

Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area

EEA GRANTS

LESSONS LEARNED

2014 - 2021

REPORT

**ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE CONDUCTED TO
ORGANIZATIONS FINANCED BY THE PT_ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME**

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1. FRAMEWORK

This report presents the analysis on the results obtained in the questionnaire "Lessons Learned in the EEAGRANTS 2014 – 2021 Financing Mechanism", carried out by the Secretary General for the Environment, Operator of the Environment, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy Programme – 'Environment Programme'. The survey prepared by the 'EEA Grants Team' of the Foresight and Planning Services, which are responsible for the operational coordination of the 'Environment Programme', was applied to the group of Promoters and Partners of the projects funded by the Environment Programme of the EEA Grants, which involved a set of 50 (fifty) responses. The questionnaire was carried out between 21 June and 31 July 2024, with 324 emails sent, and 50 responses obtained, totaling a response rate of 15.4%.

The main objective of the analysis carried out was to determine the degree of satisfaction of the respondents regarding the EEA Grants Funding Mechanism, in the period 2014 – 2021, to identify opportunities for improvement in the future.

The results presented follow the structure of the survey, which is divided into two parts – A and B, and aims to listen to the respondents' opinions regarding:

Part A

- Theme 1- The Project
- Theme 2- EEAGrants Funding Mechanism
- Theme 3- Programme Operator Management and Procedures

Part B

- Theme 4- Communication of the Environment Programme

Each of these parts includes a set of questions, which will be analyzed and detailed in Chapter 2.

The responses were ordered to determine those with the highest and lowest number of positive responses within each of the themes, and between the different themes, to allow a conclusion from all the themes, which were considered by the respondents as having the highest and lowest levels of satisfaction.

The questionnaire also aimed to assess the suitability of the communication of the Environment Programme (Part B - Theme 4), which will undergo an independent analysis, as it involves a different level of information. The responses will also be ranked to determine the aspects that obtained the highest and lowest levels of suitability. The methodology followed to determine the results is detailed in Chapter 2.

2. RESULTS ANALYSIS

2.1. METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire (Annex 1) that serves as the basis for collecting the information targeted by this analysis is divided into two parts – A, B.

Part A aims to identify what went well and what went less well in relation to the EEAGRANTS 2014-2021 Financing Mechanism, and consists of a set of 15 simple-answer questions (Q) distributed across 3 themes:

- Theme 1- The Project (Q1 to Q6)
- Theme 2- EEAGRANTS Financing Mechanism (Q7 and Q8)
- Theme 3- Programme Operator Management and Procedures (Q9 to Q15)

For these 15 questions, the analysis involved placing them in ascending order of percentage of negative responses (“No”), with those with the highest value being those that represent the greatest concern, and as such, constitute opportunities for improvement for the next Financing Mechanisms.

This methodology was carried out using two different approaches – by theme and between themes.

Part B, which will be subject to independent analysis, aims to assess the degree of suitability of the Environment Programme's communication, with respondents being asked to assign a score to the different questions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least suitable and 5 being the most suitable.

Regarding Part B, the following results will be calculated:

- Most suitable topic – the one with the highest number of responses of 5.
- Two topics with the highest suitability- The two topics with the highest suitability will be those with the highest sum of the number of responses with scores of 4 and 5. In the event of a tie, the tiebreaker will be the number of responses with a score of 5.
- Least suitable topic – considered to have the lowest suitability for communication, will be the one with the highest sum of the number of responses classified as 1 and 2. In the event of a tie, the tiebreaker will be the number of responses of 1. Finally, there is an observations field, the results of which are presented in the annex (Annex 2).

