

# Evaluation of Programmes Implemented in the Slovak Republic under the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism in the 2014–2021 Programming Period

## Final Report

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## 2 List of abbreviations

ACC	Programme “Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation”
AECM	Agri–environment–climate measure
AIBA	National Agency for International Education Affairs (Liechtenstein)
ASF	Arts Support Fund
ASFEU	Agency for EU Structural Funds of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic
BIN	Programme “Business Development, Innovation and SMEs”
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear
CC	Community Centre
CoE	Council of Europe
CLT	Programme “Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation”
CMC	Coordination and Methodology Centre
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
DIKU	Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education
DGV	Programme “Domestic and Gender–based Violence”
DSB	Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection
EAS	Elementary Art School
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Economic Area
EETA	Environmental education, training and awareness
EP	European Parliament
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro (unit of currency)
FC	Family Centre
FM	Financial Mechanism
FMO	Financial Mechanism Office
FSCNM	Fund for the Support of the Culture of National Minorities
GGC	Programme “Cross–border Cooperation/Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency”
GGCPP	Cross-border Cooperation/Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency Predefined Project
GHG	Green house gass
GII	Green Industry Innovation
IIPA	Integrity and Internal Public Administration
ILFR	Institute for Labour and Family Research
IN	Innovation Norway
IPO	International Partner Organisation
IPR	Interim Progress Report
IROP	Integrated Regional Operational Programme
KUN	Centre for Equality and Diversity in Norway

LDD	Least developed districts
LDI	Programme “Local development, poverty reduction and Roma inclusion”
LGBTI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people
LPIS	Land Parcel Identification System
MC	Maternity Centre
MC SR	Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic
MEAT	Most Economically Advantageous Tender
MFC	Multifunctional centres
ME SR	Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic
MIRDI SR	Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic
MoLSAF SR	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic
MRC	Marginalised Roma communities
MJ SR	Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic
MoI SR	Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
MERDY SR	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Youth of the Slovak Republic
MoH SR	Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic
MoE SR	Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic
NAP	National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Women
NEA	Norwegian Environment Agency
NFM	Norwegian Financial Mechanism
NFP	National Focal Point
NP	National Project
NRFC	Non-Repayable Financial Contribution
NVE	Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD/DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPII	Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure
OP QE	Operational Programme Quality of the Environment
OP HR	Operational Programme Human Resources
OP RI	Operational Programme Research and Innovation
OZ	Civic association
PA	Programme area
PA	Priority Axis
PDP	Pre-defined project
PO	Programme Operator
PP	Public procurement
PPO	Public Procurement Office
RDP	Rural Development Programme
MA	Managing Authority
RA	Research Agency
RRP	Recovery and Resilience Plan
SAC	Sexual assault centres
SB	State budget

SEA	Slovak Environmental Agency
SECAP	Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan
SGR	Self-Governing Region
SGS	Small Grant Scheme
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SNCHR	Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
SPCHG	Social protection of children and guardianship
SR	Slovak Republic
SS	Secondary schools
STU	Slovak Technical University
SVS	Secondary Vocational School
SWH	Safe Women's House
TI	Transparency International
TRL	Technology Readiness Level
UA	Ukraine
UMC	Union of Maternity Centres
WT/AAL	Welfare Technology and Ambient Assisted Living

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## 4 Summary

The main objective of the evaluation was to provide an independent and objective assessment of the implementation and results of the programmes supported by the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA FM) and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (NFM) in the programming period 2014–2021. It was a summative (ex-post) evaluation, which provides findings on the functioning of the programmes and their benefits for the target groups after the implementation. It focused on the assessment of all 6 programmes implemented in Slovakia in the period 2014–2021. Each program was assessed separately based on two evaluation criteria selected by the evaluation contractor – the National Focal Point (hereinafter referred to as "NFP"):

- Programme for Entrepreneurship in Culture, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (CLT) – criterion of relevance and comprehensiveness,
- Programme for Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion (LDI) – criterion of relevance and effectiveness,
- Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (DGV) Program – criterion of coherence and sustainability,
- Cross-Border Cooperation/Good Governance, Responsible Institutions, Transparency (GGC) Program – criterion of relevance and effectiveness,
- Trade, Innovation and SME Development Program (BIN) – relevance and comprehensiveness criteria,
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Program (ACC) – cost-effectiveness and comprehensiveness criteria.

Key evaluation questions were defined for each evaluation criterion, as outlined in Chapter 6, Methodology. The following evaluation methods were primarily used to assess the programs based on the selected criteria and to answer the main evaluation questions: desk research, theory of change, analysis of the financial and physical implementation of projects and programs, personal interviews, and a validation workshop (a more detailed description of the methods is provided in Chapter 6, Methodology). The final report, or program evaluation, fully reflects the terms and provides answers to the main evaluation questions, including the main findings and recommendations. An overview of all recommendations is provided at the end of Chapter 8, Overall Summary.

### *Programme "Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (CLT)"*

In accordance with the terms of reference, only the contemporary art component was subject to evaluation. The evaluation of the relevance of the contemporary arts component of the CLT programme confirmed its high relevance and consistency with the current needs of the SR. The programme under this component actively responded to the needs of vulnerable groups of the population, with individual projects focusing mainly on minorities and people with disabilities. Their needs were taken into account through direct involvement in project implementation, inclusive activities for the audience and sensitisation activities for the majority population. A key element of the programme's relevance was the successful bilateral cooperation with Donor States, which was manifested through strengthened links between artists, cultural institutions and actors from Slovakia and Donor States. The early launch of the programme and the active involvement of the donor programme partner, Arts Council Norway contributed to the good functioning of the

bilateral cooperation. Both calls for proposals attracted a high level of interest from applicants. The programme has maintained its relevance even in the context of unpredictable external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The evaluators recommend maintaining the main thematic features of the programme in the next programming period, with possible adjustments including an increase in the maximum grant amount to compensate for price increases and a reduction in the administrative burden on beneficiaries. It is also recommended to increase the active involvement of vulnerable groups such as artists and project promoters, e.g. by scoring points in favour of such applications.

The contemporary arts component of the CLT programme showed very high coherence – no duplications with existing national cultural support schemes were identified. The programme complemented appropriately the existing offer of national grant schemes, in particular ASF and FSCNM, as well as the EU-funded IROP 2014–2020 programme to support creative potential in the regions. Unlike the ASF, which provides a large number of smaller grants (with an average amount below EUR 8 000), the CLT allowed for the implementation of strategic projects. Project Promoters particularly appreciated the CLT's transparent application approval process, the size of the grants, the approval of grants for the full amount requested and the unique opportunity to receive an additional grant for the implementation of ongoing activities through the CLTDP call. In the context of the current developments in the cultural sector in Slovakia, where the ASF has been facing problems with unprofessional management since autumn 2023, many experienced NGOs have run into existential problems. Project Promoters therefore announce an increased demand for support for contemporary arts from the NFM/EEA FM in the next period, which, in the view of the evaluators, requires a significant increase in the financial allocation in the next programming period. For the Donor State, this also represents an opportunity to further increase the relevance of support and to strengthen their role as supporters of free and committed artistic creation in Slovakia.

*Programme “Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion (LDI)”*

The LDI programme was highly relevant to the needs of the target groups, especially children and youth in LDDs, MRCs and institutions working in the field of inclusive education, employment and community development. The intervention logic of the programme was based on a thorough needs analysis and was in line with national priorities and objectives as well as the objectives of Norway as a Donor State. The programme responded to current challenges such as low availability of community services, high unemployment, early school leaving and the need for local capacity building. The evaluation confirmed the correct thematic and geographic focus of the calls (on the MDGs and LDDs respectively). The programme fulfilled its ambition to reduce regional disparities and contributed to the inclusion of vulnerable groups. Recommendations for the future include: maintaining an integrated approach and participation of target groups in the design phase of interventions and calls, and targeting support more consistently to the most vulnerable groups, including the MDGs, through calls and prioritisation mechanisms.

The program supported the creation of eight community centers, created 27 jobs, and supported 21 municipalities, where the range of extracurricular activities for children and young people was increased. As part of the projects implemented, 6,261 people at risk of poverty used the services provided by youth centers (planned for 1,500 people), with which

30 field social workers and/or Roma mediators cooperated. This made it possible to extend the operating hours of centers for children and young people by an average of 36 hours per week (planned 8 hours) with the involvement of 129 Roma working in the centers. In relation to the Roma minority, the program enabled 8,456 Roma to use the supported services and distributed 15,500 (instead of the planned 11,500) textbooks and methodological materials covering Roma history and language to primary and secondary school teachers. It also involved 152 educational institutions that have introduced Roma language or culture curricula and supported the improvement of inclusive education through the involvement of 66 schools that apply inclusive education models. The beneficiaries trained 81 teachers from kindergartens, primary and secondary schools working with Roma children in innovative educational practices and 80 administrative and management staff from schools working with Roma children.

The LDI programme has demonstrated a high level of effectiveness in terms of delivering the intended outputs and outcomes. Most of the quantitative objectives of the programme have been met or exceeded. Significantly higher numbers of Roma used the supported services and were involved in community activities, while the number of Roma workers employed also exceeded expectations. The programme supported the establishment and operation of multifunctional centres, which have become the backbone of local communities. The qualitative analysis shows significant progress in terms of inclusion, community cooperation and mutual understanding in the supported communities. Many of the projects have created superior partnerships between schools, municipalities and communities and have strengthened trust through joint activities. The programme has also generated other outputs and outcomes beyond those originally planned, e.g. new forms of MRC participation, mentoring models and non-formal learning approaches have emerged. These outputs contribute significantly to inclusion, reducing prejudice and increasing social cohesion. The main challenges have been the uneven quality of outputs depending on the capacity of Project Promoters and the absence of longer-term monitoring of effects. The LDI programme can be seen as an important contribution to social cohesion and inclusion in Slovakia, with a number of its outputs having the potential to be institutionalised or further developed. For the future, it is recommended to strengthen the capacity and stability of local actors, to support the systematic integration of innovations into policies, to introduce qualitative indicators and case studies into the monitoring frameworks of future calls and to monitor the impact/effects of projects after their completion.

#### *Programme "Domestic and Gender - based Violence (DGV)"*

Internal and external coherence of the DGV programme has been ensured to a high degree. The projects were complementary in terms of content and territory, and created the necessary synergies that had a significantly positive effect on the achievement of the intended programme results. The service providers involved covered all the regions of the Slovak Republic, which testifies to the territorial coherence of the programme. The DGV programme has also established some content links with other EEA and Norway Grants programmes in Slovakia (GGC, LDI and Active Citizenship Fund projects), which confirms the comprehensive approach of these financial mechanisms, which should be built upon in the upcoming programming period. The programme has created clear added value in four key areas: content focus, process setting, multi-institutional cooperation and, to a limited extent, international cooperation. External coherence with projects funded by the ESF was

ensured without creating unwanted duplication – the NFM projects were a superstructure to the OP HR projects and allowed continuity of funding for services for women experiencing violence and their children. The limitations of the evaluation lie in the relatively small number of projects implemented and the specificity of the sector, which has limited absorption capacity. The identified duplication in the form of mandatory project opening and closing conferences represents an inefficient use of resources given the size of the country and the limited professional capacity in the field.

The sustainability of the benefits achieved by the DGV programme is assured to a high degree over the next five years. Recipients have thoroughly and carefully planned project activities with sustainability in mind, while technical equipment, training materials and awareness raising campaigns continue to be used. The biggest challenge for sustainability is the retention of skilled professionals after the end of project funding, which is related to the shortage of skilled workers in the smaller regions of eastern and central Slovakia. Systemic barriers to long-term sustainability lie in the lack of legislative coverage of domestic and gender-based violence, the absence of a coherent legal framework and an unpredictable funding system. The Coordination and Methodology Centre does not have clearly defined competences and lacks the executive powers necessary for effective coordination. A key factor for future sustainability will be the transposition of EU Directive 2024/1385 on combating violence against women, which can bring about systemic changes and stabilisation of funding. Prospects for future development call for maintaining the broad content focus of the calls through the small grants scheme and the implementation of a pre-defined project focusing on improvements in the area of sexual violence (pilot project for the creation of a SAC). The limitations of the evaluation are related to the short time since project completion and the impossibility of long-term monitoring of the impact of systemic changes on the sustainability of the results achieved.

*Programme “Cross-border Cooperation/Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency (GGC)”*

In the 2014–2021 programming period, the GGC programme represented a comprehensive intervention aimed at strengthening integrity, transparency, efficiency in public administration, justice, public procurement and cross-border cooperation. Its design was based on a thorough analysis of the needs of the SR and reflected strategic priorities at national level.

The relevance assessment showed that the program was designed in close connection with the current challenges and needs of the target groups and was able to respond flexibly to unforeseen circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Both crisis situations had a significant impact on the scope and timing of projects – it was often necessary to reallocate funds on an operational basis (e.g. allocating almost 300,000 EUR for humanitarian aid to Ukraine in 2022, or adjusting the budget for project GGCPP004 due to the inability of Ukrainian partners to fully implement activities).

The effectiveness of the programme has been demonstrated by meeting or exceeding most of the target values of indicators, with qualitative effects – such as the usability of outputs in practice, Project Promoters' satisfaction and the multiplier effect – confirming the high added value of the interventions. The activities implemented have led to real changes in the areas supported: the creation of new partnerships, the transfer of know-how and the expansion of target groups. Examples include achieving and exceeding the target values for

the transfer of best practices between Slovakia and Ukraine (25 vs. target 10) and the number of family law cases handled by judges (3,300 vs. target 120).

The analysis of implementation highlighted some systemic challenges, in particular the fragmentation of themes and the high administrative burden, which limited the potential for synergies and restricted the involvement of smaller stakeholders. Flexibility of management and the willingness of the Programme Operator to react promptly to situations that arose enabled the continuity of implementation to be maintained and the intended results to be achieved even in challenging conditions.

Overall, the GGC programme has contributed significantly to the achievement of Slovakia's strategic objectives in the assessed areas and has created a solid foundation for the further development of public administration, justice and cross-border partnerships. Its main added value lies in its flexibility and ability to adapt to changing conditions and strategic challenges in the region. The sustainability of outputs, as well as the long-term use of new standards, methodologies, and partnerships, will be key pillars of future reform cycles in the areas of governance, national, and cross-border public services. Its main added value lies in its flexibility and ability to adapt to changing conditions and strategic challenges in the region. The sustainability of outputs and the long-term use of new standards, methodologies and partnerships will be key pillars of future reform cycles in the areas of governance, national and cross-border public services.

The experience and lessons learned from implementation at the same time provide valuable starting points for setting future programming period and increasing the effectiveness of public interventions. Recommendations aim at optimising programme design, simplifying processes, strengthening coordination and support to smaller actors, as well as further developing bilateral and international cooperation.

#### *Programme "Business Development, Innovation and SMEs (BIN)"*

The BIN programme responded appropriately to the key challenges of the Slovak economy, in particular the need to increase spending on R&D and the demographic changes related to the ageing population. Bilateral cooperation has proved to be a highly relevant and successful dimension of the programme, resulting in high quality partnerships with institutions from Donor States. Although the programme was not able to utilise the allocated resources, the targets set were exceeded for most of the measurable indicators. At project level, the programme responded appropriately to the needs of specific target groups, including the elderly, people with disabilities and disadvantaged students. The evaluators concluded that the set-up of the BIN programme was not optimal – the combination of the business and education sectors brought more administrative complications than synergies, while the relevance of the education component was relatively lower. To continue similar programmes, it is therefore necessary to separate support to the business and education sectors into separate programmes with tailored modalities, to simplify the mix of financing mechanisms and to reduce the administrative burden. At the same time, it is necessary to maintain the focus on the needs of disadvantaged groups and to ensure an early start-up of the programme with increased involvement of Donor States partners in the business sector. The BIN programme thus represents a valuable lesson for the future set-up of the EEA and Norway Grants programmes – its relevance in thematic areas was high, but the implementation set-up requires substantial modifications.

The BIN programme showed mixed results in terms of coherence with other public interventions. Although the overall programme setting was unique due to the combination

of GII and WT/AAL themes and the cooperation with Donor States, partial duplications were not avoided. Outcome 1 (Business competitiveness) showed the greatest overlap with the calls for proposals launched under the Priority Axis 9 Support to Research, Development and Innovation of the 2014–2020 OP II. In Outcome 2 (Education), significant duplications were identified with the Erasmus+ programme, which supports both institutional cooperation of educational institutions and mobility of students and school staff. Competition from the Erasmus+ brand is likely to have reduced the absorption capacity of the BIN programme, which was particularly evident in the SGS03 call. Despite some duplication, the BIN programme has created four key dimensions of added value: (i) quantifiable economic benefits in the form of increased sales, profitability and new jobs in the supported enterprises, (ii) know-how transfer between Slovakia and the Donor States, (iii) strengthening of the Slovak innovation ecosystem, and (iv) long-term institutional links with the Donor States, with most of the partnerships continuing in 2025. For the continuation of a similar programme, it is necessary to reduce duplication with EU programmes, for example through the mandatory involvement of partners from Donor States, which would ensure a clear differentiation from existing national and European programmes.

*Programme “Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation (ACC)”*

Outcome 1 of the ACC programme has contributed to improving the quality of life in cities, increasing the climate awareness of the population and strengthening the resilience of the target areas to weather extremes. The projects have been implemented largely cost-effectively and have achieved significant results, particularly in the area of awareness-raising activities. The key contribution of the Living Lab Dropie project has increased the effectiveness of the programme and demonstrated how education and community interventions can be implemented in cost-effective manner. A significant proportion of the results achieved have exceeded initial expectations, particularly in the areas of education and behaviour change. It has also confirmed that the cost-effectiveness of infrastructure interventions depends on good timing, planning and system flexibility. The ACC04 call or the supported projects have been implemented economically and efficiently. The results in terms of wetland restoration, awareness campaigns and impact on the population confirm its high added value. The programme has demonstrated that environmental interventions with well-defined objectives can be implemented effectively even in complex areas, as long as the Project Promoters are professionally prepared and the measures are appropriately designed. The evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of the ACC programme confirmed that the programme was implemented cost-effectively in most cases, despite difficult external conditions (COVID-19 pandemic, price increases, public procurement).

Outcome 1, focusing on increasing urban resilience and citizen awareness, achieved most of the targets with a very favourable cost-benefit ratio:

- the cost of achieving behaviour change was significantly lower than in comparable EU programmes (e.g. only EUR 25–63/person),
- the number of behaviour changers (46 862) was three times higher than the target (15 800),
- projects implemented up to 167 measures against a target of 142,
- school projects were low-cost and high-participation, achieving exceptional cost-effectiveness,



- delays were mainly due to price increases, procurement, but were dealt with effectively.

Outcome 2, focusing on wetland restoration (ACC04 call), was rated as highly cost-effective and efficient:

- the average cost of wetland restoration was EUR 0.71/m<sup>2</sup>, below the average for EU projects,
- projects restored more than 5 million m<sup>2</sup> of ecosystems and positively affected 166 421 people,
- the most effective projects achieved costs below EUR 11/person and EUR 0.30/m<sup>2</sup>.

Overall, the ACC programme achieved its outputs in a cost-effective and timely manner. The flexible management of the programme, the combination of soft and hard measures and the use of existing capacities (e.g. schools) have contributed to its effectiveness. A weakness is the insufficient setting of the CO<sub>2</sub> indicator due to the predominantly adaptive nature of the interventions, which affected its achievement. The programme is an example of good practice in public investment in climate adaptation and education.

The ACC programme has achieved a high degree of coherence in relation to other interventions in climate change adaptation, environmental education and awareness and ecosystem restoration. The results of the evaluation showed that the programme was systematically designed to complement existing EU programmes, without creating duplication and with high added value for the target groups. In terms of external coherence, the ACC programme was linked to the strategic priorities of the SR, as well as to the specific objectives of the OP QE, IROP, RDP 2014–2022 and RRP. The interventions were thematically and geographically complementary, particularly in the areas of urban greening, adaptation, education, outreach and wetland restoration. ACC filled a gap in the available EU programmes, especially for smaller beneficiaries (e.g. schools, municipalities), which were allowed to implement integrated projects. The individual calls (ACC01 – ACC05) and the pre-defined project Dropie were designed to complement each other thematically and to promote synergies within the programme. The combination of "soft" (planning, education, cooperation) and "hard" measures (greenery, classrooms, building insulation, photovoltaics, wetland restoration) created a coherent model of interventions that was unique in the Slovak environment. The programme demonstrated strong synergies with the OP QE (flood measures, ecosystem restoration), IROP (urban revitalisation, schools), the RRP (green infrastructure, education), as well as the LIFE programme (restoration of protected areas vs. restoration outside protected areas). ACC contributed pilot solutions that could be subsequently scaled up in other schemes. The programme focused on areas that were not systematically covered by other funding sources. It created innovative models of interventions, improved climate literacy, fostered city and community collaboration, and increased local resilience. The ACC programme provides a model example of how to complement existing schemes in a targeted and non-duplicative way with solutions that have the potential for long-term impact on community resilience, biodiversity and climate education.

## 5 Introduction to evaluation

The Final Report on the Evaluation of Programmes Implemented in the Slovak Republic under the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism in the 2014–2021 Programming Period is submitted by the Provider under the Service Contract No. 174/2025 concluded between the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic and the Consortium consisting of Octigon, a.s., Consulting Associates, s.r.o., ERUDIO, s.r.o. and Projektové služby, s.r.o. The report was prepared in accordance with the Terms of Reference, the defined requirements for the content and structure of the final report.

In the programming period 2014–2021, 6 programmes were supported in Slovakia through the EEA FM and NFM:

- Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (hereinafter referred to as "CLT"),
- Cross-border Cooperation/Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency (hereinafter referred to as "GGC"),
- Domestic and Gender-based Violence (hereinafter referred to as "DGV"),
- Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion (hereinafter referred to as "LDI"),
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation (hereinafter referred to as "ACC"),
- Business Development, Innovation and SMEs (hereinafter referred to as "BIN").

Contributions from the EEA FM and NFM were provided to the Slovak Republic on the basis of Memoranda of Understanding. The Donor State in the case of the NFM is the Kingdom of Norway, and in the case of the FM EEA, the Donor States are the Kingdom of Norway, Iceland, and the Principality of Liechtenstein. The overall responsibility for the implementation of the set objectives lies with the National Focal Point (hereinafter referred to as the "NFP"), whose function in Slovakia has been performed since October 2020 by the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as the "MIRDI SR"), previously performed by the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic. At the same time, it performs the function of Programme Operator for the CLT, LDI, DGV and GGC programmes.

Table 1: Overview of programmes, financial resources and programme operators

Programme	Source:	Programme operator
Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (CLT)	EEA FM, NFM, SB	MIRDI SR
Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion (LDI)	NFM, SB	MIRDI SR
Domestic and Gender-based Violence (DGV)	NFM, SB	MIRDI SR
Cross-border cooperation/Good governance, Accountable institutions, Transparency (GGC)	EEA FM, SB	MIRDI SR
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation (ACC)	EEA FM, NFM, SB	MoE SR
Business Development, Innovation and SMEs (BIN)	EEA FM, NFM, SB	RA

Source: own elaboration

The Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic (MoE SR) is the Programme Operator of the ACC programme and the Research Agency (RA) is the Programme Operator



of the BIN programme. Donor Programme Partners (DPPs) and International Partner Organisations (IPOs) are actively involved in the design and implementation of the programmes.

At the programme level, the basic document is the Programme Agreement concluded between the EEA Financial Mechanism Committee or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway and MIRD SR as the NFP. The Programme Agreements were signed in November 2018 for the CLT, GGC and DGV programmes, and in November 2019 for the ACC, BIN and LDI programmes. The entry document for each program agreement is the Concept Note, which outlines the basic characteristics of the program, its expected contribution to the objectives of the EEA FM and NFM, the program's objectives, planned outcomes and outputs, indicators, preliminary budget, etc. The Concept Note is submitted to the EEA FM and NFM for approval.

The Programme Agreements contain basic information:

- scope and legal framework,
- programme provisions,
- project-related provisions,
- sources and forms of funding,
- final provisions (dispute resolution, termination of the contractual relationship, disclaimer, validity and duration of the agreement).

Annex I. of each Programme Agreement contains the following important information:

- programme implementation structures,
- a results framework with description of the programme objectives with the relevant outcomes, outputs and quantified indicators (baseline and target values),
- general conditions,
- period of eligibility of costs,
- sources and grant rate,
- maximum eligible costs and amount of advance payment.

Annex II of each Programme Agreement contains a description of the operational rules. The Programme Agreements have been amended several times by means of addenda.

The eligibility of project expenditure under the EEA FM/NFM 2014–2021 expired on April 30, 2024. However, the programs themselves had not yet been completed at the time of writing the evaluation report.

The objective of the Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (CLT) programme is to strengthen social and economic development through cultural cooperation, cultural entrepreneurship and cultural heritage management. The CLT programme supported projects that contributed to the achievement of results in two areas: (i) Restoring and revitalising cultural heritage and (ii) Improving access to contemporary art.

The main objective of the LDI programme is to contribute to strengthening social and economic cohesion by promoting local development and poverty reduction, social inclusion of the MRCs and support for children and youth at risk. In particular, the programme targeted LDDs and the Roma population facing long-term social exclusion.

The aim of the DGV programme is to prevent domestic and gender-based violence and to protect and assist victims. The programme supported projects under two programme areas – Work-Life Balance and Domestic and Gender Based Violence.

The aim of the GGC programme is to improve the integrity and accountability of public administration, increase transparency, promote the efficiency of the justice system and strengthen institutional cooperation between the SR and the UA. The programme responded to Slovakia's long-standing challenges in the fight against corruption, weak perceptions of public integrity, low trust in the judiciary and the need to modernise public procurement.

The aim of the BIN programme is to increase value creation and sustainable growth. The programme supported projects that contributed to the achievement of results in two thematic areas: (i) increased competitiveness of Slovak enterprises in the focal areas of green innovation in industry, public utility technologies and assistance to the elderly (Outcome 1) and (ii) improved education and employment potential in Slovakia in the areas of green innovation, industry, public utility technologies and assistance to the elderly and the infirm in independent living (Outcome 2). The cross-cutting theme was (iii) strengthened cooperation between Slovakia and the Donor States (Outcome 3).

The ACC programme aimed to contribute to climate change mitigation and reduce vulnerability to climate change at local and regional levels through a combination of investment and learning activities at the local level (soft and hard measures). Two main outcomes were defined in the programme: i) Increased climate resilience and responsiveness in the target areas and ii) Increased adaptive capacity of the target ecosystems to climate change.

## 6 Methodology

The evaluation was of a summative (ex-post) evaluation given that the financial and physical implementation of the projects had been completed at the time of the evaluation.

Each program was evaluated separately by a relevant expert.

### Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation was designed to answer the following questions, which are listed according to the evaluation criteria:

#### *Relevance*

- How well is or was the programme designed?
- How does or has the programme responded to the needs of stakeholders (organisations/institutions, target groups)? For which target groups are the results achieved key?
- Does the programme address the needs of specific target groups (especially minorities) and if so, how?
- To what extent do the outputs and outcomes correspond to the needs and priorities of the Slovak Republic?

#### *Effectiveness*

- To what extent have the Outcomes been achieved and Outputs been produced to the desired quality (as opposed to quantity)?
- What factors influenced the achievement of Results (Outcomes and Outputs)?
- Were other outputs, beyond those listed in the Result Framework, achieved that will contribute to the planned outcomes? If so, which ones?
- Were other outcomes, beyond those listed in the Results Framework, achieved that will contribute to the planned objectives? If yes, which ones?

#### *Efficiency (Cost-effectiveness)*

- To what extent has the programme deliver or is likely to deliver the outcomes and outputs foreseen in the Results Framework?
- Will they/were they achieved in a reasonable time and with adequate financial resources?
- Have there been problems, failures and/or delays in implementation? If so, what have they been?

#### *Coherence*

- What were the synergies and linkages with other interventions of the Programme Operator?
- Has the programme created added value without creating duplication with other similar programmes funded by other public or international sources (beyond the EEA FM and NFM funding)? If yes, how?

#### *Sustainability*

- To what extent can the benefits likely to continue in the next five years?
- What financial, economic, social, environmental and institutional capacities within the system are needed to sustain the benefits achieved over time?

The evaluation did not include impact assessment.

### *Desk-research*

Through the desk-research method, which is used to systematically process data and information available from existing sources, the evaluator has obtained important information for refining the basic evaluation framework, applying evaluation methods and defining the workflow. The set of documents provided by the NFP and the programme operators allowed for an analysis of the programmes and projects in terms of financial and physical implementation. The information and data obtained from desk-research were complemented in the next stages by the analysis of primary data, i.e. data collected by the evaluator specifically for the purpose of the evaluation.

### *Theory of change*

Through the theory of change, the evaluator captured the internal logic of the programmes under review. The theory of change allowed verifying the link between needs-inputs-activities-outputs-outcomes-objectives. Using this method, we verified the inputs, activities, and outputs needed to achieve the intended goals. A separate theory of change was developed for each programme graphical format.

### *Analysis of financial and physical implementation*

Based on the data provided, the evaluator analysed the status of financial and physical implementation at the level of each programme and supported projects. It took into account the adjustments made to objectives in terms of outputs and outcomes during the programming period and the reasons for the changes made. The results of the analysis of the state of financial and physical implementation were an important input for assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation.

### *Personal interviews*

The evaluator carried out individual interviews to obtain further data on the implementation of programmes and projects. The first group of interviewees consisted of the institutions involved in the management and implementation of the programmes – the NFP, programme operators and representatives of the Donors (the Kingdom of Norway and the FMO). The second group consisted of representatives of Slovak Project Promoters who have implemented projects with financial support from the EEA FM and NFM. Another target group for personal interviews were partner institutions from Norway in the case of the evaluation of bilateral cooperation (BIN).

The purpose of the individual interviews was to obtain additional data and information necessary for an objective assessment of the implementation of the EEA FM and NFM in the programming period 2014–2021 in Slovakia. The evaluator conducted semi-structured interviews, which allowed for interviews on pre-defined topics and also provided a space to obtain additional relevant information. The face-to-face interviews were conducted with a selected (representative) sample of respondents.

### *Validation workshop*

Based on the analysis of the data and information collected, the evaluator proceeded to formulate preliminary findings and conclusions. To confirm the validity of the main findings and conclusions of the evaluation, a validation workshop was organised in cooperation with the NFP for programme operators. During the workshop, the Evaluator presented the main findings and conclusions for each programme, together with the key arguments for their

formulation. Subsequently, programme operators and NFP had the opportunity to comment on each finding and conclusion during a facilitated discussion. Based on the results of the workshop, the evaluator revised the main conclusions and recommendations, which are presented in the report.

The following tables provide an overview of the evaluation methods for assessing specific programmes in terms of the chosen evaluation criteria.

Table 2: Draft evaluation methods for the CLT evaluation

Programme	Cultural entrepreneurship, cultural heritage and cultural cooperation (CLT)	
Scope	Outcome 2: Access to contemporary arts improved : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 2.1 – Capacity of cultural players supported</li> <li>Output 2.2 – Audience development supported</li> </ul>	
Criteria	Relevance	Coherence
Methods	Desk-research, theory of change, personal interviews	Desk-research, theory of change, personal interviews

Source: own elaboration

Note: Outcome 1: Improved state of cultural heritage and corresponding outputs 1.1 – Restored and revitalized cultural heritage and 1.2 – Monitored and preserved cultural heritage demonstrated high absorption capacity (including the use of additional funds and the creation of a reserve list). There is also good experience with similar activities from previous implementation periods. Therefore, this output was not subject to evaluation.

Table 3: Design of evaluation methods for LDI evaluation

Programme	Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion (LDI)	
Scope	Outcome 1: Social and economic development of the least developed districts strengthened: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 1.1 – Services and infrastructure for children and youth provided</li> </ul> Outcome 2: Social inclusion of marginalised Roma communities enhanced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 2.1 – Services to Marginalised Roma Communities provided</li> <li>Output 2.2 – Capacities of organisations active in the social inclusion of marginalised Roma communities increased</li> </ul> Outcome 3: Capacity of schools for inclusive education enhanced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 3.1 – Children and youth with Roma background empowered</li> </ul>	
Criteria	Relevance	Effectiveness
Methods	Desk-research, theory of change, personal interviews	Desk-research, theory of change, financial and physical implementation analysis, personal interviews

Source: own elaboration

Table 4: Design of evaluation methods for DGV evaluation

Programme	Domestic and Gender-based Violence (DGV)	
Scope	Outcome 1: Understanding of gender equality increased: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 1.1 – Measures targeting education and awareness-raising activities in the field of gender equality implemented</li> </ul> Outcome 2: Victims of domestic and gender-based violence protected and supported: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 2.1 – Services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence preserved</li> <li>Output 2.2 – Services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence expanded or enhanced</li> </ul> Outcome 3: Response systems to victims of domestic and gender-based violence improved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 3.1 – Coordination and methodological teams established</li> <li>Output 3.2 – Institutions in the field of domestic and gender-based violence trained</li> <li>Output 3.3 – Specialised police teams created</li> <li>Output 3.4 – Police facilities upgraded to cater sensitivity to victims of</li> </ul>	

	domestic and gender-based violence	
Criteria	Coherence	Sustainability
Methods	Desk-research, theory of change, personal interviews	Desk-research, theory of change, personal interviews

Source: own elaboration

Table 5: Design of evaluation methods for GGC evaluation

Programme	Cross-border Cooperation/Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency (GGC)	
Scope	<p>Outcome 1: Integrity of public administration improved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 1.1 – Measures to improve the integrity of public administration implemented</li> </ul> <p>Outcome 2: Quality of the judicial system improved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 2.1 – Quality of family law prosecution improved</li> <li>Output 2.2 – Access to the justice for the victims improved</li> </ul> <p>Outcome 3: Slovak-Ukrainian institutional cooperation enhanced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 3.1 – Measures fostering Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation implemented</li> <li>Output 3.2 – Measures fostering Slovak-Ukrainian-Norwegian institutional cooperation related to CBRN (chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear) safety</li> </ul> <p>Outcome 4: Increased application of the Value for Money principle in public procurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 4.1 – MEAT (“Most Economically Advantageous Tenders”) criteria applied</li> </ul>	
Criteria	Relevance	Effectiveness
Methods	Desk-research, theory of change, personal interviews	Desk-research, theory of change, financial and physical implementation analysis, personal interviews

Source: own elaboration

Table 6: Design of evaluation methods for BIN evaluation

Programme	Business Development, Innovation and SMEs (BIN)	
Scope	<p>Outcome 1: Increased competitiveness of Slovak enterprises within the focus I areas: Green Industry Innovation and Welfare Technology and Ambient Assisted Living technologies,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 1.1 – Enterprises supported to develop innovative green technologies, processes, solutions, products or services</li> <li>Output 1.2 – Enterprises supported to green their business operations</li> <li>Output 1.3 – Enterprises supported to innovate welfare and ambient assisted living technologies, solutions and processes</li> <li>Output 1.4 – Start-ups supported for business growth</li> </ul> <p>Outcome 2: Education and Employment potential enhanced in Slovakia in Green Industry Innovation and Welfare and Ambient Assisted Living technologies</p> <p>Output 2.1 – International mobility supported</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Output 2.2 – Institutional cooperation supported</li> </ul> <p>Bilateral Outcome: Enhanced collaboration between beneficiary and Donor State entities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bilateral Output 1 – Donor cooperation enhanced</li> <li>Bilateral Output 2 – Bilateral partnerships promoted</li> </ul>	
Criteria	Relevance	Coherence
Methods	Desk-research, theory of change, face-to-face interviews	Desk-research, theory of change, personal interviews

Source: own elaboration

Table 7: Design of evaluation methods for the evaluation of ACC

Programme	Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation (ACC)	
Scope	<p>Outcome 1: Increased climate change resilience and responsiveness within target areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Output 1.1 – Action plans for mitigation and adaptation implemented by local authorities in urban areas</li> <li>▪ Output 1.2 – Awareness raising activities on climate change mitigation and adaptation carried out by schools</li> <li>▪ Output 1.3 – Awarenessraising activities on climate change mitigation and adaptation carried out</li> <li>▪ Output 1.4 –Climate Change and Environmental Education Centre in Dropie supported for additional demonstration measures and educational programmes</li> </ul> <p>Outcome 2: Enhanced ability of target ecosystems to adapt to climate change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Output 2.1 – Restoration of degraded wetland ecosystems</li> </ul>	
Criteria	Efficiency	Coherence
Methods	Desk-research, theory of change, financial and physical implementation analysis, personal interviews	Desk-research, theory of change, face-to-face interviews

Source: own elaboration

## 7 Programme evaluations

### 7.1 CLT programme evaluation

The subject of the evaluation was the Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (abbreviated as 'Culture' or 'CLT') programme for the 2014–2021 programming period. Eligibility of expenditure at project level ended on 30 April. The evaluation was carried out between April and July 2025, approximately one year after the end of project implementation.

#### 7.1.1 Description of the programme

The Culture Programme built on the programme "Conservation and Revitalisation of Cultural and Natural Heritage and Promotion of Diversity in Culture and Arts within the European Cultural Heritage", implemented under the EEA Financial Framework 2009–2014. In the programming period 2014–2021, the objective of the programme is formulated as "Social and economic development strengthened through cultural cooperation, cultural entrepreneurship and cultural heritage management". This objective was achieved through a combination of interventions aimed at restoring, revitalizing, and sustainably utilizing important sites of national cultural heritage and strengthening social inclusion through contemporary art. The program emphasized the economic effects of developing the cultural sector, including cultural tourism and its benefits for the local economy. The programme operator was initially the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, since 2020 the role of the programme operator has been performed by MIRD SR.

The Culture Programme has supported projects that have contributed to achieving results in two areas: (i) Restoring and revitalising cultural heritage and (ii) Improving access to contemporary art. In accordance with the terms of reference, only projects implemented under Outcome 2 (Improving access to contemporary art) are subject to the evaluation.

A total of 20 projects were supported under Outcome 2, aimed at supporting capacity development of cultural actors, building and developing audiences in the field of contemporary art and culture and promoting bilateral exchanges in the field of contemporary art. These projects were approved and contracted in two calls (CLT02 and CLT03), with applicants eligible for grants of between EUR 50 000 and EUR 200 000. The amount of co-financing from the applicant's own resources was set between 0–20 %.

As each project had to have at least one partner from the Donor States (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein), the Programme operator launched the CLTBF02 call before the launch of the CLT02 call to promote partnerships through visits and meetings between Slovak entities and organisations from the Donor States. In this call, 14 applicants were supported with travel grants of up to EUR 5 000. A second call to strengthen bilateral relations between the Donor States and Slovakia in the field of contemporary culture and live art was launched at the end of 2022. Three successful applicants were awarded grants of up to EUR 7 000.

During the implementation of the programme, several reallocations of funds took place: (i) the cancellation of the pre-defined ROGER project allowed to increase the allocation of the CLT03 call, (ii) the savings in programme management costs were used to increase the budget of the CLT02023 project, and (iii) reallocations from other programmes allowed the launch of the CLTDP call for additional funding for existing projects, in particular to cover increased prices and to implement additional activities.

An overview of the calls and contracted projects is given in the table below.



Table 8: Calls and contracted projects under Outcome 2

Call (year of closure)	Focus				Number of applications received	Number of projects contracted*	Volume of grants contracted in EUR *
CLTBF02 (2019)	Bilateral Contemporary Art	Travel	Grants	-	22	14	42 435
CLT02 (2020)	Small Contemporary Art	Grant	Scheme	-	35	9	1 599 395
CLT03 (2021)	Small Contemporary Art	Grant	Scheme	-	73	11	1 796 483
CLTDP (2023)	Additional funding for existing projects				10	8	493 269
CLTBF05 (2023)	Bilateral Contemporary Culture	Cooperation		-	8	3	18 000
TOTAL							3 946 582

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Programme Operator

\*Projects that were terminated early are not counted.

As of March 2020, programme implementation has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with culture and the arts among the most affected sectors due to the closure of institutions and cancellation of events. Approved projects were therefore partly moved online and partly postponed until 2022 and 2023, when cultural life was restored. Despite this, the Culture Programme has achieved and significantly exceeded all target values of the output indicators related to Outcome 2.

The target for the indicator on the involvement of artists and cultural experts was set at 500, but the programme managed to involve up to 3 090 artists and cultural experts. The number of cultural actors (institutions) supported showed similarly positive results: the original target of 40 cultural institutions supported was exceeded by 51. The involvement of educational institutions reached 162 institutions (the target was 20). In the area of events dedicated to artistic freedom and freedom of expression, the target of 100 events was exceeded to 464 events, reflecting the programme's strong emphasis on the promotion of democratic values and artistic freedom. A particularly positive result is the overachievement of the target in the area of promoting minority culture, where 433 events aimed at raising awareness of minority culture were held instead of the planned 100 events. The programme also successfully met the requirements for audience outreach, with 542 audience development events instead of the originally planned 100.

The Culture Programme has also contributed to the achievement of measurable indicators at national level. In 2023, the number of visitors to cultural events reached 4.5 million, a significant increase from the pandemic years. At the same time, household spending on cultural services increased to EUR 2.43 million. Thus, the programme has contributed to improving access to contemporary art, international cooperation, as well as increasing public cultural engagement.

### 7.1.2 Theory of change

The contemporary arts component of the CLT programme was based on the premise that systematic support for contemporary art brings not only cultural but also wider societal benefits. In doing so, it responded to the identified main needs of contemporary art in Slovakia, which included the continued support of free artistic creation in the performing arts, visual arts, music and literature. This need was complemented by the necessity to strengthen the capacities of creators, cultural institutions and actors, particularly in the areas of cultural institution management, artistic and technical skills, international

cooperation, inclusivity and diversity. Another identified need was to increase public interest in contemporary art and the related broadening of the target audiences for contemporary art through systematic audience building. At the same time, the programme responded to current societal challenges, namely the need to combat extremism, hate speech and the radicalisation of society, viewing culture and the arts as a tool for positive social change. The programme also had the ambition to contribute to the internationalisation of the Slovak cultural sector and the establishment of sustainable partnerships with Donor States.

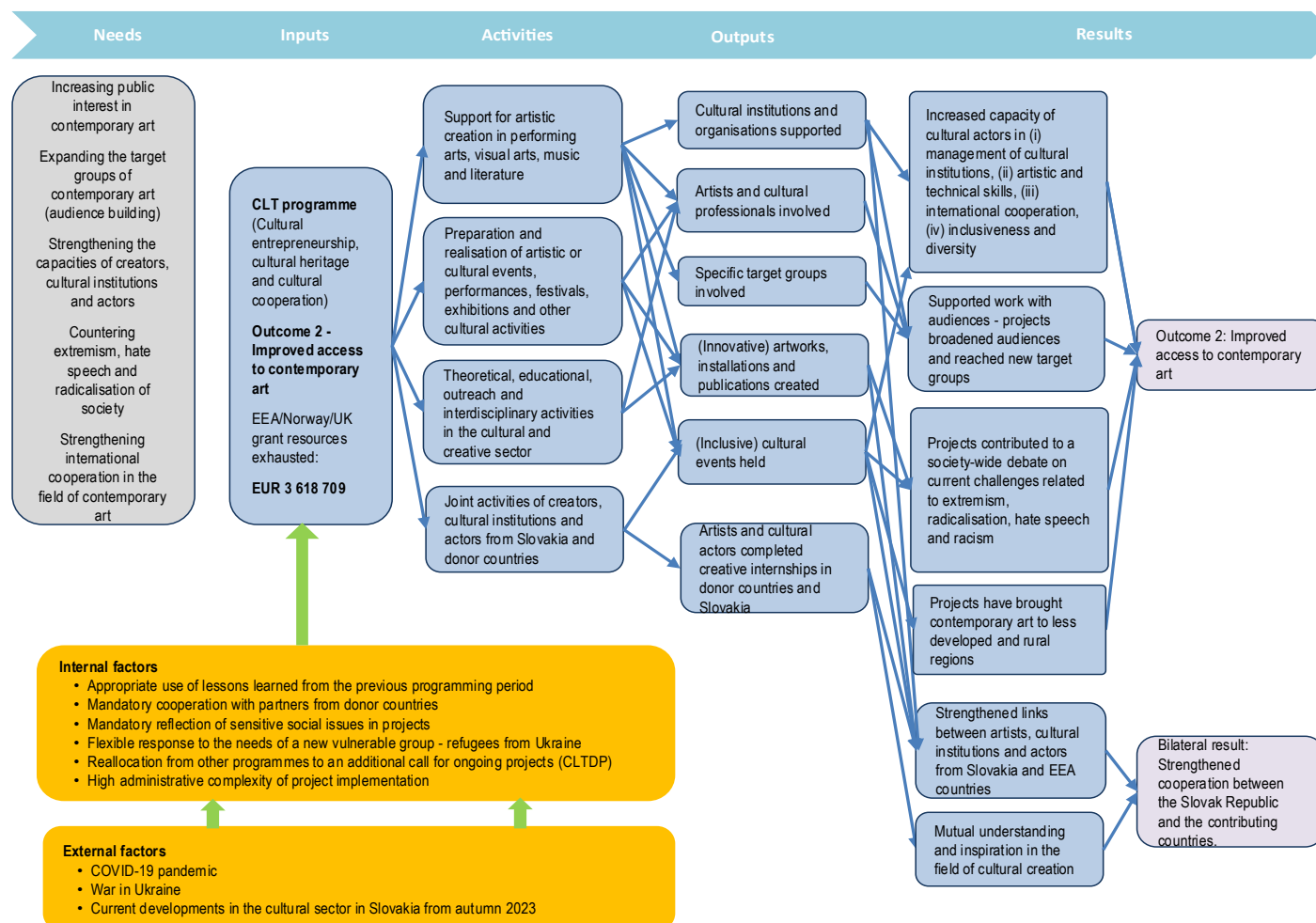
The theory of change envisaged the implementation of a wide range of activities focusing on contemporary art, with the mandatory involvement of artists, cultural institutions and actors from Donor States. The preparation and implementation of artistic or cultural events, performances, festivals, exhibitions and other cultural activities constituted the main form of presenting the results of the projects to the public. These activities were complemented by theoretical, educational, awareness-raising and interdisciplinary activities to ensure the long-term development of the sector's capacities. At the same time, the programme supported targeted work with audiences, with the intention of broadening the audience and reaching new target groups.

The activities implemented led to the achievement of specific measurable outputs and outcomes. The supported cultural institutions and organisations have strengthened their capacities and created conditions for more stable functioning. The artists and cultural professionals involved benefited from international cooperation and the development of their skills and creativity, while the innovative works, installations and publications produced were tangible outputs of the creative processes supported by the programme. The programme supported the delivery of inclusive cultural events that reached and engaged a wide range of audiences. The involvement of specific target groups (e.g. people with disabilities, refugees from Ukraine, Roma community, LGBTQI+ community) was also an important result. All projects have contributed to a society-wide debate on current challenges related to extremism, radicalisation, hate speech and racism. Some projects have also brought contemporary art to less developed and rural regions, thus reaching new audiences.

Improving access to contemporary art was a major result of the programme, and in the long term the programme has thus contributed to increasing public interest in contemporary art and broadening its audiences. The bilateral outcome – enhanced cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the Donor States – was mainly manifested through strengthened links between artists, cultural institutions and actors from the Slovak Republic and Donor States, as well as their mutual understanding and inspiration in the field of cultural production.

Unforeseen external factors that emerged during the implementation of the CLT programme posed challenges to its implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the projects to change their original timing and move some of their activities to online formats. The war in Ukraine has created new social needs, but also opportunities for cultural activities aimed at supporting those who have left. Last but not least, events in the cultural sector in Slovakia from autumn 2023 onwards had an impact on the programme and its beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the Contemporary Arts Component achieved a 95 % uptake of the (increased) allocation and largely met its objectives. A schematic representation of the theory of change is presented on the following page:

Figure 1: Theory of Change\_CLT



Source: Authors' own elaboration

### 7.1.3 Assessment based on the evaluation criterion relevance

Relevance is one of the five basic evaluation criteria defined by the OECD/DAC<sup>1</sup> in 1991. It generally assesses the extent to which the objectives and settings of an intervention are consistent with the needs, policies and priorities of target groups, Donor and Beneficiary States and institutions, and whether this consistency persists even if circumstances change.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the ex-post evaluation of the CLT programme, which was carried out in the context of the evaluation of the programmes implemented in the Slovak Republic under the EEA FM and NFM FM in the programming period 2014–2021, this is a retrospective assessment of the relevance of the programme. The four evaluation questions identified by the MIRD SR cover the following aspects of the relevance of the CLT programme:

- 1) How well is or was the programme designed?
- 2) How responsive is or has the programme been to the needs of stakeholders (organisations/institutions, target groups)? For which target groups are the results achieved key?
- 3) Does the programme address the needs of specific target groups (especially minorities)? If yes, how?
- 4) To what extent do the outputs and outcomes correspond to the needs and priorities of the Slovak Republic?

The following text contains conclusions, findings and recommendations that respond to all four evaluation questions.

#### 7.1.3.1 Findings

##### A) Program settings

Experience with the implementation of 2009–2014 programming period played an important role in setting up the CLT programme. At that time, combination of the restoration of tangible cultural heritage and the promotion of contemporary art was supported too, but for the *Raising Awareness of Cultural Diversity and Enhanced Intercultural Dialogue* (equivalent to the current contemporary art component) only one call was launched with an allocation of EUR 1.4 million, under which 11 projects were supported. Even then, at least one partner from a Donor State was already a compulsory part of the contemporary art projects. Similarly, the focus on members of disadvantaged groups and the fight against extremism, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism and hate speech were priority themes set out in the call.

In the preparation of the CLT programme for 2014–2021, partial changes were made to the contemporary art component, which are clearly positive in terms of its relevance. On the one hand, the commercial function of culture in building audiences was strengthened – the development of a communication strategy was made compulsory as part of the contemporary art projects. On the other hand, the position of contemporary art within the CLT programme has been strengthened: both the allocation and the number of calls for proposals have been increased<sup>3</sup>. In addition, in Outcome 2, objectives were added to build the capacity of institutions and actors in the cultural sector from the Beneficiary State.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation (2019): 'Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use'

<sup>2</sup> Results Guideline. Rules and Guidance on how to design, monitor and evaluate programmes, manage risks, and report on results. Adopted by the Financial Mechanism Committee on 9 February 2017. Updated March 2021

<sup>3</sup> At the same time, soft activities have become a mandatory component of cultural heritage restoration investment projects.

