



Strategic Report 2020/2021 Portugal

1st August 2020 - 31st July 2021



REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA

PLANEAMENTO

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1. Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty generated continues to be the most significant context with impact on the implementation of the Financial Mechanism in Portugal. Economic and social macro indicators already show the severe impact of the COVID 19 pandemic, in particular on economic growth and employment and the increase of the labor market inequalities. Efforts to buffer these impacts worsened the public national debt.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of the Grants will certainly gain an utmost importance.

Since the last reporting period (from 1st august 2019 – 31st July 2020), the implementation of the EEA FM 2014-2021 has recorded significant development with the launching of the last open calls and progress with the selection and contracting of projects as detailed in the table below.

Programme	Open Calls	2nd Round of Calls	Total amount Available	Open Calls launched	Receveid applications	Total amount requested	Open Calls ongoing	Open Calls to launch	Selected projects	Nr. Projects with DPP	% Projects with DPP
Blue Growth	8	2	€ 35,276,470	9	244	€ 157,165,736	0	1	61	28	46%
Environment	8	0	€ 23,985,564	7	148	€ 55,483,058	0	1	53	24	45%
Culture	2	0	€ 7,670,809	2	75	€ 46,685,597	0	0	15	15	100%
Work-Life Balance	7	0	€ 4,722,942	7	147	€ 23,184,571	0	0	21	20	95%
Total	25	2	€ 66,932,843	25	614	€ 282,518,962	0	2	150	87	58%

From a total of 288 selected projects, 218 projects contracts were signed including all 13 Pre-defined projects (PDP) and the Active Citizens Fund as detailed below.

Programme	Total Fund for Projects	Nr. Projects selected	Total Fund selected projects	% commitment for projects	Nr. Project Contracts signed	Total Fund contracted	% commitment under contracts
Blue Growth	42,452,941 €	64	17,894,169 €	42.15%	57	16,558,516 €	39.00%
Environment	27,135,294 €	56	25,957,467 €	95.66%	56	25,905,436 €	95.47%
Culture	9,547,059 €	17	9,525,147 €	99.77%	8	6,239,007 €	65.35%
Work-Life balance	6,352,942 €	29	6,352,942 €	100.00%	25	5,048,553 €	79.47%
Active Citizenship	10,110,600 €	122	8,081,977 €	79.94%	70	4,163,215 €	41.18%
Total	95,598,836 €	288	67,811,702 €	70.93%	216	57,914,728 €	60.58%

In the reporting period an agreement was reached for the allocation of the Reserve following the conclusion of the Mid-Term Review. The Blue Growth and the Environment Programmes received an additional 1 M € to the respective programmes (already reflected in the table above).

The implementation of the FBR 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 and are currently subject to limitations. However, bilateral initiatives have continued and promoters have shown the capacity to adapt and continue the planned activities.

The results of the FBR Open Call #1 under the FBR at national level have been quite broad and diverse and there is a consensus among the JCBF members that this approach, together with the pre-defined bilateral initiatives supported, has proven to be very fruitful for the promotion of bilateral relations. A new FBR Open Call #2 was launched in July to support partnerships between entities from Portugal and Norway that address innovative approaches.

An overall perspective on the financial execution shows (table below) some delays, however all Programmes are in condition to finalize the selection and contracting of the last projects by the end of the year where a complete portfolio of projects under the EEA Grants 2014-2021 will be available and with many projects in conditions to be completed over the next reporting period.

Programme	Total (Projects+Manag.)	Certified amount under the last IFR (31.12.2020)	% Certified	Financial Execution in quarter report (30.06.2021)	% Financial Execution	Estimated Financial Execution by 31.12.2021	% Financial Execution by 31.12.2021
Blue Growth	45,882,353 €	3,351,966 €	7.3%	4,894,882 €	10.7%	16,192,150 €	35.3%
Environment	29,411,765 €	2,223,568 €	7.6%	3,170,935 €	10.8%	4,405,364 €	15.0%
Culture	10,588,235 €	345,617 €	3.3%	455,194 €	4.3%	1,874,438 €	17.7%
Work-Life balance	7,058,824 €	1,674,295 €	23.7%	1,735,517 €	24.6%	3,845,678 €	54.5%
Active Citizenship	11,500,000 €	3,444,288 €	30.0%	3,699,366 €	32.2%	5,107,174 €	44.4%
Fund for Bilateral Relations	2,957,000 €	539,499 €	18.2%	586,313 €	19.8%	927,000 €	31.3%
Technical Assistance	1,540,500 €	729,800 €	47.4%	784,770 €	50.9%	987,070 €	64.1%
Total	108,938,677 €	12,309,032 €	11.3%	15,326,977 €	14.1%	33,338,874 €	30.6%

No major 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.

The joint procedure to procure the setting up of a joint IT system covering the implementation of the EEA FM 2014-2021 by the NFP and the Programme Operators is in full development with the first deliverables by September 2021.

Communications activities by the NFP have continued to be actively promoted aiming to broaden the knowledge of the EEA Grants in Portugal and the current pandemic context did not hinder the extensive outreach of communication of the EEA Grants in Portugal.

Monitoring by the NFP on the progress, compliance and risk over the programmes was extensive and diverse covering several aspects of the implementation. Shorter reporting periods from Programme Operators was considered necessary and implemented and a particular outlook on the results framework on Programmes was promoted with the contribution from the FMO.

2. Political, economic and social context

The European Council, in view of the serious impacts of the pandemic on European economies, created the Next Generation EU, a strategic instrument for mitigating the economic and social impact of the crisis, capable of promoting economic convergence and resilience, helping to ensure the sustainable growth of long term and to respond to the challenges of the transition to a greener and digital society.

The Commission staff working document¹ that provides the analysis of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (PRR) submitted by Portugal in early 2021 and that supported the approval in June 2021 provides the scenery where this plan will operate and presents an accurate macroeconomic analysis after the hit of the pandemic crisis in 2020:

«Following several years of above-average growth and an improving labour market, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Portugal's economy hard. It took a toll on all aspects of social and business activity, especially on the country's large hospitality sector. Real GDP, which was growing faster than EU average before the crisis, fell by 7.6% in 2020. After a resurgence of infections brought new lockdown restrictions early in 2021, real GDP is set to recover from the second quarter onwards. Substantial government support has shielded the labour market throughout the crisis, limiting the increase in the unemployment rate, which nevertheless went up 0.4 percentage points year on year to 6.9% in 2020. Youth employment, in particular, remains an issue, with more than a fifth of people aged 15-24 unemployed in 2020 and, overall, there is a risk of increasing job destruction. The fiscal policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic provided significant stabilisation to the economy but resulted in a worsened budgetary outlook. The general government debt-to-GDP ratio, which had been on a steady downward path since its 2016 peak of 131.5%, spiked to an all-time high of 133.6% in 2020. »

The Portuguese PRR is organized around three structural dimensions:

- Resilience: improving economic recovery and increasing the capacity to react and overcome future crises and associated challenges, in all its aspects: social resilience, economic and productive fabric resilience and territorial resilience;
- Climate Transition: better and more sustainable use of resources, increased production of renewable energy and decarbonisation of the economy and society;
- Digital Transition: increasing skills so that the Portuguese can take advantage of the technological tools available, arising from the growing digitization of economic activity, maximizing the efficiency of their work and promoting participation in a more inclusive market.

