

# *STRATEGIC REPORT*

## *FM14-21*

Slovakia

Reporting period:

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants under the programme period 2014 – 2021 is entering its final stage. The year 2023 brought its own challenges, as most of previous years did. The most important challenges were increase in prices of energies, construction materials and construction works and the war conflict in Ukraine.

Two proposals for amendment of Memoranda of Understanding between the Donor States and Slovakia were proposed by the National Focal Point, in order to utilize the grants provided for Slovakia. Most significant is reallocation of €5,738,179 from the SK-INNOVATION Programme to other Programmes: €5,017,647 was attributed to the SK-CULTURE Programme and €2,529,412 was attributed to the SK-CLIMATE Programme. Unfortunately, the majority of the additional funds allocated to the SK-CLIMATE Programme stayed uncommitted. This caused a new risk and altogether with some projects with very low spending this Programme became the riskiest one in the course of 2023. On the other hand the SK-INNOVATION Programme, considered by the NFP as the riskiest Programme in the past, became less risky because of reallocations amounting to almost 27%.

As the eligibility of funds under the projects ends on 30 April 2024, the National Focal Point identified a new risk, related to savings of the funds at the project level (specifically under the SK-GOVERNANCE Programme). This is caused by the delays in public procurement processes, construction works or problems with suppliers.

On the other hand, 2023 brought also successes. The Programme Operators did tremendous work in supporting the Project Promoters and mitigating impacts of previous years. Within most Programmes one or two Calls for additional funds for Project Promoters already implementing projects were launched, in order to accommodate the increase in prices or to implement additional activities in their projects.

Very successful activity conducted was the Synergy Network meeting, organised by the SK-DOMESTIC Programme in December 2023 in Bratislava.

Another successful event was organized in October 2023 by the NFP and FMO. The Roundtable discussion on Roma Inclusion was attended by relevant stakeholders and focused on the status and mapping of Roma concerns in relevant programs and funds as well as discussing Roma concerns and general issues at country level.

The Fund for Bilateral Relations was increased by almost €470,000. As of 31 December 2023 the amount of contracting within this Fund represents 69%. 10 new pre-defined initiatives at the national level were approved by the Joint Committee for Bilateral Funds and should be implemented in 2024. At the Programme level, Calls for proposals were closed and several study tours were organised by the Programme Operators in order to share best practices and experience in respective areas between Slovakia and the Donor States.

Overall, the implementation of the Programmes is reaching its ends, first results are achieved and some challenges still remain to face in the final months. A more significant shift would occur should the Donors reconsider the inclusion of construction expenses and expenses for the purchase of equipment in the list of authorized expenses within the Fund for Bilateral Relations.

## 2. COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS AND EFFECTS OF THE GRANTS

In 2023, alongside political, economic, and social developments, the Slovak Republic marked an important milestone - its 30th anniversary of independence.

After the resignation of the Prime Minister Eduard Heger on 16 December 2022 and his fail to form new government, the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, appointed the first bureaucratic government in the history of Slovakia<sup>[1]</sup> on 15 May 2023. The technical government was led by the Deputy Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia, Ľudovít Ódor and took Slovakia to early parliamentary elections on 30 September 2023. Smer-SD party as the winner of the elections with 22,94% formed a coalition with parties Hlas-SD (14,7%) and the Slovak National Party (SNS – 5,62%)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Speedy growth of energy and food prices (6%) in the year 2023 led to an increase in the inflation rate (15%)<sup>[3]</sup>. Low unemployment (below 6%) has remained one of the positive signs of economic development, softening the social and economic disparities.<sup>[4]</sup>

## BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

The expected annual GDP growth reached just over 1%, slowed by declining private and public consumption. Regarding green innovation, Slovakia dropped below the average of EU countries in 2023 in developing environmental technologies. The support of the SK-INNOVATION Programme to Slovak enterprises has the potential to bring essential effects. With the scope of supported projects in the area of welfare technology and ambient assisted living, the EEA and Norway Grants significantly impact this emerging sector in Slovakia as the supported projects were some of the few initiatives to flag this topic.

The support of SMEs in Slovakia remained fragmented at both regional and national levels. The public support infrastructure involves numerous different subjects, each of them operating the support schemes and activities in their specific domains while lacking sufficient coordination.<sup>[5]</sup> On the other hand, the continuity of support infrastructure for social enterprises has been secured, which is positive. Finally, toward the end of the year, Slovakia has introduced several measures specifically tailored to foster innovative entrepreneurship, such as speeding up company registration, tax reliefs on incomes from selling the shares of domestic companies and employee stock option plans (ESOPs). As they only came into force in late 2023 or the start of 2024, their effects could not yet be observed.<sup>[6]</sup> However, there is a potential that they could help to leverage the effects of the grants aimed at increasing the competitiveness of Slovak enterprises within the focus areas: Green Industry Innovation and Welfare Technology and Ambient Assisted Living (WT/AAL).

The innovation performance of Slovak enterprises needs a further boost. According to the European Innovation Scoreboard evaluation, Slovakia is an emerging innovator, which means its overall innovation performance is below 75% of the EU average.<sup>[7]</sup> Also, DESI 2023 results show that the digitalization level of Slovak SMEs is below the EU average in all of the monitored indicators.<sup>[8]</sup> Thus, the support of the Programme to Slovak enterprises to increase their competitiveness has the potential to bring essential effects.

Regarding WT/AAL, this issue is only partially reflected in several national-level policies aimed at the elderly or disabled persons. Also, while their presence in the form of commercial products is still scarce (typically limited to generic smart home solutions), the situation is slightly improving compared to previous years, likely also thanks to awareness building by the Programme's Calls. With the scope of supported projects, the grants significantly impact this emerging sector in Slovakia. The supported projects were some of the few initiatives to flag this topic.

Regarding green innovation, Slovakia dropped below the average of EU countries in 2023 in developing environmental technologies (measured as the number of environment-related inventions divided by the total number of patents).<sup>[9]</sup> Support for Green Industry Innovation shall contribute not only to fostering the debate on innovative green solutions across various sectors,

improving the response to climate change and fostering high-value-added activities among Slovak enterprises but also to compensate for this negative overall tendency, of course, to the scope allowed by the number of supported enterprises.

The most visible achievements of education projects supported by the SK-INNOVATION Programme so far include especially cooperation initiatives among schools. The expected effects of these grants shall contribute to addressing some of the shortcomings of the education system in Slovakia, such as limited teaching quality, lack of internationalisation and job market orientation of tertiary education.

Involvement of the partners from Donor states in the supported projects creates a good precondition for developing sustained collaborations, as they are typically involved in the core value-creating activities, such as specification, development, prototyping or testing of the product or solution.

For example in project BIN01\_2021\_010: Development of Smart Furniture with Artificial Intelligence and Medical Devices (implemented by NOVOTA ART, s.r.o.) partner JaHo Mur og Fasade AS from Norway, carries out research and final testing of prototypes with seniors living alone and immobile persons in sample housing units built for this purpose. Based on the test results of functionality, safety, interior mobility and reliability, the furniture pieces may be modified. The Norwegian partner is preparing a showroom in Kristiansand where prototypes of smart furniture will be displayed for sale.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

In the area of climate change, the Ministry of Environment of the SR presented the first law on landscape planning to the Slovak government. The landscape planning reform is one of the milestones of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic. The new government declares its commitment to continue meeting the climate goals resulting from the Paris Climate Agreement. In addition, cities supported by the SK-CLIMATE Programme, such as Bardejov, Banská Bystrica, Žilina, Snina or Brezno, evenly distributed around Slovakia has improved the quality of public buildings and reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions via thermal insulation of buildings.

The year of 2023 was a key year for progressing towards projects implementation and started to show a positive trend towards meeting the overall objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants to reduce social and economic disparities. The restoration of wetland ecosystems will lead to the stabilization of the microclimate, the prevention of the consequences of floods, the prevention of erosion and dry, dusty areas, the increase of plant species and thus a greater number of natural pollinators, the increase of animal species and the provision of ecosystem services. As the wetlands are not yet restored in a full extent, it is not possible to measure the fulfilment of set target values of indicators. A joint field work of Project Promoter Green Foundation (project ACC04P01: Wetlands for life and well-being: Morava river alluvium Ramsar site restoration), Slovak Project Partner BROZ and Bilateral Partner Norwegian Institute for Nature Research took place in June 2022 in Slovakia. This was as part of the Project's activity focused on monitoring of wetland and wetland habitat before the full extent of the wetland restoration<sup>[10]</sup>. Within this Project the agricultural land was transformed into alluvial meadow, invasive species were removed, and native species and trees were planted.

The implementation of projects can serve as a motivating factor for the region's transition to ecological and sustainable agriculture, which is fully in line with the goals of the new EU common agricultural policy and Green Deal. It is an opportunity to make the region more attractive to young farmers and increase employment in the sector. By landscaping wetlands, building

educational trails, informational and educational events aimed at visitors to the region, local residents, landowners and local government, it will encourage and inspire not only the protection of wetlands and their biodiversity, slow tourism, and thus reduce economic disparities between regions and inhabitants.

In respect of strengthening bilateral relations with Donor State entities, there are 23 projects carried out with participation of Donor project partners. The projects have actively involved important Norwegian partners, which is undoubtedly a great benefit for the support of bilateral cooperation, mutual sharing of experience and know-how, by for example organizing training courses or developing new methodologies for carbon sequestration. One example is the Project ACC04P02: Ecohydrological Restoration of Peatlands in the Carpathians (implemented by State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, Banská Bystrica).

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

There has been a change in the head of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and Alexander Daško has been appointed to the post. In the last two months of 2023, there were no major legislative changes in the area that would have had a major impact on the implementation of the funding mechanisms. Most of the projects supported under the SK-LOCALDEV Programme can be expected to have some impact on reducing social and economic disparities.

At the beginning of 2023, in February, the Supreme Court ruled for the first time in the history of the Slovak Republic that the education of Romani children in an ethnically homogeneous school in the municipal district of Stará Ľubovňa - Podsadek is illegal. This judgment is final.<sup>[11](#)</sup> This decision has certainly had an impact on the implementation of projects under the Financial Mechanism, as several projects under the LDI02 Call focus on inclusive education.

Most of the supported projects can be expected to have some impact on reducing social and economic disparities. It is important that the projects are implemented in the spirit of inclusive approaches and combating segregation and social exclusion. In the case of training activities, it is important that these activities have continuity beyond the end of the projects and that partners look for ways to incorporate them into existing structures. Good example is pre-defined project LDIPP001: Innovative education of teachers to increase their intercultural competences in the education process of Roma pupils (implemented by the National Institute of Education and Youth). It is also very important that the projects provide personal growth and at the same time do not deepen stigmatisation. However, at this phase it is not yet possible to assess what that impact is.

Bilateral relations with entities of the Donor country are of great benefit in the implementation of the projects, because in this way Slovak organisations have the opportunity to obtain information and know-how from a country where inclusion and integration works effectively. Good example is project LDI03017: Affirmative action boosting up Roma employment and education (implemented by Agency for Labour of the Banská Bystrica Self-governing Region with Norwegian partner Stiftelsen Mangfold i Arbeidslivet). During the study trip in Norway, the project promoter became familiar with examples of good practice in the employment of disadvantaged groups of population through affirmative action and targeted programs, as well as in the field of diversity management.

## DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to a Eurostat survey from 2023, up to 34 % of women in Slovakia will experience domestic or gender-based violence.<sup>[12]</sup> Many articles<sup>[13]</sup> about domestic and gender-based violence have been published. Under the SK-DOMESTIC Programme several successful campaigns on increasing gender sensitivity or targeting cyber stalking took place, with very high reach of approx. 1,000,000 views each.

In the Slovak Republic, the year 2023 can be characterized as a year of awareness in the fight against domestic and gender-based violence. Thanks to Norway Grants, study materials on relationships and sexual education, which are intended mainly (but not only) for students, has been put into practice, and schools can thus educate young people about the prevention of domestic and gender-based violence (project DGV01010: 34all" (three for all) - Three substantial messages on CSE and SRHR for each target group (implemented by InTYMYta – formerly called Society for Planned Parenthood)).

In 2023, the prestigious international conference on domestic and gender-based violence Synergy Network 2023 was held in Slovakia. President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová together with the State Secretary of the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, Michal Kaliňák as well as other representatives of the Slovak government spoke at this venue, and they agreed to prioritize the topic of domestic and gender-based violence and to improve the position of women in Slovak society. The conference and its legacy was supported by the Minister of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, Richard Raši as well.

The campaign of the project DGV01009: United for Equality (implemented by organization Risotto) aimed at increasing gender sensitivity and changing the usual ways of thinking based on prejudices and stereotypes. The campaign communicated the idea that "the world is unisex" with a reach of 42,694 and 1,187,092 impressions on social networks. Also, the project's DGV02014: Together with us - Expanding of counseling and support services for women experiencing violence and their children (implemented by ALEJ counselling centre) campaign aimed to address a new form of violence against women, cyber/stalking. The aim of the campaign was to reach out to women so that they could identify themselves and know where to turn. The campaign had a high social following: a reach of 900,000 views.

