

Seventh Annual Meeting
Financial Mechanism 2014-2021
EEA GRANTS PORTUGAL
Coimbra, October 24th 2024

Adopted by 11th November 2024

According to Article 2.7 of the Regulation on the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) 2014-2021, the seventh Annual Meeting between the **Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC)** and the **National Focal Point (NFP)** was held in Coimbra, on October 24th 2024.

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

Ms. **Torill Johansen**, Deputy Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, co-chaired the meeting on behalf of the **FMC**.

The meeting was also attended by the Secretary of State for Planning and Regional Development, Mr. **Hélder Reis**, the Ambassador of Portugal to Norway and Iceland, Mr. **Pedro Pessoa e Costa**, the Ambassador of Norway to Portugal, Ms. **Hanne Brusletto**, the Deputy Head of Mission at Embassy of Iceland in Paris, Ms. **Una Jóhansdóttir**, the Head of Country and Bilateral Unit of the **Financial Mechanism Office (FMO)**, Ms. **Katrine Steinfeld**, as well as other representatives from FMO, the Norwegian and Portuguese Ministries for Foreign Affairs, the Audit Authority, the Programme Operators (PO) and the Active Citizens Fund (ACF).

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

Opening statements

Maria Mineiro welcomed all the participants, and thanked Bissaya Barreto Foundation for hosting the annual meeting at their premises before passing the word for the opening statements.

The **Secretary of State for Planning and Regional Development** welcomed the participants in the 7th Annual Meeting, and highlighted how 2024 marks a very important year for EEA Grants and Portugal, celebrating the 30-year anniversary of cooperation and also marking the closure of the current financial mechanism and the beginning of negotiations for the next one. It was mentioned how Portugal has benefited from 5 Financial Mechanisms and the importance of the current one, stressing its role in fostering bilateral relations between programme operators and donor countries, and the overall ability to achieve impressive results even after the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Lastly, a word was given regarding the expectations for the new financial mechanism, its negotiations and the definition of priorities for the new cycle.

Torill Johansen, on behalf of the Donors, thanked the NFP for hosting the Annual Meeting and for the organization of all the activities and on-site visits in Coimbra, and also took the chance to congratulate the NFP on the organization of the 30-year anniversary event, as it gave an overview of what has been achieved over all the funding periods. The focus on bilateral relations and the fruitful cooperation were also noted.

Hanne Brusletto, thanked the Bissaya Barreto Foundation for hosting the meeting and also highlighted the 30-year anniversary event as an extraordinary opportunity to learn about the impact of EEA Grants over the last decades, mentioning how the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Maria Varteressian, was impressed and touched by the projects presented. The opportunity for this Annual Meeting as an important chance to receive an updated status of grants and progress of the current mechanism was also recognized. Finally, reference was made to the new financial mechanism and the steps taken to start its negotiation.

Una Jóhansdóttir conveyed her happiness in joining the EEA Grants work in general and in this meeting in particular, and also congratulated the organization of the 30-year anniversary event. Lastly, there was a positive note on the negotiations for the new financial mechanism and EEA Grants next steps.

Strategic Report 2023/2024 – Presentations and Discussions

On the topics of the Agenda of the Annual Meeting **Maria Mineiro** started by highlighting the main milestones over the reporting: the 5 Programmes selected a total of 410 projects, including 14 pre-defined projects and a total of 62% of these projects involve collaboration with entities from the donor countries (excluding ACF data), which represents the commitment of all parties to strengthen Bilateral Relations; the current financial execution is

79% and it is expected an acceleration till the end of 2024; there are currently 166 concluding and 240 closed projects, which amounts to 60% of completion; the close monitoring of the indicators for the outcomes and the outputs allows for the proper accounting of their accomplishment now that the period of execution has already ended.