Portugal has a Government with political stability, which allowed swift and targeted measures to be taken to combat COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Effects of the Grants

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic the effects of the Grants will gain an utmost importance. At the current stage of the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) 2014-2021 it is early to report any results and effects of the Grants where most of projects are still being selected and contracted and only one project has been reported as completed.

However, if the effects of the grants towards reducing social and economic disparities are not yet available to assess, the progress towards strengthening bilateral relations with donor states entities is already evident at project level where around 60% of the selected and/or contracted projects so far entail one or more Donor States entities as partner entities.

¹ Brussels, 16.6.2021 SWD(2021) 146 final, https://ec.europa.eu/info/system/files/com_321_7_swd_en.pdf.

4. Status of programmes

4.1 Blue Growth Innovation and SMEs (Blue Growth)

With the objective of increased value creation and sustainable growth, the **Blue Growth, Innovation and SMEs Programme** covers 3 Programme Areas (i) Business Development, Innovation and SMEs, (ii) Research and (iii) Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeships and Youth Entrepreneurship.

The progress in the financial execution has been slow (see table below) due to delays in the selection procedures. The PO expects to significantly increase payments to projects, particularly when contracting selected projects under Open Call #4 (Research) and Open Call #5 (Education) until the end of 2021.

The Programme received an extra 1M€ from the agreement reached on the reallocation of the Reserve by 21st June 2021 to Outcome 4 - Education, training and cooperation in marine / maritime issues enhanced.

Although the respective modification of the Programme Agreement is to this date still pending, the full allocation of the additional funds will be to projects to be selected under the Call #5, which received a high interest and where applications accepted for selection are requesting around 5.2M€ for an updated available total amount of around 2.7M€, so the commitment of the additional funds is ensured and will enhance results in this programme area.

Budget Heading	Contracted Eligible Expenditure	Revised Eligible Expenditure*	Total Executed Amount		%	Estimated Executed amount by the end of 2021	%
			By the end of Previous Reporting Period (31.03.2021)	By the end of Present Reporting Period (30.06.2021)			
Programme Management	€ 3,429,412.00	€ 3,429,412.00	€ 773,395.80	€ 856,400.92	25%	€ 1,358,332.00	40%
Outcome 1 Increased competitiveness for PT enterprises within Blue Growth	€ 26,776,470.00	€ 25,681,424.00	€ 1,930,460.00	€ 1,930,460.00	8%	€ 7,155,057.00	28%
Outcome 2 Resource Efficiency of enterprises in Marine Sector supported	€ 1,176,471.00	€ 1,910,058.00	€ 61,509.00	€ 61,509.00	3%	€ 236,096.00	12%
Outcome 3 Enhanced performance of Portuguese research organizations	€ 9,423,529.00	€ 9,423,529.00	€ 600,000.00	€ 600,000.00	6%	€ 4,998,235.00	53%
Outcome 4 Education, training and cooperation in marine / maritime issues enhanced	€ 3,900,000.00	€ 5,437,931.00	€ 100,000.00	€ 1,446,512.00	27%	€ 2,444,430.00	45%
TOTAL	€ 44,705,882.00	€ 45,882,354.00	€ 3,465,364.80	€ 4,894,881.92	11%	€ 16,192,150.00	35%

*after PA modifications

The Programme entails a total of 5 Open Calls and 3 Small Grant Schemes (SGS). Due to savings under the first calls under Outcome 1 (Increased competitiveness for Portuguese enterprises within the focus area of Blue Growth), a set of second round of calls and reallocations of savings led to the launch of 3 open calls in 2021 with a total allocation of about 15.3 M€. The PO reports that the broader scope given to open calls under Outcome 1 and 2 and the increase on the total maximum grant available resulted in higher number of applications under the above mentioned second round of calls and the absorption of unallocated funds from the first round of calls was successful. These selection committees for these round of calls is estimated to take place by November 2021.

The call text of the last open call foreseen to be open in 2021 (SGS#2) is under discussion with DPP/FMO and should be launched soon.

A brief status on the open calls is presented in the table below.

Blue Growth													
Call	Name	Total Available	Calls with reallocated amounts	Sub-Total	Applications Received	Total Grant Applied for	Open	Close	Projects selected	Projects with DPP	Total Amount Awarded	Savings	
Call#1	1 st open call for Business, Development,	€ 14,200,000			35	€ 48,025,983	12/06/2019	29/11/2019	24	18	€ 9,936,336	€ 4,263,664	
Call#2	2 nd open call for Business, Development,	€ 8,576,470	€ 4,263,664	€ 12,840,134	51	€ 37,500,899	10/02/2021	30/06/2021					
Call#3	Resource Efficiency of Enterprises in Marine	€ 1,176,471		€ 2,676,471	3	€ 851,109	22/10/2019	31/12/2019	2	0	€ 410,057	€ 766,414	
Call #3 (2nd)	Resource Efficiency of Enterprises in Marine		€ 1,500,000		6	€ 2,856,408	10/02/2021	31/05/2021					
Call#4	Research	€ 5,423,529			63	€ 58,648,881	28/07/2020	30/10/2020					
Call#5	Education	€ 1,550,000			27	€ 6,188,295	28/07/2020	11/12/2020					
SGS#1	Business growth in start-ups	€ 3,000,000		€ 4,029,469	6	€ 875,485	23/10/2019	30/06/2020	6	5	€ 836,316	€ 2,163,684	
SGS#1 (2nd)	Business growth in start-ups		€ 1,029,469		7	€ 1,111,803	10/02/2021	31/05/2021					
SGS#2	Development of business and management skills – training on job	€ 1,000,000		€ 1,000,000			2021						
SGS#3	Ocean Literacy	€ 350,000	€ 361,460	€ 711,460	46	€ 1,106,873	24/10/2019	28/02/2020	29	5	€ 711,460	€ 0	
TOTAL		€ 35,276,470	€ 7,154,593		244	€ 157,165,736	–		61	28	€ 11,894,169	€ 7,193,762	

From the total of 61 projects selected under open calls a total of 54 projects contracts were signed in the reporting period. The table below presents the progress of commitment of funds for projects and contracting, including the 3 Pre-defined projects and considering in the total available fund for projects the amount of €1,176,471 resulting from the allocation of the Reserve.

Programme	Total Fund for Projects	Nr. Projects selected	Total Fund selected projects	% commitment for projects	Nr. Project Contracts signed	Total Fund contracted	% commitment under contracts
Blue Growth	42,452,941 €	64	17,894,169 €	42.15%	57	16,558,516 €	39.00%

To encourage cooperation between research institutions and SMEs, in order to facilitate commercialization of innovative ideas, products and processes, as stated in MoU, applications were given additional score if they are dedicated to develop user driven research base innovation and the development or implementation of green solutions, involving strong partnerships and bilateral cooperation between Beneficiary State and Donor States institutions. Almost half of the selected projects (46%) entail a partnership with one or more entities from the Donor States.

To ensure synergies with the Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy Programme, as stated in the MoU, resource efficiency in maritime sector is addressed in a joint approach aiming to contribute to the current global threat that marine litter poses to the Oceans, under a specific Outcome in the Programme (**Outcome 2** Resource Efficiency of enterprises in Marine Sector supported) with a dedicated Open Call (Open call #3 Resource Efficiency of Enterprises in the Maritime Sector). Joint events between the two Programmes for the presentation of results under this topic are foreseen to take place in early 2022.