As part of the project DGVPP002: Improving the victim-oriented approach – a tool enhancing the capacity to fight violence against women and domestic violence (implemented by the Institute for Labour and Family Research) since July 2023, a new activity - The National Line for Women Experiencing Violence has been implemented. The National Line has been operated within the project 24/7. The counsellors have provided support to 238 women experiencing gender-based violence. The line also assisted 33 women experiencing gender-based violence who had used the line's services in previous months (or even years) and needed to consult their situation again. The line is also contacted by relatives or friends of women experiencing violence (130 people), men experiencing intimate partnership violence (16 men), or women who experienced another type of violence.

The three projects implemented in partnership with Norwegian Donor project partner benefit from sharing of know-how and transfer good practice examples from Norway to Slovakia. A good example is project DGV01004: Gender Equality Promotion (implemented by Human Rights Institute with Norwegian partner KUN). Experts from the partner organisation participate in regular online project meetings, provide consultation on the public campaign in the form of feedback on texts, content and influencers, and take an active part in the preparation of promotional material and background material for the new videos.



## CULTURE

The basic legislative framework for the protection of cultural heritage in Slovakia in 2023 didn't change. In 2023 the cultural heritage sector was also influenced by an energy crisis, inflation, the unavailability of some kinds of building materials, and a military conflict in Ukraine. The mentioned circumstances also made renovation and restoration of cultural heritage objects which were supported by EEA and Norway Grants much more difficult. The SK-CULTURE Programme provided, in the sense of supporting diversity, the opportunity for the development of various cultural subsectors, including literature, music, theatre and performance, film, crafts, visual arts, design, and architecture.

Even it is still not possible to fully evaluate the contribution of the project results to the reduction of economic and social disparities, many interesting activities were already organized. The aim of these activities was to involve mainly local communities in the process of renovation. For example, during the project CLT01003: Coburg manor house in Jelšava - historical craft and ecological center of Gemer (implemented by City of Jelšava) many interesting events were organised directly in manor house like Days of City of Jelšava, cultural event Mining in Gemer region, Black Holes cinema in the manor house etc. Many local people from Jelšava are involved also like a workers and craftsmen which has also an interesting social impact on local young generation as the kids are proud on their parents working on the conservation of their manor house.[\[14\]](#)

The grants provided, in the sense of supporting diversity, the opportunity for the development of various cultural subsectors, including literature, music, theatre and performance, film, crafts, visual arts, design, and architecture.

94% of cultural heritage projects are being implemented in partnership with the Donor entities, which is extraordinary. All projects were contributing to the strengthening the bilateral co-operation by organizing common activities, events and visits. For example, within the project CLT03031: Authors' Reading Month 2023 in Banská Štiavnica and Bratislava (implemented by literarnyklub.sk with Norwegian literature center) partners cooperated on creating a diverse programme with 30 Norwegian authors Slovak cities (Bratislava and Banská Štiavnica) during the festival Authors Reading Month in July 2023.

## GOOD GOVERNANCE AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

The year 2023 was marked by the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independent Slovakia. It has also been the second year of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In the area of good governance, projects implemented under the SK-GOVERNANCE Programme contribute to the goal of reducing disparities between Slovakia and Ukraine.

All the cross-border projects between Slovakia and Ukraine matched the goal of reducing disparities between the two societies. The expected integration of Ukraine into the EU is expected to be beneficial for Slovakia and especially its poorer Eastern border regions. And the integration of Ukraine shall also strengthen European project and the EU security. The projects supporting regional administration such as GGC01009: Future of Public Administration (implemented by Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice) and GGC01007: Cities in the Enlarged European Area (implemented by the City of Košice) have been efficient by the sheer fact of being implemented in the less developed regions, so they contributed to mitigation of regional disparities. The Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia successfully



implemented the project GGC01006: Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation - CBC4US dealing with the collaboration Slovak and Ukrainian municipalities.

The progress towards the increasing acceptance of green transformation has been made in 2023, bringing generally conservative (i.e. fossil preferring) Slovak society and culture more open to the Programme's goals. These topics have been addressed on the borderland region of Slovakia and Ukraine by the project GGC01008: Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Mitigation Steps for SK – UA crossborder region (CLIMADAM) (implemented by the Agency for the support of the regional development Košice). The possible inspiration by Donor countries green transition and especially the societal and cultural underpinning of carbon neutral development might serve as a possible key future point of support.

Particularly positive development has been the reform of a court map. The expected result in the field of judicial reform shall be the speeding up of court decisions and increasing the quality of court decisions, especially by making judges and courts specialized in the respective field of law.<sup>[15]</sup> The solid achievements have been made by the project GGCPP002: Enhancing the efficiency of the justice system through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties (implemented by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic) in the area of judicial reforms, following also the Programme's goals.

From bilateral perspective, good example is project GGC01005: Safe and Inclusive Border between Slovakia and Ukraine (implemented by the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic with Äpenhet AS), where the active involvement of the Donor project partner in all project meetings and most of the activities should result in creation of 4 manuals and organization of 6 workshops.

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[3] <https://www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/vyberova-chronologia-udalosti-z-dom/762571-clanok.html>

[4] <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/z4jfRPS/nezamestnanost-na-slovensku-nadalej-klesa/>

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[7] [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_23\\_3683](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_3683)

[8] <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2023-report-state-digital-decade>

[9] [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard\\_en#european-innovation-scoreboard-2023](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard_en#european-innovation-scoreboard-2023)

[10] <https://levarskemokrade.eu/>

[11] Press release from 13.02.2024, available at: <https://poradna-prava.sk/aktuality/prelomovy-rozsudok-najvyssieho-sudu-sr-vzdelavanie-romskych-deti-na-cisto-romskej-skole-v-starej-lubovni-predstavuje-segregaciu/>

[12] Eurostat. (online). Available at: [https://euractiv.sk/section/spolocnost/press\\_release/slovensko-nedokaze-dostatočne-ochranit-zeny-pred-nasilim-prilezitost-zmenit-to-dostane-nova-vlada](https://euractiv.sk/section/spolocnost/press_release/slovensko-nedokaze-dostatočne-ochranit-zeny-pred-nasilim-prilezitost-zmenit-to-dostane-nova-vlada)

[13] E.g. Rác, Ivan: Násilie páchané na ženách v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách. / Ivan Rác. In: Sociálna prevencia. -ISSN: 1336-9679. – Roč. 18, č. 1 (2023), p. 17-19.

[14] [www.kastieljelsava.sk/kastiel-v-jelsave-video-reportaz/](http://www.kastieljelsava.sk/kastiel-v-jelsave-video-reportaz/)

[15] <https://www.podnikajte.sk/zakonne-povinnosti-podnikatela/velky-prehľad-zmien-pre-podnikateľov-2023>

### 3. STATUS OF PROGRAMMES

#### GENERAL

The Programmes implemented in Slovakia in 2023 experienced both progress and challenges. Allocations were adjusted, leading to contracting new projects as well as providing financial boost in form of Calls for additional funds in several Programmes. Aim was to cope with the current economic challenges of extraordinary price increases caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the war in Ukraine. Some Programmes allowed conducting more activities within the projects implemented. First results were brought by some projects such as CLTPP001: Pro Monumenta II. (implemented by the Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic) while other Project Promoters coped with delays caused mainly with public procurement issues.

#### SK-INNOVATION Business Development, Innovation and SMEs

The year 2023 was quite turbulent for the SK-INNOVATION Programme, bringing changes in Programme allocations, and cancelations of projects as well as successful results.

The Memoranda of Understanding on implementation of the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms 2014 – 2021 adjusted the Programme allocation twice in 2023. As of 17 February 2023, the Programme was reduced by €4,235,292 (including state co-financing) and on 21 December 2023 by another €1,502,887 (including state co-financing). The total allocation of the Programme as of 31 December 2023 was €17,791,231 (including state co-financing). Overall, the Programme's allocation (for regranting) has been reduced by 26,6 % in 2023.

Out of 6 projects implemented under the BIN SGS01 Call on support of newly established businesses (start-ups), 4 are already completed<sup>[1]</sup>. In January 2023 one new project contract was concluded as another project from the reserve list decided not to proceed, due to insufficient time for implementation. 2 remaining projects BIN SGS01\_2020\_026: Replacement of Obsolete Wave Energy for the third generation (implemented by niore Energy, s.r.o.) and BIN SGS01\_2020\_011: Innovative lighting solutions made of solid wood and natural materials (implemented by Setup.lighting s.r.o.) are expected to finish the implementation on time.

The projects implemented under the BIN01 and BIN02 Calls on support of innovation and business development are in various stages of implementation. Out of 14 projects implemented within BIN01, 2 project promoters (BIN 01\_2021\_009: Research of mobile zero waste technology for regeneration of used sorbents from industry (implemented by DEKONTA Slovensko, spol. s r.o.) and BIN 01\_2021\_016: Innovation of plastic waste recycling system (implemented by Greentech Slovakia s.r.o.)) terminated contracts in 2023. The reasons included concerns about compliance with legislative requirements, lack of technical staff as well as

significant changes in the market segment in which the project promoter operates. The PO expects even further changes. Under the BIN02 Call, 1 out of 3 projects implemented completed its activities and submitted the Final Project Report in December 2023 (project BIN 02\_2021\_025: Competitiveness of the company by purchasing new technology (implemented by ELEKTRO RECYCLING, s.r.o.)). As the projects are structured to achieve results in the final stage of their implementation, the PO expect significant progress in meeting the indicators for these Calls upon the completion of the projects.

Within the Educational component of the Programme, 14 projects were implemented in 2023. Under the BINS02 Call on supporting of institutional cooperation between higher educational institutions, upper secondary schools and private sector all 11 projects conducted opening conferences during the year. The project BINS02\_2021\_005: Secondary vocational school of gastronomy and services in Prešov (implemented by the Secondary vocational school of gastronomy and services in Prešov) held the closing conference in January 2024, as it is about to be completed. Within the project, 90 apprentices were supported.

At the beginning of 2023, 3 projects<sup>[2]</sup> under the BINS03 Call on supporting international mobility between higher educational institutions, upper secondary schools and private sector were contracted. Majority of mobilities to/from Norway and Iceland took place at the end of the year.

Due to the lack of time until the end of implementation period together with limited personal capacities, the PO did not launched Calls for additional funding.

The bilateral aspect of the Programme can be considered successful. On 21 March 2023 the PO organised Vocational Education and Training (VET) webinar with partners from all Donor states. The webinar was attended by almost 40 participants. The Call BINBF02 was closed on 31 December 2023, with 5 initiatives supported in the total amount of €48,544. In February 2023 a new Call BINBF04 for bilateral initiatives was opened with total allocation of €70,000. So far 5 initiatives were supported, 4 of them were related to participation at the Oslo Innovation Week 2023.

As of 31 December 2023 the SK-INNOVATION Programme was the most successful Programme from a financial point of view (according to the financial data directly from the Project Promoters). The processing of the Project Interim Reports by the PO represents a significant weakness, which has been the subject of several meetings between the PO and the NFP.

With regards to the results achieved until the end of December 2023, the fulfilling of the indicators is ongoing and they will be achieved at the end of the Programme implementation. Some of the indicators did not reach the target values just yet, however, the progress in their fulfilment is visible. For example "Number of products or services commercialized (new to the market)" reached even higher values than estimated with an achievement value of 13 (while the target value was 3).

There were no changes in addressing the special concerns set in the Memoranda of Understanding in the Programme set-up. The Programme is addressing main focus areas: Green Industry Innovation, Welfare technology and Ambient Assisted Living under Outcome 1. 15 % of the total eligible expenditure of the Programme was allocated for so called "Educational component" under Outcome 2. Focus on young and female entrepreneurs as prioritized target group was addressed in selection criteria of respective Calls for proposals.

[\[1\]](#)

BIN SGS01\_2020\_003: mFIRES – Modular First Responder Information System (implemented by INTELLOPE, s.r.o.)

BIN SGS01\_2020\_023: Energy savings and a better environment for children with attendance analysis (implemented by Zachráň včely s.r.o.)

BIN SGS01\_2020\_005: OPATRIO: Web-based application for home care service management (implemented by PRORozVOJ, s. r. o.)

BIN SGS01\_2020\_012: SELITEX - Second Life for Textile (implemented by WAKIVAKY j.s.a)

[\[2\]](#)

BIN SGS03\_2022\_002: Smart systems as a tool for reduce the carbon footprint of green industrial technologies (implemented by University of Žilina)

BIN SGS03\_2022\_001: Bergen to Bratislava: Knowledge and Human Capital Exchange (implemented by Comenius University in Bratislava)

BIN SGS03\_2022\_003: Raising Excellence in Research and Project Management and Administration through Close Cooperation (implemented by the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava)

## **SK-CLIMATE Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**

The year 2023 marked some acceleration in the implementation of 49 supported projects as well as challenges for the SK-CLIMATE Programme.

The Memoranda of Understanding on implementation of the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms 2014 – 2021 adjusted the Programme allocation once in 2023. As of 17 February 2023, the Programme allocation was increased by €2,529,412 (including state co-financing). The total allocation of the Programme as of 31 December 2023 was €23,960,000 (including state co-financing).