2.2 THEME ANALYSIS

2.2.1. THEME 1 – THE PROJECT

Regarding the issues related to the Project, the results obtained are presented in the following table:

Theme	Question		Yes	No
1	1	Did it help to meet previously identified needs?	100%	0%
1	2	Have you promoted partnerships with the potential to be used in other areas?	100%	0%
1	4	Did it allow the promoter/partners to acquire knowledge and skills?	100%	0%
1	6	Did the project have an impact at a local/sectoral level?	98%	2%
1	5	Was the Consortium able to ensure post-financing sustainability?	76%	24%
1	3	Have you enhanced knowledge sharing with the Partner(s) from the Donor Country(ies) (Norway/Iceland)?	72%	28%

From the analysis of the results obtained, it can be concluded that 50% of the questions present a level of satisfaction of 100%, and the questions that represent the greatest level of dissatisfaction are related to the fact that respondents do not consider that the Project has strengthened the sharing of knowledge with partners in the Donor Countries (Q3 – 28% of negative responses) and with the consortium's ability to ensure sustainability post-project (24% of negative responses).

2.2.2. THEME 2- EEAGRANTS FINANCING MECHANISM

To determine what went well and/or badly with the EEA Grants Funding Mechanism, respondents were asked to answer just two questions, and the following results were obtained:

Tema	Questão		Sim	Não
2	8	Does it add value and not duplicate its impact with other similar programs in the same sector/area as the Environment Programme?	94%	6%
2	7	Did it gain greater recognition among the population and target audience?	92%	8%

From the analysis of the results presented, more than 90% of respondents responded positively to both questions, thus revealing a high level of optimism regarding the added value and recognition of the Financing Mechanism among the population and target audience.

2.2.3. THEME 3- PROGRAMME OPERATOR MANAGEMENT AND PROCEDURES

Regarding the Management and Procedures of the Programme Operator, the hierarchy of the responses obtained is presented in the following table:

Tema	Questão		Sim	Não
3	11	Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator sufficient?	94%	6%
3	14	Do you think the information meetings were useful?	92%	8%
3	12	Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator adequate?	90%	10%
3	13	Were the requested clarifications provided in a timely manner by the Programme Operator?	90%	10%
3	15	Do you consider that the training activities carried out were useful?	88%	12%
3	9	Were the guidelines adequate for submitting payment requests and financial management of projects?	84%	16%
3	10	Was there a lot of bureaucracy involved in presenting documentation and proof of expenses?	68%	32%

Analyzing the results presented, it can be concluded that the bureaucracy in the presentation of documentation and proof of expenses (Q10) stands out, as 68% of respondents consider it to be high. For this reason, this aspect can be analyzed and seen as an opportunity for improvement when defining the next Financing Mechanisms.

In contrast, the remaining questions on this topic have positive response rates equal to or greater than 84%, thus revealing high levels of satisfaction on the part of respondents regarding the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator, both in terms of their content and response times.

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2.3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS OBTAINED BETWEEN THEMES

The following table shows the degree of satisfaction of respondents regarding all the topics under analysis.

Tema		Questão	Sim	Não
1	1	Did it help to meet previously identified needs?	100%	0%
1	2	Have you promoted partnerships with the potential to be used in other areas?	100%	0%
1	4	Did it allow the promoter/partners to acquire knowledge and skills?	100%	0%
1	6	Did the project have an impact at a local/sectoral level?	98%	2%
2	8	Does it add value and not duplicate its impact with other similar programs in the same sector/area as the Environment Programme?	94%	6%
3	11	Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator sufficient?	94%	6%
2	7	Did it gain greater recognition among the population and target audience?	92%	8%
3	14	Do you think the information meetings were useful?	92%	8%
3	12	Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator adequate?	90%	10%
3	13	Were the requested clarifications provided in a timely manner by the Programme Operator?	90%	10%
3	15	Do you consider that the training activities carried out were useful?	88%	12%
3	9	Were the guidelines adequate for submitting payment requests and financial management of projects?	84%	16%
1	5	Was the Consortium able to ensure post-financing sustainability?	76%	24%
1	3	Enhanced knowledge sharing with Donor Country Partner(s) (Norway / Iceland)	72%	28%
3	10	Was there a lot of bureaucracy involved in presenting documentation and proof of expenses?	68%	32%

From the analysis of the results presented, it can be concluded that 67% of the questions have a positive response rate greater than or equal to 90%, and 20% of these questions have a value of 100% of positive responses, thus revealing that most respondents are satisfied and optimistic about the EEAGRANTS 2014-2021 Financing Mechanism.