The Concept Note of the CLT Programme for 2014–2021 was based on existing national documents. The most important of these was the Cultural Development Strategy for 2014–2020 developed by the MC SR, which thematically covered both the cultural heritage component and the contemporary art component. In line with the strategy, the CLT programme positioned culture as a factor for the development of the whole society. At the same time, other aspects defined by the strategy were also reflected in the CLT, including the need to build audiences, support original artistic creation, support for cultural research and promotion of Slovak culture abroad.

In 2020, the MC SR and the MF SR prepared the document Revision of Culture Expenditure, which was the basis for the preparation of the new Strategy of Culture and Creative Industry of the Slovak Republic 2030<sup>4</sup> (published in 2023). A closer look at the objectives and priorities of the new strategy confirms the continued relevance of the CLT programme in terms of the needs and priorities of the Slovak Republic. The highest degree of alignment of the contemporary arts component settings with the 2030 Strategy can be identified in the following areas:

- Inclusivity and Diversity: the programme has targeted work with marginalised groups and thus directly contributed to Strategic Goal 5 – Inclusive Culture.
- International cooperation: bilateral cooperation with Donor States is in line with Strategic Objective 6 – Respected Culture, specifically Strategic Priority 6.4 Develop a systematic presentation of culture and creative industries abroad through the promotion of international cooperation and mobility.
- Capacity building: systematic capacity development of cultural institutions and actors is in line with Strategic Objective 3 – Decent Culture.
- Countering extremism: the use of the arts as a tool to address societal challenges has contributed to Strategic Objective 7 – Responsible Culture.

The high relevance of the CLT programme to the needs of the Project Promoters and target groups was also confirmed by the interviews conducted as part of the evaluation. As the following examples show, the benefits of the projects for the different organisations are substantial, albeit very diverse:

- The Faculty of Architecture and Design STU in Bratislava, through the CLT02015 project, responded to alarming statistics on the increasing proportion of young people (including students) with extremist views. The project supported the establishment of the Creative Centre in the underground premises of the faculty, which sought to promote empathy for difference through interactive discussions, workshops, theatre performances and special lectures. As stated by representatives of the Project Promoter, through various channels (website, YouTube channel, physical and online activities), it was possible to reach a wider audience, including educators and the public. The main benefits of the project are considered by the Project Promoter to be the benefits for the image of the university or the faculty – the project has shown that STU is dedicated to the arts and social issues in addition to technical disciplines.
- The East Slovak Gallery implemented the project CLT03041 focused on inclusive cultural programmes and linking contemporary art with social issues. According to the Project Promoter, the project was a breakthrough – it contributed to the transformation of the gallery from a passive institution exhibiting paintings to an

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<sup>4</sup> <https://strategiakultury.sk/>

active platform reflecting contemporary social challenges. The changes achieved, according to the Project Promoter, include:

- Strengthening the capacity of the team: staff received training (e.g. sign language course), developed sensitivity to the needs of different groups and acquired new competences in inclusive work.
- Building a network of partnerships: links with civic associations and non-profit organisations were strengthened. Organisations such as ETP Slovakia, Smile at Me or the Union of the Blind now approach the gallery for their various activities.
- Audience expansion: new segments of visitors were attracted who had not visited the gallery before. They have created new programme lines that people have become accustomed to going to.
- Brand reinforcement: they produced a publication "House of Mine" documenting all the programs, which serves as a guide for other institutions. The gallery has thus also established itself as an inclusive space in professional circles.
- Attendance: despite the current political climate and the degradation of culture, the gallery has managed to maintain a high level of attendance, even increasing interest in guided tours.

At the end of the project, the Project Promoter also carried out a barrier-free audit of the gallery and created a mobile application accessible to blind visitors.

- The civic association Divadlo Pôtoň realized a unique site-specific festival in the form of an 80-kilometre walking pilgrimage through nine villages from Dudince to Bátovce. Through the CLT02023 project, they engaged the local (rural) community, created 82 works of art, received positive media coverage and increased their visibility and reputation. The project has also opened the door for other major international projects. The project has been the subject of a scientific publication<sup>5</sup> and a short film that has been screened in Donor States.
- The Post Bellum SK civic association is primarily focused on engagement activities (documenting the stories of the 20th century), using contemporary art as a tool to communicate historical facts and democratic values. While so far they have mainly used drama education in schools, the project CLT03037 allowed them to experiment with a wider range of art types and forms: young artists selected through an open call created a multi-genre exhibition (painting, spatial installations, short documentary films from Slovakia and Norway with stories of Holocaust survivors), which aimed to communicate the facts about the 20th century and to refute the misinformation present in Slovak society. For the Project Promoter, the project meant capacity building in terms of (i) expanding the international department of the organisation, (ii) new experiences with more complex art forms, (iii) creating outputs that can be used in other activities, and (iv) expanding cooperation with museums, universities and experts.
- The Žudro Civic Association specializes in research and documentation of Roma music. The project CLT02017 allowed them to bring together professional Norwegian musicians with folk Roma musicians from Slovakia, who together created new music with roots in traditional Roma songs. They have subsequently undertaken five successful concert tours – two in Slovakia, two in Norway and one in the UK. The concerts were mostly sold out and were met with positive response from the audience and critics alike. Thanks to the project, an album was released on a British label and received positive reviews in prestigious music periodicals. As the Project

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<sup>5</sup> Miroslav Ballay: Into the Miracles. Interpretive probes for the course Fundamentals of Artistic Communication and Interpretation. UKF Nitra 2023

Promoter is an organisation without its own staff and resources, the project has been extremely important for it in terms of capacity building and international networking.

The high level of relevance of the projects and the satisfaction of the Project Promoters with the projects implemented clearly confirm the relevance of the CLT programme. The CLTDP call, through which ongoing projects were able to obtain additional funding<sup>6</sup> for their implementation in 2023, has undoubtedly played a positive role in this respect. Of the ten applications submitted under Outcome 2, eight were supported for a total amount of almost EUR 0.5 million. This pragmatic approach on the part of the NFP and the Programme Operator has helped to increase both the relevance and effectiveness of ongoing projects, and has also provided some encouragement to Project Promoters after coming through a challenging pandemic period.

The relevance of the time-lagged programme set-up is also demonstrated by the adequate level of sustainability of project outcomes. In this sense, the continuation of activities oriented towards specific target groups (e.g. East Slovak Gallery, OZ Žudro) and the integration of the acquired capacities into the regular activities of the organisations (e.g. East Slovak Gallery, Post Bellum SK) are strengths. In two cases the sustainability of the outcomes is temporarily limited due to the renovation of their premises (STU Bratislava, Pôtoň Theatre). However, the main challenge remains the financial sustainability of international cooperation, as the Project Promoters do not have enough resources of their own to continue intensive bilateral activities.

#### B) Target groups

The supported projects have contributed to addressing the needs of specific target groups, and in many cases the projects have brought innovative solutions. In general, there were two possible approaches, which were often interlinked even within a single intervention: (i) activities contributing to equality and integration of disadvantaged groups, i.e. their targeted involvement in project activities or their empowerment, and (ii) activities aimed at eliminating negative phenomena such as radicalism, extremism and hate speech on the part of mainstream society, i.e. its sensitisation towards disadvantaged groups. The following examples illustrate the diverse target groups targeted by the projects and the approaches taken by the Project Promoters to engage them:

- The Faculty of Architecture and Design STU (CLT02015) systematically addressed marginalised groups within the Creative Centre. Through discussion events and theatre performances, students and teachers came into direct contact with Roma, elderly and migrants in order to get to know each other and to shape their empathy towards difference. Developing empathy in students is also important for their future careers as architects, urban planners and designers, as these professions create on behalf of clients and need to be empathetic to their needs.
- The East Slovak Gallery (CLT03041) has implemented a wide range of inclusive activities for different disadvantaged groups. It has organised visits to artists' studios, camps and guided tours for Roma children<sup>7</sup>. For the deaf community, it provided sign language interpretation at the opening of exhibitions, organised a sign language course for gallery staff and included three interactive exhibits translated into sign language in the permanent exhibition. In cooperation with the Union of the Blind, it created special programmes adapted to the needs of blind visitors. Various

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<sup>6</sup> This was reallocated funding from other NFM and EEA FM programmes.

<sup>7</sup> Beyond the scope of the project, they realised an exhibition of the Roma painter Rudolf Dzurek and bought works by the Roma artist Emilia Rigova for the collections.



activities were also targeted for seniors (e.g., tea sessions with artists and guided tours), children with disabilities, and children from families in need.

- The Pôtoň Theatre (CLT02023) targeted the local (rural) community of the villages in the Levice district, which they tried to involve in workshops, work-in-progress presentations and one-day itineraries of the festival. Local residents had free entry to the events; the organisers also worked with mayors, local entrepreneurs (honey producers, bakers) and senior citizens who cooked and baked for the participants. The 100 or so pilgrims who walked the entire three-day, 80-kilometre route of the festival were mostly unknown participants from other regions of Slovakia and from other countries, so the project helped to showcase the little-visited region on the touristic side as well. The works on display were a balanced mix of aesthetic and engaged art, with the engaged ones including work reflecting on the war in Ukraine, environmental themes and the life of the Roma community.
- Post Bellum SK (CLT03037), as part of the project activities, worked purposefully with teachers and students of pedagogical colleges, especially regarding educational methods and the way of presenting facts about the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pupils and students of primary and secondary schools, especially in less developed regions with a high level of misinformation, were the target group of the experiential learning activities. The Jewish minority was a direct part of the project – especially as Holocaust survivors who gave their testimonies to the documentary filmmakers.
- OZ Žudro (CLT02017) project was built on bringing Roma and non-Roma together through music, linking musicians from poor backgrounds and without formal education (Mr. and Mrs. Dreveňák) with professionals in the field of music. It provided a platform for amateur Roma musicians to showcase their talents to a mainstream audience, which had a motivating effect not only on them but also on the wider Roma community. Thanks to the project, Dreveňák's musicians have gained popularity: they receive invitations to perform at concerts and have released a solo album, but health problems limit their further public appearances. According to the Project Promoter, the equal treatment of all musicians involved, regardless of their professional qualifications, including equal fees and other conditions, was particularly important. The project also included a conference held in Norway to address the issues of refugees and displaced people in the arts.

Other specific target groups addressed by individual projects included the LGBTQI+ community (e.g. at Café Kušnierik at the Pohoda festival in Trenčín) and children and adults with mental or physical disabilities (e.g. inclusive film school and open screenings at the Úsmev cinema in Košice).

With the support of the Programme Operator, some projects have been able to respond appropriately to the start of the war in Ukraine by engaging a new vulnerable group – those who have left Ukraine. These organisations include, for example, the East Slovak Gallery, which provided them with free admission and organised specialised programmes. In the STU project, a workshop originally planned to support the homeless was turned into helping those displaced from Ukraine – in a residential facility in Gabčíkovo, teachers and students built a community kitchen that is used for social and cultural activities, including communal cooking and eating, which is a bonding element in any community.

Overall, it can be concluded that human rights and social issues have been translated into project activities through contemporary art. The concrete effect of these activities on specific target groups was not the subject of this evaluation. However, the interviews conducted showed that there is a clear consensus on the usefulness and importance of this aspect of CLT, as well as the need to maintain it in the future.



### C) Bilateral cooperation

The involvement of at least one partner from a Donor State was a mandatory part of the projects supported. The interviews conducted confirmed the high relevance of bilateral cooperation in the field of contemporary art – the Project Promoters agreed that this was an important and enriching part of the CLT programme. According to them, this is mainly due to the status of contemporary art in the Donor States, especially in Norway, which has a developed system of state support and, as a result, many active artists and cultural institutions are interested in international cooperation.

All the Project Promoters interviewed have chosen relevant and high-quality bilateral partners. The partnerships have been mutually beneficial, in most cases, they have developed naturally from existing contacts and some have continued beyond the end of the project. In an interview, the representative of Post Bellum SK (CLT03037) appreciated that their Norwegian partners from the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities took initiative beyond the project – e.g. they paid for the air tickets to the opening of the exhibition in Sered' out of their own resources. Also noteworthy was the active role of the Norwegian partner Kitchen Orchestra, which initiated the project CLT02017 with OZ Žudro and to largely drafted the project application. The representatives of OZ Žudro also highlighted the professional approach of the Norwegian musicians, who had thoroughly studied the issues of Roma communities in Slovakia and learned Roma songs. It is also worth mentioning the project CLT02023 of Pôtoň Theatre, which was the only one to have partners from all three Donor States.

Of course, not all partnerships were equally successful. In the CLT02023 project, Pôtoň Theatre's cooperation with the Norwegian partner Company B was disrupted. Valiente's initial negotiations on budget reduction (which did not happen in the end due to reallocation of resources), and the partner Island Academy of the Arts withdrew from the CLT02015 project due to the COVID-19 pandemic. NGOs with limited internal capacity also pointed to the administrative complexity of bilateral partnerships, which was already evident at the outset when concluding partnership agreements. However, these complications are relatively minor compared to the overall benefits of international cooperation from the perspective of the Project Promoters.

The Donor States, the NFP and the Programme Operator have also contributed to the good functioning of bilateral cooperation. First of all, they were instrumental in the early start of the CLT programme, so that Slovak applicants did not have difficulties in finding bilateral partners. The involvement of Arts Council Norway<sup>8</sup> in the assessment process of the submitted applications proved to be crucial for the quality of the partnerships, giving an opinion on the suitability of the proposed Norwegian partners and thus helping to ensure the emergence of meaningful bilateral collaborations.

#### 7.1.3.2 Conclusions and recommendations

Main findings regarding the relevance of the CLT programme:

- C1: The contemporary arts component was well designed: audience building, capacity development of Project Promoters, minority and sensitive societal themes as well as mandatory cooperation with partners from Donor States were confirmed as appropriate framework settings. The calls for proposals received a high level of interest from applicants. Supported projects exceeded the targets in all key indicators. The programme has also made good use of reallocations from other programmes through the additional call for ongoing projects (CLTDP). The grants provided have enabled the implementation of relevant and innovative projects that

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<sup>8</sup> Consultations with Liechtenstein on the selection of bilateral partners were only formal, none with Iceland.

have had a significant impact on the Project Promoters and have fostered promising partnerships with organisations from Donor States. The outputs and outcomes achieved are also relevant in terms of the contextual changes that have occurred during its implementation (COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, current events in the cultural sector in Slovakia).

- C2: The programme has actively responded to the needs of vulnerable groups and the supported projects have made significant efforts to involve marginalised groups in cultural life. The vulnerable groups most targeted by the projects were minorities and people with disabilities. Their needs were addressed in different ways: (i) by direct involvement in the implementation of the projects, (ii) by inclusive activities that attracted them as an audience, and/or (iii) by sensitising other groups of the population. Some projects have also been able to respond flexibly to the needs of a new vulnerable group – those who have left Ukraine.

The above conclusions led to the formulation of the following recommendations for the NFP and the Programme Operator:

- R1: Based on the successful implementation of the Contemporary Arts Component, the evaluators recommend maintaining its main thematic features (audience building, capacity development of Project Promoters, minority and sensitive societal themes, mandatory cooperation with partners from Donor States) in the next programming period. Possible changes could concern two areas related to its implementation: (i) increasing the maximum amount of grant requested to a level that would compensate for the price increases in recent years, and (ii) finding ways to reduce the administrative burden on the Project Promoter (e.g. through lump sums and assistance in the development of cooperation agreements with bilateral partners).
- R2: Based on the experience of the 2014–2021 programming period, the evaluators recommend increasing the level of active involvement of vulnerable groups in projects, i.e. as artists, creators or implementers of specific project activities. This can be achieved, for example, by scoring such project applications more favourably than applications that only work with vulnerable groups as an audience.

#### 7.1.4 Assessment based on the evaluation criterion coherence

Coherence is a new evaluation criterion that was added to the OECD/DAC criteria in the 2019 revision<sup>9</sup>. The evaluation under this criterion focuses on how well a given intervention is aligned with other activities, policies and programmes in the same country, sector or institution.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of the ex-post evaluation of the CLT programme, two evaluation questions identified by the donor cover the following aspects of CLT programme coherence:

- 1) What were the synergies and linkages with other interventions of the Programme Operator?
- 2) Did the programme add value without creating duplication with other similar programmes funded by other public or international sources (beyond the EEA FM and NFM funding)? If yes, how?

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<sup>9</sup> OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation (2019): "Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use"

<sup>10</sup> Results Guideline. Rules and Guidance on how to design, monitor and evaluate programmes, manage risks, and report on results. Adopted by the Financial Mechanism Committee on 9 February 2017. Updated March 2021

The following text contains findings, conclusions and recommendations that respond to both evaluation questions posed. In order to make the text easy to read, they are presented in a coherent text.

#### 7.1.4.1 Findings

In the field of contemporary art, the setting of the CLT programme was unique compared to other programmes in Slovakia – mainly due to the mandatory bilateral cooperation, the mandatory focus on sensitive societal issues, as well as the targeted audience development and capacity building of institutions and actors in the field of culture. These four aspects can be considered as the main added value of the programme. The interviews conducted in the framework of the evaluation confirmed that both the Programme Operator and the sample of Project Promoters consider them to be the essence of the programme, which should be maintained in the future.

The evaluation found no duplication with other contemporary arts support programmes:

During the given programming period, the only program remotely related to CLT was a grant program within the Active Citizens Fund – Slovakia, which also supported vulnerable groups in Slovakia (e.g., Roma). However, contemporary art was not used as the primary tool for addressing the identified problems, so the similarity to CLT is only marginal.

Thematically closest to the CLT programme was the IROP 2014–2020 and its priority axis 3 Mobilisation of creative potential in the regions. However, the key call IROP-P03-SC31-2016–5 had a different philosophy than CLT: it was only for entrepreneurs and NGOs, with eligible expenditure mainly including expenditure on the acquisition of tangible and intangible assets, construction works and marketing activities; creative production itself was only one of the eligible activities and aimed at creating new jobs in the cultural and creative industries.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of national resources, the CLT programme (Outcome 2) shows a high degree of complementarity with the ASF programmes, which provide a substantial part of the MC SR subsidy system. In particular, it provides funding *for the creation, dissemination and presentation of works of art; support for international cooperation; educational programmes in the field of arts, culture and creative industries; scholarships for individuals who contribute creatively or through research to the development of arts and culture*<sup>12</sup>. ASF grant calls are launched annually for several programme lines and differ from CLTs mainly in the number of grants awarded and their amount: for example, in 2024, a total of 2 592 applications were approved for a total amount of EUR 20 million<sup>13</sup>, so the average grant awarded was less than EUR 8 000. Thanks to this philosophy, the ASF is a long-term donor for a large number of Slovak artists and cultural actors, contributing smaller amounts to their main artistic activity or to the organisation of their main events.

All the Project Promoters interviewed for the evaluation have many years of experience with ASF grants. From their point of view, the main advantages of the CLT programme compared to ASF grants are the following: (i) the transparent process of approving grant applications, (ii) the relatively high amount of grant per project, which allows for the implementation of long-term and strategic projects for the Project Promoters, (iii) the

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<sup>11</sup> However, this call also confirmed the high absorption capacity in the field of culture: up to 619 applications were received, of which 280 were approved. The total amount of the NRFC for the approved applications for NRFC was almost EUR 43 million.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.fpu.sk/sk/fond/>

<sup>13</sup> Annual Report of the Fund for the Promotion of the Arts 2024

approval of the grant in the full amount requested<sup>14</sup>, (iv) the unique possibility to obtain an additional grant for the implementation of ongoing activities (CLTDP call).

In the context of the ASF grant schemes, it should be noted that since the arrival of the new Slovak Government in autumn 2023, some Project Promoters feel discriminated in the approval of ASF grants in 2024 and 2025, in particular NGOs, which are thus gradually running into serious problems. For example, the Project Promoter Post Bellum SK gives specific examples on its website where the ASF Council, without giving relevant reasons, changed the recommendations of the expert panels to support their three projects from a total of EUR 60 000 to a final amount of EUR 4 500.<sup>15</sup>

The problematic functioning of the ASF, which is of fundamental importance for contemporary art in Slovakia, means that some established organisations – especially those from the NGO sector – will look for other sources of funding to continue to operate. This was also the spirit of the beneficiaries' statements in the interviews with the evaluators: several of them announce an increased demand for the support of contemporary art from the resources of the NFM/ EEA FM in the next period. The evaluators consider this scenario likely and also note that for the Donor States the current situation in the cultural sector in Slovakia represents an opportunity to further strengthen the relevance and visibility of the CLT programme.

In addition to the broad-based support to the arts through the ASF, national resources are also distributed through the thematically narrowed FSCNM grant schemes. Its grant philosophy is similar to the ASF – supporting a large number of smaller projects. In 2024, there were 1 567 projects totalling EUR 9 million<sup>16</sup>, so the average grant awarded was less than EUR 6 000. In 2024, 22 % of the Fund's resources represented the support to Roma minority culture, 2 % to support Ukrainian minority culture and 1 % to support Jewish minority culture.

Some thematic similarity was also identified with the Human Rights Grants of the MJ SR, which are intended for the promotion, support and protection of human rights and freedoms and for the prevention of all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other manifestations of intolerance. However, the arts are not the only and indispensable instrument for the protection of human rights and freedoms in these grants, so their intersection with the CLT programme is marginal.

#### 7.1.4.2 Conclusions and recommendations

Main conclusions regarding the coherence of the CLT programme:

- C3. Given the unique setting of the contemporary art component, its coherence was very high. No duplications were identified, the CLT programme appropriately complemented the existing offer of the national ASF and FSCNM grant schemes, as well as the EU-funded IROP 2014–2020 programme to support creative potential in the regions. The programme operator did not offer similar grant schemes for contemporary art as the above-mentioned sources. Compared to ASF calls, CLT Project Promoters particularly appreciated the transparent and fair application approval process, the amount of grant awarded, as well as the possibility to receive an additional grant for the implementation of ongoing activities (CLTDP call). In the context of the current developments at the ASF, which has long been the most

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<sup>14</sup> According to the Project Promoters, the ASF routinely cuts the requested grant by tens of percentages in the approval process, while requiring the project to be implemented in its full (original) scope.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.postbellum.sk/buducnost-vzdelavacich-programov-post-bellum-je-v-ohrozeni/>

<sup>16</sup> Annual Report of the Fund for the Promotion of National Minority Culture for 2024

important source of support for Slovak contemporary art, some applicants (especially from the NGO sector) have run into existential problems and announce an increased demand for support for contemporary art from the resources of the NFM/ EEA FM in the next period.

On the basis of the above findings, a recommendation was formulated for the the NCF and the Programme Operator:

- R3: In the opinion of the evaluators, the high absorption capacity and the increasing social and political challenges related to the contemporary art sector in Slovakia require a significant increase in the financial allocation for the support of contemporary art from the NFM/ EEA FM resources in the next period. It also represents an opportunity for Donors States to further increase the relevance of the programme and to strengthen their role as supporters of free and committed artistic creation in Slovakia.

## 7.2 Evaluation of the LDI programme

### 7.2.1 Description of the programme

The LDI programme funded by the NFM in the period 2014–2021 focuses on reducing regional disparities, supporting youth, social inclusion of the MRC and promoting inclusive education.

The main objective of the programme is to contribute to strengthening social and economic cohesion by supporting local development and poverty reduction, social inclusion of the MRC and support for children and youth at risk. The programme focused in particular on LDDs and the Roma population facing long-term social exclusion.

The Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic acted as PO at the beginning of the implementation of the programme, whose competences were later transferred to MIRD SR. Implementation was carried out in cooperation with the Council of Europe, which acted as the IPO. The Cooperation Committee consisted of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and the administrative unit of the Government responsible for the development of the LDD.

According to the Programme Agreement on the financing of the LDI Programme effective from 15/11/2019, the period of eligibility of expenditure was from 29/11/2016 to 31/12/2024. Disbursement under the projects started only in 2021. The total eligible expenditure of the programme as of 31.12.2024 amounted to EUR 16 247 058.82, of which the programme grant from the NFM (85 %) was EUR 13 810 000 and the national co-financing of the programme (15 %) was EUR 2 437 058.82. The total programme expenditure incurred was EUR 14 331 681,26, representing 88,21 % uptake of eligible programme expenditure (see Table 10). The original allocation of the NFM programme grant was reduced from the original EUR 15 million to EUR 13.810 million, of which EUR 12.182 million was actually spent (see Table 9). The reduced absorption capacity of the programme was mainly influenced by external factors, which are addressed in Chapter 5.

Table 9: Overview of programme grant and national co-financing

	Eligible programme expenditure by Programme Agreement z 15. 11. 2019 in EUR	Eligible programme expenditure k 30. 4. 2025 in EUR	Total eligible expenditure incurred as at 30.4.2025 in EUR
Programme grant (NFM)	15 000 000	13 810 000,00	12 181 929,07
National co-financing	2 647 059	2 437 058,82	2 149 752,19
Total	17 647 059	16 247 058,82	14 331 681,26

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the Programme Operator's documents and the Programme's website (\* according to the latest published amendment No. 4 to the PD, \*\* according to the Final Report on the FM14–21 Program, Annex 1, Part A (Version 0.2 as of 17.03.2025 13:43:58 CET))

The LDI programme was implemented through several open calls (LDI01, LDI02, LDI03) and two calls for additional funding (LDIDP, LDIDP2). Overall interest in the calls was high, indicating the relevance of the programme focus for the target groups – in particular local governments, NGOs and schools in the LDDs. The calls focused on supporting multifunctional centres for children and youth, developing services for the MRC and increasing the capacity of educational institutions in the field of inclusive education.

The contracting of projects was carried out in phases and some projects required amendments, modifications or additional funding due to external factors such as inflation and the evolution of prices of construction materials triggered by the war conflict in Ukraine or prolonged implementation, in particular due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The introduction of additional support through the LDIDP and LDIDP2 calls allowed successful Project Promoters to draw down funds and complete projects efficiently.

Table 10: Summary overview of the programme by priority area, outcomes, calls, eligible programme expenditure and actual programme expenditure

Programme area (P0)	Programme outcome (according to the programme Results Framework)	Call	Call code	Number of projects contracted	Number of completed projects	Real-Implementation with a Norwegian partner	Eligible programme expenditure in EUR (Norwegian grant + national co-financing)	Eligible expenditure incurred in EUR (Norwegian grant + national co-financing)
P010 – Local development and poverty reduction	Outcome 1: Social and economic development of the least developed districts strengthened	Pre-defined project		0	0	0	0,00	0,00
		Open call	LDI01, LDIDP	9	8	7	5 607 663,00	4 339 677,49
		Small Grants Scheme		0	0	0	0,00	0,00
		Total Outcome 1		9	8	7	5 607 663,00	4 339 677,49
PA07 – Roma inclusion and empowerment	Outcome 2: Social inclusion of marginalised Roma communities strengthened	Pre-defined project		0	0	0	0,00	0,00
		Open call	LDI02, LDIDP, LDIDP2	10	9	4	6 231 603,82	5 864 189,77
		Small Grants Scheme	LDI03, LDIDP2	7	7	4	1 447 792,00	1 379 191,78
		Total Outcome 2		17	16	8	7 679 395,82	7 243 381,55
PA08 – Children and young people at risk	Outcome 3: Increased capacity of schools for inclusive education	Pre-defined project	PDP	1	1	1	1 560 000,00	1 387 761,88
		Open call		0	0	0	0,00	0,00
		Small Grants Scheme		0	0	0	0,00	0,00
		Total Outcome 3		1	1	1	1 560 000,00	1 387 761,88
Total programme costs (excluding programme management costs)				27	25	16	14 847 058,82	12 970 820,92
Programme management							1 400 000,00	1 360 860,34
Total cost of the programme							16 247 058,82	14 331 681,26

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the Programme Operator's documents and the Programme's website

According to the available evidence, most of the programme objectives expressed in terms of output and outcome indicators have been met. New youth centres have been established or existing youth centres have been supported to provide services to children and young people in regions with limited opportunities. A number of projects applied an integrated approach in the MRC, including investments in infrastructure, community services, health and education. Schools participating in the pre-defined project have increased their capacity in inclusive education through training, distribution of textbooks and introduction of new methodologies. The selected indicators also tracked data on the number of municipalities involved, partnerships implemented, field workers, jobs created and experts trained.



The LDI programme represented an important tool for promoting social inclusion and local development in selected regions of the Slovak Republic. One of the benefits was the ability to link different stakeholders – municipalities, non-profit sector, schools – and motivate them to cooperate. Although the sustainability of some of the interventions depends on continued funding as a priority, the projects implemented have brought new partnerships and infrastructure that continue to operate. Lessons learned from the implementation of this programme can serve as a starting point for future policies on local development and inclusion of socially disadvantaged groups, including Roma.

Examples of successfully implemented projects include multifunctional community centers for children and youth focused on education, youth development, including sports, and community involvement in the municipalities of Moldava nad Bodvou, Snina, Jelšava, Vranov nad Topľou (under the auspices of the municipal library), and Prakovce. A successful integrated approach was applied in the project Gemera Renewal Centers project, which focused on education and improving the job skills of unemployed people from MRC, integrating local communities and the wider public, and the Svidník Community Center project, which focuses on the development and education of MRC and reducing differences between Roma and non-Roma. Examples of successful local initiative projects and the reuse of proven good practices in local development and social inclusion of MRC include the Mission 1000 project, which focuses on healthcare for pregnant women and mothers, their education, financial independence, and employment in the district of Spišská Nová Ves; the UPre project for women to support employment, financial independence, and education of women from MRC in the district of Rožňava, the Inclusive Neighbourhoods project in the Košice region focused on housing, employment and education of MRC, as well as the Support and Development of Activities with the Roma Community in Zborov project focused on expanding the existing services of the Community Center, field social work, and increasing the capacity of organizations already operating in the field of social inclusion directly in MRC. A successful project promoting inclusive education is a predefined project implemented in cooperation with the CoE, which aimed to introduce models of inclusive education in schools, develop methodological materials, train teachers and school principals, and incorporate the Roma language and culture into the curriculum.

The LDI programme focused on LDDs and support for socially disadvantaged groups, with an emphasis on the MRC. Projects targeting the MRC were an important component, but were not the only type of activities supported. A number of projects had an MRC component, particularly in the areas of employment, health, housing or community centres – these were often a condition or one of the priorities within the assessment criteria. At the same time, projects with a broader focus were also supported, e.g. projects aimed at infrastructure development in municipalities that do not have an MRC population or only have it as a minority component, support for employment or SME development in districts without explicit targeting of MRCs, and support for education and social services for a broader group of disadvantaged people, not just MRCs.

### 7.2.2 Theory of change

The LDI programme was designed as a comprehensive intervention aimed at reducing regional, socio-economic disparities and promoting social inclusion, particularly in LDDs with a high proportion of MRCs.



The programme thematically focused on three main areas of intervention: (1) local development and poverty reduction, (2) Roma inclusion and empowerment, and (3) support for children and youth at risk of social exclusion. It responded to challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, low levels of inclusive education, substandard housing and discrimination.

Interventions were based on an integrated community approach and linked the areas of education, health, employment, housing and non-discrimination. The program invested in three types of interventions: (i) the establishment and operation of multifunctional centres for children and youth combining education, interest activities and counselling; (ii) the provision of integrated services for the MRC, including health care, employment, and self-help construction; and (iii) a pre-defined project to promote inclusive education, including Roma language instruction, and the development of intercultural competencies of teachers and school managers.

Inputs of EUR 14.33 million, cooperation with Norwegian partners, as well as the involvement of municipalities, schools and NGOs have created the basis for sustainable changes in the target areas of the intervention. The programme has demonstrated a direct link between activities, outputs and outcomes achieved and the fulfilment of the long-term objective of increasing social and economic cohesion in the following way:

**Outcome 1:** The programme strengthened the development of LDDs by supporting community infrastructure, particularly children and youth centres, which provided a safe space for personal growth and social integration. These centres also supported job creation and increased the participation of vulnerable groups in local life. The positive impact has also been to improve the perception of the Roma population by the majority society.

**Outcome 2:** The programme supported the social inclusion of Roma through their active involvement in projects, employment in community centres and the implementation of joint activities with the majority. The services provided, including health care and housing support, have led to a growth in trust between communities and to the building of partnerships between communities, schools and the NGO sector.

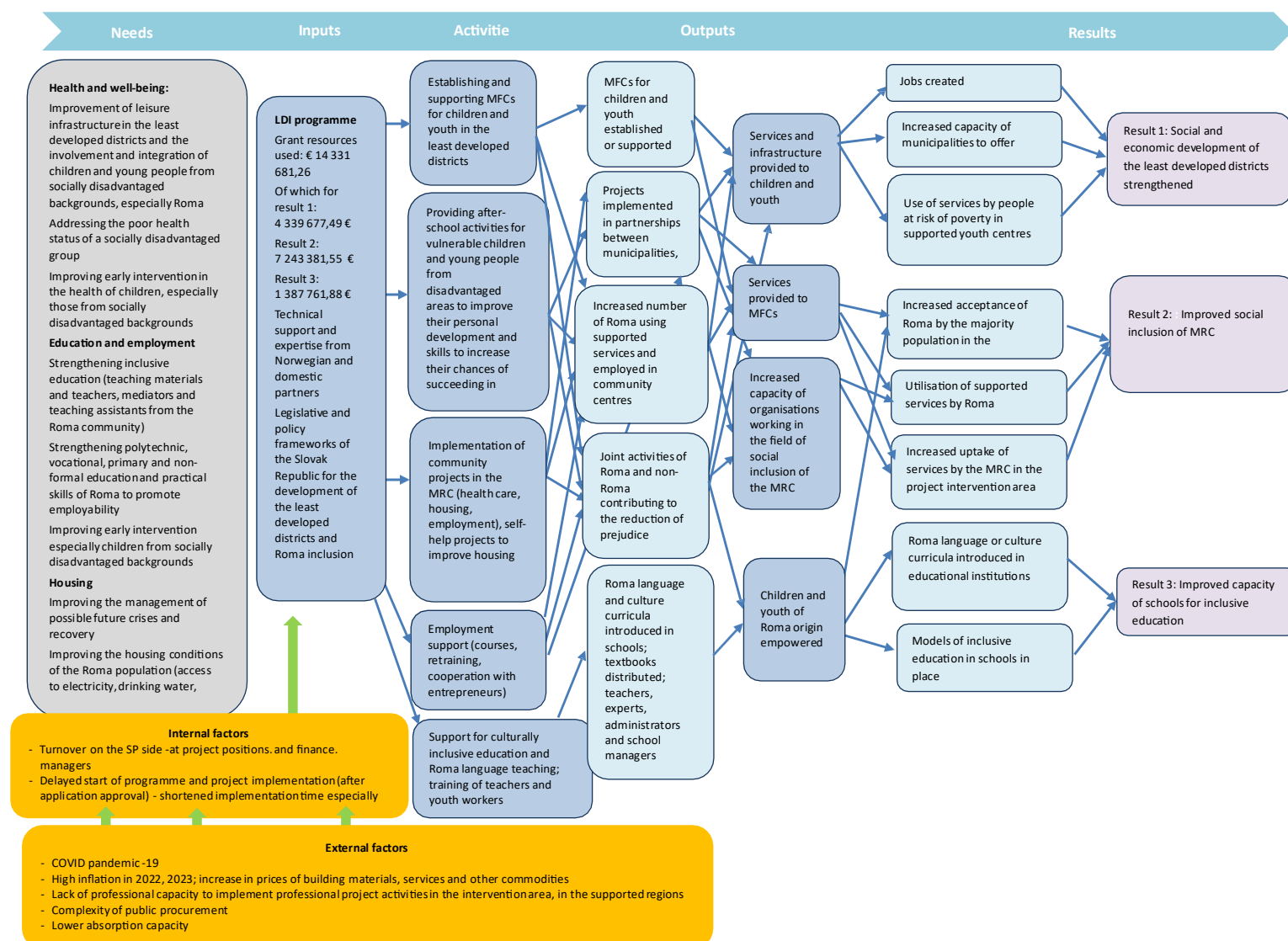
**Outcome 3:** Schools in the target areas increased their capacity to provide inclusive education through the introduction of Roma language and culture instruction, distribution of teaching materials and training of teaching staff. The involvement of mediators and assistants from the MRC has strengthened trust between the school and the community, reducing the risk of early school leaving.

Preconditions for success were the participation of the MRC, the available capacities of municipalities and NGOs, as well as the effective cooperation of public institutions. Risks were mainly staff turnover, mistrust of target groups, complexity of public procurement and short duration of support. Successful projects have created the potential for replication and use in national policies.

The LDI programme is based on the principles of participation, partnership, sustainability and efficient use of public resources, creating a model for effective interventions in settings with high levels of poverty and social exclusion.

The theory of change thus offers a framework for understanding how integrated interventions can bring about systemic change in the LDDs of Slovakia. Its schematic representation is presented below:

Figure2: Theory of Change\_LDI



Source: authors' own elaboration

### 7.2.3 Assessment based on the evaluation criterion relevance

This evaluation focuses on the criterion of relevance in the context of the LDI programme implemented in the Slovak Republic under the 2014–2021 NFM. The evaluation is carried out according to the Results Guidance<sup>Chyba! Záložka nie je definovaná.</sup> issued by the FMO, which defines relevance as one of the six evaluation criteria as *"the extent to which the objectives and settings of the programme/fund are relevant to the needs, policies, and priorities of the Project Promoters, the country, Donor States, European Union, and the institutions – and the extent to which they continue to be relevant in the event of a change in circumstances."* The evaluation is also in line with the OECD/DAC framework, which defines relevance as the extent to which the objectives and design of a programme match the priorities, needs and context of the target groups, as well as national policy priorities and strategies.

In line with the Results Guidance<sup>Chyba! Záložka nie je definovaná.</sup>, the ex post evaluation of the LDI programme is conducted in response to the four evaluation questions of the sponsor:

- How well is or was the programme designed?
- How responsive is or has the programme been to the needs of stakeholders (organisations/institutions, target groups)? For which target groups are the results achieved key?
- Does the programme address the needs of specific target groups (especially minorities)? If yes, how?
- To what extent do the outputs and outcomes correspond to the needs and priorities of the Slovak Republic?

#### 7.2.3.1 Findings

##### How well is or was the programme designed?

The LDI programme was designed as a comprehensive thematic intervention with an integrated approach linking the areas of education, employment, health, housing and community work. Its structure was based on the strategic challenges of the SR identified in national and sector strategies, including:

- Slovakia's Strategy for Roma Integration up to 2020,
- LDD Development Action Plans,
- National Reform Programmes of the SR,
- as well as recommendations of international institutions (EU, OECD, UNDP) related to inclusion and reduction of regional disparities.

The LDI focused on LDDs, defined according to Act No. 336/2015 Coll., thus responding to the high concentration of poverty, unemployment and low availability of public services. Moreover, the programme took into account the need for complementarity with the ESIF, as several areas (soft interventions, direct work with communities, capacity building of local actors) were not sufficiently funded by the ESIF. At the same time, the programme ensured continuity of interventions for which support from the ESIF has been discontinued.

A strong feature of the programme design was its three-pillar structure (PA10, PA7, PA8) and the participatory approach in its preparation – municipalities, schools, NGOs as well as donor partners from Norway were consulted already in the preparation of the Concept Note

phase. This approach supported a better definition of call priorities as well as a realistic setting of outcome indicators.

The design of the LDI programme was also in line with the objectives of the NFM 2014–2021, whose main priority is to reduce social and economic disparities in the EEA and to strengthen bilateral relations between Norway and the beneficiary country. The LDI programme directly addressed the thematic areas of support "local development and poverty reduction (PA10)", "inclusion and empowerment of Roma (PA7) " and "children and youth at risk (PA8)".

#### How has the programme responded to the needs of stakeholders? For which target groups are the results achieved key?

The needs analysis in the programme design phase identified high unemployment rates, lack of access to health care, low quality and inclusiveness of education, substandard housing and exclusion of marginalised groups – especially Roma – from as key challenges. It particularly highlighted the low availability of services in LDDs, the lack of coordination between actors and the lack of preventive and community-based approaches. These findings formed the basis for the thematic focus of the programme and the design of its challenges.

The LDI programme targeted the needs of a wide range of stakeholders, including the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Governments. The programme's calls were thematically structured to address specific needs: e.g. call LDI01 focused on supporting community and multifunctional centres, call LDI02 on an integrated approach in the areas of employability, housing, education, health and non-discrimination of the MRC, call LDI03 on supporting capacity building of smaller local organisations through the implementation of local initiatives and the replication of good practices in local development and social inclusion of the MRC. The calls have enabled the involvement of donor partners in piloting innovations.

The high alignment of the programme with needs was also reflected in the number of applications submitted. More than 72 applicants participated in calls LDI01 to LDI03, with 27 projects contracted (see Table 10) (e.g. successful community centres in Jelšava, UPre Women, Mission 1000). These activities reflected the absence of community infrastructure, low employability of women, early school leaving and lack of preventive services.

The programme facilitated multi-sectoral collaboration between schools, communities, municipalities and the third sector. It also provided technical assistance and capacity building, which was crucial for smaller organizations and communities.

The relevance of the programme was confirmed during the actual implementation (especially 2020–2023), when the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated social inequalities in the LDD. Thus, the projects were not just the formal fulfilment of plans, but addressed the actual deteriorating conditions in housing, employment and access to education. This dynamic contextualisation also increases the relevance of the programme retrospectively.

Does the programme address the needs of specific target groups (especially minorities)? If so, how?

The LDI programme aimed to support local development and poverty reduction with a strong focus on vulnerable groups at high risk of exclusion, such as the Roma, and on improving the living conditions of vulnerable groups, with an emphasis on the MRC. This orientation was already embedded in the Concept Note as well as in the individual calls.

Around half of the contracted projects focused exclusively or predominantly on the MRC, while the remaining projects were oriented towards the wider community in the LDD, often in mixed communities. Approaches to MRC included:

- Establishing and strengthening community centres,
- working with families, prevention programmes for children and youth,
- inclusive education (e.g. introducing Roma language and culture into the curriculum, teaching assistants from the MRC),
- promoting the employability of women and youth (e.g. the 'UPfor Women' project, Mission 1000).

Of particular value was the linking of work with the MRC with activities aimed at the majority, thus preventing stigmatisation. This approach also contributed to breaking down prejudices, increasing social capital and strengthening local networks.

In terms of relevance, the programme appropriately combined targeted support for the MRC with a broader community-based approach, which increased the acceptance of the projects in the territory.

To what extent do the outputs and outcomes correspond to the priorities of the SR?

The outputs and outcomes of the LDI programme are strongly aligned with the identified priorities of the SR, in particular:

- Reducing regional disparities, e.g.:
  - elaboration of action plans for approval by the Government of the Slovak Republic, which are binding documents aimed at eliminating social and economic disparities and reducing the high unemployment rate in the LDDs (a priority of the Government resulting from the *Programme Declaration of the Government and Act No. 336/2015 Coll. on Support to the Least Developed Districts*<sup>17</sup>);
  - social cohesion in the regions based on equal opportunities; housing and social infrastructure in the regions; support for investment in human capital; systematic support for the creation of SMEs and trades and promotion of employment; development of specific projects for selected target groups with an emphasis on promoting the competitiveness of the region; preventive measures to prevent voluntary unemployment; increasing the availability, efficiency and quality of social infrastructure (strategic priorities for regional development until 2030 according to the *National Strategy for Regional Development*);
- social inclusion of the MRC, specifically e.g.:

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<sup>17</sup> LDDs are located in three (out of eight) Slovak self-governing regions, namely in Košice, Prešov (eastern Slovakia) and Banská Bystrica (central Slovakia).

- focus on eliminating (various) forms of social exclusion of Roma as such, Roma communities and the MRC; stop segregation of Roma communities, non-discrimination, change attitudes and improve coexistence (strategic objectives of *the Roma Integration Strategy until 2020, then 2030*);
- Reduce incidents of anti-Roma racism as much as possible and across all areas of society (education, housing, employment and health) (objective of the priority area Combating anti-Roma racism and promoting participation of the *Roma Integration Strategy 2030*);
- Other priorities for the inclusion of the MRC in the areas of health, education, culture in line with strategies such as *the National Health Programme, the National Drug Prevention Programme, the Slovak Republic Youth Strategy to 2020, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, etc.)
- Improving access to inclusive education, specifically e.g.:
  - Targets focusing on three main areas of the education system for children and pupils from the MRC: Target (1) aimed at supporting the child/pupil and family care, Target (2) aimed at supporting the professional capacities of the teacher and Targets (3 – 6) aimed at supporting the creation of a stimulating environment for pupils from the MRC (targets of the priority area Education within the *Roma Integration Strategy 2030*);
  - To develop the education system in the SR so that early childhood care and pre-primary education are accessible to everyone and fulfil a social, educational and compensatory function, so that appropriate conditions are created for equal education of all citizens of the SR, including members of national minorities, so that pupils and students with special educational needs are assisted through quality education and are able to integrate effectively into life or the labour market and to be full members of society; increase support for the development of quality youth work at local and regional level, including policy development in this field and training of youth workers (global objective and complementary objective of *the National Programme for the Development of Education and Training*);
- Supporting local communities and increasing the capacity of local authorities, e.g.:
  - Slovakia's priority development areas: resource conservation and development, sustainable use of resources and community development (priorities and visions in the framework of the *Vision and Strategies for the Development of Slovakia by 2030 – the long-term strategy for sustainable development of the Slovak Republic – Slovakia 2030*).

Measurable outcomes that exceeded the planned target values of the implemented interventions and that illustrate the fulfilment of the above priorities include e.g.:

- 8 community/multifunctional centres established out of 9 planned,
- 27 jobs created out of 20 planned,
- 21 villages with increased capacity to offer children and youth various extra-curricular activities out of 10 planned,
- 152 educational institutions implementing curricula on Roma language or culture out of 106 planned,

- 47.60 % of the majority population in the intervention area receiving Roma compared to the planned 39.26%,
- 66 schools involved in inclusive education out of 60 planned,
- distribution of 15 500 textbooks on Roma culture and language to primary and secondary school teachers, out of the planned 11,500,

At the same time, the programme complemented existing public policies, especially in areas covered by the ESIF, and replicated solutions that had been successfully tested such as direct community work; interventions in the field of education through support to out-of-school activities for children and youth and improvement of relevant infrastructure (MFC, CC); in the field of health in the form of outreach work and the building of necessary infrastructure (access to drinking water, improvement of hygiene habits, etc.); linking services through an integrated approach in the areas of housing, employment, health, education and innovation development, e.g. by strengthening the capacity of municipalities in the field of social inclusion.

#### 7.2.3.2 Summary of main findings

Consistency of the programme design with the strategic priorities of the SR and the needs of the target groups

The LDI programme was consistently designed with regard to the needs of the SR and specific target groups, in particular children and youth in LDDs, MRC, as well as staff and institutions working in the field of inclusive education.

The target groups were appropriately set, while the intervention logic of the programme reflected the priorities of the SR (territorial cohesion, inclusion of the MRC, quality education) and was based on the identified challenges in the national strategies and addressed gaps that were not sufficiently covered by other mechanisms (e.g. ESIF). The links between community centres, schools and municipalities, as well as the trilateral cooperation with Donor partners from Norway, were seen as particularly positive.

Thematic and geographical relevance of calls

The programme calls were appropriately thematically targeted and reflected real needs on the ground, as evidenced by the high uptake and interest from local actors. The programme targeted LDDs defined under Act No. 336/2015 Coll., which face cumulative challenges in the areas of poverty, unemployment, housing and access to services. The priority focus on the MRC was visible, with some challenges allowing for broader community intervention.

Connectivity between actors and a multisectoral approach

The programme promoted cooperation between community centres, schools, municipalities and NGOs, as well as with bilateral partners from Norway. This multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach has strengthened the relevance of the interventions and increased their acceptance in the territory. The involvement of bilateral partners from Norway has also brought innovative potential and international expertise.

Qualitative benefit: MRC participation in activities and linking with the majority were important factors for positive social change in communities – some projects also reported changing attitudes and breaking down stereotypes in communities.



## Flexibility and contextual adaptability of interventions

The programme has demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing conditions – particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when several projects responded to deepening employment, education and health problems during implementation and were able to target the most vulnerable populations. Interventions were tailored to the local cultural context, needs and capacities of the Project Promoters.

### 7.2.3.3 Conclusions and recommendations

- C1: The LDI programme shows a high degree of relevance to the needs of the target groups and the priorities of the SR. The intervention logic of the programme was appropriate, comprehensive, participatory and reflective of the strategic challenges in the LDDs and other areas of intervention. The linkages between community work and inclusive education, health support, employment and local capacity strengthening can be positively assessed.
- C2: Although the programme is primarily oriented towards the MRC and LDD, some of the challenges allowed for a broader scope without a strict preference for the most vulnerable groups.

Based on these findings, two recommendations were formulated, one for the NFP and one for the Programme Operator:

- R1: In future, maintain and strengthen an integrated and multisectoral approach that links community work, educational institutions and local government. We also recommend ensuring systematic participation of target groups, including the MRC and youth, in consultation and co-design of interventions, thereby increasing their meaningfulness, ownership and effectiveness.
- R2: Ensure explicit targeting of the MRC when setting calls and evaluation criteria – e.g. through separate calls, priority points in project evaluation or allocations. This will increase the effectiveness of interventions towards the most vulnerable groups and meet the objectives of the inclusive policies of both the SR and Donor States.

### 7.2.4 Assessment against the evaluation criterion effectiveness

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the LDI programme is carried out in accordance with the effectiveness criterion, which is defined in the Results Framework as one of the six evaluation criteria as "*the extent to which the programme/fund has achieved the intended results, including any differences in results between groups*". The evaluation is also in line with the OECD/DAC methodology. It aimed at verifying the extent to which the planned outputs and outcomes have been achieved, the quality of the outputs and outcomes, as well as identifying the factors influencing their achievement. At the same time, other outputs and outcomes that were not explicitly mentioned in the Results Framework, but which make a significant contribution to the objectives of the programme, are also examined.

In line with the Results Framework, the evaluation of the LDI programme is carried out in response to the four evaluation questions:

- To what extent have the outcomes and outputs produced been of the required quality (as opposed to quantity)?
- What factors influenced the achievement of outcomes and outputs?

