

EEA GRANTS

Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area

LESSONS LEARNED

SURVEY

**Analysis of the Results of the Survey Conducted with Organizations
Funded by the Environment Programme**

INDEX

1. Framework.....	3
2. Analysis of the results obtained	5
2.1. Methodology	5
2.2 Analysis by Themes.....	6
2.2.1. Theme 1 – The Project.....	6
2.2.2. Theme 2 - EEAGrants Funding Mechanism	6
2.2.3. Theme 3 - Management and procedures of the Programme operator	7
2.3. Analysis of the results between themes	8
2.4. Analysis of EEA GRANTS Environment Programme Communication results.....	9
Annex 1 – Questionnaire	12
Annex 2 – Observations – compilation of the obtained responses	22

1. FRAMEWORK

This report presents the analysis of the results obtained from the survey "Lessons Learned from the EEA Grants Funding Mechanism 2014 – 2021," conducted by the EEA Grants team. It was applied to a group of Promoters and Partners of the projects funded by the Environment Programme of the EEA Grants, with a total of 50 (fifty) responses. The survey was conducted from June 21 to July 31, 2024, with 324 emails sent and 50 responses received, resulting in a response rate of 15.4%.

The main objective of the analysis was to assess the satisfaction level of respondents regarding the EEA Grants Funding Mechanism during the 2014–2021 period, to identify opportunities for future improvements.

The results presented follow the structure of the survey, which is divided into two parts – A and B, and aims to gather the opinions of respondents on the following topics:

Part A

- Theme 1 – The Project
- Theme 2 – EEA Grants Funding Mechanism
- Theme 3 – Management and Procedures of the Programme Operator

Part B

- Theme 4 – Communication of the Environment Programme

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

The responses were ordered to identify those with the highest and lowest number of positive answers within each theme, as well as across the different themes, in order to conclude which themes were considered by respondents as having the highest and lowest satisfaction levels.

The survey also aimed to assess the adequacy of the communication of the Environment Programme (Part B – Theme 4), which will follow an independent analysis, as it involves a different type of information. The responses will also be ranked to determine the aspects that were considered most and least adequate. The methodology used to determine the results is detailed in Chapter 2.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OBTAINED

2.1. METHODOLOGY

The survey (Annex 1) that forms the basis for the collection of information for this analysis is divided into two parts – A and B.

Part A aims to identify what went well and what went less well regarding the EEA Grants Funding Mechanism 2014 – 2021. It consists of a set of 15 questions (Q) with simple responses distributed across 3 themes:

- Theme 1 – The Project (Q1 to Q6)
- Theme 2 – EEA Grants Funding Mechanism (Q7 and Q8)
- Theme 3 – Management and Procedures of the Programme Operator (Q9 to Q15)

For these 15 questions, the analysis involved arranging them in ascending order of the percentage of negative responses ("No"), with those showing the highest value representing the greatest concerns, thus constituting opportunities for improvement for future Funding Mechanisms.

This methodology was applied using two distinct approaches – by theme and across themes.

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

Regarding Part B, the following results will be determined:

- Most Adequate Topic – the topic with the highest number of responses with a score of 5.
- Two Topics with Highest Adequacy – the two topics with the highest adequacy will correspond to those with the greatest sum of responses with scores of 4 and 5. In case of a tie, the tie-breaker will be the number of responses with a score of 5.
- Least Adequate Topic – considered the topic with the least adequate communication, it will correspond to the one with the highest sum of responses rated 1 and 2. In case of a tie, the tie-breaker will be the number of responses with a score of 1.

Lastly, there is a section for observations, and the results are presented in the annex (Annex 2).

2.2 ANALYSIS BY THEME

2.2.1. THEME 1 – THE PROJECT

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

Tema	Questão		Sim	Não
1	1	Did it help address previously identified needs?	100%	0%
1	2	Did it promote partnerships with potential for use in other areas?	100%	0%
1	4	Did it allow the promoter/partners to acquire knowledge and skills?	100%	0%
1	6	Did the project have an impact at the local/sectoral level?	98%	2%
1	5	Did the consortium manage to ensure post-financing sustainability?	76%	24%
1	3	Did it enhance knowledge sharing with the partner(s) from the Donor Country(ies) (Norway/Iceland)?	72%	28%

From the analysis of the results obtained, it can be concluded that 50% of the questions show a satisfaction rate of 100%, and the questions representing the highest dissatisfaction are related to the respondents not considering that the Project enhanced knowledge sharing with the Donor Countries' partners (Q3 – 28% negative responses) and the consortium's ability to ensure post-project sustainability (24% negative responses).

