EEA GRANTS

Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

SURVEY

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

24.06.2024

ÍNDEX

1. FRAMEWORK 3
2. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OBTAINED 4
2.1. METHODOLOGY 4
2.2 ANALYSIS BY THEMATIC AXIS 5
2.2.1. AXIS 1 – TRANSITION TO THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY 5
2.2.2. AXIS 2 – CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION 6
2.2.3. AXIS 3 – CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE CONSERVATION 8
2.3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS BETWEEN THEMATIC AXES 9
2.4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS RELATING TO THE DEFINITION OF STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT FINANCING MECHANISM 11

1. FRAMEWORK

This report presents the analysis of the results obtained from the survey "Survey EEA Grants: Future Mechanism- Defining Priorities- What priorities?", conducted by the EEA Grants team, and applied to the Promoters and Partners of projects funded by the Environment Programme of the EEA Grants, which involved a total of 101 responses. The survey took place from February 16 to March 21, 2024, with 324 emails sent and 101 responses received, yielding a response rate of 31.2%.

The main objective of the analysis was to prioritize the areas that the different stakeholders in the funded projects attributed to each of the areas addressed in the survey, so the conclusions drawn here will serve as a useful tool in defining the areas to be funded and the strategy to be adopted for the future Funding Mechanisms.

The results are presented based on the structure of the survey, which is divided into the following main thematic areas:

1. Transition to the Circular Economy;
2. Climate Change Mitigation;
3. Climate Change and Nature Conservation.

Each of these thematic areas includes a set of detailed areas in Chapter 2.

It should be noted that the Climate Change Mitigation area includes urban mobility, as the survey was conducted in February 2024, when the governing structure still included urban mobility.

The responses were ranked in order to identify, on one hand, the most and least prioritized areas within each thematic area, and on the other hand, across the thematic areas, allowing conclusions to be drawn about which areas were considered by respondents as having the highest and lowest priorities.

The survey also aimed to determine the most suitable strategies for the future Funding Mechanism, which will follow an independent analysis, as it pertains to a different type of information. The responses will also be ranked to identify the strategies with the highest priority.

The methodology used to derive the results is detailed in Chapter 2.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OBTAINED

2.1. METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire (Annex 1) that forms the basis for the data collection in this analysis is divided into two parts – A and B. Part A aims to identify the most relevant areas to be financed in the next 5 years, with respondents being asked to assign priorities to the various areas of each main axis, on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least prioritized and 5 being the highest priority.

In Part B, the most appropriate strategies for a future EEA Grants Financing Mechanism are evaluated, with respondents assigning scores on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least appropriate and 5 being the most appropriate.

Finally, there is a field for comments, the results of which are presented in Annex 2.

Regarding the thematic axes, the following results are provided:

a) By thematic axis:

- Theme with the highest number of responses with priority 5.
- Two themes with the highest priority – The two themes with the highest priority correspond to the ones with the greatest sum of responses rated as priority 4 and 5. In case of a tie, the tie-breaker criterion will be the number of responses with priority 5.
- Theme with the lowest priority – The theme considered to have the lowest priority corresponds to the one with the greatest sum of responses rated as priorities 1 and 2. In case of a tie, the tie-breaker criterion will be the number of responses with priority 1.

This analysis was conducted for each of the three thematic axes.

b) Between thematic axes Additionally, a similar analysis was carried out between thematic axes to rank the responses and identify the three areas deemed most important by the respondents. However, it should be noted that the results presented here are less reliable.

c) **Financing strategies** Regarding the most appropriate strategies for a future Financing Mechanism, a similar analysis was conducted as described in item b), identifying the three strategies considered most appropriate, as well as the least appropriate.