The questions that reveal the highest percentage of negative responses, and as such represent the aspects that require the greatest concern in defining future Financing Mechanisms, are related to the bureaucracy associated with the management of Procedures (Q10 – 68% of respondents consider that there was a lot of bureaucracy), and the fact that respondents do not consider that the Project has strengthened knowledge sharing with partners in the Donor Countries (Q3 – 28% of negative responses) and with the consortium's ability to ensure sustainability post-project (24% of negative responses).

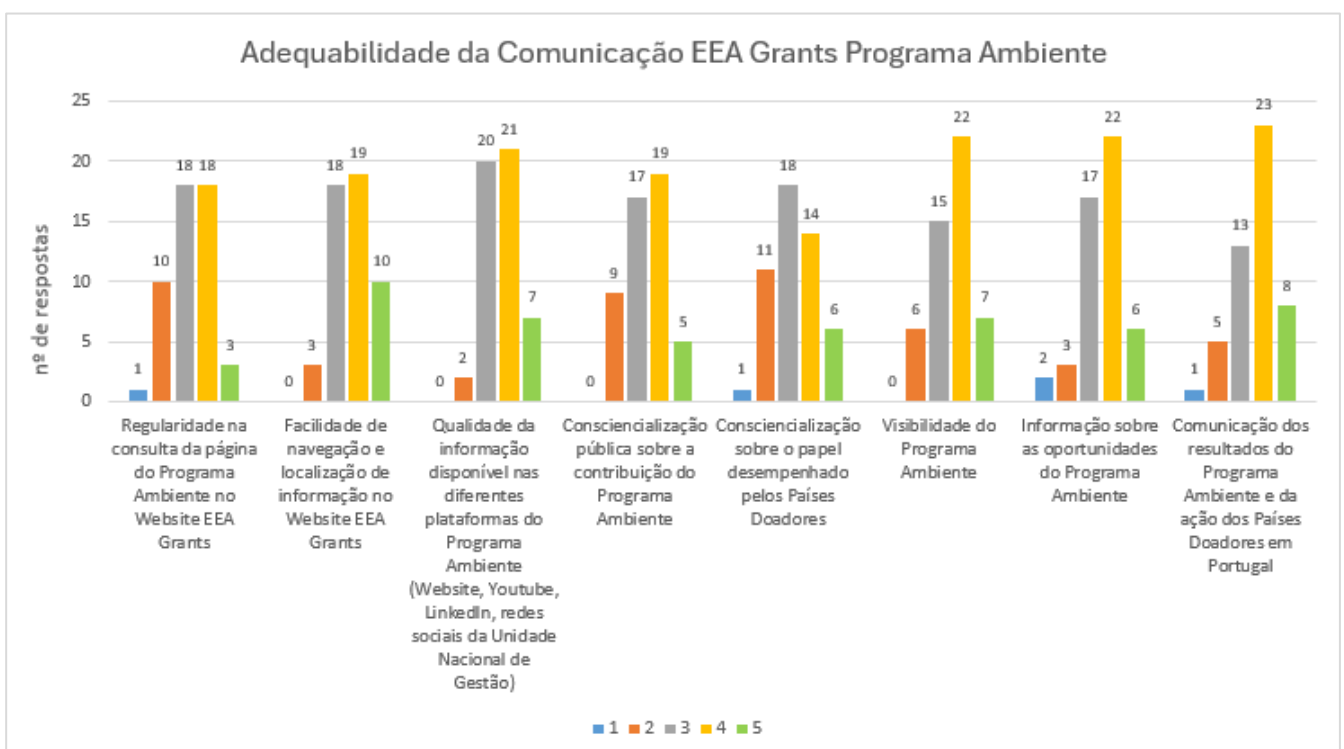
2.4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS RELATED TO EEA GRANTS COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

As part of the questionnaire, a question was asked to assess the suitability of the EEA Grants Communication of the Environment Programme.