Under the Outcome 1, majority of projects within the ClimaUrban Calls ACC01 and ACC02 have implemented or are in the process of implementing key measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation. 4 out of 8 projects completed their key hard measures particularly focusing on enhancing grey and blue-green urban infrastructure. On the other hand, the projects ACC01P03: Climate resilient Bratislava - Pilot projects for decarbonisation, energy efficiency of buildings and sustainable rainwater management in urban space (implemented by the City of Bratislava) and ACC02P03: Snina a city that is ready for climate change (implemented by the City of Snina) has reached very low disbursement levels of 11,92% (for ACC01P03) and 15,43% (for ACC02P03) as of December 2023. The NFP and the PO are in regular contact regarding these projects.

15 out of 30 projects implemented under the ClimaEdu Call ACC03 were completed. Primary and secondary schools created education materials on climate change and build physical measures in schools and school areas. Awareness raising campaigns for public carried out by schools are helping students, teachers and targeted public having more climate friendly behaviour.

Progress in implementing all 6 projects supported under the ClimaLocal Call ACC04 accelerated significantly, with a shared goal of restoring degraded wetland ecosystems to enhance their resilience to climate change. However, challenges such as adverse natural conditions and time constraints pose risks to project completion within the allocated timeframe. Norwegian partners involved in 3 of the 6 projects contribute expertise in carbon capture in wetlands and support awareness-raising activities, enhancing the projects' impact and knowledge exchange.

In September 2023, the below mentioned project from the reserve list of the ClimaInfo Call ACC05 was contracted in the amount of €253,452 due to the additional funds awarded to the Programme. There are 4 projects implemented in total, reaching high interest of target groups in awareness raising activities carried out. The new project ACC05P06: Green Mission (implemented by the Slovak Mining Museum) introduces the concept of outdoor environmental programs and hybrid presentation zones to showcase environmentally friendly adaptation measures. These initiatives aim to transform revitalized, barrier-free public spaces into "organic community gardens" and "gallery rain gardens", providing engaging environments for visitors while promoting sustainable practices.

The Call for award of additional funding ACCDP to already contracted Projects was launched on 10 January 2023 (with deadlines for submission of project applications on 10 March 2023, 10 June 2023, 10 September 2023 and 15 December 2023) with allocation of €830,000 from EEA Grants and €1,900,000 from Norway Grants in order to help the Project Promoters to address the current economic challenges marked with exceptional price increases beyond the control of the Project Promoters. A total of 8 projects were supported in the amount €787,597. This represents 31% of the additional allocation provided to the Programme, based on the adjusted Memoranda of Understanding on implementation of the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms 2014 – 2021 effective from 17 February 2023.

The pre-defined project PdP1: Living Lab centre in Dropie (implemented by Slovak Environment Agency) made limited progress in its activities. A domestic wastewater treatment plant was constructed and a rain garden was created within practical workshop for students "Youth Climate Change Living Lab". Nevertheless, the implementation of the project is delayed and most probably will not be finished on time. As of 31 December 2023 the disbursement of this project was only 3,53%. The NFP and the PO are in regular contact regarding this project.

From the bilateral perspective the Programme is considered successful. The newly contracted project brought another Norwegian project partner, increasing the number of projects implemented in bilateral partnership to 23.

Throughout 2023, the PO organised several bilateral activities including two EduClima Study tours in May 2023 (with participation of 44 students and teachers from Slovakia, 5 representatives of the PO, 3 representatives of DPPs and 4 students and teachers from Norway). Then, UrbanClima Study tour to Oslo, Norway was organized in September 2023 (with participation of 20 representatives of 10 Slovak cities - Komárno, Nitra, Lučenec, Sereď, Bratislava - Petržalka, Pezinok, Košice, Michalovce, Martin a Levice, 3 representatives of PO, 20 representatives of 2 Norwegian cities – Bærum and Lørenskog as well as 3 representatives of DPPs.).

As of 31 December 2023 the SK-CLIMATE Programme was the most problematic in terms of disbursement, mainly due to the shortness of time with regards to the end of eligibility period in 30 April 2024. It is reasonable to assume that the implementation of this Programme will end up with an unsatisfactory result (estimated 70%). Also, it is reasonable to assume that the project PdP1: Climate change and environment education centre (Living Lab) in Dropie (implemented by the Slovak Environment Agency) as well as the project ACC01P03: Climate resilient Bratislava – Pilot projects for decarbonisation, energy efficiency of buildings and sustainable rainwater management in urban space (implemented by the City of Bratislava), whose

implementation is in an unsatisfactory state, will not be successfully completed in the full financial scope and the final disbursement figure may be even lower.

With regards to the results achieved until end of December 2023, the fulfilling of the indicators is ongoing. Some of the indicators did not reach the target values as of the end of the year 2023. This is visible on the indicator "Number of local decision-makers and administrators completing workshops/courses" (achieved value 0 out of 360) because the relevant activity has not been completed as of 31 December 2023. On the other hand a positive example can be the indicator "Number of students participating in awareness raising campaigns" which reached even higher values than estimated with achievement value 21,858 (while the target value was 7,600).

There are no other special concerns set in the Memoranda of Understanding related to the SK-CLIMATE Programme.

### **SK-LOCALDEV Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion**

The Programme implementation in 2023 saw progress in all 24 projects implemented. Despite delays in certain projects and unexpected challenges, significant strides were made towards achieving the Programme's objectives.

The Memoranda of Understanding on implementation Norway Financial Mechanisms 2014 – 2021 adjusted the Programme allocation once in 2023. As of 17 February 2023, the Programme allocation was decreased by €1,400,000 (including state co-financing). The total allocation of the Programme as of 31 December 2023 was €16,247,059 (including state co-financing).

8 projects under the Call LDI01 focused on local development are being successfully implemented, contributing to the establishment of multifunctional Youth Centers aimed at providing leisure, educational, and employment opportunities for children and young people from diverse backgrounds. For some of them the construction works are still in progress, however the activities can be implemented. These centers have witnessed a rise in client numbers, particularly from socially and medically disadvantaged and Roma communities. However, delays in project implementation prompted the postponement of the condition regarding the 12 months operation of Youth Centers to ensure sustainability. In previous Strategic Report the NFP formulated concern related to regional elections that took place in October 2022, and change of mayors threatened implementation of 6 projects. The risk related to the impact of the results of the 2022 municipal elections was partially confirmed during the monitoring of the NFP executed in 2023. More detailed information can be found in chapter 6 and Annex A.

16 projects are being implemented under Outcome 2, 7 out of them under the small grant scheme, addressing health, education, employment, housing, and non-discrimination for Roma inclusion. The work of NGOs in the area of Roma interventions brings results. The activities include applying the good practices and measures, which help the Roma, inclusion and empowerment directly at local level in Roma communities with Roma people.

The Call for additional funds LDIDP was launched on 28 April 2023 with allocation of €632,810 in order to help Project Promoters to cope with the current economic challenges of extraordinary price increases caused by external factors through no fault of the Project Promoters themselves. A total of 4 projects under the LDI01 Call and 1 project under the LDI02 Call were supported in the amount of additional €561,681.

On 22 June 2023 the second Call for additional funds LDIDP2 was launched, with the aim to allow Project Promoters to carry out additional activities, including expansions or continuation of existing activities that contribute to the objective of their project. A total of 1 project under the



LDI01 Call, 2 projects under the LDI02 Call and 5 projects under the LDI03 Call were supported in the amount of €585,581.

Also, the pre-defined project LDIPP001: Innovative education of teachers to increase their intercultural competences in the education process of Roma pupils (implemented by National Institute for Education and Youth) under Outcome 3 mostly met the project indicators and milestones. There were time deviations in the implementation of educational activities which were postponed due to the pandemic. In summer 2023, the extension of the project by new initiatives, including an increase in the project budget by €260,000 was approved. The activities include trainings, capacity building and digitalization of teaching materials.

The bilateral aspect of the Programme is considered successful as 15 projects are implemented in partnership with Norwegian partners. €60,000 from the Fund for Bilateral Relations was allocated for a study trip to the Youth Centre with CoE's label in Budapest in the autumn 2024, aimed at Project Promoters and their Norwegian partners or other representatives from Norway.

In October 2023 the Roundtable discussion on Roma Inclusion was organized by the NFP and FMO. The event was attended by relevant stakeholders including representatives of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, Active Citizens Fund, Council of Europe, the National Institute for Education and others. The discussion was divided into two parts. In the first part of the meeting, the status and mapping of Roma concerns in relevant programs and funds was presented. The second part was dedicated to discussion on Roma concerns and general issues at country level.

As of 31 December 2023 the SK-LOCALDEV Programme was perceived by the NFP as a relatively unproblematic Programme. In case of maintaining the speed of processing of the Project Interim Reports by the PO, it is reasonable to assume that the Programme will be completed with good results (both financially as well as in terms of outputs and outcomes).

With regards to the results achieved until end of December 2023, the target values of most indicators are going to be achieved or overachieved. Based on the implemented projects it seems that except for the indicator "Number of projects applying an integrated approach" and "Number of multi-stakeholder partnerships established or supported" the target values of all indicators will be achieved or overachieved. The reason for the underachievement is not enough projects supported.

With respect to the conditions set out in the Memoranda of Understanding, there have been no changes since the last reported set-up of the Programme. Funding for infrastructure (hard measures) shall not exceed 60 % of the total eligible expenditure. The Call LDI01 reflected establishing multi-functional centers, targeted at vulnerable children and youth in the least developed regions of Slovakia. The Programme contributes to fostering local development and to reducing poverty, with a strong focus on vulnerable groups at high risk of exclusion, such as Roma. Predefined project LDIPP001: Innovative education of teachers to increase their intercultural competences in the education process of Roma pupils (implemented by the National Institute for Education and Youth) in line with MoU is focused on innovative education of teachers in order to increase their cultural competences in the educational process of Roma pupils. The Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities is involved in the preparation and implementation of the Programme as a member of the Cooperation Committee and actively cooperates with Programme Operator.

## **SK-DOMESTIC Domestic and Gender-based Violence**

Out of 9 projects implemented under the DGV01 Call, one has successfully completed all its activities in 2023. Remaining project promoters continue their activities in cooperation with other



organisations active in the field of gender equality, thanks to which they manage to increase the quality or the effectiveness of the impact of their activities. In total 26 awareness raising campaigns promoting gender equality took place. Success and high impact of these campaigns is attributed to the emerging trend among advertising agencies in Slovakia to prioritize socially responsible advertising communication.

The Memoranda of Understanding on implementation Norway Financial Mechanisms 2014 – 2021 adjusted the Programme allocation once in 2023. As of 17 February 2023, the Programme allocation was decreased by €1,200,000 (including state co-financing). The total allocation of the Programme as of 31 December 2023 was €9,388,235.

Under Outcome 2 related to support and protection of victims of domestic and gender-based violence, 9 projects successfully launched their activities and continue to provide services for women and children with experience of violence. Projects incurring investment costs, particularly those involving the renovation or expansion of women's shelters or their own premises, are facing implementation delays. No new places have yet been created within the women's shelters, but the works started in October 2023 and successful completion is expected. On the other hand, the projects have prepared several educational and awareness-raising campaigns on various topics. The DGV02014 project campaign, targeting cyber/stalking as a new form of violence against women, sought to enable women to identify and seek assistance. With a significant social following, reaching 900,000 views, the campaign prompted an increase in calls to the help line.

The Call for additional funds DGVPD was launched on 3 May 2023 with allocation of €618,379 in order to allow Project Promoters to carry out additional activities, including expansions of existing activities; that contribute to the objective of their project. A total of 3 projects under the DGV01 Call and 4 projects under the DGV02 and DGV03 Calls will be supported in the amount of €603,520.

The pre-defined project DGVPP002: Improving the victim-oriented approach – a tool enhancing the capacity to fight violence against women and domestic violence (implemented by the Institute for Labour and Family Research) under Outcome 3, focusing on enhancing the capacity to combat violence against women, saw notable developments in 2023. As mentioned in chapter 2, a significant budgetary amendment facilitated the establishment of the National Helpline for Women Experiencing Gender-Based Violence, operational since July 2023. Additionally, comprehensive regional coordination efforts, training sessions for professionals, educational initiatives, and research collaborations highlighted the Programme's multifaceted approach to addressing domestic and gender-based violence.

The bilateral Call DGVPF04 closed on 15 December 2023 received only 1 application. The initiative was supported and in addition to strengthening bilateral relations aims to introduce the work and know-how of Norwegian partner Reform through online workshops and social media platforms.

A significant development in 2023 was the SYNERGY conference hosted by the Slovak Republic from 6-8 December 2023. Organized by the PO in collaboration with the Coordinating-Methodical Centre for gender-based and domestic violence and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, the conference aimed to address the needs and sustainability of specialized support services for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence in Europe, particularly focusing on sexual and intimate partner violence. The event, graced by President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, Minister of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, Richard Raši and State Secretary of the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, Michal Kaliňák, facilitated knowledge exchange and showcased best practices from Norway and

European standards outlined by the Council of Europe, garnering positive feedback from both domestic and international participants.