2.2.2. THEME 2 – EEA GRANTS FUNDING MECHANISM

Regarding the evaluation of what went well and/or less well with the EEA Grants Funding Mechanism, respondents were invited to answer only two questions, with the following results:

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

The analysis of the results shows that more than 90% of the respondents answered positively to both questions, revealing high optimism regarding the added value and recognition of the Funding Mechanism among the population and target audience.

2.2.3 THEME 3 – MANAGEMENT AND PROCEDURES OF THE PROGRAMME OPERATOR

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

Tema	Questão		Sim	Não
3	11	Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator sufficient?	94%	6%
3	14	Do you think the clarification meetings were useful?	92%	8%
3	12	Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator adequate?	90%	10%
3	13	Were the requested clarifications provided in a timely manner by the Programme Operator?	90%	10%
3	15	Do you think the training actions were useful?	88%	12%
3	9	Were the guidelines adequate for submitting payment requests and managing project finances?	84%	16%
3	10	Was there excessive bureaucracy in submitting documentation and expense proof?	68%	32%

From the analysis of the results, it can be concluded that the bureaucracy in submitting documentation and expense proofs (Q10) stands out, with 68% of respondents considering it excessive. Therefore, this aspect could be analyzed and seen as an opportunity for improvement when defining future Funding Mechanisms.

In contrast, the other questions in this theme show positive response rates of 84% or higher, indicating high levels of satisfaction with the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator, both in terms of content and response times.

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2.3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS BETWEEN THEMES

The table below presents the satisfaction levels of the respondents regarding all the themes under analysis:

Tema	Questão		Sim	Não
1	1	Did it help address previously identified needs?	100%	0%
1	2	Did it promote partnerships with potential for use in other areas?	100%	0%
1	4	Did it allow the promoter/partners to acquire knowledge and skills?	100%	0%
1	6	Did the project have an impact at the local/sectoral level?	98%	2%
2	8	Does it add value and not duplicate its impact with other similar programs in the same sector/area of the Environment Programme?	94%	6%
3	11	Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator sufficient?	94%	6%
2	7	Has it gained greater recognition among the population and the target audience?	92%	8%
3	14	Do you think the clarification meetings were useful?	92%	8%
3	12	Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator adequate?	90%	10%
3	13	Were the requested clarifications provided in a timely manner by the Programme Operator?	90%	10%
3	15	Do you think the training actions were useful?	88%	12%
3	9	Were the guidelines adequate for submitting payment requests and managing project finances?	84%	16%
1	5	Did the consortium manage to ensure post-financing sustainability?	76%	24%
1	3	Did it enhance knowledge sharing with the partner(s) from the Donor Country(ies) (Norway/Iceland)?	72%	28%
3	10	Was there excessive bureaucracy in submitting documentation and expense proof?	68%	32%

From the analysis of the results presented, it can be concluded that 67% of the questions have a positive response rate of 90% or higher, and 20% of those questions have a 100% positive response rate. This reveals that most respondents are satisfied and optimistic regarding the EEA Grants Funding Mechanism 2014 – 2021.

The questions that show the highest percentage of negative responses, and thus represent the aspects requiring greater attention in defining future Funding Mechanisms, are related to the bureaucracy in managing Procedures (Q10 – 68% of respondents consider the bureaucracy excessive) and the fact that respondents do not believe the Project enhanced knowledge sharing with the Donor Countries' partners (Q3 – 28% negative responses) or the consortium's ability to ensure post-project sustainability (24% negative responses).

