

FINAL PROGRAMME REPORT

FM14-21

Portugal

Blue Growth Innovation and SMEs

Programme short name	PT-INNOVATION
Programme Operator	Directorate General for Maritime Policy (DGPM PT)
Host Programme Area	PA01 Business Development, Innovation and SMEs
Financial Mechanisms	EEA Grants
Programme grant in EUR	€ 38,150,000.00
Programme co-financing in EUR	€ 6,732,352.94
Final incurred amount in EUR	€ 38,803,426.74
Final incurred rate %	86.46 %

PROGRAMME RESULTS

Programme Objective: Increased value creation and sustainable growth

Eligible expenditure: € 44,882,352.94 Amount incurred: € 38,803,426.74

Issues the programme aimed to address

The Blue Growth Programme of the EEA Grants was created to address several important challenges affecting the blue economy in Portugal, particularly in economic activities linked to the sea, such as fishing, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, coastal tourism, and ocean renewable energy.

In Portugal, it was essential to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in becoming more competitive and innovative. Many of these businesses had good ideas but lacked the financial and technical support to turn them into successful products and services. The programme helped bridge that gap by promoting innovation and sustainable development.

Another area the programme sought to support and improve was the inefficient use of resources in the maritime sector. A significant amount of waste ends up in the sea, harming the environment and the health of the oceans. The programme supported projects that reuse marine litter as raw material, encouraging the circular economy and protecting the ocean.

On a scientific level, the programme recognized the need to enhance research on marine ecosystems. Portugal has a vast maritime area, but there are still gaps in scientific knowledge about its resources and potential. Therefore, universities and research centers were supported to develop new studies and technologies.

The programme also placed high value on education and ocean literacy. Promoting knowledge about the sea—from school to vocational training—is essential to prepare new generations who are aware of the ocean's importance.

Finally, the programme fostered cooperation between Portugal and Donor Countries, creating useful and lasting partnerships. In a country with a strong connection to the sea, these issues are fundamental to ensuring economic development, social justice, and environmental protection.

Programme contribution to overall objectives

The Blue Growth Programme made a significant contribution to the two main objectives of the EEA Grants: reducing social and economic disparities and strengthening bilateral cooperation between beneficiary and Donor States.

1. Reducing social and economic disparities

The programme directly supported small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the Portuguese economy, particularly in coastal regions with fewer opportunities and facing challenges such as unemployment, low skill levels, and limited economic diversification.

By funding more than 100 innovative projects, emerging technologies, and sustainable activities, the programme helped create qualified jobs, generate income, and stimulate local economies. New products, services, and technological solutions were introduced to the market, boosting business competitiveness. Moreover, more sustainable practices were promoted, such as the reuse of marine litter as a resource, contributing to a more efficient and environmentally responsible blue economy.

Support for research projects and the promotion of ocean literacy also played a key role in strengthening human capital, enhancing scientific knowledge, and preparing professionals and communities to face future challenges.

By integrating the business sector with the scientific and educational systems, the programme fostered a genuine blue innovation ecosystem that helps tackle structural inequalities and promotes a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economy — a true investment with direct impact on the country's social and economic cohesion.

2. Strengthening bilateral cooperation

The Blue Growth Programme was instrumental in strengthening the relations between beneficiary and Donor States, by encouraging international cooperation at all stages of project implementation — from design to execution and evaluation.

Partnerships were established between Portuguese universities, research centers, companies, and public entities, and their counterparts in Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. Many approved projects included partners from these countries, promoting the exchange of knowledge and best practices in areas such as technological innovation, sustainability, and marine education.

The programme also contributed to the creation of long-term research and cooperation networks and enabled mobility of researchers, students, and professionals, fostering the sharing of experiences and mutual capacity building.

These bilateral partnerships not only enriched the projects but also opened new internationalisation opportunities for Portuguese entities, strengthening strategic ties with Donor Countries.

The Blue Growth Programme proved to be an effective tool for economic, social, and environmental development, as well as a solid bridge for sustainable international cooperation. Its integrated approach, focused on innovation, capacity building, and ocean protection, contributed in a concrete and visible way to the core objectives of the EEA Grants.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the results achieved by the Blue Growth Programme is strongly anchored in its integrated approach, which combined support for businesses, scientific research, education, and international cooperation. This long-term vision is essential to ensure that the programme's positive impacts endure well beyond its funding period.

In the business sector, many supported projects introduced new products, processes, and technologies with strong market growth potential. The focus on innovation and SME competitiveness created favorable conditions for their continuity and expansion, particularly through the commercialization of sustainable solutions such as the reuse of marine waste. Furthermore, the commitment to the circular economy is expected to consolidate, given the growing pressure for environmentally responsible practices.

In the field of research, the funding of projects and scientific infrastructures, such as the Mário Ruivo research vessel, provides a solid foundation for future collaborations and advances in marine knowledge. The continuity of these initiatives depends on the maintenance of the networks created and the continued engagement of partner institutions.

In education and training, the development of new courses, exchange programmes, and ocean literacy initiatives has had a multiplier effect. When these results are integrated into school curricula and vocational training programmes, they are highly likely to persist and continue influencing future generations.

Finally, the strengthened bilateral cooperation between Portugal and the Donor Countries has resulted in partnerships that, in many cases, remain active. The trust and shared knowledge developed through these relationships are key to fostering future projects and the ongoing strengthening of the blue economy in Portugal.

Outcome 1: Increased competitiveness for Portuguese enterprises within the focus area of Blue Growth

Amount incurred: € 21,097,251.00

Results

Outcome 1 proved to be a strategic pillar of the Blue Growth Programme, by encouraging Portuguese businesses to innovate, collaborate, and grow in a sector with enormous potential—the ocean economy. The results exceeded initial expectations across nearly all indicators, demonstrating not only the immediate impact of the funding but also the potential for continuity and scalability of the supported projects.

The strengthening of ties between businesses and scientific and technological institutions, as well as international cooperation with partners from Donor States, are elements that will endure beyond the end of the programme, creating a solid foundation for the sustainable economic development of Portugal's blue economy.

This Outcome's main goal was to enhance the competitiveness of Portuguese companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups, within the blue economy sector. To that end, five calls for proposals were launched (Call#1, Call#2, SGS#1, 2nd SGS#1, and SGS#2), focused on business development, innovation, and the application of new technologies.

The funding aimed to support the creation, application, and commercialization of innovative products and technologies, as well as to promote partnerships between businesses and research institutions, fostering research-based innovation aligned with real market needs. Additionally, some projects aimed to strengthen business and management skills for ongoing ventures supported by the programme.