- Were additional outcomes, beyond those listed in the Result Framework, achieved and contributed to the intended outcomes? If so, which ones?
- Were other outputs, beyond those listed in the Result Framework, achieved that will contribute to the planned objectives? If yes, which ones?

#### 7.2.4.1 Findings

To what extent have the outputs and outcomes been achieved to the required quality?

Outcomes 1: Social and economic development of the least developed districts enhanced

Under this component, projects aimed at establishing multifunctional youth centres in the LDCs were supported. Indicators such as the number of jobs created (27 against a target of 20), the number of municipalities with increased capacity to offer services (21 against a target of 10), as well as the number of people at risk of poverty who benefited from the supported services (6 261 against a target of 1 500) were significantly exceeded. The number of centres established was slightly lower (8 against a target of 9)(see Tab. 11).

The fact that the target values of measurable indicators were exceeded confirms the success of the program in terms of achievement of outputs and outcomes. At the same time, however, it suggests that the targets set when designing the program may have been conservative or not ambitious enough. This approach is common in many grant-funded programs and can distort the picture of the actual quality of the outcomes achieved – even though they were achieved legitimately.

Qualitatively, the outputs were in line with the programme's objective of creating accessible, community-oriented and inclusive spaces for children and youth. The centres provided a comprehensive portfolio of activities (leisure, counselling, education, health), with an emphasis on engaging Roma and marginalised children and youth. The projects also created sustainable partnerships between municipalities and NGOs.

Table 11: Overview of the implementation of outcome and output indicators for PA10

(PA)	Expected outcome/output of the programme	Indicator	Unit of measurement	PA target value	Planned target value according to the Final Programme Report	Achieved by the end of programme implementation	Rate of achievement against target in the Final Report
PA10	Outcome 1 Social and economic development of the least developed districts strengthened	Number of jobs created (broken down by gender, age)	Number of	20	20	27	135 %
		Number of municipalities with an increased capacity to offer children and young people multiple activities of interest	Number of	10	10	21	210 %
		Number of people at risk of poverty using services	Number	1 500	1 500	6 261	417 %

	provided by supported youth centres (disaggregated by gender, age, per Roma)					
Output 1.1 Services and infrastructure provided to children and young people	Number of multifunctional youth centres established or supported	Number	10	9	8	89 %
	Number of legal entities involved in projects	Number of	30	30	67	223 %
	Number of projects implemented in multi-level and/or multi-stakeholder local partnerships	Number of	10	9	8	89 %
	Number of field social workers and/or Roma mediators cooperating with youth centres	Number	20	20	30	150 %
	Average number of hours (in hours per week) by which the centre is open longer for children and young people	average in hours	8	8	36	450 %

Source: authors' own elaboration

## Outcome 2: Social inclusion of marginalised Roma communities strengthened

Projects under this component provided integrated interventions directly in the MRC – covering education, employment, health, housing and non-discrimination. Achievements far exceeded targets – number of Roma using services (8 456 against a target of 4 000), joint activities between Roma and non-Roma (142 against 36), improvement in majority attitudes (+16 %) (see Table 12).

Similarly to Outcome 1, the multiple exceeding of the target values for outcome 2 indicators indicates that the program objectives may have been set too low (not ambitious enough) when the program was designed, as they were set before any call for proposals was announced or any project was concluded during the 2014–2021 programming period.

Despite this limitation, in terms of quality, interventions responded to real community needs – e.g. the Mission 1000 project improved access to maternal and child health care, other projects led to infrastructure improvements in 18 localities and the introduction of positive employment policies in communities. There was a strong emphasis on cultural sensitivity, collaboration with field workers and community activism.

### Outcome 3: Increased capacity of schools for inclusive education

A pre-defined project aimed at increasing teachers' intercultural competences and integrating Roma culture into teaching met and exceeded all indicators – 152 schools introduced elements of inclusion (target 105), 15,500 textbooks were distributed (target 11,500), 81 teachers received training.

The project met the qualitative requirements of the programme – it provided didactically and culturally appropriate materials, supported schools in the integration of Roma pupils, increased the capacity of teachers and contributed to the change of school climates. (See Table 13).

Outcomes 1–3 show the significant impact of the programme not only in terms of improving living conditions, but also in terms of strengthening interpersonal relations, inclusion and community development.

Of the 25 projects supported by the program, 21 contain elements focused on MRC (Roma communities, marginalized groups, inclusion). Four projects do not contain direct references to MRC, but they indirectly support MRC. These are projects with a broader focus, such as community development, public services, culture, education, or support for small municipalities and regions without a specific ethnic focus. In the first call (LDI01) focused on MFC, half of the supported projects (4 out of 8) included explicit elements focused on MRC. The remaining four were designed in general terms, focusing on disadvantaged social groups in the LDDs. The output of the program under the second (LDI02) and third (LDI03) calls was defined as "improved social inclusion of MRC. "In the second call, "services provided to MRC" were a mandatory outcome of the program. In the third call, the outcomes were not defined as mandatory, but still contained an element focused on MRC. All supported projects under the second (9 projects) and third (8 projects) calls contained elements

Table 12: Overview of the implementation of outcome and output indicators for PA7

(PA)	Expected outcome/output of the programme	Indicator	Unit of measurement	PA target value	Planned target value according to the Final Programme Report	Achieved value by the end of programme implementation	Rate of achievement against target in the Final Programme Report
PA7	Outcome 2 Improved social inclusion of the MRC	Percentage of the majority population in the intervention area accepting Roma	%	39,3 %	39,3 %	47,6 %	> 25 %
		Number of Roma using supported services (by gender, age)	Number	3 000	4 000	8 456	211 %
		Percentage of people living in the MRC in the project intervention area receiving services	%	20,0 %	20,0 %	20,22 %	> 20 %

Output 2.1 Services provided MRC	Number of projects applying an integrated approach (i.e. addressing more than one thematic area of intervention covering components of health, education, employment, housing and non-discrimination)	Number of	12	18	16	89 %
	Number of joint activities between Roma and non-Roma	Number of	24	36	142	394 %
	Number of MRCs with investments in public infrastructure reducing disparities between Roma and non-Roma	Number	4	10	18	180 %
	Number of Roma working in centres	Number	24	50	129	258 %
	Number of MRC who received services	Number	12	24	107	446 %
Output 2.2 Increased capacity of organisations working in the field of social inclusion of the MRC	Number of supported entities/players active in the field of social inclusion of the MRC	Number of	20	40	126	315 %
	Number of good practices replicated in the MRC	Number	10	29	65	224 %
	Number of multi-stakeholder partnerships established or supported	Number	10	18	16	89 %

Source: author's own elaboration based on the Programme Operator's documents and the programme's website

Qualitative analyses show that while projects have achieved varying levels of quality of outputs, project implementation has often contributed to the establishment of local partnerships and improved coordination between schools, municipalities and communities, and a number of community centres have become anchors of local stability – serving not only as spaces for leisure activities, but also as places of trust. Projects that engaged local authorities and created partnerships had a higher impact and effectiveness of interventions.

Examples of good practice include projects focusing on mentoring young Roma, women's leadership groups and the creation of community plans.

At the programme level, the quality of outputs can be assessed as uneven. In addition to official programme and project documentation, personal interviews also revealed that where strong capacity and experience were lacking, outcomes were more formal. Where experienced NGOs with links to target groups were active, outputs were demonstrably integrated into local structures. This highlights the importance of involving locally anchored actors and the need for longer-term continuity.

In terms of effectiveness of the programme, the main challenges are the lack of tools to systematically measure qualitative impacts (e.g. attitudinal changes, impact of education on school results) and the availability of data on long-term impact/effect (2+ years after the end of the projects). For the future, it is therefore recommended to add qualitative indicators or case studies to the monitoring frameworks of future calls, focusing on long-term impact/effect monitoring – in the areas of education, attitudes of majority, employability and community cohesion.

Quantitatively, the LDI programme has met the programme objectives through the planned outputs and outcomes. The indicators in the programme's Result Framework were overwhelmingly met or exceeded. At the same time, the qualitative level of outputs was in most cases in line with the programme principles – especially in terms of integration of vulnerable groups, cultural sensitivity, outreach work and multi-level cooperation. The interventions were in line with the initial objectives of the programme – they reflected the needs of the target groups, took into account the specificities of the MRC, promoted networking and community work. Examples of good practice demonstrate that the interventions were not only formally successful, but also in terms of value and content in line with the principles of inclusion, sustainability and participation.

Table 13: Overview of the implementation of outcome and output indicators for PA8

(PA)	Expected outcome/output of the programme	Indicator	Unit of measurement	PA target value	Planned target value according to the Final Programme Report	Achievement by the end of programme implementation	Rate of achievement against target in the Final Programme Report
PA8	Outcome 3 Improved capacity of schools for inclusive education	Number of educational institutions that have a Roma language or culture curriculum in place	Number	105	105	152	145 %
		Number of schools applying inclusive education models	Number	60	60	66	110 %
	Output 3.1 Children and youth of Roma origin empowered	Number of textbooks and methodological materials covering Roma history and language distributed to primary and secondary school	Number of	11 500	11 500	15 500	135 %

	teachers and pupils					
	Number of kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers working with Roma children trained in innovative educational practices (by gender, per Roma)	Number	80	80	81	101 %
	Number of administrative and management staff of schools working with Roma children trained in innovative educational practices (by gender, per Roma)	Number	80	80	80	100 %
	Number of candidates for the post of Roma language teacher prepared for the state language examination (broken down by gender, per Roma)	Number	10	10	13	130 %
	Number of multipliers/trainers trained in Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and Human Rights Education (HRE) (gender disaggregated, per Roma)	Number	10	10	18	180 %
	Number of professionals trained in the field of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and Human Rights Education (HRE) (gender disaggregated, per Roma)	Number of	60	60	60	100 %

Source: author's own elaboration based on the Programme Operator's documents and the programme's website

#### Which factors influenced the achievement of outputs and outcomes?

A number of positive factors had a significant impact on the achievement of outputs and outcomes:

- The presence of a strong local partnership between schools, communities and local government was strongly evident in ensuring the sustainability of interventions and

in linking the school environment to community life. Projects that integrated community workers into school activities (e.g. LDI01006, LDI02027) showed higher participation rates of the target group, better school attendance and stronger soft skills development of MRC children.

- The expertise of the Project Promoters, especially NGOs that had previous experience working with the MRC, contributed to the effective implementation of the project activities. These Project Promoters (e.g. Man in Peril – LDI01010, ETP Slovakia – LDI03018) were able to respond in a targeted manner to the specific needs of the communities, using proven approaches and providing quality educational, social and community services.
- The flexibility of the programme during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed Project Promoters to adapt implementation strategies (e.g. hybrid or community-based forms of education, online counselling). This allowed to mitigate the negative impacts of the crisis period on the MRC and to maintain continuity of support, which was reflected in meeting or exceeding indicators in the areas of employment, child labour and community work (e.g. LDI02016, LDI03025).
- Proactive support from the programme operator and IPO (through training, experience sharing and regular monitoring) increased the capacity of Project Promoters and contributed to a common understanding of programme objectives. Know-how and experience of project partners from Norway as a Donor State helped to standardise interventions, especially in the areas of working with community centres, mentoring and education of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Limiting factors were:

- Delays in signing contracts and the high administrative burden, especially in the initial phases of projects, reduced the real time for implementation. This led to time stress and the need to implement activities in a shortened period, which may have affected the quality and scope of some outputs (e.g. late start of community services – LDI03020, LDI02014).
- Weak capacity in some Project Promoters, particularly new or small organisations, was reflected in limited ability to respond to changes in the environment or implementation challenges (e.g. gaps in child attendance, inexperience in tracking indicators). Some projects showed problems with documentation of outputs or delays in meeting monitoring obligations.
- Turnover of key staff and their hard-to-replace expertise at short notice caused disruptions or delays in service delivery, particularly in areas such as outreach social work, mentoring or pedagogical assistance. In some cases (e.g. LDI02026) the intensity of work with the community was reduced, affecting the sustainability of the changes achieved.

Although some factors proved to be risky, they were largely compensated at the programme level by the strong professional capacities of the Project Promoters, the support of the PO and the experience sharing mechanisms. Overall, the positive factors had a decisive impact on the achievement of programme objectives, while the limiting factors were mainly project-specific and managerial in nature, with limited impact on macro-level results.



Were other results achieved beyond those listed in the Result Framework? If so, which ones?

A number of projects implemented under the LDI programme have produced additional results that were not explicitly included in the Result Framework, but which significantly support the objectives of the programme and have the potential for long-term systemic impact. These include:

- Development of community leadership and participatory structures. Several projects have contributed to the identification, involvement and development of leaders from the MRC background who have become agents of change at the local level (e.g. LDI03020 Strengthening Minorities project, Centre for Community Education n.o., Banská Bystrica).
- Increased participation of the MRC in local decision-making. A number of municipalities declared that the project experience has improved the participation of the MRC in municipal decision-making, including participation in committee meetings, discussions on priorities and community planning (e.g. project LDI03025 Support and development of activities with the Roma community in the municipality of Zborov).
- Participation of the MRC in the development of community plans and action groups. Several projects have established working groups with the participation of the MRC, which have participated in the preparation of community plans for social services or municipal development (e.g. project LDI01007 MFC, city of Snina, LDI02026 Everybody Different, Everybody Equal, city of Žilina). These activities created the basis for their permanent involvement in local governance.
- Establishment of networks between community centres and schools. Projects such as LDI03018 Emancipated Roma women fighting discrimination, Utopia, n. o., Poltár; LDI01008 Unity in diversity, municipality of Prakovce; LDI03023 Developing skills and career counselling for social inclusion, People in danger n. o., Prešov or LDI01004 MFC Vranov nad Topľou have successfully linked community centres and schools. The result is continuous cooperation in the field of school mentoring, leisure activities and individual support for pupils.
- Integrated community service models In some projects, several types of services – social, health, educational – have been linked in one place (e.g. LDI03022 UPre Women, Carpathian Foundation n.o., Rožňava; LDI03021 Mission 1000, ACEC n.o., Spišská Nová Ves), thus creating functional models of "one-stop-shop" community centres.
- Mutual exchange of experience and networking between communities. PO supported networking, with several projects initiating visits and exchanges of experiences between municipalities with similar challenges. This promoted the dissemination of good practices and the transfer of innovative solutions.
- Influencing the attitudes of the majority society, e.g. by promoting inclusion through school projects and community festivals, through health care programmes, especially for children and pregnant women and mothers in health facilities. E.g. projects LDI02028 Community Centre Svidník, LDI01004 MFC Vranov nad Topľou, LDI03021 Mission 1000, ACEC n.o., Spišská Nová Ves contributed to increasing understanding and inclusion through public activities such as community festivals,

health days, exhibitions and activities at schools that purposefully linked the majority and the MRC. The projects also implemented health interventions targeting mothers and children, improving access to health care.

These results are significant in terms of sustainability and systemic development and can be used as a basis for public policy development in the areas of inclusion, community work and participation of vulnerable groups. Their systematic capture and further development can increase the long-term impact of the programme.

**Were other outputs achieved beyond those listed in the Result Framework? If so, which ones?**

Achieved Additional results identified as part of the programme implementation include:

- Development of new educational methodologies and practices. Several projects have developed their own methodological approaches and tools for working with children from the MRC, parents or the community. For example, projects LDI03018 Emancipated Roma Women, Utopia n. o., Poltár, as well as LDI03021 Mission 1000, ACEC n. o., Spišská Nová Ves, have prepared methodologies for community education and involvement of women in community work or public life.
- Development of the first strategic document for work with the MRC at the municipality level. In the town of Snina (project LDI01007 MFC) a comprehensive strategic document was prepared, which analyses the situation of the MRC in the town and proposes systemic measures to improve their living conditions – the document was approved by the town council and represents the basis for the further inclusive policy of the town. The local government took the decision to develop a housing programme in the Banská Bystrica district within the framework of the participation of MRC representatives in governance under the pressure of the local association and the community in the project LDI03020 Empowering Minorities, Centre for Community Education n. o., Banská Bystrica.
- Training for a wider group of stakeholders. In several projects, trainings were conducted not only for the project team, but also for school staff, local government and health professionals, raising awareness and expertise in working with marginalised groups.
- Support for peer-to-peer mentoring. Projects such as Misia 1000, ACEC n. o., Spišská Nová Ves or LDI03018 Emancipated Roma Women Fight Discrimination, Utopia, n. o., Poltár developed the concept of "peer mentoring" among Roma women, where stronger and more active women acted as mentors for other women in the community, especially in areas such as health, education and work.
- Joint community events to promote inclusion. Many projects have implemented community days, workshops, festivals or sports events and public events to promote intercultural understanding and reduce prejudice in communities (e.g. LDI02028 Community Centre Svidník, LDI01005 Multifunctional Centre in Moldava nad Bodvou).
- Informal forms of mental health and well-being support. Activities such as group counselling, therapeutic games, art therapy or experiential

activities with children and youth have been implemented within several projects. These outputs have significantly supported the psychological resilience of both children and parents.

These outputs were often not captured through quantitative indicators, but significantly enriched the qualitative impact of the programme and contributed to the goals of inclusion, trust and reducing tensions in communities. They represent both good practice and potential for replication or institutionalisation in future public policies on inclusion and social cohesion.

#### 7.2.4.2 Key findings

##### Achievement of objectives, outputs and outcomes

The LDI programme has substantially met its planned outputs and outcomes, with the values of most indicators being exceeded. The implemented projects reached thousands of people from the target groups, improved their access to services, promoted inclusive education, community development and strengthened the capacity of local governments, educational institutions and non-profit sector organizations to work with the MRC and increased the acceptance rate of the majority population in the intervention area.

##### Fulfilling outputs and outcomes outside the Result Framework

Additional outcomes generated outside the Result Framework – mentoring models, community planning, new forms of cooperation between municipalities and schools, and informal activities to strengthen trust and coexistence – have also been important contributions. While these outcomes were not captured by quantitative indicators, they have high qualitative impact and potential for long-term sustainability and institutionalization.

##### Quality of outputs

The quality of outputs was achieved but was uneven – it depended mainly on the capacity and prior experience of Project Promoters and local anchoring. Projects led by experienced NGOs achieved synergistic outcomes, connected actors and created sustainable partnerships. Where capacity was weaker, outputs were more formal and less connected to target groups.

#### 7.2.4.3 Conclusions and recommendations

- C3: The LDI programme was effective in achieving the intended outputs and outcomes. Targeted activities in the areas of community development, inclusive education and services for the MRC have brought about concrete improvements in access to services, quality of life and community relations. Differences in the quality of outputs were mainly related to the different levels of capacity and experience of Project Promoters. The outcomes highlight the need for long-term support to these actors and their role as agents of change.
- C4: The programme also generated significant additional benefits beyond the original framework through synergistic and innovative outputs – such as participatory planning, community leadership, MRC involvement in public processes, peer mentoring and new forms of community work. These outputs have a high potential for long-term sustainability and systemic change, but there is as yet no tool to systematically monitor and integrate them into public policies.

Based on these findings, two recommendations were formulated, one for the NFP and one for the Programme Operator:

- R3: In future programming periods, systematically strengthen support to actors with proven expertise in working with MRCs and communities and introduce more flexible models of funding and administrative management of projects, thereby increasing continuity and quality of services and the use of proven approaches by Project Promoters with proven outcomes.
- R4: Integrate quality results and good practice and innovations, including those generated outside formal results frameworks, into strategic frameworks and policies at national and regional levels. This will improve the capture of changes that are not visible through quantitative indicators but are fundamental to transforming community relations and inclusion. Introduce systematic collection of qualitative data (e.g. changes in attitudes, psychosocial impacts) and track long-term impacts (e.g. change in attitudes, quality of coexistence, involvement of MRC).

### 7.3 Evaluation of the DGV programme

The aim of the DGV programme is to prevent domestic and gender-based violence and to provide protection and assistance to victims of such violence. The programme is administered by the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic. The Norwegian Directorate for Health/Helsedirektoratet is involved in the programme as the DPP, and the Council of Europe as the IPO.

The implementation of the programme is based on the Programme Concept Note, which justifies and describes the DGV programme, including the needs to which the programme is to respond, the programme's objectives and interventions, its expected outputs, outcomes, impacts and sustainability, as well as the target groups. The Programme Concept Note outlines the bilateral ambitions of the programme, including cooperation with partners from donor countries and international organisations, summarises the modalities and indicators linked to the programme's objectives, and sets the grant rates.

According to the Program Agreement on the financing of the DGV Program (Addendum No. 4 to the Program Agreement on the financing of the Program "Domestic and Gender-Based Violence"), the eligibility period for expenditures was from November 29, 2016, to December 31, 2020, with a total budget of EUR 9,137,956. 47, of which the program grant from the NFM (85%) amounted to EUR 7,767,263 and the national co-financing of the program (15%) amounted to EUR 1,370,693.47. The total expenditure of the program was EUR 8,358,478.99, of which the program grant from the NFM (85%) was EUR 7,104,707.13 and the national co-financing of the program (15%) was EUR 1,253,771.86. The final amount spent represented 91.47% of the total eligible expenditure. The table provides an overview of the allocated and actually used financial resources of the NFM and national co-financing.

Table 14: Overview of the Program Grant Amount and National Co-Financing

-	Eligible programme expenditure according to program agreement of 15 November 2019 in EUR	Eligible program expenses as of April 30, 2024 in EUR	Total eligible expenditure incurred as at 30 April 2025 in EUR
Program Grant (NFM)	9 000 000	7 767 263	7 104 707.13
National co-financing	1 588 236	1 370 693,47	1 253 771.86
Total	10 588 236	9 137 956.47	8 358 479

Source: own elaboration

The objective of the programme is 'Prevention of domestic and gender-based violence and protection and assistance to victims'. Support for the programme is directed toward two programme areas – Work-Life Balance and Domestic and Gender Based Violence, through pre-defined projects and three open calls for proposals, as well as a related call for additional funding for existing projects.

Within the Work-Life Balance programme area, the programme planned to support the result "Increased understanding of gender equality" through the pre-defined project "HER STORY" and one small grants scheme aimed at building the capacity of organisations working in the field of gender equality and work-life balance. The pre-defined project "HER STORY" was eventually not implemented, only its sub-activities were implemented and became part of the only pre-defined project implemented "Improving the protection of the interests of victims – Strengthening capacities and practices to combat violence against women and domestic violence" (DGVPP002).

The Small Grants Scheme Call for proposals to support institutions working in the field of gender equality and work–life balance (DGV01) was launched on 18 July 2019 by the operator of the Domestic and Gender–Based Violence Programme – the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic under the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014–2021.

8 project applications with a total amount of EUR 1,445,616 were received under the 1<sup>st</sup> round of the DGV01 Small Grants Scheme call closure. By decision of the Operator of the Domestic and Gender–Based Violence Programme, the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic dated 3 May 2021, 7 project applications with an allocation of EUR 1,242,086 were supported. 1 project was implemented in partnership with a bilateral partner from Norway.

Three project applications with a total amount of EUR 468 506 were submitted by the closing date of the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of the call for proposals of the small grants scheme DGV01. By decision of the Programme Operator, which entered into force on 22 July 2021, all three submitted project applications with an allocation of EUR 468 506 were supported. However, one project was ultimately not implemented (Phoenix Civic Association, grant amount – EUR 179 889). Of the two projects implemented, 1 project was implemented in partnership with a bilateral partner from Norway. In total, 9 projects were supported and implemented.

The two projects supported under the Work–Life Balance programme area also developed bilateral cooperation with Norwegian institutions, providing opportunities for sharing practices and discussing methodologies related to the prevention of and response to gender–based violence. Bilateral partnerships have also contributed to the development of new training tools, educational materials and public campaigns.

Through calls (DGV02 and DGV03) linked to the achievement of Outcome 2 of the DGV programme, nine projects were implemented to support capacity building, improvement of infrastructure and specialisation of existing services for victims of domestic and gender–based violence. The programme targeted support to 22 counselling centres and safe houses for women. These efforts have helped to improve the availability and quality of services, particularly in regions with limited access to specialised support. The DGVDP's call for additional funding to implement existing projects further supported four of these projects in the DGV programme.

The programme also contributed to institutional strengthening by supporting the Coordination and Methodology Centre (CMC) through the only implemented pre–defined project DGVPP002: "Improving the protection of the interests of victims – Strengthening capacities and practices in the fight against violence against women and domestic violence" linked to the achievement of Outcome 3. Eight regional teams were set up to facilitate cooperation between service providers, law enforcement and local authorities, thereby improving coordination in the field of domestic and gender–based violence, conducting research activities, supporting the creation of appropriate interviewing spaces for women experiencing violence and their children, and strengthening the professional capacities of relevant actors. Cooperation with the Norwegian Centre for the Study of Violence and Traumatic Stress (NCVTS) has provided opportunities to share practices and good practice in the field of domestic and gender–based violence, but also in the field of sexual violence.

Table 15 : Overview of evaluated calls launched under the DGV programme

Call (year of closure)	Focus	Number of applications received	Number of projects approved	Costs incurred in EUR (grant + co- financing)
DGV01 (2021)	Support for organisations working in the field of gender equality and work-life balance	8	7	1 515 764,07
DGV02 (2021)	Support to intervention teams at local level providing services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence, including children	10	6 <sup>18</sup>	2 815 145,55
DGV03 (2021)	Increase the quality of services to meet required standards, including specific services for child victims	3	3	1 540 408,63
DGVDP (2023)	Allocation of additional funds for the implementation of existing projects in the DGV programme (for beneficiaries DGV01, DGV02 and DGV03)	7	7	Counted under DGV01, DGV02 and DGV03
TOTAL in EUR				5 871 318,25
Pre-defined project	Focus	Costs incurred in EUR (grant + co- financing)		
DGVPP002	Improving the protection of victims' rights – Strengthening capacities and practices to combat violence against women and domestic violence	1 569 750, 77		
TOTAL Calls + Pre-defined projects in EUR				7 441 069,02

Source: Own elaboration

### 7.3.1 Theory of change

The DGV programme was based on a broad set of identified needs, which can be categorised into three main areas. The first group of problems and the resulting needs are the gaps in awareness and prevention. The need to improve social awareness of gender equality and to strengthen primary and tertiary prevention, including work with perpetrators of violence, is enormous and is underlined not only by the Concept Note but also by the results of personal interviews with grantees through the NFM. The second category is represented by the needs related to the latency of violence against women, which include the need to increase the reporting rate of domestic and gender-based violence, increase the conviction rate of perpetrators and strengthen the credibility of responsible institutions, and is also directly related to the low awareness and prevention activities in this area. The third and most extensive group is the needs in the area of services for victims, which include the expansion and improvement of specialised service providers, the provision of services for vulnerable groups and victims of sexual violence, the expansion of the

<sup>18</sup> One project (DGV02016) was cancelled and replaced by project DGV02022, which was supported from the reserve list.



infrastructure network of service providers for women experiencing violence and their children, and the provision of stable funding for the services provided.

In order to address these needs, the DGV programme was established, which allowed to allocate financial resources – EUR 9 million from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, supplemented by EUR 1 588 236 of national co-financing from the State Budget of the Slovak Republic – and to use existing institutional capacities, namely the professional capacities of the CMC, the network of functioning organisations providing services for women experiencing violence and their children, as well as the network of organisations established in the field of gender equality. These inputs were critical prerequisites for the successful implementation of the programme, and their quality and availability directly influenced the scale and effectiveness of the interventions implemented.

The implementation of the DGV programme was carried out through one pre-defined project, three calls (including 1 of the small grants scheme) and one call for additional support for the projects carried out. All projects implemented (linked to the achievement of Outcomes 1, 2 and 3) included awareness-raising activities involving the support and implementation of awareness-raising campaigns, educational and promotional activities such as trainings, workshops, seminars, conferences, exhibitions, blogs, podcasts, videos presented on social media. In parallel, capacity building activities for services were also implemented, which included support for the establishment of intervention teams providing services for victims, including children, support for building and expanding the network of providers of specific social services for women experiencing violence and their children, support for qualification and accreditation for the provision of social services, and support for counselling for victims. These activities were primarily directed towards the achievement of Outcomes 2 and 3. The third category of activities consisted of infrastructural measures aimed at supporting infrastructure for women experiencing violence and their children through technical and structural modifications of facilities, which were also linked to Outcome 2 (the equipment of the premises of the VAW and counselling centres) and, in particular, to Outcome 3 (the equipment of the interrogation rooms).

During the planning and implementation of the activities, various internal and external factors entered into the process and had an impact on the progress and results of the programme. Among the most significant internal factors were, in particular, the delay in the start of the actual implementation of the programme (including a one-year delay in issuing decisions in call DGV01) and the cancellation of the originally planned pre-defined projects, of which only one was finally implemented. External factors outside the direct control of the programme with a direct impact on the success and implementation of the programme were legislative changes and the failure to ratify the Istanbul Convention. The transposition of Directive 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the EU on combating violence against women, which may create new opportunities or requirements for the programme, will also have a significant impact on the sustainability of the results achieved. On the other hand, the start of the implementation of the European Union funds, namely OP HR, timed to fall within the NFM programming period, has created a positive impact in the form of complementary projects with the DGV programme. Although the COVID-19 pandemic affected social service providers in general to a high degree, by the time the projects were implemented through the NFM, it no longer posed a major risk or threat to the actual implementation of the DGV programme. Conversely, the systemic factors that to some extent posed risks and some constraints to the DGV programme included legislative obstacles, absorption capacity of potential applicants, involvement of other

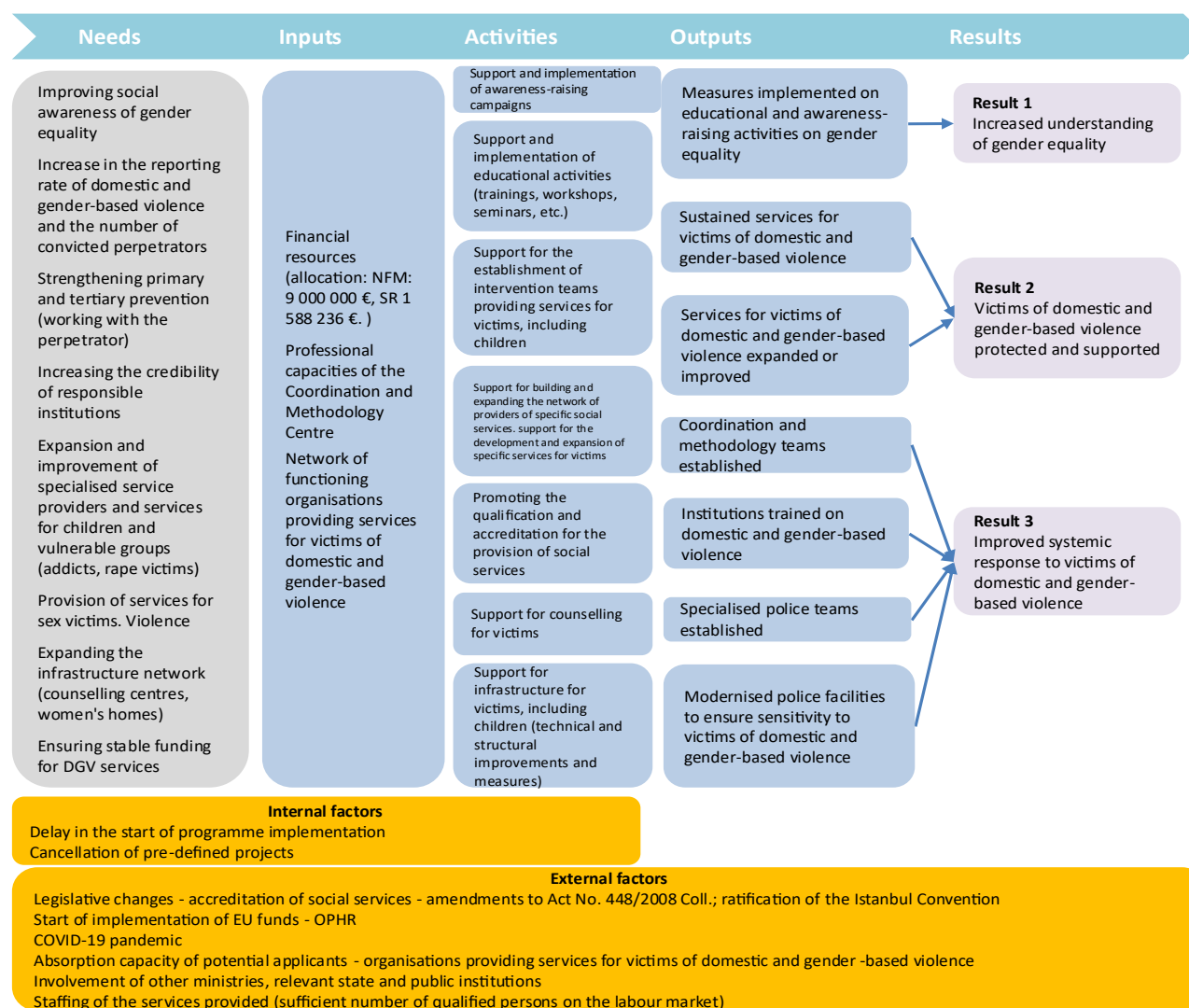


ministries and relevant institutions, and staffing of the services provided (these represented only marginal changes in one project). These factors mainly negatively affected the achievement of the measurable indicators for Outcome 2 and also the non-implementation of two planned pre-defined projects.

Outputs produced through project activities most often included educational materials, trainings, workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, both in the area of gender equality and in the area of domestic and gender-based violence (Outcome 1, 2 and 3). Other important outputs were the establishment of coordination and methodology teams linked to Outcome 3. The activities of the pre-defined project linked to Outcome 3 were directed towards the establishment and upgrading of police interrogation rooms to ensure sensitivity towards victims of domestic and gender-based violence and their children.

These outputs in turn contribute to the achievement of broader outcomes that represent potential changes in the target areas, and which are key to the successful implementation of the DGV programme. The first outcome, increased understanding of gender equality, was directly linked to the education and awareness raising outputs, whereby the educational activities implemented and increased awareness led to a better understanding of gender equality issues in society. The second outcome, protected and supported victims of domestic and gender-based violence, is intended to be a direct result of expanded and improved services for victims, where the established coordination teams and improved services have the potential to lead to more effective protection and support for victims of violence. The third outcome, improved systemic response to victims of domestic and gender-based violence, was linked to the creation of specialized police teams and upgraded facilities, with trained institutions and improved systemic capacity supporting a more effective system-wide response to the needs of women experiencing violence and their children.

Figure 3: Theory of change\_DGV



Source: Authors' own elaboration

### 7.3.2 Assessment based on the evaluation criterion of coherence

The evaluation criterion coherence, in line with the current OECD/DAC definition and the Results Guideline<sup>19</sup>, aims to provide an answer to the question "*How well does the intervention fit (among others)?*". Coherence involves the analysis of synergies and linkages between other interventions implemented by the same institution (programme operator or fund manager). Coherence also implies consistency of activities with interventions of other actors in the same sector/programme area (e.g. EU Structural Funds funded activities); complementarity, harmonisation and coordination with others; and the extent to which the programme/fund adds value while avoiding duplication of effort.

In the context of the NFM and the DGV programme, this criterion focuses on the one hand on examining the appropriateness and complementarity of projects and activities implemented under the programme with other interventions of the programme operator (MIRDI SR), where the evaluators also assessed the internal coherence of the programme and analysed synergies between the projects implemented with each other, but also within the EEA and Norway Grants (evaluation question 1). The focal point for this criterion was primarily the analysis of the external coherence of the implemented interventions, which included a comparison of the DGV programme with other similar programmes funded by other public or international sources and an assessment of their coherence, but also of undesirable duplications. In addition, under the coherence criterion (evaluation question 2), the evaluators also focused on identifying the added value of the DGV programme, specifically in terms of the projects implemented during the evaluation period.

The main evaluation questions for assessing the coherence criterion, which are based on the Results Guideline and whose formulation appropriately corresponds to the above definition of an evaluation criterion in the context of the NFM:

1. What were the synergies and linkages with other interventions of the Programme Operator?
2. Has the programme created added value without creating duplication with other similar programmes funded by other public or international sources (beyond the EEA FM and NFM funding)? If yes, how?

#### 7.3.2.1 Findings

##### Internal coherence

The content focus of interventions under the DGV programme is very specific, concentrating on two main areas: (i) gender equality and work-life balance and (ii) the area of domestic and gender-based violence in the context of protection and support for women experiencing violence and their children, its prevention and systematic education for relevant actors. The substantive focus of the DGV programme is based on the Concept Note, which is the basic document for the programme set-up, including all relevant information on the programme, including a description of the baseline situation, needs and risk assessment, as well as specific foreseen interventions and activities for the programme period. The preparation of the Concept Note follows the rules and steps set out in the

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<sup>19</sup> Results Guideline Rules and Guidance on how to design, monitor and evaluate programmes, manage risks, and reports on results Adopted by the Financial Mechanism Committee on 9 February 2017 Updated March 2021. Available online: [https://eeagrants.org/sites/default/files/resources/Results%20Guideline%20revised%20March%202021\\_0.pdf](https://eeagrants.org/sites/default/files/resources/Results%20Guideline%20revised%20March%202021_0.pdf)

Results Guideline and the Blue Book<sup>20</sup>, which identifies the priority sectors and programme areas for the programming period, and offers specific recommendations for their implementation. This document also shows the chosen objective of the programme: *"Prevention of domestic and gender-based violence and protection and assistance to victims"*, and the results that are linked to it.

The assessment of the programme in this section relates to Outcome 1: Increased understanding of gender equality and the related Output 1.1 – Measures implemented on educational and awareness-raising activities in the field of gender equality.

Within the Work-Life Balance programme area and Outcome 1, 9 organisations were supported – MyMamy, Woman in Distress, EsFEM, Institute of Human Rights, InTYMYta, Risotto, Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, Union of Maternity Centres and Man in Danger. In the framework of the implementation of their projects, these organisations established cooperation with other organisations working in the field of gender equality, thanks to which they managed to disseminate the outputs and outcomes of the project and increase the quality or effectiveness of the impact of their activities.

Table 16: Overview of supported and implemented projects linked to Outcome 1 of the DGV Programme

Organisation	Project name	Total eligible expenditure in EUR (total)	Project grant in EUR (total)
Human Rights Institute	Promoting Gender Equality (RRR)	313 908	282 517
Man at Risk	Equality for Roma communities (RRR)	206 851	186 166
EsFem	Escape from (co-)dependency	199 256	179 330
Woman in distress	Women's rights are human rights	131 756	118 580
Union of Maternity Centres	Women in Communities	174 180	155 020
Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	Promoting gender equality and work-life balance in Slovakia	180 575	180 575
Risotto	Together for equality	220 000	198 000
MyMamy	Different paths to equality	240 167	216 150
InTYMYta	3 for All- "Three important messages on comprehensive relationship and sexuality education (CRSE) and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for each target group."	197 806	176 047

Source: own elaboration based on documentation provided

The supported projects implemented a wide range of activities, e.g. lectures on gender issues in primary and secondary schools for pupils and students, as well as for teaching staff (Human Rights Institute, Human at Risk, EsFem, Union of Maternity Centres). A manual for educators has also been prepared (InTYMYta). An important activity was the organization of campaigns on women's rights, on raising awareness on gender equality issues, on stepping out of the circle of violence, on invisible but important women (Human Rights

<sup>20</sup> Priority sectors and programme areas 2014 – 2021. Available online: [https://eeagrants.org/sites/default/files/resources/FMO\\_170774%2BBBlue%2BBook%2BFinal%2BUpdate\\_2017\\_FIN.pdf](https://eeagrants.org/sites/default/files/resources/FMO_170774%2BBBlue%2BBook%2BFinal%2BUpdate_2017_FIN.pdf)

Institute, Woman in Distress, Union of Maternity Centres, Risotto). Various festivals (MyMamy), exhibitions, round table discussions, several publications and promotional materials (e.g. diaries, quartets) and audiovisual material have been produced and used extensively in chaparies or lectures. Special attention was paid to the involvement of Roma women and children, and partly also of Roma men (OZ Man in danger). The organisations themselves evaluated the implementation of their activities as successful, efficient and effective, with high added value. Most of them managed to achieve more than they expected for the target groups in promoting gender equality. The activities also met the needs of the target groups.

The monitoring of programme indicators showed that in the vast majority of cases the planned target values of the indicators were achieved or significantly exceeded. Tables 30 and 31 show the achieved values of the output and outcome indicators for each organisation. The situation was the same in the publicity of the programme or in the monitoring of the programme's coverage (number of pupils reached and number of districts in which lectures were given), where the planned coverage was clearly exceeded in the vast majority of cases (Tables 32 and 33). Almost all projects included representatives of the RMC.

#### Synergies with other interventions of the Programme Operator

Synergies between interventions within the programme area were high, with individual activities complementing and supporting each other very well, always within the same organisation or even between organisations. Participants in the interviews talked about cooperation between actors in the implementation of projects, in some cases the supported organisations were partners or helped each other staff in the preparation and implementation of lectures and campaigns or activities within the community centres.

There is a high synergy between the measures of the Work-Life Balance programme area and the measures of the Domestic and Gender Based Violence programme area. Several lectures and round tables or discussions in the maternity centres talked about gender-based violence, provided a space for women to communicate and raise topics that are usually taboo in society. Gender-based violence has been the subject of several publications and campaigns (EsFem, SNCHR).

Compared to the interventions from other NFM/FM EEA programmes, the greatest synergy between interventions can be observed between the Gender Based Violence (GBV) programme and the Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion (LDI) programme. The two programmes overlapped in at least one target group – Roma. In addition, poverty is often linked to gender issues, as it is closely related to gender discrimination in the area of pay for work or, more generally, in women's professional advancement. In addition to the LDI programme, the DGV programme also showed high synergies with the Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (CLT) programme, as several activities of the DGV programme were oriented towards the promotion of culture, e.g. through the promotion of prominent Roma women and their portraits, portraits made by children in community centres in Eastern Slovakia, travelling exhibitions of these portraits, the production of calendars with portraits (Man in Peril), the organisation of festivals (MyMamy), and the establishment of a library of gender studies (EsFem).

Synergies between the DGV programme interventions were ensured by the composition and focus of the supported activities and were also fulfilled by the fact that the supported organisations linked the issues of gender equality and gender-based violence. The outputs of the implementation of the activities of the Work-Life Balance programme area set the stage for the Domestic and Gender-Based Violence programme area or topics related to this area, whether supported by the NFM or not. This helped to raise awareness in the area of gender equality among the target groups and in society. Among the other interventions and programmes supported by the Programme Operator, synergies were most evident with the Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion (LDI) and Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (CLT) programmes, through individual activities supported by DGV01.

For the analysis of Outcome 2 Protected and supported victims of domestic and gender-based violence, a total of nine implemented projects were examined, which were supported through two calls for projects (DGV02 and DGV03) and one call for additional funding (DGVDP).

The analysis of Outcome 3 Improved systemic response to victims of domestic and gender-based violence is linked to the review of a single implemented pre-defined project.

For a better overview, all projects analysed are listed in the table below. For better readability and clarity of the text, the evaluators use only the project code to refer to the projects below.

Table 17: Overview of the projects analysed linked to DGV Programme Outcomes 2 and 3

Project code	Project name	Recipient	Amount of approved grant in EUR
DGV02013	We stand by women. We protect and support them!	Fenestra	486 622
DGV02014	Together with us – Expanding counselling services for women experiencing violence and their children	ALEJ Counselling Centre	499 702
DGV02015	Safe path out of violence	Women in distress	535 400
DGV02017	Women's safe house – a step towards a life without violence	Centrum Slniečko, n. o.	599 258
DGV02018	LUNA, n. o. safe women's home in Trenčín	LUNA, n. o. o.	600 000
DGV02022	Building Bridges of Help	KA Social Services Centre	519 497
DGV03019	Stop the cycle of violence	Alliance of Women of Slovakia	577 704
DGV03020	A FUTURE WITHOUT VIOLENCE Improving and innovating services for people at risk of violence in the context of addiction	FUTURE, n. o. o.	493 403
DGV03021	"Kália" – Counselling centre for women experiencing violence and their children	TENENET o. z. z.	458 848
DGVPP002 (pre-defined project)	Improving the protection of victims' rights – strengthening capacities and procedures to combat violence against women and domestic violence	Institute for Labour and Family Research	1 400 000

Source: authors' own elaboration

In view of the above-mentioned objective and the expected outcomes of the programme, the implementation of specific projects and through a pre-defined project requires adequate professional capacities that are established in the Slovak environment and have sufficient experience in the field of domestic and gender-based violence. Although there were three groups of eligible applicants in both calls DGV02 and DGV03, only one of them<sup>21</sup> expressed interest in the grants – for simplicity the evaluators further use their common designation – service providers for women experiencing violence. Municipalities and regions only used the opportunity to participate in the calls as project partners (in projects: DGV02017, DGV02018, DGV02022). The number of entities meeting the eligibility criteria in the calls is very limited due to the fact that they are specialised service providers meeting the conditions resulting from the applicable legislation of the Slovak Republic. This limitation, although perfectly legitimate from the evaluators' point of view, has to a large extent negatively affected the absorption capacity of the programme and thus the achievement of all the measurable indicators for Output 2.1 and Output 2.2<sup>22</sup>. The DGV annual reports also mention this problem, stating that the programme's expectations in this respect were too ambitious, since, for example, supporting the target value of the indicator *Number of existing counselling centres supported* set at 35 centres would in fact mean supporting almost all centres available in Slovakia. In the next programming period, a more realistic setting of measurable indicators is necessary. Due to this fact, the interest of eligible applicants to participate in the calls was relatively low, which in turn caused that the success rate of applicants in the calls was relatively high. The main positive aspect of the low number of eligible applicants can be observed precisely in the issue of internal coherence, where a high degree of harmonisation and coordination of interventions within the programme can be seen.

Based on the analysis of available project documents, official project and programme operator websites, supported by the findings of the face-to-face interviews, the evaluators conclude that the projects were highly complementary in terms of content and territory, thus contributing jointly to the achievement of the expected outcomes and objectives of the programme. The participating service providers for women experiencing violence covered all the regions of the Slovak Republic with their services, which shows the territorial coherence of the programme. Also within the eligible activities that were implemented in the projects linked to Outcome 2, it is possible to speak of content synergies and harmonisation (training activities for different professional capacities, including mutual training of service providers for women experiencing violence and sharing of good practice, or provision of supervision; awareness-raising campaigns, which focused on different aspects of domestic and gender-based violence and were mostly carried out locally, or the preparation of methodological and educational materials, which were correlated and did not create duplication).

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<sup>21</sup> Legal entities established in the Slovak Republic that are registered in the register of social service providers or are accredited social service providers in the Slovak Republic under Act No. 305/2005 Coll. on Social Legal Protection of Children and Social Guardianship or Act No. 448/2008 Coll. on Social Services and on Amendments to Act No. 455/1991 Coll. or Act No. 274/2017 Coll. on Victims of Crimes, provided that the social service providers meet the required standards.

<sup>22</sup> Number of existing counselling centres supported; Number of existing places in safe women's homes supported; Number of service providers leading or involved in consortia with public institutions at local level; Number of counselling centres established or specialised to meet the required standards; Number of places in safe women's homes established or specialised to meet the required standards; Number of safe women's homes and counselling centres with improved conditions in terms of children's needs.





Figure 4: Regional coverage of DGV projects, own elaboration

As this is a very specific and professional area of social service provision, the actors know each other very well and are aware of each other's activities, sharing and exchanging knowledge, materials, etc. with each other. The synergies between the projects are greatly facilitated by the cooperation and partnerships between the grantees. This further supports the improvement of the quality of the projects implemented and also the targeting and better targeting of assistance and services for the target groups – women experiencing violence and their children. In most of the projects analysed, the service providers for women experiencing violence chose another service provider for women experiencing violence or for children as a project partner (DGV02013, DGV02014, DGV02015, DGV03019, DGV03020, DGV03021) and thus formalised their cooperation. During personal interviews, the implementing actors repeatedly highlighted the level and quality of this cooperation and stressed that the possibility of joint project implementation and exchange of experiences between organisations active in the field of DGV is one of the added values of the NFM. The organisations interviewed continue this cooperation even after the end of the projects, albeit in a limited mode.

The pre-defined project *DGVPP002 Improving the protection of victims' rights – strengthening capacities and procedures to combat violence against women and domestic violence* implemented by the ILFR was also complementary to the projects implemented in the form of the small grants scheme, in particular in the area of providing training, in its research activities and in strengthening the competences of relevant state and public institutions that come into contact with women experiencing violence and their children. In addition, the pre-defined project has also responded appropriately to the need to improve conditions for women experiencing violence and their children in these institutions, specifically by equipping eight special interrogation rooms in police stations adapted to the needs of victims of domestic and gender-based violence, and also by creating regional teams at the regional administration with a mandate to prepare Regional Action Plans for the prevention and elimination of violence against women. In interviews, all interviewees rated the cooperation with the CMC positively. In particular, they highlighted the methodological and research activities of the Centre. The coordination function of the Centre is currently not fulfilled as originally intended when it was established in 2015, in line with the requirements of the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (hereafter "Istanbul Convention"), as the latter has not yet



been ratified by the Slovak Republic.<sup>23</sup> However, the CMC contributes to the coordination of prevention as well as educational activities in the field of domestic and gender-based violence.

For the 2014–2021 programming period, MIRD SR is the operator of three other programs in addition to the DGV program, two of which can be identified as relevant to the DGV programme: (i) the Cross-Border Cooperation/Good Governance Programme (GGC) funded by the EEA Financial Mechanism and (ii) the Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion Programme (LDI) funded by the NFM in the same way as the DGV programme.

