



**FINAL STRATEGIC REPORT
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
EEA FINANCIAL MECHANISM
AND
NORWEGIAN FINANCIAL MECHANISM
2009–2014 IN SLOVENIA**



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Funding period 2009-2014 has only just ended, but we are already seeing the outcomes and outputs of Grants-funded programmes and projects that spurred growth, improved the quality of life in different regions across Slovenia, and contributed to the development of areas of public health, tourism, environmental protection, cultural heritage, education and civil society. Over 120 projects that were implemented during the period aimed at promoting partnerships and integration and followed the principle of sustainability. Moreover, all projects helped strengthen cooperation between Slovenia and the donor countries and raised awareness about the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovenia.

Funding from the EEA and Norway Grants supported our efforts to preserve and restore our heritage, and helped boost investment in an environmentally friendly, healthy and knowledge-based future of our country.

In terms of figures, Grants-funded projects supported the development of public infrastructure at three natural heritage sites, restoration and revitalisation of three cultural monuments of national importance, strengthening of civil society, enhancement of democracy and sustainable development, and promote equality and organisational development of Slovenian civil society organisations (CSO). Furthermore, with the help of the EEA and Norway Grants 250 students participated in mobility projects, 246 participants (teaching and administrative staff) were involved in short-term mobility projects, while upgraded preventive health care programmes for children, young people and adults were designed and piloted, and activities promoting prevention of lifestyle-related diseases and improved mental health services were implemented. Last but not least, awareness about gender issues was significantly raised, and understanding of equal/unequal power relations between men and women was improved as a result of funding from the EEA and Norway Grants in the period 2009-2014.

The majority of the projects under the programmes met the goal of "progress towards sustainable development in all dimensions" (environmental, economic and social), and will, therefore, be carried forward.

When presenting project results, all Project Promoters (PPs) emphasised that the EEA and Norway Grants and cooperation with partners from Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein were the pivotal aspect adding value to the projects. Cooperation with Donor State institutions at the national, programme and project level contributed to the exchange of knowledge, experience and good practice and facilitated strengthening of bilateral relations between Slovenia and the donor states. The partnerships forged and friendships made will undoubtedly lead to further cooperation in numerous areas in the future. Mutual understanding, and trust building formed a solid basis for long-term partnerships.

Some of the valuable lessons learned in the funding period 2009-2014 include, for example, the need to select external evaluators for project evaluation in parallel with the launch of the calls, the need to recognise the importance and relevance of good human resources management for an effective implementation of programmes and processes within the National Focal Point (NFP), and knowing that shortage of staff can put efficient implementation of programmes at considerable risk.

No major changes to the management and control system occurred in the period 2009-2014.

The outcomes and achievements of the five programmes make an excellent springboard for further work together towards common goals and shared values, and for building better opportunities for us all.

2 ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECT OF THE GRANTS

2.1 Cohesion

The period of programming and developing the EEA and Norway Grants programmes 2009-2014 was marked by a number of challenges and issues Slovenia was facing at the time. These challenges emerged in an effort to produce effective response to global crisis on the one hand, and on the other, to the unprecedented pace of social and technological progress, which required long-term adjustments. A number of questions about the future of education, social values and climate change action were left unanswered.

Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy is responsible for the development of certain strategic documents and formulation of development policies in Slovenia; it holds extensive experience in this regard. This helped us better recognize strategic priorities of our country and identify the areas of intervention to be addressed by the EEA and Norway Grants, and to find complementarities with other funding sources, particularly EU Cohesion Policy. We developed programmes knowing that the experience of donor countries would be an invaluable and indispensable element in this process, which would help us strengthen bilateral relations and build a strong foundation for future cooperation.

Programme agreements identified the areas that contribute to the main objectives pursued by the EEA and Norway Grants, and were recognised important for economic and social development of Slovenia. As such, the contribution was complementary to several priorities under the European Structural and Cohesion Funds and considerably contributed to strengthening the pillars of our society.

The implementation of five programmes and more than 120 projects, and the use of support which was channelled through the programmes, enabled Slovenia to boost its activities in the areas of environment and climate change, civil society, human and social development, cultural and natural heritage, research and scholarships and, last but not least, decent work and tripartite dialogue. Support provided in these areas was all about preserving and restoring our heritage, be it natural or cultural, and investing in environmentally friendly, healthy and knowledge-based future of Slovenia. The results and outcomes of the projects that were implemented in the period 2009-2014 contributed to development of different regions across Slovenia. Partnerships and cooperation of different types of institutions in various areas were fostered by the implemented projects to enhance bilateral relations between Slovenia and the donor countries.

At the end of the funding period we evaluated the outputs and outcomes of the co-financed projects and programmes, and the selected programme areas. We further looked into regional distribution of outputs. The evaluation of the programme Slovenian Scholarship Fund, Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme and EEA Financial Mechanism Programme showed that all three programmes were implemented in both cohesion regions, and that they contributed to reducing regional disparities and increasing economic and social cohesion in Slovenia. The areas of public health and gender issues,

education, environmental monitoring, biodiversity and cultural heritage benefitted from funding through these programmes.

Figure 1: Mapping of Project Promoters by regions

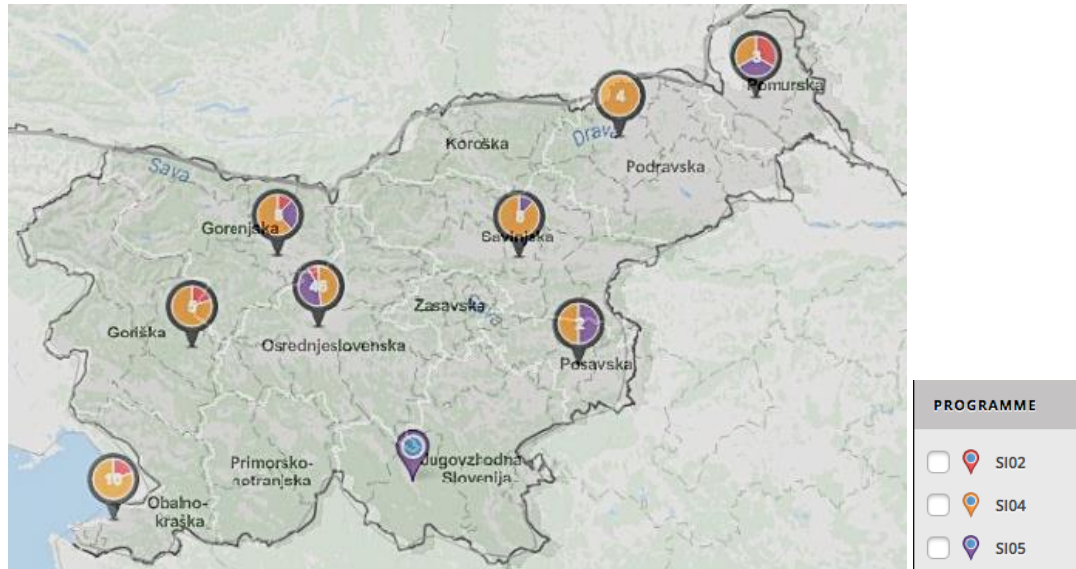


Figure 1 presents Project Promoter locations. Figure 1 also shows that the projects were evenly distributed across all Slovenian regions. While the map shows the location of project promoters, partners did not necessarily come from the same region. Most projects (46) had project managers from the Osrednjeslovenska region, where Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, is located. Half of the projects in the Osrednjeslovenska region were co-financed by the programme SI04 (Slovenian Scholarship Fund). Similarly, this can be attributed to the fact that it is in Ljubljana that the University of Ljubljana with associated 26 faculties is located, and that the number of secondary schools is much higher in this region than elsewhere in the country. Both cohesion regions participated in the funding schemes and implemented projects financed by the EEA and Norway Grants.

Figure 2: Mapping of Project Promoters and project partners (SI02 and SI05)

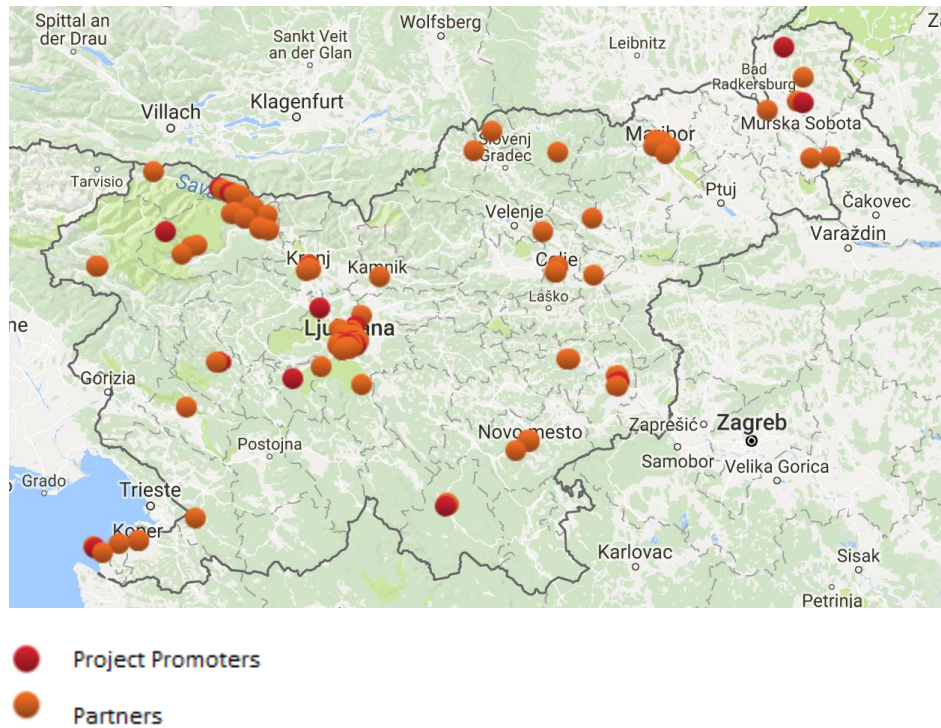


Figure 2 shows spatial distribution of Project Promoters and project partners for programmes SI02 and SI05.

Figure 3: Outcomes of programmes SI02 and SI05

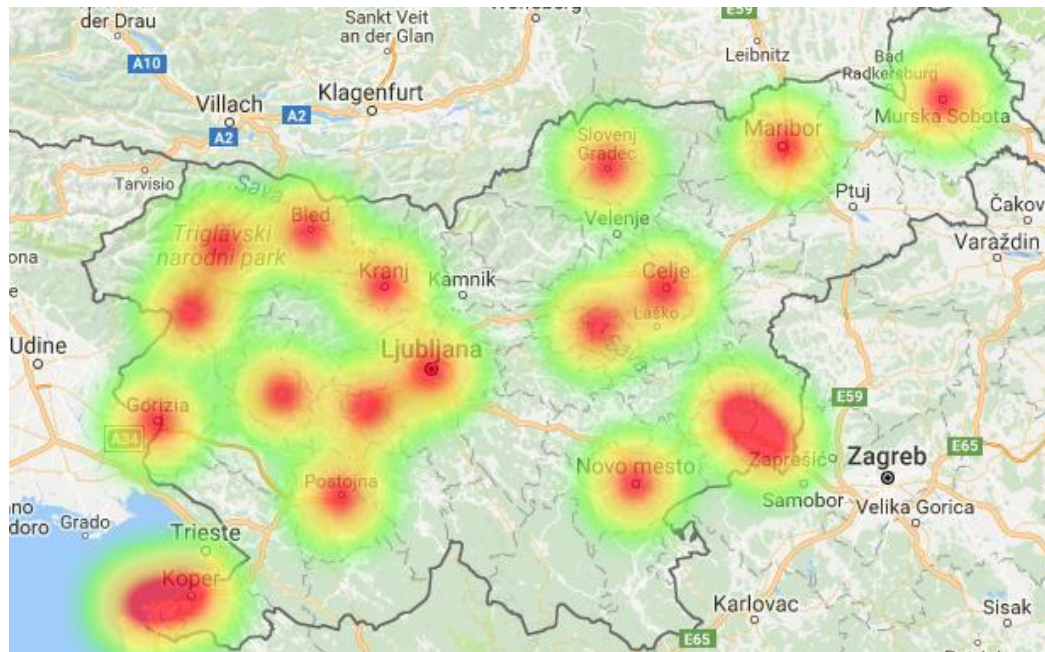
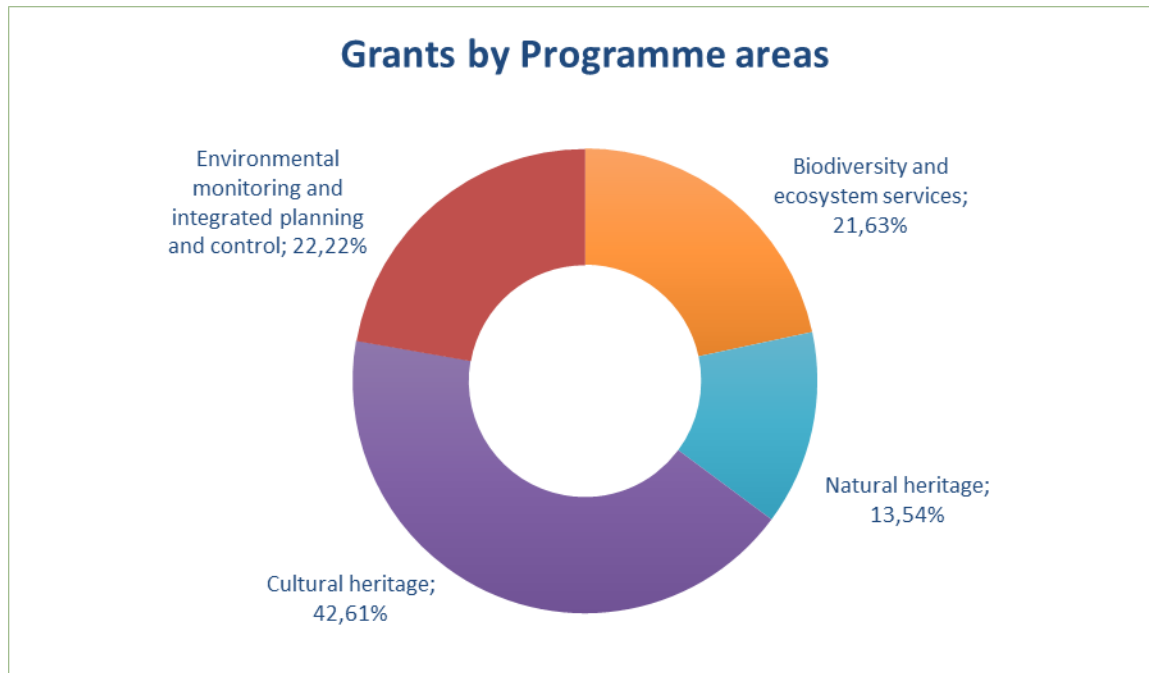


Figure 3 illustrates spatial distribution of the outcomes of the projects which were evenly distributed across the country.

Programme SI02 – EEA Financial Mechanism Programme

Figure 4: Programme areas



The SI02 programme was designed in compliance with national priorities in the areas which were supported under the programme. It was very successful as regards the achievement of programme outputs and outcomes.

Environmental Monitoring and Integrated Planning and Control

The overall goals and challenges of the pre-defined project "Modernization of spatial data infrastructure to reduce risks and impacts of floods" were to facilitate water management and reduce flood risks and impacts through the establishment of vertical component of the state coordinate system, help improve Slovenian geoid and spatial information on topography and hydrography, and increase compliance of data and network services with the INSPIRE standards.

Slovenia is a mountainous subalpine country which experiences frequent floods. Threats and damage triggered by floods call for a well-thought-out emergency disaster response and efficient disaster relief actions, along with systematic flood prevention actions that need to be designed at the Government level. A step towards better disaster risk reduction was the predefine project which represents a shift from reactive crisis management and disaster relief to risk prevention. Its long-term goal is to facilitate water management and reduce flood risks and impacts by establishing and supplying relevant and standardized data.

Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

The projects implementation was an important milestone in terms of putting in place a proactive approach to nature conservation in Slovenia. At the policy level already the sub-programme

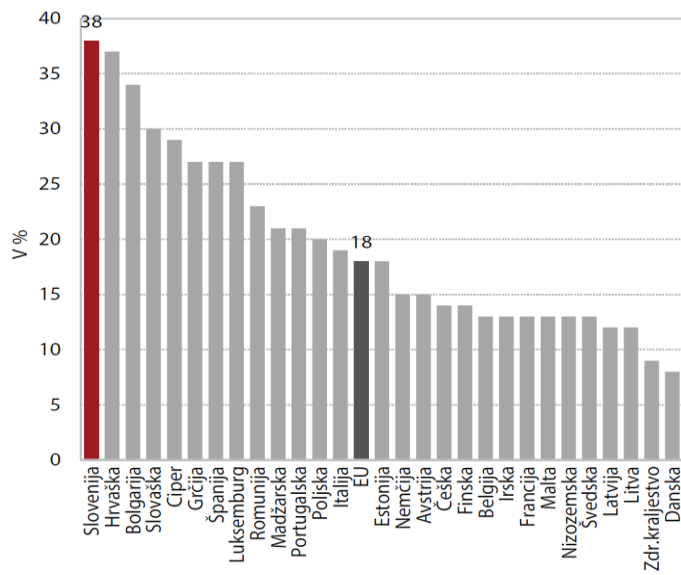
implementation supported the development of proactive habitat conservation, and led to ring-fencing the resources for habitat conservation in the scope of EU funding. A particularly big step was the inclusion of proactive habitat conservation in the Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy 2014 – 2020, which is supported by the European Regional Development Fund.