Key results in numbers

A total of 63 projects were approved under this Outcome, 42 of which involved partners from Donor States (Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein), highlighting strong contributions to bilateral cooperation. Projects were implemented along the Portuguese coastline, including 5 in Madeira and 1 in the Azores.

Out of the approved projects, 56 were completed by April 2024, with a total executed amount of approximately €21 million Euros. The contracts had an average grant size of around €608,000.

Surpassed Indicators

The results achieved significantly exceeded the initial targets:

- 160 jobs created (target: 45)
- 51 new products/technologies developed (target: 25)
- 34 innovative technologies/processes/solutions applied in businesses (target: 15)
- 26 intellectual property rights applications submitted (target: 10)
- 35 new-to-the-market products/technologies commercialized (target: 10)

There was also outstanding performance in the output indicators, particularly the number of businesses supported and the strengthening of cooperation between companies and research institutions—both national and from Donor States (Output 1.4).

Likewise, Output 1.6 indicators were exceeded, with 66 businesses (large or medium-sized) receiving support for business and management training, leading to the training of 296 professionals, thus enhancing company capacity and strengthening human resources to better face new challenges.

These results are even more relevant considering that many projects were at prototype, proof-of-concept, or market validation stages—critical phases where public funding is typically scarce. The programme helped bridge this gap, playing a key role in the blue innovation ecosystem.

Examples of High-Impact Projects

The PT-INNOVATION-0118 ([PhytoNUTRE](#)) project was one of the most successful initiatives, creating 15 jobs and developing 8 new products or technologies. It stands as a clear example of impactful innovation with tangible economic results.

The PT-INNOVATION-0094 ([InFishMix](#)) project stood out by introducing insect-based feed in aquaculture, offering a more resilient and environmentally sustainable solution. The project led to the creation of 17 new jobs, the application of 3 innovative technologies, and the submission of 4 intellectual property rights applications related to insect protein production and customized formulations for different fish species.

The PT-INNOVATION-0092 ([AmpliAqua](#)) project exceeded all its initial goals. It created 4 jobs, developed 2 new products or technologies, and fostered cooperation between 5 SMEs and research institutions—three national and two from Donor States—fulfilling one of the Blue Growth Programme's key strategic objectives

Success Factors

The success of Outcome 1 was due to several factors, namely the clear definition of objectives and the alignment of support with the real needs of businesses. The promotion of matchmaking events between Portuguese entities and those from Donor States facilitated the formation of international partnerships and enabled the inclusion of a wide range of business profiles, including startups and early-stage companies. Additionally, the geographical diversity of the projects allowed for the involvement of various regions across the country, including the autonomous regions, contributing to a more equitable distribution of investment.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

During the implementation of Outcome 1, which aimed to increase the competitiveness of Portuguese companies in the Blue Growth sector, several operational and contextual challenges affected the progress of some projects and the dynamics of the programme as a whole.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most decisive factors, as it significantly hindered or even made it impossible to carry out in-person activities, ensure the mobility of researchers, technicians, and workers—which was essential in many projects with a strong international collaboration component—and acquire equipment, due to disruptions in supply chains and a general increase in prices.

These difficulties led to delays in the implementation of activities and increased costs for both the promoters and the National Management Unit. Nevertheless, despite these constraints, the objectives were met and the results exceeded the established targets, demonstrating the resilience of the entities involved.

Structural and regulatory limitations

Other challenges relate to the limited turnover of specialised human resources, as well as the lack of technical capacity for legal and administrative support on the part of the promoters. At the same time, changes in national and European regulations affected the applicability and profitability of some of the technologies developed, which required adaptations by the companies and partners involved.

Despite these limitations, the programme was able to maintain its momentum and promote a high execution and success rate among the supported projects.

Monitoring and evaluation – EY's contribution

The external evaluation carried out by EY highlighted the importance of improving result monitoring mechanisms. In many cases, the outcome indicators depend on information provided by the promoters themselves, which is only available after the completion of the projects, and on complex or highly technical data, which is difficult to translate into figures or standardised metrics.

EY pointed out that, although the results were extremely positive (and in many cases exceeded the targets), the quantitative translation of these achievements is not always possible, which may hinder the analysis of the programme's real impact.

As a good practice, EY highlighted the inclusion of descriptive fields in the Implementation Reports, allowing for a qualitative and narrative assessment of project progress. This approach complements numerical data and should be reinforced in future programming cycles.

Lessons learned

Flexibility in implementation is essential to accommodate unforeseen events such as health crises or regulatory changes.

The importance of solid partnerships, especially with research institutions and international partners, was confirmed as a critical success factor.

There is a need to strengthen technical and administrative support mechanisms for promoters, particularly SMEs and startups, which often lack dedicated teams for legal and project management matters.

The continuous monitoring of indicators should be reviewed and adjusted to the technical and temporal reality of the projects, also incorporating qualitative tools.

Outcome 2: Resource efficiency of enterprises in Marine Sector increased

Amount incurred: € 1,598,858.00

Results

Although this Outcome involved only five projects and did not benefit from partnerships with Donor States, the results exceeded expectations. The projects demonstrated that it is feasible to implement sustainable solutions that give value to waste—especially marine litter—by transforming it into products with real economic value. Moreover, these initiatives strengthen the circular economy, reduce the environmental impact of maritime activities, and promote good practices that can be replicated in other regions and sectors.

These results were essential to reinforce Portugal's commitment to a sustainable blue economy, demonstrating that resource efficiency is possible, profitable, and environmentally responsible.

Its main objective was to increase resource efficiency in marine sector enterprises by promoting solutions based on the circular economy. Through Calls #3 and 2nd Call #3, projects were supported that applied or developed innovative technologies and products focused on the reuse, recycling, and valorisation of marine waste, particularly marine litter as a secondary raw material.

This outcome fits within the “sustainable blue economy” strategy, promoting the application of business solutions for the collection, reuse, and recycling of waste that would otherwise be discarded. The approach followed the principles of the circular economy and product life cycle, redefining “waste” as a resource.

This result sought synergies with the Environment Programme (PT-Environment), although the lack of alignment in the timing of the calls and the absence of incentives for collaboration between promoters of the two programmes limited the development of integrated projects.

Key results in numbers

Five projects were approved under this outcome, with a total funding of approximately €1.8 million. The contracts had an average value of €613,000. Three were located along the coastal strip between Lisbon and Aveiro, and two in the Azores.

Although one project initially proposed a partnership with a Donor State, the Icelandic partner withdrew before the contract was formalised. Thus, this Outcome did not include projects with Donor Project Partners.

