

Sixth Annual Meeting
Financial Mechanism 2014-2021
EEA GRANTS PORTUGAL
São Miguel, October 10th 2023

Adopted by 28th November 2023

According to Article 2.7 of the Regulation on the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) 2014-2021, the sixth Annual Meeting between the **Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC)** and the **National Focal Point (NFP)** was held in São Miguel, Azores, on October 10th 2023.

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

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 the Regional Secretary for Finance, Planning and Public Administration, **Duarte Freitas**, the Secretary of State for Planning, **Eduardo Pinheiro**, the Ambassador of Portugal in Norway and Iceland, **Pedro Pessoa e Costa**, the Ambassador (Designate) of Norway in Portugal, **Hanne Brusletto**, the Deputy Permanent Representative at the Embassy of Iceland in Paris, **Pétur Skúlason Waldorff**, the Managing Director of the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO), **Ragna Fidjestol**, as well as other representatives from FMC and FMO, the Portuguese Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Audit Authority, the Programme Operators (PO) and the Active Citizens Fund (ACF) manager. The Honorary Consul of Norway in Azores, Mr. **João Luís de Melo Oliveira** was present as an observer.

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

Opening statements

Maria Mineiro welcomed all the participants and passed the word for the opening statements.

The **Regional Secretary for Finance, Planning and Public Administration**, welcomed the participants to the region and highlighted the relevance of Azores and the importance of the EEA Grants over the different mechanisms and the importance of maximizing results, to create synergies, the need for involvement of the local community in the projects and to ensure that the benefits reach individuals, as ultimate beneficiaries of projects. Also, focused the relevance to promote projects in the areas of green technology, sea economy and sustainable tourism.

The **Secretary of State for Planning** welcomed the participants at Azores and expressed the relevance of the opportunity to meet the local projects and their positive impact in Sao Miguel and Terceira islands. Also welcomed the new participants in the Annual Meeting and the new team members of the NFP, highlighting their motivation and sense of commitment, and enjoyed the opportunity to recognize the effort and work of the previous team, namely its previous head, Susana Ramos. As entering to the final stage of the Mechanism 2014-2021, important notes were made about the singularity and relevance of the EEA Grants to Portugal's priorities, including the close cooperation with donor countries.

Torill Johansen, on behalf of the Donors, thanked the NFP for hosting the Annual Meeting and for the organization of all the activities and on-site visits in Azores. It was highlighted the importance of exchanging information regarding the Programmes status, in the challenge of closing the projects considering the pressure from the Covid -19 Pandemic and the aftermath of the Russia invasion of Ukraine. The importance of flexibility measures, the importance of monitoring and to apply mitigation measures were mentioned as solutions to increase the execution of the EEA FM 2014-2021 which is in the final stage of implementation that will occur in 30/4/2023. The strong bilateral cooperation, the fruitful cooperation with the Norwegian Embassy in Portugal and the partnerships in the different Programmes were also noted.

Hanne Brusletto recognized the opportunity and time for this Annual Meeting as it represents an important chance to receive an updated status of all the Mechanism to meet all of the involved; The relevance of bilateral relations and mutual and beneficial cooperation were highlighted, as the EEA grants are an instrument that led to substantial and reinforce the relations.

Pétur Skúlason Waldorff noted the changes at the NFP, at the Embassy of Norway in Portugal and a new FMO Director in Brussels. In addition, relevant bilateral events were mentioned as evidence of the strength of the relations between Iceland and Portugal: the signature of a MoU between Iceland and the Portuguese government for the energy sector and the study visit under the Work life Balance Programme concerning the better working hours system; Finally, the potential of Azores for bilateral cooperation was also highlighted.

Ragna Fidjestol, who was recently appointed as Managing Director for the FMO expressed her enthusiasm for working again with the EEA Grants Portugal, highlighting the team's efforts regarding communication and the bilateral activities.

Maria Mineiro made a warm welcome address to all participants and presented the new NFP Team, reaffirming their enthusiasm and commitment to embrace the challenge of closing the current Financial Mechanism. Also, it was explained the importance of holding

the annual meeting in Azores, taking into account the relevance of the region in the Portuguese context. A word of appreciation was given to the commitment and sense of duty of the programme operators in the implementation of the Mechanism and to the former NFP. Finally, it was made a brief review of the Annual Meeting Programme.