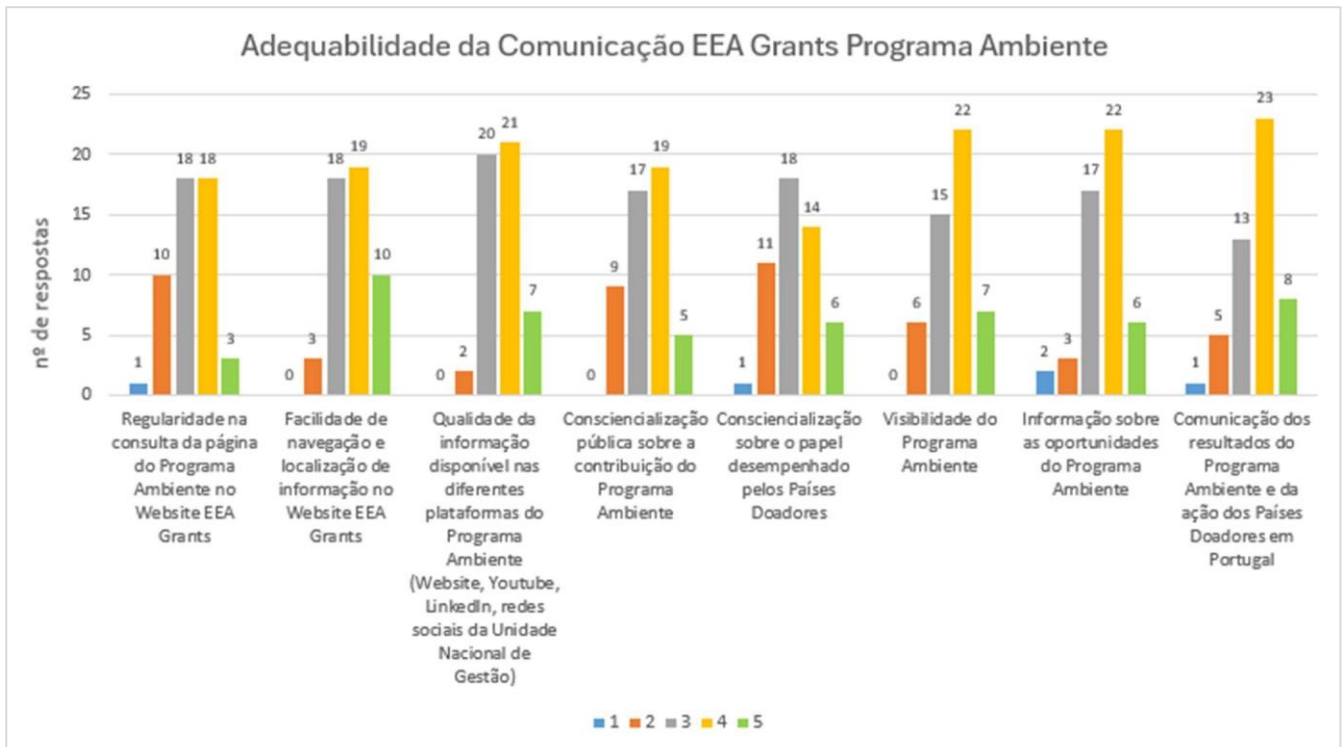
2.4. ANALYSIS OF EEA GRANTS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME COMMUNICATION RESULTS

Within the framework of the survey, a question was asked to assess the adequacy of EEA Grants communication for the Environment Programme.

The areas analyzed were as follows:

1. Regularity of visiting the Environment Programme page on the EEA Grants website
2. Ease of navigation and locating information on the EEA Grants website
3. Quality of information available across the Environment Programme's platforms (Website, YouTube, LinkedIn, social media of the National Management Unit)
4. Public awareness of the contribution of the Environment Programme
5. Awareness of the role played by the Donor Countries
6. Visibility of the Environment Programme
7. Information on opportunities within the Environment Programme
8. Communication of the results of the Environment Programme and the actions of the Donor Countries in Portugal

The following figure represents the results obtained:



From the analysis of the responses, it is clear that the area with the highest number of maximum score responses is the "Ease of navigation and location of information on the EEA Grants website" (20%). This area remains in the top 3 of adequacy when analyzing the data based on the sum of scores 4 and 5, with a total of 58% of responses, only surpassed by the "Communication of the results of the Environment Programme and the Actions of the Donor Countries" (62%), and tied with the "Visibility of the Environment Programme" (58%).

The "Information on opportunities within the Programme" was the area with the highest number of responses scoring 1 (4%). However, when analyzing the sum of responses with scores 1 and 2, the "Awareness of the role played by the Donor Countries" becomes the least adequate (24%).

In summary:

ADEQUACY OF EEA GRANTS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM COMMUNICATION		
+	Communication of the results of the Environment Programme and the actions of the Donor Countries in Portugal	62%
+	Ease of navigation and location of information on the EEA Grants Website	58%
+	Visibility of the Environment Programme	58%
-	Awareness of the role played by the Donor Countries	24%

2. Considera que o Mecanismo de Financiamento EEAGrants (Das seguintes opções seleccione "Sim" ou "Não"):

2. Do you consider that the EEAGrants Financing Facility (Select "Yes" or "No" from the following options):

ANNEX 1 – QUESTIONNAIRE

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE EEA GRANTS FUNDING MECHANISM 2014 – 2021

Questionário às entidades envolvidas nos projetos financiados

Questionnaire to organizations involved in the projects funded

* Obrigatória

A. Lições Aprendidas / Lessons learned

O que correu bem? O que correu menos bem? (Das seguintes opções seleccione "Sim" ou "Não"):