As of 31 December 2023 the SK-DOMESTIC Programme was perceived by the NFP as a relatively unproblematic Programme. In case of maintaining the speed of processing of the Project Interim Reports by the PO, it is reasonable to assume that the Programme will be completed with good results (both financially as well as in terms of outputs and outcomes).

With regards to the results achieved until end of December 2023, the fulfilling of the indicators is ongoing and there are visible results (for example "Number of schools provided with lectures focused on gender equality" with achieved value 129 (and target value was 89)). To add, schools respond well to lecture offers, therefore, the value is supposed to increase further as lectures are still ongoing. On the other hand, some of indicators will not reach the target values because the expectations of the Programme Operator were unrealistic. For example, in case of the indicator "Number of service providers running or participating in a consortium with public institutions at local level" this was caused by the limited number of organizations to be supported in Slovakia).

Special concerns set in the Memorandum of Understanding are reflected in the Programme Agreement. It is built on the results achieved by the SK09 Programme (from the previous Programme period), preserving the established services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence. Special focus is paid to children victims and vulnerable groups, such as victims with addictions, victims of sexual abuse. Outcome 1 is dedicated to increasing understanding of gender equality via awareness-raising activities, while providing schools from marginalised Roma communities to which lectures specifically focused on gender equality. Pre-defined project DGVPP002: Improving the victim-oriented approach – a tool enhancing the capacity to fight violence against women and domestic violence (implemented by the Institute of Labour and Family Research) proposed in the MoU providing support to Coordination Methodological Centre is being implemented. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic is a Programme partner as a member of the Cooperation Committee and a voting member of the Selection Committee. The Concept Note set maximum level of funding available for infrastructure at 30% of the total eligible expenditure of the Programme.

## **SK-CULTURE Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation**

A significant progress was made within the Programme in 2023. The pre-defined project CLTPP001: Pro Monumenta II (implemented by the Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic) was completed in June 2023 by organising final conference with Donor project partner. 3 centres for traditional craft techniques were established in Trnava, Banská Štiavnica and Levoča and together 343 cultural monuments were monitored by regional inspection teams. Also, the pre-defined project CLTPP002: Red Monastery – Reborn (implemented by the Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic) has further continued with preserving its historical and cultural significance and by rejuvenating original monastery functions and integrating traditional crafts.

The Memoranda of Understanding on implementation of the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms 2014 – 2021 adjusted the Programme allocation twice in 2023. As of 17 February 2023, the Programme was increased by €4,067,647 (including state co-financing) and on 21 December 2023 by another €950,000 (including state co-financing). The total allocation of the Programme as of 31 December 2023 was €28,089,412 (including state co-financing). Overall, the Programme's allocation (for regranting) has been increased by 23,29 % in 2023.

Withing the second modification in February 2023, additional funds were allocated for covering additional activities or to cover the price increase (within already contracted projects). Of the six

programmes implemented in Slovakia, only the SK-CULTURE Programme has been able to absorb not only its original allocation, but also fully absorb the amount increased by the second modification of the Memoranda of Understanding. The Programme has therefore become the prime candidate for receiving additional funding. Therefore, within the third reallocation in December 2023, additional funds were allocated to the Programme. This amount was used to allocate additional funds to the project CLT01004: Restoration, reconstruction and revitalization of the Synagogue in Trenčín.

All 18 cultural heritage projects implemented under the CLT01 Call completed the public procurement processes, made significant progress in construction works and caught up with the delays from previous years. 2 projects even developed entrepreneurship strategies, which were submitted to the PO (CLT01008: Renovation of the Mannor house of the Zichy family in Voderady (implemented by Bohdal Ltd.) and CLT01013: Today as a bridge to tomorrow – The Church of Dominicans in Košice – facade restoration (implemented by Dominican Convent)).

Within Outcome 2 related to improvement of access to contemporary art, 4 out of 9 projects implemented under the CLT02 Call completed their activities and final reports have been approved for 3 of them. One of the completed projects, CLT02023: Resurrection of Miracle (implemented by Civic Association Pôtoň), successfully organised international site-specific festival called "Into the Miracles" with participation of all three Donor project partners that took place in July 2023. The follow-up project activities "Essence of a Miracle" took place in all three Donor states during autumn 2023.

Despite launching only in 2022, all 11 projects implemented under the CLT03 Call experienced a swift implementation, where COVID-19 measures caused few problems, and implementation has continued without interruption.

The Call for additional funds CLTDP was launched on 8 March 2023 with allocation of €4,068,629 in order to financially assist Project Promoters to cope with the current economic challenges of extraordinary price increases caused by external factors through no fault of the Project Promoters themselves as well as to allow Project Promoters to carry out additional activities that contribute to the objective of their project. A total of 15 projects under the CLT01 Call and 8 projects under the CLT02 and CLT03 Calls were supported in the additional amount of €4,128,034.

From the bilateral point of view, the Programme is also a success. Except one, all projects are implemented with Donor project partner.

The bilateral Calls CLTBF04 to strengthen bilateral cooperation in field of cultural heritage management and CLTBF05 to strengthen bilateral cooperation in field of contemporary culture and living art were closed on 15 December 2023. One application has been submitted within CLTBF04 Call and 8 applications were submitted within CLTBF05 Call. In total, 3 applications have been approved and 2 are under the assessment.

The pre-defined bilateral initiative CLTBFPI-01 of Slovak Arts Council and Arts and Culture Norway was completed in 2023. There are 3 more pre-defined initiatives being implemented, 2 by the National Trust Slovakia and one by the Monument Board of the SR.

As of 31 December 2023 the SK-CULTURE Programme was perceived by the NFP as a relatively unproblematic Programme. In case of maintaining the speed of processing of the Project Interim Reports by the PO, it is reasonable to assume that the Programme will be completed with good results (both financially as well as in terms of outputs and outcomes).

With regards to the results achieved until the end of December 2023, the majority of indicators have been achieved or overachieved and there are visible results (for example "Number of

cultural monuments monitored“ with achieved value 343 (and target value was 210) or “Number of events targeting audience development” where the target value has been overachieved as well (achieved value 313 and target value 100). On the other hand, the indicator “Number of entrepreneurship strategies developed and implemented” achieved value 8 (target value was 20). To add, the project promoters are working on the strategy. Submission is expected at the end of projects implementation. The strategy is mandatory for all the projects.

The special concerns set in the Memorandum of Understanding are reflected in the Programme Agreement. The Programme focus on the role that art, culture and cultural heritage play in local and regional development; with emphasis on the potential of the cultural and creative sectors in relation to social and economic development and their ability to reach out to the broader public. Measures addressing less developed and disadvantaged geographical areas and communities, valorisation of cultural heritage, as well as facilitating networking between service providers are prioritised. Two small grants scheme calls addressing contemporary art and culture, as well as the promotion of bilateral exchange of living art were opened with total allocation of €3,000,000. The Programme contributes to greater awareness about the culture of social, ethnic and cultural minorities and groups, including the Roma population via implemented projects. No more than 70% of the total eligible expenditure of the programme is be available for infrastructure (hard measures). The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, is actively involved in the preparation and implementation of the Programme, specifically as member of the Cooperation Committee.

### **SK-GOVERNANCE Cross-border Cooperation / Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency**

In 2023, the war in Ukraine is still considered a Programme risk and influenced the implementation of projects under the Slovak-Ukrainian institutional cooperation Outcome. 5 projects are being implemented within the Call GGC01, 3 of them with Norwegian partner. However, the Project Promoters with the cooperation of the project partners created alternative scenario plans that could be used as the war in Ukraine complicated the implementation of planned activities. Project GGC01005: Safe and Inclusive Border between Slovakia and Ukraine (implemented by the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic) successfully finalized all activities in 2023, the project grant was spent up to 98,40%. Project GGC01009: Future of Public Administration (implemented by Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice) also completed all planned activities, including the final conference in November 2023, but there are still unspent funds due to the pandemic restrictions and war which prevented business trips to Ukraine.

Another risk represents the pre-defined project GGCPP004: TRIGLAV – Strengthen the fight against CBRN threats at the Slovak-Ukrainian border (implemented by the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic). Even though the opening conference took place in January 2023 due to a significant delay in the implementation of the project activities, the Project Promoter was not able to implement all planned activities in 2023 (for example one exercise of Slovak Security Forces and one study trip to France). Due to the delay in implementation, the project budget was decreased by €360,635.

Activities continued also under the pre-defined project GGCPP001: Improving Integrity of the Public Administration / IIPA (implemented by the Government Office of the Slovak Republic) related to the integrity of the Public Administration. There were significant savings identified within the project, therefore the project grant was reduced by €300,557.

Under the pre-defined project GGCPP002: Enhancing the efficiency of the justice system through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties (implemented by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic), among other activities, the new map of courts in the Slovak Republic took effect in June 2023 and in October 2023, reconstruction works at eight

partner courts were finished. Using the refurbished premises in 8 courts and realizing trainings of judges will significantly contribute to the efficient justice system.

Activities contributing to the increased application of the Value for Money principle in public procurement continued within the pre-defined project GGCPP003: Responsible Public Procurement (implemented by the Public Procurement Office).

The adjusted Memorandum of Understanding on implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014 – 2021 is effective from 17 February 2023, reflecting the reallocation of abovementioned savings. Within this reallocation the Programme allocation was decreased by €411,765 (including state co-financing). Total allocation of the Programme is €9,588,235 (including state co-financing).

4 out of 9 Projects are being implemented in trilateral partnerships between Slovakia, Ukraine and Norway. In order to support the bilateral aspect of the Programme, and Updated Bilateral Call GGCBF02 was launched in March 2023. In total here were 6 applications submitted, 3 were approved, 2 rejected and one is being assessed<sup>[1]</sup>, consuming practically the whole allocation of €106,000. Also, the second study trip to Iceland within the pre-defined initiative GGCPP002: Enhancing the efficiency of the justice system through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties (implemented by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic), took place in October 2023 with the cooperation of the Icelandic partner – National Agency for Children and Families.

In November 2023 after detailed revision of the budget and already incurred expenditure, the Project Promoter of GGCPP001: Improving Integrity of the Public Administration / IIPA (implemented by the Government Office of the Slovak Republic) informed the PO about the final amount of saved financial resources in the amount of €298,612. Savings were caused by traveling restrictions connected with the pandemic of COVID-19, personal changes in the project team and savings caused by technical, financial and time difficulties.

As of 31 December 2023 the SK-GOVERNANCE Programme was perceived by the NFP as a problematic Programme in terms of disbursement.

With regards to the results achieved until end of December 2023, some of the indicators are already achieved and some will be achieved at the end of the Programme implementation. For example the indicator “Number of line ministries whose policies in the field of integrity of public administration are coordinated” achieved value 5 (target value 5). Or, the indicator “Number of inter-ministerial meetings promoting cooperation on the protection of the rights of the victim” with achieved value 17 out of 30.

Special concerns set in the Memorandum of Understanding have been addressed by the Programme. Within the component Good Governance are three pre-defined projects implemented, addressing integrity of public administration, efficiency of the justice system and application of the Value for Money principle in public procurement (in cooperation with OECD). An Open Call GGC01 with allocation €2,000,000 and a small grant scheme GGC02 with allocation €500,000 focusing on institutional cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine related to good governance were launched. The maximum level of funding available for infrastructure at 30% of the total eligible expenditure of the Programme is being observed.

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<sup>[1]</sup> One application was received by the end of 2023 and will be assessed early in 2024.

#### 4. STATUS OF BILATERAL FUNDS

It is safe to say that the year 2023 was in the name of pre-defined initiatives at national level, and 2024 will be fully focused on their successful implementation. Despite the fact, that the pre-defined initiative of the Migration Office of the Slovak Republic was cancelled in July 2023, by the end of the year 97% of the funds were allocated either to Calls for proposals and pre-defined initiatives at the national level or, upon the Expression of Interest, to the POs.

On the other hand, the drawing of the fund is still not so satisfactory, even though several initiatives were completed in 2023. All 15 initiatives implemented under Calls for proposals at the national level (FBR01, FBR02 and FBRTG01) were finalised and altogether used 7% of the Fund allocation<sup>1</sup>. The total drawing of the funds improved from 10.6 % to 17,11%.

At the end of the year, in December 2023, the National Focal Point proposed reallocation of €469,953 from the SK-INNOVATION Programme to the Fund for Bilateral Relations, as a response to the letter of the Financial Mechanism Committee. The Memoranda of Understanding on implementation of the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms 2014 – 2021 were amended in December 2023 and as a result a new pre-defined initiative of European Capitals of Cultures will be implemented in 2024, by the City of Trenčín and Bodø 2024 as well as a new initiative by Arts Council Slovakia and Norway. The total allocation of the Fund is now €2,731,952.