Exceeded indicators

The results achieved under the marine litter reuse component of the Blue Growth Programme were very positive, with the main targets not only met but significantly exceeded. In total, 56 tonnes of marine litter were collected annually for reuse or recycling, surpassing the target of 40 tonnes. Of this, 30.03 tonnes were successfully reused, exceeding the initial goal of 20 tonnes.

The collected waste consisted mostly of plastics, wood, maritime containers, and fishing nets—materials that pose serious environmental risks if left unmanaged. These were transformed into new products, demonstrating the potential of circular economy approaches in the blue economy.

Additionally, six companies were supported in applying material efficiency solutions, contributing to more sustainable production practices and fostering innovation in the reuse of marine waste.

Examples of High-Impact Projects

PT-INNOVATION-0090 ([Azores EcoBlue](#)) collected 42 tonnes of marine litter, of which 25 tonnes were reused.

PT-INNOVATION-0089 ([SeaRubbish2Cap](#)) exceeded expectations by collecting 13 tonnes of waste (target: 5) and reusing 5.03 tonnes (target: 2.5). The project successfully developed a new polymeric material using recycled ocean waste, proving the feasibility of large-scale recycling. It demonstrated that this type of waste can be reused without special treatment, meaning that funding the collection process is the main requirement for scaling the solution.

PT-INNOVATION-0091 ([Green fish oil from blue industry](#)) addressed the challenges of the tuna canning industry in the Azores. With rising production leading to more waste and environmental concerns, the project introduced modernised equipment that transformed tuna by-products into high-value commercial fish oil. This reduced waste, created new products, and promoted local economic development with a lower environmental footprint.

The two indicators under Output 2.1 (supporting companies to make their operations more sustainable) were successfully achieved. The projects demonstrated that it is possible to "green" the blue economy—not only by reducing environmental impacts but also by creating economic value from waste.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Outcome 2 aimed to promote resource efficiency in marine sector enterprises, with a special focus on the valorisation of marine litter and the circular economy. Although the results achieved significantly exceeded the established targets, the implementation of this Outcome faced several structural and operational challenges, offering important lessons for future editions of the programme.

Challenges in programme coordination

Despite the clear thematic link between the Blue Growth Programme and the Environment Programme (PT-Environment), which also addressed the issue of marine waste, practical coordination between the two programmes was limited. The intended synergies were based on a complementary logic: while the Environment Programme focused on preventing marine litter from land-based sources, the Blue Growth Programme funded projects that reused and integrated this waste as raw material.

However, no specific incentives were included in the Calls to promote collaboration between promoters from both programmes, nor was there alignment in the timing of the Calls, which prevented the submission of integrated projects. No common projects or partners were identified that had directly benefited from this connection.

This result sought synergies with the Environment Programme (PT-Environment), although the lack of alignment in the timing of the calls and the absence of incentives for collaboration between promoters of the two programmes limited the development of integrated projects.

The lesson learned is clear: to promote real synergies between programmes, it is essential to launch the Calls simultaneously and create concrete incentives for collaboration, such as joint evaluation criteria or increased funding for integrated projects.

Delays in application analysis and approval

Another recurring challenge was the long delay between the closure of the Calls and the approval of projects. This delay had several impacts, including the need to revise activity schedules and initially planned budgets; difficulties in managing human resources, especially in small companies and entities with limited experience in co-financed projects; and a loss of momentum and motivation among partners, which put at risk the active engagement of technical staff and external entities.

In the case of projects approved in the final stages of the programme, this delay hindered the ability to meet execution deadlines, even preventing some planned activities from taking place.

The lesson learned is the need to provide the Programme Operator with the resources and mechanisms to speed up the assessment of applications, enabling quicker decisions and minimizing the negative administrative impact on promoters.

Operational and technical challenges

In addition to administrative issues, several projects faced operational limitations. These included the pressure to meet tight deadlines, particularly for projects with strong technical components; difficulty in attracting and retaining specialized professionals, which affected the execution capacity and adaptability of the teams; and the need to revise or cancel some activities, which partially compromised the achievement of initial goals.

Even so, the promoters demonstrated a strong ability to adapt and succeeded in meeting or exceeding the established targets, especially in terms of amounts of waste collected and reused and the valorisation of marine litter through technological innovation.

Evaluation and monitoring

Although Outcome 2 did not include a large number of projects (only five), the results were solid and aligned with the expected indicators. However, as mentioned in the evaluation report, the absence of active international cooperation in this Outcome (no projects had effective Donor Project Partners) represents a missed opportunity to reinforce the bilateral dimension and integrate knowledge from other geographies experienced in the marine circular economy.

Outcome 2 demonstrated the potential of Portuguese companies to apply circular solutions in the marine sector. The supported projects proved that it is technically feasible and economically relevant to transform marine litter into marketable products. Nevertheless, the challenges in programme coordination, delays in decision-making, and technical execution difficulties offer valuable lessons for the future.

To maximise impact in future cycles, it will be essential to improve coordination between programmes with complementary themes, reduce the time required to analyse applications, create real incentives for inter-institutional and international collaboration, and provide stronger support to promoters with less administrative experience by reinforcing technical and legal assistance from the outset.

Outcome 3: Enhanced performance of Portuguese research organizations

Amount incurred: € 8,788,089.98

Results

Outcome 3 was highly successful in strengthening national scientific capacity, promoting international cooperation with the Donor States, and generating applicable knowledge for the blue economy sector. The funded projects were of high scientific quality, exceeded ambitious targets, and reinforced the links between research, innovation, and the sustainable management of marine resources.

This Outcome represented a strategic investment in the future of marine research in Portugal, creating the conditions for more informed public policies, better maritime spatial management, and the development of technologies with direct impact on the blue economy.

Its main objective was to improve the performance of Portuguese research organisations in the area of Blue Growth. This Outcome focused on technological development, marine environmental monitoring, and the improvement of knowledge in areas such as natural capital, ecosystem services, and the impacts of human activities on the marine environment.

This Outcome also included two Pre-Defined Projects (PDP2 and PDP3), both based in the Lisbon area, with a grant of €2 million each.

PDP2 – Atlantic Observatory ([Atlantic Observatory](#)) established a collaborative marine research unit that promotes networking between research institutions and maritime authorities, including the autonomous regions. The Observatory mobilised 72 researchers from Beneficiary States and 26 from Donor States, far exceeding the initial targets. Four technical meetings were held, bringing together a total of 81 participants. The initiative also led to improved coordination between scientific infrastructures and better access to marine data.