Challenges faced under the Blue Growth Programme

The contracting of experts and the timely delivery of the respective assessments has been identified as the most cumbersome aspect delaying the selection procedures.

National budgetary rules are also identified as a constraint in the financial execution of the Programme.

The sometimes lengthy reply by FMO to implementation issues has been noted as a constraint to the demanding timings of the Programme.

4.2 Work-life Balance and Gender Equality (Work-Life Balance)

The Programme Work-life Balance and Gender Equality covers 3 Programme Areas: (i) Work-life Balance, (ii) Domestic and Gender-based Violence and (iii) Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency.

The Programme has progressed well in selecting and contracting projects and that is shown in the respective financial execution of 25% by the end of the 1st half of 2021, although some delays was faced regarding the internal financial verification procedures. PO expects to significantly increase payments to projects until the end of the year when most projects contracted between 2019 and 2020 will be able to apply for intermediate payments.

Budget Heading	Eligible Expenditure	Revised Eligible Expenditure*	Total Executed Amount		%	Estimated Executed amount by the end of current year	%
			By the end of Previous Reporting Period (31.03.2021)	By the end of Present Reporting Period (30.06.2021)			
Programme Management	€ 705,882.00	€ 705,882.00	€ 228,933.20	€ 248,121.21	35%	€ 350,299.21	50%
Outcome 1 Enhanced gender equal opportunities in the labour market	€ 3,252,942.00	€ 2,656,416.00	€ 526,774.43	€ 526,774.43	16%	€ 1,149,187.54	35%
Outcome 2 Improved accountability systems for women's equal participation	€ 2,100,000.00	€ 2,299,999.00	€ 825,414.77	€ 825,414.77	39%	€ 1,639,301.13	78%
Outcome 3 Improved system for protection and prevention of domestic and gender-based violence	€ 1,000,000.00	€ 1,396,526.00	€ 135,206.79	€ 135,206.79	14%	€ 706,889.96	71%
TOTAL	€ 7,058,824.00	€ 7,058,824.00	€ 1,716,329.19	€ 1,735,517.20	25%	€ 3,845,677.84	54%

* After PA modifications.

The Programme has launched all 7 open calls (4 Open Calls and 3 SGS). Due to the modification of Open Call #3 to a Small Grant Scheme under the Outcome 1 “Enhanced gender equal opportunities in labour market”, the selection procedure in this case was delayed. The Programme had savings from the open calls in a total of € 751,447 and has managed to successfully reallocate the funds to an extra project selected under SGS#1 (under contracting) and three new pre-defined projects agreed with DPP and the Donor States. A brief status on the calls is presented in the table below.

Work-Life Balance												
Call	Name	Total Available	Calls with reallocated amounts	Sub-Total	Applications Received	Total Grant Applied for	Open	Close	Projects selected	Projects with DPP	Total Amount Awarded	Savings
Call#1	System for assessing the value of work and pay and development of instruments for measuring gender inequalities in work	€ 900,000	€ 0	N/A	10	€ 2,206,676	28/02/2019	23/05/2019	2	2	€ 441,690	€ 458,310
Call#2	Projects to combat sex segregation in educational and professional choices and discrimination in the labour market	€ 870,000	€ 0	N/A	26	€ 6,010,834	08.03.2020	19.06.2020	3	3	€ 703,250	€ 166,750
SGS#3	White book s/studies to foster gender equality	€ 552,942	€ 0	N/A	9	€ 933,671	21.04.2021	30.06.2021				
Call#4	Projects to improve protection of victims of violence against women and domestic	€ 700,000	€ 0	N/A	19	€ 3,652,963	07/03/2019	30/05/2019	3	3	€ 680,011	€ 19,989
Call 5	Intervention projects to promote gender equality at local level	€ 1,200,000	€ 0	N/A	34	€ 7,816,770	08/03/2019	31/05/2019	6	6	€ 1,200,000	€ 1
SGS#1	Studies on the economic impact of gender equality	€ 200,000	€ 0	N/A	10	€ 562,998	08/03/2019	31/05/2019	3	3	€ 172,235	€ 27,765
SGS#2	Prevention projects for children and young people and promoting non - violent masculinities	€ 300,000	€ 0	N/A	39	€ 2,000,659	07/03/2019	30/05/2019	4	3	€ 270,418	€ 78,632
TOTAL		€ 4,722,942	€ 0	N/A	147	€ 23,184,571	-		21	20	3,467,604 €	€ 751,447

From the total of 21 projects selected under open calls all projects contracts were signed in the reporting period (1 project contract to be contracted under SGS#1 due to the reallocation of funds to the reserve list). The 3 new Pre-defined projects recently agreed are estimated to be contracted in the fall. The table below presents the progress of commitment of funds for projects and contracting, including the 7 Pre-defined projects.

Programme	Total Fund for Projects	Nr. Projects selected	Total Fund selected projects	% commitment for projects	Nr. Project Contracts signed	Total Fund contracted	% commitment under contracts
Work-Life balance	6,352,942 €	29	6,352,942 €	100.00%	25	5,048,553 €	79.47%

The projects are generally reported to be progressing well and the Programme Operator reports the first project to be successfully completed (Pre-defined Project # 4 – *Promova* project).

Challenges faced under the Work-Life Balance Programme

The PO faced some challenges in the management team of the Programme that have been successfully overcome. A new Director General appointed last fall has given adequate priority to the Programme and a new programme manager and extra team members were appointed. The PO faced delays in the renewal of the external staff responsible for the financial procedures contract that affected the regular progress of these tasks. This was solved recently.

4.3 Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy (Environment)

The Programme aims at improving the environmental status in ecosystems and reduce adverse effects of pollution and other human activities. It covers 2 Programme Areas (i) Environment and Ecosystems and (ii) Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.

The progress in the financial execution has been slow (see table below) due to slow start of implementation of projects partly justified by the current state of the Covid-19 pandemic. The PO expects to increase payments to projects until the end of the year when most projects contracted in 2020 will be able to apply for intermediate payments.

Budget Lines	Eligible Expenditure	Revised Eligible Expenditure*	Total Executed Amount		%	Estimated Executed amount by the end of 2021	%
			By the end of Previous Reporting Period (31.03.2021)	By the end of Present Reporting Period (30.06.2021)			
Programme Management	€ 2,276,471.00	€ 2,276,471.00	€ 501,745.81	€ 563,371.62	25%	€ 768,120.00	34%
Outcome 1 Increased application of circular economy principles in targeted sectors	€ 12,050,000.00	€ 12,050,000.00	€ 969,961.56	€ 1,334,385.80	11%	€ 1,861,933.82	15%
Outcome 2 Enhanced sustainable development in Biosphere Reserves	€ 2,200,000.00	€ 2,200,000.00	€ 439,733.29	€ 520,464.83	24%	€ 725,732.42	33%
Outcome 3 Increased climate change resilience and responsiveness in targeted areas	€ 11,708,823.00	€ 12,885,294.00	€ 466,345.03	€ 752,713.11	6%	€ 1,049,577.76	8%
TOTAL	€ 28,235,294.00	€ 29,411,765.00	€ 2,377,785.69	€ 3,170,935.36	11%	€ 4,405,364.00	15%

* After PA modifications.

The Programme entails a total of 4 Open Calls and 3 Small Grant Schemes (SGS). The Programme received an extra grant of 1M€ after the agreement on the allocation of the Reserve. A new open call under Outcome 3 (Increased climate Change resilience and responsiveness in targeted areas) to tackle the adverse effects of the desertification will be open in the fall 2021 (Call #5 Climate change-related extreme weather preparedness and risk management).

