

# Annual Status Report 2016 on the EEA Grants

**Submitted by:** Financial Mechanism Committee to the EFTA  
Standing Committee

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# EEA GRANTS

## 3

donor countries

Iceland (Share of contribution: 2009-2014 3.03% / 2014-2021 2.68%)

Liechtenstein (Share of contribution: 2009-2014 1.12% / 2014-2021 1.06%)

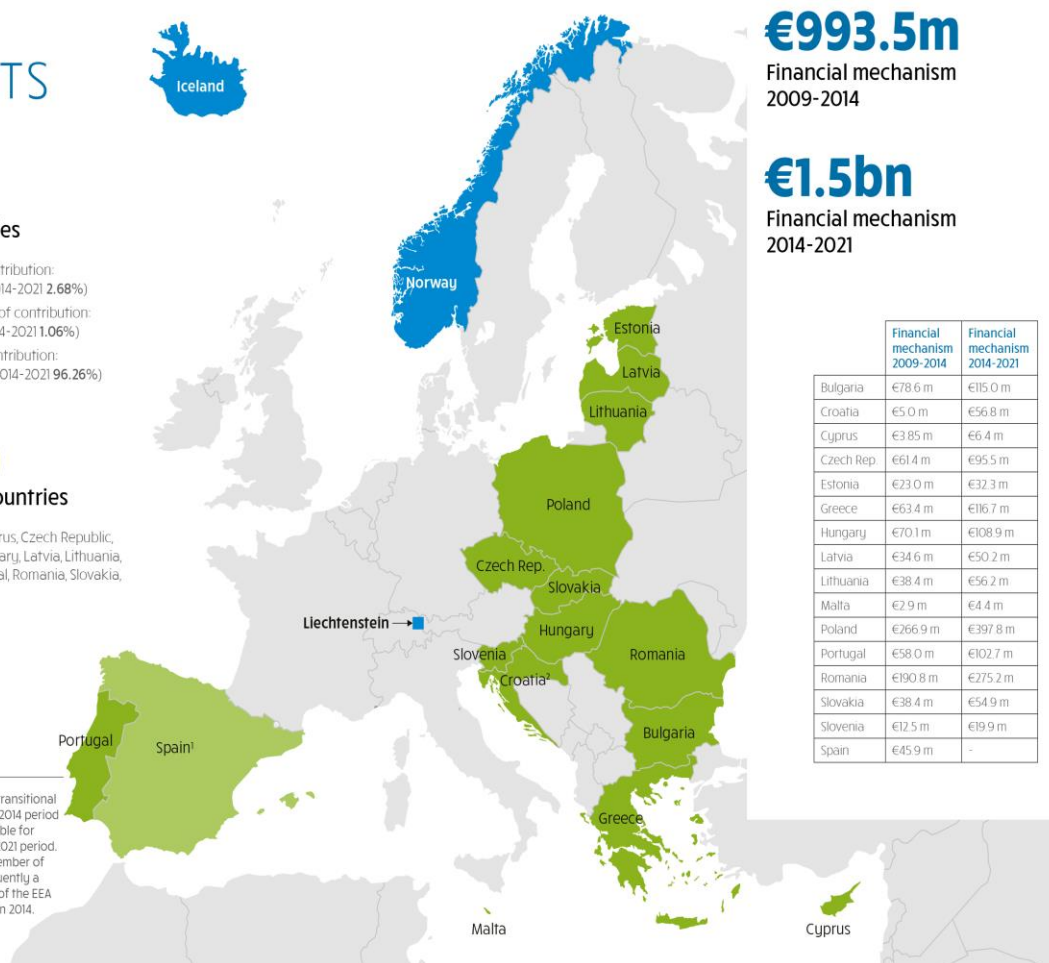
Norway (Share of contribution: 2009-2014 95.85% / 2014-2021 96.26%)

## 16 (15)

beneficiary countries

Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain

- Spain received only transitional funding in the 2009-2014 period and is no longer eligible for funding in the 2014-2021 period.
- Croatia became a member of the EEA, and consequently a beneficiary country of the EEA and Norway Grants, in 2014.



*Through the EEA Grants, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway contribute to reducing economic and social disparities and strengthening bilateral relations in 16 EU countries in Central and Southern Europe.*

The Annual Status Report from the Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC) to the EFTA Standing Committee presents an overview of the implementation of the EEA Grants for the year ending 31 December 2016. The FMC is the decision-making body for the EEA Grants and is composed of representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The Financial Mechanism Office operates as the secretariat for managing the Grants on behalf of these donor states.

Unless otherwise stated, data in this report refer to programmes, projects and funding from the EEA Grants as well as joint initiatives by the EEA and Norway Grants.