Unfortunately, the “Atlantic Summer School” did not take place due to the last-minute unavailability of the *Mário Ruivo* research vessel, which led to its cancellation after three attempted dates. Nevertheless, the summer school was fully structured and may still be implemented in the future, maintaining its potential for training young researchers.

PDP3 – Mário Ruivo Research Vessel ([Mário Ruivo](#)) The vessel, originally acquired under the previous mechanism (2009–2014), was now equipped with state-of-the-art technology, significantly enhancing its capacity for marine data collection. This included the installation of advanced equipment such as scientific sonars, sub-bottom profilers, and multibeam echo sounders.

This technological upgrade has positioned the vessel as a cutting-edge scientific platform serving both the national and international research community.

The investment in enhancing marine research infrastructure—particularly the *Mário Ruivo* vessel and the Atlantic Observatory—allows Portugal to consolidate a leadership position in Atlantic Ocean research. These projects have increased the capacity for data collection and analysis, enabling more robust studies on habitats, currents, biodiversity, and the impacts of climate change.

Key results in numbers

This Outcome was implemented through Call #4 – Research, which was the sole call dedicated to this area. A total of six projects were approved, all involving partnerships with Donor State entities and resulting in signed contracts. The overall funding allocated reached €5.42 million.

The projects focused on two main thematic areas: four of them explored sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and blue biotechnology, with the goal of adding value to marine products; the other two concentrated on marine natural capital and ecosystem services, particularly deep-sea habitats and restoration strategies such as sea forestation.

Each contract averaged €938,000 in funding. The projects were implemented across various regions in Portugal, from the Algarve in the south to Braga in the north.

Exceeded indicators

The projects surpassed several of the established targets. A total of 30 peer-reviewed scientific articles were published, exceeding the target of 20. Among these, 12 were joint publications with Donor State

partners, surpassing the goal of 10. Additionally, 9 new products, technologies, or services were developed. One of the most notable achievements was the support provided to 16 research institutions—more than 500% above the original target of 3.

Examples of impactful projects

PT-INNOVATION-0075 ([YUM ALGAE](#)) developed two new products using microalgae as a functional food ingredient. The project also submitted five scientific articles and involved three research institutions in its development and implementation.

PT-INNOVATION-0080 ([BREEDFLAT](#)) submitted eight scientific articles and developed four new products and two new technologies specifically designed for feeding species such as sole. These innovations were tailored to meet the nutritional requirements and energy usage of the species during the reproduction phase in commercial aquaculture environments.

PT-INNOVATION-0081 ([Blue Forests](#)) supported five research institutions in the development of new marine and maritime technologies and processes. This project significantly contributed to Output 3.4, making it one of the most successful outcomes under Outcome 3.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Outcome 3 had as its main objective the improvement of the scientific capacity of Portuguese research institutions in the field of Blue Growth. This Outcome was particularly successful, having exceeded most of the established targets—even after upward revisions. However, project implementation was not without operational and structural challenges, which provide important lessons for future funding cycles.

Difficulty in defining realistic targets

One of the first challenges identified was the difficulty in setting appropriate targets during the programme planning phase. Despite the revision of indicators midway through implementation, the final results were far higher than expected. This reveals two key insights: there was an underestimation of the potential impact of the approved projects, and the initial targets did not accurately reflect the ambition and technical capacity of the teams involved.

The main lesson to be drawn is the importance of adopting a more flexible approach to monitoring indicators. This should allow for their revision when significant positive deviations are observed, ensuring that project performance is evaluated accurately and fairly.

Rigidity in budgets and reprogramming

One of the main obstacles identified was the rigidity of budgets and the limited opportunities for project reprogramming, particularly in contexts marked by uncertainty or scientific innovation. This was especially challenging for research projects with strong experimental components, where the natural progression of activities often requires ongoing adjustments. It also impacted startups and organisations with smaller administrative structures, which are typically more vulnerable to unforeseen events and cost fluctuations.

Although the programme's management and control systems were effective in identifying irregularities and mitigating compliance risks, the process for making budgetary changes was slow and overly bureaucratic. This limited the promoters' ability to respond swiftly to emerging challenges.

The main lesson learned is the importance of introducing greater flexibility and agility in reprogramming mechanisms — particularly for R&D projects, where methodological, scientific, or technological adaptations are common and often essential for project success.

Recommendations for the future

Based on the challenges encountered, several practical recommendations emerge to improve the implementation of similar initiatives in the future:

First, it is crucial to review the methodology for setting indicators, ensuring that they are based on realistic benchmarks and can be adjusted over time as needed. This will allow for more accurate and fair evaluations of performance throughout the project lifecycle.

Second, simplifying the processes for budget and activity reprogramming is essential. Reducing the administrative burden on promoters—particularly in sectors marked by scientific uncertainty—would increase their ability to adapt and maintain the quality of project execution.

Third, it is important to develop specific guidelines tailored to research projects, recognising their inherently dynamic nature and the risks linked to innovation. Flexibility must be embedded into the structure of such projects from the outset.

Fourth, targeted investment in training for promoters—especially those from institutions with less experience managing public funds—can ensure smoother implementation. Capacity building in administrative and financial management is a key factor in enabling equal participation and high-quality project outcomes.

Despite the limitations faced, the projects completed under Outcome 3 demonstrated exceptional performance, significantly strengthening national scientific capacity. The challenges did not prevent the achievement of the intended objectives, but they did lead to avoidable inefficiencies and, at times, frustration among promoters. With more operational flexibility and tailored support, these projects could have delivered even greater impact.

Outcome 4: Education, training and cooperation in marine and maritime issues enhanced

Amount incurred: € 4,889,816.00

Results

Outcome 4 had an extremely positive impact and demonstrated that investing in education and training on marine topics is essential for sustainable blue development. Strong participation, promoted exchanges, and the production of educational materials show that the Programme not only met but exceeded its objectives.

This result directly contributed to strengthening the human capital needed to face the challenges of the sea and oceans and left an educational legacy that may continue to generate impact in the coming years. By combining training, international cooperation, and awareness-raising, Outcome 4 laid the foundation for a society that is more informed, prepared, and engaged with the future of the ocean.

The main goal of this Outcome was to improve skills and competences related to the marine and maritime sectors by promoting education, training, and cooperation across all levels of education and professional development. It adopted a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach that included basic education, higher education, and vocational and mobility programmes.