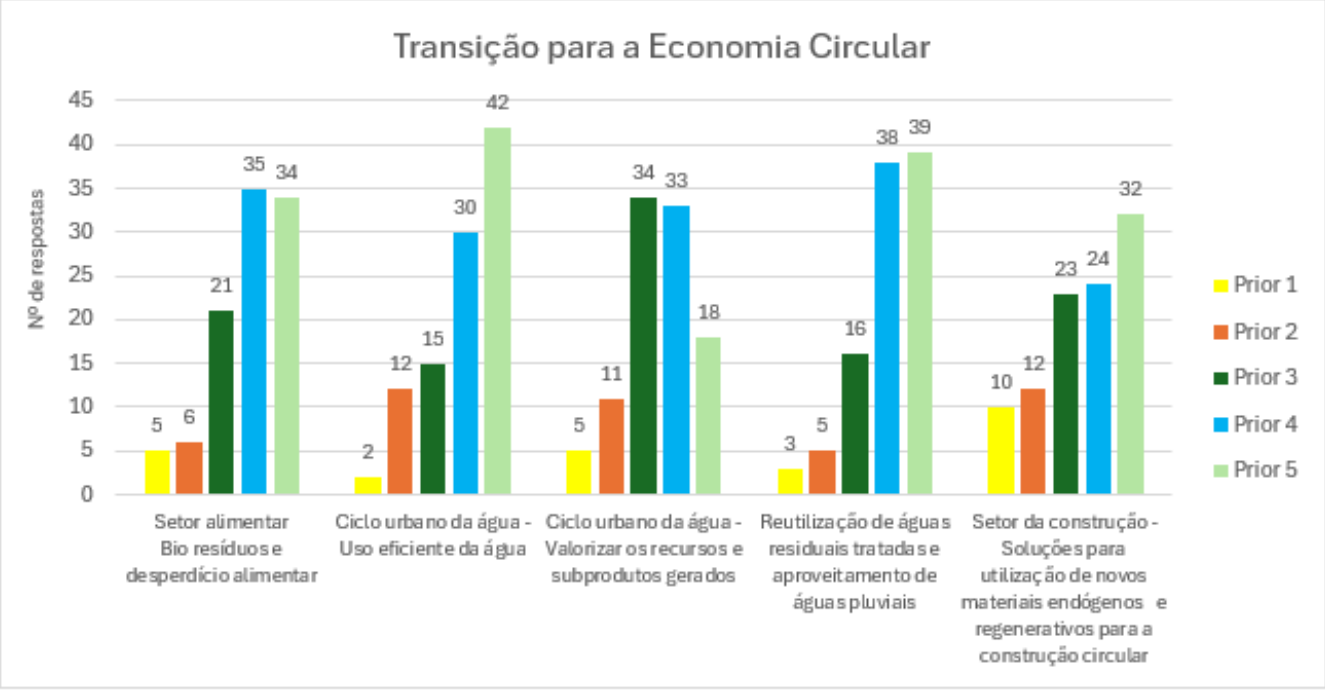
2.2 ANALYSIS BY THEMATIC AXIS

2.2.1. AXIS 1 – TRANSITION TO THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The "Transition to the Circular Economy" axis includes five areas, which are listed below:

1. **Food Sector** – Biowaste and food waste;
2. **Urban Water Cycle** – Efficient water use;
3. **Urban Water Cycle** – Valorization of resources and by-products generated;
4. **Urban Water Cycle** – Reuse of treated wastewater and rainwater harvesting;
5. **Construction Sector** – Solutions for using new endogenous and regenerative materials for circular construction.

The following figure presents the results obtained for each of these areas.



Based on the analysis of the results, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents consider the area "Urban Water Cycle – Efficient water use" as the highest priority, with 42% of respondents assigning the maximum score (5).

However, considering the sum of responses rated as 4 and 5, the areas with the highest percentage of responses are "Reuse of treated wastewater and rainwater harvesting," totaling 77%, and "Efficient water use," with 72%.

On the other hand, "Construction Sector – Solutions for using new endogenous and regenerative materials for circular construction" is the least prioritized theme, with 22% of responses rated as priority 1 and 2.