These developments in nature conservation have had positive influence on other developments in the country. Well-preserved biodiversity represents a great potential for Slovenia, especially for the development of high-quality eco-tourism and sustainable high-quality food production. With a large increase of tourists in Slovenia in 2017 this potential is becoming more explored, and efforts for further development of visitor infrastructure (dealt with in the sub-programme Conservation and revitalisation of natural heritage) try to promote this as a sustainable form of use of biodiversity.

Support for the selected programme areas that was channelled through the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme (conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems, natural heritage) has proven time and again its added value. The 2018 Development Report of Slovenia by the Institute of Macroeconomic Analyses and Development (IMAD) states that “the extraordinary abundance of plant and animal life in Slovenia places the country among the top most biodiverse countries in Europe. This is not only something naturally given to us, but also a result of our hard and committed work and responsible attitude towards ecosystem management. Protected areas with high levels of biodiversity and landscape diversity and natural assets are especially important in this respect. The surface of such areas, which are extremely important for conservation of habitat areas for conservation-reliant species is especially extensive in Slovenia, placing the country among the top EU countries with twice as much habitat conservation area as the EU average. Despite a number of biodiversity conservation activities, the level of biodiversity is falling in Slovenia as well, particularly on account of unsustainable space management practices.”¹

¹ 2018 Development Report, IMAD

Figure 5: Protected areas in EU, 2016



Vir: Eurostat Portal Page – Tables on EU policy, 2018.

Ecosystems and their services are of key importance for our health and quality of life. Natural resources act as the pillars of economic development, offer opportunities for new investments and employment, and improve the standard of living and quality of life. Similarly to other resources, the increase or decrease in the value of natural resources results in the increase or decrease in long-term social benefits or costs. Sustainable protection and efficient management of natural resources are necessary for the long-term preservation of the quantity and quality of our natural resources which act as one of the key pillars of a healthy living environment, production of high-quality food, performance of economic activities with high added value, and provision of high-quality jobs.²

Conservation and revitalisation of cultural and natural heritage

Publicly accessible natural heritage contributes to Slovenian tourism sector, which has been promoting Slovenia as the Green Destination³ since 2016. Tourism sector principally recognises well-preserved nature as an important part of the tourism offer; on the other hand, the new Sustainable Development Strategy for Slovenian Tourism 2017–2021 focuses on classical issues such as increase in currency inflow, tourist stays, overnights, new accommodation facilities and employment⁴.

The EEA Programme with the two selected projects of visitor infrastructure and sustainable mobility indirectly supported efforts to gain funding for sustainable mobility in protected areas from the Climate Change Funding Programme. Additionally, the EEA Programme indirectly contributed to the inclusion of

² Slovenian Development Strategy 2030

³ Slovenian Tourist Board 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y866acho>

⁴ Government of the Republic of Slovenia 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/ydgpvcv8a>

natural heritage into the new tourism strategy, explicitly by making it an important tourism-related issue, and implicitly through the planned investment of tourist taxes in the visitor infrastructure⁵.

The proposal for the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme stated that, based on the draft National Programme for Culture 2012–2015, one of the goals of the programme was to restore the majority of endangered cultural monuments in Slovenia; the objective was largely realized through the support from the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme.

Funding under the programme in the area Cultural heritage helped restore and revitalize three cultural monuments of national importance whose visibility increased and number of visitors significantly grew thanks to the developed programmes on the importance and presentation of cultural heritage. These activities significantly contributed to the achievement of the objective of the programme area “Cultural and natural heritage for future generations safeguarded and conserved and made publicly accessible”, and at the same time complied with the goals defined in the National Programme for Culture 2014-2017.

Programme SI03 - Funds for Non-governmental Organisations

The programme contributed to further development of NGO sector in Slovenia - providing much needed support in the areas that are not supported by other donors, and contributing importantly to the diversification of funds for local NGOs. NGO Fund was a unique opportunity for many small, local, grass-root organizations to access international funds, expand their reach and further develop their organizations, and as such an important factor for their capacity building.

Even though the projects ended in 2016, their results continue to live and keep improving the lives of the most valuable in our society – through established cross-sectoral partnerships, enhanced advocacy and watchdog capacities, and developed networks and coalitions. With support from the NGO Fund, several organizations managed to open the doors to establish dialogue with local or national authorities; they became stronger by joining their forces in different coalitions, provided comprehensive analysis that grew into proposals for better legislation, tested new and innovative ways of working with and for most vulnerable groups and activated the inactive. Even though the programme budget was relatively modest compared to others, the programme still left a remarkable stamp not just on the whole sector but also on the society itself.

The overall objective of the NGO Programme in Slovenia was to strengthen civil society development and enhance contribution to social justice, democracy and sustainable development, which provided appropriate response to the civil society needs in Slovenia. The main aims of the NGO Fund were to improve NGOs’ organisational development and to build their advocacy capacities. Special attention was given to supporting deficit priority areas, promoting cross-sectoral partnerships in community development, and encouraging ideas that adequately addressed current pressing problems in Slovenian society, while contributing to the long-term development of the NGO sector.

⁵ Ministry of Economic Development and Technology 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/yae6t2nv>

Figure 6: Number of NGOs in Slovenia 2009 - 2016, source: CNVOS, NGO sector, facts and figures

ŠTEVILO AKTIVNIH NEVLADNIH ORGANIZACIJ 2009 – 2016

oblika / leto	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
društva, zveze društev	20.417	20.718	21.268	21.614	21.980	22.564	22.961	23.258
zavodi	1.515	1.732	1.910	2.069	2.305	2.563	2.778	2.991
ustanove	167	183	195	202	212	232	236	232
skupno število	22.099	22.633	23.373	23.885	24.497	25.353	25.975	26.481

Programme SI04 - Slovenian Scholarship Fund

Slovenian government adopted the Resolution on the National Higher Education Programme 2011–2020 just as the programme Slovenian Scholarship Fund was being developed. The Resolution foresees an increase in public expenditure on tertiary education as a share of GDP and an increase in expenditure on educational institutions per student (higher education spending per student is projected to surpass the OECD average by 2020), which would create the conditions required for a high-quality study process. A substantial increase in the participation rate of young people in the 19-24 age group in tertiary education is envisaged (to 75% in 2020), along with an increase in the proportion of students aged over 29 years to 20% of all students. International student and teaching staff mobility is projected to increase as well. By 2020, as much as 20 % of Slovenian graduates are expected to be mobile.⁶

Slovenian Scholarship Fund fitted in well with the overall goals and ambitions of Slovenia in the field of education. According to the data provided by IMAD in the 2017 Development Report for Slovenia, donor funding presented an important source given that “public expenditure has been declining since 2012. In 2015 it accounted for 4.65% of GDP and was significantly lower than Slovenia’s long-term average at all levels except pre-primary education. The several year downward trend has been primarily a consequence of the Government’s fiscal consolidation measures, but also of certain other measures to rationalise the use of public expenditure on education. In 2013 (the latest international data) education expenditure was lower than the EU average for the first time. This holds true for the upper secondary and tertiary levels of education, while expenditure on pre-primary, primary and secondary education was higher than the EU average”.⁷

“Like the rest of the OECD area, Slovenia has been deeply affected by the global crisis. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis and facing demographic decline, reduced public budget for education

⁶ 2012 Development Report, IMAD

⁷ 2017 Development Report, IMAD

requires a greater focus on efficient use of public money, according to 2011 OECD study. Efforts in Slovenia include achieving greater certitude on the actual number of students in the tertiary education system”⁸

The number of Slovenian educational institutions involved in various international activities and project has been growing from year to year. Internationalization at all levels of education is something that the Programme Operator (PO) as well as the institutions themselves perceive as a necessity and way forward. Studies that the PO carried out showed clearly that there is a long-term impact of international mobility as well as cooperation projects on the level of individuals (teachers and students) as well as on the institutional level. Furthermore, such international activities have contributed to the enhancement of interpersonal, intercultural and linguistic skills of individuals - skills that are of great importance in today’s global society.

Slovenia implemented Slovenian Scholarship Fund programme, which received support through the EEA and Norway Grants, and underlined its role as an important complementary programme to existing EU programmes. Its focus on the three donor countries and improvement of bilateral relations with them has been an important element of more targeted activities aiming at enhancement of mutual understanding, sharing, exchange and cooperation between Slovenian educational institutions and those of the three donor states.

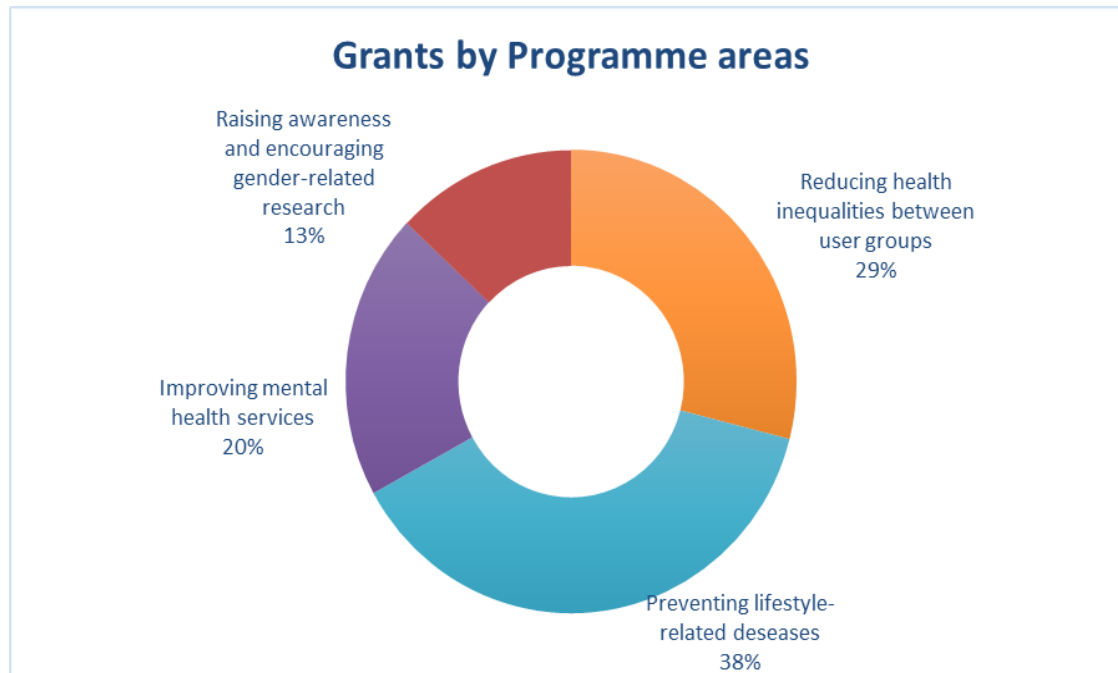
The results, i.e. the number of mobilities and implemented joint projects support this.

As no other programme besides Lifelong learning offered financial support to mobility and cooperation projects with the selected donor states, the existence of Slovenian Scholarship Programme represented an important stimulus for focused bilateral cooperation and enhanced partnerships. Consequently, many new synergies were created during the programme implementation with programme operators responsible for other programmes financed by the EEA and Norway Grants and EU programmes, like Europe for Citizens, Erasmus+ and regional CEEPUS programme.

⁸ Education Policy Outlook: Slovenia, OECD 2016

Programme SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme

Figure 7: Programme areas



Like in other modern societies, health is perceived in Slovenia as the quintessential element of social capital, a precondition for social and economic development. Slovenians rank health – an important element in the quality of life and welfare – at the very top of the values scale, moreover health is inextricably connected with social capital which is essential for social and economic development. It therefore comes as no surprise that one of the goals of Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 is healthy and active life. By 2030, Slovenia wants to increase life expectancy from 58.8 years to 64.5 years⁹.

The pattern and magnitude of health inequalities in Slovenia are similar to those found in other EU countries. Further significant improvements in the population health indicators can be achieved if Slovenia improves the wider social, economic, and physical environment in which people are born, live, work, and age, as well as the accessibility and quality of health programmes and services.

The results, outputs and outcomes achieved in this area importantly contribute to one of the main objectives pursued by the financial mechanisms – reducing economic and social disparities. Certain pilot projects, which were implemented in the area of public health were later integrated in the public health system, which improved public health services provided to citizens. The pre-defined project Towards Better Health and Reducing Inequalities in Health contributed to achieving both previously determined programme results in the field of Public Health Initiatives. This, in turn, was a springboard for the achievement of the set programme outcome – reducing or preventing lifestyle-related diseases.

⁹ Source: Slovenian Development Strategy 2030, available at <http://www.svrk.gov.si/>

It should be noted that the programme and project implementation was relatively short, and the total amount granted to Slovenia through the SI05 programme represents a very limited share of funds therefore it is not possible to directly attribute the changes in the statistical data for specific sectors or regions to the SI05 programme.

The decision to develop the abovementioned programme proved to be a very sensible one, as the programme areas are still very much topical; moreover, they are identified as priority areas in Slovenian Development Strategy 2030. The society of future will have to tackle the challenge of better health of people throughout their life span, as population ageing comes hand in hand with an increase in the prevalence of chronic diseases. Reduction of health inequalities is one of the key challenges to overcome in order to create the conditions for the quality of life for all, whereby the health status of the populations in all regions should be improved, particularly among seniors, low-skilled and those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The SI05 programme was also designed so as to correspond with Slovenia's national priorities seeking to improve the situation of women and to advance the development of effective gender equality policy. The achieved outputs and outcomes were in line with the programme goals.

Slovenia ranks relatively high as concerns the indicators of gender equality. It holds the 10th place in the EU with the gender equality index 68.4 (EU average is 66.2)¹⁰. The goal of Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 is to increase the gender equality index to at least 78 by 2030. In order to achieve this, it is crucial to continue to support the environment in which gender equality is understood as a public good for all.

2.2 Bilateral relations

To summarize bilateral cooperation at all levels we present findings of the evaluation of the programmes SI02, SI04, SI05 and Technical assistance and Fund for Bilateral relations at National level:

“Strengthening long-term bilateral cooperation is one of the overall objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants. The purpose of the funds for bilateral cooperation at national level was mainly to initiate bilateral relations right from the beginning in the agreed programme areas of the MoU. NFP was responsible for the management of the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level. Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level covered broader initiatives and target groups compared to the bilateral relations at the programme level. At a programme level, part of the resources under this fund was intended for the search of donor project partners for the implementation of projects in partnerships. The funds for the establishment of bilateral partnerships were proposed to be reimbursed to the project promoters selected within the public call for proposals for the co-financing of projects, in the form of reimbursement of costs. Nevertheless, none of the PPs requested the reimbursement upon submitting the application. Bilateral funds were used to facilitate networking and exchange of knowledge and best practices between PPs in Slovenia and entities in donor states.

¹⁰ Source: Slovenian Development Strategy 2030

As expenditures on bilateral relations at the programme level remained below planned figures, calls for proposals were published in the scope of programmes SI02 and SI05 in 2016 (one call with two deadlines for submission of proposals), only PPs of already approved projects were able to apply for funds. Two types of activities were foreseen (1) participation of Slovenian representatives at conferences, seminars, workshops in Norway and (2) organisation of bilateral conferences, seminars and workshops in Slovenia. Due to lack of interest of target groups and because the implemented activities cost less than initially estimated, all available funds were not spent and the second call for proposals in 2017 was approved.

A significant problem that POs encountered in this respect was having difficulty finding the experts from donor countries for activities at the programme level.

In general, cooperation at the project level ran smoothly; all projects under programme SI04 involved donor country partners. Programme SI02 included six project partners from donor countries. The pre-defined project ("Modernization of Spatial Data Infrastructure to reduce risks and impacts of floods") involved two project partners from donor countries. Programme SI05 included altogether 20 projects with bilateral partnerships; two pre-defined projects had one donor project partner each. In general, bilateral cooperation at the project level was very successful; the projects contributed to strengthening relations between the donor countries and Slovenia according to interviewed PPs, additionally, understanding/knowledge of cultural, political or socio-economic situation improved among project partners.