More than 52% of the funds are currently allocated to the pre-defined initiatives at national level. In December 2022, the NFP and the JCBF agreed on new approach in the pursuit of dedication of the funds to bilateral initiatives - directly addressing line ministries and other “umbrella” organizations with an offer to submit proposals for realisation of pre-defined initiatives. In March and April 2023, the National Focal Point launched two rounds of addressing organizations within the state and public administration, such as ministries, self-governing regions, Union of Towns of Slovakia, Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia, Slovak Rectors' Conference, Council of Universities of the Slovak Republic and others. A total of 19 applications were submitted. The minimum contribution for one bilateral initiative was set at €20,000 and the maximum contribution at €75,000. Among the eligible activities were e. g. seminars, workshops, conferences, study trips or internships pursuing the objective of strengthening mutual relations between Slovakia and Donor states. During the 13th meeting of the JCBF (conducted as a per-rollam meeting between 9th June and 7th July 2023), based on the recommendation of the National Focal Point and members of the JCBF, 10 of the proposed bilateral initiatives were approved and the Work Plan was modified accordingly. Total allocation of the 10 new initiatives adds up to €577 269,80.

Taking into account the interest of the applicants, the National Focal Point considers addressing “umbrella” organizations to be an effective approach.

In relation to additional allocation of bilateral funds to programmes, the 14th meeting of the JCBF was dedicated to discussion on approval of the Expressions of Interest sent by the Programme Operator for SK-CULTURE Programme and SK-GOVERNANCE Programme. It was conducted as a per-rollam meeting between 21 August 2023 and 06 September 2023. As a result, the amount of €15,000 was allocated to the pre-defined initiative under the SK-CULTURE Programme called Heritage and Climate symposium (implemented by the National Trust Slovakia in cooperation with the partner Riksantikvaren Norway) in October 2023. Within the pre-defined project of the Ministry of Justice of the SR (under the SK-GOVERNANCE Programme) a change of partner from the Norwegian Courts Administration to National Agency for Children and Family in Iceland was approved.

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<sup>1</sup> Taking into consideration the allocation of the Bilateral Fund as of 31 December 2023 which is €2,731,952.

Most of the activities planned at the Programme level should be completed in the 2024. Significant activities implemented in 2023 include the Synergy meeting organised in Bratislava in December 2023 by the Programme Operator for SK-DOMESTIC Programme or several Study tours conducted by the Programme Operator for SK-CLIMATE Programme for Slovak and Norwegian students and teachers, as well as representatives of Slovak municipalities.

Several Calls at the Programme level were closed at the end of 2023:

Programme	Call ID	Call opened	Allocation	No. of submitted applications	No. of supported applications	Contracted /Amount to be contracted	Disbursed amount
SK-Culture	CLTBF04	15.12.2022 – 15.12.2023	€25,000	1	1	7000€	0 €
	CLTBF05	15.12.2022 – 15.12.2023	€20,000	8	3	25 000 €	CLTBF05-02 - 7 000,00 € - 14.02.2024
SK-Domestic	DGVBF04	20.12.2022 – 20.12.2023	€95,127	1	1	10 000 €	0 €
SK-Governance	GGCBF02	15.03.2023 – 31.12.2023	€106,287,19	6	3 <sup>2</sup>	88 568 €	23 694,00 € - GGCBF02-01 – 21.12.2023
							23 160,00 € - GGCBF02-02 – 24.01.2024
							24 000,00 € - GGCBF02-03 – 05.03.2024
SK-Innovation	BIN BF02	22.11.2021 – 31.12.2023	€50,000	11	5	48 544,00 €	37 436,06 €

<sup>2</sup> Another 1 application is being currently evaluated by the Programme Operator. This application is expected to be approved in 2024.



	BIN BF04	15.02.202 3 – 30.06.202 4	€70,000	13	5	15 878,00 €	5 212,00 €
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The composition of the JCBF changed in 2023. On 31 July 2023, the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bratislava terminated its mission after almost 20 years. As Norway's diplomatic relations with Slovakia are currently handled by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna, representatives of the Vienna Office kindly accepted the invitation to become members of the JCBF since August 2023. The cooperation is beneficial and effective.

## 5. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

### a. Management and control systems (MCS)

The Detailed Description of Management and Control System (DDMCS) at national level accompanied by the Audit Report and the Opinion was acknowledged by the FMO on 29th March 2019. The update of the DDMCS version 1.6 was approved on 11 February 2022.

There were no significant changes in the set up or staffing of the National Focal Point and there was no need to update the DDMCS at national level in 2023. In the first half of 2023, an organisational change took place at the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic and the tasks of the Department of EEA and Norway Grants were expanded to include the implementation of the Swiss contribution. The new tasks should not negatively impact implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants and abovementioned change from the perspective relevant for this report included only changes in the name of the organizational units performing the tasks of the National Focal Point.

The respective authorities reported no information on significant changes in the setup of Management and Control System of the Audit Authority or the Certifying Authority.

A detailed overview of staffing is provided in Annex D.

### b. Complaints

There were no complaints received by the National Focal Point in 2023.

### c. Irregularities

The Irregularities Authority reported 9 irregularities to the FMO via the GrACE system for the year 2023. Out of these, three cases were closed during the same year. The majority of irregularities were reported for the SK-CULTURE Programme and SK-CLIMATE Programme. The most common nature of irregularity was the infringement of public procurement rules/principles. In total there are currently 9 open cases.

### d. Audit

#### The system audits

Since the submission of the last Strategic Report to the FMO, the AA did not carry out any system audits at any level of the management and control system. Based on the results of the risk assessment performed by the AA, only one key requirement at the level of the PO – Research Agency was found risky. This key requirement was verified and tested in the audit on projects at the level of the PO – Research Agency.

### The audits on projects

In the period lasting from May 2023 to February 2024, the AA carried out the audit on projects No. 23-049. This audit was focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the NFP and the PO – Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. Within the audit on projects were identified 16 findings. Among the most serious findings, identified by the audit on projects No. 23-049, were the following ones:

- the NFP insufficiently performed administrative financial control of the IFR (ineligible travel costs were not identified in the IFR);
- the PO insufficiently performed administrative verification of the public procurement below the threshold within the IPR;
- the PO insufficiently performed administrative verification of the IPR;
- the PO did not identify a conflict of interest in the contracts outside the scope of the public procurement law within the IPR;

In the period lasting from June 2023 to December 2023, the AA carried out the audit on projects No. 23-051. This audit was focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the PO – Research Agency. Within the audit on projects No. 23-051 were identified 3 findings.

In the period lasting from September 2023 to February 2024, the AA carried out the audit on projects No. 23-050. This audit was focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the PO – Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic. Within the audit on projects were identified 13. Among the most serious findings, identified by the audit on projects No. 23-050, were the following ones:

- the PO insufficiently performed administrative verification of the public procurement below the threshold within the IPR;
- the PO insufficiently performed administrative verification of the IPR;
- during on-the-spot verification of expenditure related to the IPR was found that one window and materials/works related to it were not delivered within reconstruction of the building;
- ineligible expenditure identified by another national authority (the PO) in the IPR before the sample selection and settled before sending the AAR (not included in the TER);

In the period lasting from June 2023 to August 2023, the AA ensured the performance of the audit on projects No. 23-076. This audit was focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the AA and the CA. Since the selected sample consisted of expenditure declared by the AA (including expenditure of the Government Audit Office) and the CA, the AA requested the Department of Internal Audit of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, as an independent body, to perform audit on projects No. 23-076 to verify this expenditure. Within the audit on projects No. 23-076 no findings were identified.

## 6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### a. Monitoring

In 2023 the regular monitoring of the SK-LOCALDEV Programme was carried out. The monitoring was focused on risks assessment and was performed from December 2022 till June

2023. The risk assessment was chosen based on the low disbursement relative to the total programme allocation as well as to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and in order to monitor high commodity price increases and the change of statutory representatives in the projects after the municipal elections that took place in October 2022. As part of the risk monitoring, the NFP also assessed the staffing capacity of the PO.

The PO is sending updates to the NFP on the status of projects at the beginning of each month since June 2023. At the same time, the NFP requested the PO to set interim progress milestones for the riskiest projects (spending less than 15%) under the Calls LDI01 and LDI02.

The risk related to the impact of the results of the 2022 municipal elections was partially confirmed during the monitoring. The PO managed to mitigate the risk through intensive communication with the new statutory representatives of the municipalities in the 6 projects concerned.

Finally, the NFP concluded that the PO has taken the necessary measures to eliminate threats to the implementation of the Programme due to insufficient capacity in the organisational structure.

In October 2023, the National Focal Point launched monitoring of the results of the SK-GOVERNANCE Programme. The monitoring also includes sample of projects involving all four pre-defined projects as well as two projects implemented under the GGC01 Call focused on fostering institutional cross-border cooperation with Ukraine. The results of the monitoring were concludes in 2024, thus, they are not included in this report.

In addition, the NFP is executing an ongoing monitoring of the status of programmes on a monthly basis. The PO's were asked by the NFP to send them updates regarding the status of all projects (with information about disbursement) on a monthly basis. The aim was to identify risky projects and prevent potential delays or setbacks.

## **b. Evaluation**

Based on the Addendum 2 to the Agreement for the Financing of Technical Assistance, the current budget allocated for evaluation is €171,742. As mentioned in the previous Strategic Report, the evaluation of all Programmes will be procured and preformed as one single order. Therefore, it is not relevant to estimate budget for each Programme separately. From December 2023 till March 2024, the terms of reference for the evaluation were commented upon by the Programme Operators and the Financial Mechanism Office. In April 2024, in cooperation with the Public Procurement Department at the NFP, the final estimated value of the order will be determined, which is the last step before announcing the public procurement. The evaluation will start in 2024, and is expected to be completed in 2025.

The updated evaluation plan is included in the Annex B to this Strategic Report.

## **7. ISSUES FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING ANNEXES**

### **A. Risk assessment and management plan**

### **B. Evaluation plan**

### **C. Cooperation with Donor Programme Partners and/or International Partner Organisations**

### **D. Technical assistance report**

### **E. Communication summary**

## Annex A: Risk assessment and management plan

SK-INNOVATION			Overall level of risk 2
Risks	Previously planned response	Actual response	Planned future response
Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme as well as at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. In 2023 in total €5,700,000 was reallocated from this Programme to other Programmes implemented in the SR.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme as well as at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.
Wide – range results framework set in the Concept Note causing complications in the implementation due to the broad range of the implemented projects	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme as well as projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process.	Based on the gained experience, the NFP will propose to the donors programmes with a narrower results framework in the new programming period.
High fluctuation of the PO employees resulting in insufficient institutional and management experience at the PO level	Within the above-mentioned monthly monitoring, the NFP will monitor also the staffing situation of the PO. In the period of the implementation, it is crucial that the PO will stabilize and, if needed, also strengthens its capacities, especially in the field of the control of public procurements and project payments.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. There was only one personnel change at the position of project manager in 2023. PO strengthened its capacities by hiring additional financial manager. Personnel conducting verifications of the public procurement is stabilised as well.	The risk has passed in 2023

Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. On 11 May 2023 an online seminar on public procurement for project promoters was organised with cooperation with the Public Procurement Office of the SR.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.
Low disbursement rate at the project level	New risk identified in 2023	The NFP continually monitored the implementation of Programme . Based on the request of the NFP, the PO established partial progress milestones for the riskiest projects (monitored on monthly basis). Several meetings with the PO were organised to encourage the PO to speed up the verification of the interim project reports. The reallocation executed in 02/2023 (which decreased the Programme allocation) was a result of NFP's mitigation of negative consequences of the situation in 2023.	According to the information provided by the project promoters to the PO based on the NFP's request, the disbursement rate should not be as low as it was expected before the reallocations were done.
<b>SK-CLIMATE</b>			<b>Overall level of risk</b> <b>3</b>
<b>Risks</b>	<b>Previously planned response</b>	<b>Actual response</b>	<b>Planned future response</b>
Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.

	projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	implementation process. On 11 May 2023 an online seminar on public procurement for project promoters was organised with cooperation with the Public Procurement Office of the SR.	
Significant market prices increase on construction materials and equipment endangering successful implementation of the projects	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. €2,500,000 were allocated to the Programme in 2023. However, the PO was not able to distribute the additional funds in the above mentioned amount. In December 2023, the PO declared that the non-contracted amount of funds was €2,900,000.	The risk has passed in 2023 as the market prices increase on construction materials and equipment does not represent danger for successful implementation of the projects as the allocation for this purpose was not used. However, this leads to new risk – low disbursement rate - identified below.
Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. Partial progress milestones for the 3 riskiest projects were established by the NFP. These are being monitored on monthly basis.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.
Low disbursement rate at the project / Programme level	New risk identified in 2023.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at projects' level. Partial progress milestones for the 3 riskiest projects (ACC02P03, ACC01P03, PdP1) were established by the NFP. These are being monitored on monthly basis. The	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.