To this end, the following areas were analyzed:

1. Regularity in consulting the Environment Programme page on the EEA Grants Website
2. Ease of navigation and location of information on the EEA Grants Website
3. Quality of information available on the different Environment Programme platforms (Website, YouTube, LinkedIn, social networks of the National Management Unit)
4. Public awareness of the contribution of the Environment Programme
5. Awareness of the role played by Donor Countries
6. Visibility of the Environment Programme
7. Information on the opportunities of the Environment Programme
8. Communication of the results of the Environment Programme and the action of Donor Countries in Portugal

The following figure represents the results obtained:



From the analysis of the responses obtained, it appears that the area with the highest number of responses with the highest score is “Ease of navigation and location of information on the EEA Grants Website” (20%), an area that remains in the top 3 for suitability when we analyze the data in light of the sum of scores 4 and 5, with a total of 58% of the responses, only surpassed by “Communication of the results of the Environment Programme and the Action of Donor Countries” (62%), and tied with “Visibility of the Environment Programme” (58%).

“Information on the opportunities of the Program” proved to be the area with the highest number of responses with a score of 1 (4%), however, when analyzing the criterion based on the sum of the number of responses with scores 1 and 2, “Awareness of the role played by Donor Countries” is considered the least suitable (24%).

In summary:

SUITABILITY OF COMMUNICATION EEA GRANTS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME		
+	Communication of the results of the Environment Programme and the action of Donor Countries in Portugal	62%
+	Ease of navigation and location of information on the EEA Grants Website	58%
+	Visibility of the Environment Programme	58%
-	Raising awareness of the role played by Donor Countries	24%

ANNEX 1 – QUESTIONNAIRE

A - Lessons learned: What went well? What went less well?

(Select "Yes" or "No" from the following options):

1. Your project

Did it help to fulfil previously identified needs?	
Have you promoted partnerships with the potential to be used in other areas?	
Strengthened knowledge sharing with Donor Country(ies) Partner(s) (Norway / Iceland)	
Has it enabled partners to acquire knowledge and skills?	

2. Do you consider that the EEAGrants Financing Facility

(Select "Yes" or "No" from the following options):

Have you gained greater recognition among the public and the target audience?	
Does it add value and not duplicate its impact with other similar programmes in the same sector/area as the Environment Programme?	

3. Regarding the Programme Operator's management and procedures (Select "Yes" or "No" from the following options):

Were the guidelines adequate for submitting payment requests and managing project finances?	
Was there a high level of bureaucracy when it came to submitting documentation and proof of expenditure?	
Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator sufficient?	
Were the explanations provided by the Programme Operator adequate?	
Were the clarifications requested provided in good time by the Programme Operator?	
Do you think the clarification meetings were useful?	
Do you think that the training sessions you attended were useful?	

B - Regarding the EEA Grants Environment Programme Communication, please select the options below:

(Rate from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least adequate and 5 the most adequate)

	1	2	3	4	5
Regular consultation of the Environment Programme page on the EEA Grants website.					
Easy navigation and localization of information on the EEA Grants website.					

Quality of the information available on the different platforms of the Environment Programme (Website, YouTube, LinkedIn, social networks of the National Management Unit).					
Raising public awareness of the contribution of the Environment Programme.					
Raising awareness of the role played by donor countries.					
Visibility of the Environment Programme.					
Information on the opportunities of the Environment Programme.					
Communication of the results of the Environment Programme and the actions of the Donor Countries in Portugal.					