The supported initiatives covered a wide range of actions. These included the creation of new academic courses and multidisciplinary postgraduate programmes, as well as professional internship programmes specifically in SMEs. Projects also promoted summer schools, intensive courses, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Student, teacher, and trainee mobility programmes were another key area, alongside scholarships and teacher exchange schemes. Ocean literacy was a central theme, with initiatives encouraging the integration of topics such as marine litter and nautical sports into school curricula. In addition, public awareness campaigns were developed to engage society with the key challenges faced by the ocean.

The achievements under this Outcome were driven by the projects selected and implemented through Calls #5, SGS#3, and PDP1.

Key Results in Numbers

A total of 42 projects were approved under this Outcome, 17 of which involved Donor Project Partners. The total funding approved was approximately €5.4 million. Project sizes ranged from small local actions to the large Pre-Defined Project (PDP1), which received €2 million.

The projects were spread across the entire country, with 16 located in the Lisbon region and 1 in the Azores.

Exceeded Indicators

Outcome 4 achieved remarkable success, far exceeding the targets initially set. A total of 2,451 participants engaged in training activities, against a target of just 210, reflecting the programme's broad reach and appeal. In terms of ocean literacy, 48,943 people benefited from initiatives aimed at enhancing awareness and knowledge about the ocean, vastly surpassing expectations.

The academic impact was also significant, with the number of ECTS credits awarded being 30 times higher than anticipated. Additionally, 2,785 learners received support under the programme, well above the original target of 40.

Exchange programmes were another area of strong performance. A total of 170 students from Beneficiary States and 49 from Donor States participated in mobility initiatives. Similarly, 62 teachers and technicians from Beneficiary States and 18 from Donor States took part in these exchanges, fostering stronger international collaboration and capacity building.

One of the most outstanding achievements was the production of 437 joint intellectual outputs—including curricula, teaching materials, studies, and scientific papers—far exceeding the target of 21. This result showcases the dynamic knowledge generation and the creation of high-value educational content.

Output 4.3, which measures awareness-raising activities related to ocean literacy, also far outpaced expectations. A total of 993 campaigns were implemented (target: 28), demonstrating both the relevance of the topic and the strong commitment of implementing institutions to prepare communities for climate change and foster a culture of ocean stewardship.

Awareness-raising activities on ocean literacy carried out (SGS) – non-formal education

International cooperation was another highlight of this Outcome: of the 12 projects in the education area, 11 involved Donor State partners. This success was particularly reflected in Output 4.1, with a high number of exchanges between students and teachers from both Donor and Beneficiary States, contributing to strengthened bilateral cooperation.

With regard to outcome and output indicators, as well as the results achieved, all targets set for the programme were met or greatly exceeded, with only one exception—which nonetheless highlights the high performance of the approved projects, while also indicating that some indicators could have been revised or improved.

Success Factors

The Blue Growth Programme adopted an inclusive approach, implementing actions that spanned all educational levels — from primary education to postgraduate and vocational training. The quantitative results far exceeded the established targets, demonstrating a high level of engagement from educational institutions and communities.

The Programme also achieved effective international cooperation by promoting the exchange of experiences and good practices between Portugal and the Donor States, fostering mutual learning and long-term collaboration.

A strong investment was made in public awareness and ocean literacy, with initiatives reaching tens of thousands of people. These efforts helped raise knowledge and sensitivity towards marine issues and sustainability.

Lastly, the Programme successfully engaged a wide range of target groups, including young students, maritime professionals, educators, and the general public — reinforcing its multidisciplinary and inclusive nature.

Examples of impactful projects

The project **PT-INNOVATION-0064** ([BridgingAll](#)) supported 21 schools, including vocational education and training centres, in delivering education and training on marine and maritime topics. As a result, 287 learners received specialized training. Additionally, the project organised 82 events focused on nature-based education in coastal and marine geosciences, engaging a total of 2,832 students and teachers.

PT-INNOVATION-0067 ([EDUCOAST](#)) had a strong impact on skills development, with 1,403 participants self-reporting improved competencies upon course completion. The project conducted 76 training sessions in marine and maritime sciences, targeting teachers, postgraduates, and summer school participants, reaching a total of 1,598 individuals.

In the case of **PT-INNOVATION-0032** ([AE Vago](#)), ocean literacy was significantly enhanced, with 8,335 people improving their knowledge and understanding of marine issues. The project also involved 4,231 students in practical nautical activities, such as canoeing and sailing, further strengthening their connection with the sea.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Outcome 4 aimed to promote education, training, and cooperation in marine and maritime areas, covering everything from basic education to higher education and vocational training. Although the results far exceeded the expected targets, implementation faced several important challenges, particularly in project management and the way support was distributed.

Funding dispersion and limited impact

One of the main challenges identified was the dispersion of funding across a large number of small-scale projects. With 42 approved projects and a relatively modest average grant, support was distributed among promoters with varying levels of technical and organisational capacity. This fragmentation limited the potential for creating initiatives with deeper and longer-lasting impact on communities.

Experience from this cycle suggests that supporting fewer, larger-scale projects with more robust funding could have produced more significant and sustained results, with a stronger national footprint. This approach would also enable greater operational efficiency for the Programme Operator, an enhanced ability to select applications with higher added value and long-term potential, and projects better positioned to engage Portugal's educational and scientific communities.

Excessive administrative burden for small-scale projects

Another relevant challenge was the high administrative burden associated with the projects, which proved particularly heavy for those with lower funding and smaller teams. Many promoters, especially schools and associations with little experience in managing public funds, felt overwhelmed by the demanding financial and technical reporting procedures.

This issue affected the smooth execution of some activities and diverted resources that could have been directed toward more impactful and educational actions. To mitigate this, one of the key lessons learned was the need to simplify administrative processes, particularly through the application of simplified cost options (lump sums, unit costs, or flat rates), which reduce the need for detailed accounting and allow promoters to focus on results.

Recommendations for the future

Based on these challenges, several lessons and recommendations emerge. It is advisable to concentrate support on projects with greater scale and impact potential, giving priority to structuring initiatives that have regional or national reach. Reducing the fragmentation of funding would also allow the Programme Operator to manage resources more effectively and with less dispersion. In addition, applying administrative simplification mechanisms—tailored to the size and complexity of each project—can help reduce the bureaucratic burden on promoters, especially those with lower technical capacity.

To improve alignment between project types and procedural requirements, the adoption of differentiated application models—such as pilot projects, micro-projects, or structuring projects—would make it possible to adapt criteria and support accordingly.