Strategic Report 2022/2023 – Presentations and Discussions

On the topics of the Agenda of the Annual Meeting **Maria Mineiro** started by highlighting the main milestones over the reporting period: the 5 Programmes selected a total of 410 projects, including 14 pre-defined projects; the current financial execution is 53% and it is expected an acceleration till the end of 2023; 144 projects were in collaboration with entities from the donor countries (not including the ACF data) which represents the commitment of all the involved in straightening Bilateral Relations; 34% of projects are closed; the close monitoring of the indicators for the outcomes and the outputs, demonstrates that progress is being made from programmes to accomplish the defined targets;

In what concerns the main activities till April 2024, **Maria Mineiro** highlighted the relevance of the current stage of the Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, as its closing increases the complexity of the work, demanding highly skilled technical resources, commitment to ensure the delivery of the results and an even more systematic approach for monitoring, requiring a continuous follow up of the results, but also the commitment with a strategic alignment to keep up with the consistency of the mission, vision and expected outcomes.

Regarding the remaining budget, considering the FMC letter on reallocations from Programmes to the Bilateral Fund, **Maria Mineiro** proposed that any remaining amount not spent by the end of 2023 should be transferred to the FBR.

a) Status of the Programmes and ACF

At this stage **Maria Mineiro** gave the floor to the representatives of each 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 period.

Torill Johansen noted the good progresses in all the Programmes and at the level of bilateral partnerships.

Regarding the **Blue Growth Programme**, the team reported a current financial execution of **43%**, expecting to achieve 70% by the end of 2023. In addition, the indicators and the material execution of the projects contribute to support the presented execution forecast. It was highlighted the upcoming mid-term event at Porto de Leixões (17th October) which is expected to have great visibility.

The **FMC** asked about the lessons learned from the Blue Growth Programme combining three different programme areas research, education and business innovation to promote

blue growth, and whether the synergies outweighed the increased administrative burden of managing such a complex programme.

The **Blue Growth Programme** highlighted that the complexity is a consequence of a positive investment in complementarity between business innovation, new technologies, education which promote very important synergies. The less positive experience results from the administrative burden of the implementation due to different regulatory requirements for different programme areas. The main focus of the team is to implement the projects, counting with a high level of commitment and close relationship with promoters to achieve it.

Regarding the **Environment Programme** the team reported a current financial execution of **56%**.

The **FMC** highlighted the good progress of the programme, in general, and referring to the early evaluation of the programme which highlighted the bottom up approach adapted in the programme, asked about how people are benefiting from the activities. They also asked about the status of projects that received additional funding.

The **Environment Programme** highlighted with examples the impact that projects are having in the communities, and reassured the FMC that the last projects that received funding were being regularly monitored with site visits and no delays to report.

Regarding the **Culture Programme**, the **FMC** expressed concerns regarding the commitment of the promoters with the deadlines and with the frequent changes in the team, and asked what concrete measures and assistance could be offered to the projects. **The Culture Programme team, which was recently reinforced by new members**, reported a current financial execution of **42%**. The concerns about the execution rate are related to the projects of the CALL #1, as the CALL #2 reports a material execution of 93% and a financial execution of 89%. The team reassured the commitment to respect the deadlines by putting all the efforts to achieve the completion of the projects. They underlined that efforts were being made to overcome the difficulties and that are showing positive results which include daily, weekly and monthly updates with the promoters, and a very close contact with the NFP.

In addition, the **Secretary of State for Planning** informed the presents that he will attend on site visits to the most critical projects in the next few weeks, in order to ensure that the bottlenecks are being addressed.

Regarding the **Worklife Balance Programme** the team reported a current financial execution of **75%**, with high rates of material execution, as 45% of the projects are closed. The impact and relevance of the programme and its objectives were also highlighted.

The **FMC** noted the strong bilateral character of the programme and the high number of closed projects.

Regarding the **Active Citizens Programme**, the representative of Fundação Bissaya Barreto reported a current financial execution of **84%** and made a status update of the programme implementation.

The **FMC** noted the good performance of the programme and congratulated the new team, while thanking the former director for his efforts towards the programme.

Ragna Fidjestol provided a brief status on the regional funds directly managed by the FMO, since it is important to mention 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 entities in the selected projects.

Pedro Pessoa e Costa emphasized the importance of the bilateral relations between Portugal, Norway and Iceland and the activities and partnerships that have been developed in recent times, in areas as relevant as the Blue economy, sustainability, energy and culture.