Comments: (box for 100 words)

ANNEX 2 – OBSERVATIONS – COMPILATION OF RESPONSES OBTAINED

1. *The EEAGrants Environment team, whose competence is unquestionable, always provided extraordinary support. They were always available and informative and always committed to helping overcome the constraints that arose throughout the execution of the project!*

2. *The cooperation between the various entities involved and the replication of the project at an intermunicipal level was an added value.*

3. *More flexibility about the Finance Plan adjustments along the projects' execution is critical to maximize success of the Activities Plan once there are contingencies to be accommodated which a less flexible program can turn into drawbacks.*

4. *The EEAGRANTS 2014-2021 FINANCING MECHANISM was extremely important for increasing the national and international visibility of the National Network of Biosphere Reserves. It allowed the development of communication products, in addition to management support instruments and training actions for managers and local stakeholders. Partnerships with donor countries also went very well, some of which are still ongoing (e.g. several joint projects with the UNESCO Chair at the University of Coimbra). The Portuguese experience with Biosphere Reserves (RB) and the UNESCO MaB Programme was widely shared with donor countries.*

5. *The last training action in Barrancos was very important because it brought together elements from several projects with the sharing of relevant information.*

6. *It is important to recognize Secretary General for Environment availability in providing quick clarifications and support for project management.*

7. *The projects funded by EEAGrants are excellent opportunities to develop, test and apply innovative methodologies and solutions in a wide range of fields of knowledge, with significant impacts on social, economic and environmental development and sustainability. It is a programme that allows*

knowledge to be shared and explored in a network to promote environmental sustainability and the quality of life of the population. The programme has an extremely attractive programmatic and financial framework, which allows the implementation of a wide range of projects.

8. The projects funded by EEAGrants are excellent opportunities to develop, test and apply innovative methodologies and solutions in a wide range of fields of knowledge, with significant impacts on social, economic and environmental development and sustainability. It is a programme that enables networking, sharing and exploring knowledge to promote environmental sustainability and the quality of life of the population. The programme has an extremely attractive programmatic and financial framework, ensuring the implementation of a wide range of projects, and is an added value for Portugal.

9. Improvements: existence of a project manager; HR expenses in a more simplified regime (e.g. negotiating a % of the budget without presenting documents and based on results), indirect costs as a % of HR presented, existence of a platform for submitting applications and documentation for monitoring the project;

10. This mechanism has been well developed and has been committed to by operators. A joint database was lacking. Meetings and gatherings of all programme operators should continue. There is still a long way to go, but the first steps have been taken towards continuous improvement. The next mechanism should focus on consolidating and simplifying processes. There is currently a pool of highly qualified people who should be assigned to the next mechanism.

11. Admin and financial reporting is too extensive, focused on all kinds of duplicates and redundancies - please look into other simplified options, such as Horizon Europe, or EIT Funding (no invoices required, no timesheets, etc with a focus on results). The time that EEA PT staff would save as well on checking reporting would be, in our opinion, better invested in visiting projects on the ground and promote knowledge sharing - something we would really appreciate. On the communication front, the EEA rules are also very tight and what is required from us are too many tasks, for a budget that does not even consider this kind of communication. Plus, if you allow projects to have their identity, this will increase EEA visibility, because project teams will feel greater

ownership of their project identity and, therefore, speaking more of EEA. Other than that, well done!!! :)

12. Excellent initiative that allows for a real impact on the territory and the population. Competent team involved and always available to support.

13. Despite the short duration of the project compared to the time needed to obtain results on the ground in the context of the call (agroforestry systems, combating desertification and adapting to climate change), it achieved the expected results and created several synergies. As soon as we obtain funding for this, we will try to continue monitoring the results of the measures implemented and follow up on the established collaborations and dissemination of the results. In this sense, a post-implementation support mechanism focused on monitoring and dissemination could allow us to make the most of the project results.

14. Very positive elements in this experience: - opportunity generated by the funding to carry out actions previously identified as necessary - great support received from the programme management staff in managing the project Taking into account the slowness of the administrative processes leading to the financial execution of the projects, in accordance with the requirements of the programme and the public procurement rules, it is suggested: - review programme management procedures in order to reduce the administrative burden associated with project management - extend the duration of the projects (18 months, confirming the extension by 4 months to one month of the contracted closure)

15. Clearly excessive bureaucracy, especially related to human resources, which limits the possibility of presenting proof of actual expenditure on the project. If the rules are not changed, we will not participate in a program of this type again, even if the financing rate is higher.

16. It was important to develop a project with a Program as different as this one.