Although Outcome 4 was extremely successful in terms of participant numbers, impact on ocean literacy, and international cooperation, the dispersion of funding across many small projects and the associated administrative complexity limited its structural impact. The experience demonstrated that a more concentrated allocation of resources and simplified project management could significantly amplify the positive results in future programme cycles.

Bilateral Outcome: Enhanced collaboration between beneficiary and donor state entities involved in the programme

Results

The Programme Operator has prioritised the development of strategic bilateral actions aimed at strengthening business relations and cooperation between the Donor States and Portugal, as well as deepening collaboration in the fields of research and education.

The Donor Programme Partners have played a key role in promoting and facilitating these bilateral partnerships by actively informing relevant entities about opportunities within the programme. The integration of innovation, science, and education has fostered an environment conducive to political, technical, and administrative dialogue on shared priorities, contributing to an increasingly strong bilateral relationship between Portugal and the Donor States.

In terms of bilateral results, Bilateral Outcome 1 focused on increasing cooperation initiatives under the Blue Growth Programme. The indicator — number of projects involving a Donor Project Partner — significantly exceeded the established target, with 67 projects approved (target = 22).

Similarly, all indicators under the bilateral outcome were achieved, with 58% of partnerships established during the projects expected to continue after implementation. This continuation after the programme's closure demonstrates the strength of collaboration between beneficiary and Donor Entities, which is also

reflected in the satisfaction level (5.38 on a scale of 1–7) and the trust level between entities (5.85 on a scale of 1–7).

This achievement was largely made possible through matchmaking events, designed to facilitate direct interaction and encourage the formation of partnerships between Portuguese entities and organisations from the Donor States. These events proved essential for fostering collaboration and supporting the creation of international project consortia within the Programme.

Bilateral activities promoted in 2024 included:

Visit of the Portuguese delegation to Norway | 16–19 June 2024

Following the development of offshore wind energy, Portuguese authorities are preparing plans for major investments in the modernisation of ports and shipyards, including maritime traffic management and single-window systems, which offer significant opportunities for bilateral cooperation with Norway.

The proposed efforts in business promotion to showcase Norwegian green solutions also support alignment with Europe's green initiatives, the opportunities arising from the EU's recovery plans, and Norway's green alliance with the EU. These efforts will also follow up on the recommendations of the Ocean Panel, of which both Norway and Portugal are members. The mission took place in Oslo and Bergen and included visits to Norwegian entities (ports and companies), as well as matchmaking events in both cities.

Event “Business Cooperation and the European Green Deal” – Sofia/Bulgaria – 4–5 June 2024

The event aimed to contribute to achieving the goals of the European Green Deal by identifying the main challenges to business cooperation in green solutions, exploring the best strategies for collaboration on green business initiatives, and creating synergies between the EEA and Norway Grants and other European or national funding programmes.

In addition to its overarching objectives, the event featured thematic sessions focused on key topics within the Green Deal framework. These included the role of carbon capture and storage, the digitalisation of the sustainable blue economy, and the use of hydrogen for the decarbonisation of transport.

A matchmaking session was also held during the event, featuring scheduled meetings that facilitated bilateral encounters between entrepreneurs, companies, scale-up professionals, researchers, investors, and other stakeholders. This session served as a platform to build partnerships, explore business opportunities, and foster cooperation aligned with the principles and priorities of the European Green Deal.

Event “Oslo Innovation Week | 23–27 September”

This event brought together more than 80 initiatives driven by Norwegian and international incubators, investors, and the startup ecosystem, showcasing real solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals. Oslo Innovation Week connected the world with Nordic pioneers shaping the future through innovative ideas, collaborative ventures, and transformative technologies.

The event aimed to highlight a strong commitment to sustainability and value creation, presenting business solutions aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly through thematic sessions on green initiatives and the circular economy. The Programme Operator was accompanied by three project promoters: MP-RAS, RecycledReef, and a partner from the DiCiMa project.

Visit of the Norwegian delegation to Portugal | 18–21 March 2025

The timing and context of this visit were highly significant for bilateral relations between the two countries. In parallel with the offshore wind sector development, Portuguese authorities are preparing

major investments in port and shipyard modernisation, including maritime traffic management systems and single-window systems. These developments present major opportunities for bilateral cooperation with Norway.

The effort to promote Norwegian green solutions in cooperation with Portugal also supports alignment with Europe's green initiatives, the opportunities stemming from the EU Recovery and Resilience Plans, and Norway's green alliance with the EU. These actions also contribute to following up on the recommendations of the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, of which both Norway and Portugal are members.

The event gathered and strengthened connections between various stakeholders of the Blue Economy from both countries and was held across several regions of Portugal. The mission included a joint delegation of 35 Norwegian and Portuguese participants.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

In the context of bilateral relations under the Blue Growth Programme of the EEA Grants, several challenges and key lessons were identified—both to strengthen cooperation between Portugal and the Donor States (Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein), and to enhance the programme's future success.

Among the main challenges, the difficulty in building effective partnerships stands out. Despite the incentives for establishing bilateral partnerships, many promoters struggled to identify and engage partners from the Donor States with relevant experience or specific interest in the project. Additionally, cultural and institutional differences—particularly in working methods, timelines, and expectations between national and donor partners—created communication difficulties and strategic misalignments in several projects.

Another recurring obstacle was the lack of continuity in the established relationships. Some partnerships were formed solely to meet eligibility criteria and did not result in continued collaboration after project completion. Moreover, the complex administrative processes associated with formalising partnership agreements and jointly managing projects were identified as barriers that hindered smooth cooperation.

On the other hand, valuable lessons were also drawn from this experience. The importance of support during the matchmaking phase stands out: events and platforms for networking, organised from the beginning, were essential for the success of many partnerships, and strengthening this phase could significantly improve the quality and impact of cooperation. The strategic value of bilateral cooperation for innovation and internationalisation was also confirmed. Projects involving Donor State partners demonstrated greater potential for innovation and better access to international markets, proving that such partnerships are a valuable asset for the growth of the blue economy.

Another crucial aspect was ongoing support for communication between partners. Bilateral coordination teams and joint evaluation moments contributed to the success of projects with stronger alignment. Integrating partners from the project design stage resulted in greater impact and longer-lasting cooperation. Finally, bilateral relations helped to strengthen scientific and educational networks between Portugal and the Donor States, creating opportunities for academic and technical knowledge sharing with the potential to generate new joint projects in the future.

