

FINAL REPORT OF THE PROGRAMME
BLUE GROWTH
EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA FINANCIAL MECHANISM 2014–2021
(EEA FM 2014–2021)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Programme Context and Objectives

The Blue Growth Programme, funded by the EEA Grants under the EEA FM 2014–2021, was managed by the Directorate-General for Maritime Policy, which acted as Programme Operator (PO). With an allocation of more than €38 million, it invested in projects that strengthened business innovation, scientific research, environmental sustainability, and ocean literacy in Portugal.

Created to address various challenges of the blue economy in Portugal, especially in sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, coastal tourism, and ocean renewable energy, the programme aimed to:

- Strengthen the competitiveness and innovation of SMEs in the maritime sector;
- Promote the reuse of marine waste and the circular economy;
- Enhance scientific research on marine ecosystems;
- Improve education and ocean literacy;
- Foster bilateral cooperation with donor countries (Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein).

Overall Results

Through an integrated approach based on innovation, capacity building, and ocean protection, the programme proved to be an effective instrument for sustainable development and long-term international cooperation, directly aligned with the core objectives of the EEA Grants.

It directly contributed to **reducing economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area** by supporting more than 100 innovative SME led projects, contributing to the creation of skilled jobs and the stimulation of local economies, boosting business competitiveness through the introduction of new sustainable products, services, and technologies, and promoting environmentally responsible practices.

It also strengthened bilateral relations between Portugal and the donor countries by developing innovative partnerships, fostering collaboration between universities, research centres, companies, and public entities from Portugal, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, encouraging knowledge and best-practice exchange, creating long-term cooperation networks and international mobility for researchers, students, and professionals, and expanding internationalisation opportunities for Portuguese entities.

The final financial execution reached 86% of the total allocation (EEA Grants + national contribution), demonstrating efficient use of the available funds and contributing to the achievement of the Programme's strategic objectives.

Achieved Results

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

- Funding: €21.1 million
- Number of projects: 63
- Objective: to increase the competitiveness of Portuguese companies in the blue economy sector.
- Results: 160 jobs created, 51 new products/technologies, 35 new products marketed, 34 innovative technologies/processes, 26 intellectual property rights applications, 35 new products/technologies on the market.
- Project examples: PhytoNUTRE, InFishMix, Ampliaqua.
- Lessons learned: importance of strong international partnerships, flexibility in implementation to accommodate unforeseen events, and the need to provide technical and administrative support to promoters.

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

- Funding: €1.6 million
- Number of projects: 5
- Objective: to increase resource efficiency in maritime sector companies, promoting circular economy-based solutions.
- Results: collection of 56 tonnes of marine litter for reuse, 6 companies implemented material efficiency solutions.
- Project examples: Azores EcoBlue, SeaRubbish2Cap, Green fish oil from blue industry.
- Lessons learned: articulation with the Environment Programme when launching calls, need to reduce delays in project assessment, and to provide more support to promoters with little experience in administrative procedures.

Enhanced performance of Portuguese research organizations (Outcome 3)

- Funding: €8.79 million
- Number of projects: 6
- Objective: to improve the performance of Portuguese research organisations in the Blue Growth field.
- Results: 30 scientific articles published, 16 institutions benefited, 9 new products/technologies developed.
- Project examples: YUM ALGAE, BREEDFLAT, Blue Forests.
- Lessons learned: need for flexibility in defining indicators and budgets, greater streamlining of reprogramming mechanisms, particularly in dynamic R&D projects.

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

- Funding: €4.89 million
- No. of projects: 42
- Objective: to develop skills in the marine sector.
- Results: 2.451 participants in training, 48.943 people reached through ocean awareness initiatives, more than 250 students benefited from mobility initiatives, and 437 intellectual outputs generated.
- Project examples: BridgingAll, EDUCOAST, AE Vago.
- Lessons learned: consolidation of larger-scale projects, simplification of administrative processes in smaller projects, and reduction of funding dispersion.

Bilateral Cooperation

The PO 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 research and education. The main results achieved were:

- 67 projects involved donor country partners.
- 58% of the planned partnerships will continue after the programme.
- Events and missions facilitated technological, scientific, and educational exchange with Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein.
- Lessons learned: importance of matchmaking and support to promoters throughout the process, integration of partners from the outset, and continuous support for communication between partners.

Sustainability and Future Impact

The programme laid solid foundations in four strategic areas: business, science, education, and international cooperation. The projects fostered innovation, circular economy, ocean literacy, and scientific capacity, reinforcing the competitiveness of Portugal's blue economy and consolidating long-term international partnerships.

Recommendations

- Greater administrative and budgetary flexibility;
- Focus on larger-scale, higher-impact projects;
- Strengthening support to SMEs and startups;
- Alignment and coordination with complementary programmes;
- Better definition and monitoring of indicators, including qualitative tools.