Based on the analysis carried out on the projects implemented under these two programmes, the highest degree of complementarity was observed for three specific projects:

1. GGC Programme – Project GGCPP002 *"Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Judiciary through the Protection/Empowerment of Victims and Vulnerable Parties"* implemented by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic
  - There are evident overlaps in content with the GGC programme, as the project focuses on improving the efficiency and quality of the justice system as regards the protection of victims of crime and the protection of minors in the context of family law disputes. The project description explicitly seeks to fill the gaps not covered by the DGV programme and to create synergies in order to comprehensively protect these target groups. As this project is aimed at multi-institutional cooperation, training of relevant professionals and improvement of the conditions for working with minors, it complements the above-mentioned pre-defined project DGVP002 and also some of the projects under the small grants scheme in terms of content.
2. LDI Programme – Project LDI03018 *"Emancipated Roma Women Fight Discrimination"* implemented by Utopia
  - The content links are not as obvious and direct as with the GGCPP002 project, but indirectly the project has the potential to create an enabling environment for Roma women and improve the quality of life in their own communities. The empowerment of Roma women and their empowerment in relation to their own lives and decisions can also have a significant preventive effect in the area of domestic and gender-based violence.
3. LDI Programme – Project LDI03022 *"UPfor women: a programme for the development and employability of women from marginalised communities"* implemented by the Carpathian Foundation
  - The content of the project also focuses on the empowerment of Roma women, especially on their social inclusion and improved access to the labour market. Similarly to the above mentioned project, the evaluators see the project's potential for creating synergies mainly in the prevention of domestic and gender-based violence, which has a positive impact especially on strengthening the financial independence of women from Roma communities, gaining self-confidence and taking responsibility for their lives.

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<sup>23</sup> The Slovak Republic was one of the first countries to sign the Convention on 11 May 2011, but has not ratified it to date. The Convention was signed on behalf of the EU on 13 June 2017 and the procedure was completed with the deposit of two instruments of approval on 28 June 2023, which means that the Convention entered into force for the EU on 1 October 2023.

Based on this analysis, it is possible to identify obvious overlaps between specific projects implemented through the EEA and Norway Grants. The evaluators consider that the creation of synergies within specific programmes has a high potential which should be supported in the coming programming period.

As part of internal coherence, the evaluators also took a closer look at the Active Citizenship Fund programme funded by the EEA Financial Mechanism. Despite the fact that its operator is not MIRD SR, but the Ekopolis Foundation in partnership with the Open Society Foundation and the Carpathian Foundation, the evaluators identified overlaps and synergies that are worth mentioning in this context in this section of the evaluation report.

The two projects with the largest and most clearly identifiable overlap with the DGV programme are:

1. The project "*No bruises*" implemented under the Call on *Human Rights* by the Slniečko Centre, n.o., which was also the implementer of the project DGV02017, focused on prevention and education in the field of domestic and gender-based violence.
2. The project "*What protection and support does the current system guarantee to women experiencing violence and their children?*" implemented by Fenestra in cooperation with HANA in response to the Call for Proposals on the theme of *Public Interest Advocacy*, which was also a beneficiary or partner in the projects of the DGV programme. The project focused on monitoring available services for women experiencing violence and their children through a new robust mapping tool.

At the same time, some overlaps can also be seen in other projects implemented through the Active Citizenship Fund, in particular in the *Vulnerable Groups*<sup>24</sup>, *Human Rights*<sup>25</sup> and also in the *Microgrants*.<sup>26</sup>

#### External coherence, added value of the programme and avoidance of duplication

Thematically, of similar programmes funded by other public or international sources (outside of the EEA FM and NFM funding), at the time of implementation of the DGV programme, the closest projects were those funded by the ESIF.

When comparing the projects related to Outcome 1, the evaluators note that, in addition to the NFM, the Operational Programme Human Resources (OP HR) specifically focused on gender equality issues in the same time period, under Priority Axis 4: Social Inclusion and Specific Objective 4.1.2: Prevention and elimination of all forms of discrimination, which envisaged the support of the following activities:

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<sup>24</sup> For example, projects aimed at strengthening the skills of women, especially those in a vulnerable position (single mothers, women from marginalised Roma communities, mothers from disadvantaged social backgrounds and mothers living in crisis intervention centres): '*TWO HANDS I HAVE 1 and 2* – National Labour Training Centre SK, n. "*Red Pyjamas*" – MISSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE; "*A Better Life for Roma Women*" – OZ for the Promotion of Education, Upbringing and Culture – ROMAD; "*Dorka Bags*" – DORKA, n. o. Source: <https://acfslovakia.sk/podporene-projekty/zranitelne-skupiny/>

<sup>25</sup> Project "*Strengthening key institutions, education and awareness raising for sustainable promotion of non-discrimination and gender equality* by Citizen, Democracy and Responsibility. Source: <https://acfslovakia.sk/podporene-projekty/ludske-prava/>

<sup>26</sup> The project "*Internal Communication Platform of the League for Mental Health*" implemented by the League for Mental Health, which included, for example, the topic of psychological violence. Source: <https://acfslovakia.sk/podporene-projekty/mikrogranty/>

- Support and promotion of the application of inclusive policies for members of the MRC,
- Training of front-line workers in preventing and combating all forms of discrimination,
- Support for activities aimed at eliminating negative stereotypes of the majority and its sensitisation in relation to Roma, dissemination of ideas of tolerance, acceptance of differences and improvement of young people's attitudes towards disadvantaged population groups,
- Activities aimed at raising awareness of the prevention of all forms of discrimination and ways of protecting against it,
- Promoting the development of equality policy at national level and encouraging the exchange of good practice, promoting diversity with a focus on entrepreneurship,
- Supporting the institutional development of specialised advisory services to combat all forms of discrimination, including legal advice on discrimination in the labour market,
- Promoting cooperation between the social partners and the professional public in the design, development and implementation of anti-discrimination policies.

Some duplication also exists in the case of another priority axis of the OP HR, namely No.5: Integration of marginalised Roma communities. In the case of specific objective 5.1.1: "Increase the educational level of members of marginalised communities, especially Roma, at all levels of education with emphasis on pre-primary education", the following types of activities are concerned, which may show some duplication with the DGV:

- Support for programmes oriented towards improving cooperation between educational establishments and parents of Roma children
- Systematic support for educational activities and leisure-time activities for children from the RMC, with the main emphasis on linking the majority with the minority
- Activities aimed at preventing and eliminating segregation in schools and classrooms.

In the case of specific objective 5.1.2: "Increase financial literacy, employability and employment of marginalised communities, especially Roma", which may show some duplication with the NFM DGV, the following activity:

- Supporting the existence and functioning of community centres in villages with the presence of the RMC.

In addition to the OP HR, the MoLSAF SR also provides a subsidy<sup>27</sup> for the promotion of gender equality, to non-profit organisations providing services of general interest or to civil associations, if they have activities or activities aimed at promoting equality between women and men and equal opportunities in their subject of activity, registered churches or

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.gender.gov.sk/dotacie/dotacie-mpsvr-sr/informacie-k-ziadosti/>

religious societies established in the territory of the Slovak Republic or legal persons deriving their legal personality from the registered church or religious society, if the activities or actions are aimed at the prevention of poverty of individuals and families and the prevention of and support for the resolution of domestic violence and other threats to the behaviour of other natural persons. The grant also supports activities aimed at:

- Equality between women and men and equal opportunities and the promotion of the principle of equal treatment,
- Eliminating the gender pay gap,
- Promoting the reconciliation of family and working life.

As can be seen from the above, the OP HR focused more on the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised social groups in society, improving their employability and eliminating discriminatory practices on the labour market, including in relation to both sexes (pay, job opportunities and career advancement). While these themes can support awareness-raising on gender equality, they do not directly address it, nor do they focus on increasing women's participation in decision-making, combating stereotypes, or activities promoting women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. In addition, NFM and EEA FM support is more directly targeted at women, or children and youth in general, while adult men participate in project activities to a lesser extent. In contrast, in the ESIF programmes, measures are in most cases targeted at both genders. For these reasons, the NFM and EEA FM programmes cannot be considered as completely duplicative with the ESIF programmes and the support of the MoLSAF.

Civic associations and non-profit organisations promoting gender equality can also apply for support in the form of grants from regional and local authorities, as well as foundations created by the private sector (SPP, Orange, Tesco, DM, etc.). However, this is rather general support for the non-profit sector without a direct focus on gender equality, which allows organisations to cover the operating costs of their activities. Such support cannot be considered as duplicative with the programmes and activities supported by the NFM and the EEA FM.

Duplication with other programmes was partly created mainly with the OP HR (PA 4 and 5) supported by the ESIF, which allowed to finance projects mainly related to equal treatment in the labour market, including support to the RMC, and also support to gender equality from state funds through the subsidies of the MoLSAF SR. The support from the ESIF and the MoLSAF SR was more gender-specific, while in the NFM projects adult men participated only to a small extent in the activities. Taking into account the complicated administration of the ESIF, the NFM funds worked much more efficiently, flexibly and ultimately with a higher added value than the support from the ESIF or the state budget. At present, support from the NFM appears to be the most effective in the Slovak Republic.

When analysing the projects linked to Outcomes 2 and 3, the situation is slightly different. The projects funded through the NFM have tended to create synergies with the projects funded through the ESIF and to provide continuity and stability in terms of funding achievements in the field of domestic and gender-based violence.

This trend can be seen most clearly with the National Helpline for Women Experiencing Violence,<sup>28</sup> which is part of the CMC, and which was at one point funded by the NFM under the pre-defined project DGVPP002 to bridge the time period in which its ESF funding ended while waiting for the start of the implementation of *the NP Prevention and Elimination of Violence and Social Exclusion through National Helplines* through the Slovakia Programme, also funded by the ESF.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of content, the DGV program in the evaluated programming period was most intertwined with the calls announced under priority axis 4 of the OP HR, since the focus of the OP HR was on reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>30</sup>. The calls on *Counselling and awareness-raising in the field of prevention and elimination of discrimination I and II* and on the *NP Prevention and elimination of gender equality* of the OP HR responded overall to vulnerable and at-risk groups of people and also focused on supporting the development, but also the improvement of services for victims of violence, especially women. Several Project Promoters of grants from the NFM also implemented projects through the above-mentioned OP HR calls, but they did not overlap in time, did not create duplications and, on the contrary, often built on each other, while the NFM projects represented a kind of superstructure to the OP HR projects, which at the same time allowed to ensure the sustainability of the positive outcomes achieved. The Project Promoters of grants through the NFM themselves did not perceive that there was a problem of duplication between projects funded by the NFM and those funded by the ESF or other sources.

#### Added value of the programme area

The implementers of projects linked to Outcome 1 have achieved higher values for all output indicators than planned through their activities for the groups interviewed, and by several tens of %. For example, it was expected that the proportion of the population with a favourable perception of gender equality would be increased by 15 % by the project activities, in reality, according to the feedback received from the questionnaires completed by the participants in the activities, the output was on average up to 69.43 %. The situation was similar with the expected proportion of the population rejecting gender stereotypes, where instead of a 15 % improvement, an improvement of up to 59.35 % was achieved. In the case of students, the situation was as follows: the proportion of students with a favourable perception of gender equality was up to 61.67 % instead of the expected 20 %, and the proportion of students rejecting gender stereotypes was up to 55.7 % instead of the expected 15 %. The lectures and workshops organised in the schools and the assistance provided to the teachers played an important role in this process, as most of them reacted positively to the organisation of the lectures, and many of them requested them after the

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<sup>28</sup> The National Helpline for Women Experiencing Violence was launched under the NP "Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women" funded by the ESF under the OP Employment and Social Inclusion.

<sup>29</sup> The implementation of the NP Prevention and elimination of violence and social exclusion through national helplines started in January 2024 with a planned end in December 2024.

<sup>30</sup> "The groups most at risk of poverty and social exclusion are considered to be the unemployed, young people, single-parent families, people with disabilities and also those in employment with low levels of education. The most vulnerable groups also include homeless people, drug and other addicts, vulnerable or abused children, chronically ill patients, etc." Citation. from the Assessment of progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the Social Inclusion OP HR (2021). Available at: <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/esf/programove-obdobie-2014-2020/monitorovanie-hodnotenie/hodnotenia-op-lz/>

projects had finished. In total, lectures were delivered in 75 schools with CRC (against a target of 69 schools) and in 242 schools (against a target of 216 schools). Some schools are continuing with the lectures with the help of the supported organisations on a voluntary basis (Man in Danger, SNCHR) or are extending the outreach to other districts. Information about the lectures has also reached employers, who also ask to present gender equality issues to their employees (SNCHR). The number of districts has also been considerably expanded for some organisations compared to the plan. For example, the Human Rights Institute conducted lectures in 18 districts instead of 12, and the SNCHR increased the number of districts for holding lectures from 15 to 26. The number of districts always exceeded the plan, except for MyMamy OZ, where it was achieved as planned. In doing so, each organization reached more pupils and students than planned. The exception was Women in Distress, which reached almost 800 fewer pupils and students than planned. In total, 11 264 pupils and students were reached (of whom 1 864 were Roma), which was 1 404 more than planned. The largest relative increase in the number of pupils and students reached was recorded for the activities of the Union of Parent Centres and InTYMYta.

The original target of 37 campaigns was 37, and 38 campaigns were carried out. Most of the campaigns were organized by the civic association Man in danger, Woman in distress and MyMamy. The campaigns were successful and had a high impact on raising awareness in relation to gender equality.

Projects targeting Roma used innovative tools, such as art competitions in which children and women portrayed prominent Roma women. The drawings later became part of publications (e.g. calendars and quartets) and also a travelling exhibition. Activities were also carried out in cooperation with community centres. The work with the Bible as an effective tool for eliminating pathological phenomena, including arranged child marriages, as well as other forms of gender-based violence, was interesting. This activity, which drew on studies in feminist theology, was a pilot test of education and training focused on values in everyday life.

In interviews, representatives of the participating organizations spoke about the most important qualitative results of their projects, which many times exceeded their expectations and constituted the added value of the projects. For example, the activities have led to the introduction of gender-based quotas in different areas of school life, e.g. in working groups, etc., or to an increased interest of teachers in this issue and a growing demand for lectures even after the project has ended (Human Rights Institute). The organisations also considered the growing interest and involvement of Roma women in social life and the development of their skills as an added value of the programme, in favour of their higher employability, in their better position in their own communities where they function as women leaders (Man in Danger). Qualitative outcomes included increased awareness in society on gender issues (Woman in distress), women's increased self-esteem and ability to speak out about their problems, and their overall increased socialization (MC and SNCHR). Among the specific qualitative outcomes was an apparent sensitization to and recognition of addictive behaviours (EsFem).

The organizations themselves were motivated mainly by the needs of the selected groups that the organizations recognized, but also by the desire to sustain their multi-year activities. Also for the organisations, the project brought added value in the form of newly created expertise, status in the region and municipalities (EsFem is invited to the working groups set up at the regional level, Women in Distress and UMC are better recognised by

the municipalities), gaining new contacts and networks in the territory of their similarity (UMC).

Bilateral cooperation was also supposed to be an added value of the DGV programme, but this has only been developed to a limited extent through the implemented projects. Of the organisations involved in the Work-Life Balance programme area, only one had a Norwegian partner: the NGO Human Rights Institute, which formed a partnership with KUN, the Centre for Equality and Diversity ([www.kun.no](http://www.kun.no)). In the project, Norwegian experts supported the development of inclusive education programmes aimed at linking gender-based violence and cultural diversity. The project included targeted interventions for marginalised Roma communities, drawing on Norwegian experience in inclusive education and public campaigns. The Human Rights Institute viewed the cooperation as an excellent opportunity for acquiring know-how in the field of gender issues.

In addition, InTYMYta CSO included in their report a presentation of three good practice examples from Norway during relationship and sex education workshops, which they assessed as a suitable primary prevention against sexual violence and harassment and a way to lead youth and others towards respect, equality, health and safety.

Within the Work-Life Balance programme area, the programme has created added value in the form of qualitative outcomes, as identified by NFM Project Promoters, in the form of increased awareness of gender issues among pupils and students in the targeted schools, their teachers, and in society at large, higher self-esteem among women and their ability to talk about their problems, and thus their increased socialisation. Project activities have also led to the introduction of gender quotas in various areas of school life, in working groups, etc., or to increased interest of teachers in this issue and demand for lectures after the project, or the inclusion of this topic directly in the teaching in schools. Added value was also created in the Roma communities supported, namely in the greater involvement of Roma women in social life and the development of their skills for the benefit of their higher employability, better position in their own communities where they function as women leaders. The strengthened capacities of the supported organisations were also an important added value. However, only minimal progress was made in the area of bilateral cooperation with Norwegian organisations, as only one organisation implemented a project in cooperation with a Norwegian partner.

Analysis of available documents and interviews with NFM contribution from linked to Outcomes 2 and 3 revealed several findings regarding the added value of the DGV programme compared to other providers of contributions/subsidies:

#### Content focus

- The DGV programme was able to respond appropriately to the current needs of the target groups, giving Project Promoters sufficient scope to improve and expand services, while at the same time helping to sustain the outcomes and outputs already achieved. Other providers of contributions/subsidies, including EU funds, do not always reflect the current needs of the target group and its specificities. Project Promoters agreed that there was a clear interest in identifying the specific needs of the target groups in the DGV programme, which was very much reflected in the right setting and focus of the programme.
- The programme also provided scope for the implementation of new and innovative activities or methods that could not be funded from other sources. The programme



allowed to test some new methods of working with clients or children (e.g. mapping the course of violence), to adapt the environment of counselling centres and SWHs, also for children of women experiencing violence (e.g. snoezelen rooms, Montessori playrooms), or to use new forms of awareness-raising campaigns (e.g. the use of the "Snoezelen room", the "Montessori playroom"). Involvement of influencers, production of podcasts) and to educate in new areas (e.g. analysis of children's drawings, CAN syndrome), or to provide new forms of therapies or courses for female clients (e.g. ACCESS BARS®, self-defence courses, establishment of a therapeutic garden). At the same time, he has helped to create or update manuals and methodologies for different situations arising from the practice. In the case of the pre-defined programme, mention can also be made of the opening of the topic of sexual violence (study on Integrated Assistance in Cases of Sexual Victimization from 2024), the creation of an accredited training programme for the Police Academy on the topic of domestic violence, programmes for both men and women in prison, or the establishment of eight interrogation rooms in order to adapt them to the needs of women experiencing violence and their children.

#### Process set-up, funding and administrative burden

- Respondents appreciated that the projects were financed by the NFM and co-financed by the national budget and did not require co-financing from their own resources.
- They were also overwhelmingly positive about the lower administrative complexity and flexibility of the projects compared to projects financed through the ESIF. Some assessed negatively the disproportionate number of audits in a relatively short period of time or the lack of clarity of some forms (interim reports).
- Project Promoters were particularly positive about the communication and cooperation with the Programme Operator, which they agreed was above standard, even unique, in the sense that the Programme Operator, in addition to his management skills, also has expertise on the subject and shows a genuine interest in the successful implementation of projects and the improvement of the situation and status of the target groups.

#### Multi-institutional cooperation

- Networking and multi-institutional cooperation, which was a compulsory activity in the calls, was also assessed as a superior standard that contributes greatly to improving the situation in the field of domestic and gender-based violence and to achieving the objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants. In all projects, cooperation has been established and continued. In addition to the NGO network, various state and public institutions (e.g. municipalities, higher territorial units, police forces, SPCHG, Prison and Judicial Guard Corps, Labour, Social Affairs and Family Offices, Police Academy, primary and secondary schools, etc.) have been involved in the programme.

#### International cooperation

- Norwegian grants provide a unique platform for international cooperation and knowledge transfer, which is extremely valuable for Slovakia. This was also confirmed by the beneficiary of the pre-defined CMC project, who assessed the partnership with the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies as



very beneficial and useful in terms of added value for the project and the programme in general in terms of expertise, but also for providing an opportunity to present the outcomes of the project and the Slovak Republic at international and European platforms and conferences. Overall, however, it was extremely difficult for service providers for women experiencing violence to find a Norwegian partner for the projects (only in one project did the organisation Norwegian Alternative to Violence ([Alternativ til Vold](#)) figure in the project, but it was not officially a partner of the project, it was in the status of a cooperating organisation). One of the main reasons for this was that the approached entities from Norway did not respond to the requests for cooperation – it is highly probable that due to the specificity of the topic, the number of these entities is small in relation to the number of countries where Norwegian grants are implemented and thus they do not have the capacity to satisfy all the interested parties for cooperation. Other obstacles in the search for a Norwegian partner included the language barrier or the administrative and legislative difficulty of concluding a partnership on the part of the Norwegian partner. In some projects a Norwegian partner was not sought. However, there was an overwhelming consensus that they would welcome such a partnership or another form of cooperation with Norwegian organisations in the future.

- The contribution of CoE as an international partner organisation, with which many of the Project Promoters have worked, was also invaluable, particularly in providing technical assistance, CoE was a key partner in the implementation of the Synergy conference<sup>31</sup>. All interviewees highly appreciated the contribution of the conference in terms of sharing good practice between different actors working in the field of domestic and gender-based violence as well as in terms of creating potential partnerships and strengthening international cooperation (e.g. delegations from other countries in some cases visited the grantees in person, thus gaining new contacts and new sources of information).

Norwegian grants are seen as very suitable for NGO Project Promoters, such as organisations providing specific services for women experiencing violence and their children, given that these organisations mostly do not have the capacity for the time, administrative and financially demanding projects of other donors.

Some unwanted duplication may arise more internally within the programme, particularly in the specific activities that the Project Promoters are required to carry out within the project, in particular the organisation of the project launch and closing conferences. These are duplications in the sense that the Slovak Republic is too small a country to avoid overlapping of experts (experts in the field, representatives of state and public institutions, etc.) who are usually invited to these events. The question is therefore their ambiguous objective and added value for achieving positive results, given the staff capacity and also the financial costs involved in organising these events. As it stands, in the view of the evaluators, they do not fulfil their purpose and are rather a burden for the Project Promoters in the DGV programme and an inefficient use of resources and use of professional capacities.

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<sup>31</sup> The conference, the theme of which was "Supporting Services for Victims of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence – Pathway to Outcomes and Sexual Violence", was held on 6–8 December 2023 in Bratislava and was held under the auspices of the President of the Slovak Republic. The conference was organized by the Programme Operator (MIRDI SR) in cooperation with KMC, MoLSAF SR, and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security as the coordinator of the SYNERGY network.

### 7.3.2.2 Conclusions and recommendations

- C1: The internal and external coherence of the DGV programme has been ensured to a high degree. The projects created the necessary synergies and linkages that had a significantly positive effect on the achievement of the intended results and objectives of the programme, both internally (within the DGV Programme and in the framework of the EEA and Norway Grants provided with the GGC, LDI and Active Citizenship Fund programmes and, in the case of the Outcome 1, also with the CLT programme and externally with the projects funded by the ESIF.
- C2: The DGV programme has shown that the supported activities are meaningful, generate added value in the form of qualitative outcomes beyond expectations, help to raise awareness on gender equality among the target groups, integrate gender equality issues into the educational process, but also into society in general, contribute to women's higher self-esteem and their ability to talk about their problems, and thus to their higher socialisation. Added value has also been created in the Roma communities supported, in the greater involvement of Roma women in social life and the development of their skills for the benefit of their higher employability, their better position in their own communities where they function as women leaders. The programme focused less on involving adult men in supported activities. The DGV programme added value in four areas in particular:
- Content focus: improving and expanding the quality of services provided, including the implementation of innovative activities and the promotion of new services for women experiencing violence and their children, promoting awareness raising and education focusing on new aspects in the field of domestic and gender-based violence in line with the current needs of the target groups,
  - process set-up, funding and administrative burden: the benefits are mainly in terms of providing an opportunity for service providers for women experiencing violence with limited capacities to get involved, and also in terms of strengthening their motivation to continue to participate in the calls from EEA and Norway Grants,
  - Multi-institutional cooperation, which is essential for making progress in the field of DGV and which has proved to be very beneficial for both the grantees and the institutions involved, and also has great potential for continuous improvement of the services provided to the target groups and for kick-starting systemic change,
  - limited international cooperation, mainly present in the pre-defined project and in the two projects linked to Outcome 1 (cooperation with the Norwegian partner), but also throughout the programme through engagement and cooperation with CEs. International cooperation has meant increasing the opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience and to present the Slovak Republic in European and international fora.
- C3: Duplication with programmes funded from other sources outside the EEA and Norway Grants was partly created mainly in projects linked to Outcome 1 with the OP HR (PA 4 and 5) supported by the ESIF, which allowed to finance projects mainly in the context of equal treatment in the labour market, including support to the MRC, as well as the promotion of gender equality from state funds through the subsidies of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. The support from the ESIF and the MoLSAF SR was more gender-specific, while in the NFM projects, adult men participated only to a small extent in the activities. Taking into

account the complicated administration of the ESIF implementation mechanism, the DGV funds worked much more efficiently, flexibly and ultimately with a higher added value than the support from the ESIF or the state budget. At present, support from the NFF appears to be the most effective in the Slovak Republic.

The projects linked to Outcome 2 and 3 were complementary to the OP HR programmes, helped to maintain continuity of services and outcomes, complemented each other in terms of content, did not overlap in time and did not create duplication.

However, for the projects linked to Outcome 2 and 3, there were some internal duplications – the obligation for each Project Promoter to organise an opening and closing conference for the project appears to be pointless and burdensome for the Project Promoters. With the current set-up and requirements, this activity does not add value to the projects or the programme as a whole in terms of funds spent, administrative burden and staffing required, on the contrary it can be said to create unwanted duplication.

#### Recommendations to the NFP and the Programme Operator:

- R1: Synergies between programme areas and their interventions should be maintained and further improved in the future. In order to promote a results-oriented policy, promoting synergies between interventions within and between programmes is even more important. Continue to support programmes that have a substantive overlap in the area of domestic and gender-based violence and contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants (LDI – in the poverty eradication and Roma inclusion strand and GGC – in the good governance strand), or merge them while maintaining substantial support for the area of domestic and gender-based violence.
- R2: However, this linking should not result in a reduction in the number of interventions, but rather the opposite – an expansion of interventions, as well as an expansion of target groups with a need to raise awareness for gender issues. There is also a need to broaden the target groups and to involve much more men, possibly married couples, employees and members of local government, and other groups, and to adapt the scope of interventions accordingly. Family stereotypes can only be effectively overcome by sensitising both genders to the issue in parallel.
- R3: Continue to set the content focus in such a way that the implemented projects are complementary to activities financed from other mechanisms, including the state budget and EU funds. Explicitly identify this complementarity with EU and national programmes and strategies in the programme agreement and in the calls for proposals, while it is essential to put emphasis on the consistency of the programme focus with the planned transposition of *Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence*.
- R4: For the future, there is a need to establish regular communication between the different donors supporting gender equality, non-discrimination and gender-based violence solutions, for example through a donor platform, in order to coordinate

support in a way that enhances synergies between these supports and eliminates unnecessary duplication.

- R5: Continue to promote multi-institutional cooperation as a mandatory element in project implementation and, conversely, consider making it mandatory to organise a kick-off and closing conference for projects implemented through the DGV Small Grants Scheme. It is worth considering either changing this activity to an optional activity; or modifying it – using online platforms or hybrid formats; or holding a mandatory opening conference and a joint closing conference; or allowing Project Promoters to present project outcomes in their other individual activities where organisations present all their activities implemented in a given year, or introducing a central planning calendar for such events – joint planning of opening and closing conferences if this type of activity is kept mandatory.
- R6: Strengthen the possibilities of cooperation with the Norwegian partner through networking of organisations active in the field of domestic and gender-based violence, e.g. through more intensive matchmaking events (online/ in person) or through the so-called "matchmaking events" (online/ face-to-face). Reverse matching – an online platform with data on one side about Norwegian organisations with a short description of their activities and content focus with information about availability for partnership in the NFM project (possibly also the expected capacity that can be released for the project) and language possibilities, and also the same short description to the Slovak organisation about its activities and the planned project purpose, language and capacity possibilities + contact information. An alternative may be to update, make more functional and attractive the already existing database for the search of partners for EEA and Norway Grants in line with the above. In order to support the development of bilateral relations with Norwegian partners, the programme should be better promoted in the conditions of the Kingdom of Norway, and possibly the possibility to search for partners in other Donor States. International cooperation in supported projects will help to multiply the added value and create it in new areas of gender equality issues.

### 7.3.3 Assessment based on the evaluation criterion sustainability

*"Do the results achieved have the capacity to be sustained?"* This is the key question regarding the OECD/DAC evaluation criterion Sustainability. In assessing the sustainability of the positive results achieved through the projects implemented under the DGV programme, the evaluators focused on the extent to which these are sustainable at all, and also on the internal and external factors that most influence sustainability. In the context of this criterion, it was important to identify which positive results contribute most to the objectives of the programme and at the same time are the most beneficial for all the target groups of the programme. Following this, the evaluators were able to assess the sustainability of these benefits and identify the ideal conditions that would contribute most significantly to ensuring that these benefits are sustained. The evaluators also looked at which areas appeared to be most relevant for the next programming period in terms of sustainability.

The Results Guideline understands sustainability as the extent to which the benefits of a programme/fund persist or are likely to persist. "Benefit" means a positive change with lasting effects. It should be manifested not only at the level of outputs but also at the level

of outcomes (which was only possible to a limited extent given the short time period that has elapsed since the projects ended).

The main evaluation questions for assessing the Sustainability criterion, which are based on the Results Guideline, and whose wording of the questions appropriately corresponds to the above definition of the evaluation criterion.

1. To what extent can the benefits achieved be expected to be sustained over the next five years?
2. What financial, economic, social, environmental, social and institutional capacities within the system are needed to sustain the benefits achieved over time?

### 7.3.3.1 Findings

#### Sustaining the benefits over the next five years

The benefits achieved from the support of the DGV programme in the Work-Life Balance programme area (Outcome 1) can be expected to be sustained to a limited extent without further financial support. However, it can be assumed that these benefits will be further developed within the target groups reached – pupils, students and teachers of the participating secondary and primary schools, partner community centres, town and municipal authorities or cultural institutions, as well as the supported organisations that have acquired new skills, experience and created new networks of collaborators, through further projects funded by the NFM or other sources. This is evidenced by the fact that many schools are already asking to repeat lectures and incorporate them into the curriculum, that several community centres have introduced new services for women and children from the RMC, that a library of gender studies has been created and numerous videos, blogs, podcasts have been created to disseminate information on gender equality through social networks. However, the intensity of this process will also depend on whether the organisations that have been supported in the programme will be able to continue to organise similar effective and efficient activities as during the implementation of the supported projects, or even expand them to include new types of activities and target groups. As these are non-profit sector organisations, external sources of funding for activities in this area are essential.

Recipients of the small grant scheme and the pre-defined project linked to Outcomes 2 and 3 plan their activities and outputs very carefully and rigorously to be able to ensure their sustainability. The operation of these entities and their activities are financed mainly from the state budget (contribution of the local authorities, subsidy mechanism of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, subsidy mechanism of the MJ SR), but also through other sources (ESF, various foundations, private donors, 2 % tax, etc.). Very often, the staff of service providers for women experiencing violence and their children go above and beyond their duties and their full-time jobs in order to ensure the running of the organisation and to be able to carry out all the activities, to continue education or awareness-raising. The most challenging aspect from their perspective seems to be retaining quality professionals and trained people after the project funding ends. Often the service providers interviewed are faced with the fact that they are not able to keep these skilled workers in the same form and with the same conditions as during the project after the end of the funding, and then they have to look for new professionals again after receiving new grants, which is not easy. Overall, there is a shortage of qualified staff suitable for these specific professions in several regions (especially in the districts of

eastern and central Slovakia) (e.g. in the DGV02013 project there was a problem of filling the posts in the new counselling centres, which was solved by agreement with the Programme Operator by using the capacities of the already existing centres, but the operation of the new centres had to be slightly limited for this reason). These risks to sustainability are directly related to the funding and system set-up of the services provided, which the evaluators address below.

The technical equipment and investment interventions that were part of the redevelopment project and some of the projects funded by the small grants scheme were also designed to allow for long-term use (e.g. children's playrooms, snoezelen rooms or therapeutic garden). For the pre-defined project, the sustainability of the newly built or furnished interrogation rooms is ensured by the MoI SR. As it later turned out, a problem arose in the case of the relocation of one police force where a new interrogation room was equipped, which is likely to be solved by moving all the equipment to the new location or by maintaining and using a specific room in the original location. Also from the grantees' point of view, it is important to provide women experiencing violence and their children with a welcoming environment that is tailored to their needs and has positive effects on their recovery from often very traumatic experiences. It is also the use of these outputs that has directly contributed to improving services for women experiencing violence and their children.

Outputs of awareness campaigns (visuals, videos, podcasts, blogs, etc.) and educational materials (manuals, methodologies, research reports, etc.) can continue to be used. The focus on new forms of violence, such as stalking, cyberstalking, psychological and economic forms of violence, which are still relevant, has proved to be successful in awareness-raising campaigns, which also supports the use of the outputs implemented. As a result of these activities, there has been a significant increase in awareness, reflected in increased traffic to grantees' websites or specific projects, or increased contact with the National Hotline for Women Experiencing Violence or the hotlines of service providers for women experiencing violence. Service providers perceive the need for continuity of awareness campaigns and their long-term impact on the public, so they recycle these visuals and try to make them as accessible as possible to citizens and especially to the target group. In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, there is again a lack of systemic funding for public education on domestic and gender-based violence, which would also contribute significantly to the sustainability of the results achieved.

There is still a great interest in education, organisations see a great scope for education of pupils in primary and secondary schools in the framework of primary prevention, but also education of state and public institutions, where there is a great shortage of staff sensitised in this field, also according to the latest research and studies. It is important to include this in the training of these workers during their studies or when they start work. Training should be continuous and repeated, as this area is also constantly changing and evolving. In this context, it is worth mentioning the CMC and the establishment of an accredited training programme for the Police Academy, which focuses particularly on domestic violence and which also continues to be used. In addition, a number of grantees continue to provide training for schools or other interested institutions, with funding for these activities most often coming from interested parties or being provided on the time of the grantees' female staff, the funding for which is diversified as mentioned above.



### Needs within the system to strengthen sustainability

Financial capacity in the form of grants from various public and private sector donors is essential for sustaining the benefits achieved. From the public sector, in addition to the EEA FM and NFM grant schemes and projects, these are mainly subsidies from the budget of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic and funds from the Slovakia Programme, several of the specific objectives of Priority 4. In the area of social capacities, it will be necessary to evaluate the investments in gender awareness-raising from the NFM-funded projects in terms of changed attitudes and increased awareness of the target groups reached by the projects' activities, such as pupils, students, teachers, professionals, women and children from the RMC, as well as the general public, and to enable them to disseminate the knowledge gained through ongoing activities or activities and projects that they themselves will prepare and implement. In the area of institutional capacities, it is necessary to promote cooperation and communication between the supported organisations, their target groups with the hitherto unsupported actors in the field of gender equality and to create a platform for the exchange of information, experiences and examples of good practice or for the preparation of new activities and projects. Cooperation and communication between providers of contributions and subsidies should also be institutionalised in the form of a platform to harmonise grant support so as to eliminate unnecessary duplication and ensure maximum synergy between the different programmes.

DGV's program area Work-Life Balance (Outcome 1) supported the sustainability of gender equality awareness-raising activities for a total of 9 organisations that had already been active in this area for a long time. The majority of those organisations that participated in the guided interviews reported that they were able to fully continue and develop their activities thanks to the support from the NFM. Some of them even stated that the possibility to continue their activities was their main motivation to apply for NFM funding. The same organisations also stated that they would continue their activities only to a limited extent after the end of the projects funded by the NFM. For example, for these reasons, the EsFem NGO will distribute the book collection from the Gender Studies Library among other partner organisations, the Human Rights Institute NGO will continue to give lectures in schools but on a voluntary basis, the Women in Distress NGO will also continue with the support of the regions, which will cover their travel costs from the grant programme, OZ UMC in turn often supports municipalities as long as there are functioning maternity centres in the municipalities, OZ Man in distress also cooperates with private donors such as DM and Tesco, SNCHR is funded directly from the state budget. In general, however, there is an ongoing challenge to secure stable funding for activities to promote gender equality and the organisations that carry out these activities.

In this respect, better cooperation and coordination of the NFM with other domestic donors, in particular the MoLSAF SR, and a stronger involvement of local and regional governments in the implementation of various measures for the promotion of gender equality are desirable.

The participating organisations have significantly improved their expertise (People in Danger, EsFem, UMC and others) and management skills (SNCHR, UMC and others, despite the problems associated with the COVID 19 pandemic and the change in the political situation in Slovakia, which also required changes in content and funding) through the supported projects. Problems with implementation were also evident in specific traditionally gendered social groups, which required specific approaches and understanding

of the context, which in turn slowed down the implementation process. Existing staff and knowledge capacity to implement some project activities, such as surveys, was also an issue. Project administration and cooperation with the Programme Operator was rated highly positive, except for the complexity of bookkeeping in relation to expenditure. Several institutions suggested introducing simplified reporting of expenditure, for example in the form of lump sum payments.

However, the supported organisations have reached the wider public through online campaigns and lectures at schools and workshops in their regions but also throughout the country. The knowledge, capacities, contacts, partnerships and networks gained through the project can significantly contribute to the sustainability of the project. The organisations have also gained new partners in the public sector (EsFem, UMC) and private sector (UMC) and have also strengthened partnerships and cooperation with each other (EsFem, MyMamy, Man in Danger), while creating larger networks. However, the long-term sustainability of these gains depends on a number of factors, including continued financial, social and institutional support.

Considering the strengthened position of the supported organisations on gender equality issues and their improved visibility in the regions and in Slovakia, and the fact that the financial support under the NFM has ended for the time being, it will be necessary to find other ways to sustain the social capital created during the project. This social capital will be sustained if the following financial, social and institutional capacities are created or maintained:

- *Financial:* there will be a sufficient number of different donors available and sufficient funds to cover the needs of the organisations. Donors from the public sector (except for programs from EEA FM, NFM, including the MoLSAF SR, the MA for the Slovakia Programme, regions and local governments) and the private sector should communicate and coordinate with each other the supported measures so that there is no unnecessary duplication between measures, but their synergy is promoted. In addition to the new EEA FM and NFM funded programmes, the Slovakia Programme and its Priority 4 in particular will play an important role in funding in the area of equality and non-discrimination (closely related to gender equality issues). This priority concerns the implementation of measures under the following specific objectives:
  - Specific objective: ES04.3. Promoting gender-balanced participation in the labour market, equal working conditions and a better work-life balance, including access to affordable care for children and deprived persons (ESF+)
  - Specific objective: ES04.6. Promote equal access, in particular for disadvantaged groups, to quality and inclusive education and training and support their successful completion, from early childhood education and care through general and vocational education and training to tertiary level and adult education and learning, including facilitating learning mobility for all and accessibility for people with disabilities (ESF+)
  - Specific objective: ES04.12. Promoting the social integration of people at risk of poverty or social inclusion and social exclusion, including the most deprived persons and children (ESF+)



- Specific objective: RS04.3. Promote the socio-economic inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions including housing and social services (ERDF)
- Specific objective: ES04.8. Promoting active inclusion in order to promote equality of opportunity, non-discrimination and active participation and to improve employability, in particular for disadvantaged groups (ESF+)
- Specific objective: ES04.12. Promoting the social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including the most deprived persons and children (ESF+)
- Specific objective: RS04.3. Promote the socio-economic inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including persons with special needs, through integrated actions including housing and social services (ERDF)
- Specific objective: ES04.10. Promote the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, such as Roma (ESF+)
- Specific objective: ES04.8. Promoting active inclusion to promote equality

opportunities, non-discrimination and active participation and improving employability, in particular for disadvantaged groups (ESF+).

- *Social:* there will be a social environment that promotes awareness-raising on gender equality, at least the participants in the activities organised within the DGV-supported projects, including school pupils and students, teachers, professionals, Roma children and women, will have the capacity to disseminate the knowledge and information they have acquired during the implementation of the DGV programme activities, to continue them with other participants from the same and new target groups (men and married couples), or to organise their own activities and projects.
- *Institutional:* it will be necessary to create and promote a space for communication between the different actors and thus develop networking and cooperation between actors, for example through platforms:
  - Platform of organisations and partners – all the supported organisations and the schools, community centres, libraries, civic associations, etc. they address will create a platform for awareness-raising in relation to gender issues in order to exchange information, experiences and examples of good practice in the field, as well as to prepare and implement new projects.
  - Donor platform – all organisations financially supporting gender equality will create a platform for the exchange of information, experiences and examples of good practice in the field of funding and for the alignment of support in order to eliminate unnecessary duplication of support and to achieve greater synergy between actions supported by different donors.

In order to sustain the positive benefits achieved over time for Outcome 2 and 3, legislative and systemic changes, including the funding system, and certain institutional changes

towards strengthening the CMC's position appear to be the most important. All interviewees agreed that the current situation is not sufficient. Shortcomings in legislation, unsystematic and unpredictable funding or the absence of a coordination system in the field of domestic and gender-based violence were identified by all interviewees as risks to the long-term sustainability of the achievements of the DGV programme.

In the context of legislation, these are mainly the absence of clear definitions and specifications of services provided in the field of domestic and gender-based violence. The analysis of available documents and interviews conducted revealed that the absence of a specific law or a coherent legislative framework to anchor this issue is key for service providers for women experiencing violence, as the current legislation looks at domestic and gender-based violence either in the context of social services (Social Services Act) or in terms of criminal activity – and there is no legal regulation here either, that explicitly and explicitly addresses the issue of domestic and gender-based violence as a separate offence, where perpetrators are usually convicted under offence-specific sections that only partially cover domestic and gender-based violence. The human rights perspective is completely absent from current legislation. There is also no clear link between this issue and violence against children. Although the role of the MJ SR has been strengthened in recent years through legislation aimed at establishing and funding intervention centres, which has greatly helped service providers for women experiencing violence and has meant a significant advance towards the protection of the target groups, e.g. the transposition of the EU Directive on the protection of victims<sup>32</sup> has not been satisfactory from the perspective of service providers.

Respondents also perceive negatively the fact that the Istanbul Convention has not yet been ratified by the Slovak Republic, which in their view could have contributed significantly to improving the situation and triggering changes at various levels. In view of the current developments, which do not foresee such ratification in the foreseeable future, attention is rather drawn to the need to transpose *Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which is* expected to bring significant progress in this area. In this context, although several respondents mentioned that the Istanbul Convention is more comprehensive and elaborate in their view and would definitely welcome its ratification by the Slovak Republic, a consistent transposition of the EU Directive could, in their view, bring more pressure to achieve systemic changes, including institutional changes and stabilisation of funding.

Funding for services for women experiencing violence and their children is closely linked to legislation and systemic change. Currently, the funding of entities active in this field is provided through contributions from the local government, subsidy schemes of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic and the MJ SR. However, this is only provided for a short period of time – funding is unpredictable, inconsistent and unstable. In addition, it is conditional on the fulfilment of various conditions that have to be constantly re-proven, which does not create an environment based on mutual trust and respect from the providers' point of view. Moreover, this funding only covers the necessary capacities and the services they provide, and does not serve campaigns or education, etc.

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<sup>32</sup> Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA

Thus, providers of services for women experiencing violence often rely on external foreign resources, including the NFM and the ESIF, which serve to develop these organisations, improve the quality of services, increase the expertise of the relevant actors and also raise public awareness of the issue. Interviewees often commented that although there is talk about the area and government officials often verbally express support and promises to improve the situation, this does not happen in reality and the system remains unchanged in the long term. The need for legislative earmarking of these services is evident, and this should be linked to legislative support for who is responsible for funding the services provided, their development, and also preventive and educational activities. Regarding the sustainability of the NFM projects, a number of respondents were critical of the delay in the implementation of the DGV programme, which has also resulted in a reduction in the time taken to implement projects. Several respondents considered a minimum of three years as the ideal time period for project implementation.

The institutional changes that emerge from the analysed documents and from the interviews carried out are mainly related to the creation or allocation of one or more bodies specifically responsible for the area of domestic and gender-based violence, the development and evaluation of policies, the initiation of legislative changes, and the overall coordination and implementation of measures in this area. The competences of the CMC, as mentioned above, do not allow it to be considered as a coordinating body in the true sense of the word, as it performs more of a research and methodological function and has no executive powers, nor has it been entrusted with any similar tasks under the NAP in the current period (2022–2027) or in the previous one (2014–2019). However, the CMC has professional capacities and has the potential to play an executive role and to act more intensively in coordinating activities in the field of domestic and gender-based violence.

In order to sustain the gains made, the evaluators also consider that future content needs to be considered in response to the emerging new needs of service providers for women experiencing violence and their children and for the target groups themselves, which should be the focus of attention in the next programming period. On the basis of the interviews, the evaluators conclude that the sustainability of the gains achieved is not possible without further support to improve the quality of services provided and to update the priorities in this area also through the NFM. In particular, focusing on specific target groups (persons with addiction, RMC, persons with intellectual disabilities, seniors, isolated women, LGBTI+ community, migrant women) or on the specific needs of the target group of women experiencing violence appears to be important. It is not always possible to provide counselling and services for women experiencing violence that can cover and address these needs. Despite the possibility of referring to organisations or institutions dedicated to addressing these needs, it is often difficult to combine these services. This can have a negative impact and effect on clients who are confused, do not have a clear idea of what is and will be happening to them, what to address first, what they are entitled to, and may feel that they are just being shuffled between organisations. In the view of the evaluators, the content of the calls in the programme period under evaluation was sufficiently broad to implement activities targeted at the specific needs of the target groups. However, the Project Promoters mostly gave priority to activities of a general nature that did not target specific target groups or needs (an exception is the focus of the DGV03020 project on women experiencing violence and their children in the context of addictions), especially with regard to the sustainability of the project outcomes, as their follow-up possibilities and funding are very limited.

The focus on children of women experiencing violence has proved challenging for some organisations due to the accreditations and professional staff required. A number of respondents commented that, for example, the position of special educator/pedagogue in the project made sense for women's safe houses, but less so for counselling centres, so as not to create unwanted duplication with the existing system of support services already in place, focused solely on children. On the other hand, most of the clients of the service providers have one or more children, and in particular the activities to create child-friendly spaces in both the SWHs and the counselling centres have been very beneficial, and these spaces are still maintained and used.

Respondents also reported a growing need to define services for survivors of sexual violence, which is also completely absent from current legislation. Despite the impossibility of implementing a pre-defined project aimed at the establishment of SACs (sexual assault centres), a feasibility study on the establishment of such centres has been carried out under the pre-defined project DGVPP002, which should be followed up in the next programming period, in line with the commitments that are also contained in the EU Directive to be transposed. The issue of sexual violence and its unclear anchoring within the current legislation, in terms of the services provided for those who are subjected to it, is an obvious problem that needs to be addressed comprehensively and at a multi-institutional level. It is the close cooperation and involvement of all relevant actors (e.g. the MoH SR), which can be supported through the NFM, that is the key to success. From the point of view of the evaluators, it is desirable to focus on this area through the implementation of a pre-defined project through the NFM that would support the establishment of a pilot SAC centre.

Nor is it clear how to grasp services for convicted offenders or for potential offenders (who themselves identify their condition as risky and express an interest in eliminating those risks), who should implement them, and how. Activities for offenders were also implemented in the programme period under evaluation, but exclusively for offenders in custody (pre-defined project DGVPP002). From the point of view of the evaluators, it makes sense to also focus on work with offenders, but to this end it is advisable to carry out a thorough analysis of the needs and risks involved. A number of respondents among the providers of services for women experiencing violence expressed that they do not currently work with perpetrators or that they would only do so after mature reflection and analysis of their capacities, and that services for perpetrators and for women experiencing violence and their children would have to be very strictly separated.

## Conclusions and recommendations

C4: It can be expected that the benefits achieved from the support of the DGV programme in the Work-Life Balance programme area will only be maintained to a limited extent without further financial support. However, it can be assumed that they will be further developed within the target groups reached – pupils, students and teachers of the participating secondary and primary schools, partner community centres, town and municipal authorities and cultural institutions, as well as the supported organisations that have acquired new skills, experience and created new networks of collaborators, through further projects funded by the NFM or other sources. Sufficient financial, social and institutional capacities are needed to sustain the programme's gender awareness-raising activities. Sustaining the gains made over the next five years is assured to a high degree. Project Promoters plan and set up projects in advance in an appropriate way to ensure that mandatory sustainability

can be ensured without major threats. However, extensive legislative and systemic changes are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the gains made over time in the area of domestic and gender-based violence. The legislative coverage of domestic and gender-based violence is insufficient and not clearly defined. The same applies to the area of sexual violence. The CMC, as a coordinating and methodological body, also has no clearly defined place within the system and has no executive competences, as originally intended under the Istanbul Convention. Funding for DGV services is unpredictable and unsystematic. Moreover, it is very important to transpose the EU Directive in such a way as to bring about systemic change and progress in the field of DGV. In addition to these areas, the evaluators consider that the other content of support through the NFM in this area has a major impact on the sustainability of the benefits achieved. There is a growing need to focus on specific areas (sexual violence, economic and psychological violence) and target groups (RMC, people with addictions, isolated women, young women and girls, people with different types of disadvantages, etc.). Support for activities aimed at working with perpetrators (both potential and convicted) should also be considered. In this context, the broad focus of the Small Grants Scheme calls appears to be an ideal setting, giving Project Promoters the possibility to choose the content of their calls in the light of their own capacities.

**Recommendations for the NFP and the Programme Operator:**

- R7: Support initiatives towards legislative and systemic changes, including the introduction of a consistent and predictable funding system for services provided to women experiencing violence, and further support the CMC and its empowerment within the system of assistance to women experiencing violence.
- R8: Contribute to the transposition of the EU Council Directive by supporting specific activities, namely by supporting research activities (e.g. in the preparation of methodologies or action plans or recommendations for legislation) or by directly implementing projects that are in line with its objectives (e.g. a pilot programme for the establishment of a SAC centre for sexually victimised persons through a pre-defined project).
- R9: Continue to keep the broad content focus of the calls so that Project Promoters can also implement activities targeting women experiencing specific types of violence (sexual, economic, psychological, etc.) and different specific target groups or groups with specific needs (e.g. RMC, persons with addiction, isolated women, young women and girls, persons with different types of disadvantages, migrant women, etc.), including perpetrators. In the context of absorption capacity, it should be taken into account that not all organisations work with these specific target groups (e.g. RMC, people with addictions) and it would be inappropriate and inappropriate to restrict their possibility to participate in DGV calls, therefore it is not recommended to narrow down the eligible activities in calls to the specific target groups mentioned above. Nor do the evaluators recommend launching a call narrowly specific to work with offenders in the forthcoming programming period. At the same time, however, it is advisable to retain the possibility to focus on offender work as part of the eligible activities in the broad calls of the DGV programme. The evaluators give consideration to carrying out an in-depth needs and risk analysis as well as an

analysis of the absorption capacity of eligible applicants in the field of offender work (especially potential offenders who themselves identify their behaviour as risky), e.g. as part of the activities of a pre-defined project.