A brief status on the calls is presented in the table below.

Environment												
Call	Name	Total Available	Calls with reallocated amounts	Sub-totaç	Applications Received	Total Grant Applied for	Open		Projects selected	Projects with DPP	Total Awarded Amount	Savings
Call#1	Deposit-return solutions	€ 6,400,000	0	N/A	13	€ 9,001,753	05.09.2019	31.01.2020	8	2	€ 6,400,000	€ 0
Call#2	Circular economy in construction	€ 4,301,301	€ 801,031	€ 4,301,301	25	€ 10,317,693	18.07.2019	31.10.2019	10	10	€ 4,301,031	€ 0
Call#3	Biosphere reserves	€ 2,200,000	0	N/A	7	€ 15,342,675	29.11.2019	15.05.2020	1	1	€ 2,198,666	€ 1,334
Call#4	Low-carbon economy measures	€ 6,058,823	0	N/A	7	€ 7,008,384	30.01.2020	20.10.2020	7	5	€ 6,058,801	€ 22
Call#5	Climate change-related extreme weather preparedness and risk management	€ 1,176,471										
SGS#1	Plastics in oceans	€ 1,000,000	0	N/A	24	€ 3,796,738	18.07.2019	31.10.2019	6	1	€ 1,000,000	€ 0
SGS#2	Circular economy standards	€ 198,969	0	N/A	4	€ 198,969	18.07.2019	31.10.2019	4	1	€ 198,969	€ 801,031
SGS#3	Local adaptation measures	€ 2,650,000	0	N/A	68	€ 9,816,846	03.12.2019	30.04.2020	17	4	€ 2,650,000	€ 0
TOTAL		€ 23,985,564	€ 801,031	N/A	148	€ 55,483,058			53	24	€ 22,807,467	€ 802,387

All 53 projects selected under open calls and 3 pre-defined projects are contracted. The remaining funds to be allocated to projects will be selected under the new open call to be launched with the additional allocation to the Programme from the Reserve.

Programme	Total Fund for Projects	Nr. Projects selected	Total Fund selected projects	% commitment for projects	Nr. Project Contracts signed	Total Fund contracted	% commitment under contracts
Environment	27,135,294 €	56	25,957,467 €	95.66%	56	25,905,436 €	95.47%

The special concerns of the Programme in the MoU (Circular Economy in the building sector, living labs for low carbon cities and National Network of Biosphere Reserves) translate in a strong focus on innovative approaches, in particular from private business. Innovation Norway as DPP plays an important role in the implementation of the Programme.

To ensure synergies with the Blue Growth, Innovation and SMEs Programme, resource efficiency in maritime sector is addressed in a joint approach aiming to contribute to the global threat that marine litter poses to the Oceans, under a specific small grant scheme (SGS #1 Plastic in oceans). Joint events between the two Programmes for the presentation of results are foreseen to take place in early 2022.

Challenges faced under the Environment Programme

The slow starting and full progress of contracted projects has been the main challenge identified by the PO. Close monitoring has been implemented to ensure full support and management of risks, in particular to projects with completion dates in 2021 and 2022 and to any projects over 24 months.

4.4 Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (Culture)

The Programme aims at social and economic development strengthened through cultural cooperation, entrepreneurship and heritage.

The progress in the financial execution has been slow (see table below) with payments reported only to pre-defined projects, due to delays in the selection procedures under the open calls. The PO expects to significantly increase payments to projects, particularly when contracting selected projects under Open Call #1 (Heritage) and Open Call #2 (Arts) until the end of 2021.

Programme Lines	Eligible Expenditure	Revised Eligible Expenditure*	Total Executed Amount		%	Estimated Executed amount by the end of 2021	%
			By the end of Previous Reporting Period (31.03.2021)	By the end of Present Reporting Period (30.06.2021)			
Programme Management	€ 1,041,176.00	N/A	€ 64,179.00	€ 70,944.80	7%	€ 267,593.80	26%
Outcome 1 - Cultural Heritage management enhanced	€ 6,274,059.00	N/A	€ 281,437.50	€ 384,249.37	6%	€ 1,115,893.82	18%
Outcome 2 - Improved access to contemporary arts	€ 3,273,000.00	N/A	€ -		0%	€ 490,950.00	15%
TOTAL	€ 10,588,235.00	- €	€ 345,616.50	€ 455,194.17	4%	€ 1,874,437.62	18%

* After PA modifications.

The Programme entails two Open Calls that selected a total of 15 projects. A brief status on the calls is presented in the table below.

Culture												
Call	Name	Total Available	Calls (re)launched with reallocated amounts		Applications Received	Total Grant Applied for	Open	Close	Projects selected	Projects with DPP	Total Awarded Amount	Savings
Call#1	Local development through the Safeguarding and Revitalization of Coastal Cultural Heritage	4,397,809 €	0	N/A	31	€ 31,222,219	05.09.2019	04.05.2020	6	6	4,375,897 €	21,912 €
Call#2	Connecting Dots – Arts mobility and audience development	3,273,000 €	0	N/A	44	€ 15,463,378	05.09.2019	28.10.2020	9	9	3,273,000 €	0 €
TOTAL		7,670,809 €	0		75	€ 46,685,597	-		15	15	7,648,897 €	21,912 €

The special concerns of the Programme in the MoU directs the focus on the role that arts, culture and cultural heritage play in local and regional development with emphasis on employment, social inclusion and cohesion, on cultural entrepreneurship, on cultural heritage management, preservation and conservation and on audience development and cultural activities in education. This aim is being tackled by the selected projects under the two open calls foreseen.

The goal set in MoU where more than 20% of the total eligible expenditure of the Programme is to be set aside for cultural cooperation and exchange between the Donor States and Portugal is accomplished through the Arts Outcome of the Programme where mandatory partnerships with the Donor States entities or artists is foreseen.

However, partnerships under Open Call #1 were not mandatory and the result shows that all 6 selected projects entail a bilateral partnership.

All projects under **Outcome 1** (Cultural Heritage management enhanced) were contracted and the 9 projects selected under **Outcome 2** (Improved access to contemporary arts) are expected to be contracted by the end of the summer and in full implementation by September 2021.

Programme	Total Fund for Projects	Nr. Projects selected	Total Fund selected projects	% commitment for projects	Nr. Project Contracts signed	Total Fund contracted	% commitment under contracts
Culture	9,547,059 €	17	9,512,007 €	99.63%	8	6,239,007 €	65.35%

Challenges faced under the Culture Programme

The PO faced some challenges in the management team of the Programme that have been successfully overcome. A new programme manager and extra team members were appointed. The selection procedures were lengthy and delays in contracting of projects will be demanding for the Programme.

5. Status of bilateral funds

The implementation of the FBR has been affected by the pandemic COVID-19 context, as expected, since the traveling for physical meetings and matchmakings were suspended and there were several limitations during this period. The main consequences identified in the implementation of the bilateral initiatives were related with the physical execution with travels postponed or canceled. However, this did not involve relevant financial impact and many mitigations strategies were put in place such as the rescheduling of trips and meetings, digital meetings or conferences and the extension of the bilateral initiatives closing date.