IRREGULARITIES

Case Id	Reporting level	Nature of irregularity	Case opened	Status	Estimated final input to the FMO for cases not closed	Decision	Amount of financial correction
IR 238	PT-INNOVATION-0001	Deviation from project contract	25/05/2023	Closed	-	Project grant amount reduced. Amount linked to irregularity paid back/deducted from payment.	€ 3,715.16

SUMMARY OF PROJECTS

		Number of projects contracted	Number of projects completed	Project grant contracted (EEA Grant + national co-financing)	Project grant incurred (EEA Grant + national co-financing)	Project Eligible Expenditure contracted (Includes project co-financing)	Project Eligible Expenditure incurred (Includes project co-financing)
Outcome 1: Increased competitiveness for Portuguese enterprises within the focus area of Blue Growth	Pre-defined	0	0	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00
	Contracted through open calls	42	39	€ 23,692,886.00	€ 19,405,875.00	€ 35,936,590.35	€ 27,970,119.87
	Contracted through small grants scheme	21	17	€ 2,266,325.52	€ 1,691,376.00	€ 2,013,344.73	€ 2,013,543.16
	Total Outcome 1	63	56	€ 25,959,211.52	€ 21,097,251.00	€ 37,949,935.08	€ 29,983,663.03
Outcome 2: Resource efficiency of enterprises in Marine Sector increased	Pre-defined	0	0	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00
	Contracted through open calls	5	5	€ 1,795,344.00	€ 1,598,858.00	€ 2,416,442.57	€ 2,638,088.73
	Contracted through small grants scheme	0	0	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00
	Total Outcome 2	5	5	€ 1,795,344.00	€ 1,598,858.00	€ 2,416,442.57	€ 2,638,088.73
Outcome 3: Enhanced performance of Portuguese research organizations	Pre-defined	2	2	€ 4,000,000.00	€ 3,785,143.98	€ 3,785,146.98	€ 3,785,143.98
	Contracted through open calls	6	6	€ 5,423,268.00	€ 5,002,946.00	€ 5,267,650.05	€ 5,281,733.25
	Contracted through small	0	0	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 0.00

	grants scheme						
	Total Outcome 3	8	8	€ 9,423,268.00	€ 8,788,089.98	€ 9,052,797.03	€ 9,066,877.23
Outcome 4: Education, training and cooperation in marine and maritime issues enhanced	Pre- defined	1	1	€ 2,000,000.00	€ 1,948,105.00	€ 1,948,104.88	€ 1,948,105.00
	Contracte d through open calls	12	12	€ 2,726,263.00	€ 2,331,434.00	€ 2,685,337.81	€ 2,715,706.49
	Contracte d through small grants scheme	29	27	€ 711,460.00	€ 610,277.00	€ 663,948.81	€ 663,614.01
	Total Outcome 4	42	40	€ 5,437,723.00	€ 4,889,816.00	€ 5,297,391.50	€ 5,327,425.50
Total programme costs (Excluding programme management costs)		118	109	€ 42,615,546.52	€ 36,374,014.98	€ 54,716,566.18	€ 47,016,054.49

FINAL BALANCE

Overview of programme expenditure

Programme area (PA)	Budget Heading	EEA Grants	Total grant	Programme eligible expenditure	EEA Grants contribution incurred	Total grant contribution incurred	Programme co-financing incurred	Total eligible expenditure incurred
PA01	Programme management	€ 2,065,000.00	€ 2,065,000.00	€ 2,429,411.76	€ 2,065,000.00	€ 2,065,000.00	€ 364,411.76	€ 2,429,411.76
PA01	Outcome 1: Increased competitiveness for Portuguese enterprises within the focus area of Blue Growth (EEA Grants)	€ 21,926,717.00	€ 21,926,717.00	€ 25,796,137.65	€ 17,932,663.35	€ 17,932,663.35	€ 3,164,587.65	€ 21,097,251.00
PA01	Outcome 2: Resource efficiency of enterprises in Marine Sector increased (EEA Grants)	€ 1,526,042.00	€ 1,526,042.00	€ 1,795,343.53	€ 1,359,029.30	€ 1,359,029.30	€ 239,828.70	€ 1,598,858.00
PA02	Outcome 3: Enhanced performance of Portuguese research organizations (EEA Grants)	€ 8,010,000.00	€ 8,010,000.00	€ 9,423,529.41	€ 7,469,876.48	€ 7,469,876.48	€ 1,318,213.50	€ 8,788,089.98
PA03	Outcome 4: Education, training and cooperation in marine and maritime issues enhanced (EEA Grants)	€ 4,622,241.00	€ 4,622,241.00	€ 5,437,930.59	€ 4,156,343.60	€ 4,156,343.60	€ 733,472.40	€ 4,889,816.00
	Total	€ 38,150,000.00	€ 38,150,000.00	€ 44,882,352.94	€ 32,982,912.73	€ 32,982,912.73	€ 5,820,514.01	€ 38,803,426.74

Description of budget spending

Programme management

The programme management cost budget, with a total allocation of €2,065,000.00, was mainly used to cover the costs associated with the oversight and coordination of the implementation of the EEA Grants programme. The total eligible expenditure incurred amounted to €2,429,411.76, reflecting a combination of management and administrative costs, as well as programme monitoring costs related to the implementation of various projects within the programme. The total contribution incurred for grants amounted to €2,064,993.52. The categories with the highest expenditures relate to human resource costs. This programme was characterised by a high turnover of staff, with periods of limited availability of full-time staff, and others with a greater number of dedicated personnel. Funds were also allocated to staff training and capacity building in various areas such as communication, project management, and legal matters. Regarding other categories, it is important to highlight expenditures on specialised services provided by external experts, who carried out the evaluation and monitoring of applications, as well as physical verifications of projects during closure. In parallel, mention should also be made of the services provided by consultancy firms, namely EY, which conducted the programme evaluation study, and the company responsible for reviewing and validating all payment requests submitted by project promoters. Throughout the entire programme cycle, significant work was carried out for the design and development of the

selected IT application (SIMFEE), used for tracking the full cycle of applications, implementation, and monitoring, which also generated considerable expenditure.

Outcome 1: Increased competitiveness for Portuguese enterprises within the focus area of Blue Growth (EEA Grants)

This outcome, with 63 approved projects, had the highest volume of funding and also the largest unused balance. The missing amount is mainly due to project savings, ineligible expenses identified in audits, and the partial or total non-execution of planned activities. Total allocated budget: €25,796,137.65 Financial execution (eligible): €21,097,251.00 Unused funds: €4,698,886.65 The unused funds in this Outcome were mainly the result of: Savings generated by the promoters themselves in various budget lines, namely human resources, equipment purchases, and subcontracting; Ineligible expenses identified during audits and checks carried out by the Programme Operator and other control entities; Partial or total non-execution of some planned activities, often affected by external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, logistical constraints, hiring difficulties, or delays in equipment acquisition; Voluntary financial adjustments by promoters to ensure project feasibility and the fulfilment of essential objectives within the set deadlines. Most of the funding for this Outcome was spent primarily on human resources and costs arising from other contracts, such as technical subcontracting, scientific services, and consultancy. This reflects the applied and technological nature of the projects, with a strong focus on human capital and innovation. No cases of fraud or serious mismanagement leading to the forced recovery of funds were reported under this Outcome.