- R10: As these are not-for-profit sector organisations, external resources to fund existing and new activities, and to sustain benefits in this area, are essential. It is therefore recommended that the NFM continues to promote awareness for gender equality with activities that will use the already established gender equality results, engage the organisations and their already reached target groups and help to disseminate these results in other groups of students, pupils, teachers, professionals, but also in new target groups such as adult men, married couples, employees and members of local governments.
- R11: In the future, financial, social and institutional capacity is essential to sustain the gains made. Financial capacity is mainly represented by contributions/grants from various public and private sector donors. In the area of social capacity, it will be necessary to assess the investment in gender awareness-raising from the NFM-funded projects in terms of changed attitudes and increased awareness of the target groups reached by the project activities such as pupils, students, teachers, professionals, women and children from the RMC, as well as the general public reached, and to enable them to disseminate the knowledge gained through ongoing activities or activities and projects that they themselves will prepare and implement. In the area of institutional capacities, cooperation and communication between the supported organisations, their target groups and the hitherto unsupported actors in the field of gender equality should be promoted and a platform for the exchange of information, experiences and examples of good practice or the preparation of new activities and projects should be created.

## 7.4 Evaluation of the GGC programme

### 7.4.1 Programme description

#### 7.4.1.1 Basic information about the programme

The "Cross-border Cooperation/Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency" (GGC) programme was one of the six programmes implemented in Slovakia in the 2014–2021 programming period under the EEA FM and NFM. In the first phase, the programme was managed by the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, and is currently administered by MIRD SR, with the Norwegian Barents Secretariat (the programme's donor partner) and the OECD as key partners and international partner organizations.

The aim of the programme is to improve the integrity and accountability of public administration, increase transparency, promote the efficiency of the justice system and strengthen institutional cooperation between the SR and the UA. The programme responded to Slovakia's long-standing challenges in the fight against corruption, weak perceptions of public integrity, low trust in the judiciary and the need to modernise public procurement.

#### 7.4.1.2 Programme framework and intervention logic

The GGC programme was designed as a comprehensive intervention focusing on two main PAs:

- (1) Good Governance, Accountable Institutions and Transparency (PA16)
- (2) Efficiency and effectiveness of the judicial system, strengthening the rule of law (PA21)

The logic of the intervention was based on the need for systemic reforms to address identified weaknesses in Slovak public administration and the judiciary, with particular emphasis on transfer of know-how and strengthening bilateral and cross-border cooperation.

PA16 supported measures to enhance the integrity of public administration, strengthen anti-corruption mechanisms, improve transparency and make public procurement more efficient. In PA21, the programme focused on improving the quality of the justice system, protecting the rights of victims and vulnerable groups, as well as modernising judicial infrastructure and training judges and prosecutors.

The programme's theory of change assumed that a combination of systemic reforms, capacity building, experience sharing and strengthened institutional partnerships would lead to long-term improvements in the integrity, transparency and efficiency of public administration and the justice system in Slovakia, as well as to strengthened cross-border links with UA.

#### 7.4.1.2.1 Implementation structures and partnerships

The implementation of the GGC programme is ensured through management structure, in which the Programme Operator played a key role. The donor partner is the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, which provided expertise in bilateral and trilateral cooperation, especially in the context of Slovak–Ukrainian and Slovak–Norwegian projects. The OECD, as the International partner organisation, contributed expert content, particularly in the areas of integrity, anti-corruption strategies and public procurement.



Other actors, including local and regional governments, universities, NGOs and partner institutions from the UA and Norway, also contributed to the implementation of the programme. Thematic working groups, selection panels and evaluation teams played a crucial role in ensuring transparency and quality of project selection.

An important element of the implementation structure was also the participation of beneficiaries and partners in regular consultations, workshops, trainings and networking events, which supported the exchange of experience and transfer of good practices between the Slovak Republic, the UA and Donor States.

#### 7.4.1.3 Financial and thematic characteristics of the programme

The total allocation for the GGC program was set at EUR 10 million at the time the program agreement was signed. Of this amount, EUR 8.5 million came from the EEA FM, and the Slovak Republic's State budget contributed EUR 1.5 million. During implementation, this amount was reduced by approved reallocations of funds. A detailed description of the financial parameters can be found in Table 18.

Table 18: Overview of the Program Grant Amount and National Co-Financing of the GGC Program

	Eligible programme expenditure according to the program agreement as of 25 June 2019 in EUR	Eligible programme expenditure as of 31 December 2024 in EUR	Total eligible expenditure incurred as of 31 December 2024 in EUR
Program grant (EEA)	8 500 000,00	7 470 665,00	6 873 124,34
National co-financing	1 500 000,00	1 318 351,62	1 212 903,34
Total	10 000 000,00	8 789 016,62	8 086 027,68

Source: Authors' Own Elaboration Based on the Programme Operator's Materials and the Programme's Website

The programme financed four PDPs and five projects from the open call GGC01, which focused on institutional cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the UA. In addition, a small grant scheme call GGC02 was also launched but was not filled due to a low number of applications.

Pre-defined projects included:

- GGCPP001 – Improving the Integrity of Public Administration (IIPA)
- GGCPP002 – Enhancing the effectiveness of the justice system through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties
- GGCPP003 – Responsible Public Procurement
- GGCPP004 – TRIGLAV – Strengthening the fight against CBRN threats on the Slovak–Ukrainian border

The open call GGC01 supported five projects that focused on the development of Slovak–Ukrainian cooperation in areas such as public administration, adaptation to climate change, regional development, transparency and exchange of know-how.

Financial flows were set up so that grants covered up to 100 % of eligible project expenditure, while respecting state aid rules and ensuring transparency in the process of resource allocation.



#### 7.4.1.4 Focus and content of the programme

The GGC programme responded to Slovakia's specific needs in the areas of public administration, justice and cross-border cooperation. The main thematic areas were:

- Integrity and anti-corruption: Strengthening systems to prevent, detect and punish corruption, building an ethical culture and implementing OECD recommendations.
- Transparency and Efficiency in Public Procurement: Introducing the "value for money" principle, promoting the use of MEAT criteria and modernising public procurement processes.
- Quality of the justice system: Protection of the rights of victims and vulnerable groups, modernisation of judicial infrastructure and training of judges and prosecutors.
- Cross-border cooperation: development of partnerships between Slovak, Ukrainian and Norwegian institutions, exchange of experience, joint solutions to security challenges (e.g. CBRN threats), support for regional development and adaptation to climate change.

The programme emphasises sustainability of results, transfer of know-how and building long-term institutional links between the Slovak Republic, UA and Donor States.

#### 7.4.1.5 Significant outputs and outcomes of the programme

The results of the GGC programme can be assessed as beneficial in terms of the systemic changes that have been achieved in the areas of integrity of public administration, transparency, efficiency of the judiciary and the development of cross-border cooperation. Specific outputs include:

- Development and implementation of national and sectoral anti-corruption strategies, codes of ethics and methodological tools to manage corruption risks.
- Improving the legislative and methodological framework for public procurement, increasing the use of MEAT criteria and strengthening the value for money principle.
- Upgrading judicial infrastructure, training and improving access to justice for vulnerable groups.
- Strengthening Slovak-Ukrainian institutional cooperation, conducting joint workshops, study visits, exchanging best practices and creating new partnerships in the field of public administration, regional development and security.
- Preparation and implementation of adaptation strategies to climate change in border regions, promotion of sustainable mobility and environmental measures.

The GGC programme strengthened bilateral cooperation and supported the transfer of innovation and best practices to Ukrainian and parts of Slovak public administration.

#### 7.4.2 Theory of change

The Theory of Change is an analytical framework that allows to systematically describe and verify the logical and causal links between needs, inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and programme objectives. In the context of GGC programme evaluation, it is used to understand whether and how implemented interventions contribute to meeting the needs of target groups and the programme's strategic objectives. The theory of change serves as a

basis for causal analysis, identifying weaknesses in the intervention logic and answering evaluation questions.

#### 7.4.2.1 Context and needs

The GGC programme was established in response to identified challenges in the areas of integrity, transparency, efficiency of public administration, public procurement, justice and cross-border cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the UA. Key needs stemmed from:

- High levels of perceived corruption and low trust in public administration and justice institutions (Slovakia ranked 54<sup>th</sup> in the TI rankings, poor performance in the Global Competitiveness Index, repeated demonstrations for higher integrity).
- Lack of coordination of integrity and corruption prevention policies, the need for a systemic approach to ethics in public administration, whistleblower protection, risk management and evaluation of the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures.
- Weak capacities and competences in the area of public procurement, where lowest price was the dominant criterion and qualitative aspects were neglected.
- Limited access to justice for victims and vulnerable groups (in particular children and victims of domestic violence), the need to modernise judicial infrastructure and raise awareness of victims' rights.
- Lack of institutional cooperation in border regions and the need to build trust between Slovak and Ukrainian institutions in the context of growing security challenges and military conflict.

#### 7.4.2.2 Inputs

Significant financial, human and expert resources have been allocated to the GGC programme:

- Financial resources: the total GGC programme budget for the 2014–2021 programming period was established on the basis of a Programme Agreement divided between PDPs (e.g. IIPA, Improving Judicial Efficiency, Responsible Public Procurement, TRIGLAV) and calls focused on institutional cooperation and cross-border projects.
- Expert capacity: Involvement of domestic and foreign experts (e.g. OECD, Norwegian partners), experts from public administration, judiciary, municipalities, academia and NGOs.
- Institutional background: Programme Operator (MIRDI SR), donor partners programme (Norwegian Barents Secretariat) and IPO (OECD), implementation and monitoring structures, existing cooperation networks between Slovak and Ukrainian institutions.

#### 7.4.2.3 Activities

Based on the inputs, comprehensive activities were implemented in four main thematic areas:

1. Enhancing integrity and transparency of public administration
  - Integrity review and draft action plans (in cooperation with OECD).

- Development and implementation of codes of ethics, sectoral anti-corruption programmes and risk management methodologies.
  - Public opinion surveys and evaluation of the effectiveness of integrity policies.
  - Capacity building – training, workshops, seminars for public officials and managers.
2. Improving the efficiency of the judiciary and protecting vulnerable groups
- Renovation of court premises (child friendly rooms).
  - Training programmes for judges, prosecutors, mediators.
  - Study trips and exchange of experience with partners from Norway and Iceland.
  - Media campaigns on victims' rights and public awareness raising.
3. Responsible public procurement
- Development of methodologies and standards (in particular MEAT criteria).
  - Organisation of training, workshops and analytical activities.
  - Preparation of model documents, dissemination of good practice examples and collection of procurement data.
  - Cooperation with the OECD in adapting international standards to Slovak conditions.
4. Cross-border cooperation and capacity building on the border with the UA
- Joint projects between cities and regions (workshops, study tours, pilot measures).
  - Development of institutional cooperation, exchange of know-how, support for humanitarian and security activities.
  - Activities aimed at climate change adaptation, inclusion and support for vulnerable groups in border areas.

#### 7.4.2.4 Outputs

The outputs of the GGC programme represent concrete products, services and activities that have been generated by the interventions implemented:

- Increased number of public administration staff, judges, prosecutors and professionals trained (e.g. 350 integrity staff trained, 180 professionals trained to work with victims, hundreds of participants in workshops and seminars).
- Development and implementation of codes of ethics, action plans, methodologies and standards for public administration, public procurement and the judiciary.
- Improvement of infrastructure and equipment of courts, offices and cross-border institutions (e.g. renovation of court premises, child-friendly rooms, purchase of technical equipment for border forces).
- Implementation of joint cross-border events, study tours and pilot actions (e.g. 12 joint seminars, dozens of media appearances, creation of new partnerships).
- Publications, analytical materials, manuals, websites and audiovisual works for target groups and the general public.

#### 7.4.2.5 Results

Results represent the short and medium term effects of the outputs on target groups and society:

- Increased integrity and transparency of public administration: Improvement in Slovakia's ranking in corruption perception indices, increased trust in institutions, reduced number of corruption cases, expanded ethical standards across government departments.
- Improved quality of the justice system: Improved access to justice for victims and vulnerable groups, increased expertise of judges and prosecutors, modernised court infrastructure, greater sensitivity to the needs of children and victims.
- More efficient and accountable public procurement: Increased use of MEAT criteria, higher level of analytical and methodological support for procurers, reduced scope for corruption and waste of public resources.
- Enhanced cross-border cooperation and trust between Slovak and Ukrainian institutions: Increased crisis preparedness, better coordination of security and humanitarian activities, expanded network of partnerships, transfer of know-how and innovation.

#### 7.4.2.6 Goals/Impacts

The main objectives of the GGC programme are "increased integrity and accountability of public administration" and "improved Slovak-Ukrainian institutional cooperation"<sup>40</sup>. The long-term impacts of the programme can be summarised as follows:

- Reducing corruption and increasing trust in institutions: long-term improvement in Slovakia's ranking in international indices, increased legal certainty and stability.
- Increased efficiency of public administration, justice and procurement: Sustainable systemic changes in processes, better value for money, better protection of citizens' rights and business environment.
- Strengthening societal and public sector resilience to crises: Better preparedness for security, humanitarian and environmental challenges in border regions.
- Sustainability and dissemination of positive effects: Long-term use of the methodologies, infrastructure, partnerships and know-how developed after the end of the funding from the programme.

#### 7.4.2.7 Internal and external factors

##### Internal factors

1. Fragmentation of the programme: The thematic fragmentation of projects has limited synergies and sharing of outputs. There was a lack of a central coordination platform, which reduced the effectiveness of interventions.
2. Administrative burden: Complex processes (public procurement, strict reporting requirements) slowed down implementation and could discouraged smaller applicants.
3. Limited capacity of Project Promoters: Smaller actors (municipalities, NGOs) could not absorb the administrative burden, leading to the failure of callGGC02.

## External factors

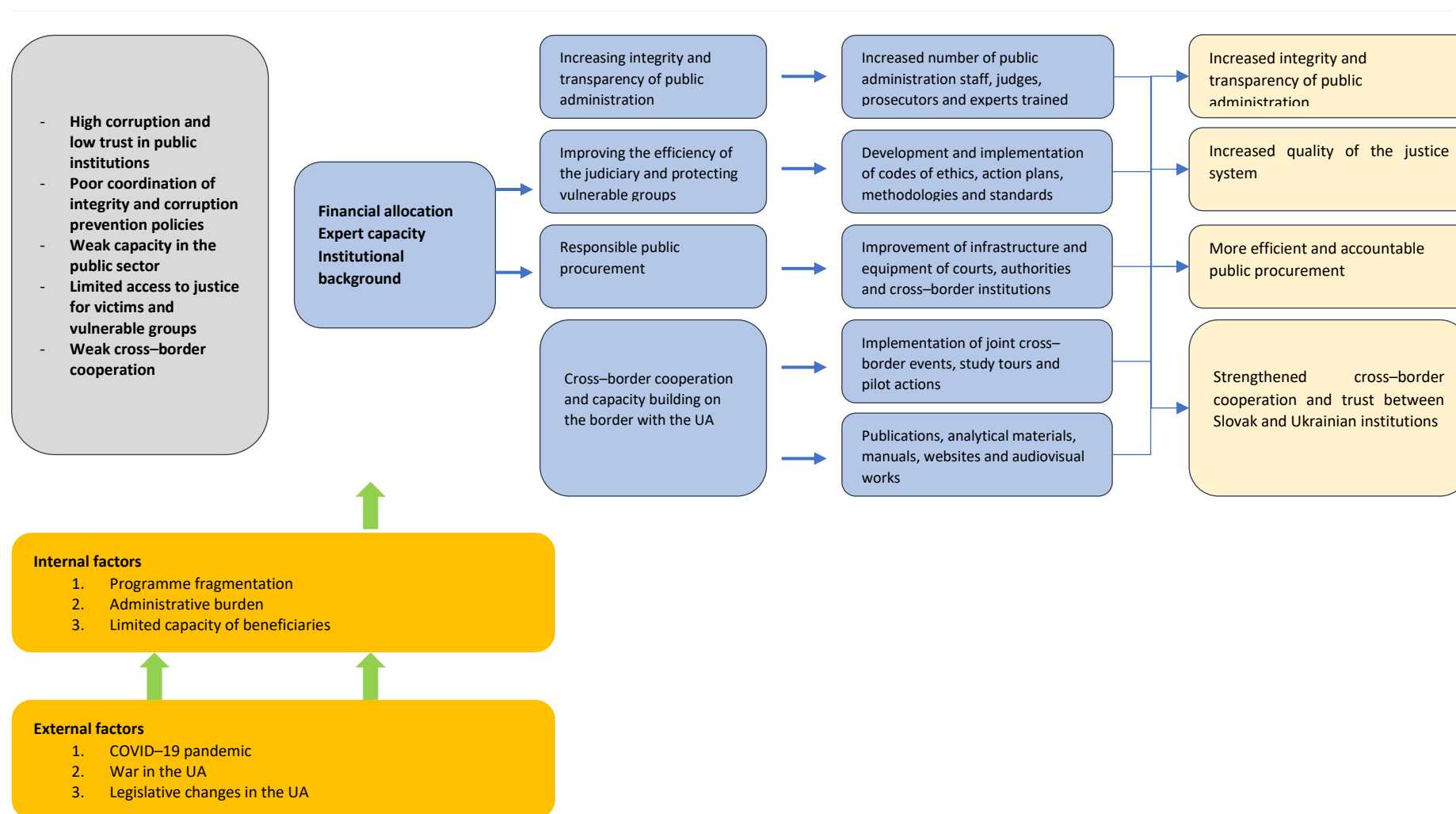
1. COVID-19 pandemic: Forced the transfer of activities to an online environment and adjustments to timelines. Projects (e.g. GGCPP004) responded flexibly, but digital transformation limited the depth of partnerships. (*Documented in final reports.*)
2. War on UA: Forced projects with a cross-border component (GGC01005, GGC01007) to discontinue physical collaboration, move workshops to other countries (Finland, Norway), and address security risks. (*Records of extraordinary project changes.*)
3. Legislative changes in UA: Public administration reforms during the war made coordination with Ukrainian partners difficult, e.g. in the development of adaptation strategies in the CLIMADAM project (GGC01008).

### 7.4.2.8 Weaknesses

The analysis of the theory of change also revealed a number of weaknesses in the intervention logic:

- Administrative burden and complexity of processes: Beneficiaries repeatedly pointed to the high administrative burden and the need to simplify reporting and control mechanisms, especially for smaller and soft projects.
- Lack of sharing of outputs and synergies between projects: There was a lack of a central platform for the exchange of know-how, examples of good practice and methodologies between projects within the programme.
- Limited flexibility in responding to external crises: The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in the UA showed the need for more flexibility in planning and implementation of activities, including the possibility of rapid budget transfers and online forms of collaboration.

Figure 5: Theory of Change\_GGC



Source: Authors' own elaboration

### 7.4.3 Assessment based on the evaluation criterion relevance

Relevance is one of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and is key to assess the extent to which the GGC programme has responded to the real needs of the Slovak Republic, its institutions, target groups and strategic priorities. Relevance in the context of the EEA FM and NFM means the extent to which the objectives, design, setting and implementation of the programme are in line with the identified problems, stakeholder expectations, national and European strategies, as well as current challenges in the environment of public administration, justice, public procurement and cross-border cooperation. The relevance assessment is the starting point for assessing the overall contribution of the programme and its capacity to generate long-term positive changes in the target areas.

In this chapter, the evaluation will focus on four key evaluation questions: (1) How well was the GGC programme designed in terms of identifying needs and priorities? (2) How responsive was the programme to stakeholder needs and which target groups were key? (3) Did the programme address the needs of specific target groups (especially minorities and vulnerable groups)? If so, in what way? (4) To what extent do the outputs and outcomes of the programme correspond to the priorities and strategic documents of the SR and the EU?

Several analytical methods were used to assess the relevance of the GGC programme: analysis of programme documentation, results framework, project final reports, surveys, consultations with stakeholders (Programme Operator, Project Promoters), as well as analysis of needs and priorities at the level of target groups. Emphasis was placed on the analysis of how the programme responded to the identified challenges (e.g. weak integrity of public administration, low efficiency of the judiciary, need for modernisation of public procurement, need for development of cross-border cooperation with the UA) as well as on the programme's capacity to reflect changing conditions (COVID-19 pandemic, war in the UA, legislative changes).

Relevance was assessed not only in terms of formal consistency with national and European strategies (Slovak Anti-Corruption Strategy, reform of the judiciary, EU strategic documents), but also in terms of the addressability of interventions to the real needs of the target groups. The evaluation also took into account internal and external factors influencing implementation (implementation mechanism, management structures, capacity of Project Promoters, pandemic and geopolitical challenges) and their impact on maintaining or increasing the relevance of the programme throughout the evaluation period.

#### 7.4.3.1 Findings

##### Programme agreement and identification of needs

The GGC programme was designed based on a thorough analysis of the needs of the SR identified through a number of analytical and participatory processes during the period 2016–2018. Key inputs to the needs identification were provided by:

- OECD analytical outputs: In 2017–2019, a series of consultations and analytical workshops were held between the Slovak Government Office, the OECD and other stakeholders, which resulted in the publication "OECD Public Integrity Review: Slovak Republic 2019". This report identified Slovakia's main challenges as weak public administration integrity, low trust in institutions, lack of a systemic approach to ethics and corruption prevention,

the need to strengthen whistleblower protection and improve risk management. The results of this analysis were explicitly reflected in the GGC Programme Agreement (2018) and its annexes.

- TI Corruption Perceptions Index: in 2016, Slovakia ranked 54<sup>th</sup> out of 176 countries, its best ranking since 2008, but still on the tail of the EU. This fact was repeatedly discussed in the preparatory workshops and served as an argument for the need for systemic reforms in the area of integrity and transparency.
- PPO statistics and procurement analysis: In 2015, 80 % of the public procurements audited were found to be in breach of the rules. Analysis by the PPO and the OECD pointed to the dominance of lowest price as a criterion and the neglect of qualitative aspects, which led to the need to introduce the "value for money" principle and to promote the use of MEAT criteria.
- Consultations with experts and stakeholders: Several workshops and roundtables were held in 2016–2018 with the participation of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, the Office of the National Authority, the Ministry of Justice, donor partner of the program (Norwegian Barents Secretariat), IPO (OECD) and other actors. The results of these consultations were documented in the preparatory materials for the Programme Agreement and in the minutes of the preparatory meetings.
- Strategic documents of the Slovak Republic and the EU: The GGC Programme was designed in line with the Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Slovak Republic, the reform of the judiciary, the strategy for the development of public procurement and the EU priorities in the field of the rule of law and cross-border cooperation.

Based on these inputs, the intervention logic was clearly defined in the Programme Agreement (2018): to enhance the integrity and accountability of the public administration, improve transparency, efficiency of the judiciary and strengthen institutional cooperation between the SR and the UA. The objectives of the programme were elaborated into measurable indicators (e.g. number of staff trained, number of good practice examples transferred, number of joint SR-UA workshops), which were then monitored during implementation.

The analysis of the compliance of the programme objectives with the identified needs was carried out through desk-research of the programme documentation, analytical reports of OECD, TI, PPO, World Justice Project. The results of this analysis confirm that the GGC programme was designed on the basis of a thorough identification of needs reflecting international rankings and domestic strategic documents. The programme's objectives and actions respond directly to these needs, demonstrating the high level of relevance of the programme design.

### Response to needs and target groups

The GGC programme was designed to respond to the needs of a wide range of target groups, with the identification of these needs being participatory and informed by a number of analytical and consultative processes:

- Public Administration and Local Governments: The needs of this group were identified through integrity surveys (conducted in 2018 and 2021 in collaboration with the OECD), analysis of weaknesses in ethics, corruption prevention and risk management. The programme responded to these needs through the GGCPP001 (IIPA) projects, where 369



staff were trained (target 350), codes of ethics were developed and implemented in 5 ministries and behavioural interventions were implemented.

- **Justice and Victim Protection Professionals:** The needs of this group were identified through Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic analyses, satisfaction surveys with the justice system and consultations with professionals. The programme responded through the GGCPP002 (JUSTICE) project, where 170 professionals were trained (target 180; the number of trained professionals will continue to increase during the post-project monitoring period, according to the Project Promoter).
- **Procurement experts:** The needs of this group have been identified in the analyses of the PPO and the OECD, which pointed to the need for modernisation of processes and the introduction of MEAT criteria. The programme responded through the GGCPP003 (MEAT) project, where 6 standards and templates for MEAT were developed, 6 workshops were organised and MEAT criteria were implemented in 14 % of the procurements (target 40 %; the low value was due to the form of procurement practiced during the pandemic COVID-19 fast track or single criteria procurement. It is expected to increase sharply in statistical reporting after the abolition of the measures).
- **Cross-border partners from UA:** The needs of this group were identified in the framework of joint workshops, study visits and consultations with Ukrainian institutions. The programme responded through projects GGC01005 (SIBSU), GGC01006 (CBC4US), GGC01007 (CEEA), GGC01008 (CLIMADAM) and GGC01009 (FPA), where a total of 69 joint workshops were implemented (the number of joint workshops and seminars implemented within the framework of cross-border cooperation projects varied according to the specific project. For example, project GGC01005 (SIBSU) organised 12 joint seminars, GGC01006 (CBC4US) 13 seminars, GGC01007 (CEEA) up to 30 seminars, GGC01008 (CLIMADAM) 8 seminars and GGC01009 (FPA) 6 seminars. At the same time, 14 examples of good practice have been transferred to the UA through the above projects (new partnerships between universities, municipalities and regional development agencies have been established).
- **Minorities, vulnerable groups, victims of crime:** The needs of these groups were identified through surveys, consultations with NGOs and analysis of case studies. The programme has responded through the following specialised measures:
  - GGCPP002 (JUSTICE) – Enhancing the effectiveness of the judiciary through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties
    - Establishment of specialized rooms for children and victims: Special rooms have been created in eight courts in Bratislava, Košice and other cities, adapted for the questioning of children and victims of crime. These rooms are equipped to minimise stress and traumatising of victims during the trial.
    - Training for judges, prosecutors and victim workers. Targeted trainings have been implemented to work with particularly vulnerable groups (children, victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities). Training also covered topics such as secondary victimisation, communication with victims and working with minorities.
    - Methodological and legislative support. Methodologies and recommendations were developed for judicial authorities to ensure equal access to justice for all vulnerable groups. This included proposals for legislative changes to better protect victims' rights.

- Media and awareness campaigns. Awareness-raising campaigns on victims' rights and protection options were implemented, including dissemination of information in minority communities.
- GGC01008 (CLIMADAM) – Climate change adaptation strategy and mitigation activities for the Slovak-Ukrainian border region
  - Inclusive community workshops and participatory planning. Workshops were organised with active participation of representatives of Roma communities, seniors, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The aim was to involve them in the development of adaptation strategies and to ensure that measures reflect their specific needs.
  - Promoting gender equality. In the planning and implementation of activities, emphasis was placed on equal representation of women and men, including the promotion of women in decision-making processes at local level.
  - Educational activities for vulnerable groups. Special educational materials and workshops were prepared to raise awareness of climate risks and adaptation options, tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups.
- GGC01009 (FPA) – Future of Public Administration
  - Involvement of young people, students and representatives of minorities. The project organized workshops, hackathons and discussion forums where young people, students from marginalized groups and minority representatives were targeted for engagement. The aim was to promote their participation in public policy-making and to increase their interest in public administration.
  - Promoting digital inclusion. Online learning materials and platforms were created and made accessible to people with special needs (e.g. learning disabilities, health impairments).
  - Mentoring and support for vulnerable groups. The project provided mentoring and one-to-one guidance to vulnerable group participants to help them better navigate opportunities to engage in public life and career development.

The analysis of target groups and specific needs was carried out through the evaluation of results matrices, project applications, final reports of PDPs and projects from open calls, as well as the analysis of data on training participants, number of institutions involved and examples of good practice. The results of this analysis confirm that the programme has targeted the needs of a wide range of groups, including specific and vulnerable groups. The involvement of these groups was measurable and documented in the project reports, confirming the relevance of the programme in relation to the target groups.

At the same time, based on the findings from the workshops and interviews with GGC Project Promoters/implementers, it can be concluded that most Project Promoters perceived the programme set-up as targeted and reflective of their real needs. Project Promoters of GGCPP001 (IIPA) and GGCPP003 (MEAT) repeatedly stated that the training and methodological support was adapted to their daily practice and contributed to increasing the expertise of their staff. In the case of the project focused on justice (GGCPP002 – JUSTICE), respondents appreciated the creation of specialised rooms for minors and victims of crime, which, in their words, "significantly improved the comfort and safety of victims during interrogations" and "specialised rooms for children and victims

have become a standard that should be extended to all courts in the Slovak Republic". Recipients of cross-border cooperation projects (GGC01005 – SIBSU, GGC01006 – CBC4US) highlighted the importance of joint seminars and exchange of know-how with Ukrainian partners. In the case of projects GGC01008 (CLIMADAM) and GGC01009 (FPA), respondents stressed that "activities aimed at inclusion and participation of vulnerable groups have led to increased awareness and involvement of these groups in public life". A number of Project Promoters also reported that through the GGC programme they had been able to engage with organisations they had not previously worked with, extending the reach of the interventions to new target groups. At the same time, it was stressed by several Project Promoters that "without the support of the GGC programme it would not have been possible to implement such large-scale partnerships and transfer of innovation".

### Consistency with the priorities of the SR and the EU

The outputs and outcomes of the GGC programme are in line with the priorities of the Slovak Republic and the EU, as demonstrated by the following:

- Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Slovak Republic: the GGC Programme contributed to the implementation of the Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Slovak Republic through the GGCPP001 (IIPA) projects, where codes of ethics were developed and implemented, behavioural interventions and training of public administration employees were carried out. The outcomes of these measures were regularly monitored and evaluated in interim and final reports.
- Judicial reform and protection of victims' rights: The GGC Programme contributed to judicial reform through the GGCPP002 (JUSTICE) project, where 8 specialised rooms for children and victims were established in the courts, 170 professionals were trained and 3 300 family law cases were supported to be handled by trained judges. These measures were in line with the priorities of the Ministry of Justice and the EU Rule of Law Strategy.
- Modernisation of public procurement: The GGC Programme contributed to the modernisation of public procurement through the GGCPP003 (MEAT) project, where 6 standards and templates for MEAT were developed, 6 workshops were organised and MEAT criteria were implemented in 14 % of the procurement (40 % target). These measures were in line with the priorities of the Authority and the EU procurement strategy.
- Cross-border cooperation and regional development: The GGC programme contributed to the development of cross-border cooperation through projects GGC01005 (SIBSU), GGC01006 (CBC4US), GGC01007 (CEEa), GGC01008 (CLIMADAM) and GGC01009 (FPA), with 12–30 joint seminars and the transfer of 14 examples of good practice to the UA. These actions were in line with the priorities of the SR and the EU in the field of regional development and cross-border cooperation.

The analysis of the consistency of outputs and outcomes with national and European priorities was carried out by comparing the achieved outputs and outcomes of the programme with the objectives of the national strategies (Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Slovak Republic, reform of the judiciary, development of cross-border cooperation) and with the requirements of the EEA FM/NFM (Programme Agreement, Annex I). The results of this analysis confirm that the outputs and outcomes of the programme are in line with the priorities of the SR and the EU and have contributed to the achievement of the strategic

objectives in the areas of integrity, justice, public procurement and cross-border cooperation.

The results of the working meetings and interviews with GGC Project Promoters/implementers confirm that the majority of Project Promoters perceived the outputs of the programme as directly applicable to the strategic objectives of their institutions. Recipients of GGCPP003 (MEAT) stated that "the new methodologies and standards have been integrated into the internal processes of the PPO and serve as a model for future procurements". Project Promoters of cross-border cooperation projects (GGC01005 – SIBSU, GGC01006 – CBC4US) confirmed that "joint activities with Ukrainian partners have contributed to better preparedness for crisis situations and strengthened trust between institutions on both sides of the border". A number of respondents also stated that the GGC programme had provided them with new knowledge and experience, which they are using to develop strategic documents and plan further development activities.

### Internal and external factors influencing relevance

The implementation of the GGC programme was influenced by a number of internal and external factors that had a direct impact on its relevance and responsiveness to changing conditions.

#### Internal factors

The main internal factors were the implementation mechanism, management structures, Project Promoter capacity, programme fragmentation and administrative burden.

#### Programme fragmentation

The evaluation identified significant fragmentation of the programme in the form of fragmentation of themes, objectives and activities between several projects and calls without sufficient coordination and linkages.

In general, the fragmentation of the programme was not a significant problem for the Project Promoters of the projects – they implemented the activities according to their needs and interests, while the main objective of the call "Institutional cooperation with Ukraine" was met by all projects. Fragmentation as a challenge was particularly evident at the level of programme administration (Programme Operator), where it complicated the comprehensive evaluation and the search for synergies.

It should also be explicitly noted that the fragmentation of the GGC01 and GGC02 calls was a donor requirement, not the Programme Operator's. The two calls were almost identical in content, differing only in the size of the grant. The low interest in GGC02 (small grant scheme) was not due to lack of interest of the target groups, but to the specificity of the setting and the low allocation. Only one application was submitted under the GGC02 call and it was not supported. It follows that the modality of the calls and the basic principles of the programme were already defined in the draft programme agreement by the donors, and the Programme Operator had no possibility to influence these parameters substantially.

Nevertheless, this thematic fragmentation was also identified in the final reports and IPRs of several projects (e.g. GGCPP003 – MEAT, GGC01006 – CBC4US), where it was repeatedly stated that there was a lack of a central platform for sharing outputs, exchange of know-how and coordination between projects with similar focus. In practice, this meant that

several projects were developing similar methodologies, training or analytical tools in parallel, leading to duplication of outputs and untapped potential for synergies. Fragmentation was also reflected in a weaker multiplication effect – the results of individual projects were rarely systematically transferred to other institutions or regions. This phenomenon was also confirmed in personal interviews with Project Promoters, who reported that "there was a lack of a platform for systematic sharing of experiences and outputs, which led to some innovative solutions remaining isolated within a single project".

### Administrative burden

Administrative burden was one of the most frequently identified internal factors that affected the relevance of the programme. The relatively high administrative burden was reflected in complex procurement processes, strict reporting requirements, repeated checks and the need to submit extensive documentation even for smaller projects.

Also in the IPR and final reports (e.g. GGC01006 – CBC4US, GGC01009 – FPA), Project Promoters repeatedly stated that "the administrative processes were disproportionately complex for the size and type of project" and that "duplications in reporting and unclear documentation requirements discouraged some potential partner organisations from participating in the programme". This factor had the greatest negative impact on smaller municipalities and NGOs, which often did not have sufficient staff capacity to cope with the administrative burden. As a consequence, the diversity of Project Promoters was reduced and access to support for smaller actors was limited, making the programme less targetable to specific target groups.

### External factors

The main external factors included the COVID-19 pandemic, the UA war, and legislative changes in the UA.

- The COVID-19 pandemic forced the transfer of many activities to an online environment, adjustments to timelines, and a change in the form of project implementation. Several events, trainings and workshops had to be cancelled or reorganized, affecting the quality of outputs and networking opportunities among partners. Project Promoters in the IPR reported that 'the online format, while allowing continuity to be maintained, has limited the depth of partnerships and the exchange of experiences'.
- The war in the UA caused delays, limited physical cooperation with Ukrainian partners and in some cases led to the transfer of activities to other countries (e.g. Finland, Norway). Projects with a significant cross-border component have had to adjust timetables, budgets and some activities have had to be cancelled altogether or replaced with alternative solutions.
- Legislative changes in the UA have made coordination in the development of adaptation strategies and implementation of joint actions more difficult, especially in projects focusing on regional development and climate adaptation (e.g. GGC01008 – CLIMADAM).

The flexibility of the programme, especially on the part of the Programme Operator, allowed for rapid adaptation of activities and schedules, which was key to maintaining relevance in crisis situations. Recipients in interviews repeatedly appreciated that "the programme operator responded promptly to requests for changes and allowed adjustments to budgets and schedules without undue delays".

#### 7.4.3.2 Conclusions and recommendations

- C1: The GGC programme was designed and implemented in close relation to the carefully identified needs of the SR and its target groups, systematically addressing the main challenges in the areas of integrity, transparency, efficiency of public administration, justice and cross-border cooperation. The programme interventions were in line with national and European priorities, based on analytical evidence, stakeholder consultations and reflecting changing conditions (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, war in the UA). The outputs and outcomes of the programme have contributed to improving the status of a wide range of target groups, including minorities and vulnerable groups, as evidenced by concrete data on the number of staff trained, institutions involved, methodologies implemented and joint events with foreign partners. The programme has been able to respond flexibly to external crisis situations, ensuring continuity of implementation and adapting activities to changing conditions.
- C2: Despite the high degree of relevance and positive impacts on target groups, the implementation of the GGC programme was limited by the fragmentation of themes and high administrative burden, which reduced the potential for synergies between projects and limited the access of some groups, especially smaller municipalities and NGOs. However, the fragmentation and modality of the calls were largely the result of donor requirements and the set-up of the Programme Agreement, not a decision of the Programme Operator. The administrative burden was perceived mainly as a technical problem. These weaknesses confirm the need to optimise programme design, reduce administrative burden, strengthen coordination and output sharing in future periods, as well as targeted support to specific groups and further develop bilateral and international partnerships. Actions in these areas are key to increasing the addressability, effectiveness and long-term relevance of the GGC programme in future programming periods.

Based on the above conclusions, recommendations were formulated for the NFP and the Programme Operator:

- R1: Maintain and further develop flexibility in programme management – maintain the possibility of rapid adjustments to schedules and activities, introduce a system of regular assessment of needs and opportunities for programme adjustments.
- R2: Continue to ensure consistency with current national and European strategies when setting up future programmes (require demonstration of links to strategic documents in each call, monitor consistency during implementation).
- R3: Continue to develop bilateral and international partnerships – support joint projects, exchange placements and training with partners from Norway, OECD and UA, create a platform for long-term cooperation.
- R4: Eliminate fragmentation of the programme when setting up the next programming periods – focus on fewer thematic areas, promote the emergence of thematic clusters and joint planning of outputs.
- R5: Rethink the design and set-up of grant schemes – adapt processes to smaller actors, provide methodological support and mentoring, test new schemes with pilot groups.

- R6: Reduce the administrative and procedural complexity of the programme – digitise processes, introduce template documents, simplify reporting, set up a helpdesk for smaller actors.
- R7: Implement targeted information and motivation campaigns – organise workshops and webinars for new and small actors, prepare clear information materials.
- R8: Regularly analyse feedback from unsuccessful and unengaged applicants– solicit feedback through questionnaires, focus groups, modify program terms and conditions based on findings.

#### 7.4.4 Assessment based on evaluation criterion effectiveness

Effectiveness is one of the evaluation criteria for assessing public interventions according to OECD/DAC standards and in the context of the EEA FM and NFM programmes represents the extent to which the intended outputs and outcomes have been delivered to the required quality, extent and in line with the expectations of stakeholders, target groups and strategic documents. Evaluating the effectiveness of the GGC programme is key to assessing whether the activities and interventions of the programme have led to real, measurable and sustainable changes in the areas of integrity, transparency, efficiency of public administration, justice, public procurement and cross-border cooperation.

In this chapter, effectiveness is assessed not only in terms of the quantitative fulfilment of indicators, but also in terms of qualitative effects, multiplier effects, the programme's capacity to generate unintended benefits and flexibility to respond to unforeseen circumstances (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, war in the UA, legislative changes).

Emphasis is placed on transparent linkages between planned objectives, implemented activities, achieved outputs and outcomes, as well as identification of factors that have influenced the degree of programme effectiveness. The chapter is structured according to the four main evaluation questions:

1. To what extent were the outcomes produced and outputs achieved to the required quality?
2. Which factors influenced the achievement of outcomes and outputs?
3. Were additional outcomes achieved beyond those listed in the Result Framework?
4. Were other outputs achieved beyond those listed in the Result Framework?

##### 7.4.4.1 Findings

#### Overview of programme indicators and assessment of their achievement

The results of the analysis of the implementation of the programme indicators clearly confirm that the GGC programme has met or exceeded most of the quantitative targets in all thematic areas. The most significant exceedances were recorded in the area of justice (number of family law cases handled by trained judges reached 3 300 against a target of 120), in the area of integrity (369 staff trained against a target of 350) and in the area of cross-border cooperation (25 examples of good practice transferred to the UA, target met). In the CBRN area, the UA target was exceeded (120 trained against a target of 100). The exception is the implementation of MEAT criteria in public procurement, where 14,20 % was achieved against the target of 40 %; however, this result was affected by the specific



conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, when accelerated procedures with one participant and one criterion were increasingly used in public procurement. Qualitative evaluations and feedback from Project Promoters (final reports, IPR, interviews) confirm that the outputs of the programme were not only numerous but also directly applied in practice – new methodologies, digital tools, training, dedicated rooms for victims, new partnerships and collaborative networks. Recipients repeatedly highlighted the multiplier effect, the transfer of know-how and the high satisfaction with partnerships (e.g. GGC01005: satisfaction 5/5, 100 % of the actors have put the knowledge into practice). Overall, the GGC programme achieved high efficiency in meeting both quantitative and qualitative objectives, with the identified variations being due to objective external factors and not affecting the overall positive impact of the programme on the target groups and systemic changes in the evaluated areas.

Table 19: Achievement of GGC key programme indicators

Indicator	Targeted value	Achieved value	Project(s)	Note
Number of public administration staff trained	350	369	GGCPP001	Target exceeded
Number of trained professionals in the field of victim protection	180	170+	GGCPP002	Number will increase in the monitoring period
Number of family law cases handled by judges	120	3 300	GGCPP002	Significant overrun
Number of examples of good practice transferred to Ukraine	10	25	GGC01005–GGC01009	Target exceeded
Number of joint SR-UA seminars/workshops	69 (total)	69	GGC01005–GGC01009	Range 6–30 per project
Number of CBRN specialists trained (SR/UA)	160/100	160/120	GGCPP004	Exceeded on Ukraine side
Implementation of MEAT criteria in public procurement	40 %	14,20 %	GGCPP003	Low value due to pandemic measures, expected to increase
Level of satisfaction with the partnership (scale 1 – 5)	5	5	GGC01005	Maximum satisfaction
Percentage of actors applying knowledge from the partnership	≥50 %	100 %	GGC01005	All actors have used the knowledge

Source: GGC Programme Final Report, own elaboration

### Most of the planned outcomes and outputs were achieved with high quality and multiplier effect

Quantitative outcomes show that most projects achieved or exceeded the planned values. The most significant exceedances were recorded in the number of family law cases handled by trained judges (3,300 against a target of 120, GGCPP002) and in the number of civil servants trained (369 against a target of 350, GGCPP001). In the area of CBRN, the target for UA was exceeded (120 trained against a target of 100, GGCPP004).



Project Promoters repeatedly confirmed that the training, methodological support and new tools were tailored to their needs and contributed to increased expertise. In the area of justice, specialised rooms for children and victims were assessed as a significant contribution to the comfort and safety of victims. In the area of public procurement, new methodologies and standards were used in practice, although their wider application was limited by the pandemic measures. The level of satisfaction with the partnerships was maximum (5/5, GGC01005), with all actors putting the lessons learned into practice. The multiplier effect – dissemination of methodologies, transfer of know-how, creation of new collaborative networks – was also highlighted by the Project Promoters.

The outputs and outcomes of the GGC programme were of high quality and in many cases exceeded the planned values. The qualitative effects (usability, satisfaction, multiplier effect) confirm the high effectiveness of the programme and its benefits for the target groups and systemic changes in the evaluated areas.

#### The effectiveness of the programme was influenced by positive and negative factors, with management flexibility being key

Positive factors included in particular management flexibility – the Programme Operator allowed for quick adjustments to schedules and budgets, which was key during the pandemic and the war in UA. Recipients appreciated the prompt communication and willingness to address issues as they arose. Strong international cooperation with DPP a IPO (Norwegian Barents Secretariat) and transfer of know-how increased the professional level of the projects. Larger institutions and experienced Project Promoters were able to implement projects efficiently and manage administrative requirements.

Negative factors included the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused delays, moved events online (e.g. GGC01007), limited networking opportunities and face-to-face meetings. The war on UA reduced the number of postings from UA to SR (GGC01009), caused delays and shifted some activities to other countries. Administrative burden was the biggest obstacle, especially for smaller actors and NGOs – Project Promoters repeatedly pointed out technical problems (user-unfriendly forms, duplication in reporting, need to switch to full-fledged IS (eGrant)). Fragmentation of the programme was a challenge, especially for the Programme Operator, who had difficulties in comprehensive evaluation and finding synergies. However, Project Promoters implemented activities according to their needs and did not perceive fragmentation as a major problem. The low success rate of the GGC02 small grants scheme (only one application, no project supported) was a consequence of the set-up of the call, not the disinterest of the target groups.

The effectiveness of the programme was supported by management flexibility and good preparation of Project Promoters, but limited by pandemic and war circumstances, administrative burden and fragmentation at the level of programme administration. The factors identified are key to optimising implementation in future periods.

#### The programme generated significant multiplier effects

New partnerships between universities, municipalities and regional development agencies have been created as a outcome of GGC programme support (GGC01009, GGC01006). The projects expanded the target groups to include young people, students and NGO

professionals (GGC01006, GGC01009). Digital courses and webinars for public servants (GGC01007), new training materials, publications and audio-visual works (GGC01008) were created. New accredited training programmes were created at the universities of Košice and Kharkiv (GGC01009). Climate change adaptation strategies in border regions were developed and implemented (GGC01008).

Recipients repeatedly confirmed that thanks to the GGC programme they were able to establish cooperation with organisations they had not worked with before, which extended the reach of the interventions to new target groups. The multiplier effect was also reflected in the dissemination of methodologies, transfer of know-how and the creation of new collaborative networks.

The programme has generated significant multiplier effects which have contributed to the extension of the reach and the long-term sustainability of the outcomes. These benefits reinforce the evaluation of the programme's effectiveness and constitute an important argument for continuing similar interventions in the future.

**The programme has also achieved other outputs beyond the original plans, which have contributed significantly to meeting the objectives**

Analysis of additional outputs beyond the Result Framework was undertaken through the final reports, IPR, project websites and Project Promoters feedback. New training materials (manuals, handbooks, publications in different languages) have been produced and continue to be used. Media outputs (more than 30 articles, reports, audiovisual works – GGC01005) have been implemented and raised awareness on integrity, justice and cross-border cooperation issues. Adaptation strategies were developed and implemented in border regions (GGC01008), which were not explicitly planned initially. In some projects, the number of persons trained exceeded the planned values (e.g. GGCPP004, GGC01007).

These outputs were often the outcome of the initiative of Project Promoters who identified new needs during implementation and were able to respond flexibly to changing conditions. Project Promoters also reported that many of these outputs were integrated into mainstream public administration, justice and local government practice, increasing their long-term sustainability and multiplier effect.

The programme has also achieved other outputs beyond the original plans, which have contributed significantly to meeting the objectives and increased the multiplier effect of the programme. These outputs represent an important contribution to systemic change and the long-term sustainability of GGC programme outcomes.

#### **7.4.4.2 Conclusion and recommendations**

C3: The GGC programme met or exceeded most of the planned output and outcome indicators, with the quality of the effects achieved rated positively in key areas. Flexibility in implementation has allowed to cope with emergency crisis situations (pandemic, war in the UA) and to continue to achieve the objectives even in challenging conditions.

Based on these findings, recommendations were formulated for the NFP and the Programme Operator:

**R9: Strengthen coordination between projects, create thematic clusters and promote sharing of outputs and synergies**

The recommendation is directed towards systematic linking of projects within the GGC programme to minimise duplication of outputs and maximise the multiplier effect. We propose to create a central online platform to share methodologies, outputs and examples of good practice, to organise regular thematic workshops and networking events for beneficiaries and partners, and to introduce mandatory inter-project consultations in the preparation of new projects. Thematic clusters should focus on the main areas of the programme (integrity, justice, public procurement, cross-border cooperation) and allow for joint planning of outputs, joint impact assessment and coordinated dissemination of innovations. Such an approach will increase efficiency in the use of resources, promote transfer of know-how and contribute to the long-term sustainability of outcomes.

**R10: Continue to promote innovative and systemic solutions in the areas of integrity, transparency and cross-border cooperation**

We recommend that future calls and project schemes explicitly favour proposals that bring innovative approaches (e.g. digital tools, behavioural interventions, new forms of participation) and systemic solutions with potential for long-term impact. Support should include pilot projects, experimental activities and dissemination of good practices among Project Promoters. It is also important to ensure that innovative solutions are tested in practice and that their outcomes are systematically evaluated and disseminated throughout the programme. The programme operator should establish a mechanism to identify and disseminate innovations, for example through an annual competition or a catalogue of innovative outputs.

**R11: Strengthen the transfer of knowledge and experience between project partners, including the further development of bilateral and multilateral partnerships**

We propose to expand opportunities for exchange internships, joint trainings, study tours and professional workshops between Slovak, Ukrainian and partners from Donor States. We recommend creating a network of experts and a platform for sharing know-how, where project outcomes would be regularly presented, challenges would be discussed and common solutions would be sought. The programme operator should also support the establishment of new bilateral and multilateral partnerships, for example through matchmaking events, and ensure that knowledge transfer is a mandatory part of project activities. Regular evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of partnerships should be part of the monitoring of the programme.

**R12: Maintain and develop flexibility in programme management, promote digital tools and online forms of cooperation**

We recommend formalising the possibility to quickly adjust projects, budgets and timetables in response to changing conditions (e.g. crises, legislative changes). The Programme Operator should introduce, develop and regularly update digital tools (IT system, e.g. eGrant), improving their user-friendliness and functionality (e.g. automated notifications, clear templates, online reporting). Online forms of collaboration (virtual working groups, webinars, online consultations) should be a standard part of the implementation, thus increasing the accessibility and efficiency of programme management.

- R13: Systematically monitor the use of the knowledge gained in practice and encourage feedback from stakeholders

We propose to introduce regular questionnaires and evaluation workshops for Project Promoters and target groups, presenting examples of the use of outcomes in practice. The obligation to report concrete examples of the application of outputs should be included in the final project reports. The programme operator should set up a mechanism to systematically evaluate the feedback and use it to set up new calls and adjust the implementation rules. It is also important to encourage the publication of examples of good practice and success stories that can motivate other Project Promoters.