Maria Mineiro thanked for the clear presentations.

b) Status of the Fund for Bilateral Relations

On the use of the Fund for Bilateral Relations (FBR) **Maria Mineiro** highlighted that in the years of 2022 and 2023 the implementation of this fund was still particularly affected by the pandemic COVID-19 context, as expected. The main consequences arose from the need to postpone or cancel trips and to extend the planned implementation periods. However, bilateral initiatives have continued, and promoters have shown a capacity to accommodate the planned activities, without prejudice to the outlined results.

A brief updated status on calls, pre-defined initiatives and allocations to Programmes was provided, which present 35% of financial execution. It was also noted that the closing date will be 30/4/2025.

It was mentioned that in the next 12 months, the NFP focus will remain on managing and monitoring the implementation of the FBR initiatives and the pre-defined contracted initiatives while exploring new pre-defined initiatives. This exploratory work has already showed some results, as the NFP established contacts with two public entities to present the pre-defined initiatives model.

Torill Johansen commended the good work of JCBF, the good cooperation through the Embassies and the solid assessment on the initiatives provided by the NFP.

Pétur Skúlason Waldorff also commended the good cooperation in progress while demonstrating the availability of Iceland to join the initiatives.

João Telha reinforced the relevance of the FBR and highlighted the close work of the Embassy and the NFP for its implementation.

c) Communication

Maria Mineiro stated that the NFP has continued to actively promote the communication aiming to broaden the knowledge of the EEA Grants in Portugal.

It was given an overview of the communication activities and explained the various activities carried out with the goal of having strategic and aligned communication, including the film campaigned that were produced to promote the grants. In addition, it was also noted that the NFP continues to actively promote its close and efficient relationship with the PO communication officers. It was also highlighted the active and fruitful relation with the Embassy of Norway, also in the area of communication.

The structured planning for the social media implemented showed a continuous increase of the number of followers in the updated results, in all the different social media apps.

The main goals for the upcoming year is to broaden the EEA Grants awareness, including the development of an awareness study. In addition, the articulation and plan to start the communication of the #ourstories campaign is already on track.

The **FMC** noted the good performance on the communication area and noted the need to provide results about the news referring the EEA Grants. It was also reinforced the need for spreading the new #ourstories campaign and to amplify the video campaign.

João Telha commended the good work of the NFP and the PO in the communication matters, reinforcing the new #ourstories campaign, and also gave the note that the Embassy is also making a campaign focused on projects that can be considered benchmarks and that can make a difference.

Ragna Fidjestol also reinforcing the relevance of new #ourstories campaign.

d) Management and implementation Issues

Maria Mineiro noted the changes of NFP team, namely the new Coordination, Communication, the Coordination adviser and Bilateral Relations team members, while highlighting their commitment and enthusiasm to embrace the duties while keeping up with the stable relation with all the stakeholders.

On **monitoring activities**, it was also highlighted that NFP has been promoting continued support to all PO within a more systematic approach, taking into account the current stage of the EEA FM 2014-2021. In addition to quarter reports, monthly status reports of execution are also being produced by the PO, projects with lower execution are being closely-monitored; in the case of Culture Programme, also include additional weekly reports, followed by catch-up meetings based on a journey model and continuous feedback.

It was also underlined that the NFP continues to actively promote **joint training sessions involving the PO** in the different stages of implementation of the Programmes by setting up workshops on relevant issues for the work planning and promoting joint training sessions.

Concerning **the unified IT system** EEA Grants in Portugal, in close collaboration with the NFP and PO, it received its final approval. The system will be progressively opened to users in smaller user groups to ensure its overall performance and quality.

Torill Johansen noted the efficient functioning of Management and Control Systems and congratulated the work of all the authorities involved.

Issues for the Annual Meeting

Maria Mineiro continued on to the agenda point on **issues for the Annual Meeting**, namely the **constraints that affect the implementation of the projects**: the crises resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of the war. Additionally, the price increases and material costs have negative consequences on the projects and Programmes, especially in the Culture Programme. The NFP maintained regular monitoring of programmes through quarterly reports as defined in the description of management and control systems at national level and through regular monitoring meetings with PO (twice a year) and whenever needed supporting PO in monitoring meetings with some project promoters where higher risks were identified.

Regarding **Results and Evaluation**, **Maria Mineiro** stated that the NFP will work with PO to implement the best strategy to communicate/disseminate the results and achievements in each Programme. On the Evaluation Plan it was stated that the framework of the EEA FM 2014-2021 evaluation is being prepared, emphasizing the relevance of a special training prepared for all PO with a reputed university. The procurement procedures will be finished between the end 2023 – beginning of 2024. According to the Plan, an Ex-post evaluation will be carried out on the 4 Programmes and the NFP will carry the procedure for the FBR.