The efficiency of bilateral funds at the programme level was lower than expected; lack of interest of target groups made it difficult to implement bilateral activities. Given that many activities supported by bilateral funds at the programme level are similar or even the same as those under bilateral funds at national level, we recommend keeping just one of the bilateral funds. More emphasis should be put on promotion of bilateral cooperation, and donor countries should make further efforts to promote bilateral cooperation with beneficiary states."¹¹

Above mentioned Evaluation also look into bilateral relations at the national level: "The Work Programme of the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level included five priority areas of cooperation: (1) designing bilateral elements and aspects of the programmes in the preparation phase (2011 and 2012); (2) co-operation in the field of health; (3) co-operation in the field of gender equality; (4) Slovenian / EEA countries experiences in the past and future European integration; and (5) other initiatives to be agreed with the donors.

Bilateral health cooperation envisaged: conduction of the conference through the exchange of experiences and presentation of best practices in the field of public health, study visit at the Norwegian national telemedicine center in Tromsø and another study visit by Slovenian experts and policymakers in Norway devoted to the study of the field of public health.

¹¹ Evaluation of programmes financed by the European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014

Bilateral gender equality cooperation: a study visit to the institutions dealing with gender equality in Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein with a view to presenting best practices in the formulation and management of gender equality policy; a study visit to policymakers on gender equality at national and local level and to non-governmental organizations in Iceland with a view to exchanging experiences and establishing cooperation between stakeholders in gender equality policies, in particular with regard to measures to prevent violence against women, reconciliation in families, the role of men in gender equality and privacy in relation to the issues of gender equality; holding of a conference with exchange of knowledge on best practices in the area of gender equality with the participation of representatives from donor countries, Slovenia and third countries; a consultation meeting on the role of men in relation to gender equality; the participation of experts from Iceland at a thematic consultation seminar on gender equality issues in Slovenia; a study visit with exchange of knowledge on best practices in gender equality in Norway - national and, in particular, local level (policy formulation, research in the fields of life and work balance, violence against women, gender equality, women's role in decision making positions in the economy and politics).

Bilateral cooperation in the exchange of views on past experience and the future of European integration: holding of the Slovenia-EEA conference by focusing on the different models of European integration in the past and the prospects for the future (a look inside and outside the EU); study visit; implementation of the Slovenia-Norway conference on "Women, Peace and Security", the conference was in Ljubljana.

All planned activities were finished in the first half of 2018. MLFSA and MFA efficiently carried out the activities. The number of activities in the field of gender equality surpassed the planned figure, the increase was approved by the donor. MLFSA and MFA used up the planned spend, while MH carried out the planned activities but a portion of funds remained unspent.

Bilateral cooperation at national level (bilateral cooperation also took place at the level of programmes and projects) also included a special programme item amounting to EUR 3,600, which was available annually for an additional activity agreed with the donors. For example, a visit of a group of Slovenian Parliament members to Oslo (meetings at certain ministries) was financed under this item.

Financial indicators

The relevant figures relating to allocation and spending under the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National level are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Funds allocated to and spent on bilateral relations at national level, Source: GODC information

EUR	Health sector	Gender equality	European integration
Funds available	30,000	33,500	33,500
Funds used	5,617.21	33,500	33,500
Difference	24,382.79	0	0
Share of funds spent of the total allocation	19%	100%	100%

While a total of EUR 97,000 was planned for the implementation of various bilateral cooperation activities, EUR 72,617.21 was spent, which accounts for 75% of the available budget. Total funding made available under the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level stood at EUR 134,500, of which 72% was allocated to cooperation in the fields of health, gender equality and European integration.

Effectiveness

Long-term cooperation between different spheres (ministries, NGOs) of donor countries and Slovenia was established through the bilateral cooperation work plan. The work plan of the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level was well-thought-out. The themes (health, gender equality and European integration) were selected according to past experience. All planned activities were implemented by the first half of 2018. In the future, it would be sensible to set up a similar form of cooperation through exchange of experience in the field of science and research. Slovenian Health Ministry could make greater use of bilateral cooperation to support the flow of information on effective management of health service providers (hospitals, health centers, etc.).¹²

In conclusion, the work plan for bilateral relations at national level for the 2009-2014 period was well structured and planned. Nevertheless, some recommendations will be put forward. While all planned activities were completed, and a portion of funds was unspent, Slovenian relevant ministries acted proactively and organised additional activities. All activities strengthened bilateral long-term cooperation between Slovenia and the donor countries, supported exchange of knowledge, experience and made an important contribution to the development of many areas of cooperation in Slovenia.

Programme SI02 – EEA Financial Mechanism Programme

A total of EUR 155,000 was available for strengthening bilateral relations between Slovenia and the donor states under the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme. The activities were implemented both at the programme and project level. Funds from the bilateral fund of the EEA programme were available for additional activities under the predefined project. Bilateral relations in the field of natural heritage protection and protected area management were established through two study visits in Slovenia and Iceland in 2017. Additionally, cooperation between Slovenian and partners from donor states is expected to continue in the future in certain cases.

Wider effects

Project promoters had additional funds available for the activities, which enable integration, exchange and transfer of knowledge, technologies, experience and best practice with organisations from donor countries. Thus, two calls for proposals under bilateral cooperation at the programme level were launched. Within first call two types of activities were foreseen: 1/Type 1: participation of Slovenian representatives in conferences, seminars and workshops in Norway, and 2/Type 2: organisation of bilateral conferences, seminars and workshops in Slovenia. The call for proposals was open for project promoters under the programmes whose projects had been selected under the call, which had two

¹² Evaluation of programmes financed by the European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014

application deadlines. The funds made available under the Fund for Bilateral Activities under programme SI02 stood at EUR 40,000. Two proposals were received. The latter were both approved and received grants for activities of Type 1. Due to lack of interest of the target groups and because the implemented activities cost less than initially estimated, all available funds were not spent and the second call was launched in February 2017. Three proposals were received and approved. Representatives of two project promoters participated in a conference and workshops in the Donor States, and one project promoter organised a bilateral workshop in Slovenia.

Thanks to the funds from the bilateral fund several Slovenian project promoters and organisations from donor states were able to meet for the first time to share experience and good practices.

Shared results and improved knowledge

Slovenian project promoters were relatively successful in finding partners from donor states, since 50% of all programme-related projects were implemented in cooperation with donor project partners.

Bilateral cooperation activities in the form of regular meetings, study visits and exchange of knowledge and experience further took place under five projects which involved donor state partners. In general, bilateral cooperation at the project level was very successful. According to the survey carried out by external evaluators, bilateral cooperation at the project level contributed to strengthening relations between the donor states and Slovenia. Also, knowledge of project partners about culture, political and socio-economic situation in both countries improved.

Table 2: SI02 - Bilateral indicators

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Achievement Total
Number of articles published in one country about the other partner country	0	2	18
Number of European and international networks where project and programme partners participate together	0	1	9
Number of joint (bilateral) articles published, written by persons from an institution in both a Beneficiary and Donor State, published in a national or international publication, originated from a project financed by the programme	0	3	3
Number of joint, sector-wide initiatives, in a Beneficiary or Donor State, beyond the programme	0	1	1
Number of men involved in exchange visits between Beneficiary and Donor States	0	7	83
Number of project partnership agreements in	0	0	0

beneficiary civil society			
Number of project partnership agreements in the beneficiary private sector	0	0	1
Number of project partnership agreements in the beneficiary public sector	0	2	4
Number of women involved in exchange visits between Beneficiary and Donor States	0	6	36

The number of projects carried out in partnerships with donor project partners was much higher than expected; thus, most target values were exceeded.

Programme SI03 - Funds for Non-governmental Organisations

Slovenian NGO Programme was very successful in terms of bilateral relations; over one third of the selected projects (13) involved partners from two of the donor states, i.e. nine from Norway, and four from Iceland. Several contacts were made through cooperation of the Fund Operator (FO) and Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC). Also, the applicants who applied in partnership with organisations from donor states were rewarded with (up to) an additional 5 points (depending on the quality of partnership cooperation), which was the main trigger that encouraged NGOs to really put an extra effort into finding appropriate partners.

In FO's opinion, the outreach to Norwegian NGOs is relatively weak. The database with potential project partners is too small with only approximately 2,000 NGOs registered. Since these organisations are facing big pressure from the 16 beneficiary countries, the threat that even those will delete themselves from the database is getting bigger by the day. Therefore, the access to Norwegian NGOs should be severely increased.

According to article 4.5 of Programme Implementation Agreement "Indicatively 49% of the fund referred to in paragraph 1 will be allocated to measure a). 51% of the fund will be allocated to measure b)." Total amount of the funds spent on bilateral relations was EUR 35,653 and the final % split was: a) 58% (EUR 20,597) and b) 42% (EUR 15,056).

Table 3: SI03 Bilateral indicators

Bilateral indicators	Baseline	Target	Achieved
Number of project partnership agreements in beneficiary civil society	0	10	13
Number of projects with expected shared results (both partners are involved professionally in planning and implementation and can claim credit for achieved results)	0	10	10
Number of articles published in one country about the other partner country	0	1	5

The results of internal evaluation showed that beneficiaries reported considerable problems finding appropriate project partners. Furthermore, in some cases, the models applied in donor countries were not suitable for transfer to Slovenia due to different systems. On the other hand, the majority of beneficiaries stated that cooperation with donor states partners worked out excellent and that they managed to transfer the knowledge successfully. In some cases, they estimated that a view from the outside was very valuable; partners were supportive, responsible and positive.

Even though Slovenian NGO Fund was particularly successful in terms of bilateral cooperation, several further steps have been taken to ease the way for future beneficiaries. In February 2017, FO visited several organisations in Norway to establish non-formal partnership on information sharing to potential partners - smaller organisations that are harder to find online, also because they often do not have any information published in English, were looked for. These organisations explained that the EEA and Norway Grants were less visible among smaller organisations that were reluctant to engage in something they did not understand well.

FO assessed bilateral cooperation as extremely successful in terms of quality and number of project partnerships, which proved to grow into real partnerships where partners cooperate and work together for the benefit of all. These are perfect opportunities for longterm cooperation.

Programme SI04 - Slovenian Scholarship Fund

The programme was implemented from 2013 to 2017, during that period, 92 applications for preparatory and study visits were received, out of which 30 were rejected due to low quality or incompliance with the programme rules and 62 were approved and realised. The main outcome of 17 preparatory visits were strengthened bilateral cooperation between the sending and hosting institution, and in 92% a plan for joint projects under either Norway or EEA Grants or other similar programmes. After all three calls had been completed, the Programme Operator only opened the call for study visits, which was open until all the funds were spent in 2015 and then re-opened after the re-allocation of funds from Measures 2-5 to Measure 1. The funds were re-allocated after the first project final reports were received and it was evident that a portion of funds would remain unspent. The main outcomes of study visits were strengthened bilateral cooperation, sharing of results of projects and good case practices under Norway and EEA Grants, and concrete plans for future cooperation under other similar programmes. In terms of indicators, 112 partnership agreements in public sector were conducted, which made for 467% of the target. There were also 24 partnership agreements in private sector and in the civil society respectively, which in both cases made for 2400%. The high figures can be attributed to the fact that there were more preparatory and study visits realised than initially planned and that many educational institutions cooperated with organisations from their local environment (companies, NGOs, etc.).

In 2016, a group study visit to Norway was organised for ten headteachers of secondary schools who visited four different school centres in order to get familiar with the education system, good practices in school management, curriculum development and examples of successful projects under EEA and Norway Grants. The results of such study visits usually include future cooperation with the hosting institution under the EEA and Norway Grants, Erasmus+ or other similar programmes, implementation of

new ideas, exchange of good practices in participants' work and, personal growth and development of their professional and personal competences.

The activities under Measure 1 proved to be very important in programmes identical to the Norway and EEA Grants. They offered opportunities to strengthen bilateral cooperation, find new partners, share and gain new knowledge, experience, good practices not only to institutions that participated in the programme under Measures 2-5, but also to those that did not manage to obtain funds for the projects under the EEA and Norway Grants. The outcomes are wider, covering more educational institutions and offering them opportunities of this kind. PO consider that the re-allocation of funds that remained unspent under completed projects from Measures 2-5 brought positive outcomes reflected in increased number of mobilities, wider effect, increased number of future partnerships and enhanced cooperation between Slovenian and donor states educational institutions. The outcomes could have been even better, had there been more flexibility allowed in terms of re-allocation of unspent funds (including the distribution between the two mechanisms) and not only 5%, which made over EUR 100,000 EUR of funds unspent and at least 10 unrealised study visits.

Donor partnership programmes

PO highlights the importance and necessity in all the selected projects to have a donor state partner institution, which helps increase bilateral cooperation in each and every project. The obligation of having a partner from Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway in each project encouraged the PO to establish close cooperation with DPPs in every donor state. Good relationships that the PO established during these years helped project beneficiaries and study visits participants to team up with quality partners from donor countries.

Programme SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme

Extent of cooperation: The programme in the area of public health initiatives was designed and carried out in partnership with the donor project partner (DPP) Norwegian Institute of Public Health. The DPP facilitated networking and transfer of know-how through bilateral relations and study visits.

Bilateral relations at the programme level were implemented through two measures:

- **Preparation of project proposals:** This measure was implemented by the PO in co-operation with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway in Budapest and with close involvement of the DPP. The measure supported search for partners prior to or during the preparation of a project application, the development of such partnership and the preparation of an application for a donor partnership project. Slovenia was relatively successful in finding Norwegian partners; as many as 20 projects out of 26 projects included partners from Norway. In general, bilateral cooperation at the project level was very successful.
- **Fund for bilateral relations:** The fund supported networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, technology, experiences and best practices between Slovenian project promoters and entities in Norway. The activities under this measure included study visits of Slovenian experts and policy makers to Norway, expert visits from Norway to Slovenia, annual events and conferences with participation of Norwegian partners and information activities supporting networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, information and experience.

A call for proposals of bilateral activities under bilateral cooperation at the programme level worth EUR 104,000 was launched on 20 May 2016. Two types of activities were foreseen: 1/Type 1: participation of Slovenian representatives at conferences, seminars, workshops in Norway and 2/Type 2: organisation of bilateral conferences, seminars and workshops in Slovenia. The call for proposals was open for project promoters and had two application deadlines. Seven proposals, of which 5 were in line with the requirements of the call, were submitted by the first deadline. Six proposals were received by the second deadline.

Given that a considerable amount of money remained unspent, the Cooperation Committee decided to approve the launch of another call for proposals of bilateral activities in 2017. The call had the same characteristics as the first one. The deadline for submission of proposals of bilateral activities was 31 March 2017. Five proposals were submitted by the deadline. All bilateral activities financed under the Fund for bilateral relations were completed by 31 August 2017. The total amount disbursed for bilateral activities was EUR 71,680.15.

Shared results

The funds available under the Fund for bilateral relations allowed for the implementation of several bilateral activities.

Improved knowledge and mutual understanding

Co-operation between the two countries included study visits and professional cooperation as well as sharing of knowledge between both countries. Transfer of knowledge accelerated the development of Slovenian health sector. On the other hand, the Norwegian partners acquired experience regarding the transfer of such products to a country with a different health system, and a different social, economic and cultural history.

Wider effect

One particular feature of programme SI05 was the cooperation of Norwegian partners in a number of projects, since as many as 20 projects involved Norwegian partners. In terms of achievement of objectives at the programme level, it was the input in the form of cooperation with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health from Oslo that played a decisive role. Experience shows that good relations established between project partners from both countries are usually pursued even after the closure of projects and make an important contribution to sustainability of the results.

Bilateral indicator values were set quite modestly, since the project promoters as well as PO did not expect cooperation between the two countries would run as smoothly as it did. It was expected that cultural differences, geographical distance and specifics of the health systems would have a significant negative impact on the outcome of bilateral cooperation. However, this did not materialize in practice. Cooperation and special ties with Norwegian institutions at the programme and project level give an additional boost to already successful bilateral relations between the Kingdom of Norway and the Republic of Slovenia.

Table 4: SI05 Bilateral indicators

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Achieved
Number of project partnership agreements in beneficiary civil society	0	0	0
Number of project partnership agreements in the beneficiary private sector	0	0	0
Number of project partnership agreements in the beneficiary public sector	0	2	26
Number of projects with expected shared results (both partners are involved professionally in planning and implementation and can claim credit for achieved results)	0	2	20
Number of women involved in exchange visits between beneficiary and donor states	0	30	149
Number of men involved in exchange visits between beneficiary and donor states	0	25	68
Number of joint (bilateral) articles published, written by persons from both institutions in a beneficiary and donor state, published in national or international publications, originated from a project financed by the programme	0	4	50
Number of joint (bilateral) scientific papers written with co-researchers in at least one beneficiary and one donor state, and published in a national or international scientific publication, originated from a project financed by the programme	0	3	3
Number of new technologies/new practises, including IT-systems, adopted in a beneficiary state, as a result of transfer of knowledge from a donor state partner	0	2	8
Number of professional networks between institutions in beneficiary and donor states established and operational	0	1	8

Donor partnership programmes

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH) in Oslo acted as the donor programme partner (DPP) in the SI05 programme and also as the project partner of the pre-defined project. The NIPH is a national centre of excellence in the areas of environmental medicine, epidemiology, forensic toxicology and drug abuse, infectious diseases control and mental health. Social inequalities represent one of the research areas in which the NIPH has been one of the leading organisations in Norway, a country with a good record of egalitarian traditions, which can be shared with Slovenia.