In what concerns to the main activities till April 2025, **Maria Mineiro** highlighted NFP team's responsibility to close the current financial mechanism, and reported how NFP continued its strategic approach in coordination with the PO to closely monitor results, tracking the progress of each Programme, in particular in the Culture Programme, with the continuation of weekly reports to address specific risks. The priority given to the Fund for Bilateral Relations (FBR) was also referred, as work is being done to close ongoing initiatives while supporting the finalization of bilateral activities under the programmes. NFP assured its commitment to keep on providing close feedback to the Joint committee for the Bilateral Fund in Portugal (JCBF) and mentioned how it was expected to still have some Pre-Defined Projects presented.

Regarding communication, a particular effort will be done on dissemination of project results and deliverables.

a) Status of the Programmes and ACF

At this stage **Maria Mineiro** gave the floor to the representatives of each PO and the ACF Manager to present a brief status on the progress of the Programmes. All Programmes reported the main milestones achieved.

Regarding the **Environment Programme** the team reported a current financial execution of **87%**.

The **Environment Programme** highlighted its overall results for the different outcomes, explained the synergies and bilateral activities resulting from its work, illustrated the good results achieved with examples of projects that impacted public policy at local and national level, and applied innovation, and finished referring to lessons learnt resulting from two surveys made to promoters and partners in the programme. The organisational restructuring in the Programme Operator was also mentioned. Accordingly, an autonomous entity will be established on 1 January 2025 which will be in charge of closing the programme.

Regarding the **Culture Programme**, the team reported a current overall financial execution of **77% with 98% technical execution**.

The **Culture Programme** mentioned the recent changes in the Programme Operator organization and reported its main results regarding its two outcomes, and how some of the outcome targets had been surpassed and shared both outcomes best examples. Finally, mention was given to the importance of continuity and the communities' expectation in the future financial mechanism.

The **Blue Growth Programme** reported a current financial execution of **71%**.

The **Blue Growth Programme** explained the programme main objective on increased value creation and sustainable growth, and the current global status of the programme and its projects, also informing on the different outcomes' financial execution, current and expected. The PO also provided information on its communication activities, its pre-defined projects and projects' successful examples.

Then, the **Work-life Balance and Gender Equality Programme** reported a current financial execution of **91%**.

The **Work-life Balance and Gender Equality Programme** presented its 3 programme areas and budget, explaining how it was aligned with the national plans, as well as its implementation results on 6 pre-defined projects, 4 open-calls, 3 small-grant schemes, and bilateral activities, and explained the programme outcomes, highlighting the Programme's good examples.

Regarding the **Active Citizens Fund**, a current financial execution of **93%** was reported.

The ACF stated the numbers of beneficiaries, the volunteers involved, as well as youngsters mobilized in Human Right activities and laws and policies influenced by the Programme's work. There was also mention of the study on the Programme's results and impact evaluation, which will be publicly presented at the programme's closing event.

Torill Johansen thanked all the presentations and noted how, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, good results have been achieved, and stressed the importance of on sharing the results and positive impact of the projects with the public both in Portugal and in the Donor States. Then, the number of goals reached in Blue Growth's Pre-Defined Project (PDP) 2 Atlantic Observatory was questioned and the PO explained that a physical evaluation is still taking place, to verify the numbers reported, so the information conveyed is still to be updated.

The Culture programme was also asked to clarify whether all the projects were finalized, to which the PO explained the progress on 2 indicators (out of 16) that were not fulfilled until the present moment, and the efforts being made on completing them. While the assessment of the projects were continuing, signals indicated that the pre-defined project (Water World) and one of the infrastructure projects under outcome 1 (Porto Brandao) would likely be only partially completed by the closure of this financial mechanism.

Pedro Pessoa e Costa emphasized the importance of the bilateral relations between Portugal, Norway and Iceland and the activities and partnerships that have been developed

in recent times, highlighting both the quality of the relations and the projects and mentioning the paramount importance of the EEA Grants to allow such important projects in such pivotal areas to be carried out.

Maria Mineiro thanked for the clear presentations and presented the challenges affecting projects implementation, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine, with prices increase and material costs having had negative effects on projects and Programmes, especially those involving significant infrastructure component, and the support given by NFP to the PO's.

