

Annual Status Report 2017 on the EEA Grants

Submitted by: Financial Mechanism Committee to the EFTA Standing
Committee

Date: 27 September 2018

EEA GRANTS

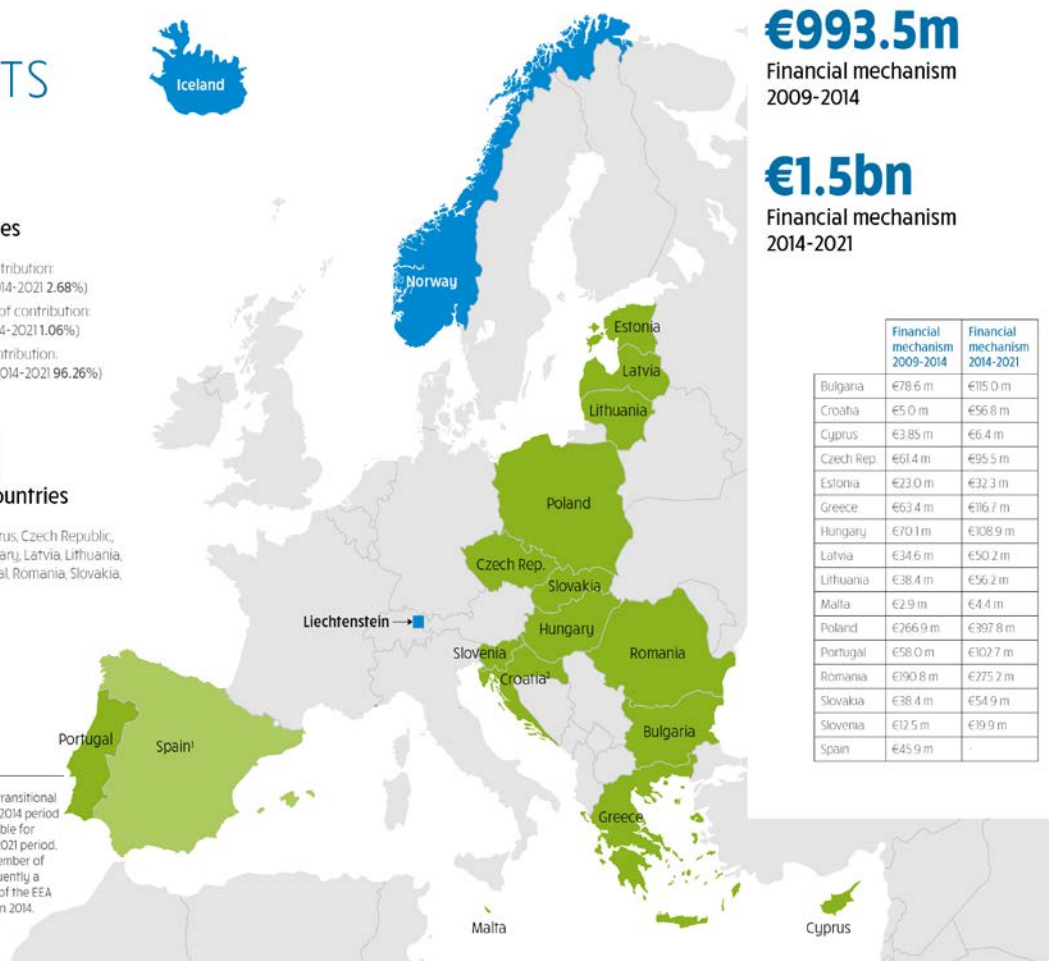
3
donor countries

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 in the EEA and strengthening bilateral relations between the EEA and 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 2017. 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 and in some cases joint initiatives by the EEA and Norway Grants.

1 Highlights in 2017

1.1 Reducing economic and social disparities

2017 has been a pivotal year, and the 2009-2014 EEA grants have reported tangible results, reached high numbers of end-beneficiaries and created substantial added value to the priority sectors in the beneficiary countries.

In 2017, the vast majority of programmes have reported positive and, in many cases, impressive overall results. For example:

- Nearly 25,000 citizens across the beneficiary countries benefitted from human rights support provided by NGOs. An important focus of this support was victims of hate crime. More than 3,000 NGOs have reported strengthened capacity and more than 70,000 people are engaged in work to promote sustainable development. As a result of advocacy activities by supported NGOs, there were changes or improvements to 330 laws, policies, and practices while 4,274 organisations were involved in policy and decision-making processes under the NGO programmes;
- Greenhouse gas emission reductions are estimated at over 520,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year. In addition, 949 management plans for Natura 2000 areas have been developed or implemented compared to an original target of 453 while 153 environmental and marine monitoring plans and programmes have been developed or implemented, exceeding the target of 67. In most cases, those plans are used as guidelines and best practices in local, regional, and national management of ecosystems, utilising additional EU funding for further development and implementation on a larger scale;
- About 13,600 children and youth have directly benefitted from services, leading to improved education, health and social inclusion;
- In Research (EEA and Norway Grants), 3,200 researchers have been engaged in joint projects, resulting in 1,500 internationally refereed scientific publications, papers or articles developed together by institutions from donor and beneficiary countries. Collaboration has helped to increase research competence for both donor and beneficiary country institutions. The Grants have had a positive impact on project promoter applications for EU research funding, which can be attributed to their participation in EEA / Norway Grants-supported projects;
- In Education, Grants for learning mobility have enabled over 1,900 students to successfully complete University courses in exchanges;
- In Cultural heritage, international recognition through 12 EEA & Norway Grants funded winners of the Cultural Heritage award Europa Nostra Awards over the years, two of which in 2017. Furthermore, 42 cultural buildings and heritage sites have been opened to the public and over 1.7 million people attended cultural performances supported by the Grants in the beneficiary states;
- Increased visibility in beneficiary and donor states concerning Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway's contribution and its results. During 2017, the amount of followers on Facebook increased by 1,600 and the total engagement amounted to 11254 interactions.

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

- By the end of 2017, disbursement rates stood at almost 92%, compared to 83.4% by the end of 2016.

- There were 5,216 projects in 95 programmes for a combined total of over €807.5m.¹ Most projects were in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria and Hungary (970, 749, 664 and 558 respectively);
- The civil society sector has a large and wide variety of projects: 2,941 - or 56% - of the total. There were 817 environmental protection and management and climate change projects, representing more than €300m (over 37% 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.

- By the end of 2017, there were 49 programmes with a donor programme partner, including the Council of Europe, resulting in 1,420 projects with donor partners (27%). 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 civil society, culture, environment and renewable energy;
- Both the donor and beneficiary states consider that the donor programme partners and international partner organisation have been instrumental in the success of programmes;
- Cooperation under the Grants has laid the foundation for further collaboration since many partners plan to develop future projects together;
- At project level, the Grants have yielded 1,636 partnerships with Norwegian entities, 469 partnerships with entities from Iceland and a further 58 with entities from Liechtenstein;
- 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.

2 Establishing the 2014-2021 Grants

Planning and preparing the future Financial Mechanisms 2014-21 has been given high priority in 2017, and much of the Financial Mechanism Committee and Financial Mechanism Office resources have been oriented in this direction.

The main tasks in 2017 have been to:

- Conduct MoU negotiations with the 15 beneficiary states - 10 MoUs were signed by end-2017;
- Support programme design in a collaborative process with those beneficiary countries in which MoUs have been signed - 1 programme agreement was signed in 2017;
- Prepare the Funds for Youth Employment and Regional Cooperation;
- Prepare the Grants Management Information System.

¹ Projects registered in DoRIS (Documentation, Reporting and Information System) up to and including 19 January 2018.