The cooperation with the NIPH was very effective on programme and on project level.

As the DPP, the NIPH helped to identify the potential partners from Norway based on their competencies, experience and compatibility of their activities with the overall objective and expected outcomes of the programme.

As the project partner in the pre-defined project, NIPH co-operated with the Slovenian National Institute of Public Health. Co-operation of both institutions in the joint project included study visits and professional cooperation as well as sharing of knowledge between both countries. The two institutions particularly focused their common work on health care data and health indicators. The Norwegian experts shared their experience in developing and implementing the so-called Norwegian Health Profiles. The transfer of knowledge accelerated the development of Slovenian health indicators in municipalities. On the other hand, the cooperation with Slovenian experts provided the Norwegian experts with a valuable critical view on their previous work. They also acquired experience regarding the transfer of such products to a country with a different health system, different social, economic and cultural history and also with different situation in terms of access and use of data.

The NIPH established professional ties with many stakeholders in Slovenian public health sector, in particular with the Slovenian National Institute of Public Health, which represents a good base to continue cooperation in the framework of other programmes or projects.

3 REPORTING ON PROGRAMMES

3.1 Overview of Programme achievements

Programme SI02 – EEA Financial Mechanism Programme

The SI02 programme covers three areas (i.e. Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Conservation and Revitalisation of Cultural and Natural Heritage, Environmental Monitoring and Integrated Planning and Control) that are essential for stimulating and promoting green, sustainable and creative potential of our country. In order to achieve positive changes in these areas it is necessary to provide long-term support for activities that aim at raising awareness of the importance and presentation of the natural and cultural heritage, preservation of biodiversity and for necessary investments in infrastructure.

Environmental Monitoring and Integrated Planning and Control

The programme area saw the implementation of the pre-defined project 'Modernization of Spatial Data Infrastructure to Reduce Risks and Impacts of Floods'. The project was successfully implemented by the project team from the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP), and Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia (SMA) in cooperation with project partners of the Norwegian Mapping Authority (Statens kartverk) and the National Land Survey of Iceland (Landmælingar Íslands). The project especially supported balanced regional development, improvement of spatial management, and mitigation of risks of natural disasters.

Achievement of the outcome "Increased exchange of information on environmental impact, status and trends between Beneficiary States and other EU Member States" indicators was monitored on the basis of the implementation of the pre-defined project Modernisation of Spatial Data Infrastructure to Reduce Risks and Impacts of Floods. All outcome indicators have been fulfilled; some indicator values have been surpassed.

Slovenia and other EU members have to transpose the Inspire Directive in the national legislation and report on its implementation. The key outcome of the project, which also reflects the Inspire Directive implementation, was the establishment of conditions that facilitate the exchange of information on environmental impacts of diverse natural or man-made causes. The prerequisite is standardisation of geolocation base as prescribed in the Inspire Implementing Rules, such as the European spatial reference system and standardisation of topographic data themes, which were important parts of the project. Both will enable transnational exchange and comparability of spatial and environmental geo-referenced data. The Slovenian reference system has been successfully established within the project (coordinate reference system (emphasis on vertical component), topographic data standards and harmonisation of hydrographic data). Also, the metadata system within Slovenian geoportal has been improved, together with awareness-raising about its importance and use through capacity building programme which has been prepared and promoted, and through workshops or conferences on the importance of the Inspire Directive. As a result, more public authorities provide their data publicly, so that discovery and download services are established. One of the pivotal results is accessibility of LIDAR terrain data for the whole Slovenian territory under the authority of Slovenian Environment Agency, which can be used by state authorities, local communities and experts in flood mitigation processes. Other public authorities are included in the Inspire network (or in the process of inclusion). Network services specifying common interfaces for web services (discovery services, view services, download services and transformation services) are established or in the process of establishment. Instructions and guidelines have been prepared on how to establish such services according to the Inspire Implementing Rules. The network services are accessible through Slovenian Inspire geoportal and will be available also through European Inspire geoportal. The increased exchange of information on environmental impact, status and trends between Beneficiary States and other EU Member States was reported in the national report on Inspire implementation. The awareness about the need for cooperation between public bodies and promotion of standardisation in the field of SDI has improved by (1) better promotion of achieved results, (2) support from credible partners with sound results, such as Norwegian SDI implementation, and (3) establishment of data coverage for the whole of Slovenia (not only samples), such as digital terrain data or topographic data in future, which may be used by every user in any part of Slovenian territory.

Table 5: Outcome – Environmental Monitoring and Integrated Planning and Control

Outcome	Indicator	Indicator value		
		Baseline	Target	Total achieved
Increased exchange of information on environmental impact, status and trends between Beneficiary States and other EU Member States	Number of public authorities that link their spatial datasets to the INSPIRE network	1	3	3
	Implementation of INSPIRE Implementing Rules	0	3	3

	Accessibility of spatial data	1	3	3
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Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

To achieve the overall programme objective (halt the loss of biodiversity) the programme focuses on the areas with the highest biodiversity, which lie within the EU Natura 2000 network. Four projects were implemented on Natura 2000 sites with the greatest need to improve unfavourable conservation status of Natura habitat types (HT) and species. Project activities targeted 25 Natura habitat types and species, three forest HT and five forest species, three wetland HT and five wetland species, and four grassland HT and five grassland species. Additionally, the projects expanded existing monitoring and surveys to those Natura species whose conservation status was unknown due to insufficient data. Implemented projects extended the scope of the monitoring and survey of unknown species and contributed to improved conservation status of 16 habitat types and species, resulting in the final improvement of five of them.

Information, education and awareness activities took place to support the implementation of conservation activities previously described, to achieve an added value effect and ensure sustainability. Higher acceptance of implementation of the Natura 2000 site management programme, especially those implemented in project activities, has been noticed. The final situation in achieving programme indicators is shown below:

Table 6: Outcome – Biodiversity and Ecosystem services

Outcome	Indicator	Indicator value		
		Baseline	Target	Total achieved
Increased capacity to manage and monitor Natura 2000 sites effectively	Number of management plans for Natura 2000 areas implemented	109 plans in forestry /19,600 ha agriculture	115 plans in forestry (+6) / 20,180 ha in agriculture (+580 ha)	+ 115 plans forestry (+6 plans) = 20,218 ha in agriculture (+ 618 ha)
	Number of Natura 2000 species / habitat types monitored and the share of their population / range covered by monitoring	110 species/ habitat types	116 species/ habitat types (+ 6 species / HTs)	123 species / habitat types (+13 species / habitat types)
	Number of Natura 2000 species / habitat types in	Total 176 units out of 748	Total 181 units (+5) out of 748	181 units out of 748 (+5 units)

	favourable or improved conservation status			
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The number of Natura 2000 species/habitat types in a favourable or improved conservation status was calculated based on a complex methodology and final values could not be reported in interim reports, only their estimates. Final assessment confirms the improvement of the conservation status for five units, thus reaching 181 units.

The number of newly monitored Natura 2000 species and habitat types slightly surpassed the expected indicator value. This can be explained by a high number of research / monitoring institutions being project partners. Their basic interest is monitoring activity; as a result, monitoring was included in every project and was successfully implemented.

Conservation and Revitalisation of Cultural and Natural Heritage

The Programme objective was to safeguard and conserve cultural and natural heritage for future generations and make it publicly accessible.

In the area of conservation and revitalisation of *natural heritage* the Programme contributed to the improvement in conservation and revitalisation of natural heritage in three natural heritage sites that attract many visitors. New infrastructure was developed and improvement of the old infrastructure were made in order to connect the achievement of nature conservation goals concerning natural heritage sites and environmentally acceptable public access to natural assets.

The outcome indicator on the annual number of visitors has been considerably surpassed; yet, it has shown a fall in the figures since the beginning of the selected projects. The indicator value was surpassed because there were two projects selected instead of only one; the two projects included highly visited natural heritage sites. As a result, more than 200,000 visitors experienced three natural heritage sites in an improved way. In other words, tourists enjoyed improved information on the nature conservation; they experienced natural heritage sites in a nature-friendly way, while noticeable increase in the use of sustainable transport options when visiting protected areas was recorded. The recorded figures surpass by far the minimum indicator value planned in the Programme. The decrease in visitor numbers was observed only in the project "Park and Experience Nature". It is expected that the number of visitors will increase again in 2018 and 2019, and will easily reach the baseline number from 2015.

We believe that the most important achievement of the natural heritage part of the Programme is its contribution to increased awareness of more than 200,000 visitors annually about the benefits of using sustainable mobility when visiting protected areas. The environmentally friendly way of visiting natural heritage sites contributes directly to the climate change prevention and mitigation through the reduction of CO₂ emissions. Natural heritage sites, which are protected and revitalised with support from the EEA Grants have become an important messenger spreading the word about Slovenia as a green destination where measures are being actively implemented to safeguard well-preserved nature for future generations.

Table 7: Outcome – Conservation and Revitalisation of Cultural and Natural Heritage

Outcome	Indicator	Indicator value		
		Baseline	Target	Achieved
Cultural heritage made accessible to the public Number of natural heritage sites	Number of natural heritage sites protected or revitalised	0	1-3	3
	Annual number of visitors of cultural and/or natural heritage sites and/or museums	5000	5000	210,106

In the area of Cultural Heritage the Programme contributed to the achievement of the outcome “Cultural heritage restored, renovated and protected”. The priority of the Programme was to invest into projects of national importance, into cultural monuments.

The achievements in this area include improved accessibility and protection of cultural heritage as well as the restoration and renovation of cultural monuments of national importance and the establishment of necessary infrastructure. At the end of project implementation in the beginning of 2017, three cultural monuments, which represent immovable cultural heritage were renovated, restored and safeguarded, thus contributing to having cultural heritage publicly accessible, renovated, restored and conserved.

The effects of implemented projects within the programme area are reflected in the preservation and protection of cultural and natural heritage, diversification and better quality of tourism offer of tourist destinations, in the possibility to create integrated cultural and natural products, development of other services in different areas and in increased number of tourists and other visitors.

Lessons learned

According to the recommendations set out in the Evaluation report on programmes financed by the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014, it would be necessary to shorten the timing of the interim financial reports review, as some project promoters had many problems due to long payment deadlines. A longer duration of projects, as well as a change of administrative procedures with the aim of simplifying them was also recommended.

Programme SI03 – Funds for Non-governmental Organisations

The overall objective of the NGO Programme in Slovenia was to strengthen civil society development and to enhance contribution to social justice, democracy and sustainable development, which provided appropriate response to the civil society needs in Slovenia. The main aims of the NGO Fund were to improve NGOs’ organisational development and build their advocacy capacities. Special attention was given to supporting deficit priority areas, promoting cross-sectoral partnerships in community development, and encouraging ideas that adequately address current pressing problems in Slovenian society, while contributing to long-term development of the NGO sector.

NGO Programme in Slovenia pursued five outcomes: Active citizenship fostered, Cross-sectoral partnerships developed, Advocacy and watchdog role developed, Developed networks and coalitions of NGOs working in partnership and Empowerment of vulnerable groups. Detailed review of achievements of selected projects shows that all 5 outcomes were addressed.

Figure 8: Outcomes indicator table

Outcome	Standard indicator	Baseline	Target	Achieved
Active citizenship fostered	Evidence of decision-makers responding to citizen's actions	0	10	35
Cross-sectoral partnerships developed, particularly with government organisations at local, regional and / or national level	Number of mechanisms fostering dialogue between citizens, civil society and local/national institutions	0	11	11
Advocacy and watchdog role developed	Number of laws, policies or practices changed or improved because of NGO advocacy activities	0	6	15
Developed networks and coalitions of NGOs working in partnership	Number of NGO networks/ platforms/ coalitions developed	0	20	33
Empowerment of vulnerable groups	Number of beneficiaries engaged in the strategic planning/ implementation of activities	0	55	2630

The programme has reached (or exceeded) all its targets. The targets were overachieved due to the fact that most project promoters were active in more than just one area, therefore contributing to more than just one outcome. The targets were modest but realistic, taking into account the funds distributed and the maximum amount of donations. The overachievement is a result of exceptional work of project promoters and some external circumstances that happened during the Programme implementation (for example referendum on same-sex rights resulting in the change of the law, early parliamentary elections giving possibilities to include NGO representatives in working groups, etc.).

Great progress has been made in terms of organisational capacity development. As the NGO Fund was the only fund that enabled CSOs to invest in their future there were some initial difficulties. Some CSOs did not understand that capacity building activities did not have to be directly linked to projects. Medium and large project promoters needed to dedicate at least 20% of the funds to organisational development, which brought great results. All organisations reported significant progress in this area - FO monitored the progress and measured it before/after surveys based on the matrix provided by the FMO.

Lessons learned

The FO takes particular pride in the fact that projects were evenly distributed across the country. In fact, most of them were implemented out of Ljubljana, the capital, which does not happen often. FO managed to follow the initially set distribution of funds per each programme area (with smaller adjustments).

The projects that were implemented in the areas that are usually overlooked by other donors and national authorities (environment, human rights, democracy) brought the best results and had an

important impact. Indeed, the FO promoted projects that dealt with topics that were not covered by other programmes or funding sources. FO is also proud of bilateral partnerships that were established; beneficiaries are for the most part still working together and cooperating. FO would also put even more effort to educating evaluators and making sure they deeply understand the programme goals and can evaluate projects accordingly. An important takeaway from this period is that such grants are extremely rare in Slovenia and the interest by potential beneficiaries is, accordingly, huge. With this in mind, FO proposes to change the application process by making the first stage more creative to make sure that best ideas are selected, and then provide support for the second stage and full application to avoid the possibility of losing great projects only due to lack of project writing skills, this goes particularly for small organisations and project managers that lack the necessary experience.

Programme SI04 - Slovenian Scholarship Fund

Slovenia implemented Slovenian Scholarship Fund programme, which received support through the EEA and Norway Grants and underlined its role as an important complementary programme to existing EU programmes. Its focus on the three donor countries and improvement of bilateral relations with them has been an important element of more targeted activities aiming at enhancement of mutual understanding, sharing, exchange and cooperation between Slovenian education institutions and those of the three donor states.

Results, i.e. the number of mobilities and joint projects implemented support this. Thus, Slovenian Scholarship Fund enabled mobility of 184 higher education students, compared to 64 Erasmus students that went to donor countries, mostly due to much higher financial support from this programme. Furthermore, 136 higher education students were involved in inter-institutional cooperation projects (intensive programmes). One intensive programme funded by Erasmus programme (and launched before the start of Slovenian Scholarship Fund programme) was joined by seven projects co-financed by Slovenian Scholarship Fund to make eight inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education as a result of the 2009-2014 funding period. 143 teaching staff members participated in mobility activities in the 2009-2014 programmes, and 227 higher education teachers were supported via mobility projects, with another 34 taking part in inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education. From existing four Comenius school partnerships (taken as a baseline) PO provided support to seven school partnership projects where 139 pupils and 107 teachers were involved and produced other concrete results apart from mobility.

Programme Slovenian Scholarship Fund followed two outcomes:

- **Outcome 1** - Increased higher education student and staff mobility between Beneficiary States and EEA EFTA States and between Beneficiary States and Norway.

Based on the final reports from project promoters 250 students participating in mobilities through Measure 2 and 4 received ECTS credits for their activities. This number represents 227% of the target set in the programme. More mobilities lead to more ECTS credits. It was also due to the fact that majority of the participating institutions already had experience with other similar programmes (Lifelong learning, Erasmus, etc.). Therefore processes were already in place, where participants signed three-partite contract with the sending and receiving institutions with the

exact programme of the exchange and the number of ECTS credits they will obtain during these activities.

- **Outcome 2** - Increased and strengthened institutional cooperation within the all levels of education sector between the Beneficiary States and EEA EFTA States and between Beneficiary States and Norway.

Through the institutional cooperation projects in education and training (Measures 5) 246 participants (pupils, teachers or staff) were involved in short-term mobilities and have improved their skills and competencies. Out of these, 107 were staff or teacher personnel involved. The target has been exceeded by 7% out of 107% realization rate. It can be concluded that all these participants have increased their skills and competences, because all the projects have addressed the topics integrated in the regular implementation of the programme, have strengthened the bilateral cooperation among partners and have a long-term effect. There are also concrete results in form of products or services that are being used and disseminated after projects have concluded.

As no other programme besides Lifelong learning offered financial support to mobility and cooperation projects with the selected donor states, the existence of Slovenian Scholarship Programme represented an important stimulus for focused bilateral cooperation and enhanced partnerships. Consequently, many new synergies were created during the programme implementation with programme operators responsible for other programmes financed by the EEA and Norway Grants as well as by other EU programmes, like Europe for Citizens, Erasmus+ and regional CEEPUS programme.