		NFP has initiated a meeting with the PO regarding the use of non-contracted funds under the SK-CLIMATE Programme. This meeting took place on 21 November 2023.	
<b>SK-LOCALDEV</b>			<b>Overall level of risk 2</b>
<b>Risks</b>	<b>Previously planned response</b>	<b>Actual response</b>	<b>Planned future response</b>
Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. On 11 May 2023 an online seminar on public procurement for project promoters was organised with cooperation with the Public Procurement Office of the SR.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.
Significant market prices increase on construction materials and equipment endangering successful implementation of the projects	Even though the NFP requested the reallocation of 1,4 MEUR from this Programme, the Programme still has enough uncommitted funds. These uncommitted funds (minimum 627 080 EUR) will be used to cover the increased market prices through a restricted call which should be launched in spring 2023.	The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. The PO redistributed €500,000 to the Project Promoters via Call for additional funds.	The risk has passed in 2023.
Lack of interest and/or motivation of project promoters to implement projects. After the regional elections in November 2022, new majors were elected in 6 out of 14 projects and,	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as	The NFP conducted regular monitoring of the Programme focused on risks assessment. The risk was partially confirmed as the PO managed to mitigate the risk through intensive	The risk has passed in 2023.



sadly, the implementation of project is not a priority for all of them.	projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	communication with the new statutory representatives of the municipalities in the 6 projects concerned.	
Delays in schedule such as delays of construction works due to weather conditions, problems with the supplier, delays in public procurement etc.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. Based on the request of the NFP, the PO established partial progress milestones for the riskiest projects that are being monitored on monthly basis.	The risk has passed in 2023.
Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.
<b>SK-DOMESTIC</b>			<b>Overall level of risk 2</b>
<b>Risks</b>	<b>Previously planned response</b>	<b>Actual response</b>	<b>Planned future response</b>
Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme level in 2023. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. In 2023 in total €1,200,000 was reallocated from this Programme to other Programmes implemented in the SR. The PO redistributed €600,000 to the Project Promoters via Call for additional funds for additional activities.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme level. This will be done on a monthly basis.

Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. On 11 May 2023 an online seminar on public procurement for project promoters was organised with cooperation with the Public Procurement Office of the SR.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.
<b>SK-CULTURE</b>			<b>Overall level of risk 1</b>
<b>Risks</b>	<b>Previously planned response</b>	<b>Actual response</b>	<b>Planned future response</b>
Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. On 11 May 2023 an online seminar on public procurement for project promoters was organised with cooperation with the Public Procurement Office of the SR. The public procurement processes were completed in 2023 in all heritage projects.	The risk has passed in 2023
Significant market prices increase on construction materials and equipment endangering successful implementation of the projects	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis.	The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. €5,000,000 were allocated to the Programme in 2023 and the PO redistributed €4,000,000 to the Project Promoters via Call for additional funds.	The risk has passed in 2023

Delays in time schedule such as delays of construction works due to weather conditions, problems with the suppliers, delays in public procurement etc.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis.	The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. Projects made significant progress in construction works and caught up with the delays from previous years, nevertheless some delays may still occur.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme as well as at projects' level. This will be done on a quarterly basis.
Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary.	The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme level. This will be done on a quarterly basis.
<b>SK-GOVERNANCE</b>			<b>Overall level of risk 3</b>
<b>Risks</b>	<b>Previously planned response</b>	<b>Actual response</b>	<b>Planned future response</b>
Russia's invasion in Ukraine	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis. It was agreed with the PO that if planned activities cannot be implemented due to the current situation in Ukraine, the Project Promoters would submit a request for a change in the projects to the PO.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme level.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme as well as at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis. The NFP is prepared to take immediate actions in order to provide direct support for Ukrainian partners or adjust the projects in response to the situation, if needed.
Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process. On 11 May 2023 an online seminar on public	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.

		procurement for project promoters was organised with cooperation with the Public Procurement Office of the SR.	
Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.	The NFP continually and closely monitored the implementation of this Programme at programme and projects' level. The NFP provided professional support to the PO with the implementation process.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.
Low disbursement rate at project / Programme level	New risk identified in 2023	The NFP will consider the utilization of the unspent funds from individual projects.	The NFP will propose the reallocation of the unspent funds to the Bilateral Fund at the national level. A more significant shift would occur should the Donors reconsider the inclusion of construction expenses and expenses for the purchase of equipment in the list of authorized expenses within the Fund for Bilateral Relations.

## Annex B: Evaluation plan

## **Annex C: Cooperation with Donor Programme Partners and/or International Partner Organisations**

The cooperation of the Programme Operators with Donor Programme Partners and/or International Partner Organisations in individual Programmes is formalised within Cooperation Committees and Selection Committees where the representatives of DDPs and IPOs are represented.

The National Focal Point has the opportunity to follow this cooperation during these meetings and could assess it as highly beneficial and constructive. But to obtain a full, comprehensive picture, the National Focal Point approached separately all involved parties and offered the opportunity to express their opinion on the cooperation in the course of 2023.

### **SK-INNOVATION Programme**

#### **Programme Operator and Partners**

Programme Operator: Research Agency  
Donor Programme: Innovation Norway (IN NO)  
Partners: Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-DIR NO)  
National Agency of International Education Affairs (AIBA LI)

The PO values the effectiveness and success of its cooperation with DPPs. The PO particularly appreciates their consistent willingness to provide help and assistance on a range of issues, including offering concrete suggestions for improvement or simplification of procedures. DPPs' prompt responsiveness to inquiries and flexible communication style are also highly valued.

In the year 2023 the involvement of the DPPs was focused mainly on advising on the use of the Fund for Bilateral Relations, assisting in Project Partner search, evaluating the submitted Grant Proposals under the Bilateral Fund and organizing an online webinar.

In general HK-dir has a good cooperation and communication with the PO on the education component of the innovation programme. In 2023 an online webinar was organised together in March on Vocational Education and Training with Slovak and Norwegian stakeholders. In their view, the challenge for the PO has been the lack of competence within the field of education and limited administrative capacity/resources.

The NFP has not received response of the Innovation Norway and the National Agency of International Education Affairs.

### **SK-CLIMATE Programme**

#### **Programme Operator and Partners**

Programme Operator: The Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic  
Donor Programme: The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE)  
Partners: The Directorate for Civil Protection (DSB)

### The Norwegian Environment Agency (NEA)

The PO states that due to the close cooperation with the Donor Programme Partners overall 4 bilateral activities were carried out getting very positive feedback from the Slovak as well as Norwegian participants

The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate highlights the physical Cooperation Committee meeting in Slovakia that was combined with project visits, which were great opportunities for the DPPs to see some projects in practice and to communicate with project managers. For NVE it seems that the program in Slovakia appears to be well-run, with good cooperation between the Programme Operator and NVE.

The Norwegian Environment Agency have the impression that the PO is working seriously and well to secure good progress in the implementation of the Programme. The year 2023 has been very successful regarding the bilateral activities on the Programme's level under the Bilateral Fund. Due to close cooperation between the PO and the DPPs, overall four bilateral activities were carried out getting very positive feedback from the Slovak as well as Norwegian participants.

The NFP has not received response of the Directorate for Civil Protection.

## SK-CULTURE Programme

### Programme Operator and Partners

Programme Operator: Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic

Donor Programme Partners: The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (RA)

Arts and Culture Norway (ACN)

The PO's cooperation with the Donor Programme Partners, Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage and Arts and Culture Norway, continued in year 2023. The cooperation was mainly focused on the sessions of the Cooperation Committee.

The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage states that the cooperation in 2023 has been close and the flow of information has been good. They are impressed at the amount of work the PO has put into reallocation and additional funding for existing projects this year. The closing event for the Culture Programme in Slovakia in 2024 is a priority for Riksantikvaren as a DPP and it will be attended with general director as well as communications staff.

The Arts and Culture Norway states that the risk of the ACN not being able to conduct the role as DPP fully, is minimized compared to 2022, due to extended communication with the PO in 2023. Participating in a bilateral project with The Slovak Arts Council while simultaneously evaluating applications for the PO provided valuable learning and insights into the PO's operations, especially application assessment, but also revealed a need for the PO to strengthen its knowledge of the Slovak cultural sector.

## SK-DOMESTIC Programme



### Programme Operator and Partners

Programme Operator:	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic
Donor Programme Partner:	Norwegian Directorate of Health
International Partner Organisation:	Council of Europe (CoE)
Other Programme Partner:	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

The PO states excellent cooperation with the Helsedirektoratet and the Council of Europe. In 2023, the DPP and IPO monitored Program progress, offered strategic advice on domestic and gender-based violence, and supported the Programme with resources and expertise. This included data collection, hotline worker support, perpetrator programs, and preparation of SYNERGY network meeting conference. Additionally, a Slovak translation of a CoE Recommendation on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women and children was provided.

The Norwegian Directorate of Health had a very fruitful collaboration with PO. They appreciate hard work and accessibility of the PO, as well as responsiveness to suggestions and contributions. The PO have been effective in informing about important developments in the Programme implementation and the CC meetings have been an occasion where good discussions have taken place. It has been easy to reach consensus when there have been different choices to be made in terms of prioritizing projects and re-allocating funds. In December, PO succeeded in organizing a high quality event, namely the SYNERGY network meeting in Bratislava, combined with onsite visits.

Despite a lack of an autumn meeting, the CoE states that the communication in 2023 maintained positive. The politically challenging environment for gender equality did not prevent the PO from hosting a successful SYNERGY Network conference aligned with Istanbul Convention standards, even featuring an opening address by President Čaputová. Through their SYNERGY Network participation, the PO strengthened its skills for intersectional approaches and specialized support services, particularly for victims of sexual violence. The PO's active engagement also led to significant contributions in discussions on good practices for implementing the Istanbul Convention. While the CoE offered additional funding for Slovak NGOs to raise awareness about the Convention, there was no uptake due to low absorption capacity.

### SK-GOVERNANCE Programme

#### Programme Operator and Partners

Programme Operator:	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic
Donor Programme Partner:	The Norwegian Barents Secretariat
International Partner Organisation:	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The PO states that the overall cooperation, day-to-day communication as well as communication through the Cooperation Committee with the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and OECD is very good.

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat highly values the cooperation with the PO as Their dedication and expertise have been instrumental in the Programme's implementation in general, but also in terms of fostering bilateral and cross-border cooperation in 2023. While the cooperation with the PO has been generally smooth, opportunities for some practical/technical improvements have been recognised. One potential improvement could involve transitioning from per rollam meetings to video meetings. This shift would allow for more extensive discussion on topics crucial to the Programme's success, enhancing communication and collaboration.

The NFP has not received statement from IPO.

### **SK-LOCALDEV Programme**

#### **Programme Operator and Partners**

Programme Operator:	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic
IPO:	Council of Europe

The PO has very good cooperation with the IPO Council of Europe. In 2023, three CC meetings were held where IPO provided advice and reflections in the meetings; monitored the progress in the Programme and provided strategic advice on Roma inclusion and local development and support to the Programme.

The NFP has not received statement from IPO.

## Annex E: Communication summary

### 1. Best projects

Projects that can be mentioned as the best practice and effective communication and publicity examples are:

The DGV02014 project "[Together with us - Expanding of counseling and support services for women experiencing violence and their children](#)" focused on developing its services in the context of developing incidents of stalking and a new form of cyberstalking violence following the end of isolation after the COVID-19 pandemic. These forms of violence have recently begun to show increased to extreme levels of severity. The project launched a comprehensive awareness campaign in cooperation with a gender-sensitive advertising agency. This campaign featured expert blog posts on social media, media engagement, and a central campaign video that reached 900,000 views. Due to overwhelming demand for support during the campaign, the Recipient extended its duration. The campaign's success was further recognized by a Bronze Golden Nail Award and three shortlists in the prestigious Slovak advertising competition Zlatý klinec, highlighting the urgent need to address stalking and cyberstalking."

The LDI022015 project "[Inclusive neighborhoods](#)" directly improves the quality of life for individuals in marginalized Roma communities by focusing on housing, employment, and education. Projekt DOM.ov works with clients in the Košice region, supporting them through financial literacy training, micro-loans for land and building materials, and skills training to facilitate self-construction of low-cost housing. This integrated approach helps families break the cycle of generational poverty by creating better living conditions, improving educational opportunities for children, and increasing parents' employment prospects. The project's success is underscored by the completion of 12 homes in 2023, with 17 more under construction. Its significance was further highlighted by a visit from the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, who met with project participants.

The BIN01\_2021\_010 project "[The Development of Smart Furniture with Artificial Intelligence and Medical Devices](#)" develops smart furniture with robotic arms, AI, and medical sensors to promote independent living for elderly and disabled individuals. The project creates prototypes, integrates medical devices, and conducts user testing. These smart furnishings aim to improve quality of life, support early health diagnosis, and potentially reduce care costs. The project effectively communicates its goals through a dedicated website and aligns with BIN programme objectives by fostering innovation in assisted living technologies.

The ACC02P01 project "[Mitigation and adaptation to climate change in Žilina](#)" aims to improve the quality of life in urban areas by integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. The focus is on the City of Žilina, where the project has developed a strategic action plan to reduce CO<sup>2</sup> emissions and adapt to climate change impacts. Specific actions include energy efficiency improvements in a kindergarten, green and blue infrastructure, sustainable transportation initiatives, waste management solutions, and educational activities. Collaboration with the Norwegian partner, Tou Scene, enhances the project's educational and publicity efforts.

### 2. Visibility of the Grants and the Donors

The NFP adheres to the Communication Strategy for the National Focal Point, ensuring consistent messaging and branding. Key actions include:

#### Dissemination and Publicity:

Activities are coordinated with the Press Department of the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. The NFP leverages its website

(<https://www.eegrants.sk>) and active Facebook profile ([Facebook/Granty EHP a Nórska na Slovensku](#)) for project promotion and public engagement.