On the **next funding period**, **Maria Mineiro** mentioned the expectations of a fruitful period of negotiations and the internal reflection about the strategic priorities in each area. Despite the amounts available for the future EEA FM are still unknown, it was suggested to maintain the current focus areas of the Blue Economy, Environment, Culture, and Work-Life Balance, given the clear bilateral interest. In addition, it may be considered a concentration strategy to prioritize programs with greater scale and impact, avoiding dispersion and to select one or two areas of focus per program. Moreover, efforts should be made to enhance the participation of Donor Programme Partners in the different phases.

Torill Johansen noted that the negotiations are still in progress and that they are still working on the Blue Book. Considering the different priorities in the EEA FM 2014-2021, it is expected the programme areas to be reduced. Also, the regulations are also in a process of revision, in order to simplify, receive good practices and accommodate them according to the existent rules.

The Risk Assessment was discussed under the restricted part of the Annual Meeting.


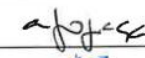

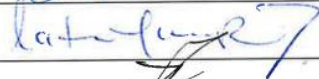


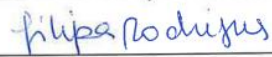
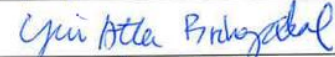

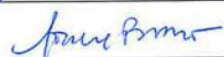


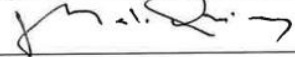



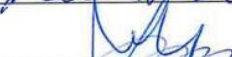

Sum-up and conclusions

Torill Johansen thanked the NFP for hosting the Annual Meeting **and confirmed the formal approval of the Strategic Report 2022-23** and made positive remarks to the use of FBR.

The meeting was closed by 13.30.

List of Participants

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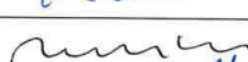

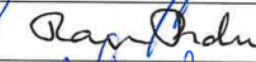

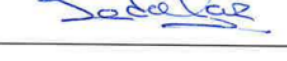

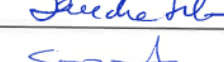

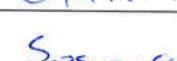


Representative	Entity	Signature
Amélia Pardal	DGPC, Focal Point EEA Grants	
António Fogaça	NFP, Communication Officer	
Carla Tavares	Advisor to the Secretary of State for Planning	
Catarina Romão Gonçalves	DGPC, Deputy Diretor General	
Duarte Martins de Freitas	Regional Secretary for Finance, Planning and Public Administration	
Eduardo Pinheiro	Secretary of State for Planning	
Filipa Rodrigues	NFP, Financial Adviser	
Geir Atle Bringedal	Desk Officer for Portugal in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
Hanne Brusletto	Ambassador of Norway in Portugal	
Joana Branco	DgArtes, Focal Point EEA Grants	
Joana Marteleira	CIG, Head of EEA Grants Team	
João Custódio	NFP, Coordination Advisor	
João Luís de Melo Oliveira	Honorary Consul of Norway in the Azores	
João Telha	EEA Grants and Economic Relations, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon	
Jorge Silva	DgArtes, Focal Point EEA Grants	
Karina Asbjornsen	Deputy Head of Mission, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon	
Luísa Fragoso de Almeida	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PT)	
Marco Rebelo	Environment Secretary General	

Nuno ALVES

Direção Regional de Ambiente e
Fundos Estruturais

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Representative	Entity	Signature
Maria João Carapêto	Head Deputy of NFP	
Maria Lúcia Santos	Bissaya Barreto Foundation, Managing Director	
Maria Mineiro	Head of NFP	
Marisa Lameiras da Silva	DGPM, Director General	
Mualla Cirakli	FMO, Country Officer	
Pedro Barbosa	DGArtes, Deputy Director General	
Pedro Pessoa e Costa	Ambassador of Portugal in Norway and Iceland	
Pétur Skúlason Waldorff	Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Delegation of Iceland to the OECD	
Ragna Fidjestøl	FMO, Managing Director	
Raquel Leal	Communication Officer, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon	
Sandra Cruz	DGPM, Deputy Director General	
Sandra Ribeiro	CIG, President	
Sandra Silva	DGPM, Director of Programs and Funding	
Sara Gomes	NFP, Programme and Bilateral Officer	
Sofia Acha	DGPC, Focal Point EEA Grants	
Susana Escária	SGA, Director of Foresight and Planning Services	
Teresa Silva	IGF - Audit Director	
Torill Johansen	Deputy Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	