Lessons learned

The need to monitor the projects more closely; the need to have a procedure allowing the PO to decide, based on interim reports, to reallocate the funds from low-performing projects to the reserve list, and to consider targets and realisation of targets in selection of projects during later calls. PO also recommended more funds for joint projects for which there is very high interest, particularly in the education and training area. Another positive characteristic of the programme that helped overachieve some of the targets are higher grants for participants in mobility projects compared to other similar programmes (e.g. Erasmus+). This allowed individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds to participate in the programme and go on exchange to donor countries, where living standard is much higher and life more expensive than in Slovenia.

Programme SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme

The SI05 programme covered two areas (i.e. strengthening of public health and primary health care capacities and development of effective gender equality policy) that are crucial for social and economic prosperity of any country. Programme SI05 programme was designed in line with national priorities to strengthen public health and primary health care capacities in the areas of disease prevention and health promotion with specific focus on NCDs, mental health and health inequalities. It was very successful as regards the achievement of programme outputs and outcomes.

19 projects selected under a call for proposals were implemented within the programme area *Public health initiatives*:

- 7 projects in the sub-area Reducing inequalities between user groups;
- 6 projects in the sub-area Prevention of lifestyle-related diseases;
- 6 projects in the sub-area Improved mental health services.

The project results set under all of the projects have been achieved, in some cases even significantly surpassed. For instance, the number of trained professionals in health inequality and related topics and issues, the number of trained professionals in lifestyle-related chronic diseases prevention and the number of trained primary health care and other professionals in mental health was considerably higher than expected. The reason for this in most cases lies in planning which was too modest.

The programme outputs contributed to programme outcomes in both programme areas according to expectations.

Table 8: Outcomes of SI05 programme

Outcome	Standard outcome indicators	Baseline	Target value	Achieved value
Reduced inequalities between user groups	Number of actions taken to reduce inequalities in health through increased access	0	10	91
Lifestyle-related diseases prevented or reduced	Number of actions/activities aiming to reduce or prevent lifestyle-related diseases at national/local level	0	15	14
Improved mental health services	New local structures for mental health	0	3	22
Awareness raised and research on gender issues promoted	Attitudes towards gender roles changed	0	60	60

Some pilot projects, which were implemented in the area of public health, were later integrated in the public health system, which improved public health services for citizens. However, some projects will not be continued because they did not get new sources of future funding. In order to ensure systematic and sustained financing of the solutions presented and tested within the framework of individual projects, the possibilities of expanding the public health network at the primary level should be explored. This means that the programme of services for primary healthcare would be upgraded with proposals identified through pilot projects in order to receive financing from the compulsory healthcare insurance.

Since the share of women holding leadership positions in business and politics in Slovenia is still noticeably lower than the share of men, it is important to continuously raise awareness on the importance of women's participation in economic and political life and to promote work life balance, as well as to amend the current legislation to increase women's representation in decision-making positions. Reconciliation between work and family-life is a pre-condition for more equality between women and men as regards participation in both the labour market and in leadership positions.

5 projects selected under a call for proposals were implemented within the programme area *Mainstreaming gender equality and promoting work-life balance*:

- 1 project in the sub-area Economic decision-making;
- 2 projects in the sub-area Political decision-making;
- 2 projects in the sub area Promoting work-life balance.

Implementation of projects targeting gender equality successfully raised awareness about gender issues, promoted research on gender issues and increased understanding of equal/unequal power relations between women and men. The responses to the imbalances that persist in participation in politics at the

local and national level were identified within the programme, and a research that analysed collective agreements in Slovenia and the role of social partners in promoting gender equality was carried out.

Lessons learend within this period: it took almost one year from the publication of the call to the selection of the projects, which is a relatively long period. There are several reasons for this delay (institutional changes, the selection of external independent evaluators). The limited number of experts who also frequently co-operate in the role of project promoters, consequently led to reduction in the number of potential applicants. This led to delay in the assessment of applications and announcement of the results of the call. It should be taken into consideration that the above-mentioned problems are usually faced by small countries.

3.2 Overview of calls and financial figures

Table 9: Allocated and spent funds by programmes (SI02, SI04, SI05)

	No. of received applications of projects	No. of co-founded projects	No. of rejected projects	Allocated funds**** (in EUR) (A)	Spent funds (in EUR) (B)	% of spent funds (B/A)*100
SI02	43	10 (9 CfT* + 1 PDP**)	34	9,387,632.28	9,085,074.33	96.78 %
SI04	94***	52	42	1,827,613.00	1,695,945.00	92.80 %
SI05	182	26 (24 CfT + 2 PDP)	158	12,378,042.89	11,419,479.74	92.26 %
<p>* CfT = Call for tender ** PDP = Pre-defined project *** Without study visits **** The funds relate only to projects, and not to funds that were allocated to management in the framework of programmes, bilateral relations and complementary activities.</p>						

Source: GODC (December 2017)

Programme SI02 – EEA Financial Mechanism Programme

The projects for the programme areas of Biodiversity and ecosystem services and the Conservation and revitalisation of cultural and natural heritage were selected through the Call for proposals to co-finance projects under the Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 and the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 which was published on 27 December 2013 in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 110/2013. The deadline for the submission of proposals to co-finance projects was 28 February 2014.

Table 10: Statistics on the completed review of administrative suitability and eligibility of applications

RECEIVED APPLICATIONS	DISMISSED AND REJECTED APPLICATIONS				COMPLETE APPLICATIONS	
	Unsuitably marked envelope	Administrative phase and eligibility of applications phase	Total dismissed/rejected applications	Share of received applications	Complete applications	Share of received applications
43	11	4	15	34.9%	28	65.1%

The applicants requested a total of EUR 44,072,520.24, which is by 6.03 times more than the available funding amounting to EUR 7,301,756.00. The average requested amount of grants equalled EUR 1,377,266.26. The applications with an inadequately marked envelope (11) were not opened and the data was not collected.

Table 11: Available funding according to individual areas compared to the requested amount of grants for the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme (in EUR)

	Available grants	Requested amount of grants	Average requested amount of grants
EEA PROGRAMME	7,301,756.00	44,072,520.24	1,377,266.26
BRIES	2,030,508.00	4,772,050.23	596,506.28
ND	1,271,248.00	1,990,527.86	663,509.29
KD	4,000,000.00	37,309,942.15	1,776,663.91

Quality assessment was performed for 28 applications: 7 from the area Biodiversity, 3 from the area Natural heritage and 18 from the area Cultural Heritage.

Each application, which fulfilled administrative and eligibility criteria was assessed by two evaluators from the selected area. After scoring, the applications were classified according to the average number of points per individual application awarded by both evaluators.

Table 12: Successful rate of applications (Applications which were submitted for quality assessment)

Area	Number of applications which was submitted for quality assessment	Selected project for the implementation	Success rate of applications
Biodiversity and ecosystem services	7	4	57.14 %
Natural heritage	3	2	66.67 %
Cultural Heritage	18	3	16.67 %
Total	28	9	32.14 %

The selection process was prolonged due to unsuccessful public procurement for the selection of experts assessing the quality of projects. This consequently meant that time remaining for project implementation was shorter.

In the area Environmental Monitoring and Integrated Planning and Control the pre-defined project “Modernisation of Spatial Data Infrastructure to Reduce Risks and Impacts of Floods” had been implemented since 2013.

Programme SI03 – Funds for Non-governmental Organisations

Project selection

Two calls for project proposals were foreseen within the NGO Programme in Slovenia: one for large and medium projects (published in June 2013) and the other for small projects (published in March 2014). The call for bilateral funds was also published in March 2014.

Open call for large and medium projects

Interest in the call exceeded expectations. A total of 365 were received against initially expected 200 applications. Summary of the results of administrative check: 15 projects were selected in the scope of the first call (large and medium projects). Contracts with project promoters were signed in February 2014. 18 projects were selected in the scope of the second call (small projects), and the contracts were signed in October 2014.

In March 2014, FO announced the second call for small NGO projects (up to EUR 20,000) which made a total of EUR 340,184 available. Amid huge interest in the call, 241 applications were received. At the end of 2014, the majority of the 18 contracts were signed with beneficiaries.

Applicants showed particular interest in priority areas Children & Youth, Social Equality and Environmental Protection, while priority area Democracy and Human Rights was somewhat overlooked. By the end of 2015, there were 10 projects selected under the bilateral fund.

Quality of applications

The positive side of receiving many applications was the ability to choose from among a large number of project ideas. In the first call 211 applications reached the quality threshold of 70% (or 70 points), among them 94 reached the score between 80% and 90%, while 41 applications were above 90%. 110 applications remained below the threshold. In the second call (small projects) 97 applications reached the quality threshold of 70%, 94 reached the score between 80% and 90%, while 4 applications achieved more than 90%. 124 applications remained below the threshold. Generally speaking, many high-quality applications that would be worth supporting were received under both calls, but the funds were unfortunately limited. Most of high-quality projects addressed environmental protection and social equality, while the least were dedicated to human rights and social services topics.

Additional call for allocation of unspent funds

Certain amount of funds remained non-allocated in the scope of the two planned and realised calls supporting NGO projects; also it became evident during the completion period that the actual spending was lower than anticipated and contracted. Following the approval from the FMO and the Selection committee at the end of 2015, the FO published an additional call for allocation of unused programme funds in the beginning of 2016.

External evaluators were selected from REC's pool of experts, which had been developed for the last 15 years. FO invited 11 experienced experts with proven knowledge in priority areas covered by the calls, adequate project evaluation experience and who were familiar with the NGO sector. To avoid misunderstanding of selection criteria, FO organised training for external evaluators to provided them with necessary instructions. Nevertheless, there were still some discrepancies in their way of

scoring projects. It simply happens from time to time that two experts look at the same project from different perspectives.

FO's assessed programme implementation as highly successful, although much more work was invested than it was expected due to the number of applications that went beyond expectations. FO succeeded to select projects which feed into the outcomes even though faced some problems with predefined outcomes as there was a mix of infrastructure and content ones. Also, many of the projects pursued more outcomes, but needed to be placed under only one. NGOs did not understand very well why they needed to categorise themselves under primary or secondary outcome. FO expected to get more advocacy projects (in priority areas of human rights and democracy) as there is almost no funding available for them in Slovenia. Indeed, NGO sector is so underdeveloped in this field and lacks the capacities for developing good projects, so that FO had to reallocate funds to other priority areas even though it was a two-step application process and individual support was provided to all applicants for the development of their project ideas. FO believes this could be improved in the future by a more structured work with potential applicants – starting from the needs assessment to project idea development.

Programme SI04 - Slovenian Scholarship Fund

Three calls were announced during the programming period; for each of them the Programme operator performed all activities related to the preparation of the call: information day, workshops for applicants, technical review of applications received, evaluation process with external evaluators and approval by the National selection committee.

Table 13: Received and approved applications (SI04)

Measure	2013			2014			2015			Total %
	Received	Approved	%	Received	Approved	%	Received	Approved	%	
Measure 2 Mobility projects in high education	13	6	46.2	11	7+1	72.7	10	6+1	70	61.7
Measure 3 Mobility projects for teaching staff and vocational education and training	5	5	100	8	5	62.5	6	3+1	66.7	73.7
Measure 4 Inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education	2	2	100	4	2	50	2	2	100	75
Measure 5 Inter-institutional cooperation projects in education and training	8	2	25	14	3	21.4	9	2	22.2	22.6

Source: Adapted from Slovene Scholarship Fund SI04 Final Programme Report 2017

There were some initial problems in the first Call (2013) with receiving a sufficient number of applications for mobility projects for the school sector (Measure 3). According to the trends of each call it can be concluded that there was larger interest in the preparation and implementation of inter-institutional project (Measure 5) with the possibility of enhanced cooperation and achievement of tangible results, with a greater impact on the local and wider school environment. The interest was improved in the last two calls with better visibility of programme after more intensive promotion in that sector. Interest in other Measures stayed consistently high.

Due to high amounts of funds requested by applicants in Measure 2 of the Call 2013, the PO set the limit of approved funds per institution based on the size of the institution for the next two calls (2014 and 2015). PO set the maximum amount of the grant in regards to the number of students enrolled – applicant institutions with more than 5,000 students could apply for up to EUR 150,000 EUR, institutions with less than 5,000 students could apply for a maximum grant of EUR 50,000. This allowed PO to get more projects approved and achieve a wider geographical spread. Additional national priority was formulated in order to extend the diversity of educational institutions included

in the programme; to stimulate applications and projects that did not receive funds in the previous call, such applications received additional five “national” points.

Programme SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme

The Call for proposals to co-finance projects under the Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 and the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 was published on 27 December 2014 in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia No. 110/2014. The deadline for submitting applications was 28 February 2014. The call for proposals was divided into two sets; i.e. SET A (Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009–2014) and SET B (EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009–2014).

SET A included the areas of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009–2014:

- Area Public Health Initiatives - A.1
 - Sub-area Reducing inequalities between user groups - A.1.1
 - Sub-area Prevention of life-style related diseases - A.1.2
 - Sub- area Improved mental health services - A.1.3
- Area Gender Equality - A.2
 - Sub-area Economic decision-making - A.2.1
 - Sub-area Political decision-making - A.2.2
 - Sub-area Promoting work-life balance - A.2.3

In order to carry out the call for proposals and to select projects, *the Core and the Extended Committee for SET A and SET B* were established. The Core Committee for SET A conducted the administrative check of received proposals (i.e. checked the compliance of applications with administrative and eligibility criteria for SET A).

Table 14: Statistics at the end of administrative check for SET A - Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014

	ALL RECEIVED APPLICATIONS (Set A)	REFUSED and REJECTED APPLICATIONS					COMPLETE APPLICATIONS	
		Inappropriately marked envelope	2nd received application for the same sub-area	Admin. phase and applications eligibility phase	Total no. of refusals / rejections	Proportion in relation to the total no. of received applications	Complete applications	Proportion in relation to received applications
SET A – NOR FM PROGRAMME	182	29	2	23	54	29.7%	128	70.3%

Table 15: Applications submitted for the quality assessment for SET A – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009–2014

SET A - Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009–2014	128
Area A.1 – Public Health Initiatives	85
Sub-area A.1.1 Reducing inequalities between user groups	34
Sub-area A.1.2 Prevention of life-style related diseases	29
Sub-area A.1.3 Improved mental health services	22
Area A.2	43
Sub-area A.2.1 Economic decision-making	16
Sub-area A.2.2 Political decision-making	7
Sub-area A.2.3 Promoting work-life balance	20

The quality assessment was made by external independent evaluators. Based on the priority list made by external evaluators, the Extended Committee took the decision on selected projects.

Table 16: Statistics at the end of selection procedure for SET A – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009–2014

	No of selected projects
SET A - Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009–2014	24
Area A.1 – Public Health Initiatives	19
Sub-area A.1.1 Reducing inequalities between user groups	7
Sub-area A.1.2 Prevention of life-style related diseases	6
Sub-area A.1.3 Improved mental health services	6
Area A.2	5
Sub-area A.2.1 Economic decision-making	1
Sub-area A.2.2 Political decision-making	2
Sub-area A.2.3 Promoting work-life balance	2

In the first quarter of 2015 a total of 24 contracts were signed with project promoters of projects selected through the public call in the area of Public Health Initiatives and in the area of Gender Equality. Hence, it took almost one year from the publication of the call to the selection of the projects, which is a relatively long period. There are several reasons for this delay.

First, several institutional changes hampered smooth functioning of the PO. Due to changes in the Government of Republic of Slovenia in 2014, there were some changes in the management structures of the EEA and Norway Grants on the side of the beneficiary state. The PO was transferred from the Ministry of Economy, Development and Technology to the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy on 1 March 2014. This institutional change had an evident impact on the implementation of programmes and projects by delaying it considerably.

Second, the number of received applications was much higher than expected (182 received applications, of which 128 eligible applications); hence, it took longer to check the compliance of applications with administrative and eligibility criteria.

Third, the selection of external independent evaluators was a very long and complex process. In fact, the procedure fell through twice before a pool of independent experts to perform quality assessment of applications could finally be established.

The delays resulting from the late announcement of the call for proposals and late signing of contracts shortened the implementation period and represented a risk factor affecting successful implementation of projects.

3.3 Individual Programme summaries

Programme SI02 – EEA Financial Mechanism Programme

Why was the programme needed?

The Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Natura 2000 Site Management Programme (2007-2013) in 2007 with a view to halting the loss of biodiversity. The programme identified conservation objectives and measures for each species and/or habitat types at each Natura 2000 site. This Natura 2000 programme outlined the measures for nature conservation, forestry, agriculture, fisheries and hunting, water management, regional development, and monitoring and research. The implementation of the Natura 2000 programme was, however, subject to available funds, and better funding brings better implementation.

The challenges of the programme area Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services were therefore to improve the conservation status of habitat types and species, especially in agricultural (grassland) and wetland areas, and some forest habitat types, and to extend monitoring and surveys of species and habitat types. To achieve better results the programme area was focused on a maximum of three groups of habitats (extensive grasslands, wetlands, endangered forest types), building on existing data and previous conservation efforts, and implementing all four groups of activities (initial monitoring and inclusion in data portals, on-site conservation activities, monitoring for verification of success, and information and education activities). Target groups were researchers and technical nature conservation experts, public institutions involved in nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources (forestry, agriculture, and water management), NGOs and local decision makers.