In the reporting period the Joint Committee for Bilateral Relations (JCBF) held 6 meetings scheduled to deliver timely decisions on the cut-off dates established in the Open Call #1 and other important decisions on bilateral initiatives of common interest:

- 9th JCBF Meeting – 13th October 2020, on-line Zoom, (FBR Status report; FBR Open Call #1 and Work Plan approaches, status and next steps);
- 10th JCBF Meeting – 23rd October 2020, on-line Zoom, (5th Cut-off period);
- 11th JCBF Meeting – 9th December 2020, on-line Zoom, (Work Plan 2021-2023);
- 12th JCBF Meeting – 25th February 2021, on-line Zoom, (6th Cut-off period);
- 13th JCBF Meeting – 12th April 2021, on-line Zoom, (modifications of FBR Open Call #1);
- 14th JCBF Meeting – 23rd June 2021, on-line Zoom, (7th Cut-off period, presentation of proposal for FBR Open Call #2 and Pre-Defined Initiatives).

FBR Open Call #1 and Open Call #2

The results of FBR Open Call #1 have been quite broad and diverse and there was a consensus among the JCBF members that this approach has proven to be very fruitful for the promotion of bilateral relations.

Nevertheless, to meet the demand of the FMC decision that “...any open calls carried out through JCBF will only aim at Norwegian partners”, the JCBF approved the NFP proposal for the 7th cut-off date in 12th May 2021, to be announced as the last decision period of the Open Call FBR # 1 and to consider a new Open Call in different terms.

The FBR Open Call #2 (*Portugal & Norway – Partnerships for Innovation*) was open by the 1st July 2021 and aims to support partnerships between entities from Portugal and Norway that address innovative approaches. It has an initial total amount available of € 200.000 that can be

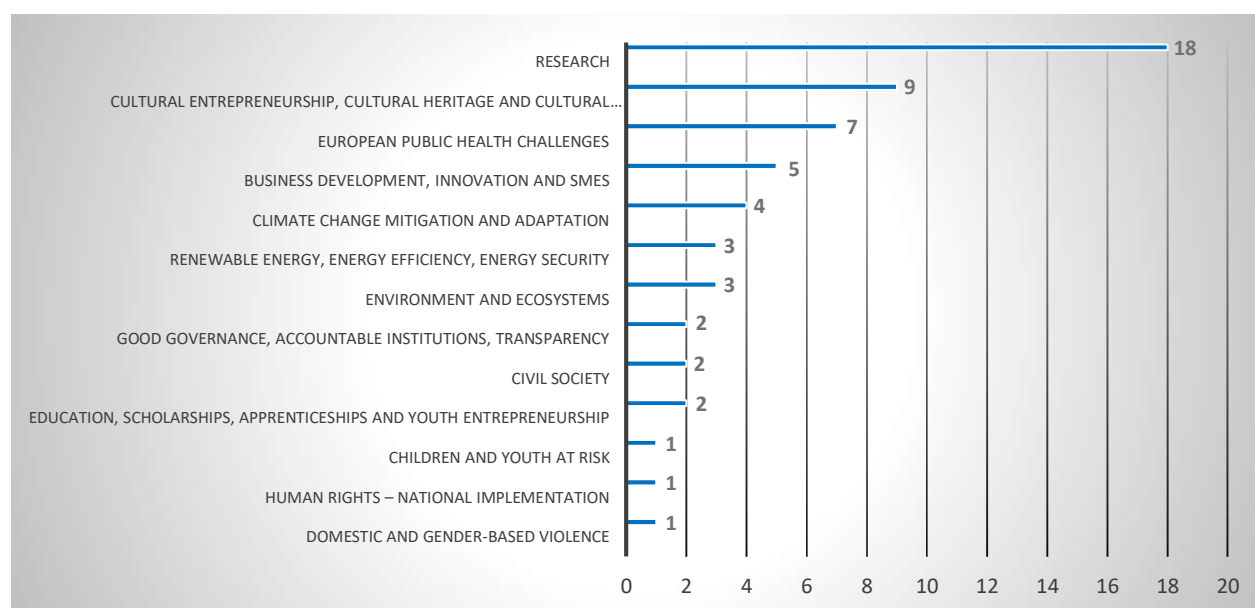
reinforced by decision of the JCBF, it will remain open until 26 May 2023 with a total of 4 semi-annual cut-off dates and the first cut-off date will be by 26th November 2021.

The main figures from the FBR Open Call #1 after 7 cut-off dates are presented in the table below:

	CALL#1							TOTAL
	1 st Cut-off date 17.05.2019	2 nd Cut-off date 12.09.2019	3 rd Cut-off date 10.01.2020	4 th Cut-off date 08.05.2020	5 th Cut-off date 18.09.2020	6 th Cut-off date 15.01.2021	7 th Cut-off date 12.05.2021	
Applications received	26	9	23	12	13	37	12	132
Applications accepted	24	9	17	12	13	34	12	121
Amount requested	220 987,00 €	118 302,00 €	259 340,00 €	157 883,00 €	182 366,00 €	508 433,70 €	155 974,11 €	1 603 285,81 €
Applications approved*	11	5	9	6	8	13	6	58
Amount Approved*	145 904,74 €	66 386,51 €	109 682,14 €	81 290,43 €	102 713,07 €	166 727,88 €	76 797,53 €	749 502,30 €

*Includes Initiative FBR_OC1_58 which have withdrawn after approval (11.250€) - Icelandic Partner

The core support areas and type of bilateral activities supported are detailed in the graphic below:



Pre-defined Initiatives

A total of six agreed pre-defined bilateral initiatives were contracted, out of which 1 was completed and 1 was contracted in the reporting period. Two pre-defined bilateral initiatives were already completed in the previous reporting period.

The following pre-defined bilateral initiative was completed in the reporting period:

Children and Youth at Risk bilateral initiative was contracted with the National Agency for Protection of Rights of Young Children (CNPDPJ) in partnership with the Oslo Child and Family Agency. The official kick-off of the Bilateral initiative took place by July 3rd, 2019, following the International Seminar “*Reflecting upon the participation of children in public decision-making*”. The main results of this bilateral initiative are based on the long experience in Portugal and Norway of including the participation of children with the production of a **Thematic Glossary of**

Child Protection Systems and the Promotion of Children Rights focused on the hearing of the child in special vulnerability context and a **Digital Referential of Good Practices** to improve the hearing and participation of the child in the protection of their rights. CNPDPCJ reported that the partnership with Oslo Child and Family Agency strengthened “...the bilateral relations between Norway and Portugal as it contributed to expand mutual knowledge within the scope of the promotion of the rights of the child, provided valuable insights on the organization of the systems and on the conceptual framework underlying the past, present and future work in this field in both countries and contributed to stimulate the further development of bilateral relations in other areas of mutual interest.”

The following pre-defined bilateral initiative was contracted in the reporting period:

The pre-defined bilateral initiative **E-bug partnership and development project PT-NOR 2021-2023**, approved in the 14th JCBF meeting in June 2021, was contracted with the national General Directorate for Public Health (DGS) in partnership with the Directorate-General for Education (DGE), the Antibiotic Centre for Primary Care, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health and the Portuguese National Authority of Medicines and Health Products, I.P. (INFARMED). As a pedagogical project, e-Bug, led by Public Health England’s (PHE) Primary Care Unit and involving a consortium of several international partner countries, is expected to contribute to children and young people across the globe education, at junior and senior school level, about microbiology, spread and prevention of infectious diseases, benefits of prudent antibiotic use and how inappropriate use can have a negative impact on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and Public Health. The bilateral initiative is currently completing the contracting procedures and will be implemented for twenty-four months, from July 2021 to December 2023.