- R14: Strengthen capacity building of partner institutions, in particular abroad (UA), through targeted technical assistance and exchange of experience

We recommend to organise technical missions, tailor-made training, mentoring and joint planning of further projects with emphasis on the needs of Ukrainian partners. It is important to promote transfer of know-how, exchange of experts and long-term partnerships that will strengthen the capacities of institutions in the UA and contribute to the sustainability of outcomes. The programme operator should establish a system to identify the needs of partner institutions and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of technical assistance.

## 7.5 Evaluation of the BIN programme

The subject of this report is the ex-post evaluation of the Business Development, Innovation and SMEs (BIN) programme for the 2014–2021 programming period. The eligibility of project expenditure ended on 30 April 2024. The evaluation was carried out between April and July 2025, approximately one year after the end of project implementation.

### 7.5.1 Description of the programme

The BIN programme was partly built on the 'Green Innovation in Industry' programme implemented under the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009–2014. While in the previous period the focus was on bioenergy, in the 2014–2021 programming period the focus of the programme has been broadened to all green technologies (GII<sup>33</sup>) and utility technologies and assistance to the elderly and infirm (WT/AAL)<sup>34</sup>. In addition to research and innovation, the programme has also included education in the areas of GII and WT/AAL. The objective of the programme was "Enhanced Value Creation and Sustainable Growth".

Based on this intervention logic<sup>35</sup>, BIN supported projects that contributed to the achievement of outcomes in two thematic areas: (i) *increased competitiveness of Slovak enterprises within the focal areas of green innovation in industry, public benefit technologies and assistance to the elderly* (Outcome 1) and (ii) *improved training and employment potential in Slovakia in the areas of green innovation, industry, public benefit technologies and assistance to the elderly and the sick in independent living* (Outcome 2). The cross-cutting theme was (iii) *strengthened cooperation between Slovakia and the Donor States* (Outcome 3).

The Programme Operator is the Research Agency under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. The donor partners of the programme are IN, DIKU and the Liechtenstein AIBA.<sup>36</sup>

A total of 21 projects aimed at supporting entrepreneurial activities in the field of GII and WT/AAL were implemented under Outcome 1. These projects were approved and contracted in three calls:

- BIN SGS01 was a small grants scheme designed to support start-ups. Applicants could apply for grants of EUR 100 000–200 000, with a minimum of 10 % self-financing.
- BIN 01 and BIN 02 were calls for innovation and business development projects; they differed mainly in the source of funding (NFM and EEA FM respectively). Applicants could apply for a grant of EUR 200 000 – 2 000 000 and the amount of co-financing from own resources depended on the State aid scheme used, the legal form of the applicant, the type of activities and the location of their implementation.

Seven out of the 21 projects supported took up the option to involve a partner from a Donor States.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Green Industry Innovation

<sup>34</sup> Welfare Technology and Ambient Assisted Living

<sup>35</sup> A reconstruction of the theory of change of the BIN programme is presented in section 3

<sup>36</sup> IN was mainly involved in programme area PA01 "Business Development, Innovation and SMEs " (Outcome 1). DIKU and AIBA were involved in the implementation of program area PA03 "Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeships and Youth Entrepreneurship" (Outcome 2).

<sup>37</sup> Initially, there were eight projects with a partner from a Donor State, but during project implementation, one of the partners in the BIN SGS01 call withdrew.

An overview of the calls and contracted projects under Outcome 1<sup>38</sup> is given in the following table:

Table 20: Calls and contracted projects under Outcome 1

Call (source of funding, year of closure)	Focus	Number of applications received	Number of projects contracted)	Amount of contracted grants in EUR
BIN BF01 (EEA FM/NFM, 2020)	Bilateral travel grants	1	0	0
BIN SGS01 (NFM, 2020)	Small Grants Scheme – support for start-ups	31	6	1 005 120
BIN BF03 (EEA FM/NFM, 2021)	Support for bilateral initiatives	7	0	0
BIN 01 (NFM, 2021)	Call for projects – Innovation and business development	25	12	10 210 307
BIN 02 (EEA FM, 2021)	Call for projects – Innovation and business development	35	3	2 164 351
BIN BF04 EEA FM/NFM, 2024)	Support for bilateral initiatives	30	13	52 017
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>129</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>13 431 795</b>

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Programme Operator

Under Outcome 2, 14 projects were implemented to support GII and WT/AAL related training. Eligible applicants were Slovak secondary and higher education institutions, which were required to have at least one partner from a Donor State. These projects were approved and contracted in two calls (BIN SGS02 and BIN SGS03), which differed mainly in the source of funding (NFM and EEA FM respectively) and the related choice of Donor States from which the bilateral partners could come. SGS02 focused more on (long-term) institutional cooperation and SGS03 on (short- and medium-term) international mobility, but ultimately the supported projects were similar in terms of content. Applicants were eligible for grants of between EUR 5 000 and EUR 200 000; co-financing from own resources was not necessary.

Table 21 : Calls and contracted projects under Outcome 2

Call (source of funding, year of closure)	Focus	Number of applications received	Number of projects contracted	Volume of grants contracted in EUR
BIN BF02 (EEA FM/NFM, 2021)	Bilateral initiatives in the field of education	11	5	48 544
BIN SGS02 (NFM, 2022)	Small grants scheme – support for institutional cooperation between universities, SS and the private sector	13	11	1 909 247
BIN SGS03 (EEA FM, 2022)	Small Grants Scheme – Support for international mobility between universities, SS and the private sector	3	3	555 145
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2 512 936</b>

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Programme Operator

<sup>38</sup> The three early terminations are not counted in the number of contracted projects or in the volume of contracted grants.

Due to low absorption capacity and implementation problems, the allocation for the programme has been reduced in 2023 from the original EUR 23.5 million to EUR 17.8 million. (NFM, EEA FM and SR sources). The total uptake amounted to EUR 15.6 million, representing 87.8 % of the reduced allocation.

The final report of the BIN programme concludes that the programme has achieved its main objective of promoting competitiveness in the GII and WT/AAL areas. Most of the measurable indicators met or exceeded the target value.

Under Outcome 1, the target values for the indicators Number of products or services commercialised on the market – new to the market (38, original target was 3), Number of new processes/technologies/solutions developed and applied in practice – new to the firm (21, original target was 7), Number of processes/technologies/solutions developed (18, original target was 5), Number of applications for intellectual property protection filed (21, original target was 3) and Number of jobs created (111, target was 25) were well exceeded. The planned values of the environmental indicators on CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions and collection of waste from production and operational processes for reuse or recycling were not achieved.

Outcome 2 resulted in four new courses/modules in environmental technologies (target was 4). 85 % of participants (staff and students) improved their skills and competences (target was 75 %). It is also worth mentioning the high interest in workshops on new learning methods and youth engagement and youth apprenticeships, which had a total of 1 900 participants (target was 50).

### 7.5.2 Theory of change

The BIN programme was a strategic instrument of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanism to support innovation and the development of entrepreneurship and education in Slovakia. It responded to key challenges in the Slovak economy, in particular the need to increase the competitiveness of enterprises, insufficient spending on R&D, weak linkages between education and the labour market, and insufficient technological readiness for an ageing population. Environmental needs included the development of green technologies, the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the improvement of energy efficiency of enterprises.

The theory of change of the programme was based on the assumption that targeted support for innovation in focal areas – green innovation in industry, public utility technologies and assistance to the elderly and infirm in independent living – together with education interventions would contribute to systemic changes in the Slovak innovation ecosystem. Donor States have provided both financial resources and expert support to donor partners (Innovation Norway, DIKU, AIBA), with a strong emphasis on bilateral cooperation.

The implementation logic of the programme consisted of a two-pronged approach. In the entrepreneurial component, the programme supported the application, development and commercialisation of new products and solutions through direct grants and small grant schemes for start-ups. The education component focused on institutional cooperation and international mobility between universities, secondary schools and businesses in Slovakia and in Donor States through small grant schemes.

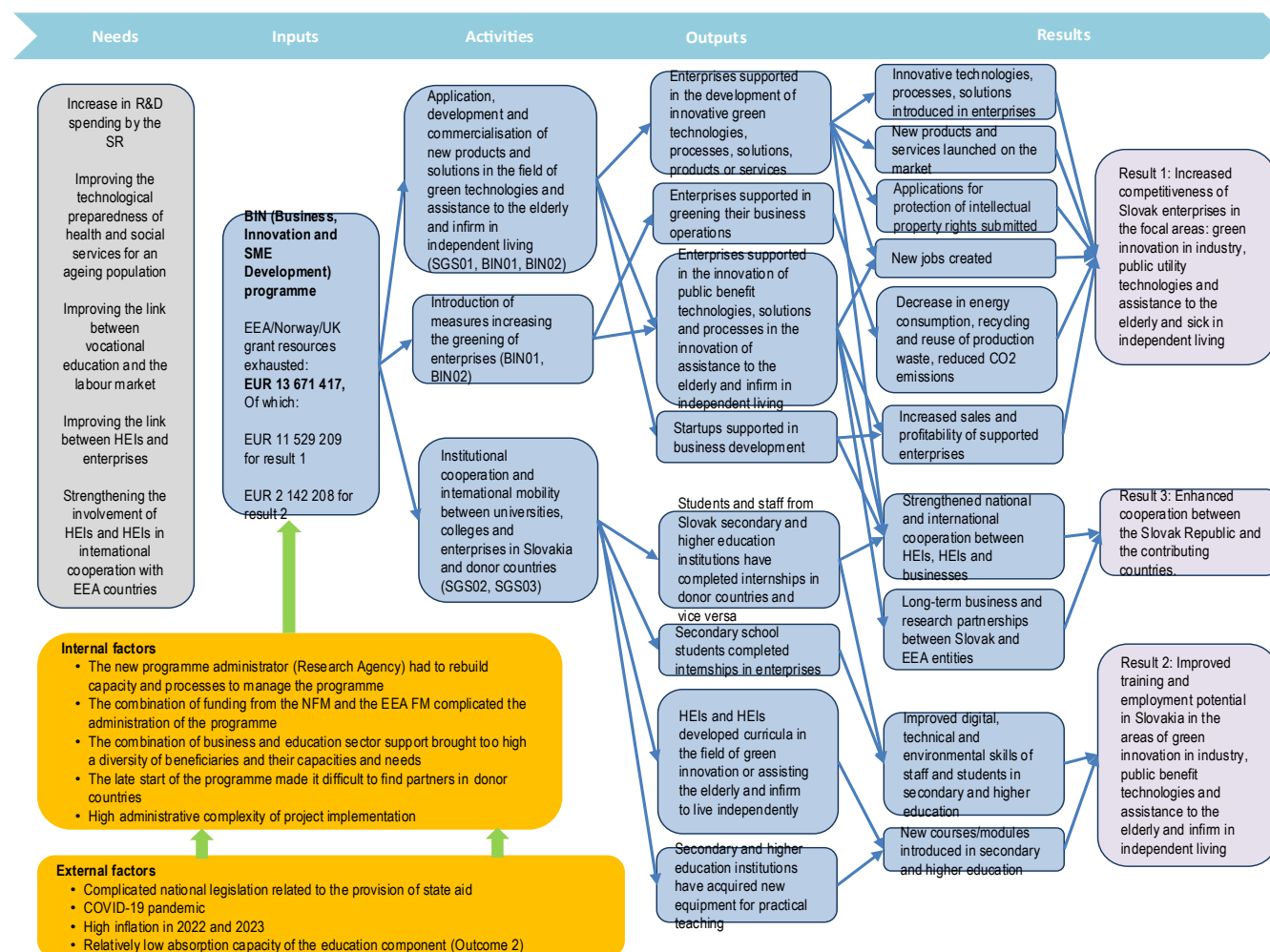
The outputs of the programme were reflected in the introduction of innovative technologies and processes in the supported enterprises, the modernisation of educational programmes and the strengthening of international partnerships. In the medium term, some new products and services have been launched on the market, some of the supported enterprises have experienced increased sales and profitability and new jobs have been created. To a limited extent, the programme has also achieved environmental benefits in the form of reduced energy consumption and reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

The benefits of the outputs were translated into three main outcomes. The first outcome – increased competitiveness of Slovak enterprises – was achieved by strengthening their technological capacities and market opportunities. The second outcome – improved education and employment potential – was reflected in improved professional skills of students, teachers and non-teaching staff and in the introduction of new training modules and programmes. The third outcome – strengthened bilateral cooperation – has resulted in functional international partnerships that continue to work together to a large extent after the end of the programme.

The BIN programme achieved 87 % uptake of its (reduced) allocation and largely delivered on its theory of change despite implementation challenges. A schematic representation of this is presented on the next page:



Figure 6: Theory of Change\_BIN



Source: authors' own elaboration

### 7.5.3 Assessment based on the evaluation criterion relevance

Relevance is one of the five basic evaluation criteria defined by the OECD/DAC<sup>39</sup> in 1991. It generally assesses the extent to which the objectives and settings of an intervention are consistent with the needs, policies and priorities of target groups, Donor States and beneficiary countries and institutions, and whether this consistency persists even when circumstances change.<sup>40</sup>

In the context of the ex-post evaluation of the BIN programme, which was carried out in the context of the evaluation of the programmes implemented in the Slovak Republic by the EEA FM and the NFM in the programming period 2014–2021, this is a retrospective assessment of the relevance of the programme. The four evaluation questions identified by the sponsor cover the following aspects of the relevance of the BIN programme:

- 5) How well is or was the programme designed?
- 6) How responsive is or has the programme been to the needs of stakeholders (organisations/institutions, target groups)? For which target groups are the outcomes achieved key?
- 7) Does the programme address the needs of specific target groups (especially minorities) and if so, how?
- 8) To what extent do the outputs and outcomes correspond to the needs and priorities of the Slovak Republic?

The following text contains findings, conclusions and recommendations that respond to all four evaluation questions. In order to maintain coherence and good readability, they are presented in a coherent text.

#### 7.5.3.1 Findings

The BIN Programme Financing Agreement was based on a Concept Note, developed in 2017 by RA as the Programme Operator in collaboration with program's donor partners (IN, DIKU, AIBA) and the NFP. Consultations with interested individuals and institutions (stakeholders) were a key tool for identifying needs and shaping the programme structure. These took place in 2016 and 2017 in Slovakia, Norway and Iceland, and the results have largely informed the final design of the programme, including the combination of GII and WT/AAL themes, as well as the combination of support to the business and education sectors.

The BIN programme aimed to respond to the need for increased value creation and sustainable growth in the business sector in Slovakia. In doing so, it focused on increasing the competitiveness and profitability of Slovak enterprises, innovating products, services and processes, as well as supporting the creation of new jobs. According to the Concept Note, an important baseline indicator was Slovakia's last place among EU countries in terms of per capita spending on research and development. Social care technologies and technologies supporting independent living for the elderly were justified in the programme by the increased demand for social and health services due to the ageing population. In the field of education, the programme was intended to support international mobility of teachers and students between Slovakia and Donor States, training and internships, the development of innovative curricula and cooperation between businesses and educational institutions.

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<sup>39</sup> OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation (2019): "Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use"

<sup>40</sup> Results Guideline. Rules and Guidance on how to design, monitor and evaluate programmes, manage risks, and report on results. Adopted by the Financial Mechanism Committee on 9 February 2017. Updated March 2021

### A) Relevance of the programme to the needs and priorities of the Slovak Republic

The chosen thematic areas of the BIN programme were in line with the national priorities of the Slovak Republic at the time. In particular, the Concept Note refers to the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation of the Slovak Republic 2014–2020 (RIS3 SK), the National Programme for Active Ageing 2014–2020, the National Priorities for the Development of Social Services 2015–2020 and the National Programme for the Development of Education and Training 2018–2027. With the exception of the latter, these strategic documents were updated during the implementation of the BIN programme. However, a closer look at them confirms the continued relevance of the BIN programme:

- The Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation of the Slovak Republic 2021 – 2027 (SK RIS3 2021+) has set the following vision: *by introducing an optimised system of policies and measures in the field of research, development, innovation and human resources, to support the structural change of the Slovak economy towards growth based on increasing research and innovation capacity and excellence in the segments with the greatest competitive potential.* The BIN programme has undoubtedly contributed to Domain 1: Innovative Industry for the 21st Century, which aims to *support innovation for the transformation of industrial production in Slovakia to a higher level so that it leads to a significant reduction of negative impacts on the environment, to an increase in energy efficiency, to an increase in competitiveness associated with export growth,* and to Domain 3: Digital Transformation of Slovakia, which aims to *support the digital transformation of all areas of society in order to improve the quality of life of citizens, to increase the competitiveness of industry and the entire economy, and to ensure the efficient performance of public administration.*
- The National Programme on Active Ageing 2021–2030 builds on its predecessor from 2014–2020 and further emphasises the trend of an ageing population and the related challenges for society as a whole. Innovative projects supported under the BIN programme have contributed to the programme's priority areas 4.3 Health care promoting active ageing and 4.7 Promoting dignity, independence and quality of life for older people.
- The National Priorities for the Development of Social Services for 2021–2030, developed by the MoLSW in 2021, state that *the priority is therefore to continue to support the development of new as well as existing social services and professional activities of a community nature, taking into account their local, generic and financial availability, also with the use of modern technologies.* Innovations in the field of WT/AAL are therefore still a highly relevant topic in the social services sector.

Interviews with Project Promoters confirmed that the programme was indeed responding to real market needs and many projects were addressing problems without available alternatives. Both companies and training institutions identified specific needs that were important to them and could increase their competitiveness. Although not all of the innovations produced proved to be economically viable (i.e. sustainable without additional funding), the programme enabled a relatively large number of relevant innovative ideas to emerge and be tested.

As an example, the KOOR project (BIN 01\_2021\_001) developed a digital energy management platform integrating different types of energy (gas, electricity, water) and equipment from different manufacturers. According to the beneficiary's representatives, there was no product on the market that met all these requirements. In this case, it was an internal process innovation (collection and analysis of data from different energy equipment installed in the clients' buildings) which resulted in a better service to existing customers; the technical solution itself is not commercially available on the market.

Another example is the BA Solar project (BIN 02\_2021\_002), in which a kitchen and an allergen-free catering delivery system was built for people with food allergies and intolerances. Such a cooked meal preparation service does not yet exist on a commercial basis in any European country. The project has developed recipes that can cover the needs of people with different types of intolerances and tested a system for the preparation, sale and distribution of cooked food. Although the project has not yet succeeded in finding an economically viable model in Slovak conditions, the Norwegian partner is preparing to test it in Norway, where the purchasing power is significantly higher.

In the field of education, a good example is the project of the Slovak University of Technology (BIN SGS03\_2022\_03), which focused on capacity building of non-teaching staff of universities in the field of project management and research management. This topic has not yet been systematically addressed in Slovakia. Its high relevance is evidenced by the great interest of other Slovak universities in participating in project events, as well as the interest of entities from third countries (Slovenia, Cyprus) in the implementation of similar activities.

#### B) Relevance of the programme in terms of its implementation

The emergence of the BIN programme was influenced by a variety of external and internal factors that had an impact on its set-up and thus on its relevance. As the new programme operator, RA had to deal with building capacity to manage the programme and setting up processes for its implementation in a short time. The biggest challenge was to comply with the complicated national legislation related to the granting of state aid. The start-up phase was also marked by the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>41</sup>. As a consequence of these initial complications, the launch of the programme was delayed, which made it difficult for grant applicants to find partners from the Donor States (see below).

However, the relevance of the programme was also affected by internal factors that were within the decision-making power of the donors and the programme's governance structures. The most important of these were as follows:

- The interviews conducted as part of this evaluation showed a high level of agreement among stakeholders that combining business and education sector support in one programme was too ambitious. The programme brought too high a diversity of Project Promoters (start-ups, established companies, secondary schools, universities) with different needs and capacities. At the same time, relatively few projects took advantage of the opportunity for cross-sector collaboration; in most projects, businesses worked with businesses and schools with schools, which shows the persistent barriers between the world of education and business in Slovakia. As a result, the combination of education and business support has increased the complexity of programme administration in terms of the variety of legal forms of Project Promoters, the state aid schemes used and the co-financing rate of projects. To a certain extent, this has also reduced the clarity of the overall programme set-up for the general and professional public (Is it a programme for schools or for companies?). In particular, the SGS03 call showed that the programme set up in this way has a lower absorption capacity in the education sector than calls for the business sector, so that part of the resources had to be reallocated to other programmes.
- A weakness of the BIN programme was the funding coming from both financial mechanisms. As it was not possible to combine both sources in one call, similar calls were launched, differing mainly in the source of the allocated funding (BIN01

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<sup>41</sup> The first call for BIN SGS01 was launched in June 2020.

and BIN02, SGS02 and SGS03). This approach was not entirely clear to potential applicants; some project proposals were submitted in both calls, causing complications in the project approval process.

- The final relevance of the business component (Outcome 1) was also to some extent influenced by the selection of the Project Promoters that received a grant to implement their project plans. The analysis of the sample of supported projects showed that, in terms of the likelihood of achieving the project objectives or long-term impacts, the projects can be divided into three groups:
  - Projects that were directly related to the beneficiary's previous main activity, e.g. the development of a specific application for building energy management in the case of KOOR (BIN 01\_2021\_001), which has been involved in this activity for a long time. This type of project generally had a high chance of achieving the objectives set, strengthening the competitiveness of the Project Promoters and bringing economic effects for the company.
  - Projects where the Project Promoter had significant knowledge or experience in a given subject area but did not have a finished product to offer on the market. This group includes, for example, the Save the Bees project (BIN SGS01\_2020\_023), which had a successful product for monitoring bee hives and wanted to transfer this technical solution to another segment (school buildings). The second example is a project by BA Solar (BIN 02\_2021\_002), which was working on the topic of food intolerances but had not yet offered commercial services in this area. This group of projects also includes BIN SGS01\_2020\_012 by WAKIVAKY, which has created a new branch of its business from waste material from its core business (eco-skins used in a sewing workshop for the automotive industry), focusing on upcycling unused leather offcuts into designer seats, bags and cases. This type of project has generally successfully completed the innovation phase; its risks lie mainly in the commercialisation phase, which de facto determines whether or not the project will have positive economic impacts on the company. At the time of the evaluation interviews, none of the three examples above was sufficiently economically viable.
  - The projects of Project Promoters who were active in a different segment and did not have sufficient know-how and experience in the area targeted by the project. Thus, the beneficiary's main objective was to use the opportunity of the grant to diversify into a new area. An example is the project of Novota Art (BIN 01\_2021\_010)<sup>42</sup> aimed at developing intelligent furniture for the elderly and disabled, although neither the company nor its Norwegian partner had previous experience in the field of social services or health care, or in the development of complex technical equipment. This type of project represents the highest risk in terms of achieving its objectives, as was confirmed in the case of the project in question, which ended up in the prototype development phase with no chance of being marketed in the foreseeable future. The contribution of such a project to the competitiveness of the Project Promoter is unclear.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> It was the largest project of the BIN programme in terms of approved grant amount (almost EUR 1.9 million).

<sup>43</sup> The Project Promoter of the project, Novota Art, declined to participate in the evaluation interview. Information on the project is therefore based on available documentation and an interview with the Norwegian project partner.

- Last but not least, the high administrative complexity of project implementation has also had an impact on the relevance of the programme. Despite the willingness and significant assistance of RA staff, many Slovak Project Promoters were critical of the principle set-up of the monitoring and control mechanisms of the BIN programme – in their view, they were built on a primary mistrust of the Project Promoters and instead of being results-oriented they were primarily focused on the detailed accounting of the grant provided. The administrative complexity of the programme from a bilateral cooperation perspective is analysed in Section D.

### C) Specific target groups

The BIN programme was only partially oriented to address the needs of specific target groups, through the thematic area WT/AAL, which focused on assisting the elderly and sick to live independently. In total, there were 11 projects (of which 8 under Outcome 1 and 3 under Outcome 2), i.e. about one third of all projects supported. This target group was highly relevant for the BIN programme as it will continue to grow given the demographic development in Slovakia. In most cases, GII projects have delivered environmental solutions useful for the whole population or for certain sectors of the economy, i.e. without targeted benefits for specific target groups.

According to the Concept Note, young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs were also explicitly defined as a priority target group of the BIN programme. Nevertheless, the target value for the indicator *Number of women or young entrepreneurs supported* was set rather modestly at four. According to the final report of the programme, this target was slightly exceeded – a total of five entrepreneurs falling into the category of young or women entrepreneurs were supported. One of them is the startup WAKIVAKY by young entrepreneur Dominika Bukatovičová, which produces original leather and textile products from upcycled materials.

Based on the interviews conducted with secondary and higher education institutions, it can be noted in this context that they implemented the principle of inclusion in their projects – students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning disabilities were targeted in project activities. For example, in the framework of the cooperation between SVS Levice and Glemmen Upper Secondary School, both schools applied the principles of fair selection of students participating in international mobility. On the Slovak side, these were students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (mainly single-parent families), on the Norwegian side, students from families with a migrant background. For many students on both sides, this was ultimately the first opportunity to travel abroad. Another example is the University of Žilina project, where special attention was paid to students with Asperger's syndrome and other special educational needs.

### D) Bilateral cooperation

Strengthening cooperation, knowledge transfer and increasing mutual understanding between Slovakia and the Donor States is a key aspect of the Norwegian and EEA FM and their added value compared to other grant schemes. In the BIN programme, a twofold approach was taken to the involvement of a partner from a Donor State: while bilateral cooperation was voluntary in the Outcome 1 projects, it was made a mandatory part of the project application in the calls under Outcome 2. Therefore, in the education component (Outcome 2), 100 % of the projects (14 out of 14) had a partner from the Donor State, while in the business component (Outcome 1) only one third (7 out of 21) had a partner from the Donor State. Some of the partners from Norway (four universities and one company) were involved in more than one project. The only bilateral partner outside Norway was the University of Iceland; Liechtenstein had no representative in the BIN projects.



To establish and strengthen cooperation, separate calls were launched from the Bilateral Fund, under which applicants could apply for travel grants of up to EUR 10 000. However, due to travel constraints during the COVID-19 pandemic, the BIN BF01 and BIN BF03 calls did not contract any project; thus, bilateral cooperation was only realistically supported through the BIN BF02 (2021) and BIN BF04 (2024) calls. While BIN BF02 primarily served to search for a mandatory project partner for the BIN SGS02 and BIN SGS03 calls, the BIN BF04 projects supported the establishment of future collaborations as well as participation in professional events (e.g. Oslo Innovation Week).

Interviews with Slovak Project Promoters show that the delayed start of the BIN programme had a negative impact on the search for partners from Donor States. Almost all countries where Norwegian and EEA FM were implemented had a similar programme to support entrepreneurship and innovation, so that entities from different countries were de facto competing in the search for a suitable partner. Thus, the later launch of the Slovak BIN programme meant that some suitable partners from the Donor States had already been contracted by other countries, so that some Slovak Project Promoters had to put more effort into finding a suitable partner, or settle for relatively less attractive partners.

Despite this initial complication, bilateral cooperation proved highly relevant. According to the interviews conducted, the Norwegian and Icelandic partners brought specific know-how in areas where they have a technological edge or unique experience, which allowed Slovak organisations to gain access to advanced technologies, methodologies and practices that would otherwise have been difficult for them to access. At the same time, bilateral partners represent a potential gateway to the markets of Donor States. Examples of the diverse know-how they have brought to the cooperation include:

- Pure Food Norway has provided Slovak partners with specialised know-how in the field of gluten-free bakery products and recipes.
- The Norwegian partners from the SINTEF research institute brought advanced know-how in energy management, response to the needs of the electricity grid and the use of thermal batteries, where they have more experience than the Slovak entities.
- Glemmen Upper Secondary School – Norwegian partners brought experience in green technologies and sustainable development in the school environment, an area where Norway has internationally recognised expertise.
- Partners from UiT The Arctic University of Norway provided advanced know-how in the field of Industry 4.0, digitalisation of production and automation, which was reflected in the creation of the new study programme "Automation and Digitalisation of Production" offered at the University of Žilina from 2026.
- University of Iceland contributed to the project with its long experience in research management and project management. The Icelandic coordinator is a member of the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA) and works as a coach in its working groups.

Thus, after generalizing, it can be concluded that the most common types of know-how transfer were:

- Technology transfer – advanced technologies and technical solutions;
- Methodological transfer – procedures, processes and best practices;
- Sectoral expertise – specialised knowledge in specific areas;
- Managerial know-how – project and research management;
- Approaches and values – environmental awareness, inclusive education.

An important part of the bilateral cooperation was the donor partners of the IN programme, DIKU and AIBA, who accompanied RA from the beginning of the programme preparation and also played a key role in the matchmaking. RA particularly highlighted Innovation Norway's experience in managing innovation programmes in the five beneficiary States, which brought valuable know-how in programme management and bringing together project partners.

Several Project Promoters highlighted the active interest of the Donor States during the implementation of the programme. Their proximity was perceived in particular thanks to the representatives of the Norwegian Embassy who participated in the events organised by the beneficiaries.

It is worth mentioning that even Project Promoters who did not have a partner from a Donor State mentioned in the interview that a bilateral partner could be of significant benefit to their project. For example, for Save the Bees, a partner from Norway would, in their own words, have helped to increase the credibility of the project, facilitated expansion abroad, and allowed the research phase to address the problems of two countries simultaneously. Thus, it can be concluded that in some projects the absence of a partner from the Donor State was a missed opportunity; their participation would have helped to increase both the relevance and the effectiveness of the project.

Interviews with project partners from the Donor States showed that overall they assessed the cooperation with Slovak companies and schools positively. They praise Slovak organisations for their organisational skills, expertise and willingness to take responsibility for the administrative management of the project. The cooperation has yielded mutually beneficial results and in most cases continues after the projects under other programmes have ended. The relevance of the project outcomes from the perspective of the Norwegian and Icelandic partners is demonstrated by the following examples:

- Pure Food Norway appreciated the opportunity to test a new business segment (hot food as a complement to manufactured frozen products).
- The SINTEF Research Institute operates as a foundation that has to earn its own money for its operation and development. Therefore, cooperation with businesses, especially foreign ones, is important and welcome.
- For JaHo Mur og Fasade AS, the joint project with Novota Art was a continuation of previous cooperation in the construction sector and an attempt to diversify into the social services sector.
- Glemmen Upper Secondary School highlighted the good cooperation at both student and teacher level during the mobility with Levice Secondary School.
- The University of Iceland has improved its internal processes between the faculties of the university thanks to the implementation of a project with STU Bratislava. The project also raised the university's profile in the national and international community of research managers.

However, the Norwegian and Icelandic partners had major reservations about the administrative burden of the programme. As some of them have experience with NFM and EEA FM projects in other countries, they perceived Slovakia as a country with excessively high administrative requirements – not only in comparison with their own country, but also in comparison with other European countries. The key problem is considered to be too much emphasis on accounting for every cent spent and limited flexibility in shifting funds between budget lines. In their view, the administrative side of project implementation should be subordinated to the achievement of the set objectives and results, which was not the case for the BIN programme. Bilateral partners also criticised the programme for its



lack of consideration of the administrative capacities and practices of the Donor States. Some of the required documents and reports are not common in Norway; others were even perceived as inappropriate or unethical given the high level of trust between institutions and citizens in Norway. All this required a lot of mutual explanation between the Slovak beneficiaries and their counterparts in the Donor States and unnecessarily led to misunderstandings and a feeling of too much cultural difference.<sup>44</sup> In some cases, Donor State partners even considered early termination of the cooperation due to its administrative complexity, which means that the administrative processes had overlapped to the level of relevance of the whole programme.

On the other hand, the relevance of bilateral cooperation is underlined by the fact that some partnerships continue even after the end of the projects. Thus, partnerships have been established which have a medium or long-term perspective, with their cooperation manifesting itself in the form of joint preparation of follow-up projects as well as in the form of further technical and commercial exploitation of the innovations created:

- Horizon Europe programme – active planning of participation in projects (STU Bratislava with University of Iceland, University of Žilina with UiT The Arctic University of Norway, KOOR and SINTEF);
- Erasmus+: joint project for education submitted (BA Solar and Pure Food Norway), exchange agreements signed (STU Bratislava with University of Iceland);
- Preparation for commercialisation of new products and services in the markets of the Donor States (BA Solar and Pure Food Norway);
- Seeking investors and other resources to continue joint development (Novota Art and JaHo Mur og Fasade AS).

Overall, it can be concluded that bilateral cooperation has been a relevant and very important part of the BIN programme and that the BIN programme has been an effective tool to strengthen bilateral relations between Slovakia and the Donor States. Its results in the form of long-term institutional linkages, knowledge and technology transfer, as well as capacity building for international cooperation, have gone beyond individual projects and strengthened bilateral relations between organisations and countries as a whole.

#### 7.5.3.2 Conclusions and recommendations

Main conclusions regarding the relevance of the BIN programme:

- C1: The setting of the BIN programme was not optimal. While the programme chose appropriate thematic areas for GII and WT/AAL that were in line with the identified needs of the Slovak Republic, the combination of the business and education sectors in one programme proved to be too ambitious. With a heterogeneous mix of Project Promoters from start-ups, established companies, secondary schools and universities, the administrative complications caused by their different needs and capacities outweighed the synergies. At the same time, few projects have taken advantage of the possibility of cross-sector collaboration between companies and schools, leaving the programme fragmented into two almost separate sectors. As an outcome, the relevance of the education component (Outcome 2) was relatively lower than that of the enterprise competitiveness component (Outcome 1) and the programme was not able to absorb the allocated resources to the expected extent. In

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<sup>44</sup> Some of the projects had a contact person from Slovakia or the Czech Republic on the side of the Donor State partner. In such cases, communication was generally easier and understanding towards the administrative requirements of the programme operator was higher.

terms of programme administration, it also proved inappropriate to combine the NFM and the EEA FM in one programme.

- C2: At the project level, the BIN programme has appropriately addressed the needs of specific target groups, including seniors, people with disabilities and disadvantaged students.
- C3: Bilateral cooperation was a highly relevant and successful dimension of the BIN programme. The projects have established many high quality partnerships with promising sustainability rates. However, the potential of bilateral cooperation has not been fully exploited due to the late start of the programme and the low level of involvement of Donor State partners in the business sector (Outcome 1).

Based on the above conclusions, three recommendations were formulated for the NFP and the Programme Operator:

- R1: Should a similar program be continued, there is a need to (i) decouple support to the business sector from the education sector into separate programs with tailored conditions, criteria and processes, (ii) simplify the combination of the EEA FM and the NFM by allowing more flexible use of both mechanisms in a single call, and (iii) reduce the administrative complexity of program implementation.
- R2: Should a similar programme be continued, it is advisable to maintain the focus on the needs of specific disadvantaged groups.
- R3: In case of continuation of a similar program, there is a need to (i) start program implementation as soon as possible and (ii) significantly increase the level of involvement of Donor State partners in the business sector.

#### 7.5.4 Assessment under the evaluation criterion coherence

Coherence (coherence) is a new evaluation criterion that was added to the OECD/DAC criteria in the 2019 revision<sup>45</sup>. The evaluation under this criterion focuses on how well a given intervention is aligned with other activities, policies and programmes in the same country, sector or institution.<sup>46</sup>

In the context of the ex-post evaluation of the BIN programme, which was carried out in the context of the evaluation of the programmes implemented in the Slovak Republic by the EEA FM and NFM in the 2014–2021 programming period, this is a retrospective assessment of the coherence of the programme. The two evaluation questions identified by the sponsor cover the following aspects of the coherence of the BIN programme:

- 3) What were the synergies and linkages with other interventions of the Programme Operator?
- 4) Did the programme add value without creating duplication with other similar programmes funded by other public or international sources (beyond the EEA FM and NFM funding)? If yes, how?

The following text contains findings, conclusions and recommendations that respond to both evaluation questions posed. In order to make the text easy to read, they are presented in a coherent text.

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<sup>45</sup> OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation (2019): "Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use"

<sup>46</sup> Results Guideline. Rules and Guidance on how to design, monitor and evaluate programmes, manage risks, and report on results. Adopted by the Financial Mechanism Committee on 9 February 2017. Updated March 2021

#### 7.5.4.1 Findings

The Research Agency was established on 1 January 2007 as a state budget organisation with legal personality and a link to the state budget in the Department of Education. Until 30 June 2015, it operated under the name of the Agency for EU Structural Funds of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (ASFEU). This original name reflected its function as an Intermediate Body u for the Operational Programme Education (primary and secondary schools sector) and Operational Programme Research and Development (universities, universities, research organisations and the private sector) in the 2007–2013 programming period. During this period, it built up its capacity and gained significant experience in managing grant programmes, so that it naturally continued as an Intermediate Body in the new OP Research and Innovation<sup>47</sup> in the 2014–2020 programming period.

Based on this starting position, in the process of shaping the BIN programme, RA appeared to be an appropriate Programme Operator for the forthcoming programme, which was to have a broad focus on the research, innovation and education sectors. It was definitively confirmed as the BIN Programme Operator by the Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014–2021 of 26 November 2016.

However, the following years have shown that RA has not been able to capitalise on its previous experience in managing the ESIF in the preparation of the BIN. Due to the specificities of the Norwegian and EEA FM, the know-how from the ESIF was not sufficiently transferable, so that both the capacity to manage the programme and the processes to implement it had to be de facto created anew.

As a result, the first call for BIN SGS01 was launched on 29 June 2020, three and a half years after the MoU was signed. As explained in the relevance findings, the delayed start of the BIN programme disrupted the continuity of support with its predecessor and made it difficult for potential applicants to find partners in the Donor States. Thus, in organisational terms, synergies and linkages with other interventions of the Programme Operator did not emerge to the extent expected.

In terms of content, the BIN programme teetered on the edge of synergies and duplications. Its ambition to appropriately complement EU-funded programmes has been largely fulfilled, but the unusual breadth of its scope has naturally led to partial overlaps with other programmes in the innovation and education sector.

A comparison of the BIN programme with other interventions implemented by the RA showed some similarities with some of the challenges of Component 9 of the Recovery and Resilience Plan. For example, call 9I04–03–V03, aimed at supporting the development of innovative solutions in enterprises, supported a wide range of green technologies, with grant amounts ranging from EUR 200,000 to EUR 2,000,000, similar to the BIN. However, Component 9 calls were mainly to support participation in Horizon Europe, so that also in this call the project proposal had to have already had a previous positive evaluation by the Horizon Europe EIC Accelerator. In contrast to BIN, which supported all stages of the research and innovation cycle, only activities carried out corresponding to technology readiness levels 4–8<sup>48</sup>, i.e. at least from the laboratory testing level, were eligible activities

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<sup>47</sup> In December 2019, OP RI was incorporated into OP II, creating new priority axes 9 to 13. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of the Economy of the Slovak Republic became intermediary bodies in the areas of support to research and innovation. Later, the Research Agency became one of the intermediaries under the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the SR (Component 9 – More Effective Management and Strengthening of Research, Development and Innovation Funding) for the 2021–2027 programming period.

<sup>48</sup> Technology Readiness Level (TRL) scale

under call 9I04-03-V03; neither fundamental research (TRL 1), applied research (TRL 2) nor experimental proof of concept (TRL 3) were supported in this call. An important difference, of course, was the bilateral dimension of the BIN programme focusing exclusively on Donor States.

Partial duplications with other similar programmes under the responsibility of other ministries can be found between BIN projects implemented by Slovak companies (especially in the case of projects without a bilateral partner) and the projects of Priority Axis 9 (Support for Research, Development and Innovation) of the OP II 2014-2020 under the responsibility of the MoE SR. Different calls covered areas of support that were also eligible under the BIN programme, for example:

- The call OPVal-MH/DP/2018/1.2.2-15 aimed at supporting smart innovation in industry supported projects aimed at introducing smart solutions to existing technologies within the existing operations of an enterprise.
- The call OPVal-MH/DP/2018/1.2.2.2-16 aimed at supporting innovation through industrial research and experimental development within the Population Health and Health Technologies domain also supported innovations in the WT/AAL area.
- The call OPVal-MH/DP/2016/3.1.1-03 aimed at supporting new and start-up SMEs supported start-ups similarly to the call BIN SGS01.

BIN is also to some extent comparable to Interreg programmes, in particular the Interreg Slovakia-Austria programme. In the 2014-2020 programming period, it had a specific objective 1.1 *Supporting cooperation of key actors in regional innovation system facilities through knowledge transfer, capacity building and the establishment of common frameworks, joint research and innovation activities and joint research facilities, under which* universities, secondary schools and research institutions could apply for cross-border grants supporting research and innovation. However, the programme was limited to the border regions of the neighbouring countries Slovakia and Austria.

In the field of education, BIN is comparable to the Erasmus+ programme, which, like BIN Outcome 2, supports both institutional cooperation between educational institutions and mobility of students and school staff. The Donor States are eligible countries under Erasmus+, so in theory similar projects to BIN could also be eligible under Erasmus+. The advantage of BIN was the eligibility of investment expenditure, but this was probably not communicated well enough to potential applicants to make them aware of its added value compared to the more well-known and annually announced Erasmus, which in addition allows for partnerships with organisations from all over Europe. It is therefore likely that competition from the established Erasmus+ brand has reduced absorption capacity under BIN Outcome 2, which was particularly evident in the SGS03 call.

As the examples from the projects interviewed in the evaluation show, the added value of the BIN programme was perceived very differently by the beneficiaries:

#### Outcome 1:

- Startup investments – enabling the development of risky technologies through guaranteed funding (Save the Bees);
- Technological independence – creating own solutions instead of depending on third-party commercial products (KOOR);
- International networking – access to Norwegian companies and institutions, continued collaboration (KOOR, BA Solar).

## Outcome 2:

- Technical equipment – procurement of equipment that the school could not afford from its own resources (SVS Levice);
- New study programmes – creation of a new accredited programme in cooperation with a partner university from Norway (University of Žilina);
- Capacity building of specific target groups – non-teaching staff of universities working in the field of research management are not among the target groups in most projects (STU Bratislava);
- International experience – for many students from disadvantaged backgrounds the first trip abroad (Glemmen High School).

In the long term, the added value of the BIN programme has manifested itself in the form of economic impacts for most of the supported companies, including increased revenues and profitability, strengthened technological capabilities, expanded market opportunities and an overall increase in competitiveness. Exceeding the targets in the area of intellectual property and new technologies shows the good quality level of the supported projects, which have brought real innovation to the Slovak economy. The programme has also successfully fulfilled the function of know-how transfer between Donor States and Slovakia, through technology transfer, methodological transfer, sectoral expertise in specialised areas, management know-how, as well as the transfer of approaches and values in the field of environmental awareness and inclusive education.

An important added value that has been confirmed after the end of the programme is the sustainability of the partnerships established. Most of the bilateral project collaborations continue in 2025, which shows the establishment of long-term institutional links between Slovakia and the Donor States.

### 7.5.4.2 Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the assessment of the program's previous findings, the following conclusion regarding the coherence of the BIN programme:

C4. The key added value of the BIN programme lies in the combination of quantifiable economic benefits for the supported entities, transfer of know-how between Slovakia and the Donor States, strengthening of the Slovak innovation ecosystem and the establishment of long-term institutional links with the Donor States. In terms of content, the BIN focused on areas that are the subject of support from various donors, in particular the European Union. Although the overall setting of the programme – in particular the combination of GII and WT/AAL themes and cooperation with Donor States – was unique, it did not avoid partial duplications. In Outcome 1, the most overlaps were identified with the calls of Priority Axis 9 (Support to Research, Development and Innovation) of the OP II 2014–2020 under the responsibility of the MoE. In Outcome 2, there were mainly duplications with calls of the well-established and well-known Erasmus+ programme, which probably limited the interest of secondary and higher education institutions in the BIN programme.

Based on the above conclusion, a recommendation was formulated to the NFP and the Programme Operator:

R4: In case of continuation of a similar programme, duplication with the ESIF programmes should be eliminated. This can be achieved by strengthening the unique aspects offered by the EEA FM and Norwegian FM – for example, by making the involvement of partners from Donor States mandatory.

## 7.6 Evaluation of the ACC programme

### 7.6.1 Programme description

#### 7.6.1.1 Preparation of the ACC programme

The preparation of the ACC programme started in 2017 as part of the national preparation for the implementation of the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms for the period 2014–2021. The Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the Donor States – the Kingdom of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – identified the territory's climate vulnerability and lack of a systemic response to climate change as a priority area for a systematic solution.

The programme design was based on the worsening climate conditions and the low preparedness of municipalities and ecosystems for the impacts of climate change. The programme was based on the recognition that Slovakia's greatest environmental challenges are related to urbanisation, outdated infrastructure, wetland degradation and low environmental literacy. At the same time, it was identified that the ESIF did not sufficiently cover the needs of the Bratislava region, which created room for complementary solutions from EEA and Norway Grants.

#### 7.6.1.2 Institutional framework

The programme was responsible for:

- Programme Operator: MoE SR.
- National Focal Point: MIRD SR
- Donor Programme Partners: NEA, DSB and NVE

The preparation was based on Concept Note, which was consulted with national partners and donors. It also took into account experiences from previous EEA and Norway Grants funded programmes (e.g. Blue Schools) as well as strategic documents at national and European level:

- Updated Strategy for Adaptation of the Slovak Republic to the Adverse Impacts of Climate Change (2018),
- Environmental Strategy 2030 (approved in 2019),
- Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement,
- EU 2030 Climate & Energy Framework.

#### 7.6.1.3 Objectives and programme design

The objective of the programme was to contribute to climate change mitigation and reduce vulnerability to climate change at local and regional level through a combination of investment and education activities at local level (soft and hard measures). The programme was designed to:

- Promote an integrated approach – linking mitigation and adaptation to climate change,
- focus on the local level – municipalities, schools, non-profit sector,
- strengthen bilateral partnerships with institutions from Donor States,

- linked hard and soft measures at the project level (so-called integrated projects), i.e. infrastructure interventions with awareness-raising and education activities.

Two main Outcomes were defined in the programme:

1. Increased climate resilience and responsiveness in the target areas (Outcome 1),
2. Increased capacity of target ecosystems to adapt to climate change (Outcome 2).

A complementary component was bilateral cooperation with Donor States (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein), which promoted know-how exchange, training and joint projects.

#### 7.6.1.4 Financial framework of the programme

- Total grant: EUR 18 216 000 (of which EEA EUR 5.43 million and NFM EUR 12.79 million),
- National co-financing: EUR 3 214 588,
- Total allocation: EUR 21 430 588.

The allocation of the program grant was adjusted three times during the program period. According to the concluded Program Agreement No. 115/2019, the original amount of the program grant was set at EUR 16,000,000 (of which EUR 5,000,000 came from the EEA FM and EUR 11,000,000 from the NFM).

Subsequently, the program allocation was increased by Addendum No. 1 to the Program Agreement to EUR 18,216,000 (of which EUR 5,000,000 came from the EEA FM and EUR 13,216,000 from the NFM). Another amendment, Addendum No. 3, increased the total program grant to EUR 20,366,000 (of which EUR 5,850,000 came from the EEA FM and EUR 14,516,000 from the NFM).

The final change was a reduction in the grant amount by Addendum No. 4 to EUR 18,216,000 (of which EUR 5,425,000 came from the EEA FM and EUR 14,516,000 from the NFM).

The programme included open calls for projects (including small grants scheme), one pre-defined project and bilateral activities.

#### 7.6.1.5 Programme implementation

The implementation of the programme ran from 2020 to 2024 and was affected by several external factors:

- COVID-19 pandemic (delays in implementation and procurement),
- Inflation in 2022-2023 (increased prices of materials),
- Constraints in schools and lack of project management capacity.

The Programme Operator's response was:

- Extension of deadlines, strengthening of methodological support,
- Allocation of additional funding (for approved projects from calls ACC01 – ACC04),
- Flexible assessment of outputs and allowing the implementation of soft measures by the beneficiaries' own capacities.



The programme was implemented through the following main calls:

- ACC01 – ClimaUrban: the call was funded by the EEA Grants and was intended for Slovak cities with a population of more than 15 000 inhabitants. The aim of the call was to develop action plans for mitigation and adaptation to climate change in the territory of cities and to implement concrete measures in accordance with the action plan. The date of publication of the call was 29 November 2019.
- ACC02 – ClimaUrban: the call was funded by Norway Grants and was addressed to Slovak cities with a population above 15,000. The objective of the call was identical to ACC01. The publication date of the call was 29 November 2019.
- ACC03 – ClimaEdu – Raising school awareness: the call was funded by Norwegian grants and the state budget of the Slovak Republic. It was intended for primary and secondary schools. The aim was to raise pupils' awareness of mitigation (mitigation) and adaptation (adaptation) to climate change through theoretical teaching as well as through the implementation of concrete physical measures in schools and on school grounds. The date of publication of the call was 31 December 2019.
- ACC – BF 01: the call was funded by EEA and Norway Grants. The aim of the call was to support short-term initiatives in a partner country with a clear bilateral profile, which served to strengthen bilateral relations between Slovakia and the Donor States Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, while the initiatives/activities implemented had to be directly related to the objectives and expected results of the ACC Programme. The date of publication of the call was 10 February 2020.
- ACC04 – ClimaLocal – Ecosystems: call funded by the Norwegian funds and the national budget of the Slovak Republic. The main objective of the call was to restore and strengthen the capacity of degraded wetland ecosystems to adapt to climate change and ensure the sustainable delivery of their ecosystem services, in order to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on the environment and the quality of life of the population. The date of publication of the call for proposals was 15 December 2020.
- ACC05 – ClimaInfo – Awareness Raising: call funded by Norwegian grants and the State Budget of the Slovak Republic. The main objective of the call was to contribute, through a combination of soft and hard measures, to increase the climate literacy of individuals by popularising the latest scientific knowledge, innovative approaches and best practices on climate change mitigation and adaptation with a view to practical application in everyday life. The publication date of the call was 15.12.2020.
- Call for additional funding: call funded by EEA and Norway Grants. The aim of providing additional funding for contracted projects with significant infrastructure elements implemented under the Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change (ACC) Programme was to help the Project Promoters to cope with the economic challenges of extraordinary price increases that occurred through no fault of the Project Promoters themselves. The intention was to ensure that the planned project outcomes were achieved within the timeframe set in accordance with the project contracts concluded. Additional funding was earmarked for technical (hard)

mitigation and/or adaptation measures under contracted projects contributing to the indicator 'Number of climate change measures implemented' under output 1.1 (Call ACC01/ACC02) or 'Number of physical climate change measures implemented in schools' under output 1.2 (Call ACC03) or 'Estimated area of wetland ecosystems restored (m<sup>2</sup>)' under output 2.1 (Call ACC04). The date of publication of the call was 10.1.2023.