It was shared information regarding the remaining budgets of the different Programmes and the NFP explained that the FBR high remaining budget was due to a transfer of remaining budgets from other programmes that took place due to the Memorandum of Understanding modification (submitted in May 2023 and in force from July 2024). Despite all the efforts made by the NFP to promote additional PDP initiatives and the bilateral activities carried out by the POs, it is expected that this remaining budget will remain relatively high.

b) Status of the Fund for Bilateral Relations

On the use of the FBR **Maria Mineiro** highlighted the progress made on its execution, and noted how project implementation continued, with NFP actively managing and monitoring initiatives, focusing on finalizing their assessments, and consulting JCBF whenever challenges arose or significant changes were needed, to ensure the projects successful completion.

A brief updated status on calls, pre-defined initiatives and allocations to Programmes was provided, which present **51%** of financial execution. Given that FBR will remain active until April 2025, with the final report assessments for Calls 1 and 2, along with the PDPs, execution is expected to increase by the end of current year.

It was mentioned that in the next 12 months, the NFP focus will remain on managing and monitoring the implementation of the FBR initiatives and the pre-defined contracted initiatives while exploring the last new PDPs which are expected to be presented to JCBF during the next few weeks.

Torill Johansen complimented the strong bilateral achievements at both national and programme levels, and stressed that any new initiatives until the final date of implementation of the FBR would need to be carefully assessed for their feasibility, noting that all initiatives contracted must be fulfilled by the end of April 2025.

c) Management and implementation Issues

Maria Mineiro reported the several updates introduced to the Management and Control Systems during the reporting period, and also took the chance to inform about the significant changes to NFP staff, explaining the challenges arising from the lack of sufficient human resources on the Portuguese Public Administration, namely the experienced high staff turnover and frequent changes not only within the NFP but also in the Programme Operators' teams. Consequently, valuable time is lost finding new staff with the right skill sets and then training them.

Torill Johansen expressed her satisfaction with the cooperation between entities and FMO and noted how FMO expects more irregularities to arise as projects are closing, which need to be analysed carefully.

d) Monitoring and evaluation

On what concerns monitoring, **Maria Mineiro** conveyed how NFP has continued to provide support to all PO throughout the different stages of implementation, with 2 rounds of meetings with each of the PO teams which provided important inputs to conclude the Risk Assessment at Programme level. For the Culture PO, weekly and monthly meetings were held for closer monitoring.

Additionally, there were also held regular status update meetings with the FMO and the Monitoring Committee, not mandated in the EEA Regulation, has been conveyed by NFP twice in 2023 with a new meeting planned for December 2024.

Maria Mineiro also informed about the training sessions organized by NFP, with the participation of both NFP and PO teams.

The FMO, through **Mualla Cirakli** and **Silje Laerk**, complimented the NFP for its continuing attention to in-house training of Programme Operators and project promoters, and mentioned the plans for an online training session on Grace and reminded the importance of updating the statistics on the platform and checking the FAQ on closing projects.

In what concerns evaluation, **Maria Mineiro** mentioned the training sessions and ongoing collaboration between the NFP and PO throughout the evaluation process and informed on how ex-post evaluations are being carried out for all Programmes. Each PO is responsible for covering the costs of these evaluations, and the NFP guarantees a close monitoring of the process. All evaluations are expected to be complete by January/February 2025.

Although evaluation is not mandatory on FBR, it will also be carried out. Currently, the process is still in the contracting phase as the Fund is still within its eligibility period.

e) Communication

Maria Mineiro talked about the several communication activities carried out, which intend to disseminate information regarding the results achieved by the Programmes and projects to diverse target audiences, thus fulfilling the goal of actively promoting the awareness of the EEA Grants in Portugal by engaging in a number of activities, namely on the 30 years anniversary conference and the 8 films commissioned (one per Programme/Fund, 1 film of all Programmes/Funds of the current EEA Grants FM 2014-2021 and 1 film on the previous EEA Financial Mechanism). For this, there was a close cooperation between the NFP, the Norwegian Embassy in Portugal and the FMO.

The result of the awareness study conducted by the NFP was also shared, noting how 24% of respondents now know about EEA Grants, compared to only 4% in 2018. The number of website and social media numbers were also shared, as well as the main communication activities by August 2025.