Outcome 2: Resource efficiency of enterprises in Marine Sector increased (EEA Grants)

Despite the small number of projects (5 in total), execution was high (around 89%), though savings and exclusions of ineligible expenses were also recorded following verification by the Programme Operator. Total allocated budget: €1,795,343.53 Financial execution (eligible): €1,598,858.00 Unused funds: €196,485.53 The unexecuted funds in this Outcome resulted from: Adjustments following the exclusion of ineligible expenses, identified during verification by the Programme Operator; Savings made during project implementation, particularly in budget lines such as travel, subcontracting, and material acquisition; Despite these adjustments, execution was considered high and in line with the defined strategic objectives. The costs of the projects supported under this Outcome—mainly focused on technological solutions and circular economy applications—tended toward a balance between investment in human resources, technology acquisition, and specialised technical support, which were essential for the success of pilot projects with a strong environmental focus. In the case of Outcome 2, no financial corrections resulting from irregularities or external audits were formally recorded, but budgetary adjustments were made following: Exclusion of ineligible expenses identified by the Programme Operator; Reconfiguration of activities due to the withdrawal of an international partner (Iceland), which led to the partial return of allocated funds; Partial integration with the objectives of the Environment Programme, without duplication of funding but requiring cost alignment and rationalisation. These adjustments were handled preventively and did not result in legal actions or coercive fund recovery procedures.

Outcome 3: Enhanced performance of Portuguese research organizations (EEA Grants)

This outcome had a high execution rate (93%), but was also affected by adjustments due to irregularities and the return of unused funds, especially in projects with a higher degree of innovation and unpredictability. Total allocated budget: €9,423,529.41 Financial execution (eligible): €8,788,093.00 Unused funds:

€635,436.41 The unused funds under this Outcome resulted from: Adjustments made during verification, with the exclusion of ineligible expenses identified by the Programme Operator; Lower-than-expected financial execution by some partners, particularly in projects with greater technical or scientific complexity; The typical unpredictability of R&D projects, which led to the reformulation of activities and partial reprogramming—changes that could not always be accommodated within the mechanism’s deadlines and rules; Cancellation of planned activities, such as the Atlantic Summer School, due to the unavailability of the Mário Ruivo research vessel. Although the execution rate was very high (93%), the factors above explain the partial underutilisation of the initially allocated funds. The executed expenditure reflects the highly technical and specialised nature of the supported scientific projects, mainly distributed across human resource costs and equipment acquisition. This cost structure reflects the strong investment in scientific and technological capital, with returns in scientific output, applied innovation, and the strengthening of marine research capacity. The formally identified financial corrections in Outcome 3 refer to ineligible expenses under the Pre-Defined Project PDP2 (Atlantic Observatory), determined during verification by the Programme Operator. In addition, final adjustments are currently ongoing in three projects: PT-INNOVATION-0002, 0078, and 0081 — with notifications issued to the promoters and a 10-day deadline for voluntary correction. If unresolved, the cases will be referred to the competent authority for coercive fiscal recovery.

Outcome 4: Education, training and cooperation in marine and maritime issues enhanced (EEA Grants)

This outcome was characterised by a wide dispersion of support across small projects, as well as by early terminations or partial execution of some initiatives, in addition to the exclusion of ineligible expenses. Total allocated budget: €5,437,930.59 Financial execution (eligible): €4,886,100.84 Unused funds: €551,829.75 The unexecuted funds under this Outcome result from multiple factors, notably: Partial execution or early termination of several projects, especially those of smaller scale; Savings in budget lines such as travel, subcontracting, and consumables, often due to changes in activity plans; Projects with low execution rates, such as PT-INNOVATION-0070 (65.73%) and PT-INNOVATION-0079 (56.87%), due to delays in starting or adjustments to objectives; Unvalidated expenses due to non-compliance with accounting obligations, particularly in the case of project PT-INNOVATION-0030. The dispersion of support among a large number of small projects, many with limited technical capacity, also contributed to the overall under-execution. The profile of the projects supported under this Outcome reflects the diversity of educational, training, and awareness-raising activities implemented. Eligible expenditures mainly focused on human resources and equipment, reflecting the emphasis on people, territory, and the empowerment of different audiences around marine issues. The formally identified financial corrections under Outcome 4 resulted from adjustments to the following projects: PT-INNOVATION-0034, 0049, 0050, and 0032, within the framework of final payments under SGS#3 – Ocean Literacy. In the case of PT-INNOVATION-0050, a correction of €16,500.00 was recorded upon project closure. Additionally, in PT-INNOVATION-0030, expenses submitted in the second payment request were not validated due to non-compliance with financial reporting obligations. These corrections were handled administratively, and to date, there is no indication of legal proceedings or coercive fund recovery processes.

Calculation of the final balance

	EEA Grants
Total reported eligible expenditure of the programme	
Total eligible expenditure incurred	€ 38,803,426.74

(-) Total (national) programme co-financing incurred (15.00 % rate)	€ 5,820,514.01
(=) Total grant contribution incurred (85.00 % grant rate)	€ 32,982,912.73
Amounts to be deducted from the total grant contribution¹	
(-) Total advance and interim payments to the programme from the Donors	€ 36,390,350.31
(-) Any co-financing from sources other than the Donors/national ²	€ 0.00
(-) Total interest earned reported	€ 0.00
Final balance	
(=) Final balance payable to the Programme Operator	€ 0.00
(=) Final balance payable to the Donors	€ 3,407,437.58

¹ Any funds reimbursed from Project Promoters to the Programme Operator, not paid to other projects or reimbursed to the FMO (ref. Article 9.4.1(b)(iv) of the Regulation) should be reported as negative adjustments in the Financial report for the last reporting period (Annex 1). In this case, such funds will be subtracted from the "Total eligible expenditure incurred" of the programme.

² For example, financing from EU structural funds or other EU sources, from the Swiss contribution, etc. This row includes only the financing incurred during the programme eligibility period.

ANNEXES

*The Annexes are intended **for internal use only** and will not be published.*