### Collaborative Communication Network:

The NFP fosters coordinated communication efforts through regular meetings of the "Communication Network of the Grants." This working group includes the NFP, all Program Operators (POs), the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna, and representatives of the Active Citizens Fund. This structure facilitates a systematic, continuous, and effective approach to communicating about the Grants within Slovakia.

Major publicity activity prepared and organized by the National Focal Point was the campaign to raise awareness about violence against women and to promote the work of projects supported by Norway Grants. The campaign took place during the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women, an international campaign that runs from 25 November to 10 December.



The objectives of the campaign were to:

- Raise awareness about the prevalence and impact of violence against women;
- Promote the work of projects supported by the Norway Grants that are working to address violence against women;

- Encourage people to take action to end violence against women.

The campaign included a number of activities, including:

- A Facebook campaign with short videos about the projects supported by the Grants;
- Two public discussions on the topic of violence against women, which were also published as podcasts;
- Coverage of the SYNERGY Network Conference in Slovakia, with the opening address delivered by Zuzana Čaputová, President of the Slovak Republic.

The campaign benefited from support of the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. Some posts were shared on the Ministry's Facebook profile, and personal involvement from the Minister and State Secretaries helped expand the campaign's organic reach on Facebook. This collaborative effort ensured the campaign reached a wide audience and generated significant interest in the issue of violence against women.

The Facebook campaign had over 2,400 views and sparked impressive engagement, with post interactions increasing by 443% and link clicks by 450%. This surge in activity also led to a 730% growth in profile visits and gained 32 new followers, a 333% increase.

### 3. Media coverage

*Regional:*

- - [Človek v ohrození: Po dvoch rokoch skončil projekt zameraný na inklúziu](#)
  - <https://www.kosiceonline.sk/prezidentka-podporila-ludi-ktori-celia-generacnej-chudobe>
  - [teraz.sk-Na hrade Modrý Kameň pokračujú s opravou prístupového hradného mosta](#)
  - [Dunajskostredsky.sk- Michal Kaliňák rozhovor](#)
  - [TV Central Nitra-ŽIVÉ LABORATÓRIUM ZELENÝCH INOVÁCIÍ](#)
  - [local TV SEN BIN Svietidlá Setup Lighting](#)
  - [teraz.sk/regiony/solarne-panely-na-skole-v-poprade](#)
  - [sobotnik.sk-modry-kamen-v-cukrarni-castanea-bude-gastanovy-piatok/](#)
  - [Video on reconstruction of House of Art Fatra](#)
  - [tynitrcka.sk-Resurrection of Miracle: Development of New Model of Art Festival in Slovak Countryside](#)
  - [kultura.sme-Resurrection of Miracle](#)
  - [zilina.sk-Mitigation and adaptation to climate change in Zilina](#)
  - [youtube-Mitigation and adaptation to climate change in Zilina](#)
  - [youtube - ECO GYMSU](#)
  - [rimava.sk- Coburg manor house in Jelšava](#)
  - [mynovohrad.sme.sk - HraMoKaPlus - Restoration of the Baroque mansion in the castle Modrý Kameň](#)

- [presov.korzar.sme.sk](https://presov.korzar.sme.sk) - Enhancing the efficiency of the justice system through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties
- [youtube](https://youtube.com) - The Space Connects Us – Moldava nad Bodvou

National:

•

- <https://www.prezident.sk/article/prezidentka-ocenila-projekt-vystavby-domov-v-kecerovciach/>
- <https://komercespravy.pravda.sk/charita-a-csr/clanok/666279-neziskova-organizacia-projekt-dom-ov-ma-ambiciu-menit-komunitu/>
- Reportage on the national TV - RTVS
- Reportage on the national radio - RTVS
- [tvnoviny-zilina-zacina-bojovat-proti-negativnym-vplyvom-klimy-viacere-budovy-pokryje-zelenou-strechou](https://tvnoviny-zilina-zacina-bojovat-proti-negativnym-vplyvom-klimy-viacere-budovy-pokryje-zelenou-strechou)
- [rtvs.sk/ochranari-a-aktivisti-zachranuju-vzacne-mokrade](https://rtvs.sk/ochranari-a-aktivisti-zachranuju-vzacne-mokrade)
- [teraz.sk](https://teraz.sk)-Obnova Kúrie Zuzana v Markušovciach napreduje
- TASR-Medzinárodná konferencia o podpore služieb pre obe domáceho násilia
- <https://www.linkedin.com/posts/synergy-network-against-gender-based-and-domestic-violence-bratislava>
- [zastavmenasilie.gov.sk/news/vypiskajme-spolu-nasilie/](https://zastavmenasilie.gov.sk/news/vypiskajme-spolu-nasilie/)
- [dennikn.sk](https://dennikn.sk)-Resurrection of Miracle
- [tasr.sk](https://tasr.sk) - SYNERGY Network Conference in Slovakia
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/-/synergy-network-conference-in-slovakia-advancing-the-fight-against-violence-against-women>
- [epochtimes.sk](https://epochtimes.sk)-SYNERGY Network Conference in Slovakia
- [slovensko.rtvs.sk](https://slovensko.rtvs.sk) - Red Monastery - Reborn
- [rtvs.sk](https://rtvs.sk) - Restoration of Coburg manor house in Jelšava
- [noviny.sk](https://noviny.sk) - Enhancing the efficiency of the justice system through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties
- [aktuality.sk](https://aktuality.sk) - Opportunity Centrum Valaská "Development of Multifunctional Inclusion Center"

#### 4. Website and social media

Link to the National Focal Point's (EEA and Norway Grants) webpage	Total number of page views in the reporting year
<a href="https://www.eeagrants.sk/">https://www.eeagrants.sk/</a>	32630

	Link or account handle	Number of posts published in the reporting year	Number of followers
Facebook	<a href="https://sk-sk.facebook.com/people/Gra...">https://sk-sk.facebook.com/people/Gra...</a>	139	1744
YouTube	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/@grantyehpano...">https://www.youtube.com/@grantyehpano...</a>	166	52

## 5. Visuals

The EEA and Norway Grants media library (eealibrary.org) receives continuous updates with input from project promoters. POs provide regular reminders to project promoters to ensure a steady flow of content. Here are some examples of Media Library content:

- [GGC01006 Humanitarian aid](#)
- [GGC01006 Study visit of Slovak mayors to Norway and partner organization](#)
- [GGCPP001 OECD workshop](#)
- [GGCPP001 Integrity Fórum 2023](#)
- [SK-Climate projects](#)
- [SK-Culture projects](#)

NFP published new promotional videos on projects within Domestic and Gender-based Violence Programme on YouTube (15 videos):

<https://www.youtube.com/Domestic and Gender-based Violence Programme>



Programme Information			Evaluation Information								
Programme # and title	Programme Areas	Programme Duration (Start/End)	Type of Evaluation Formative / Summative	Purpose of the Evaluation Reason and learning goals	Scope of evaluation	Timing Mid-term or Final Evaluation (ex post)	Data needs and collection methods Reports; interviews; surveys; other	Evaluation Start/End Date	Evaluation Budget <sup>1</sup> (EUR)	Past Evaluations (if any): Type and Completion Date	Learning and Knowledge Sharing Who will benefit from the evaluation? How will findings be shared?
Business Development, Innovation and SMEs	Innovation, Research, Education and Competitiveness	2019 - 2024	Combination of Summative and Formative	Relevance Coherence	Outcome 1 Outcome 2 Bilateral Outcome	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, analysis / surveys (TBD)	2024 - 2025	Budget 171,742	N/A	Evaluation Report and its summary for general public will be published at the NFP webpage and distributed to all relevant stakeholders.  Result of the evaluation will be shared across sectors and other partners from BS and DS.  Depending on the findings, the NFP will request response from relevant subjects how will be the findings taken into account for future decision-making process.
Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion	Social Inclusion, Youth Employment and Poverty Reduction	2019 - 2024	Combination of Summative and Formative	Relevance Sustainability	Outcome 1 Outcome 2 Outcome 3	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2024 - 2025		N/A	
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy	2019 - 2024	Combination of Summative and Formative	Efficiency Coherence	Outcome 1 Outcome 2	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2024 - 2025		N/A	
Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation	Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance, and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms	2018 - 2024	Combination of Summative and Formative	Relevance Coherence	Outcome 2	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2024 - 2025		ex-post evaluation of sustainability, impact and partially relevance and effectiveness 2018	

Annex B – Evaluation

Strategic Report for 2023

<b>Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency / Cross-border Cooperation</b>	<b>Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance, and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms</b>	<b>2018 - 2024</b>	<b>Combination of Summative and Formative</b>	<b>Relevance Coherence</b>	<b>Outcome 1 Outcome 2 Outcome 4</b>	<b>Final Evaluation</b>	<b>Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)</b>	<b>2024 - 2025</b>		<b>N/A</b>	
<b>Domestic and Gender-based Violence</b>	<b>Justice and Home Affairs</b>	<b>2018 - 2024</b>	<b>Combination of Summative and Formative</b>	<b>Coherence Sustainability</b>	<b>Outcome 2 Outcome 3</b>	<b>Final Evaluation</b>	<b>Reports, interviews, analysis / surveys (TBD)</b>	<b>2024 - 2025</b>		<b>N/A</b>	

1

<sup>1</sup> The updated budget for evaluations in the Addendum 2 to the Agreement for the Financing of Technical Assistance is €171,742. As the evaluation of all Programmes will be procured and preformed as one single order, the budget for each Programme is not set. In April 2024, the final estimated value of the order will be determined.



# ***Communication Strategy***

## ***for the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021 in the Slovak Republic***

***Revised version 1.7, March 2024***

***Elaborated by the National Focal Point***



## Introduction:

The National Focal Point (NFP) originally elaborated the Communication Strategy (CS) in May 2017, at the time when the respective Programme Operators were preparing the Concept Notes.

Generally, the CS will be updated based on need but at least once a year in the Strategic Report. Before the updated version will be prepared, an evaluation and monitoring of all realised publicity activities will be done.

This update of the CS reflects mainly current timeframe of implementation (2023). The next update of the CS will be carried out in 2024.

The National Focal Point – EEA and Norway Grants Strategic Actions Unit is responsible for the elaboration, updating, monitoring and evaluation of this CS. The CS and its implementation has been done in close cooperation with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bratislava (Norwegian Embassy) and from August 2023 in close cooperation with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna.

### 1. Objective

The **overall aim** of the communication measures is to increase public awareness on existence of the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021 in Slovakia and provide information to the public on its objectives, possibilities, implementation and impact, as well as make the cooperation with the Donor States – Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway more visible.

**The partial aims** shall be:

- a) Increase public awareness and inform the general public about the possibilities provided by the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021.
- b) Increase public awareness about the Donor states and their roles, and about the mutual cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the Donor states.
- c) Inform potential project promoters and their partners about the availability of the EEA and Norway Grants.
- d) Communicate and present the achieved results and impact of the EEA and Norway Grants.

### 2. Target groups

1. **Primary target group** of the NFP's communication measures is the general public,
2. **Secondary target group** consists of Programme Operators and project promoters, FMO/FMC, Donor Programme Partners, and International Partner Organisations and partner entities from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway,
3. **Tertiary target group** is the professional public and media.

For all three target groups, but mainly for group 1, the overall message "*Working Together for a Green, Competitive and Inclusive Europe*" will be massively promoted.

The national slogan of the EEA and Norway Grants "*Together for good ideas*" will be promoted under implementation of the communication measures at the NFP/PO level. The national slogan was selected based on result of competition for public "The best national slogan of the Grants" that was part of information campaign "Grants in a nutshell" launched on Facebook from October to November 2018.

**Communication network with the POs:** In the course of 2023, the NFP regularly organized meetings of the non-formal working group "Communication network of the Grants", consisting of the NFP and all POs (in case that the NFP is also the PO a member of the working group is relevant project manager), the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna, and the representatives of Active Citizens Fund. This way,

the National Focal Point ensures systematic, continuous and effective approach to the communication of Grants in Slovakia.

### 3. Strategies

The NFP established shorter working titles and abbreviations of the Programmes to be used within standard daily communication focused mainly on general public (with exception of legal documents).