An overview of the pre-defined bilateral initiatives is presented in the following table:

N.	Bilateral Initiatives	Status	Final Balance and/or Budget*	Executed to date*
FBR/01	Business meeting AICEP & Innovation Norway	Complete	5 449,93€ (Budget 28 070,00€)	5 449,93€ (Final balance)
FBR/02	Mental Health and Primary Health Care	Under Revision	70 000,00 €	28 000,00€ (1 advance payment)
FBR/03	Enhancing the Protection of the Rights of the Child in Priority Areas	Complete	Budget 36 092,00€	18 321,40 € (2 advance payments Final report under evaluation)
FBR/04	Gender Equality Seminar in Iceland Event & NFP participation	Complete	33 031,00€ (Budget 37 000,00€)	33 031,00€ (Final balance)
		Complete	5 143,00€ (Budget 3 000,00€)	5 143,00€ (Final balance)
FBR/05	Route of Microplastics and Marine Litter	On going	63 168,96 €	25 267,58€ (1 advance payment)
FBR/06	E-bug partnership and development project PT-NOR 2021-2023	On going Approved on the 14 th JCBF	99 345,98 €	0,00 €
TOTAL			312 230,87 €	115 212,91 €

FBR on Programmes

All the MoU allocations of the FBR to Programmes in the total amount of €500.000 were transferred by order of the NFP to the Programme Operators in December 2018, after the signature of a formal contract setting the terms and conditions on the use of the FBR by Programmes including the reporting responsibilities.

Due to the current stage of the Covid-19 Pandemic the bilateral initiatives promoted by the Programmes were severely reduced and financial execution was marginal. The Blue Growth Programme managed to promote on-line webinars and matchmaking events related to ongoing open calls and the Work-Life Balance Programme made follow up on ongoing bilateral initiatives agreed with the DPP through on-line meetings and workshops.

The following table updates the reported financial execution by PO under the FBR:

Programme	MoU Allocation	Expenditure Executed by 30.06.2021 (verified and reported by NFP)
Blue Growth	200 000,00 €	77 498,27 €
Environment	100 000,00 €	60 072,07 €
Culture	100 000,00 €	78 671,70 €
Work-life Balance	100 000,00 €	13 984,86 €
TOTAL	500 000,00 €	230 226,90 €

The NFP has encouraged PO to regularly update the bilateral activities plan and discuss it with the DPP, exploring possible bilateral initiatives adapted to the current constraints, such as webinars in relevant programme themes.

Financial Execution and Disbursements

The Donors agreement with the NFP proposal for the Reserve allocation, allowed to reinforce the amount available for the FBR in the total additional amount of €903.000.

The financial execution and disbursements are summarized in the following table:

Total Grant	Execution					Disbursements (including advance payments)	Balance
	2018	2019	2020	1 st sem 2021	Total		
2 957 000,00 €	75 282,00 €	231 387,00 €	239 417,45 €	74 899,04 €	620 985,49 €	1 567 552,34 €	946 566,85 €
Rate	3%	8%	8%	3%	21%	53%	

The financial execution of the FBR significantly slowed down in 2021 due to the outbreak registered in the country in the beginning of the year. This changed the expectations built upon better outcome on the pandemic situation, which justifies the high positive balance between expenditure and disbursement of funds to the country.

6. Management and implementation

a. Management and control systems (MCS)

MCS at national level

By initiative of the Certifying Authority a revision of the description of the Management and Control Systems was initiated early this year and completed by July 2021.

The Certifying Authority revised and updated some aspects, such as:

- Update of the Certification Unit's organizational chart;
- Inclusion of the procedure for recovering amounts unduly paid at the time of closure;
- Definition of the methodology for administrative verification, by the Certifying Authority, of the regularity of public procurement procedures;
- Definition of the methodology for the sampling of administrative checks to be carried out by the Certifying Authority;
- Definition of the standard cost methodology of 1,720 hours, in parity with the European regulations, for the reporting of expenses with human resources.

The National Focal Point has revised some aspects of the monitoring procedures such as shorter periods for monitoring reports by the Programme Operators (quarter reports instead of semi-annual reports) and revision of control checklists.

This updated version was published in the national EEA Grants website by July 2021.

MCS at Programme level

The Audit Authority reported in the 2020 Annual Audit Report that

«...

2. Changes in management and control systems

During the reference period, in order to overcome weaknesses identified by the IGF-Audit Authority, as well to provide more detailed and updated information, some Programme Operators has revised their description of the management and control systems established in Article 5.1 of the Regulation of the implementation, as summarized below.

The Secretariat General of the Ministry for the Environment and Climate Action (SGAAC PT), Programme Operator of Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy, has updated missing elements, namely the specifications of the information system in application, the development schedule of the unfinished modules and the details of the procedures to be adopted for the purposes of supervision and quality control of the work to be carried out by external entities.

The Directorate General for Maritime Policy (DGPM PT), Programme Operator of Blue Growth Innovation and Small and Medium Enterprise, changed the description of the management and control systems related, namely, to the procedures to ensure the reasonableness of the expenses presented by the Project Promoters and the procedures for carrying out the supervision of the work performed by external entities.

Despite the revisions of the SGAAC PT e DGPM PT, we consider that the procedures for carrying out the quality control of the work performed by the external entities are not yet sufficiently detailed.

Nevertheless, this opinion does not have a relevant impact on the functioning of the system, considering that during the reference period there was no intervention from external parties on the verification of the expenditure declared. We will follow-up this issue in future audits.

The Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG PT), Programme Operator of Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality has updated the check-list to verify the reasonableness of the expenses presented by the Project Promoters and the check-list to verify the compliance with public procurement rules.

We consider that both checklists need more detail, namely the checklist for the verification of the public procurement rules. Once again, we consider that this issue doesn't have relevant impact on the functioning of the management and control system, considering the mitigating procedures adopted on the expenditures declared. Nevertheless, we will re-evaluate the issue in audit of the Programme Operator.

The Directorate General for Cultural Heritage and Cultural Entrepreneurship (DGPC PT), Programme Operator of Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation, has updated the description of the management and control systems with regards to the definition of the criteria of technical competence, suitability and experience for the invitation of external experts who participate in the selection of projects.

Recently, in May 2021 the Programme Operator of the Blue Growth Programme has submitted to the Audit Authority a second revision to its Management and Control Systems that should now receive the respective assessment in the next Annual Audit Report to be delivered by February 2022.

Information and reporting IT System

The joint procedure promoted by the NFP and PO to procure the setting up of a joint IT system covering the implementation of the EEA FM 2014-2021 was successfully contracted in December 2020 and is in full development. The first deliverables are due to September 2021.

b. Complaints

Two complaints were received by the NFP, one through the complaint mechanism and other by regular mail, but nonetheless treated equally.

Both complaints were addressing selection procedures under the Culture Programme and regarded the position of candidates excluded in the selection procedure.

The NFP is following both cases, one is being dealt under judicial procedure (exclusion after administrative assessment under Open Call #1) and other is under administrative appeal procedure (allegations on conflict of interest of one expert under Open Call #2).