Challenges and needs of the area of cultural heritage that were tackled by the programme: i) processing tourist attractions with cultural traditions which combine both tourist and cultural offer, ii) upgrading the quality and enhancing the identification of population with the cultural heritage at the local level as a foundation of cultural diversity, and iii) identifying and preserving knowledge and skills necessary for maintenance of cultural heritage and development of new creativity. Additional challenge for sustainable tourism development in connection with natural heritage sites was how to provide visitor infrastructure which also protected natural heritage from being damaged in line with the principle of viewing and visiting any valuable natural feature in a manner that does not threaten its existence or protection.

What did the programme achieve?

Nine projects selected under the call for proposals and one pre-defined project were implemented within the programme. The selected projects promoted collaboration and pursued the principle of sustainability. They made significant contribution to advancement in the areas of biodiversity and ecosystem services, conservation and revitalisation of cultural and natural heritage and the environment. The results and outcomes of the projects that were implemented contributed to the development of different regions across Slovenia.

All projects were completed by January 2017. All funded activities were in line with the general objectives of the programme. More specifically, all planned activities were “successfully finished, goals met, some of them even surpassed”.

Four selected projects (three of them in regions with development constraints) in the area Biodiversity and ecosystem services aimed to contribute to the implementation of effective on-site measures aimed at improving the conservation status of 25 species and habitat types that were in an unfavourable conservation status. Improved conservation status (as defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EC) means improved long-term natural distribution or structure and functions or the long-term survival of typical species for a habitat type, and improved distribution and abundance of its populations for a species. Information and education activities were part of each project to ensure cooperation of key stakeholders and local communities.

Both outputs were achieved in the area Natural heritage; three natural heritage sites (one in the coastal region and two in the alpine region), which are important from the tourism and visitor perspectives were addressed in two selected projects. New public infrastructure was established in a way that connects environmental protection and interpretation of the natural values attached to the sites, and at the same time improves public access in an environmentally friendly way and takes visitor experience to the next level.

Funding under the Programme in the area Cultural heritage helped restore and revitalize three cultural monuments of national importance whose visibility increased and number of visitors grew by more than 90% thanks to the developed programmes on the importance and presentation of cultural heritage.

How were bilateral relations strengthened?

Cooperation with donor state institutions at the programme and project level contributed to the exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices and facilitated strengthening of bilateral relations between Slovenia and the donor states. At the project level project promoters and their

project partners contributed to strengthening bilateral relations between Slovenia and the donor states, in particular in light of the fact that 50% of all programme-related projects were implemented in cooperation with donor project partners. Furthermore, additional funds were available from the fund for bilateral relation. With this regard two calls for proposals under bilateral cooperation were launched and five activities were implemented. For example, bilateral conference was organised at one of the Natura 2000 sites. The partnerships forged and friendships made will undoubtedly lead to further cooperation in numerous areas in the future.

Achievement of the outcome indicators "Increased exchange of information on environmental impact, status and trends between beneficiary states and other EU Member States" was monitored on the basis of the implementation of the pre-defined project Modernisation of Spatial Data Infrastructure to Reduce Risks and Impacts of Floods. All outcome indicators were fulfilled; some indicator values surpassed.

The key outcome of the project, which also reflects the Inspire Directive implementation, was the establishment of conditions that facilitate the exchange of information on environmental impacts of diverse natural or man-made causes.

What will be the impact of the programme?

Positive effects of the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 will persist after the funding period at the bilateral, national, programme and project level. As much as 30% of all projects reported that they planned to continue cooperating with project partners from donor countries. Cooperation will continue in different fields and in planned future projects. Efforts will be made to sustain project results after the completion of projects. In the area Biodiversity and ecosystem services, three projects resulted in development of further project activities for proactive conservation of endangered Natura species and habitat types at Natura 2000 sites (Goričko, Ljubljansko barje and Pohorje) with a more or less the same partnership structure as established for the EEA project implementation.

Once the sustainability of outcomes and outputs at the project level is ensured, the impacts at the programme and national level become sustainable as well.

Programme SI03 – Funds for Non-governmental Organisations

NGO Programme was kicked off in April 2013 with the signing of the Partnership Agreement between the Fund Operator and Financial Mechanism Office. The management of the fund was entrusted to REC Slovenia and CNVOS who joined forces and combined the knowledge of re-granting and in-depth understanding of CSOs' needs. The overall objective of the NGO Programme in Slovenia was to strengthen civil society development and enhance contribution to social justice, democracy and sustainable development.

The programme contributed to further development of NGO sector in Slovenia – providing the much needed support in the areas that were not supported by other donors, and contributing importantly to diversification of funds for local NGOs.

New jobs to young people, conservation of natural and cultural heritage, less violence and more equality were the breakthrough achievements of the programme. The programme gave local, proverbially overlooked project a chance – they ended up making big solutions to small problems.

NGO Fund was a unique opportunity for many small, local, grass-root organisations to access international funds, expand their reach and further develop their organizations, and, as such, an important factor supporting their capacity building.

Even though the projects have ended in 2016, their results continue to live and keep improving the lives of the most valuable in our society – through established cross-sectoral partnerships, enhanced advocacy and watchdog capacities, and developed networks and coalitions. With the support from NGO Fund several organizations managed to open the doors to establish a dialogue with local or national authorities; they become stronger by joining their forces in different coalitions; provided comprehensive analysis that become the basis for better legislation; tested new and innovative ways of working with and for most vulnerable groups and activated the inactive. Even though the program funds were not big compared to others, but they still left a remarkable stamp not just for the whole sector but also for the society itself.

Key progress towards the two overall objectives

Great progress has been made in terms of organisational capacity development. Capacity of project promoters of small projects increased tremendously during the project implementation and FO support (especially regarding the financial management, internal processes, communication, etc.).

The analyses of projects' contribution to the outcome indicators show that target values were exceeded, and that the quality of achieved results was impressively high. In terms of horizontal issues, hate speech, homophobia, tolerance and multicultural understanding, as well as Roma and trafficking were the themes directly tackled by the projects as major concerns. An important achievement of the Piece institute project which endeavors to raise public awareness about hate speech in Slovenia and promotes zero tolerance to hate speech should be underlined. In this context, an "independent body for public response to hate speech" was established as an independent system for regulating public response to the problem of hate speech in Slovenia.

Main achievement towards the bilateral objective of the Grants

NGO Programme was successful in terms of achieving the bilateral objective. 13 out of 33 selected projects were developed and implemented in partnerships with organisations from the donor states (9 Norwegian and 4 Icelandic). It is particularly important that the established partnerships were real partnerships and that most of them are still active after the completion of projects.

Extent of cooperation between countries' institutions at project level was proven through formal partnerships: 13 project partnership agreements were signed between Slovenian NGOs and donor countries' organisations, and more than 12 men and 28 women were involved in exchange visits between beneficiary and donor states.

Shared results achieved by merging input from both parties were recognised in the majority of partnership projects. FO recorded professional involvement of both partners in planning and implementing activities.

Knowledge and mutual understanding was improved due to cooperation and joint initiatives, which brought people and institutions together and raised awareness about the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovenia. Projects also attracted media attention from the donor states, for example an article about integration of vulnerable groups in Slovenia was published in Norwegian newspapers, or the

representative of the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage conducted several interviews with project promoters and collected materials for exhibition which was held in Oslo. Also, wider effects of bilateral cooperation which went beyond the projects were noticed; thus, a wide initiative was developed by the Norwegian and Slovenian partner in cooperation with reference organisations from EU and China to address the common European challenge of reducing the amounts of waste food. They developed new project and applied for funding under Horizon 2020 waste programme.

Programme SI04 - Slovenian Scholarship Fund

At the time of Slovenia's programming of the documents for the period 2009-2014, joint projects with Norway, Iceland and even Liechtenstein had existed already. They were not numerous due to various financial and geographical reasons and such was the case in mobility of students and staff. They chose other countries for their study, training or teaching assignment abroad. However, at the same time there were plenty of common topics of interest and challenges that bound donor states with Slovenia – nature, human capital, social inclusion, quality of teaching and so on. The basis was reaffirmed in the EEA/Norway Grants funding schemes, their objectives and aims.

Slovenian educational institutions, which are eligible for participation in Slovenian Scholarship Fund seized this opportunity. Not only did the programme enable focused bilateral cooperation, it ensured much higher funding compared to existing EU programmes. Concretely, the programme entailed the following possible cooperation:

- Mobility of higher education students (for study or training) and staff,
- Mobility of elementary and secondary (general and vocational) schools staff,
- Inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education (intensive programmes, summer schools),
- Inter-institutional cooperation projects at elementary and secondary level (school partnerships),
- Preparatory and study visits.

Many elementary, secondary and tertiary schools with already established partnerships came from other EU programmes. Newcomers were offered plenty of possibilities in establishing new partnerships during programme implementation that came in the form of preparatory visits, contact seminars, individual assistance or study visits.

Initial modesty of the first programme year soon evolved into a situation when many good applications had to be rejected due to the limited funding available for a specific year. Despite the potential discouragement for the applicants, these circumstances allowed to the PO to keep the projects that were approved for funding at consistently high quality levels. The interest for cooperation grew from year to year and apart from mobility of students and staff, and Slovenian institutions, particularly schools were more eager to establish inter-institutional cooperation projects, which has enormous future potential. Already the first projects reports stated that the programme allowed for strengthening of their bilateral relations, mutual understanding, trust building, and formed a solid basis for long-term partnership. Not only did mobility of students and staff enhance bilateral relations among individuals, so did the inter-institutional cooperation projects create bilateral cooperation dealing with common challenges that led to joint results and products.

Not only did most of the projects improve bilateral relations, the whole programme resulted in exceeding the majority of the outcomes that we set initially. There were more higher education student and staff mobilities, the interest for inter-institutional cooperation projects was much higher than the funds available. Vast majority of set indicators was either reached or surpassed, only a few were underachieved (school staff mobility and higher education students' practical training).

There were 34 new agreements concluded among higher education institutions, which accounts for 340% of this specific bilateral outcome indicator value. All in all, the results show that there was mutual interest for bilateral cooperation among elementary, secondary and tertiary level education institutions and that it is well worth maintaining such opportunities while expanding them also to pre-school and adult education level.

Most of the projects were concluded as planned, with all the activities carried out and funds well used. Many institutions implemented more with the same amount of funds or even less funds, some even returned the programme grants. The majority of project promoters expressed in their final reports a clear intention to continue working together with their partners from donor states some way or another. Concrete results, products created during the programming period will be used also after the programme's official closure. Plenty new relationships, friendships and professional contacts which were developed will remain, either with or without the future programme. Young students made new friendships that opened their horizons, broke barriers and stereotypes and made them more aware, appreciative and tolerant. The programme and its generous funding enabled participation of plenty of students coming from economically disadvantaged areas or families and for many of them studying abroad turned out to be a life-changing experience of promoting self-awareness and value development.

Teachers at all levels met their peers and learned about similarities or differences in classroom environment and teaching methods, which made them reflect, react and change their ways, habits and beliefs. Many times their change influenced their colleagues and consequently the whole school benefitted from the project. For the institution many times being small, coming from rural area, international cooperation brought about positive new image in their local environment and created many synergies with others in the area.

The programme also created new successful partnerships with donor programme partners in all three donor states.

Programme SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme

Why was the programme needed?

Slovenia is facing rapid changes and development challenges in all areas that are important for societal progress and prosperity. The Slovenian population ranks health – an important element of quality of life and welfare – at the very top of the scale of values. Health system can significantly contribute to reducing health inequalities by securing equal access and utilization of health services. This includes also preventive and other public health programmes.

Slovenia's public health and primary health care structures are relatively well-organised. Preventive services in primary health care are fully covered by health insurance but there are no additional financial resources for quality assurance, research, development and testing of the new innovative

approaches, programmes and tools. Financial resources for public health research, testing and introducing innovative pilot projects and for supporting non-governmental organisations are very limited. Norwegian financial mechanism offered opportunity to support development work, pilot testing, partnership building in local communities, programmes and interventions that can significantly contribute to the improvement of public health and reduction of health inequalities.

The current over-representation of men in power and decision-making in Slovenia are not only structural and multifaceted, but are also grounded in and maintained through traditional gender roles. While many structural barriers that may impede women's attempts to climb the corporate ladder have been removed through legislation, other significant structural factors limit women's career opportunities. The traditional division of labour, which defines women's responsibility as caring for the family and that of men as providing for it, certainly acts as a persistent barrier to women's advancement.

Various efforts to promote women's access to political and public life and their input into the decision-making process have been taken. However, there were very limited effects of these measures. Slovenia is aware that it must ensure full exercise of women's right to participate in public life and in political and economic decision-making at all levels. Development and implementation of gender equality policy is financed primarily from the state budget. Financial resources for gender equality research, innovative pilot projects and for supporting non-governmental organisations are very limited. Norwegian financial mechanism offers option to support development work, pilot testing, partnership building in local communities, programmes, interventions and awareness-raising activities that would significantly contribute to better understanding of gender issues and gender equality policy.

What did the programme achieve?

Programme SI05 was designed in line with national priorities in two areas; i/ strengthening of public health and primary health care capacities in the area of disease prevention and health promotion; and ii/ development of effective gender equality policy. The programme was very successful as regards the achievement of planned programme outputs and outcomes.

20 projects were implemented within the programme area *Public health initiatives*; of which 19 projects were selected under a call for proposals and one project was pre-defined. The programme in the area of public health initiatives was designed and carried out in partnership with the Donor Project Partner (DPP) Norwegian Institute of Public Health. The DPP facilitated networking and transfer of know-how through bilateral relations and study visits. The project promoters emphasised that Norway Grants and cooperation with the Norwegian partners were the crucial aspect adding value to the projects.

All projects achieved planned results; in some cases results were significantly surpassed. The implementing strategies and awareness-raising campaigns for healthy lifestyle effectively targeted the general public, and professionals in terms of the use of new work methods. New models of upgraded preventive health care programmes for children, young people and adults were designed and piloted with the focus on community approach to promote health and reduce health inequalities in the local community. Such approach provided response to the needs of the population in the local environment, better access to services and treatment, development of supportive networks and self-help groups, and took into account formal and non-formal forms of help.

Six projects were implemented within the programme area *Mainstreaming gender equality and promoting work-life balance*, of which five projects were selected under a call for proposals and one project was pre-defined. Implementation of projects aimed at gender equality successfully raised awareness about gender issues, promoted research on gender issues and increased understanding of equal/unequal power relations between women and men. The analysis of the historic context and documentation of current challenges related to gender equality in Slovenia and organisation of an international conference on exchange of good practices was key to sharing and spreading the knowledge about this topic. An overview of the national legislation and panel discussions encouraged the development of a supportive environment for the introduction of gender equality-related legislative measures.

How were bilateral relations strengthened?

Bilateral relations at the programme level were implemented through two measures: i/ Preparation of project proposals and ii/ Fund for bilateral relations.

The preparation of project proposals was implemented by the programme operator in co-operation with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway in Budapest and with close involvement of the DPP Norwegian Institute of Public Health. Slovenia was relatively successful in finding Norwegian partners; as many as 20 projects out of 26 projects included partners from Norway. In general, bilateral cooperation at the project level was very successful.

The Fund for bilateral relations supported networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, technology, experiences and best practices between Slovenian project promoters and entities in Norway.

Co-operation between the two countries included study visits and professional cooperation as well as sharing of knowledge between both countries. Transfer of knowledge accelerated the development of Slovenian health sector. Also, knowledge of project partners about culture, political and socio-economic situation in both countries improved.

In terms of achievement of objectives at the programme level, it is the input in the form of cooperation with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health from Oslo that played a decisive role. Experience shows that good relations established between project partners from both countries are pursued even after the closure of projects and make an important contribution to sustainability of the results. The bilateral cooperation at the project level contributed to strengthening relations between Norway and Slovenia.

What will be the impact of the programme?

The programme had a very tangible impact on target groups during project implementation phase. The implementing strategies and awareness-raising campaigns for healthy lifestyle effectively targeted the general public, and professionals in terms of the use of new work methods.

Certain pilot projects which were implemented in the area of public health were later integrated in the public health system, which improved public health services for citizens. Given the projects' success, the country should investigate the possibility of co-funding such projects at a system-wide level. In order to ensure systematic and sustained financing of the solutions presented and tested

within the framework of individual projects, the possibilities of expanding the public health network at the primary level and other funding opportunities should be further explored.

Projects funded with SI05 programme funds, represent an important leverage in terms of reduction of inequalities between user groups, prevention of lifestyle-related diseases and improved mental health services, but in order to achieve significant and long-term effect continuous and substantial funding for this type of activities has to be assured.