# 1 Highlights in 2016

## 1.1 Reducing economic and social disparities

2016 has been a pivotal year in terms of achieving tangible results that are reaching high numbers of end-beneficiaries, creating substantial added value to the priority sectors in the beneficiary countries.

In 2016, with more than half of the projects already finalised, and the remainder of the projects nearing completion, the vast majority of programmes have reported positive and in many cases impressive overall results. For example:

- Nearly 25,000 citizens have benefited from human rights support, 420,000 people from vulnerable groups report improved access to welfare and basic services, 3,200 NGOs have reported strengthened capacity and more than 70,000 people are engaged in work to promote sustainable development;
- Around 1.8m people have benefited from improved health services, and around 411,000 health professionals have been trained and there have been almost 60,000 visits to health care specialists;
- Greenhouse gas emission reductions are estimated at around 620,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> /year, or the equivalent of saved emissions from around 310,000 passenger vehicles per year;
- In Research and Education, over 1,500 researchers in 594 institutions are working together, resulting in 578 internationally referred scientific publications, papers or articles developed together by institutions from donor and beneficiary countries;
- In Cultural heritage: International recognition through 10 EEA & Norway Grants funded winners of the Cultural Heritage award Europa Nostra Awards over the years, two of which in 2016;
- increasing knowledge about Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway's contribution in beneficiary and donor States and sharing the results from programmes and projects. By the end of 2016, the Facebook page had received 10,000 likes, a 25% increase compared to the end of 2015.

These and other results stem from solid progress in programme implementation:

- By the end of 2016, disbursement rates stood at 83.4%, compared to 65.4% by the end of 2015.
- A total of 4,808 projects (excluding mobility projects) under 95 programmes had been registered for a combined total of €790m.<sup>1</sup> Most of the projects registered can be found in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria and Hungary (879, 703, 615 and 524 respectively);
- The civil society sector has a large and wide variety of projects: 2,911 - or 61% - of the total, while environmental protection and management and Climate change accounts for 817 projects, representing a total €310m (39% of project grants).

## 1.2 Strengthened bilateral relations

The EEA Grants 2009-2014 involve an unprecedented number of institutions and individuals in new partnerships between Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway and the 16 beneficiary countries aimed, not only at reducing social and economic disparities in Europe, but also strengthening political, professional, social and economic ties.

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<sup>1</sup> Projects registered in DoRIS (Documentation, Reporting and Information System) up to and including 07 February 2017.

- By the end of 2016, there were 49 programmes with a donor programme partner, including the Council of Europe, resulting in 1,041 projects with donor partners (22%). The Bilateral mid-term evaluation showed that programmes and projects contribute to awareness raising, changes in attitudes and the development of trust between cooperating organisations;
- Interest in the Grants and in donor country cooperation is especially high in areas where donor country competence is considered to be advanced. These areas include, but are not limited to, civil society, culture, environment and renewable energy;
- The involvement of DPPs has helped to ensure partnership with donor institution, implementation of the programme bilateral funds and ultimately to achieve results, also laying the groundwork for further collaboration, with many planning to develop future projects together, not least under larger scale EU programmes;
- Where projects have donor project partners (including education mobility projects) mostly they are from Norway (1196 projects), as compared with Iceland (304) and Liechtenstein (36);
- The concentration of bilateral project partnerships with donor partners is largest in Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic. The greatest numbers of bilateral partnerships are within the civil society environmental, cultural heritage and scholarship sectors.

Bilateral Funds at national level in all beneficiary states as well as in all programmes serve to support networking and foster partnerships. The bilateral funds finance activities such as partner search, conferences, workshops, study tours as well as outreach activities.

### **1.2.1 Cooperation with international organisations**

Strategic partnerships with international organisations brings added expertise, results and visibility. For example, the Council of Europe provides know-how in human rights, democracy and the rule of law; the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights provides expertise on the protection and promotion of fundamental rights; the International Organisation for Migration has addressed urgent needs relating to the reception and screening of new migrant arrivals and assisted voluntary returns, including victims of trafficking.

## **2 Establishing the 2014-2021 Grants**

Planning and preparing the future Financial Mechanisms 2014-21 has been given high priority in 2016, and much of the Financial Mechanism Committee and Financial Mechanism Office resources have been oriented in this direction.

Following the signature of the Agreement on an EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 in May 2016, the main tasks in 2016 have been to:

- Conduct MoU negotiations with the 15 beneficiary states;
- Consult and adopt the Blue Book and the new Financial Mechanism legal framework;
- Launch and support the programme design phase in those beneficiary countries in which MoUs have been signed (in 2016: Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria);
- Prepare the funds for Youth Employment and regional cooperation;
- Build capacity in Results Based Management;
- Prepare the Grants Management Information System.