Torill Johansen stressed the importance of the communication work developed by NFP, PO and the Norwegian Embassy in Portugal as the awareness of EEA Grants is increasing thanks to their work, and emphasized its relevance for the immediate future as there will possibly be a gap between programmes during which showing the good results of projects is particularly advantageous. There was also a congratulation note as in Norway the protocol on the future Financial Mechanism had just been recently ratified.

Pedro Pessoa e Costa seconded the previous intervention, highlighting the main role of communication in promoting the EEA Grants and its important and relevant work.

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

Any Other Business

After the coffee-break, **Maria Mineiro** expressed NFP expectations of a fruitful period of negotiations, and briefly explained the work of internal reflection about the strategic priorities in each area, which suggested to maintain the current focus on areas of the Ocean, Environment, Culture, and Gender Equality, with possible new areas on Justice and Digitalization, and referred to the importance of reducing the administrative burden.



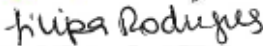





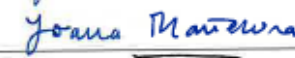


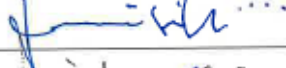


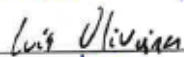


Summing-up and conclusions

Torill Johansen reinforced her gratitude to the NFP for hosting the Annual Meeting, **confirmed the formal approval of the Strategic Report 2023/2024** and thanked all for their dedication to the projects.



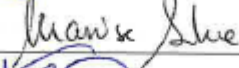






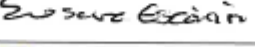



The meeting was closed by 16:30.

List of Participants

7th Annual Meeting | Center Portugal
EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021
24th & 25th October 2024

Representative	Entity	Signature
Amélia Pardal	Cultural Heritage, Focal Point EEA Grants	
Ana Catarina Sousa	Cultural Heritage, Deputy Diretor General	
Filipa Rodrigues	NFP, Financial Adviser	
Francisca Mota	Advisor to the Secretary of State for Planning (Personal Assistant)	
Geir Atle Bringedal	Desk Officer for Portugal in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
Hanne Brusletto	Ambassador of Norway in Portugal	
Hélder Reis	Secretary of State for Planning and Regional Development	
Inês Braga	NFP, Programme and Bilateral Officer	
Ingerd Haugen	Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
Joana Branco	DgArtes, Focal Point EEA Grants	
Joana Marteleira	CIG, Head of EEA Grants Team	
João Custódio	NFP, Coordination Advisor	
João Telha	EEA Grants and Economic Relations, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon	
Jorge Silva	DgArtes, Focal Point EEA Grants	
José Anadía	Environment, Focal Point EEA Grants	
Katrine Steinfeld	Head of Country and Bilateral Unit	
Luís Manuel Oliveira	IGF, Auditor/Inspector	
Luisa Fragoço de Almeida	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PT)	
Sofia TAVARES	Património Cultural	

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Representative	Entity	Signature
María Lúcia Santos	Bissaya Barreto Foundation, Managing Director	
Maria Mineiro	Head of NFP	
Marisa Lameiras da Silva	DGPM, Director General	
Mualla Cirakli	FMO, Country Officer	
Pedro Calado	Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Director	
Pedro Isidoro da Silva	Cultural Heritage, Focal Point EEA Grants	
Pedro Nuno Barbosa	DGArtes, Deputy Director General	
Pedro Pessoa e Costa	Ambassador of Portugal in Norway and Iceland	
Rute Assis	DGPM	
Sandra Cruz	DGPM, Deputy Director General	
Sandra Ribeiro	CIG, President	
Silje Laerk	Grace team, Senior Information Technology Office	
Sofia Nunes	Bissaya Barreto Foundation	
Susana Escária	SGA, Director of Foresight and Planning Services	
Teresa Curto da Silva	IGF, Audit Director	
Torill Johansen	Deputy Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
Ulrika Botelho	NFP, Communication Officer	
Una Jóhannsdóttir	Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Delegation of Iceland to the OECD	