Implementation of projects targeting gender equality successfully raised awareness about gender issues, promoted research on gender issues and increased understanding of equal/unequal power relations between women and men. The responses to the imbalances that persist in participation in politics at the local and national level were identified within the programme, and a research that analysed collective agreements in Slovenia and the role of social partners in promoting gender equality was carried out.

Since the share of women holding leadership positions in business and politics in Slovenia is still noticeably lower than the share of men, it is important to continuously raise awareness on the importance of women's participation in economic and political life and to promote work life balance, as well as to amend the current legislation to increase women's representation in decision-making positions.

Pprogramme outputs contributed to programme outcomes in both programme areas according to expectations, in some cases even significantly surpassed. The main reason for this lies in modest planning. PO did not expect such good response of programme areas' stakeholders and target groups, therefore outcome indicators were quite modest. Target values were set relatively low because the PO wanted to make sure that the target value would be reached.

The fact that the indicators were surpassed means that the intervention in the areas covered by the programme was really necessary. This is also an indicator that the areas covered by the programme need sustainable and reliable long-term funding.

4 MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Management and control systems

No major changes to the management and control system took place in the period 2009-2014 (referring to all programmes).

In accordance with Article 4.8 of the Regulations, Slovenia submitted the description of management and control system (MCS) for the implementation of both financial mechanisms, accompanied by the report and opinion of the Audit Authority, i.e. Budget Supervision Office of the Republic of Slovenia in December 2012. In August 2013 the Financial Mechanism Office confirmed that management and control system in the Republic of Slovenia complied with paragraph 1 of Article 4.8.1 of Regulations.

In May 2015, GODC established a new division dedicated only to the donor programmes, namely Financial Mechanisms Division.

At the beginning of project implementation, after the project promoters submitted the first interim reports, certain ambiguities were encountered and contract managers within programmes SI02 and SI05 decided to organise individual meetings with lead partners and control unit. These meetings were very useful and a lot of open issues were resolved, but nevertheless there were still certain delays in the reimbursement of incurred expenditure. Due to the fact that some partnerships consisted of a large number of partners it could take several months before the incurred expenditure was reimbursed; in order to ensure regular payment flow and smooth implementation of projects, one additional person started working at the control unit.

Human resources management is important for an effective implementation of programmes and processes within NFP. Due to saving measures in public sector in the period 2009-2014 shortage of staff (at NFP and PO) slowed down the start and individual phases of implementation. Flexibility in ensuring human resources in terms of quantity and skills according to the actual needs and adequate reorganisation and training of staff is very important for a successful implementation of the programme and successful work of NFP.

In January, 2017 Audit Authority (AA) carried out follow-ups of system audits at the NFP, PO for SI02 (GODC) and SI05 (GODC), Certifying Authority (MF) and PO for SI04 (CMEPIUS). Based on the audits carried out, the AA stated that the management and control system functioned effectively and in compliance with Regulations on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014 and the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism 2009-2014.

Nevertheless, the AA recommended that NFP should develop a special information system, which would enable the recording of controls over the implementation of the projects and support for financial reporting on project implementation.

4.2 Compliance with EU legislation, national legislation and the MoU¹³

The EEA and Norway Grants 2009-2014 were implemented in compliance with the relevant EU legislation, national legislation, while respecting the public procurement provisions and expenditure eligibility provisions, as well as provisions of the Memorandums of Understanding. Environmental legislation was fully respected.

Controls of compliance with the legislative framework was performed by the PO, which included the respect of provisions for controls set out in the description of management and control systems, which was submitted and approved in 2014.

¹³ This Chapter also includes Programme conditions and post-completion obligations.

NFP satisfied itself that the PO ensured that PP who, in line with the Agreement, received an exception from the general rule in Article 7.3.1(c) of the Regulation with respect to any equipment (the excepted equipment) and:

- Keep the excepted equipment in their ownership for a period of at least 5 years following the completion of the project and continue to use that equipment for the benefit of the overall objectives of the project for the same period;
- Keep the excepted equipment properly insured against losses such as fire, theft and other normally insurable incidents both during project implementation and for at least 5 years following the completion of the project; and
- Set aside appropriate resources for the maintenance of the excepted equipment for at least 5 years following the completion of the project.

The specific means for the implementation of this obligation was specified in the project contract: provided however that the Programme Operator may release any Project Promoter from the above obligations with respect to any specifically identified excepted equipment where the Programme Operator is satisfied that, having regard to all relevant circumstances, continued use of that equipment for the overall objectives of the project would serve no useful economic purpose.

NFP ensured that the PO keeps a list of the excepted equipment for each project.

NFP ensured that any public support under programmes SI02 and SI05 complied with the procedural and substantive state aid rules applicable at the time when the public support was granted. Furthermore, NFP ensured that the PO maintains written records of all assessments concerning compliance with state aid rules, particularly decisions to award grants and set grant rates, and provides such records to the FMC upon request.

NFP also provided the PO for Slovenian Scholarship Fund with detailed instructions concerning especially financial operations since the PO was not a direct budget user.

Irregularities and complaints

Programme SI03 – Funds for Non-governmental Organisations

IR-0748: Fund Operator (FO) did not detect irregularities either at the programme or project level. Nevertheless, FO suspected fraud in one particular case. During the quality assessment of applications submitted to the open call for small projects, an external evaluator suspected that one of the applicants did not meet eligibility requirements in terms of being “small NGO” although it passed administrative compliance check by providing their annual reports for 2013 as a mandatory annex to project application. The provided annual report was then checked against the official data published at the Slovenian Agency for Public Legal Records and Related Services website where the official report showed completely different numbers. The finding led not only to excluding the applicant as eligible organisation, but also indicated suspected forgery of official documents. Since the FO suspected irregularity, it requested from the applicant to provide a written explanation about the mismatching of annual reports, but the received explanation did not adequately clarify the duality of documentation. As received answers were not satisfactory, the FO decided to lodge a criminal complaint on suspicion of falsification of the official document to the Prosecutor's Office in

Ljubljana. The police also informed the FO that the submitted annual report had to go through forensic check, and that it could take a few months more to finish the investigation and start a potential criminal process. The Prosecutor's office discarded the process after the person suspected of fraud carried out 60 hours of community work to repay for his offence. All necessary steps were taken to remedy the situation in a satisfactory manner to nullify the irregularity and the case was reported to the FMO as an immediate irregularity.

Programme SI04 - Slovenian Scholarship Fund

IR 182: Based on the performed audit of the verification of the eligibility of expenditure under the 2nd and the 3rd IFR Budget Supervision Office (BSO) found that the PO for Scholarship Fund - CMEPIUS declared the entire amount of the labour cost, related to regular work, for the same employees and for the same period (basic salary with extra payments, contributions and taxes, transport to work costs and meal costs) under the European Programme ERASMUS+. The reports on the carried-out work, performed by the employees whose increased workload was paid-out, does not demonstrate a regular calculation of the value of the claimed amounts under the heading labour costs. Based on the abovementioned, the BSO established that the expenditures, related to the work performed by those whose salary was part-financed under the Programme SI04, amounting to EUR 4,618.70, were not eligible for co-financing.

Following the BSO recommendation, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (GODC) excluded the expenditure in the amount of EUR 4,618.70 from eligible expenditure under programme SI04 and recovered this expenditure from CMEPIUS. GODC checked again other certified applications for payment, which were submitted by CMEPIUS. After this examination GODC found another 4,746.64 EUR ineligible expenditure pertaining to labour costs and excluded them from the applications for payment.

IR-0786: Based on the performed audit verifying the eligibility of expenditure under the 5th and 6th Interim Financial Report under programme SI04, BSO found irregularities in the amount of EUR 6,345.00. The irregularity in the amount of EUR 323,41 was found at PP-University of Maribor (too many kilometres charged to the programme in one case, one proof of payment missing). PO called on the project promoter to recover the amount unduly received and provide evidence of the reimbursement.

IR-0787: Based on the performed audit verifying the eligibility of expenditure under the 5th and 6th Interim Financial Report under programme SI04, BSO found irregularities in the amount of EUR 6,345.00. The irregularity in the amount of EUR 3.385,52 was found at PP-University of Primorska (over-calculated subsistence allowances of students for a stay of less than 1.5 months). PO called on the project promoter to recover the amount unduly received and provide evidence of the reimbursement.

IR-0788: Based on the performed audit verifying the eligibility of expenditure under the 5th and 6th Interim Financial Report under programme SI04, BSO found irregularities in the amount of EUR

6,345.00. The irregularity in the amount of EUR 2,636,07 was found at PP-University of Ljubljana (subsistence allowances of administrative and teaching staff exceeding the actual accommodation costs paid by the faculties). PO called on the project promoter to recover the amount unduly received and provide evidence of the reimbursement.

IR-0789: Based on the performed audit verifying the eligibility of expenditure under the 5th and 6th Interim Financial Report under programme SI04, BSO found irregularities in the amount of EUR 6,345.00 and recommended the PO CMEPIUS to re-examine all final reports of project promoters and eliminate from the certified payment claims the following ineligible expenditure: (1) over-calculated subsistence allowances for monthly stays of students for a period of less than 1.5 months and (2) subsistence allowances of administrative and teaching staff exceeding the actual accommodation costs paid by the faculties, and notify the GODC and the donors accordingly. The BSO also recommended that CMEPIUS specify in its instructions to project promoters in more detail the minimum duration of stay and reimbursement rules for stays shorter than one month, as well as the principles of eligibility for different types of expenditure. Based on the review it had carried out, CMEPIUS, the PO identified ineligible expenditure amounting to EUR 1,780.79 at PP - University of Ljubljana (subsistence allowances of administrative and teaching staff exceeding the actual accommodation costs paid by the faculties) and called on the project promoter to recover the amount unduly received and provide evidence of the reimbursement.

IR-0790: Based on the performed audit verifying the eligibility of expenditure under the 5th and 6th Interim Financial Report under programme SI04, BSO found irregularities in the amount of EUR 6,345.00 and recommended the PO - CMEPIUS to re-examine all final reports of project promoters and eliminate from the certified payment claims the following ineligible expenditure: (1) over-calculated subsistence allowances for monthly stays of students for a period of less than 1.5 months and (2) subsistence allowances of administrative and teaching staff exceeding the actual accommodation costs paid by the faculties, and notify the GODC and the donors accordingly. The BSO also recommended that CMEPIUS specify in its instructions to project promoters in more detail the minimum duration of stay and reimbursement rules for stays shorter than one month, as well as the principles of eligibility for different types of expenditure. Based on the review it had carried out, CMEPIUS identified ineligible expenditure amounting to EUR 3,993.60 at PP University of Ljubljana (subsistence allowances of administrative and teaching staff exceeding the actual accommodation costs paid by the faculties) and called on the project promoter to recover the amount unduly received and provide evidence of the reimbursement.

Programme SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme

IR 0796: Based on the performed audit verifying the eligibility of expenditures under the 9th Interim Financial Report under programme SI05, BSO detected ineligible expenditure in the amount of EUR 878.10 (SI05 – 0002 “Towards better health and reducing inequalities in health”). BSO found that in three cases project promoter made ineligible claims for project-related labour cost for overtime worked at home, which did not comply with the beneficiary’s politics relating to salaries. The BSO

recommended that PO recovers EUR 878.10 from the project promoter and reimburses the ineligible expenditure to the Donors in the relevant share. PO recovered EUR 878.10 from the project promoter. The ineligible expenditure was taken into account in the Last Financial Report.

IR 0830: Based on the performed audit verifying the eligibility of expenditures under the 9th Interim Financial Report under programme SI05, BSO detected ineligible expenditure in the amount of EUR 522.35 (SI05 – 0003 “Equality in health for children and youngsters with autism and their families”). BSO found that project promoter claimed expenditure for overtime work for one employee that exceeded maximum legally allowed number of overtime work hours by 35 hours. The BSO recommended that PO recovers EUR 522.35 from the project promoter and reimburses the ineligible expenditure to the donors in the relevant share. PO recovered EUR 522.35 from the project promoter. The ineligible expenditure was taken into account in the Final Balance.

IR 0829: Control division of the PO performed an on-the-spot control of the project implementation and detected ineligible expenditure amounting to EUR 385.37 (SI05 – 0010 “Recognizing and treating victims of domestic violence in health care settings: Guidelines and training for health professionals”). Control division found there was inaccuracy in the procurement procedure for equipment and recommended that PO recovers EUR 385.37 from the project promoter and reimburses the ineligible expenditure to the donors in the relevant share. The PO recovered EUR 385.37 from the project promoter. The ineligible expenditure was taken into account in the Last Financial Report.

Regarding the complaint mechanism we received a few complaints referring to delays in the reimbursement of incurred expenditure, especially at the beginning of the project implementation (following the submission of first interim reports by PPs). Contract managers within programmes SI02 and SI05 decided to organise individual meetings with lead partners and Control unit. These meetings were very useful and a lot of open issues were resolved. Due to the fact that some partnerships consisted of a large number of partners it could take several months before the incurred expenditure was reimbursed and in order to ensure regular payment flow and smooth implementation of projects, the work of Control unit was strengthened through recruitment of additional employees.

4.3 Monitoring, reviews, evaluations and audit

Several system audits and audits of expenditures were carried out by the Audit Authority (Budget Supervision Office of the Republic of Slovenia) in the period 2009-2014. The AA reported about their activities in annual Audit Reports, which were sent to FMO. NFP sent all AA individual reports to FMO and also reported about the audits in Combined strategic and annual programme reports.

The Budget Supervision Office audits include the following:

In the period from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013:

- In December 2012, the Audit Authority issued the Report on compliance assessment of the management and control system for the National Focal Point, the Certifying Authority and the Audit Authority.
- In the period from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013 the Audit Authority did not perform any system audits and audits of projects.

In the period from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014:

- In May 2014, the Audit Authority issued unqualified opinion accompanied by the Report on compliance assessment of the management and control systems for Programme Operators for SI02 and SI05, i.e. the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (GODC), and for SI04, Centre of the Republic Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes (CMEPIUS).
- In the period from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014 the Audit Authority did not perform any system audits and audits of expenditures - projects.

In the period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015:

- In the reporting period the AA performed a System Audit at the National Focal Point (hereinafter: NFP) and Programme Operator (hereinafter: PO) for SI02 and SI05, at GODC, as well as other GODC units responsible for performing the tasks relating to the individual area of work.
- In the period between 6 November 2014 and 18 November 2014, the AA performed an audit of the expenditure under SI02 - IFR.
- In the period between 5 January 2015 and 23 January 2015, the AA performed an audit of the expenditure under SI04 - IFR No. 2 and 3.
- In the period between 5 January 2015 and 13 February 2015, the AA performed an audit of the expenditure under SI05 - IFR No. 1, 2 and 3.
- In the period between 3 March 2015 and 13 March 2015, the AA performed an audit of the expenditure under programme SI 01 - IFR No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

In the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016:

- In the reporting period the Audit Authority performed a system audit at the Certifying Authority - Ministry of Finance, Department for Management of EU Funds.
- In the period between 22 February 2016 and 15 March 2016 the Audit Authority performed a system audit at the PO for programme SI04 - CMEPIUS.
- In the period between 4 April 2016 and 23 May 2016 the Audit Authority performed an audit of expenditure under 5th and 6th interim financial reports for programme SI04.

In the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017 AA performed three follow ups of system audits at the:

- National Focal Point and PO for SI02 and SI05, i.e. GODC.
- Certifying Authority, i.e. DMEUF.
- PO for SI04, CMEPIUS.

In accordance with risk assessment methodology, the AA selected an audit sample for audit expenditure from SI05, IFR no. 9.

- The Budget Supervision Office performed audit of expenditures of the pre-defined project No. SI05-0002 (“Towards better health and reducing inequalities in health”) implemented by the National Institute of Public Health. The audit was carried out from 3 April 2017 to 14 June 2017.
- The Budget Supervision Office performed audit of expenditures of the project No. SI05-0003 (“Equality in health for children and youngsters with autism and their families”) implemented by the Institute of Autism Spectrum Disorders. The audit was carried out from 29 May 2017 to 26 October 2017.
- The Budget Supervision Office performed audit of expenditures of project No. SI05-0014 (Establishment of mental health prevention programmes) implemented by Development Agency for Upper Gorenjska - RAGOR. The audit was carried out from 29 May 2017 to 14 September 2017.

Moore Stephens LLP, London, contracted by the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO), carried out audit of Management and Control Systems of the SI05 programme. The audit was carried out from 4 December 2017 to 19 December 2017.

In 2017 NFP carried out public procurement for the evaluation of three programmes: EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 (SI02), Slovenian Scholarship Fund 2009-2014 (SI04) and Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 (SI05) and Technical Assistance and the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level (SI01).

Below are the main findings of the evaluation.

SI01 – Technical Assistance and the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National level

The technical assistance facilitated the functioning and control of the functioning of the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014 in Slovenia. The planned funds were sufficient and were expected to be fully utilized. Through the bilateral cooperation, long-term cooperation between different spheres (ministries, NGOs) of donor countries and Slovenia was being established. The work plan of The Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level was well thought out. The areas (health, gender equality and European integration) were selected according to past experience. All planned activities were implemented by the first half of 2018. In the future, it would be worthwhile to set up a similar cooperation in the form of exchange of experience in the field of

science and research. Slovenian Ministry of Health could make greater use of bilateral cooperation to enhance the flow of information on the effective management of providers of health services (hospitals, health centers, etc.).