Official title of the Programme	Shorter title	Abbreviation
Business Development, Innovation and SMEs	Business and Innovation	BIN
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	Climate change	ACC
Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation	Culture	CLT
Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency / Cross-border Cooperation	Good Governance and Cross-border Cooperation	GGC
Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion	Local Development and Inclusion	LDI
Domestic and Gender-based Violence	Domestic and Gender-based Violence	DGV

Provided information is to be tailored to the target groups and different types of communication channels will be used:

TARGET GROUP	Type of provided information	Type of communication channels
1. General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "basic" information about the new period of the EEA and Norway Grants</li> <li>- information about the actual status of the implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants and achieved results and outcomes</li> <li>- information about cooperation (what could be achieved together or what has been already achieved) among the Slovak Republic and the Donors states</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media (print media, on line media, TV and radio);</li> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eeagrants.sk">www.eeagrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> <li>- major information activities organized by the NFP</li> <li>- brochures and leaflets</li> </ul>
2. POs and potential project promoters, FMO/FMC, DPPs, and IPOs and partner entities from the donor states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information about the actual status of the implementation, specially about the calls</li> <li>- Information about the approved, contracted and implemented projects and bilateral activities</li> <li>- Information about the possibilities of bilateral cooperation, especially about the call under the BF</li> <li>- Information about the new guidelines</li> <li>- Information about the achieved results and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media (print media, online media, radio, TV);</li> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eeagrants.sk">www.eeagrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> <li>- major information activities organized by the NFP</li> <li>- workshops and seminars focused on rules and requirements of the EEA and Norway Grants</li> <li>- matchmaking seminars focused on possibilities given by the BF</li> <li>- study trips</li> <li>- events organized mainly for youth to bring together young people from Slovakia and from the Donor states to introduce them different</li> </ul>

TARGET GROUP	Type of provided information	Type of communication channels
		projects supported by the EEA and Norway Grants, to give them the opportunity to make new contacts and to get to know Slovakia and the Donor states brochures and leaflets
3. Professional public and media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information about the actual status of the implementation,</li> <li>- Information about the approved, contracted and implemented projects and bilateral activities</li> <li>- Information about the possibilities of the bilateral cooperation,</li> <li>- Information about the achieved results and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media (print media, online media, radio, TV);</li> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eeagrants.sk">www.eeagrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> <li>- major information activities organized by the NFP / for media press conferences</li> <li>- study trips</li> <li>- direct emails</li> <li>- brochures and leaflets</li> </ul>

### Overall overview of the major activities

The NFP will during the whole implementation period, organize several publicity activities. The NFP will coordinate its publicity activities with the POs' publicity activities and with the Royal Norwegian Embassy's publicity activities to avoid possible duplicity.

In **2022**, the NFP realized a mid-term communication activity, which consisted of an online and an offline part. The online part was an educational campaign associated with the competition on Facebook and Instagram, which lasted almost one month (17th May 2022 – the Constitution day in Norway – 12th of June 2022). The campaign was focused on information about the life, geography and traditions of the donor countries as well as about the aims, results and position of the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovakia. The campaign combined videos with static graphical content and many animated elements. The joint reach of this social media campaign was almost 100,000 people. The aim was to have at least 600 questionnaires completed. Even though the aim was not reached, slightly more than 300 questionnaires were submitted, the reach of the campaign was enormous.





The draw of winners was a part of a joint press conference (offline part) of Ambassador of Norway, H.E. Terje Theodor Nervik, and the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR, Mrs. Veronika Remišová. The press conference took place on 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2022 in the premises of House of Art Fatra Žilina where the project 'Let's retune to the new wave - House of Art Fatra Žilina' is being implemented. The press conference was a part of the Annual Meeting.

The NFP's major publicity activity in **2023** was a campaign to raise awareness about violence against women and promote projects supported by the Norway Grants. This campaign coincided with the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women, an international campaign that runs from 25 November to 10 December. The campaign included a Facebook component featuring short videos about funded projects, as well as two public discussions on violence against women that were subsequently published as podcasts: Podcast "[Žemy](#)" episode "[Každá piata](#)" and Podcast "[Hlboká Online](#)" episode "[Zastavme násilie na ženách](#)". Additionally, the campaign successfully amplified coverage of the SYNERGY Network Conference in Slovakia, thanks in large part to the opening address by Zuzana Čaputová, President of the Slovak Republic and State Secretary of Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic Michal Kaliňák. The campaign also had official public support of Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic Richard Raši.



The campaign's reach and impact were significant. The Facebook component alone received over 2,400 views, sparking impressive engagement with a 443% increase in post interactions and a 450% increase in link clicks. This activity surge also resulted in a 730% growth in profile visits as well as 32 new followers, demonstrating the campaign's success in attracting new audiences.

The following table shows major publicity activities organized by the NFP.

Activity	Term	Target Group	The aim	Communication channels
1. Launching conference(s)	IV. Q 2018	All target groups	partial aims a), b) and c)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eeagrants.sk">www.eeagrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> <li>- for media press conferences</li> <li>- direct emails</li> <li>- leaflets</li> </ul>
2. Mid – term publicity activity – Educational campaign associated with the competition on Facebook and	May-June 2022	All target groups	a), b), d)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eeagrants.sk">www.eeagrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>-</li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> </ul>

Instagram. This was finalized by the the press conference of Ambassador of Norway, H.E. Terje Theodor Nervik, and the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR, Mrs. Veronika Remišová.				- for media press conferences
3. Closing conference(s)	2025	All target groups	partial aims b) and d)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eeagrants.sk">www.eeagrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> <li>- media press conferences</li> <li>- study trips to visit selected projects</li> <li>- direct emails</li> <li>- brochure</li> </ul>

#### 4. Web strategy (dedicated website, use of social media)

The web strategy, as one of the partial communication strategies, will contribute to reach the overall aim of the communication measures. Through the websites information to all target groups is being provided.

There is a single web page for both FM's managed by the NFP. It is possible to hyperlink this web page via both addresses [www.eeagrants.sk](http://www.eeagrants.sk) and [www.norwaygrants.sk](http://www.norwaygrants.sk). Under this webpage, there are subpages for all programmes (one subpage per one programme). For those programmes which are managed by the NFP, all information will be available on this relevant subpage. For Environment and Business programmes the most important information is being published along with a link to their official webpages. The NFP cooperates with all POs to ensure that actual and appropriate information are being published in both languages (Slovak and English language).

The total traffic at the above mentioned webpages in 2016: A total of 121,142 page views and 34,321 visits were recorded, with returning visitors accounting for 45.20% and new visitors of the website accounting for 54.80%. After several years, the traffic has significantly increased. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe a slight decrease in the number of visitors of the page mainly because majority of calls are already closed and projects are in their implementation phase. The total number of 32,630 page views was recorded in 2023.

The NFP administers a Facebook profile under the title "[Granty EHP a Nórska na Slovensku](#)". The page has seen significant growth since its creation, with the number of likes increasing from 540 at the end of May 2017 to 1,686 at the end of 2022. This positive trend continued in 2023, with the page reaching 1,746 followers by year's end. Additionally, 2023 saw impressive engagement, with a total reach of 15,536. Content interactions also experienced a significant surge, increasing by 156.4% to reach 2,400 interactions. These figures demonstrate the NFP's successful efforts to engage with its audience on Facebook.

For the time being, the NFP does not administrate any account on LinkedIn, Twitter or Instagram. The NFP as part of the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR has to follow the internal rules concerning PR, including social media.

#### 5. Department responsible for implementation of measures including contact person

The Strategic Actions Unit of the Grants is responsible for the implementation of the CS.

The main contact person:  
 Head of the Strategic Actions Unit of the Grants  
 Martina Szabóová  
 Phone: +421 2 2092 8447  
 Email: martina.szaboova@mirri.gov.sk

The deputy contact:  
 Strategic Actions Unit of the Grants  
 Renáta Križanová  
 Phone: +421 2 2092 8448  
 Email: renata.krizanova@mirri.gov.sk

## 6. Plan for evaluation

The NFP will have to evaluate the communication activities which were done mainly in terms of visibility and awareness of the EEA and Norway Grants. The evaluation is necessary to ensure that the overall aim and partial aims will be reached. The plan for evaluation will be regularly updated based on the update of the plan of communication activities.

<b>Indicators of the overall aim</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Target value</b>	<b>Source of information</b>	<b>Deadline for next evaluation</b>
Number of processed questionnaires	number	1,000	questionnaires	end of 2024
Percentage of respondents who knew of the EEA and Norway Grants prior to completing the questionnaire.	%	70 %	questionnaires	end of 2024
The number of respondents who correctly answered at least three questions from the questionnaire.	number	65 %	questionnaires	end of 2024
Number of respondents who were able to answer the question "which countries contribute to the EEA Grants"	number	55 %	questionnaires	end of 2024
<b>Indicators of the partial aims</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Target value</b>	<b>Source of information</b>	<b>Deadline for evaluation</b>
Major activities	number	3	Invitation, program, attendance sheet	2019 2022 2025
Total number of web page view per year	number	150,000	Google Analytics	2024
Increased total number of likes on Facebook	number	1,700	Facebook Statistics	2024

## 7. Evaluation of achieved values of indicators

Due to the complications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there were delays in several Programmes implemented and thus the first evaluation of Indicators of the overall aim stated in chapter 7 was

performed in 2022, when majority of projects to be supported within the programming period were already contracted and in the phase of implementation.

<b>Indicators of the overall aim</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Target value</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Number of processed questionnaires	number	1,000	694	In 2022, an online survey was carried out as part of a midterm activity linked to an educational campaign on grants. It is expected that the number of the processed questionnaires will increase during 2024 through the final conferences at projects' and programmes' levels.
Percentage of respondents who knew of the EEA and Norway Grants prior to completing the questionnaire.	%	70 %	54,76%	In 2022, the online survey was carried out as part of a midterm activity linked to an educational campaign on grants. It is expected that the number of the processed questionnaires will increase during 2024 through the final conferences at projects' and programmes' levels.
The number of respondents who correctly answered at least three questions from the questionnaire.	number	65 %	46,11%	In 2022, the online survey was carried out as part of a midterm activity linked to an educational campaign on grants. It is expected that the number of the processed questionnaires will increase during 2024 through the final conferences at projects' and programmes' levels.
Number of respondents who were able to answer the question "which countries contribute to the EEA Grants"	number	55 %	71,76%	In 2022, the online survey was carried out as part of a midterm activity linked to an educational campaign on grants. It is expected that the number of the processed questionnaires will increase during 2024 through the final conferences at projects' and programmes' levels.
<b>Indicators of the partial aims</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Major activities including press conferences	0	3	2	Launching Conference of the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021, November 2018. The mid-term conference was held in June 2022 and was combined with an information campaign about the grants. The closing event is planned in 2025.
Increased total number of web page views	121,142	150,000	204,173	Google Analytics for period 01/2022 – 12/2023
Increased total number of likes on Facebook	540	1,500	1,746	Facebook Statistics at the end of 2023

## Annex 1: SWOT analysis

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dominantly positive connotations linked to the EEA and Norway Grants;</li> <li>- Experienced team at the NFP with implementation of EEA and Norway Grants (the NFP's team has been working with these grants since programming period 2004-2009);</li> <li>- Close and good cooperation with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna and the FMO;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To increase the overall awareness of general public about opportunities, results and impact brought by the EEA and Norway grants ;</li> <li>- To support development of partnership between Slovak and Donor State Entities through effective communication;</li> <li>- Promote the high degree of transparency through effective communication;</li> </ul>
<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low interest of media in "project success stories";</li> <li>- Limited budget for publicity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negative experiences of potential applicants with the Structural Funds / other types of foreign financial aid from the past (particularly demanding financial management, etc.);</li> <li>- Complicated process of public procurement which might potentially be a threat when the NFP has to procure some publicity services;</li> </ul>

## Annex 2: Baseline and target values

Within the 299 projects implemented in the 2009 – 2014 programming period of the EEA and Norway Grants, the general awareness concerning basic information about the EEA and Norway Grants and about the Donor states was evaluated through a questionnaire (the same questionnaire was used in all projects). Based on the figures the following results have been achieved:

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>EEA and Norway Grants period 2009 – 2014 (baseline)</b>	<b>EEA and Norway Grants period 2014 – 2021 (target for the year 2021)</b>	<b>EEA and Norway Grants period 2014 – 2021 (target for the year 2024)</b>
Number of processed questionnaires	3,725	4,500	1,000
Percentage of respondents who knew of the EEA and Norway Grants prior to completing the questionnaire.	53 %	70 %	70 %
The number of respondents who correctly answered at least three questions from the questionnaire.	59 %	65 %	65 %
Number of respondents who were able to answer the question “which countries contribute to the EEA Grants”	47 % (The result from the period 2009 – 2014 is not satisfactory for the NFP. Based on the collected information and own experience, the respondents did not know that Island and Lichtenstein are donor states. In contrast, almost all respondents recognised Norway correctly as a donor state. That is why the NFP will try to promote all three donor states and will recommend to the POs whose programmes are financed from the EEA FM to realize communication activities to improve this result.)	55 %	55 %

The NFP, based on the figures from the programming period 2009 – 2014 available as of the end of May 2017, has set the above mentioned figures as target figures which should indicate the successful achievement of the overall aim.

The set target value for indicator “Number of processed questionnaires” (4,500) proved to be very ambitious. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, it was necessary to change the way this survey was conducted. As the focus of obtaining these data could not remain solely on the project promoters, instead of the originally planned source of information (Annual Project Reports, Final Project Reports), an on-line questionnaire was created by the National Focal Point.

As the questionnaire, which is anonymous, is based solely on a willingness of public to complete it, the target value of the abovementioned indicator has been reduced. Other target values, reflecting raised awareness on the Grants in Slovakia remain unchanged. The questionnaire is disseminated through all possible communication channels to all target groups of communication at all levels of implementation.

With the implementation period ending, most closing conferences will be realized in 2024. Project promoters will be asked to hand over printed versions of the questionnaire to conference attendees. This will help collect the most relevant data on awareness of the Grants in Slovakia.