The following table summarizes the results obtained for Thematic Axis 1:

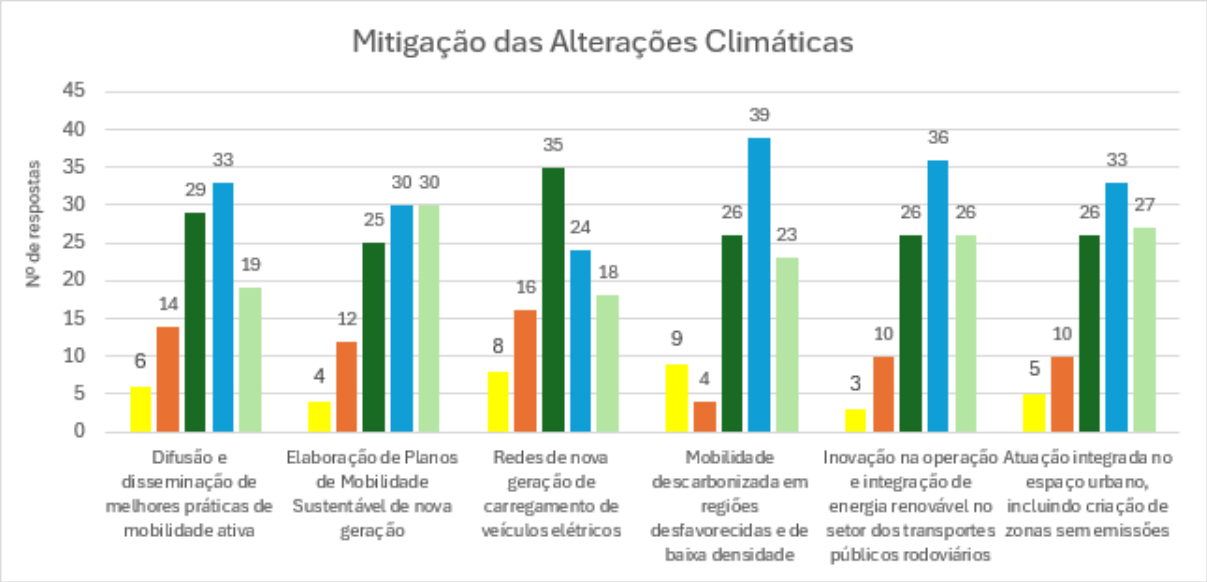
TRANSITION TO THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY		
+	Urban Water Cycle – Reuse of treated wastewater and rainwater harvesting	77%
+	Urban Water Cycle – Efficient water use	72%
-	Construction Sector – Solutions for using new endogenous and regenerative materials for circular construction	22%

2.2.2. AXIS 2 – CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Regarding the "Climate Change Mitigation" axis, the survey aimed to understand the priority assigned to each of the following areas:

1. Dissemination and dissemination of best practices for active mobility;
2. Development of next-generation Sustainable Mobility Plans;
3. New-generation charging networks for electric vehicles;
4. Decarbonized mobility in disadvantaged and low-density areas;
5. Innovation in the operation and integration of renewable energy in the public road transport sector;
6. Integrated action in urban spaces, including the creation of emission-free zones (ZERO).

The results obtained are presented in the following figure:



From the analysis of the results, it can be concluded that the theme with the highest number of responses with priority 5 was "Development of next-generation Sustainable Mobility Plans," totaling 30%.

Analyzing the sum of responses with priorities 4 and 5, the two most prioritized themes are "Decarbonized mobility in disadvantaged and low-density areas" and "Innovation in the operation and integration of renewable energy in the public road transport sector," both summing 60% of the responses. Using the criterion of the greatest number of responses with priority 5 as a tie-breaker, the most prioritized theme is "Innovation in the operation and integration of renewable energy in the public road transport sector."

On the other hand, the least prioritized theme in this axis is "New-generation charging networks for electric vehicles," with a total of 25% of responses with priorities 1 and 2.