What went well? What went less well? (Select "Yes" or "No" from the following options):

1. Contribuiu para suprimir necessidades previamente identificadas? / Did it help to fulfil previously identified needs? *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

2. Promoveu parcerias com potencial para serem usadas em outros âmbitos? / Did it help to fulfil previously identified needs? *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

3. Reforçou a partilha de conhecimento com o Parceiro(s) do(s) País(es) Doador(es) (Noruega / Islândia) / Strengthened knowledge sharing with Donor Country(ies) Partner(s) (Norway / Iceland) *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

4. Permitiu ao promotor/parceiros adquirirem conhecimentos e competências? / Has it enabled partners to acquire knowledge and skills? *

2. Considera que o Mecanismo de Financiamento EEAGrants (Das seguintes opções seleccione "Sim" ou "Não"):

2. Do you consider that the EEAGrants Financing Facility (Select "Yes" or "No" from the following options):

Sim / Yes

Não / No

5. O Consórcio conseguiu assegurar a sustentabilidade pós-financiamento? / O Consórcio conseguiu assegurar a sustentabilidade pós-financiamento? *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

6. O projeto teve impacto a nível local/setorial? / Did the project have an impact at a local/sectoral level? *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

7. Ganhou maior reconhecimento junto da população e do público-alvo? / Have you gained greater recognition among the public and the target audience? *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

8. Acrescenta valor e não duplica o seu impacto com outros programas similares no mesmo setor/área do Programa Ambiente? / Does it add value and not duplicate its impact with other similar programmes in the same sector/area as the Environment Programme? *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

3. Relativamente à Gestão e procedimentos do Operador de Programa (Das seguintes opções seleccione "Sim" ou "Não"):

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

9. As orientações foram adequadas para a apresentação de pedidos de pagamento e gestão financeira dos projetos? / *Were the guidelines adequate for submitting payment requests and managing project finances?* *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

10. Houve uma elevada burocracia na apresentação de documentação e comprovativos de despesa? / *Was there a high level of bureaucracy when it came to submitting documentation and proof of expenditure?* *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

11. Os esclarecimentos prestados pelo Operador do Programa foram suficientes? / *Were the clarifications provided by the Programme Operator sufficient?* *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

12. Os esclarecimentos prestados pelo Operador do Programa foram adequados? / *Were the explanations provided by the Programme Operator adequate?* *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

13. Os esclarecimentos solicitados foram prestados em tempo útil pelo Operador do Programa? / *Were the clarifications requested provided in good time by the Programme Operator?* *

Sim / Yes

Não / No

14. Considera que as reuniões de esclarecimentos foram úteis? / *Do you think the clarification meetings were useful? **

Sim / Yes

Não / No

15. Considera que as ações de formação realizadas foram úteis? / *Do you think that the training sessions you attended were useful? **

Sim / Yes

Não / No

Comunicação do Programa Ambiente

Environment Programme Communication

16. Relativamente à Comunicação EEA Grants Programa Ambiente seleccione as opções abaixo indicadas: (Avalie de 1 a 5, sendo 1 o menos adequado e 5 o mais adequado)

Regarding the EEA Grants Environment Programme Communication, please select the options below: (Rate from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least adequate and 5 the most adequate) *

	1	2	3	4	5
Regularidade na consulta da página do Programa Ambiente no Website EEA Grants / <i>Regular consultation of the Environment Programme page on the EEA Grants website</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilidade de navegação e localização de informação no Website EEA Grants / <i>Easy navigation and localization of information on the EEA Grants website</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Qualidade da informação disponível nas diferentes plataformas do Programa Ambiente (Website, Youtube, LinkedIn, redes sociais da Unidade Nacional de Gestão) / <i>Quality of the information available on the different platforms of the Environment Programme (Website, YouTube, LinkedIn, social networks of the National Management Unit)</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Consciencialização pública sobre a contribuição do Programa Ambiente / <i>Raising public awareness of the contribution of the Environment Programme</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Consciencialização sobre o papel desempenhado pelos Países Doadores / <i>Raising awareness of the role played by donor countries</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

○ Visibilidade do Programa Ambiente
/ *Visibility of the Environment Programme* / Comments

17. Informação sobre as oportunidades do Programa Ambiente
(caixa para 100 palavras) / Comments: (box for 100 words)
/ *Information on the opportunities of the Environment Programme*

Comunicação dos resultados do Programa Ambiente e da ação dos Países Doadores em Portugal
/ *Communication of the results of the Environment Programme and the actions of the Donor Countries in Portugal*