In addition to the above-mentioned calls, one pre-defined project was implemented under the programme, which focused on investment measures, educational activities and awareness-raising at the Climate Change and Environmental Education Centre (Living Lab) in Dropie.

### Selection of projects

The projects were selected on the basis of the criteria of efficiency, cost-effectiveness and environmental benefit. In line with the principles of the EEA and Norwegian grants, emphasis was also placed on transparency and equal opportunities, as well as on taking vulnerable populations into account. The highest interest from applicants was registered for the ACC03 call for primary and secondary schools and for the ACC05 call – ClimaInfo – Awareness Raising. The lowest proportion of approved applications out of the total number of proposals submitted was achieved in the ACC05 call, where the success rate was only 11 %. Conversely, the highest proportion of approved applications out of the total number of proposals submitted was achieved in call ACC04 – Ecosystems, where the success rate was 75 %.

Table 22: Number of project applications submitted and number of project applications approved per call of the ACC programme

Call code	Number of project applications submitted	Number of approved project applications
ACC01	7	3
ACC02	8	6
ACC03	123	30
ACC04	8	6
ACC05	36	4
PDP1	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>50</b>

Source: MoE SR

### Number of approved projects broken down by outcomes

#### Outcome 1: Increased climate resilience and capacity to respond to climate change in target areas

44 projects were approved under this area, of which:

- 9 urban projects from calls ACC01 and ACC02,
- 30 school projects on environmental education from call ACC03,

- 4 information and awareness raising projects by NGOs from call ACC05,
- 1 pre-defined project of the Dropie Environmental Centre.

#### Outcome 2: Increased adaptive capacity of target ecosystems to climate change

Outcome 2 was determined by the ACC04 call, which approved 6 projects, 5 of which were successfully completed. The implemented projects focused on:

- construction of dams, wooden dikes and vegetation strips,
- introduction of automated monitoring systems and interactive educational elements,
- peatland restoration (e.g. project SK-CLIMATE-0039).

#### Programme management and adaptation to challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic caused delays in project selection, contract preparation and actual implementation of activities. High inflation in 2022-2023 has led to unplanned price increases for construction materials, jeopardising the implementation of infrastructure measures in particular. In response to these challenges:

- There have been transfers of funds within the programme and additional provision of funds by Donor States,
- cost-saving measures were taken (e.g. implementation of soft measures by the beneficiaries' own capacity),
- temporal flexibility has been allowed through exceptions to the general rules on eligibility of expenditure.

The high level of risk was particularly evident in projects with large investment components – two projects had to be closed early without receiving support (from calls ACC02 and ACC04) and one project was partially completed (from call ACC02). Despite these challenges, 47 of the 50 contracted projects were successfully completed in full.

#### 7.6.1.6 Programme indicators and values achieved

The programme indicators were defined at Outputs and Outcomes level in accordance with the regulations of the financial mechanisms.

#### Outcome indicators

##### Outcome 1 – Increased climate resilience and capacity to respond to climate change within the target areas

- Estimated annual reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of supported entities (in tonnes): 3 024.82 t
- Number of people who have indicated that their behaviour is more climate friendly: 46 862
- Proportion of the Slovak population benefiting from living in cities with increased resilience and responsiveness to climate change: 13.13 %

## Outcome 2 – Increased ecosystem adaptability

- Estimated number of people benefiting from ecosystem improvement measures: 166 421
- Improved environmental status of ecosystems supported: yes

## Output indicators

### For Outcome 1:

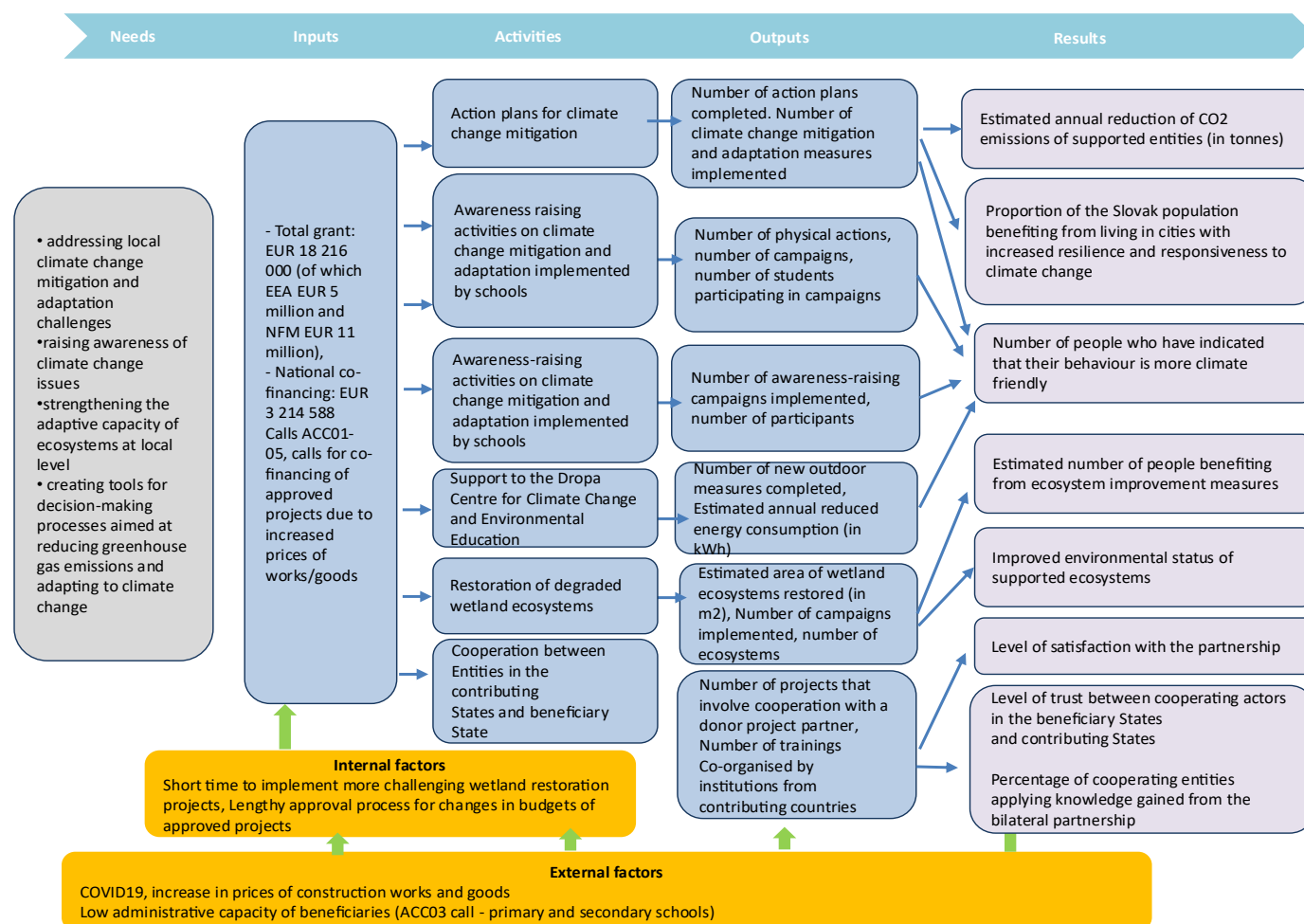
- Output 1.1: Mitigation action plans
  - Number of action plans completed: 8
  - Number of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures implemented: 167
- Output 1.2: Awareness-raising activities on climate change mitigation and adaptation implemented by schools
  - Number of physical actions reflecting climate change implemented in schools: 150
  - Number of schools implementing awareness-raising campaigns: 30
  - Number of students participating in awareness-raising campaigns: 24 718
- Output 1.3: Awareness-raising activities on climate change mitigation and adaptation
  - Number of participants reached by the campaigns: 80 530
  - Number of awareness-raising campaigns implemented: 43
- Output 1.4: Dropa Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Education supported for additional demonstration measures and educational programmes
  - Number of new outdoor climate change mitigation and adaptation measures completed: 7
  - Estimated annual reduced energy/electricity consumption (in kWh): 24 589,34
  - Number of students who have completed educational activities/courses: 1 389
  - Number of local decision-makers and managers who completed the workshops/courses: 134

### For Outcome 2:

- Output 2.1: Restoration of degraded wetland ecosystems
  - Estimated area of wetland ecosystems restored (m<sup>2</sup>): 5 012 248
  - Number of awareness-raising campaigns implemented: 5
  - Number of wetland ecosystems supported: 19

## 7.6.2 Theory of change

Figure 7: Theory of Change\_ACC



Source: authors' own elaboration

The theory of change for the ACC programme systematically defines the logical framework through which the programme was intended to contribute to the goal of increased climate resilience and reduced GHG emissions at the local level. This framework consists of the following key elements:

### Needs

The programme was based on identified challenges such as need:

- respond to the negative impacts of climate change at the local level,
- strengthen public awareness and behaviour in favour of climate action,
- restore damaged ecosystems, especially wetlands,
- develop tools and action plans for local government decision-making.

### Inputs (resources)

A total of EUR 21,430,588 was available for the implementation of activities (of which EUR 18,216,000 came from the EEA FM and NFM grants). Implementation was carried out through calls ACC01 – ACC05 and supplementary calls for project cofinancing.

### Activities

The activities implemented can be divided into four main areas:

- Climate change adaptation and mitigation measures (e.g. wetland restoration, green infrastructure, building renovation, photovoltaics, e-bikes, green roofs),
- education and awareness-raising activities (especially in schools and communities),
- development of action plans for municipalities,
- development of bilateral cooperation with partners from Donor States.

### Outputs

Measurable outputs of the programme included:

- number of ecosystems restored and acreage of wetlands revitalised,
- number of action plans and public campaigns,
- number of schools and awareness raising participants,
- estimated annual energy savings and CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions.

### Outcomes

The programme generated:

- improved environmental status in the supported localities,
- increased resilience of ecosystems to climate change,
- Increased public awareness and behavioural change,
- increased trust and knowledge transfer between partners in the Slovak Republic and Donor States.

## Impacts

Although long-term impacts are difficult to quantify over the lifetime of the programme, the expected impacts are:

- Improved quality of life in cities,
- contribution to national climate targets,
- Strengthening the capacity of local communities to cope with climate risks.

## Internal and external factors

The effectiveness of the programme has been influenced by internal and external factors:

- Internal: limited time for implementation, lengthy public procurement, weak capacity of some Project Promoters,
- External: COVID-19 pandemic, increase in prices of construction works and materials.

Based on the ACC programme's theory of change, there was a clear and logical link between objectives, activities, outputs and outcomes, which created a prerequisite for the effective achievement of the programme's stated objectives. Identified needs such as increasing resilience to the negative impacts of climate change, restoring ecosystems, improving public awareness or supporting planning at the municipal level were appropriately translated into specific activities funded by the programme.

The activities implemented in the four areas – adaptation and mitigation measures, education and awareness raising activities, development of action plans and bilateral cooperation – had sufficient potential to produce the necessary outputs in the form of restored wetlands, implemented campaigns, developed action plans and public participation activities. The outputs achieved were in line with the planned indicators and directly contributed to the expected outcomes, namely improved environmental status, increased resilience of ecosystems to climate change and changed behaviour and public awareness.

It should also be stressed that the programme activities focused on both mitigation and adaptation measures. In cases where implemented projects prioritised adaptation measures (e.g. water retention, building renovation, green infrastructure) over direct mitigation interventions (e.g. installation of renewable energy sources, replacement of heat sources), there was a risk that the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction targets would not be fully achieved. This mismatch may have reduced the programme's contribution to the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction target, even though the adaptation measures have significantly strengthened the resilience of the supported areas.

Although implementation was affected by both internal factors (e.g. weak capacity of some Project Promoters, lengthy public procurement) and external factors (COVID-19 pandemic, rising prices of building materials), the logic of the theory of change was maintained and programme activities were generally implemented in a way that was conducive to achieving the objectives.

From an evaluation perspective, it can therefore be concluded that the type of activities chosen had adequate capacity to produce the necessary outputs and contribute to results that, according to the available data, translated into improvements in the condition of the supported sites, increased environmental awareness and capacity building at the local community level. The theory of change provided a robust framework for assessing the



effectiveness and consistency of interventions with programme objectives, but the predominance of adaptation measures may have posed a risk of underachievement of CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation targets.

### 7.6.3 Assessment based on the evaluation criterion of cost-effectiveness

Outcome 1 represented the main strategic pillar of the ACC programme aimed at reducing the vulnerability of the urban environment to climate change impacts and increasing the adaptation readiness of target groups. The supported projects combined both investment and non-investment measures – from the implementation of action plans, green roofs, rain gardens to environmental education in schools.

#### Definition of the evaluation criterion in the context of the FM EEA/NFM

According to the Results Guidance<sup>49</sup>, the criterion Economy is defined as follows:

*The extent to which the programme achieves or is likely to achieve results in an economical and timely manner.*

*The criterion does not only focus on whether the programme/fund could have been implemented more cheaply, but examines whether results of equal or better quality could have been achieved with fewer financial, human or other resources.*

*"Most cost-effective way" means converting inputs (funds, expertise, natural resources, time, etc.) into outputs and outcomes compared to feasible alternatives in the context in which the programme/fund was implemented. The criterion also includes operational effectiveness: how well was the intervention managed?*

To assess the effectiveness of the outputs and outcomes of the ACC programme, the total project grants paid (EEA/Norway grant and national co-financing) for the individual projects implemented were used. The evaluation was based on the ACC Programme Final Report.

The main evaluation questions for the cost-effectiveness criterion and their interpretation

Evaluation question 1: To what extent has the programme/fund achieved or is likely to achieve the intended results (outputs and outcomes as reported in the Result Framework) in an economic and timely manner?

Evaluation question 2: Were there any delays during the implementation of the programme/fund? If yes, what were they?

#### 7.6.3.1 Findings

The main focus of the evaluation was to assess whether the ACC programme was implemented to achieve the intended outputs and outcomes with optimal use of available resources. The evaluation focused on the effectiveness of converting inputs (funds, time, staff capacity) into specific results as defined in the programme Result Framework.

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<sup>49</sup> Results Guideline ([Results Guideline](#))

<sup>50</sup> Translation of the question "To what extent did the Programme/Fund deliver, or is likely to deliver, the planned results (outputs and outcomes in the results framework) in an economic and timely way?" in the sense of the Introductory Report

## Analytical methods used:

- Qualitative content analysis of interviews according to predefined evaluation questions
- Comparison of planned vs. achieved outputs at project level
- Estimation of unit costs (e.g. EUR/person, EUR/measure, EUR/action plan) for selected types of interventions
- Assessment of project timelines against original plans and recorded changes

### Evaluation of the cost-effectiveness criterion for ACC Programme Outcome 1: Increased climate resilience and responsiveness in target areas

Outcome 1 represented the main strategic pillar of the ACC Programme, aimed at reducing the vulnerability of the urban environment to climate change impacts and increasing the adaptation readiness of target groups. It included the pre-defined project Dropie, which aimed to systematically build climate literacy among children and youth. The supported projects combined both investment and non-investment measures – from the implementation of action plans, green roofs, rain gardens to environmental education in schools.

Table 23 provides an overview of the achievement of key outcomes and outputs of the ACC programme against the planned targets. It shows the disbursed funds for the implemented projects and calculates the cost per unit of result, allowing to assess the cost-effectiveness of the intervention. It includes indicators such as the proportion of the population living in cities with increased resilience, the number of people who have reported a change in climate behaviour, and the estimated annual reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. For these indicators, the target and achieved values, the volume of grants disbursed and the calculation of the cost per unit of result (e.g. EUR /capita, EUR /person, EUR /tonne CO<sub>2</sub>) are provided. The table thus makes it possible to clearly identify the cost-effectiveness of the use of funds in achieving the programme's objectives.

Table 23: Cost per unit of Outcome 1

Outcome/output	Indicator	Target value	Value achieved	Project grant disbursed <sup>51</sup>	Cost per unit of outcome
Outcome 1: Increased climate resilience and capacity to respond to climate change in target areas	Percentage of population living in cities with increased resilience (%)	13,5 %	13.13 % (722 150 inhabitants) <sup>52</sup>	9 829 963,29 EUR (implemented projects from call ACC01, ACC02)	13,61 EUR/inhabitant
	Number of people who reported a change in climate behaviour	15 800 persons	46 862 persons	EUR 2 973 648,32 (implemented projects from ACC03, ACC05 call, pre-defined Dropie project)	EUR 63,46/person
	Estimated annual	28 570 t	3 024,82 t	EUR 9 829	EUR 3

<sup>51</sup> Source: Final project reports, EEA FM/NFM + national co-financing

<sup>52</sup> Source: Final Reports of the EN-Climate Programme

CO <sub>2</sub> reduction in tonnes			963,29 (implemented projects from call ACC01, ACC02)	249,77/tonne CO <sub>2</sub> reduced
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Source: ACC Programme Final Report

Table 24 complements this analysis with a comparative look at the cost-effectiveness of the ACC program in an international context. It compares the average unit cost of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or achieving behavioural change with selected programmes from other EU countries. It gives the average cost per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction in the ACC programme, as well as benchmarks from programmes such as Energy and Climate Change in Croatia or the average cost of mitigation in LIFE projects. It also includes the cost per unit of behavioural change using LIFE Slovakia as an example. The aim of the table is to put the outcomes of the ACC programme in a broader context and to allow an assessment of its cost-effectiveness compared to similar European programmes, thus supporting an objective assessment of value for money.

Table 24: Comparison of selected programmes in terms of cost-effectiveness

Programme/country	Indicator	Average unit cost
ACC	Reduction of 1 t CO <sub>2</sub>	3 249,77 EUR/t
Energy and Climate Change, Croatia	Reduction of 1 t CO <sub>2</sub>	selected projects in cities from EUR 3,470 to EUR 6,169/t
LIFE average mitigation projects (EU)	Reduction of 1 t CO <sub>2</sub>	700 EUR /t
LIFE Slovakia – awareness	Behaviour change (person)	85 EUR/person

Resources used:

- European Commission (2020). LIFE and Climate Change Mitigation. Available from: <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/section/life/climate-change-mitigation>  
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/search>
- LIFE CARBON FARMING – <https://climatecarbonfarm.eu/>
- LIFE13 ENV/IT/000536 – [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n\\_proj\\_id=4915](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n_proj_id=4915)
- LIFE Integrated Projects Database – <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm>

Outputs achieved and cost-effectiveness calculations under Outcome 1:

- Output 1.1 (action plans and measures):
  - 8 out of 9 planned action plans were completed
  - Number of actions implemented: 167 (142 planned)
  - Expenditure: EUR 9 829 963,29 (approx. EUR 51 373/action plan)
- Output 1.2 (Schools – campaigns and actions):
  - 30 schools involved (target met)
  - Number of students involved in campaigns: 24 718 (target: 7 600)
  - Physical actions in schools: 150 (target: 86)
  - Expenditure: EUR 1 011 756,68 (approx. EUR 6 745/measure, EUR 40,93/pupil, EUR 33 725,22/school)
- Output 1.3 (Public campaigns):

- Number of participants in campaigns: 80 530 (target: 7 500)
- 43 campaigns implemented (target: 30)
- Expenditure: EUR 1 008 604 (EUR 23 456/campaign, EUR 12,52/participant)
- Output 1.4 (Pre-defined Dropie project):
  - Number of new outdoor climate change mitigation and adaptation measures completed: 7 (7 planned)
  - Annual reduced energy/electricity consumption (in kWh): 24,589.34 (planned 66,521)
  - Number of students who completed educational activities/courses: 1 389 (planned 1 200)
  - Number of local decision-makers and managers who completed the workshops/courses: 134 (planned 360)
  - Expenditure: 953 288 EUR (686 EUR/student with completed course, 38,77 EUR/kWh of reduced energy consumption)

### Main findings

Most of the projects implemented the planned activities in full or extended. In some projects, changes in the scope of activities were implemented, indicating an efficient use of budgets. School projects were typically low-budget but achieved a high ratio of outputs per unit of input, e.g. through a combination of green classrooms, community activities and adaptive reuse of premises.

In the case of city projects, an integrated approach proved beneficial – investment measures were combined with information and planning activities – the development of action plans.

Delays in the implementation of planned activities were mainly related to procurement, the COVID-19 pandemic and price increases. However, all these factors were addressed by the Project Promoters through change procedures or transfers within project budgets. Even in projects that spent less than 100 % of the budget, the planned outputs were often achieved – indicating a high degree of cost-effectiveness.

As shown in Table 23, the cost-effectiveness of the ACC programme in Outcome 1 is high for soft measures (education, behaviour change) and low for hard measures (CO<sub>2</sub> reduction) in relation to the maximum value of EUR 150/t CO<sub>2</sub> set in the Indicator Handbook „Core Indicators 2014–2021“, which was used in the calculation of the target value for the indicator "Estimated annual CO<sub>2</sub> reduction in tonnes". Compared to other similar programmes, e.g. the Croatian Energy and Climate Change programme (table), similar costs per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduced were achieved, with both programmes showing higher unit costs than the benchmark set at 150 EUR /t CO<sub>2</sub>. Comparison with the LIFE programmes shows that on average the unit costs of mitigation in EU LIFE projects are lower, highlighting the need to better target future ACC interventions towards more effective mitigation measures with lower costs per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> reduced in order to maximise the value for money of the public funds spent and to meet the programme's set climate objectives.

In terms of cost per citizen and school, the programme is very efficient, but in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, the programme appears to be economically inefficient. This is mainly due to the setting of the eligible activities of the ACC01 and ACC02 calls, which focused not only on mitigation but mainly on adaptation. This was also reflected in the outcomes achieved. The set benchmark of 150 EUR/tonne of reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the Core Indicator document

could not be met by the implemented activities, which were primarily oriented towards adaptation and not mitigation. Similar cost-effectiveness has been achieved, for example, in the EEA FM/NFM urban projects in Croatia (Energy and Climate Change Programme, <https://eeagrants.org/archive/2014-2021/projects>).

Interviews with Project Promoters revealed that Project Promoters rated the value for money as 4 or 5 (scale 4: rather positive, 5: very positive), highlighting the benefits of the programme in particular in the possibility to implement integrated projects. A number of Project Promoters reported that they had managed to implement a higher number of activities than originally planned with a limited budget, which shows that was an efficient management of the allocated funds. All purchases were made in accordance with the Public Procurement Act, which also confirms the cost-effectiveness of the expenditure implemented by the Project Promoters.

Some respondents (schools) stressed that administrative support (e.g. for the public procurement) would increase the efficiency of implementation. Some Project Promoters considered spending limits or complexity in the public procurement rules as hindering efficient implementation (purchases of small tangible assets).

The ACC programme has delivered a high number of quality outputs and outcomes with a judicious use of budget. Effectiveness has been underpinned by a combination of soft and hard measures, bilateral cooperation as well as flexible management in a challenging period of pandemic and inflation. The programme failed to achieve the target price of EUR 150 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> reduced due to a number of factors, such as the focus of projects also on adaptation measures, increased prices of civil works and goods (benchmark set in 2016, projects implemented in 2021–2024).

#### Cost-effectiveness assessment for ACC Programme Outcome 2: Increased climate resilience and capacity to respond to climate change in target areas

The implemented projects that were approved under the ACC04 call were expected to contribute to Outcome 2. That call focused on the restoration of wetland ecosystems as a form of adaptation to climate change. The aim was to improve the environmental status of the selected areas, to restore the natural functions of wetlands and to implement accompanying information campaigns. The call supported 5 projects located in different parts of Slovakia.

#### Analysis of the outcomes achieved:

Table 25: Cost per unit of Outcome 2

Outcome/output	Indicator	Target value	Value achieved	Project grant disbursed <sup>53</sup>	Cost per unit of outcome
Outcome 2: Increased adaptive capacity of target ecosystems to climate change	Estimated number of people benefiting from ecosystem improvement measures	3 000	166 421	EUR 3 551 740,31 (implemented projects from call ACC04)	EUR 21,34/capita
	Improved environmental	Yes	Yes (19 ecosystems,	EUR 3 551 740,31	186 933,40 EUR/ecosystem,

<sup>53</sup> Source: Final project reports, EEA FM/NFM + national co-financing

status of ecosystems supported		total area: 5 012 248 m <sup>2</sup> )	(implemented projects from call ACC04)	0,71 EUR/m <sup>2</sup>
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Source: ACC Programme Final Report

In total, more than 5.01 million m<sup>2</sup> of ecosystems have been restored, which is a significant contribution to increasing landscape retention capacity and biodiversity. The activities implemented have positively affected approximately 166 421 people, for example through improvements in the quality of the environment, accessibility of natural spaces and information campaigns. Across all projects, improvements in the environmental status of the 19 ecosystems supported (marked as "yes") were achieved. All projects implemented at least one public campaign, for a total of 5 campaigns.

As can be seen from the above quantified outcomes, the ACC04 call has been implemented effectively considering the scale of the activities implemented and the overall impact on the population. The projects have achieved qualitative objectives (improved environmental condition, public activities), while quantitative outputs such as wetland acreage and number of people impacted are at a level that exceeds expectations within the available budget.

The environmental benefits are highly relevant, although the extent of restored area varied considerably between projects.

Table 26: Cost-effectiveness based on cost per m<sup>2</sup> of wetland restored

Project code	Area restored (m <sup>2</sup> )	Grant paid (EUR)	Cost per m <sup>2</sup> (EUR)
ACC04P01	229 869,00	494 298,80	2,15
ACC04P02	2 941 500,00	819 688,62	0,28
ACC04P03	214 513,59	676 796,27	3,15
ACC04P04	1 550 000,00	857 243,49p	0,55
ACC04O05	76 365,00	703 713,13	9,22

Source: ACC04 project final reports

The most efficient project was the implementation of ACC04P02, which achieved the largest restored area at the lowest cost per unit (0.28 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>). This outcome was achieved through a combination of large scale restoration, favourable ground conditions, lower technical complexity and effective project management. On the contrary, project ACC04P05 was the least efficient, with a cost of up to 9.22 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>, which was due to the implementation on a small area of the Klatovy Arm, where the high fixed costs were reflected in the unit cost, and the higher technical or administrative complexity of the restoration in the site (construction of a gravel island and gravel bench).

Table 27: Cost-effectiveness based on the number of people benefiting from ecosystem improvement measures

Project code	Number of people (estimate)	Grant paid (EUR)	Cost per person (EUR)
ACC04P01	5 523	494 298,80	89,52
ACC04P02	72 964	819 682,62	11,23

ACC04P03	64 884	676 796,27	10,43
ACC04P04	7 417	857 243,90	115,63
ACC04005	15 633	703 713,13	45,01

Source: ACC04 final project reports

The ACC04P03 project achieved the highest efficiency in this indicator (10.43 EUR /person), closely followed by ACC04P02. The ACC04P04 project was the least efficient (115.63 EUR /person), with a low number of inhabitants benefiting from the measures, while on the other hand this project achieved the best cost-effectiveness on the basis of cost per m<sup>2</sup> of wetland restored.

The evaluator made cost-effectiveness comparisons with other programmes and EU countries. According to the study 'Restoration is an investment. Comparing restoration costs and ecosystem services in selected European wetlands' ([https://www.jwld.pl/files/2025-01-JWLD-24.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.jwld.pl/files/2025-01-JWLD-24.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)), the average cost of restoring 1 hectare of wetland in the 100 projects analysed was 9 084 EUR /ha, i.e. 1.10 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>. From the LIFE database, projects from Latvia and Hungary were found in the evaluator's survey, with costs ranging from 500 – 3 900 EUR /ha (0.05 – 0.39 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>). In specific locations with higher costs (e.g. protected areas), costs ranged up to EUR 1.50/m<sup>2</sup> (Latvia) and EUR 1.40/m<sup>2</sup> (Hungary).

As noted in the study "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Water and Wetlands" ([https://www.cbd.int/financial/values/g-ecowaterwetlands-teeb.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.cbd.int/financial/values/g-ecowaterwetlands-teeb.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)), restoring ecosystems (wetlands) can be very costly, although not always, but many experiences from around the world suggest that restoring degraded ecosystems can bring significant benefits to people and often provide ecosystem services at a lower cost than alternative man-made infrastructures. Restoration often provides a suite of economically and socially important ecosystem services such as water regulation and soil stabilisation. Therefore, the costs of wetland restoration can vary over a wider range.

A survey of other projects published on the web that focused on wetland restoration yielded the following costs per 1 m<sup>2</sup> of restored wetland.

Table 28: Cost-effectiveness comparison: ACC versus other EU countries

Country/Programme	Cost per 1 m <sup>2</sup> of wetland restored	Notes
Slovakia – ACC (ACC04)	0,71 EUR/m <sup>2</sup>	Calculation according to 5 projects
Germany – LIFE+ projects	1,50 – 4,00 EUR/m <sup>2</sup>	Depends on wetland type and location (e.g. Seelter See, Peene)
Netherlands – Delta Programme (2015 – 2023)	2,50 – 6,00 EUR/m <sup>2</sup>	Comprehensive measures, often combined with flood protection features
Czech Republic and Poland – LIFE	1,00 – 2,50 EUR/m <sup>2</sup>	Projects aimed at revitalising river arms, floodplains, wetlands
Latvia – LIFE Revital projects	0,90 – 1,50 EUR/m <sup>2</sup>	Restored peatlands and wetlands in protected areas
Hungary – LIFE and GEF projects	0,80 – 1,40 EUR/m <sup>2</sup>	Aimed at the restoration of riverbanks and wetlands in Hortobágy NP

Source:

[https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC97635/lb-na-27494-en-n.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC97635/lb-na-27494-en-n.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)



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[https://www.dutchwatersector.com/news/room-for-the-river-programme?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.dutchwatersector.com/news/room-for-the-river-programme?utm_source=chatgpt.com)  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324819602\\_Netherlands\\_Approach\\_to\\_Flood\\_Control\\_Including\\_Room\\_for\\_the\\_River\\_Program\\_-\\_Policies\\_and\\_Implementation\\_Challenges](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324819602_Netherlands_Approach_to_Flood_Control_Including_Room_for_the_River_Program_-_Policies_and_Implementation_Challenges)  
[https://english.deltaprogramma.nl/binaries/delta-commissioner/documenten/publications/2012/09/18/delta-programme-2013/Delta%2BProgramme%2B2013%2BEN\\_tcm310-334162.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://english.deltaprogramma.nl/binaries/delta-commissioner/documenten/publications/2012/09/18/delta-programme-2013/Delta%2BProgramme%2B2013%2BEN_tcm310-334162.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)  
[https://www.ijc.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/Wetland-Value-Paper-April-27-2006-e.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.ijc.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/Wetland-Value-Paper-April-27-2006-e.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)  
[https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC113815/jrc-eea-env\\_joint\\_report\\_final\\_online2.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC113815/jrc-eea-env_joint_report_final_online2.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)  
[https://publications.deltares.nl/EP3502.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://publications.deltares.nl/EP3502.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

#### Key findings:

The ACC04 challenge under the ACC programme made a significant contribution to Outcome 2 – increasing ecosystem resilience to climate change in the target areas. All 5 supported wetland restoration projects implemented actions that improved the environmental status of a total of 19 ecosystems over an area of more than 5 million m<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, accompanying public information campaigns were implemented and a direct or indirect positive impact on more than 166 thousand inhabitants was achieved.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, the appeal showed a high ratio of outcomes to the resources invested. The average cost of restoring 1 m<sup>2</sup> of wetland was 0.71 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>, which is below the average of comparable projects from other EU countries (e.g. Germany: 1.5–4 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>, the Netherlands: 2.5–6 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>). Public participation is also significant – the average cost per person benefiting from the measure (EUR 21) is below that of other programmes, where it often exceeds EUR 20–40.

However, the cost-effectiveness of individual projects showed considerable variability. The most cost-effective project was ACC04P02 (0.28 EUR /m<sup>2</sup> and 11.23 EUR /person), while the least efficient was ACC04P05 (9.22 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>). When analysing the cost per number of persons benefiting from the measures, project ACC04P03 (10.43 EUR /person) had the lowest cost. The cost-effectiveness of the projects implemented under the ACC04 call was influenced by several factors. A key determinant was the size of the revitalised area, with unit costs per m<sup>2</sup> decreasing significantly for larger revitalisation scales, as fixed costs for design, permitting processes and project management were budgeted over a larger area. Another important factor was the technical and terrain complexity of the area to be restored – projects implemented in easily accessible, less damaged or less challenging sites had lower unit costs as they did not require extensive landscaping or removal of contamination. The efficiency of project management and the ability to deal with administrative issues with the affected stakeholders also influenced costs.

Comparison with international studies confirms the competitiveness of Slovak projects in terms of cost-effectiveness. In addition, all projects achieved qualitative objectives – improvement of wetland condition and implementation of education – which further increases their benefits.

The findings show that the ACC programme was able to effectively mobilise limited financial resources to achieve relevant environmental objectives. The implemented measures were not just formal fulfilment of the objectives, but made a real contribution to the ecological stability and increased climate resilience of the areas. In the context of public expenditure,



the ACC04 projects represent an example of good practice in the field of climate change adaptation in the Slovak context.

#### 7.6.3.2 Answers to the evaluation questions

To what extent has the programme achieved the intended results in a cost-effective and timely manner?

Outcome 1 of the ACC programme was achieved with high cost-effectiveness in terms of educating and changing the behaviour of the population. Soft interventions such as campaigns and educational activities showed favourable unit costs per capita, with Project Promoters themselves rating the value for money positively (Likert scale: ratings 4 to 5). In contrast, investment (hard) measures that were intended to contribute to CO<sub>2</sub> reduction experienced lower efficiency, mainly due to external factors such as the increase in the price of construction materials, inflation, the COVID-19 pandemic and delays in procurement. These factors led to an increase in unit CO<sub>2</sub> abatement costs, which amounted to EUR 3,211/t CO<sub>2</sub> compared to the planned EUR 150/t.

Overall, however, the combination of hard and soft measures has produced synergistic effects that have contributed to a reduction in average costs and wider societal impact. The most effective performance indicator was the proportion of the population living in cities with increased resilience, which reached 13.13 % (722,150 inhabitants) against a target of 13.5 %, at a favourable cost of EUR 13.45/capita. On the contrary, the highest costs were recorded for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, where only 11 % of the target was achieved (3 024.82 t out of the planned 28 570 t).

In the area of soft measures, the programme significantly exceeded the target values – 46 862 persons were recorded in the behaviour change indicator against the planned 15 800, at a unit cost of EUR 63.46/person. Unit costs for school and community projects were very effective: EUR 25.43 – EUR 63.46/person with behaviour change, EUR 6,745/physical measure in school, EUR 12.52/participant in public campaigns and EUR 33,725/school. The quality of the outputs of the programme is also demonstrated by the results such as 167 measures implemented (142 planned), 24 718 pupils involved (7 600 planned), 43 campaigns (30 planned) and more than 80 000 participants in public campaigns.

The Dropie project has made a significant contribution to the 'number of people with behaviour change' indicator and has been assessed as cost-effective in terms of both costs and results. It has created a replicable model of environmental education with quality outputs (training modules, methodologies, field activities) that has the potential to be applied beyond the target area. The project demonstrated an economic use of resources by implementing the educational activities efficiently and to an appropriate extent, while providing know-how applicable in other regions.

In Outcome 2, the programme demonstrated high cost-effectiveness – with a limited number of projects, it achieved large-scale physical outputs and positive social impact. Activities were implemented at a scale commensurate with the capacity of the Project Promoters and the nature of the territories, with indicators pointing to an efficient use of public funds. The ACC04 call had clearly defined objectives and achieved or exceeded the planned results in terms of social impact and environmental benefits. The 5 012 248 m<sup>2</sup> of wetland restoration achieved significantly exceeded expectations, with a positive impact on 166 421 inhabitants (against a target of 3 000). The average cost of 0.71 EUR /m<sup>2</sup> was lower than in comparable projects in Germany, the Netherlands, Hungary or Latvia. Improvements in environmental status were confirmed in all 19 ecosystems, with a cost per person

benefiting from the measures of only EUR 21.34, representing a cost-effective use of resources in the context of environmental interventions.

Overall, the ACC programme achieved most of the planned outcomes, exceeding the targets in soft measures and demonstrating high cost-effectiveness. Hard measures, particularly in the area of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, showed low effectiveness due to the high unit costs and the primarily adaptive nature of the measures implemented.

**Were there any delays in the implementation of the programme? If so, which ones?**

There were delays during the implementation of the programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, price increases and the lengthy procurement process. Some projects took longer to implement (e.g. green roofs), others had to adjust the scope. These risks were mitigated by the flexibility of the programme operator and the adjustment of budgets.

Also for ACC04 projects contributing to Outcome 2, according to additional information from project reports and interviews, in some cases there were delays due to permitting processes, seasonal conditions, or conservation recommendations, but this is common in similar green projects. As was evident from the Project Promoter interviews, communication with the Programme Operator was responsive and results-oriented.

The Dropie project did not report significant delays; it was stable, flexible and well prepared compared to other projects, which enabled it to implement activities on schedule.

#### **7.6.3.3 Conclusions and recommendations**

C1: Outcome 1 was achieved with high cost-effectiveness, particularly in the area of awareness and behaviour change, where the program demonstrated above-average per capita effectiveness. Soft interventions (education, campaigns) were successfully combined with physical interventions (outreach, schools), which increased the effectiveness of spending. Outputs 1.2 and 1.3 achieved low unit costs, demonstrating efficient use of resources with high levels of public and student involvement. The Dropie project has been assessed as effective in terms of both costs and results, creating a replicable model of environmental education, applicable beyond the target area. Its low-cost operation and methodologically high-quality outputs (training modules, methodologies, field activities) demonstrate that the public sector can achieve high cost-effectiveness in the field of awareness-raising and education. The Dropie project has demonstrated the cost-effective use of resources. The rules for the procurement of low-value goods and the complexity of the public procurement rules have administratively burdened the Project Promoters and slowed down the implementation of the ACC03 call projects (purchases of small tangible assets).

Outcome 2 was achieved with a higher cost-effectiveness ratio – especially in terms of the extent of the area of ecosystems restored and the population involved. The unit cost per 1 m<sup>2</sup> of wetland restored was approximately 0.71 EUR /m<sup>2</sup>, which is low compared to international standards. Under LIFE programmes, unit costs for wetland and natural habitat restoration projects typically range between 0.80 and 3.50 EUR/m<sup>2</sup>. The ACC04 call achieved a particularly favourable cost-effectiveness (0.71 EUR/m<sup>2</sup>), achieving not only ecological but also community and educational

effects. The programme has demonstrated a high uptake rate and the ability of Project Promoters to implement measures with above average performance. Investments in ecosystem restoration have had both positive environmental and social impacts (benefiting more than 166,000 people).

- C2: Failure to reach the target for annual CO<sub>2</sub> reduction in tonnes has meant that the types of measures implemented have not been primarily mitigation in nature, but rather support/saving and adaptation in nature. Output 1.1 was also the most costly due to the increase in prices of construction works and goods, which increased the total cost per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> reduced. Despite external constraints (COVID-19, increased prices, lack of administrative capacity in the case of schools), the Project Promoters were able to implement most of the planned activities, which shows an efficient management of the allocated funds.

#### Recommendations to the NFP and Programme Operator:

- R1: Maintain a combined model of support (integrated projects) that combines soft and hard measures (technical solutions with outreach and community activities). Maintain a flexible and result-oriented management model, consider introducing simplified reporting of expenditure, reduce administrative burden for small projects (schools), strengthen technical support for applicants already at the application preparation stage.
- R2: Introduce the calculation of unit costs (e.g. EUR /person, EUR /campaign, EUR /measure) as a mandatory part of project reports, which will simplify the ongoing assessment of cost-effectiveness.
- R3: Maintain support for ecosystem restoration as a backbone for mitigation and adaptation measures in the landscape, with emphasis on low costs and high public benefits.
- R4: Assess the realism of setting targets for CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions in future programs focused on mitigation and adaptation measures.

#### 7.6.4 Evaluation based on the evaluation criterion coherence

##### Definition of the evaluation criterion in the context of the EEA FM/NFM

According to the Results Framework<sup>54</sup>, the Coherence criterion is defined as follows:

*The degree of compatibility of the programme/fund with other interventions in a given country, sector or institution.*

*Coherence includes an analysis of synergies and linkages with other interventions implemented by the same institution (programme operator or fund manager). Coherence also implies consistency of activities with the interventions of other actors in the same sector or programme area (e.g. with EU-funded activities); complementarity, harmonisation and coordination with other actors; and the extent to which the programme/fund adds value while avoiding duplication of effort.*

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<sup>54</sup> Results Guideline ([Results Guideline](#))

The evaluator divided the assessment of ACC programme coherence into external coherence and internal coherence. For external coherence, the coherence of the ACC programme with the interventions of selected EU programmes in the field of climate change mitigation and adaptation was assessed. For internal coherence, the coherence between the two sets of programme activities was assessed:

1. the group of activities that primarily contribute to the outcome: *Increased climate resilience and responsiveness within the target areas*

- Action plans for climate change mitigation and adaptation implemented by local authorities in urban areas (2 calls, EEA FM/NFM funding)
- Awareness-raising activities on climate change mitigation and adaptation implemented by schools (Small Grants Scheme – 1 call, NFM funding)
- Awareness-raising activities on climate change mitigation and adaptation (1 call, NFM funding)
- Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Education in Dropie supported additional demonstration measures and educational programmes

2<sup>nd</sup> group of activities that primarily contribute to the outcome: *Increased adaptive capacity of target ecosystems to climate change*

- Restoration of degraded wetland ecosystems (1 call, EEA NFM funding)

Main evaluation questions for the criterion and their interpretation:

Evaluation question 3: What were the synergies and linkages with other interventions of the Programme Operator?

Evaluation question 4: Did the programme add value without creating duplication with other similar programmes funded by other public or international sources (beyond the EEA FM/NFM funding)? If yes, how?

Analytical methods used:

- Desk-research and theory of change
- Qualitative content analysis of interviews according to pre-defined evaluation questions
- Comparison of project-level outputs achieved with ACC programme results and with activities of other EU programmes

#### 7.6.4.1 Findings

##### Coherence with national policies

The coherence of the programme with national and European policies was systematically taken into account during its preparation, namely in the Concept Note phase. This coherence was subsequently reflected in the individual calls, with the requirement for coherence being carried over to the level of the projects submitted. Each applicant was required to demonstrate the coherence of its project with the relevant strategic documents, thus ensuring the substantive continuity and strategic coherence of the interventions.

In particular, the main strategies with which projects had to be aligned included:

- "A Greener Slovakia" – the Environmental Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030, the so-called Envirostrategy 2030;
- Strategy for Adaptation of the Slovak Republic to Climate Change;
- The Ministerial Concept of Environmental Education, Training and Awareness Raising until 2025;
- Orientation, principles and priorities of the water policy of the Slovak Republic until 2027;
- Updated National Strategy for Biodiversity Conservation until 2020;
- Action plan for the implementation of measures arising from the updated Biodiversity Strategy 2020;
- Updated Wetland Care Programme for Slovakia 2015–2021: Action Plan for Wetlands 2015–2018.

This framework ensured that the measures implemented under the ACC Programme not only reflected national and European priorities, but also strengthened synergistic links between different levels of public policy.

In addition to the consistency of the projects with the above-mentioned strategies, the supported cities from ACC01 and ACC02 also linked the projects' activities to their existing spatial plans and strategic documents, as well as to the plans of the higher territorial units.

#### Complementarity with other programmes:

Data obtained from interviews with Project Promoters (ACC01 – ACC05 calls and Dropie project) confirm that:

- the ACC programme has proved to be a suitable instrument for financing local adaptation projects that cannot be supported from other sources (OP QE, IROP),
- the ACC programme, compared to other EU programmes, has enabled applicants to implement integrated projects combining soft and hard measures,
- Project Promoters actively linked ACC activities with projects from the OP QE, IROP or the Recovery Plan,
- project activities implemented were aligned with local and national climate strategies,
- they particularly appreciated the simplicity and flexibility of the programme, which allowed them to "open up the climate issue" at local level without complex bureaucracy,
- no duplication with other instruments was noted, indicating the well-defined and complementary focus of the programme.

A survey of selected EU programmes in the Slovak Republic that contribute to the objective of "climate change mitigation and adaptation" identified the following coherence and complementarity of ACC programme activities with EU programmes.

## OP QE

The 2014–2020 OP QE contains a number of specific objectives and measures that are thematically related and complementary to the ACC Programme, in particular in the areas of climate change adaptation, ecosystem restoration and promotion of environmental awareness.

Common thematic areas in the areas of climate change adaptation, ecosystem restoration and environmental education where activities complemented each other without duplication:

*Priority Axis 2: Supporting adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change, with an emphasis on flood risk*

- Specific objective 2.1.1 – Enhancing the environmental stability of the landscape
  - Support for water retention measures in the landscape, revitalisation of streams and wetlands
  - Coherence: the ACC programme (in particular ACC04) has funded similar types of ecosystem restoration (wetlands, habitats), thus complementing this priority through integrated solutions
- Specific objective 2.1.3 – Reducing the negative impacts of floods
  - Construction and rehabilitation of green flood protection measures
  - Coherence: ACC applied nature-based solutions (e.g. rain gardens) in the urbanised environment, complementing technical measures from the OP

*Priority Axis 3: Protection and care of the environment*

- Specific objective 3.1.1 – Improve the quality and quantity of protected habitats
  - Investments in the restoration and management of protected areas, habitats and NATURA 2000
  - Coherence: ACC has financed the restoration of ecosystems also outside protected areas, thus contributing to overall ecological connectivity

*Priority axis 4: Technical assistance and awareness-raising activities*

- Promoting environmental awareness and education
  - Campaigns and activities for the general public and schools
  - Coherence: the ACC05 call of the ACC programme built on this strand, but more specifically supported interactive and practical environmental education

## IROP

The IROP 2014–2020 included a number of measures that were complementary to the ACC programme activities, in particular in the areas of urban development, green infrastructure and public spaces.

There were common areas in urban development, public space, school facilities and green infrastructure where the programmes' activities complemented each other without duplication:

*Priority Axis 4 – Improving the quality of life in the regions with an emphasis on the environment*

- Specific objective 4.1 – Improving the quality of urban life through the regeneration of settlements
  - Support for the revitalisation of neighbourhoods, urban areas, parks, transport and pedestrian infrastructure
  - Coherence: the ACC programme complemented this activity through green space planting, heat island reduction and community elements (e.g. rain gardens), thereby increasing the climate resilience of settlements

*Priority axis 2 – Improving public services in the regions*

- Specific objective 2.2 – Improve the quality and accessibility of education services at all levels
  - Reconstruction and modernisation of school premises, improving the quality of the school environment
  - Coherence: the ACC03 call from ACC supported green elements and environmental projects directly in school premises

*Cross-cutting element: Sustainable Urban Development (SUD)*

- Implemented through integrated urban development strategies in regional and larger cities
- Coherence: ACC complemented these strategies with pilot solutions and small community projects (e.g. ACC01 and ACC02) which were not subject to IROP investment priorities

**Recovery and Resilience Plan**

The Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021–2026) contains a number of components that are coherent with the activities of the ACC program, particularly in the areas of climate change adaptation, sustainable green infrastructure, and systems change in cities and schools.

It focuses on common areas in climate change adaptation, public infrastructure, school activities and green actions where activities complement each other without duplication:

*Component 2 – Adaptation to climate change*

- Investments 2A and 2B – Building green infrastructure in cities
  - Promoting green roofs, rain gardens, shading elements, tree planting
  - Coherence: direct coherence with ACC calls (ACC01 – ACC02) which supported the same types of measures in a smaller scale and integrated form (combination of soft and hard measures)

*Component 1 – Reform and investment in education*

- Investment 1.2.2 – Renovation and development of school campuses with green infrastructure elements
  - Green schoolyards, environmental education, participatory elements
  - Coherence: the ACC03 call from ACC targeted support for practical climate–environmental measures in schools, which preceded the systemic investments of the Recovery and Resilience Plan

*Component 5 – Sustainable transport and healthy air*

- Investment 5.1 – Green measures to reduce emissions and improve air quality
  - Planting green areas, water retention, reducing heat islands
  - Coherence: the ACC programme supported the preparation of action plans in cities in preparation for larger investments

**LIFE 2021 – 2027**

LIFE 2021–2027 has several components and challenges that are coherent and complementary to the ACC programme, especially in the areas of ecosystem restoration, biodiversity and nature-based adaptation. Their activities have been complementary, without duplication.

*Sub-programme: Nature and biodiversity*

- Focus: protection and restoration of wetlands, peatlands, natural habitats, strengthening ecological connectivity
- Coherence:
  - ACC projects (in particular from the ACC04 call and the Dropie project) restored wetlands and promoted biodiversity outside NATURA 2000 sites
  - LIFE projects focused on protected areas and systemic conservation
  - Complementary: ACC acted as a precursor or testing platform for larger LIFE interventions

*Sub-programme: Adaptation to climate change*

- Focus: nature-based measures in settlements, green infrastructure, water retention, elimination of heat islands
- Coherence:
  - ACC implemented pilot solutions in cities, schools, communities
  - LIFE programme funded larger systemic projects (e.g. LIFE DELIVER, LIFE TreeCheck)

*Common elements:*

- Both schemes supported:
  - Collaboration with municipalities, schools and the non-profit sector,



- preparation of adaptation plans and green projects,
- activities without the need for co-financing (in the case of ACC, advantageous for smaller beneficiaries).

#### Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2022

The RDP SR 2014 – 2022 included a number of measures that are coherent and complementary with the ACC programme, especially in the areas of landscaping, ecosystem services, green infrastructure and biodiversity.