The following table summarizes the results obtained for Thematic Axis 2:

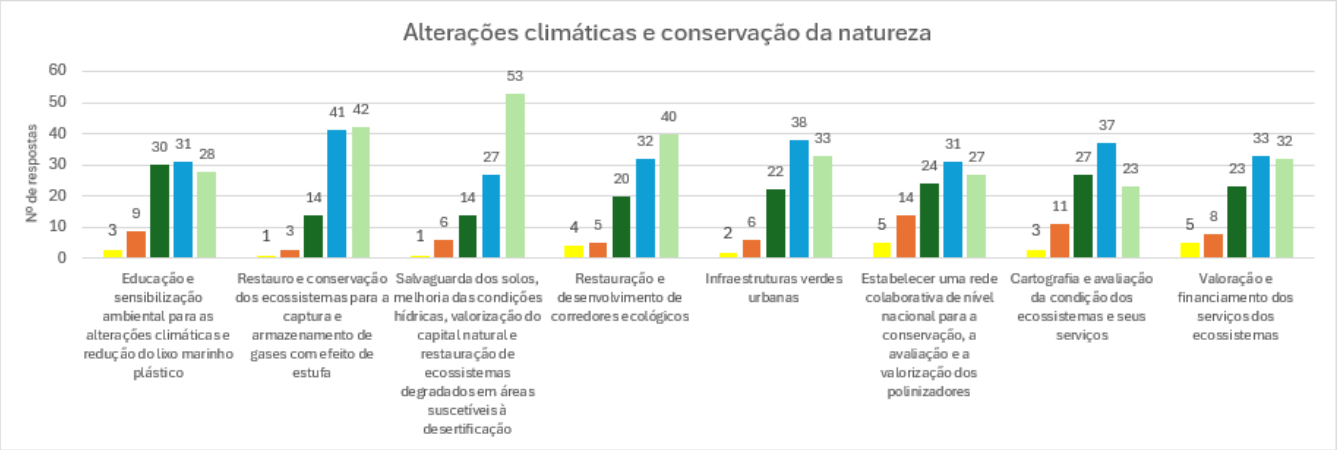
CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION		
+	Innovation in the operation and integration of renewable energy in the public road transport sector	60%
+	Decarbonized mobility in disadvantaged and low-density areas	60%
-	New-generation charging networks for electric vehicles	25%

2.2.3. AXIS 3 – CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE CONSERVATION

The "Climate Change and Nature Conservation" area addressed the following themes:

1. Environmental education and awareness for climate change and reduction of marine plastic waste;
2. Restoration and conservation of ecosystems for the capture and storage of greenhouse gases;
3. Safeguarding soils, improving water conditions, valuing natural capital, and restoring ecosystems in areas prone to desertification; Restoration and development of ecological corridors;
4. Urban green infrastructures;
5. Establishing a national collaborative network for the conservation, assessment, and valuation of pollinators;
6. Mapping and assessing the condition of ecosystems and their services;
7. Valuation and financing of ecosystem services.

The following figure presents the results obtained:



In this thematic axis, the theme that received the highest number of responses with priority 5 was "Safeguarding soils, improving water conditions, valuing natural capital, and restoring ecosystems in areas prone to desertification," with a total of 53%. This area remains in the Top 2 for maximum priority when responses rated 4 and 5 are considered together, along with the theme "Restoration and conservation of ecosystems for the capture and storage of greenhouse gases," which totals 80% and 83% of responses, respectively.

The least prioritized area in this thematic axis is "Establishing a national collaborative network for the conservation, assessment, and valuation of pollinators," with 19% of responses rated as priority 1 and 2.

The following table summarizes the results obtained for Thematic Axis 3:

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE CONSERVATION		
+	Restoration and conservation of ecosystems for the capture and storage of greenhouse gases	83%
+	Safeguarding soils, improving water conditions, valuing natural capital, and restoring ecosystems in areas prone to desertification	80%
-	Establishing a national collaborative network for the conservation, assessment, and valuation of pollinators	19%

2.3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS BETWEEN THEMATIC AXES

A transversal analysis of the various areas across the three thematic axes reveals that the two areas that received the highest number of responses with priority 5 are:

- Safeguarding soils, improving water conditions, valuing natural capital, and restoring ecosystems in areas prone to desertification (53%);
- Urban Water Cycle – Efficient water use (42%), alongside the theme Restoration and conservation of ecosystems for the capture and storage of greenhouse gases (42%).

However, when considering the sum of responses with priorities 4 and 5, the two areas deemed most important are:

- Restoration and conservation of ecosystems for the capture and storage of greenhouse gases;
- Safeguarding soils, improving water conditions, valuing natural capital, and restoring ecosystems in areas prone to desertification.