SI02 – EEA Financial Mechanism Programme

The projects financed by the EEA Grants were of great importance for Slovenia, mostly because the national programmes providing funding for these programme areas are rare and inadequate, while there are literally no such EU programmes on this level. Even though the available budget was relatively modest, the programme results are clearly visible and achieve resounding success. One nationally important predefined project was financed from the EEA Grants (*Modernisation of Spatial Data Infrastructure to Reduce Risks and Impacts of Floods*) – this project of national importance is sustainable in nature and will be continued through working together with the donor project partners even after the end of the funding period. The project Ljubljana, where the specific goals were to find a long-lasting solution in the field of protection and conservation of the heritage of water wood, preservation of the most endangered heritage within the riverbed of Ljubljana, establishment of synergic effects, and improved access to the cultural and natural heritage as a whole, as well as improved visibility of heritage in the wider area among local and international visitors achieved remarkable results.

SI04 – Slovenian scholarship fund

The operation of Slovenian Scholarship Fund 2009-2014 resulted in significant flow of knowledge and experience from more economically developed donor countries to Slovenia. The cooperation covered many different areas and took place in different forms. In addition to the flow of knowledge, the implementation of mobility projects improved and influenced the intercultural, linguistic and personal experiences of participants. Participating teachers from Slovenia found particularly valuable the acquired experience, ideas and methods of teaching. Project reports show that this knowledge was widely disseminated in domestic institutions.

Slovenian Scholarship Fund programme was very relevant in the exchange of knowledge at the level of continuous contacts among the research groups, at the level of acquiring formal education of participants (ECTS credits, completed and planned master's degrees and doctorates) at the level of improvement of the learning process due to guest lecturers, at the level of improvement of teaching practices and pedagogical work, at the level of organisation of events, at the level of various publications, films and the like, and at the level of greater mutual knowledge and understanding.

In-depth interviews showed considerable complementarity of international mobility of professors, researchers, students, pupils, teachers and professional staff funded through the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism with mobility financed by the Erasmus, Erasmus+, Comenius and Leonardo da Vinci projects. It is not a matter of competing but a matter of complementary modes of operation, especially in obtaining partnerships. The specific features of the EEA and Norway Grants with respect to other similar forms of financing international mobility related to the exchange and acquisition of knowledge are in smaller administrative requirements (simpler

procedures), greater flexibility in channelling funds (or, for example, delaying the start of the operation of the funded activity), and the focus on cooperation between Slovenia, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme

The results and the impacts of the programme are still relevant regarding the actual needs and priorities in Slovenia, but the achievement of the projects will usually require additional intervention either:

- in the form of new policy frameworks strategies to be adopted by the national government and other relevant stakeholders,
- in the form of additional substantial investments from national funding, ESIF or other funding sources.

Projects objectives targeted policy decision-makers, professional public, and contractors in health, social protection and education sector, enterprises managers, service users, employees, fathers, students, the general public, which all contribute to the society as a whole.

Recommendations

General recommendations apply to all programmes.

- **Timeliness:** As there was a considerable lapse of time between negotiating the Memorandum of Understanding, agreement and approval of programmes and launch of the first projects, it is recommended to extend the period of programme duration (to at least 5 years). Thus, the project duration could be longer (at least three years), which would enable monitoring during the project implementation. This would facilitate the achievement of the set goals, and motivate everyone involved in the project.
- **Assessment process:** The assessment process should be shortened regarding the number of received applications.
- **Improved partner search in donor countries:** Partner search system: It is recommended to develop a system for search of partners in donor countries. One recommended possibility is an on-line application system for partner search where potential donor-state partners and applicants from beneficiary countries could place their requests.

Time for partner search: There should be enough time for partner search – calls for tenders should be open longer (three months) so the applicants would have enough time to find partners in donor countries while the partners from donor countries would have enough time to apply. Another option is also a two months advance notification preceding the publication of the call and allowing potential applicants to start the search for partners in time.

- **Project implementation:** As project promoters had some problems pre-financing the projects it is recommended that projects receive support at the very beginning.

- **Clear indicators:** It is necessary to make better selection and justification of the pre-defined indicators for programme monitoring to avoid misinterpretation between POs and PPs.

The procedures of public procurement are complicated, ineffective and impractical. The procedures should be simplified. It is recommended to follow provisions of actual Slovenian legislation of that field when implementing public procurement without additional requirements. It would be necessary to discuss the introduction of flat rates which would allow project promoters to have at their disposal the means and avoid time-consuming public procurement.

- **Reporting:** The reporting procedures should be simplified. Administrative procedures should be reformed - simplified, which would make the implementation of the projects easier. Administration procedures should be modified (preferably, a more standardized way of reporting) in order to make implementation of the projects easier. Reporting should be optimised - electronic, non-paper reporting.
- **Bilateral relations funds:** Funding of bilateral relations is dispersed between bilateral relations on national, programme and project level, which is not very efficient. It is recommended to fund bilateral relations activities from a single source. There are also no uniform indicators for measuring the successfulness of bilateral relations.

4.4 Information and publicity

NFP successfully implemented its Communication Strategy during the implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants. NFP developed a Communication Strategy based on lessons learned in the previous financial perspective in order to reach the objectives with the aim of highlighting the role of the EEA and Norway Grants 2009–2014. The Communication strategy was focused on:

- ensuring that the funding is made available in a transparent manner by informing potential beneficiaries of the available opportunities and by making the procedures accessible;
- increasing public awareness of the grant schemes, their results and the impact they make;
- strengthening bilateral relations between the Donor States and Slovenia;
- securing the commitment of stakeholders to contribute to FMs overall objectives.

The Communication Strategy was compliant with the Information and Publicity Requirements set out in Annex 4 of the Regulation on the implementation of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2009–2014 and was approved by the Financial Mechanism Office on 13 July 2012. The Communication Strategy took into account the programme level as well, with different priority areas and target groups. In terms of implementing information and publicity activities, it needs to be underlined that the GODC acted both as NFP as well as PO for two programmes, EEA FM Programme - Programme SI02 and Norwegian FM Programme - Programme SI05, therefore a part of its communication strategy, measures and activities intertwined.

The basic communication tool for the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovenia for communication with the potential and actual beneficiaries, general public, internal audience, expert public and the media was the website. The NFP developed a website (www.norwaygrants.si and www.eeagrants.si), which was up and running from 1 February 2013 and was redesigned in 2015 due to progress in the implementation of programmes. The website complies with the responsive web design and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines for the visually impaired and includes information in line with Annex 4 in Slovenian and English language. It provides information on NFP, specific programmes, relevant documents (including reports, guidelines and logos), latest news and upcoming events etc. In order to keep information related to the 2009-2014 period on-line, as of 2018 the webpage provides a link to archive pages for the period [2009–2014](#) as well as for the period [2009–2004](#).

Since social media have become more widely used, the implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovenia can now be followed on Facebook. The Facebook page, which has around 1,170 followers (as of May 2018), has been active since 2011 and used to disseminate information on the EEA and Norway Grants, programmes and project activities in a more informal matter compared to the website. An Instagram profile has been created in the transition between the two periods, mostly to promote the EEA and Norway Grants in the new period 2014-2021, but it is also a tool to promote achievement of projects and programmes implemented during the 2009-2014 period. Links to the website, Facebook and Instagram profiles are placed on the GODC website.

NFP organized and attended a number of events. NFP held a press conference on the occasion of programme approval on 7 March 2013. NFP attended workshops for potential applicants and workshop for project promoters held by the SI02 and SI05 POs, opening and closing ceremonies held by Project Promoters, monitored events organised in the framework of bilateral funds. The most notable events hosted by NFP were the following:

- Launching event for the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism titled *“Cooperation for Joint Objectives”*, held by NFP and POs, took place on 19 June 2013 at the Ljubljana Exhibition and Convention Centre to mark the start of the implementation of programmes. Over 400 visitors attended the event. The event was also attended by the representatives of the Financial Mechanism Office as well as the representatives of Donor States framework organisations of individual fields who presented the possibilities of bilateral cooperation with the potential Slovenian applicants for both calls.
- CMEPIUS (PO for Slovenian Scholarship fund), CNVOS (FO for Fund for NGOs) and NFP organised a SHARE workshop where PPs from all four programmes shared good case practices and brain-stormed about possible future co-operations and projects.
- Final event for the Norwegian and EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 titled *“Working Together towards Common Goals”* on 7 October 2016, organized by NFP in cooperation with POs. The event with over 150 participants was an occasion bringing together the stakeholders to share experience and disseminate results, and featured representatives of the donor states. The closing event featured some of the projects that received support. Projects were presented on the stage and around in the “workshop” corners. Furthermore, the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Budapest supported the shooting of a short promotional video of the final event ([long](#) and [short](#) version), which was published on the website and Facebook profile.

Furthermore, all the projects funded under both financial mechanisms are compiled in a [publication *Working Together towards Common Goals*](#) that was published on the occasion of the final event. In the making of this publication, a comprehensive internal photo library was created helping to further promote the results of the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovenia.

Promotional materials (such as T-shirts, notebooks, pens, USB-drives, hats, umbrellas and many more) were purchased in 2013, 2016 and 2017 and distributed at different events. NFP also made sure that the EEA and Norway Grants visual identity was consistently used on the promotional material as well as on all documents, website, in the framework of events and other related activities.

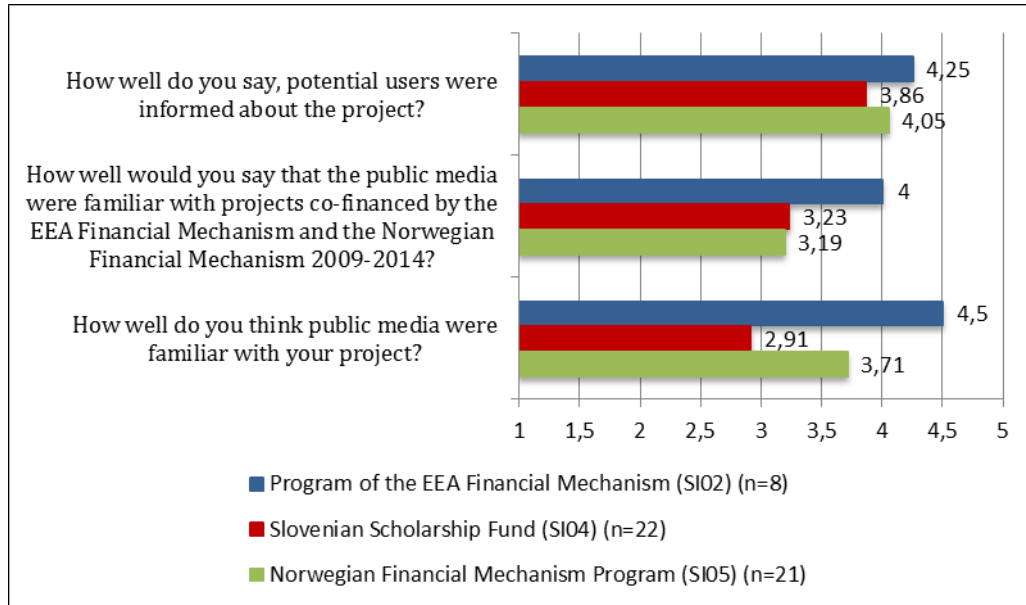
Good practices and projects were usually presented on the sidelines of annual meetings or other visits from FMO, Norwegian Embassy or representatives from donor states. In June and July 2017, promotion of the results and achievement of projects was also channelled through sponsored articles on two on-line media portals (RTVslo.si and Zurnal24.si), supported with Facebook boosted posts and Instagram adds.

Considering the above-mentioned activities and measures, NFP assesses that the Communication Strategy was successfully implemented and requirements from the Regulations and its Annex 4 were fulfilled. NFP assesses that the objectives stated in the Communication Strategy were met, the audience was reached and the right tools were used. The budget for communication activities was used economically.

Joint endeavours of NFP and POs to communicate the EEA and Norway Grants objectives, achievements and results increased the visibility of the Grants and the role of the donor states. The visibility of the Grants might be traced from the media clips, included in the GODC clipping that was collected by NFP. The number of newspaper articles was increased during the peak of the project implementation. Besides the publicity measures made by NFP and POs, the visibility of Grants was influenced by large investments and/or successful projects like Ljubljana, Idrija smelting plant, Ljuba, Cars-out, CPC+, Incredible years, just to mention a few. As well as by the award received by some project promoters, for example Europa Nostra Award which went to the project "In the same Boat – Young Guardians of Heritage" or the Gold innovation award of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia given out to the exhibition "From Ore to Mercury Drops" which is part of the project "Idrija Smelting Plant".

In the scope of evaluation made by an independent evaluator contracted by NFP (GODC), online survey with PPs was conducted to evaluate the communication effects according to the planned objectives.

Figure 9: Recognition of projects and programmes according to PPs



Source: Online survey

More communication channels bring better recognition; therefore it is recommended for all projects to use several different communication channels at the same time. The use of Internet for communication purposes should be complemented with traditional media (television, radio, print) for better effect.

POs duly fulfilled their information and publicity obligations and provided information on the existence, the objectives, and the implementation of their programmes, as well as on bilateral cooperation with donor state entities. POs successfully followed their own communication plans provided in the programme proposals; they organized several information activities (from workshops for applicants and projects promoters to seminars and final event communicating the results and achievements) and met web requirements. The main web page norwaygrants.si and eeagrants.si, were the main source of information on all programmes, and was also home page for the [SI02](#) and [SI05](#) programmes, whereas POs for [SI03](#) and [SI04](#) created their own websites for their programmes. NFP identified several good practice cases among POs' activities, for example "breakfast with journalists" held by the FO of the SI03 Programme or Apples of Quality award organised by the PO for the SI04 Programme. NFP assesses that POs successfully implemented their communication plans and fulfilled their obligations laid down in the Regulations and its Annex 4.

5 SUMMARY LIST OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Due to saving measures in public sector at the beginning of the period 2009-2014 shortage of NFP and PO staff working at the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology slowed down the start of implementation. Any change in the organisational structure which is tasked with implementation of both financial mechanisms combined with a staff shortage presents a considerable risk of delay in the implementation.

- Since the public call for programmes SI02 and SI05 was published later than foreseen, the time remaining for the implementation of selected project shortened, which increased the risk of programmes not meeting their set objectives completely. GODC which acted as the Programme Operator for SI02 and SI05 was efficiently organised and made every effort that the contracts with selected project promoters were signed as soon as possible.
- Three public procurement procedures for selection of external evaluators were published for the purpose of quality assessment of applications in accordance with Article 6.5 of the Regulation on the Implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 and the Regulation on the Implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014; the procedures unfortunately fell through (nobody applied under the first call). The limited number of experts who also frequently co-operate in the role of project promoters, consequently led to reduction in the number of potential applicants. This led to delay in the assessment of applications and announcement of the results of the call. It should be taken into consideration that the above mentioned problems are usually faced by small countries.
- After the Project promoters submitted the first interim reports, certain ambiguities were encountered and contract managers within programmes SI02 and SI05 decided to organise individual meetings with lead partners and Control unit. These meetings were very useful and a lot of open issues were resolved, but there were still certain delays in the reimbursement of incurred expenditure. As some partnerships consisted of a large number of partners, it could take several months before the incurred expenditure was reimbursed; in order to ensure regular payment flow and smooth implementation of projects one additional persons started working at the control unit.
- Human resources management is important for an effective implementation of a Programme and shortage of staff and unforeseen changes put efficient implementation at considerable risk. Each phase of implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme required an adequate number of appropriately skilled staff to carry out the required tasks. It is also important to have the support of all the supporting services within the office (i.e. the legal department, public procurement department, IT department, etc.). Flexibility in ensuring human resources in terms of quantity and skills according to the actual needs and adequate reorganisation and education of staff is very important for a successful implementation of the programme.
- Bilateral cooperation under programme SI02, areas Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and Natural Heritage, faced several challenges. The Programme Operator had considerable problems providing experts that would participate in an international conference on the relevant area. Similar problems hindered the organisation of a study visit. We are fully aware that there are only three donor countries as opposed to a number of beneficiary countries. However, we do believe that sharing of experience and good practices in identified areas of cooperation makes an important contribution to the development or even upgrade of a certain area, and to the strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation and of bilateral cooperation per se.
- In the period 2009-2014 we worked a lot on dissemination of informations, results, raising awareness, making the general public aware of the existence of the EEA nad Norway Grants,

which consequently meant better visibility of the donor countries. After the response of our project promoters and the feedback from the general public we believe that the awareness of the grants was considerably raised in Slovenia. This made us receive the news about the proposed change of the logos for the EEA and Norway Grants with some scepticism, since logos represent the very visual identity of the Grants.