Neither cases had suspensive effects of the selection procedures so these continued for final decisions, regardless any responsibility by the Programme Operator to accommodate any outcome that may arise from these procedures.

c. Irregularities

No irregularities were reported by the Irregularities Authority.

d. Audit

In the Annual Audit Report for 2020 the Audit Authority stated that «...due to the low execution of the Programmes, IGF-Audit Authority only performed the annual audit on the management and control systems of the Certifying Authority. As a result of the audit we concluded that, generally speaking, the management and control systems of the Cohesion and Development Agency P.I., as the Certifying Authority, work adequately, even if needing some improvements, particularly in what concerns the evidence on the relevant items analysis checklist.»

Regarding audits on projects the Control and Audit Unit of the Cohesion and Development Agency P.I. (Agency's UCA), under Audit Authority quality control procedures, has carried out audits of operations under for the Technical Assistance, the Blue Growth Programme and Work-Life Programme by the end of 2020 and delivered final reports by January/February 2021.

The result from the audit on projects is reported in Annual Audit Report 2020:

«...According to the audit report, in the sub-sample of PT-Innovation - Programme Management Agency's UCA has identified ineligible expenditures in the total amount of EUR 1 848, corresponding to 5,23% of the audited expenditures. Following the procedures predicted in the Sampling Guidance, the projection of that error to the total expenditure declared, correspond to EUR 27 771.

The amount of the ineligible expenditures should be withdrawn from the total expenditures of PT Innovation declared to the FMC.

Once the only error in the sample belongs to the exhaustive stratum, the project error in the population is the amount of EUR 27 771, which is below the materiality threshold of 2%, i.e. EUR 30 532»

The financial corrections to the IFR#4 were under taken by DGPM.

7. Communication

Communication Strategy

The Communication Strategy for the current Financial Mechanism, which will last until 2024, already registers, in a merely indicative way, around 90% of the indicators and objectives defined for the whole period, achieved or overcome.

Considering the current pandemic context, the NFP intends to revise/update the Communication Strategy in a more actual, structured and global way, in order to accommodate new contributions and new challenges.

To achieve this, the NFP decided, in the last quarter of 2020, to develop a Strategic Marketing Plan that served as a preparatory study for the renewed communication strategy.

Strategic Marketing Plan

The Strategic Marketing Plan served, as mentioned, as a preparatory basis for the renewed communication strategy and analysed the target audience, the branding and the EEA Grants Communication concept, among other communicational aspects. 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.

One of the main conclusions of this Plan was that Social Media is an essential tool to amplify the good results that are being delivered by the Grants, therefore a special attention to this area has been given.

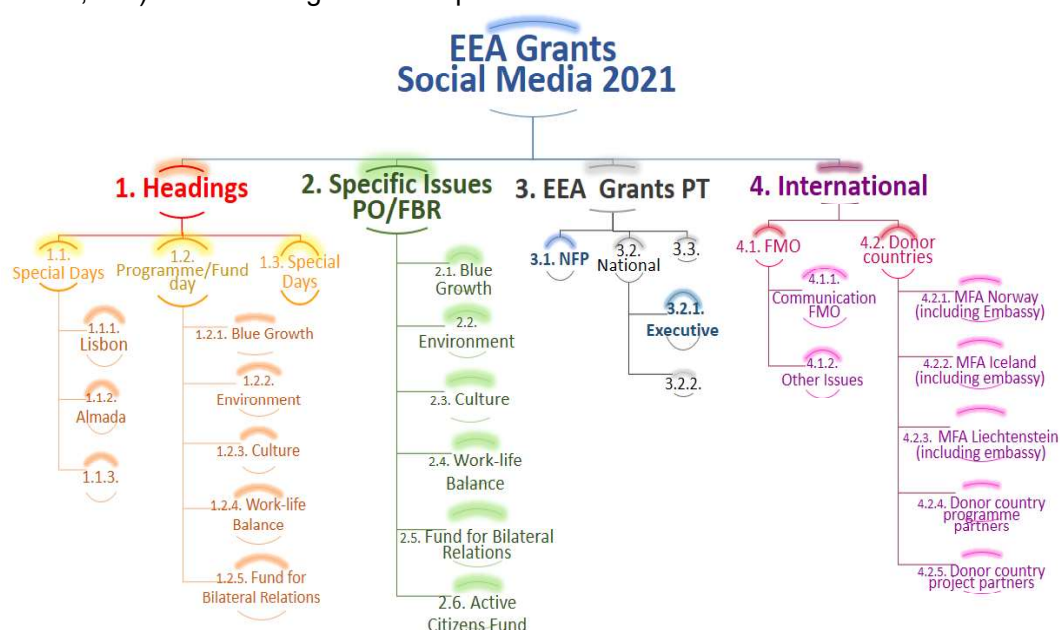
Social Media

The NFP has carried out various communication activities from August 2020 until July 2021 with a focus on social media and based on the guidelines of the Strategic Marketing Plan.

The main goal was to increase the daily content results and that has been widely overcome.

With a defined annual methodology, the NFP and PO create a Monthly Plan of organic content and, when necessary, Social Paid content.

The communication team (NFP/PO) share a folder in EEA Grants google drive where information is placed by date and content (Monthly Plan; Opportunity Definition; Real Time Marketing; Current Affairs, etc.). The following scheme represents the structure of the contents that this team created:



Having a structured planning for the social media, the results reflect, for example, the increasing number of followers, as can be seen in the next table:

Social Media Followers	November 2017	March 2018	July 2019	July 2020	July 2021
Facebook	1091	1535	2614	3256	4425
Twitter	26	87	263	490	727
Linkedin	14	78	347	1388	2619
Instagram	-	-	361	684	1277

Site EEAGrants.gov.pt

The EEA Grants Portugal joint website (NFP/PO) – www.eeagrants.gov.pt – is a crucial communication tool in the current Financial Mechanism.

Since August 2020 until July 2021 the website has had a total of 388.433 page views focusing on subjects related to calls and information of the programmes. In the next table can be seen the top 10 of preferences:

Page		Page Views	Unique Page Views	Avg. Time on Page	Entrances	Bounce Rate	% Exit
		388,433% of Total: 100.00% (388,433)	316,381% of Total: 100.00% (316,381)	00:01:23 Avg for View: 00:01:23 (0.00%)	169,731% of Total: 100.00% (169,731)	69.09% Avg for View: 69.09% (0.00%)	43.70% Avg for View: 43.70% (0.00%)
1.	/pt/	83,718 (21.55%)	75,876 (23.98%)	00:00:54	72,047 (42.45%)	74.72%	67.42%
2.	/pt/concursos/	19,258 (4.96%)	14,471 (4.57%)	00:00:59	5,500 (3.24%)	55.13%	32.76%
3.	/pt/programas/	12,910 (3.32%)	9,201 (2.91%)	00:00:18	882 (0.52%)	19.84%	6.32%
4.	/eeagrants.gov.pt/pt	9,435 (2.43%)	7,609 (2.41%)	00:01:14	1,402 (0.83%)	53.71%	27.83%
5.	/pt/programas/crescimento-azul/	9,084 (2.34%)	7,329 (2.32%)	00:00:47	3,338 (1.97%)	37.48%	21.57%
6.	/pt/programas/crescimento-azul/documentos/	7,757 (2.00%)	5,805 (1.83%)	00:03:50	2,137 (1.26%)	60.90%	49.40%
7.	/pt/programas/crescimento-azul/concursos/	7,315 (1.88%)	5,364 (1.70%)	00:00:39	1,138 (0.67%)	41.95%	15.61%
8.	/pt/programas/crescimento-azul/concursos/aviso-4-investigacao/	6,938 (1.79%)	5,781 (1.83%)	00:03:00	3,444 (2.03%)	71.49%	57.75%
9.	/en/	6,396 (1.65%)	5,128 (1.62%)	00:00:42	1,885 (1.11%)	43.29%	21.04%
10.	/pt/programas/fundo-de-relacoes-bilaterais/concursos/fundo-de-relacoes-bilaterais-1/	6,317 (1.63%)	5,090 (1.61%)	00:03:03	2,586 (1.52%)	76.72%	58.27%

The website had also developed important communication activities:

- A total of 222 news were published during the reporting period in Portuguese and 196 in English version (with the option of sharing directly on social networks);

- The NFP developed a communicational database with all the projects approved in Portugal in all Financial Mechanism since the entry into force of the Agreement, with territorial reference;
- A summary of each contracted projects under the current period is being registered in Portuguese and in English.