These areas are all included within the "Climate Change and Nature Conservation" axis.

Looking at the areas that received the highest number of responses with priority 1, we have:

- Construction Sector – Solutions for using new endogenous and regenerative materials for circular construction (10%);
- Decarbonized mobility in disadvantaged and low-density areas (9%).

Focusing now on the sum of responses with priorities 1 and 2, the two least prioritized areas are:

- New-generation charging networks for electric vehicles – Climate Change Mitigation;
- Construction Sector – Solutions for using new endogenous and regenerative materials for circular construction – Transition to the Circular Economy.

In summary:

TEMAS MAIS PRIORITÁRIOS		
+	Restoration and conservation of ecosystems for the capture and storage of greenhouse gases (Axis: Climate Change and Nature Conservation)	83%
+	Safeguarding soils, improving water conditions, valuing natural capital, and restoring ecosystems in areas prone to desertification (Axis: Climate Change and Nature Conservation)	80%

LEAST PRIORITIZED THEMES		
-	New-generation charging networks for electric vehicles (Axis: Climate Change Mitigation)	24%
-	Construction Sector – Solutions for using new endogenous and regenerative materials for circular construction (Axis: Transition to the Circular Economy)	22%

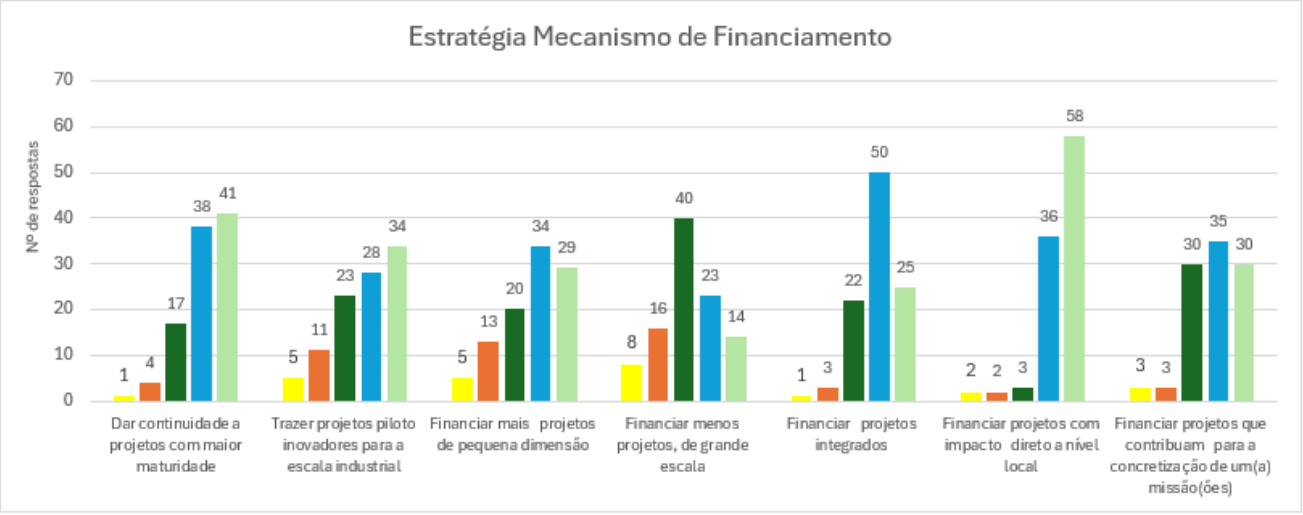
2.4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS RELATING TO THE DEFINITION OF STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT FINANCING MECHANISM

Within the scope of the questionnaire, a question was included to identify the most suitable strategies for defining the next Financing Mechanism.

The suggested alternatives were as follows:

1. Continue with projects that are more mature
2. Bring innovative pilot projects to industrial scale
3. Fund more small-scale projects
4. Fund fewer large-scale projects
5. Fund integrated projects
6. Fund projects with direct local impact
7. Fund projects that contribute to the achievement of a mission(s)

The following figure represents the results obtained:



From the analysis of the responses, it is evident that the strategy with the highest number of responses rated with the maximum score is to fund projects with direct local impact. This strategy maintains its suitability when the data is analyzed according to the adopted criterion – the sum of ratings 4 and 5, with a total of 94% of responses. The next most prioritized strategies are those aiming to continue with more mature projects (79%) and to fund integrated projects (75%).