ANNEX 2 – OBSERVATIONS – COMPILATION OF THE OBTAINED RESPONSES

- 1. The EEAGrants Environment team, whose competence is unquestionable, has always provided extraordinary support. They were always available, clear in their explanations, and committed to helping overcome the constraints that emerged during the execution of the project!*
- 2. The cooperation between the various entities involved and the replication of the project at the intermunicipal level was an added value.*
- 3. More flexibility about the Finance Plan adjustments along the project execution is critical to maximize the success of the Activities Plan, once there are contingencies to be accommodated, which a less flexible program can turn into drawbacks.*
- 4. The EEAGrants 2014-2021 funding mechanism was extremely important for increasing the national and international visibility of the National Biosphere Reserves Network. It allowed the development of communication products, as well as management support tools and capacity-building actions for managers and local stakeholders. Partnerships with the donor countries also went very well, some of which are still ongoing (e.g., several joint projects with the UNESCO Chair at the University of Coimbra). The Portuguese experience with Biosphere Reserves (BR) and with UNESCO's MaB Program was widely shared with the donor countries.*
- 5. The last capacity-building action in Barrancos was very important because it brought together the participants from several projects with the sharing of relevant information.*
- 6. It is important to recognize the availability of SGAmbiente for prompt clarifications and project management support.*
- 7. The projects funded by EEAGrants are excellent opportunities to develop, test, and apply innovative methodologies and solutions in various fields of knowledge, with significant impacts on social, economic, and environmental development and sustainability. It is a program that enables networking, sharing, and exploring knowledge for the benefit of environmental sustainability and the quality of life of populations. The program has an extremely attractive programmatic and financial framework that allows the implementation of highly diverse projects.*
- 8. The projects funded by EEAGrants are excellent opportunities to develop, test, and apply innovative methodologies and solutions in various fields of knowledge, with significant impacts on social, economic, and environmental development and sustainability. It is a program that allows working in a network, sharing and exploring knowledge for the benefit of environmental sustainability and the quality of life of populations. The program has an extremely attractive programmatic and financial framework, ensuring the implementation of highly diverse projects, being a valuable asset for Portugal.*
- 9. Improvements: the existence of a project manager; simplified HR expenses (e.g., negotiating a percentage of the budget without the need for documents and based on results); indirect costs as a percentage of HR presented; existence of a platform for submitting applications and documentation for project monitoring.*

10. *This mechanism had significant development and effort from the operators. There was a lack of a joint database. There should continue to be meetings and gatherings of all program operators. There is still a way to go, but the first steps have been taken for continuous improvement. The next mechanism should focus on the consolidation and simplification of processes. Currently, there is a human asset of more qualified individuals who should be allocated to the next mechanism.*
11. *Administrative and financial reporting is too extensive, focused on all kinds of duplicates and redundancies. Please look into other simplified options, such as Horizon Europe, or EIT Funding (no invoices required, no timesheets, etc., with a focus on results). The time that EEAPT staff would save on checking reports would, in our opinion, be better invested in visiting projects on the ground and promoting knowledge sharing – something we would really appreciate. On the communication front, the EEA rules are also very tight, and the tasks required from us are too many for a budget that does not even cover this kind of communication. Plus, if you allow projects to have their identity, this will actually increase EEA visibility, because project teams will feel greater ownership of their project identity and, therefore, speak more about EEA. Other than that, well done!!! :)*
12. *Excellent initiative, allowing real impact in the territory and with the population. The team involved is competent and always available to provide support.*
13. *Despite the short duration of the project relative to the time needed to achieve results on the ground in the context of the call (agroforestry systems, combating desertification, and climate change adaptation), it achieved the expected results and created several synergies. We will try, as much as we can, to continue monitoring the results of the implemented measures and follow up on established collaborations and the dissemination of results. In this sense, a support mechanism after implementation focused on monitoring and dissemination could allow us to make the most of the project's results.*
14. *Very positive aspects of this experience: - the opportunity created by funding to carry out actions previously identified as necessary; - great support received from the program management staff in managing the project. Considering the slowness of the administrative processes leading to the financial execution of the projects, in line with the program's requirements and public procurement rules, it is suggested: - review the program management procedures to reduce the administrative burden associated with project management; - extend the duration of projects (18 months, confirming the extension by 4 months at the closing stage).*
15. *Bureaucracy is clearly excessive, especially related to human resources, which hinders the possibility of providing proof of actual project expenses. If the rules are not changed, we will not participate in a program like this again, even if the funding rate is higher.*
16. *It was important to develop a project with such a different program.*