##### *Measure 10 – AECM*

- Aim: to promote sustainable management with a positive impact on soil, water, landscape and climate
- Coherence:
  - ACC has complemented the AECM objective with non-agricultural elements such as tree planting, wetlands or adaptation elements in settlements
  - AECM promoted measures on agricultural land; ACC, on the other hand, promoted measures in urban areas and outside LPIS land

##### *Measure 7 – Basic services and village renewal in rural areas*

- Focus: improvement of the public space in rural villages, including planting of green areas and restoration of public spaces
- Coherence:
  - ACC supported ecological, nature-friendly solutions (e.g. rain gardens, community plantings) that could be integrated into broader RDP investments
  - Most RDP investments were infrastructure-oriented, while ACC delivered innovative green content
- Added value without duplication:
  - None of the projects evaluated created duplication with other funding schemes. Instead, the programme created complementarities – especially in the area of outreach activities and smaller green interventions.
- Example: the Dropie project, implemented by Slovak Environmental Agency (SEA) as a Project Promoter, contributed significantly to environmental education and increased climate literacy. This project built on SEA's long-standing activities in the field of EETA, enriching their content with a climate theme and demonstrating the potential for replication in other regions.

#### Analysis of the degree of internal coherence of the ACC programme

There is a high degree of internal coherence between the activities implemented by the ACC programme. The activities were complementary and created synergies towards achieving the main objectives of the programme without any negative impacts or duplication.

One of the key elements was the activity "Restoration of degraded ecosystems – wetlands", which directly supported the achievement of the result "Increased resilience and responsiveness to climate change in the target areas". This activity brought visible ecological benefits in the form of restored wetland and peatland area. Although programmatically defined as an adaptation measure, its impacts extend beyond mitigation – revitalised wetlands contribute to carbon sequestration, regulation of the local microclimate and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Although CO<sub>2</sub> reduction has not been quantitatively monitored under the programme, its benefits can be considered relevant in terms of functional ecological processes.

The pre-defined Dropie project also strengthened the degree of internal coherence of the programme in the areas of environmental education, participation and biodiversity. The project integrated nature-based measures such as planting indigenous trees, building small water features (e.g. microbiotopes, ponds) and introducing innovative educational elements in the work with youth and the public. These micro-measures have significantly contributed to increasing the ecosystem stability of the site, creating favourable conditions for species-rich communities and strengthening the environmental awareness of the population.

All the activities supported under the programme were thematically related, geographically and materially aligned, and formed a logical whole without duplication or contradiction. An important added value was also the linking of technical measures with education, participation and direct involvement of the population, which strengthened the sustainability and local acceptability of the interventions.

#### 7.6.4.2 Responses to evaluation questions

##### What were the synergies and linkages with other interventions of the Programme Operator?

The ACC programme was set up to complement other strategies and programmes of the Programme Operator, e.g. measures from the OP Environment, national strategies such as the Strategy for Adaptation of the Slovak Republic to Climate Change, Envirostrategy 2030, the Ministerial Concept of Environmental Education, Training and Awareness Raising until 2025. The Project Promoters were provided with methodological documents and expert support based on the experience of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic with the implementation of environmental instruments at the local level.

The ACC Programme reflected the strategic priorities of the MoE (as Programme Operator) in the field of climate change adaptation, mitigation and awareness raising. Synergies between the different calls under the programme (ACC01 to ACC05 and the pre-defined Dropie project) were high, with the different types of measures complementing each other and forming a thematic whole.

The Ministry, as the focal point for environmental policy, coordinated the calls so that the programme did not overlap with schemes of other ministries and to exploit gaps in the system of support for local climate action. An example of this synergy is:

- The linking of the ACC01 and ACC02 calls (action plans for cities to mitigate and adapt to climate change) with the ACC03 (schools) and ACC05 (communication campaigns) calls, which together formed the basis for wider climate literacy and support for local partnerships,

- linking the pre-defined Dropie project to school and community activities through environmental education and climate action pilots,
- complementarity between soft interventions (education, planning, campaigns, cooperation with partners) and hard interventions (greening, rain gardens, wetland restoration).

The Programme Operator made it easy for applicants to demonstrate the alignment of projects with national concepts (e.g. Envirostrategy 2030, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy), thus strengthening the content framework and avoiding thematic dispersion of projects.

The calls of the programme were thematically linked to the specific objectives of the OP QE, in particular in the field of adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change, landscape revitalisation and environmental awareness.

In addition, the ACC Programme created significant synergies with the LIFE 2021–2027 Programme, in particular in the area of ecosystem and wetland restoration. Both schemes contributed to the same strategic objective – enhancing ecological stability and adaptation to climate change – but focused on different target groups, scope of interventions and type of support.

The interviews with Project Promoters clearly showed that:

- The programme was perceived as a suitable instrument to finance local projects that cannot be implemented through other funds,
- It allowed for an integrated approach by combining soft (education, planning) and hard (greenery, rain gardens) measures,
- Project Promoters actively linked ACC outputs to projects implemented under the OP QE, IROP or RRP,
- Individual programme activities were in line with local action plans and national adaptation strategies.

In addition to the challenges, synergies were also present in the pre-defined Dropie project, which linked education, environmental elements and community activities, thus contributing not only to the ACC objectives but also to the long-term environmental education strategy coordinated by the Department.

Has the programme added value without creating duplication with other similar programmes funded by other public or international sources (beyond the EEA FM and NFM funding)? If so, how?

The ACC programme has added clear value to the system of environmental interventions in Slovakia, primarily by:

1. It has complemented schemes such as the OP QE, IROP, RDP and Recovery Plan, which often supported larger scale infrastructure investments but did not allow smaller actors (e.g. schools or smaller cities) to implement a mix of soft and hard measures. ACC thus filled a gap in support for community adaptation.
2. It supported pilot and innovative solutions that other programmes did not yet cover (e.g. integrated green solutions on school campuses, local action plans with

community involvement), which was appreciated by the Project Promoters themselves in interviews.

3. It did not create duplication as it focused on actors and types of interventions that were outside the main scope of other public programmes. Project Promoters actively linked ACC outputs to projects from the OP QE, IROP or the Recovery Plan, and the programme allowed them to prepare documents, validate concepts and test approaches (the so-called pre-investment phase). It shared a common focus on wetland restoration with LIFE, but the assessment found that the two programmes did not create duplication. LIFE focused mainly on the systematic restoration of natural wetlands in protected areas, while ACC04 of the ACC programme filled a space outside protected areas, allowed for rapid local implementation, application of research and raised awareness of the importance of wetlands even in less publicized locations. The programmes thus complemented each other strategically without duplication, with ACC often acting as an 'incubator' for larger-scale LIFE interventions.
4. It has raised the visibility of the climate agenda at the local level, which other programmes have achieved only marginally or through large systemic projects (e.g. LIFE). The programme has thus contributed to long-term behavioural change and a strategic framework for smaller actors.

An example of the contribution is the pre-defined Dropie project, which directly built on SAŽP's long experience in environmental education and expanded it to include elements of climate education, thus creating a model example of combining biodiversity, mitigation and environmental awareness – without clashing with existing activities of other donor mechanisms.

#### 7.6.4.3 Conclusions and recommendations

- C3: The ACC programme was coherent in content, challenges were aligned with programme objectives and did not overlap thematically or geographically. Linking the ACC01 and ACC02 (action plans action plans of cities for climate change mitigation and adaptation) appeals with ACC03 (schools) and ACC05 (communication campaigns), which together formed the basis for broader climate literacy and support for local partnerships. Complementarity between 'soft' interventions (education, planning, campaigns, working with partners) and 'hard' interventions (green spaces, rain gardens, wetland restoration). The pre-defined Dropie project strengthened the degree of internal coherence of the programme in the areas of environmental education, participation and biodiversity. The project integrated nature-based measures such as planting indigenous trees, building small-scale water features (e.g. microhabitats, ponds), and introducing innovative educational elements into youth and public outreach. These micro-measures have significantly contributed to increasing the ecosystem stability of the site, creating favourable conditions for species-rich communities and strengthening the environmental awareness of the population. The programme created space for cross-sectoral cooperation, but there was no systematic mechanism to link projects together.
- C4: The ACC programme effectively complemented existing support schemes from EU programmes, particularly in areas where flexibility or accessibility for smaller

Project Promoters was lacking and in the area of integrated projects. The ACC programme has allowed the combination of several types of activities within a single project, which has been significantly appreciated by Project Promoters (cities, schools, NGOs). The ACC programme was set up to complement other strategies and programmes of the programme operator (e.g. measures from the OP QE, national strategies such as the Strategy for Adaptation of the Slovak Republic to Climate Change, Envirostrategy 2030, the Ministerial Concept of Environmental Education, Training and Awareness Raising until 2025).

**Recommendations for the NFP and Programme Operator:**

- R5: Encourage horizontal networking of Project Promoters – e.g. by creating platforms where activities from different calls can be linked. Create a single database of sample measures and examples of good practice.
- R6: Increase opportunities for follow-up calls for successful projects. The high level of internal coherence in the ACC has shown that smaller pilot solutions deserve to be continued. Introduce an evaluation criterion for projects' continuity with existing planning documents at local or regional level (e.g. SECAP).
- R7: Maintain and further develop complementary design to other EU programmes, national and EU strategies.
- R8: Use the results of the ACC projects as input for public policy making, e.g. when updating the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Slovak Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. The aim is to strengthen the feedback loop between practical interventions and public policy making and to ensure that successful solutions (e.g. wetland restoration, adaptation measures in municipalities, education campaigns) are taken into account in policy planning.

## 8 Overall summary

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide the managing and implementing structures with an independent and objective assessment of the implementation and results of the 6 programmes supported by the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism in the programming period 2014–2021.

### *Programme “Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation (CLT)”*

The relevance assessment of the contemporary arts component of the CLT programme confirmed its high relevance and consistency with the current needs of the Slovak Republic. The programme has actively responded to the needs of vulnerable populations. A key element of the relevance of the programme was the successful bilateral cooperation with the Donor States. The calls launched recorded a high level of interest from applicants. The programme has maintained its relevance in the context of unforeseen external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The contemporary arts component of the CLT programme showed a very high coherence with existing national cultural support schemes. The programme complemented well the offer of national grant schemes, in particular the Fund for the Promotion of the Arts and the Fund for the Support of National Minorities, as well as the Integrated Regional Operational Programme 2014–2020. Unlike the national schemes, the CLT enabled the implementation of strategic projects.

### *Programme “Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion (LDI)”*

The LDI programme was highly relevant to the needs of target groups, in particular children and youth in the LDD, the MRC and institutions working in the field of inclusive education, employment and community development. The intervention logic of the programme was based on a thorough needs analysis and was aligned with national priorities and objectives as well as those of the Donor State. The programme responded to current challenges such as low availability of community services, high unemployment, early school leaving and the need for local capacity building. The evaluation confirmed the correct thematic and geographic focus of the calls (on the RMC and LDDs respectively).

The LDI programme demonstrated a high level of effectiveness in terms of planned outputs and outcomes. Most of the quantitative objectives of the programme were met or exceeded. Qualitative analysis shows significant progress in terms of inclusion, community cooperation and mutual understanding in the supported communities. Many of the projects have established superior partnerships between schools, municipalities and communities and have strengthened trust through joint activities. The main challenges were the uneven quality of outputs depending on the capacity of Project Promoters and the absence of longer-term monitoring of effects.

### *Programme “Domestic and Gender-based Violence (DGV)”*

Internal and external coherence of the DGV programme was ensured to a high degree. The projects were complementary in content and territory, creating the necessary synergies that had a significantly positive effect on the achievement of the intended programme results. The programme generated clear added value in four key areas: content focus, process setting, multi-institutional cooperation and, to a limited extent, international cooperation. External coherence with projects funded by the ESF was ensured without

creating unwanted duplication – the NFM projects were a superstructure to the projects of the OP HR and allowed continuity of funding for services for women experiencing violence and their children.

The maintenance of the benefits achieved by the DGV programme is assured to a high degree over the next five years. Project Promoters have planned project activities consistently and carefully with sustainability in mind, while technical equipment, educational materials and awareness campaigns continue to be used. The biggest challenge for sustainability is the retention of skilled professionals after the end of project funding, which is related to the shortage of skilled workers in the smaller regions of eastern and central Slovakia. Systemic barriers to long-term sustainability lie in the lack of legislative coverage of domestic and gender-based violence, the absence of a coherent legal framework and an unpredictable funding system. A key factor for future sustainability will be the transposition of EU Directive 2024/1385 on combating violence against women, which can bring about systemic changes and stabilisation of funding.

*Programme “Cross-border Cooperation/Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency” (GGC)*

The GGC programme in the 2014–2021 programming period represented a comprehensive intervention aimed at strengthening the integrity, transparency, efficiency of public administration, justice, public procurement and cross-border cooperation. Its design was based on a thorough analysis of the needs of the SR and reflected strategic priorities at national level. The relevance assessment showed that the programme was closely linked to the current challenges and needs of the target groups and was able to respond flexibly to unforeseen circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine.

The effectiveness of the programme was demonstrated by meeting or exceeding most of the indicator targets. The activities implemented have led to real changes in the areas supported, fostered the establishment of new partnerships, know-how transfer and the expansion of target groups. The analysis of implementation highlighted some systemic challenges, in particular the fragmentation of themes and the high administrative burden, which limited the potential for synergies and restricted the involvement of smaller actors.

*Programme “Business Development, Innovation and SMEs” (BIN)*

The BIN programme responded appropriately to key challenges of the Slovak economy, in particular the need to increase R&D spending and demographic changes related to the ageing population. Bilateral cooperation has proved to be a highly relevant and successful dimension of the programme, resulting in high quality partnerships with institutions from Donor States. Although the programme was not able to exhaust the allocated resources, the targets set were exceeded for most of the measurable indicators. The evaluators concluded that the set-up of the BIN programme was not optimal – the combination of the business and education sectors brought more administrative complications than synergies, while the relevance of the education component was relatively lower.

The BIN programme showed mixed results in terms of coherence with other public interventions. Although the overall setting of the programme was unique due to the mix of themes, partial duplications were not avoided. Duplications were identified with the calls of the Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (Priority Axis 9 Support to Research, Development and Innovation) and with the Erasmus programme. Despite some duplication, the BIN programme has created four key dimensions of added value: (i) quantifiable



economic benefits in the form of increased sales, profitability and new jobs in supported enterprises, (ii) transfer of know-how between Slovakia and Donor States, (iii) strengthening of the Slovak innovation ecosystem and (iv) long-term institutional links with Donor States, with most partnerships continuing in 2025.

*Programme “Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation ACC)”*

The programme has demonstrated that environmental interventions with well-set objectives can be implemented effectively even in complex landscapes, as long as Project Promoters are professionally prepared and interventions are appropriately designed. Overall, the ACC programme achieved its outputs in a cost-effective and timely manner. The flexible management of the programme, the combination of soft and hard measures and the use of existing capacities (e.g. schools) have contributed to its effectiveness. A weakness is the insufficient setting of the CO<sub>2</sub> indicator due to the predominantly adaptive nature of the interventions, which affected its achievement. The programme is an example of good practice in public investment in adaptation to climate change and education.

The ACC programme has achieved a high degree of coherence in relation to other interventions in climate change adaptation, environmental education and awareness and ecosystem restoration. The results of the evaluation showed that the programme was systematically designed to complement existing EU programmes, without creating duplication and with high added value for the target groups. In terms of external coherence, the ACC programme was linked to the strategic priorities of the SR, as well as to the specific objectives of the OP QE, IROP, RDP 2014–2022 and the Recovery and Resilience Plan. The interventions were thematically and geographically complementary, particularly in the areas of urban greening, adaptation, education, outreach and wetland restoration. ACC filled a gap in the available EU programmes, especially for smaller Project Promoters. The ACC programme is a model example of how to complement existing schemes in a targeted and non-duplicative way with solutions that have the potential for long-term impact on community resilience, biodiversity and climate education.

**Recommendations (all intended for NFP and Programme Operators)**

For the CLT program:

- R1: Based on the successful implementation of the contemporary art component, evaluators recommend retaining its main thematic features (audience building, capacity building of Project Promoters, minority and sensitive social issues, mandatory cooperation with partners from Donor States) in the next programming period. Any changes could relate to two areas related to its implementation: (i) increasing the maximum grant amount to a level that would compensate for price increases in recent years, and (ii) finding ways to reduce the administrative burden on the recipient (e.g. through lump-sum expenses and assistance in drawing up cooperation agreements with bilateral partners).
- R2: Based on experience from the 2014–2021 programming period, evaluators recommend increasing the level of active involvement of vulnerable groups in projects, i.e. as artists, creators, or implementers of specific project activities. This can be achieved, for example, by giving such project applications a point advantage over applications that only work with vulnerable groups as an audience.



- R3: In the opinion of the evaluators, the high absorption capacity and growing social and political challenges related to the contemporary art sector in Slovakia require a significant increase in the financial allocation for the support of contemporary art from NFM/FM EEA sources in the next period. For the Donor States, this also represents an opportunity to further increase the relevance of the program and strengthen their role as supporters of free and engaged artistic creation in Slovakia.

For the LDI program:

- R1: In future programmes, maintain and strengthen an integrated and multisectoral approach that links community work, educational institutions and local government. At the same time, we recommend ensuring the systematic participation of target groups, including MRC and youth, in consultations and co-creation of interventions, thereby increasing their meaningfulness, ownership, and effectiveness.
- R2: When setting calls for proposals and evaluation criteria, ensure explicit targeting of MRC – for example, through separate calls for proposals, prioritization points in project evaluation, or allocations. This will increase the effectiveness of interventions towards the most vulnerable groups and fulfill the objectives of the inclusive policies of the Slovak Republic and Donor States.
- R3: In future programming periods, systematically strengthen support for actors with proven expertise in working with MRC and communities and introduce more flexible models of financing and administrative management of projects, thereby increasing the continuity and quality of services and the use of proven approaches by Project Promoters with proven results.
- R4: Integrate high-quality outputs, best practices, and innovations, including those that arise outside formal outcome frameworks, into strategic frameworks and policies at the national and regional levels. This will improve the capture of changes that are not visible through quantitative indicators but are essential for the transformation of community relations and inclusion. Introduce systematic collection of qualitative data (e.g., changes in attitudes, psychosocial impacts) and monitor long-term impacts (e.g., change in attitudes, quality of coexistence, involvement of MRC).

For the DGV program:

- R1: In the future, it is necessary to maintain and further improve the synergy between program areas and their interventions. In order to support results-oriented policy, promoting synergy between interventions within a single program and between programs is even more important. Continue to support programs that have content overlap with the area of domestic and gender-based violence and contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants (LDI – in the section focused on poverty eradication and Roma inclusion, and GGC – in the section on good governance), or merge them while maintaining significant support for the area of domestic and gender-based violence.
- R2: However, this link should not result in a reduction in the number of interventions, but rather the opposite – their expansion, as well as the expansion of target groups with a need to raise awareness of gender issues. It is also necessary to expand the target groups and involve men, married couples, employees and local government

representatives, and other groups to a much greater extent, and to adapt the scope of interventions accordingly. Family stereotypes can only be effectively overcome if both genders are sensitized to this issue at the same time.

- R3: Continue to set the content focus so that the projects implemented are complementary to activities financed from other mechanisms, including the State budget and EU funds. Explicitly identify this complementarity with EU and national programs and strategies in the program agreement and calls for proposals, while emphasizing the alignment of the program's focus with the planned transposition of Directive 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) 2024/1385 of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence.
- R4: For the future, it is necessary to establish regular communication between the various contributors who support gender equality, non-discrimination and solutions to gender-based violence, for example through a contributor platform, in order to coordinate support so as to increase the synergy of such support and eliminate unnecessary duplication.
- R5: Continue to promote multi-institutional cooperation as a mandatory element in project implementation and, conversely, consider the obligation to organize opening and closing conferences for projects implemented through the small grants scheme under the DGV program. It is worth considering either changing this activity to a non-mandatory (optional) activity; or modifying it – using online platforms or hybrid formats; or holding a mandatory opening conference and a joint closing conference; or allowing Project Promoters to present the results of the project as part of their other individual activities, where organizations present all their activities carried out during the year, or introducing a central planning calendar for such events – joint planning of opening and closing conferences if the obligation to carry out this type of activity is maintained.
- R6: Strengthen the possibilities of cooperation with the Norwegian partner through networking of organisations active in the field of domestic and gender-based violence, e.g. through more intensive matchmaking events (online/ in person) or through the so-called "matchmaking events" (online/ face-to-face). Reverse matching – an online platform with data on one side about Norwegian organisations with a short description of their activities and content focus with information about availability for partnership in the NFM project (possibly also the expected capacity that can be released for the project) and language possibilities, and also the same short description to the Slovak organisation about its activities and the planned project purpose, language and capacity possibilities + contact information. An alternative may be to update, make more functional and attractive the already existing database for the search of partners for EEA and Norway Grants in line with the above. In order to support the development of bilateral relations with Norwegian partners, the programme should be better promoted in the conditions of the Kingdom of Norway, and possibly the possibility to search for partners in other Donor States. International cooperation in supported projects will help to multiply the added value and create it in new areas of gender equality issues.

- R7: Support initiatives aimed at legislative and systemic changes, including the introduction of a consistent and predictable system of financing services provided to women experiencing violence, and further support KMC and strengthen its position within the system of assistance to women experiencing violence.
- R8: Contribute to the transposition of the EU Council Directive by supporting specific activities, specifically through support for research activities (e.g. in the preparation of methodologies, action plans or recommendations for legislation) or through the direct implementation of projects that are in line with its objectives (e.g. a pilot program to create a center for sexually victimized persons SAC through a predefined project).
- R9: Continue to maintain a broad focus in calls for proposals so that recipients can also implement activities targeting women experiencing specific types of violence (sexual, economic, psychological, etc.) and various specific target groups or groups with specific needs (e.g., MRC, people with addictions, isolated women, young women and girls, people with various types of disadvantages, migrant women, etc.), including perpetrators. In terms of absorption capacity, it is necessary to take into account that not all organizations work with these specific target groups (e.g., MRC, people with addictions) and it would be impractical and inappropriate to limit their ability to participate in calls for proposals in the area of DGV, therefore it is not recommended to narrow the eligible activities in calls for proposals to only the specific target groups mentioned above. In the upcoming programming period, evaluators do not recommend announcing a call narrowly specified only for work with offenders. At the same time, however, it is appropriate to retain the option of focusing on work with offenders as part of eligible activities in broadly conceived DGV program calls. The evaluators recommend conducting an in-depth analysis of needs and risks, as well as an analysis of the absorption capacity of eligible applicants in the area of working with offenders (especially potential offenders who themselves identify their behavior as risky), e.g., as part of activities within a predefined project.
- R10: As these are non-profit organizations, external sources of funding for existing and new activities and for maintaining advantages in this area are essential. Therefore, it is recommended that the NFM continue to promote awareness of gender equality through activities that build on existing achievements in the field of gender equality, involve organizations and their existing target groups, and help to disseminate these achievements to other groups of students, pupils, teachers, experts, but also new target groups such as adult men, married couples, employees, and local government representatives.
- R11: In the future, it will be necessary to secure financial, social, and institutional capacities in order to maintain the benefits achieved. Financial capacities mainly consist of contributions/grants from various public and private sector providers. In the area of social capacities, it will be necessary to evaluate investments in raising awareness of gender equality from projects financed by the NFM in the form of changed attitudes and increased awareness of the target groups addressed by the project activities, such as pupils, students, teachers, experts, women and children from MRC, but also the general public, and enable them to disseminate the

knowledge gained through ongoing activities or activities and projects that they themselves will prepare and implement. In the area of institutional capacities, it is necessary to support cooperation and communication between supported organizations, their target groups, and actors in the field of gender equality who have not yet been supported, and to create a platform for the exchange of information, experiences, and examples of good practice, or the preparation of new activities and projects.

For the GGC program:

- R1: Maintain and further develop the flexibility of program management (maintain the possibility of rapid adjustments to schedules and activities, introduce a system of regular assessment of needs and possibilities for program adjustments).
- R2: When setting future programs, continue to ensure consistency with current national and European strategies – require proof of links to strategic documents in each call for proposals, monitor consistency during implementation.
- R3: Continue to develop bilateral and international partnerships – support joint projects, exchange internships and training with partners from Norway, the OECD and the UA, create a platform for long-term cooperation.
- R4: When setting up future programming periods, eliminate program fragmentation – focus on a smaller number of thematic areas, support the creation of thematic clusters, and joint planning of outputs.
- R5: Review the design and setup of grant schemes – adapt processes to smaller entities, provide methodological support and mentoring, test new schemes with pilot groups.
- R6: Reduce the administrative and procedural complexity of the program – digitize processes, introduce model documents, simplify reporting, set up a helpdesk for smaller entities.
- R7: Implement targeted information and motivation campaigns – organize workshops and webinars for new and small entities, prepare clear information materials.
- R8: Regularly analyze feedback from unsuccessful and uninvolved applicants – obtain feedback through questionnaires and focus groups, and adjust program conditions based on findings.
- R9: Strengthen coordination between projects, create thematic clusters, and promote the sharing of outputs and synergies. The recommendation aims to systematically link projects within the GGC program to minimize duplication of outputs and maximize the multiplier effect. We propose creating a central online platform for sharing methodologies, outputs, and examples of good practice; organizing regular thematic workshops and networking events for beneficiaries and partners; and introducing mandatory inter-project consultations when preparing new projects. Thematic clusters should focus on the main areas of the program (integrity, justice, public procurement, cross-border cooperation) and enable joint planning of outputs,

joint impact assessment, and coordinated dissemination of innovations. Such an approach will increase the efficiency of resource use, promote the transfer of know-how, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of results.

- R10: Continue to support innovative and systemic solutions in the areas of integrity, transparency, and cross-border cooperation. We recommend that future calls and project schemes explicitly favor proposals that bring innovative approaches (e.g., digital tools, behavioral interventions, new forms of participation) and systemic solutions with the potential for long-term impact. Support should include pilot projects, experimental activities, and the dissemination of best practices among Project Promoters. It is also important to ensure that innovative solutions are tested in practice and that their results are systematically evaluated and disseminated throughout the program. The Programme Operator should establish a mechanism for identifying and disseminating innovations, for example in the form of an annual competition or a catalog of innovative outputs.
- R11: Strengthen the transfer of knowledge and experience between project partners, including the further development of bilateral and multilateral partnerships. We propose expanding opportunities for exchange internships, joint training, study trips, and professional workshops between Slovak, Ukrainian, and contributing partners. We recommend creating a network of experts and a platform for sharing know-how, where project outcomes would be regularly presented, challenges discussed, and common solutions sought. The Programme Operator should also support the creation of new bilateral and multilateral partnerships, for example through matchmaking events, and ensure that knowledge transfer is a mandatory part of project activities. Regular evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of partnerships should be part of program monitoring.
- R12: Maintain and develop program management flexibility, promote digital tools and online forms of collaboration. We recommend formalizing the possibility of rapid adjustments to projects, budgets, and schedules in response to changing conditions (e.g., crises, legislative changes). The Programme Operator should introduce, develop, and regularly update digital tools (IT systems, e.g., eGrant), improving their user-friendliness and functionality (e.g., automated notifications, clear templates, online reporting). Online forms of cooperation (virtual working groups, webinars, online consultations) should be a standard part of implementation, thereby increasing the accessibility and effectiveness of program management.
- R13: Systematically monitor the use of acquired knowledge in practice and encourage feedback from participating entities. We propose introducing regular questionnaires and evaluation workshops for Project Promoters and target groups, where they will present examples of the use of outcomes in practice. The obligation to report specific examples of the application of outputs should be part of the final project reports. The Programme Operator should create a mechanism for systematically evaluating feedback and using it to set new calls and adjust implementation rules. It is also important to promote the publication of examples of good practice and success stories that can motivate other Project Promoters.

- R14: Strengthen capacity building of partner institutions, especially abroad (UA), through targeted technical assistance and exchange of experience. We recommend organizing technical missions, tailor-made training, mentoring, and joint planning of further projects with an emphasis on the needs of Ukrainian partners. It is important to support the transfer of know-how, the exchange of experts, and long-term partnerships that will strengthen the capacities of institutions in Ukraine and contribute to the sustainability of results. The Programme Operator should create a system to identify the needs of partner institutions and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of technical assistance.

For the BIN program:

- R1: If a similar program is continued, it is necessary to (i) separate support for the business sector from the education sector into separate programs with tailored conditions, criteria, and processes, (ii) simplify the combination of the EEA FM and NFM by allowing more flexible use of both mechanisms within a single call, and (iii) reduce the administrative burden of program implementation.
- R2: If a similar program is continued, it is appropriate to maintain the focus on the needs of specific disadvantaged groups.
- R3: If a similar program is continued, it is necessary to (i) launch the program as soon as possible and (ii) significantly increase the level of involvement of partners from Donor States in the business sector.
- R4: If a similar program is continued, it is necessary to eliminate duplication with ESIF programs. This can be achieved by strengthening the unique aspects offered by the EEA FM and the Norwegian FM, such as the mandatory involvement of partners from donor countries.

For the ACC program:

- R1: Maintain a combined support model (integrated projects) that combines soft and hard measures (technical solutions with information and community activities). Maintain a flexible and results-oriented management model, consider introducing simplified expenditure reporting, reduce the administrative burden for small projects (schools), and strengthen technical support for applicants already at the application preparation stage.
- R2: Introduce unit cost calculations (e.g. EUR/person, EUR/campaign, EUR/measure) as a mandatory part of project reports, which will simplify ongoing cost-effectiveness assessments.
- R3: Maintain support for ecosystem restoration as a key element of mitigation and adaptation measures in the country, with an emphasis on low costs and high public benefit.
- R4: Assess the realism of setting CO2 emission reduction targets in future programs focused on mitigation and adaptation measures.

- R5: Support horizontal networking among Project Promoters – e.g. by creating platforms where activities from different calls can be linked. Create a unified database of model measures and examples of good practice.
- R6: Increase opportunities for follow-up calls for successful projects. The high degree of internal coherence in the ACC has shown that smaller pilot solutions deserve to be continued. Introduce an evaluation criterion for the continuity of projects with existing planning documents at local or regional level (e.g. SECAP).
- R7: Maintain and further develop complementary design with other EU programs, national and EU strategies.
- R8: Use the results of projects within the ACC program as input for public policy-making, e.g., when updating the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Slovak Republic's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. The aim is to strengthen the feedback loop between practical interventions and public policy-making and to ensure that successful solutions (e.g. wetland restoration, adaptation measures in municipalities, educational campaigns) are taken into account in policy planning.

## 9 Bibliography

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- Final Programme Report FM14–21 Slovakia: Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation
- Calls, lists of approved projects and other information available at [eeagrants.sk](http://eeagrants.sk)
- Grant applications, status of indicators and contact details of the selected sample of projects

### 9.2 List of information sources used for the LDI evaluation

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- Manuals issued by the Donor States and Guidelines issued by the Financial Mechanism Office:
  - Financial Guidance ([Financial Guidance](#))
  - Results Guideline ([Results Guideline](#))
  - Indicators Guide ([Core indicators guidance](#))
  - Result Reporting Guide ([Result Reporting Guide](#))
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- Guidelines issued by the National Focal Point
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- Interim project reports
- Programme Final Report
- Other documents available on: <https://eeagrants.org/about-us/legal-framework>, the National Contact Point [www.eeagrants.sk](http://www.eeagrants.sk) and [www.norwaygrants.sk](http://www.norwaygrants.sk), the Programme Operators <http://www.vyskumnaagentura.sk/sk/granty-ehp-a-norska-sk> and <https://www.minzp.sk/eea/>

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- Results Guideline Rules and Guidance on how to design, monitor and evaluate programmes, manage risks, and report on results, Updated March 2021

- Shelters and intimate partner and domestic violence support services: arenas for help, interventions, and empowerment? Joint report from Norway and Slovakia, CMC, 2024
- EU EP and COUNCIL Directive 2024/1 385 of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence
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- Act No 300/2005 Coll. on the Criminal Code as amended
- Act No. 448/2008 Coll. on Social Services and on Amendments to Act No. 455/1991 Coll. on Trade Enterprise, as amended
- Final Programme Report FM14–21 Slovakia Domestic and Gender-based Violence, 2024
- Documents from the Programme Operator:
- List of projects and contact details,
- Project documentation: last interim project report for each project implemented in the DGV Programme

#### 9.4 List of information sources used for the GGC evaluation

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- Programme Agreement for the financing of the Programme "Cross-border Cooperation/Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency" effective as of 24.11.2018, as amended
- Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Slovak Republic for 2019 – 2023
- Strategy for the Development of Public Procurement in the Slovak Republic for 2021 – 2025
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- Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014 – 2021: Programme Agreement between the Financial Mechanism Committee and Slovakia for the Programme "Good Governance and Cross-border Cooperation"
- Bilateral Cooperation Initiatives – Reports and Guidelines (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, FMO)
- Reports and Recommendations of Donor Partners (Norwegian Barents Secretariat, OECD, Financial Mechanism Office – FMO)
- Guides for GGC Project Promoters (MIRDI SR)
- Manuals and methodologies developed in the framework of projects (e.g. "Methodology for the implementation of codes of ethics in public administration", "Guide for the implementation of MEAT criteria in public procurement")
- Final evaluation reports and monitoring evaluations of the GGC programme

## 9.5 List of information sources used for the BIN evaluation

- Programme Concept Note, EEA & Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2014 – 2021, Business Development, Innovation and SME's
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- Grant applications, status of indicators and contact details of the selected sample of projects

## 9.6 List of information sources used for the ACC evaluation

- [Results Guideline](#)
- [Core indicators guidance](#)
- Programme concept note – Programme: Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
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- Programme Operator Website <https://www.minzp.sk/eea/>.
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- Database of LIFE projects  
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/search/documents>
- EEA Database <https://eeagrants.org/archive/2014–2021/projects>
- JRC Technical Report: Costs of restoration measures in the EU based on an assessment of LIFE projects  
[https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC97635/lb-na-27494-en-n.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC97635/lb-na-27494-en-n.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
- Journal of Environmental Management: Cost effectiveness of nutrient retention in constructed wetlands at a landscape level  
[https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301479722018989?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301479722018989?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

## 10 Attachments

### 10.1 List of interviews

#### 10.1.1 Governance structures of the programme

- Financial Mechanism Office (Brussels), Lina Marcinkute, 15 May 2025
- Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna, Hana Tasler Goldschmidtova, 20 June 2025 (replies were sent in writing)
- MIRD SR (National Focal Point), Jaroslav Mojžiš, 21 May 2025

#### 10.1.2 CLT Programme

- MIRD SR (CLT Programme Operator), Natália Joklová and Natália Ďurková, 12 May 2025
- Post Bellum SK, Sandra Polovková, CLT03037, 2 June 2025
- Pôtoň Theatre, Monika Desat–Škojcová, CLT02023, 25 May 2025
- Slovak University of Technology, Pavel Gregor, CLT02015, 25 May 2025
- East Slovak Gallery, Dorota Kenderová and Valér Bakajsa, CLT03041, 23 May 2025
- OZ Žudro, Jana Belišová and Mária Hejtmánková, CLT02017, 26 May 2025

#### 10.1.3 LDI Programme

- Programme Operator, Mgr. Jitka Humeník Dvořáková, MIRD, Bratislava, 7 May 2025
- National Institute of Education and Youth (NIVAM), PaedDr. Gyöngyi Ledneczka, PhD; PhD. Jozef Facuna, PhD, Project Manager, NIVAM, Bratislava, 9 June 2025
- Renew Gemer, n. o., Katarína Smatanová, Chairwoman of the Board of Directors, online, 11 June 2025
- Employment Agency BBSK, n. o., Michaela Mudroňová, Statutor, online, 11 June 2025
- Young Roma Association, n.o., BB, Mr Vozár, online, 11 June 2025
- Centre for Community Organising, n. o., BB/Zvolen, Mr. Maroš Chmelík, Executive Director, Senec, 11 June 2025
- Hornozemplín Library, Vranov nad Topľou (SK), Mgr. Danko Molčanová, Director; Ms. Project Manager, online, 12 June 2025
- City of Snina, Katarína Kapráľová, Project Manager, MFC Snina, 16 June 2025
- City of Svidník, Mgr. Marcela Ivančová, Mayor; Ing. Dana Jachymovičová, PhD., Project Manager, MFC Svidník, 16 June 2025
- Municipal Office Zborov, Jaroslav Slovák, Project Manager, Municipal Office Zborov, 16 June 2025
- Association for Culture and Education (ACEC), SnV, Tomáš Ondačka, project manager; Lucia Katreničová, regional coordinator, CC Spišská Nová Ves, 17 June 2025
- Municipality Prakovce, Mgr. Viera Jančíková, deputy mayor of the municipality; Ms. project manager, MFC Prakovce, 17 June 2025

- City of Moldava nad Bodvou, Sylvia Strámová, Director of MFC and former project manager of the project, online, 17 June 2025

#### 10.1.4 DGV Programme

- Programme Operator – MIRD SR, Jitka Dvořáková, in person – MIRD SR, 5 May 2025
- Alliance of Women of Slovakia, Katarína Farkašová, online, 22 May 2025
- Budúcnosť, n. o., Ľuba Pavelová, in person – Budúcnosť, n. o. headquarters, 21 May 2025
- TENENET, o. z., Petra Olšanská, online, 20 May 2025
- Fenestra, Dušana Karlovská, online, 20 May 2025
- ALEJ Advisory Centre BA, Dáša Malíková, online, 22 May 2025
- Woman in distress, Tatiana Brnová, online, 16 May 2025
- LUNA, n. o., Hana Štrbová, in person – LUNA, n. o. headquarters, 23 May 2025
- Centrum slniečko, n. o., Simona Nagy, online, 22 May 2025
- KA Social Services Centre, Anna Surovcová, online, 27 May 2025
- Institute for Labour and Family Research – (Coordination and Methodological Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women), Barbora Burajová, online, 19 May 2025
- Council of Europe – IPO DGV, Jenna Shearer Demir, online, 10 June 2025

#### 10.1.5 GGC Programme

- MIRD SR – Programme Operator, Natália Joklová; Jitka Dvořáková, 28 April 2025
- Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, Martin Tolla; Milada Bucseková, online, 13 June 2025
- Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia, Zuzana Špačeková; Daniela Minárová, 12 June 2025
- City of Košice, Terézia Vysocká; Daniela Hudáková, 11 June 2025
- Regional Development Support Agency Košice, n. o., Lenka Krištofová, 10 June 2025
- Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Ondrej Mital'; Eliška Zásadová, 11 June 2025
- Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, Martina Servanská, 9 June 2025
- Public Procurement Office, Linda Moravčíková; Miroslava Šrobárová, 9 June 2025
- Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, Eva Struhárová, 29 May 2025

#### 10.1.6 BIN Programme

Programme management structures:

- Financial Mechanism Office (Brussels), Lina Marcinkute, 15 May 2025
- Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna, Hana Tasler Goldschmidtova, 20 June 2025 (replies were sent in writing)
- MIRD SR (National Focal Point), Jaroslav Mojžiš, 21 May 2025
- Research Agency of the Slovak Republic (BIN Programme Operator), Sonia Sulíková and Jaroslav Gajdoš, 6 May 2025

Slovak beneficiaries:

- BA Solar/No Gravity, Gabriel Adamek, BIN 02\_2021\_002, 16 May 2025
- KOOR, s. r. o., Zoltán Tihanyi and Michal Hesek, BIN 01\_2021\_001, 16 May 2025
- Secondary Vocational School of Technology and Services in Levice, Alena Krtíková, BIN SGS02\_2021\_008, 16 May 2025
- Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Peter Cuninka, BIN SGS03\_2022\_003, 3 June 2025
- University of Žilina, Mário Drbúl and Miroslav Matúš, BIN SGS02\_2021\_007, 25 May 2025
- Zachráň včely s. r. o., Peter Kočalka and Alena Kočalková, BIN SGS01\_2020\_023, 22 May 2025
- WAKIVAKY j. s. a., Radovan Lucina, BIN SGS01\_2020\_012, 23 June 2025

Partners from Donor States:

- Purefood Norway (Norway), Ladislav Jílek, BIN 02\_2021\_002, 27 May 2025
- JaHo Mur og Fasade AS (Norway), Jaroslav Holík, BIN 01\_2021\_010, 10 June 2025
- SINTEF AS (Norway), Igor Sartori, BIN 01\_2021\_001, 17 June 2025
- Glemmen Upper Secondary School (Norway), Christiane Sofie Skahjem and Nils Henrik Landeklint, BIN SGS02\_2021\_008, 27 May 2025
- University of Iceland (Iceland), Kristín Harðardóttir, BIN SGS03\_2022\_003, 6 June 2025

#### 10.1.7 ACC Programme

Governance structures of the programme

- Katarína Fajčíková, Miroslava Gogová, Tatiana Babalová, Dominik Buchala, Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic (Programme Operator), 6.5.2025
- Jana Kortvelyesiova, Project Manager, Project ACC03P10, Educational garden - EDUGA ,online, 23 May 2025
- Milada Šimkovičová, Project Manager, Project ACC02P04: [Action Plan and Mitigation Measures for the City of Brezno](#) City of Brezno, online, 29 May 2025
- Magistrate of the Capital City of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, Roman Čajka, Director of the Eurofunds Section, Petra Romaniaková, Project Manager, Project ACC01P03: [Climate Resilient Bratislava – Pilot Projects on Decarbonisation, Energy Efficiency of Buildings and Sustainable Management of Stormwater in the Urban Environment](#), Bratislava, 29 May 2025
- Green Foundation, foundation, Búdková 3552/22, Bratislava, Jana . Tóthová, Project Manager, Project ACC04P01: Wetlands for Life and Prosperity: Restoration of the Ramsar Site in the Morava River Alluvium, Bratislava, 30 May 2025
- Connected School, Pankúchova 6 Bratislava, Lenka Peschlová, Project Manager, Project ACC03P16, Bratislava, 3 June 2025
- Special Primary School, Gen. Svobodu 1273/73, Partizánske, Janka Smatanová, Director, project ACC03P21, , by phone, 5 June 2025

- Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Education (Living Lab) in Dropa Katarína Vajlíková Vajlíková, Project Manager, , online, 5 June 2025
- Občianske združenie Ekoenergia, Kostolná 658/60, 015 01 Rajec, Ladislav. Židek, statutory Kristína . Wimmerová, Project Manager, Project ACC05P01: [KLIMA BEST – Best Practices for a Better Climate](#), online, 6 June 2025Gymnasium Anton Bernolák Senec, Zuzana Synáková, Director, project ACC03P05, by phone, 11 June 2025



## 10.2 Additional DGV programme overviews

Table 29: Overview of total expenditure, project grants and activities of supported organisations

No.	Organisation	Total eligible expenditure in EUR (total)	Project grant in (total)	Activities implemented
1	Human Rights Institute	313 908	282 517	Publicity and cross-cutting activities.
				Public debates.
				Two-stage introductory campaign.
				Public campaign.
				Workshops on RR in schools in May–December 2023, preparation of material.
				Transfer of know-how, online meetings with Norwegian partners, preparation of promotional material.
				Capacity building, transfer of know-how, online consultations with Norwegians on public campaign, study trip in Norway.
				Production and distribution of material on gender sensitive education
2	Man at Risk	206 851	186 166	Lectures and workshops in schools.
				Workshops in community centres on prominent Roma women, calendar and two exhibitions on prominent Roma women.
				Wall calendar on prominent Roma women.
				Quartet on prominent women – women without borders and women of the Bible.
				Roma women's clubs at community centres.
				Parent groups for mothers and fathers at CCs, e.g. toy libraries.
				Bibles for women.
				Exhibition of children's and women's artwork at the State Scientific Library in Prešov (prominent Roma women in children's portraits) in all participating CCs, and later also MU in PR, KE and SNV.
3	EsFem	199 256	179 330	Lecture and workshops at and for schools.
				Public talks, cafes, club and EAS.
				Experiential workshops for the public.
				Motivational publications (diary – 3 versions 22/23 and 23/24 and diary for women, 2 quartets – invisible women and unknown Slovak women).
				Library of series studies – systematization of books and book collection.

4	Woman in distress	131 756	118 580	Education Women's rights and are human rights, plus material for education.
				The Women's Rights Are Human Rights campaign , also presented at an international conference organised by the programme operator
				Redesign of the new website
				The 16 Days of Activism campaign including the exhibition "Step out of the cycle of violence" was run through FB and Instagram due to the pandemic, including campaign material, physically the campaign was implemented in the square in MT (22) and in the OC Gallery (23).
5	Union of Maternity Centres	174 180	155 020	Qualitative research on women's legitimization strategies in communities presented at the final conference.
				25 Workshops at secondary and primary schools near communities with MRC.
				A series of roundtables for local women leaders and leaders from NGOs in the field of sociology and economics – networking.
				Invisible Women Campaign through blogs, and videos on social media and infographics site of UMC.
				Opening and closing conference.
				Evaluation conference for all MC/FCs entitled "Women who have changed their communities".
6	Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	180 575	180 575	Public consultation with key stakeholders: gender inequalities in the workplace.
				International Conference "Promoting Work-Life Balance", September 2023.
				Communication campaign "Together we can do it", blogs and podcasts on gender equality, published on social networks and educational events.
				Lecture series for pupils and students on gender equality, 2022–2024.
				Sensitizing activities for adults – gender trainings in year 23 and 24, were 3x 2,5 days trainings promotion and cross-cutting activities.
				Promotional materials in the form of rollups, notepads, bamboo pens, eco-friendly notebooks with pen attached, leaflets and reusable water bottles, totaling 1,023 pieces of promotional materials.
				Activities 3 and 4 are missing from the report !!!
7	Rissotto	220 000	198 000	Awareness raising campaign.
				Audiovisual lectures for schools.
				Mandatory publicity – website, manual.
8	Mymamy	240 167	216 150	Educational materials for secondary and primary

				schools and for teachers
				Non-formal education for primary and secondary schools and for teachers in the school year 2023/2024 in the districts of PSK
				Femfest organized in PKO PR, in April 2023, together with a closing conference.
				Days of activism against violence against women – not implemented.
				Documentary screened at Femfest.
				UX and AI redesign of the website.
				Publicity and dissemination of information through the website, roll-ups at schools and Femfest.
				Gender responsive budgeting in municipalities publication and its presentation.
9	InTYMYta	197 806	176 047	Data collection and audience targeting.
				Creating freely available comprehensive content – methodology for teachers for Healthy Relationships Day on the web.
				Content testing and editing.
				Communication plan.
				Facilitation of workshops.

Table 30: Overview of outcome indicators

Organisation	Share of population (targeted by awareness-raising activities) favourable to gender equality in %		Share of population (targeted by awareness-raising activities) that reject gender stereotypes in %		Share of students (in targeted schools) favourable to gender equality in %		Share of students (in targeted schools) rejecting gender stereotyping in %	
	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality
Human Rights Institute	0,6	60,72	0,6	60,11	0,8	72,19	0,8	67,89
Man in danger	15	62,5	15	18,4	20	36,4	15	29,6
EsFem	15	75	15	68,55	20	36,36	15	29,55
Woman in distress	15	15,1	15	15	20	9	15	10,4
Union of Maternity Centres	0,2	84,44	0,8	57,18	0,5	84,71	0,5	85,39
Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	15	70	15	75	20	62,80	15	48,20
Rissotto	15	82,78	15	73,59	20	88,21	20	78,34

Mymamy	15	96,55	15	91,3	20	80,34	20	82,05
InTYMYta	0,7	77,78	0,6	75	0,85	85	0,7	70,0

Table 31: Overview of output indicators

Organisation	Number of awareness-raising campaigns on RR		Number of institutions active in R&D supported		Number of schools from the MRC that received lectures on RR		Number of schools receiving RR lectures		Number of good practice examples transferred from Norway to SK		Number of co-operation. Entities applying knowledge from bilat. partnerships		Number of projects involving cooperation with a project partner		Number of employees From the beneficiary country participating in exchanges or secondment s aimed at setting up sexual assault units		Number of employees From the beneficiary country participating in exchanges focusing on children as victims of violence		Number of employees From Donor States participating in exchanges targeting children as victims of violence		Number of employees From contributing States participating in exchanges or deployment s aimed at setting up sexual assault units		Number of seminars aimed at sharing experiences on providing services to minorities	
	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Schedule	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality
Human Rights Institute	4	4	1	1	15	15	25	25			1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Man in danger	6	6	1	1	11	11	18	17																
EsFem	4	4	2	2	11	10	17	17																
Woman in distress	7	8	2	2	5	5	33	35																
Union of Maternity Centres	3	3	1	1	17	20	45	43																
Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	1	1	1	11	5	8	20	42																
Rissotto	1	1	1	1	5	5	20	22																
Mymamy	6	6	4	4	5	5	18	18																
InTYMYta	5	5	20	12	10	11	20	23	3	3	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 32: Overview of publicity indicators

Organisation	Number of main information activities		Number of media outputs		Increased number of visits to the website		Number of promotional materials produced within the project		Number of new reports/studies/ announcements published on own website		Number of materials summarising project results		Number of visual works produced	
	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality
Human Rights Institute	2	2	15	15	100000	103 809	2	2	30	30	1	1	12	16
Man in danger	2	2	6	17	10500	1310	6	6	6	11	1	1	1	1
EsFem	2	2	6	6	600	2200	6	6	36	40	1	1		
Woman in distress	9	10	30	126	10000	20965	9503	9903	20	57	1	1	1	8
Union of Maternity Centres	2	3	48	50	8000	9446	800	1050	30	30	2	4	3	7
Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	11	11	20	22	500	4550	11500	1423	7	7	5	4	5	11
Rissotto	1	2	10	56	10000	13000	4	4	20	20	2	2	2	2
Mymamy	2	8	10	20	50000	43245	5517	5517	20	26	2	2	5	6
InTYMyta	2	2	40	44	1500	14800	1500	1800	100	96	3	3	45	52

Table 33: Overview of specific indicators

Organisation	Number of defined measures included in the project		Number of pupils receiving lectures in the framework of the project			Number of districts in which lectures were delivered under the project	
	Plan	Reality	Plan	Reality	Of which Roma	Plan	Reality
Human Rights Institute	5	5	1200	1417	61	12	18
Man in danger	5	5	300	329	177	10	11
EsFem	2	2	300	434	254	8	10
Woman in distress	3	3	2500	1715	125	9	10
Union of Maternity Centres	3	5	1050	1787	679	22	23
Slovak National Centre for Human Rights	3	3	1500	1690	219	15	26
Rissotto	2	2	2000	2046	Missing number	8	12
Mymamy	5	5	810	1192	150	10	10
InTYMYta	5	5	200	654	202	20	23