The strategy with the highest number of responses rated 1 is to fund fewer large-scale projects, and this result remains the same when considering the sum of responses with ratings 1 and 2. Therefore, it is considered the least suitable strategy (24%).

Thus, in summary:

STRATEGIES FOR THE NEXT FINANCING MECHANISM		
+	Fund projects with direct local impact	94%
+	Continue with more mature projects	79%
+	Fund integrated projects	74%
-	Fund fewer large-scale projects	19%

ANNEX 1 – QUESTIONNAIRE

ANNEX 2 – OBSERVATIONS – COMPILATION OF RESPONSES

1. *Possibility of continuing with projects that are already funded, but with greater maturity, in the context of promoting the circular economy.*

2. *Small projects give little impact. Projects should involve users, researchers, and companies willing to commercialize results.*

3. *Excellent opportunity to evolve in the environmental area.*

4. *Value projects with well-established partnerships aimed at developing solutions for society, whether through companies or public institutions.*

5. *There should be a focus on innovative solutions, not on funding the implementation of green solutions.*

6. *It would help to understand what a small project and a large-scale project are (this is subjective and could bias the responses).*

7. *Decrease bureaucracy, small NGOs struggle to cope.*

8. *Unclear what the last question was about (what mission?), so I chose a mid-range value.*

9. *Keep going!!*

10. *It would be very important to: - focus on maintaining and continuing existing projects to maximize their impact, rather than allocating support to short-term projects that often have effects limited to demonstration - continue supporting the capacity building and financial sustainability of NGOs to address the lack of available funding for advocacy in public policies - support projects that promote collaborative work between public administration bodies and NGOs to improve the implementation of public policies - create mechanisms to improve capacity building in the legal field and access to justice in environmental matters.*

11. *I believe more projects with clear-cut goals and objectives should be supported, so as to enact actual change, rather than discussing the same problems in an endlessly repeating loop of debate without concrete action!*

12. *Promote projects to fight desertification - soil erosion and productivity loss - related to food security worldwide.*

13. *It is important that funding starts with support for the realization of diagnostic and feasibility studies / data collection on the ground to support the best options for operationalizing measures.*

14. *Allowing a greater number of projects to be approved in different geographical areas will bring greater benefits to biodiversity and will involve and integrate a larger number of stakeholders.*

15. *Smaller projects might foster collaboration between companies, but larger projects involving users, researchers, and those willing to commercialize the results have proven to have impact. Not the others.*

16. *Given the limited budgets for research on the Norwegian partner side in the EEA projects, it is challenging to involve PhD students or Postdoc students in full-time work for 2 years. It would be very nice if this could be changed, so Norwegian partners could delve deeper into the active research in the consortium.*

17. *Make the evaluation process transparent and reduce bureaucracy in financial reporting!*

18. *It is important to support innovative or pilot projects that can be adapted to different geographical or social realities. Large projects or replication of projects carried out in other locations can create dependency and devalue local resources and means.*

19. *Unfortunately, the amount of paperwork involved for donor project partners is disproportionate.*

20. *More should be invested in concrete nature conservation projects and less in awareness-raising activities that increase human burden on the territory.*

21. *ZASNET AECT is the managing entity of the Transboundary Biosphere Reserve of the Meseta Ibérica.*

22. *The EEA Grants Program has supported highly relevant projects, particularly at the municipal level. Regarding the administrative management of projects, there is room for improvement, as the procedures related to reporting, especially the financial part, could be improved, e.g., by creating user-friendly tools (forms) and reporting rules to facilitate this task, which is so important for meeting deadlines and objectives, and for the effective monitoring of project development.*

23. *The calibration of ratings in section 7 is not clear, as terms like "integrated project," and "...to achieve a mission" are not explained. In any case, priority should be given to funding projects that are not covered by other institutions or agents, such as "projects with direct local impact," which could benefit from funds managed by the CCDRs.*