APP

The EEA Grants APP (EEA Grants PT), available for Android and IOS, allows its users to receive, through a push notification system, immediate information about the open calls and news.

A total of about 8.5k push notifications were sent until July 2021.

The APP maintains a functionality that allows matching between Portugal and Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway entities in order to strengthen bilateral relations and promote future partnerships.

Digital communication file

All the PO and Project Promoters have a digital communication file that works as an archive of all communication produced. This activity was created by the NFP and has been considered a good practice.

Basically, all programmes and all projects have a shared folder in the google drive of EEA Grants Portugal account. The project promoters upload photos of activities, information about the projects and other material such as clipping, etc. that remain accessible in real time to the NFP and PO.

Media relationship

In the reporting period than 150 news about EEA Grants Portugal, Programmes and Project were published. The NFP collect EEA Grants news on a weekly basis via Google Alerts (clipping).

Whenever it was considered relevant press releases to the Media are sent by the NFP, the PO and Project Promoters. The NFP also replied to journalists' interviews upon request.

Direct Communication

During this period the NFP promoted more than 200 meetings (mostly on-line) with potential beneficiaries, Programme Operators, Project Promoters, FMO, Embassies and other stakeholders.

The NFP also participated in more than 20 events (many still on-line) organized by the NFP, Programme Operators, Project Promoters and other stakeholders such as project contract signature ceremonies or public presentation of projects, as well as the presentation of first results, which represent another opportunity for the NFP to communicate about the EEA Grants in Portugal.

Network with Programme Operators

The NFP continues to actively promote its close and efficient relationship with the Programme Operators' communication officers.

The activities carried out during the reporting period were mainly:

- ✓ Monthly meetings with the communication team (at least one person from each PO);
- ✓ Monthly meeting with the communication officer of each programme (since January of 2021);
- ✓ Daily contact with the communication officer of each PO;
- ✓ On-job training;
- ✓ Monitoring meetings;

The NFP also encouraged and supported the PO to hold meetings with project promoters to explain all the details about the all the tasks related with EEA Grants implementation, namely how to communicate the Grants.

With the FMO

The relation with the FMO is also very positive and active, with:

- ✓ Monthly meeting with the head of communication of the FMO team for Portugal;
- ✓ Bi-monthly meeting with the FMO communications team and the beneficiary countries;
- ✓ Contact whenever necessary with the communication officer for Portugal;
- ✓ Joint participation in three editions of a communication workshop promoted by the NFP directed to Portuguese Project Promoters.

With the Embassy of Norway in Lisbon

The NFP maintains an active and open relation with the communication officer of Embassy of Norway in Lisbon through communication meetings and informal contacts for sharing and identifying content on social media, support in requested activities and participation in editions of a communication workshop promoted by the NFP directed to Portuguese Project Promoters.

Other Communication Activities carried out by the NFP

The NFP promoted an active communication coordination through the regular monitoring of Projects' communication plans, monthly survey on communication activities for the Projects and Bilateral Initiatives and communication meetings with Project and Bilateral Initiatives Promoters.

Main activities for the next 12 months

For the next twelve months, the NFP intends to review the current communication strategy.

The NFP will continue to support capacity building activities for project and initiative promoters in different areas, namely communication. It may have different formats such as webinars, meetings, online training, guides, manuals, etc.

Finally, NFP also intends to hold several activities (in formats still to be defined) that allow the presentation of the first results of the EEA Grants 2014-2021.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

a. Monitoring

According with the description of the MCS at national level the different levels of monitoring (compliance, results and risk-based monitoring) are carried out through the performance if several activities, such as:

- Quarter reports from the PO;
- Regular control meetings, at least with a biannual periodicity, with the PO staff including the head directors;
- Consolidation of the information on controls, audits and complaints;
- Follow-up, as an observer, of the meetings of the Cooperation Committees between the PO and their respective Donor Programme Partners (DPP) and of the selection procedures by the PO;
- Validation of the open calls text in order to guarantee the accomplishment of the minimum requirements of the Regulation;
- Prior validations before submitting to the FMC/FMO the documents owed by the PO, pursuant to the Regulation, *inter alia*, provisional approval of proposals to amend the Programme Agreement (Article 6.9.3), approval of management and control systems for the PO (Article 5.7.2), positive appraisal of the Pre-defined Projects (Article 6.5.3);

- Review of the Annual Programme Reports.

In the reporting period the NFP has performed 2 rounds of meetings with each of the PO teams (November 2020 and July 2021) which provided important inputs to conclude the Risk Assessment at Programme level. The NFP also participated in several dedicated working meetings with each PO concerning the specific challenges identified along the implementation progress that proved to be very helpful and effective.

The NFP was observer in all Cooperation Meetings and Selection Committees hosted by the PO, which is considered an important monitoring tool.

The NFP has assessed all the call texts compliance with the minimum requirements of the Regulation and informed the FMO of such assessment.

In the reporting period the NFP identified the need to shorter reporting periods by PO and in 2021 the PO submitted quarter reports instead of biannual reports.

The NFP encourage all PO to revisit the Programme's Results Framework and identify any adjustments needed to be discussed with the FMO as well as the projects that contribute most for the planned results (anchor projects) for closer risk monitoring by PO. Dedicated meetings with the FMO and each PO were promoted (May 2021) to discuss the issues identified that may need correction or clarification (such baseline values, baseline year, frequency of reporting, etc.)

The NFP has being promoting continued support to all PO in the different stages of implementation of the Programmes by setting up annual workshops on specific issues relevant for the work planning of the PO and promoting joint training sessions.

In the reporting period the following joint trainings were promoted by the NFP:

1. Project Management (ISCTE-IPPS, November 2020);
2. State Aid (PT MFA, November 2020);
3. Risk Management in Public Administrations and Good Governance (OECD – December 2020);
4. Identification and treatment of Irregularities (IGF, May 2021).

Despite the provision for a Monitoring Committee was not included in the Regulation on the implementation of EEA FM 2014-2021, the setting up of such committee was maintained under the current funding period in Portugal, with representatives from the different areas supported by the EEA Grants, either government or private agencies. In the reporting period the NFP conveyed 2 Monitoring Committee meetings (December 2020 and in June 2021). The next meeting is planned for December 2021.

b. Evaluation

No evaluations were performed at the current early stage of implementation.

However, the framework of the EEAFM evaluation is being prepared to launch the public procurement procedure by the end of 2021, early 2022.

9. Issues for the annual meeting

- a. How to improve collaborative work between the FMO team and the POs
- b. Evaluation
- c. EEAFM 2021-2027