate General for Cultural Heritage (DGPC)
Work-life Balance	Joana Marteleira	Manager at Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG)
Active Citizens Fund	Mafalda Leónidas	Deputy Director of the ACF at Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian