

# **SLOVENE SCHOLARSHIP FUND SI04**

## **FINAL PROGRAMME REPORT**

### **EEA AND NORWEGIAN FINANCIAL MECHANISMS 2009-2014**

#### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

When Slovenia started to prepare the programme proposal for the 2009-2014 period, joint projects with Norway, Iceland and even Liechtenstein already existed although, due to various financial and geographical reasons, they were not many. Tendency to choose other countries for their study, training or teaching assignments abroad existed among students and teachers. However, at the same time there were plenty of common topics of interest and challenges connecting Donor states with Slovenia – nature, human capital, social inclusion, and quality of teaching. The basis has been reaffirmed in the EEA and Norway Grants schemes, their objectives and aims.

Slovene educational institutions, eligible for participation in the Scholarship Fund, seized the opportunity. The programme enabled focused bilateral cooperation and it assured much higher funding compared to existing EU programmes. Concretely the programme included 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 in elementary and secondary level (school partnerships)
- Preparatory and study visits

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

Initially modest start soon evolved and many good applications had to be rejected due to limited funds, which proved as beneficial in terms of quality of the selected projects. The interest for cooperation grew each year. Slovene institutions were more eager to establish inter-institutional cooperation projects, so there is potential for the future.

The programme allowed for strengthening of bilateral relations, mutual understanding, trust building and forming a solid basis for long-term partnership, which has proven especially appealing to institutions implementing the projects. Mobility of students and staff enhanced bilateral relations among individuals and inter-institutional cooperation projects created bilateral cooperation that

dealt with common challenges that led to joint results and products. New teaching materials have been created (Development of new e-Learning Tool in Horticulture, Active Learning with ICT project), new videos filmed (Balancing on the Border project), joint publications written (Forms of Assistance to Children with Autistic Disorder and Their Families project or Inclusion as the Pillar of School Culture project ) and joint activities carried out (United in Biodiversity project). Festivals that existed in one country spread to many others (Play with me project). Many projects that initially involved selected individuals expanded into comprehensive school projects, affecting all staff and students, sometimes even spreading to other schools in Slovenia (Outdoor Learning project).

Not only did most of the projects improve bilateral relations, the whole programme exceeded most of the initially set targets. There has been more student and staff mobility, the interest for inter-institutional cooperation projects has been much higher than there were funds available. Vast majority of the indicators set have been reached or exceeded, only a few have been underachieved. Overall results show immense interest for bilateral cooperation among elementary, secondary and tertiary level education institutions, which indicates that it is worth maintaining such opportunities while expanding also to pre-schools and adult level education.

Quality of teaching, inclusive education, sustainable development and environment as well as innovation, creativity and multicultural dimensions have been shared challenges between Slovene and Donor state educational institutions and therefore, most often addressed topics in the programme.

Most of the projects concluded as planned, with all the activities carried out and funds well used. Many institutions implemented more with same or less funds although some projects could not spend all of the funds due to national tax legislation. With 52 realised mobility and inter-institutional cooperation projects and further 62 preparatory or study visits carried out in Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein, overall consumption of funds has reached 94%.

Majority of the projects expressed a clear intention to continue the cooperation with their partners from the Donor states. Concrete results, products created during the programme period will continue to be in use also after the programme's official closure. What is perhaps most notable is the fact that many new relationships, friendships and professional contacts developed will go on, with or without the future programme. The young students made new friendships that opened their horizons, broke their 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 underprivileged areas or families and for many, mobility represented their life-changing moment of self-awareness and value.

Teachers at all levels met their peers and learned about similarities and differences in classrooms, which made them reflect, react and change their ways, habits and beliefs. That has many times reflected on their colleagues and consequently the whole school benefited from the projects. For institutions, which at many times small and from rural areas, international cooperation brought positive new image in their local environment and created many synergies.

The fact that this programme has been part of other EU programmes plenty of synergies and cooperation opportunities occurred during its implementation period.

Last but not least, the impact of the programme can be seen on two levels; the programme brought together three national programme operators and resulted in many joint activities and it created new partnership with donor programme partners in all three donor states, without which such effective and quality programme would not have been possible.

## **2. PROGRAMME AREA DEVELOPMENTS**

The number of Slovene educational institutions being involved in various international activities and project has been growing from year to year. Internationalization at all levels of education is something that the PO as well as institutions themselves perceive as necessity and the way forward. Studies that the PO (CMEPIUS being also the National agency for European programmes in the field of education and training, among which Lifelong learning programme) 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 institution. 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.

On this basis Slovenia has implemented Slovene Scholarship Programme funded with EEA and Norway grants that we have seen as an important complementary programme to existing EU programmes. Its focus on 3 donor countries and on improvement of bilateral relations with them has represented an important element of more targeted activities aiming at enhancement of mutual understanding, sharing, exchange and cooperation between Slovenian education institutions and those of 3 donor states.

Results in the number of mobility and joint projects implemented back this intention. Just to name a few, compared to 64 mobile Erasmus students to these 3 countries, Slovene Scholarship Programme enabled mobility of 184 HE students, mostly due to much higher financial support from this programme. Furthermore 136 HE students were involved in inter-institutions cooperation projects (intensive programmes). From 1 intensive programme of Erasmus (before the beginning of the Slovene Scholarship Programme) we have now 8 inter-institutional cooperation projects in HE as a result of this current programme period. There were 143 mobile higher education staff that were mobile in the last EEA/NO programme and we have now supported 227 higher education teachers via mobility projects and 34 more took part in inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education. From existing 4 Comenius school partnerships (that we took as a baseline) we now supported 7 school partnership projects where 139 pupils and 107 teachers were involved and produced concrete results apart from their mobility.

The fact that no other programme besides Lifelong learning offered financial support to mobility and cooperation projects with these selected donor states, the existence of Slovene Scholarship Programme represented important stimulus for focused bilateral cooperation and enhanced present

and future partnerships. Consequently, many new synergies were created during its implementation years; with POs responsible for other programmes financed with EEA/NO grants as well as with other EU programmes, like Europe for Citizens, Erasmus+ and regional CEEPUS programme.

### **3. REPORTING ON PROGRAMME OUTPUTS**

#### Output 1.2 - Agreements for HE student and staff mobility formalised/existing agreements enhanced

In the period 2014 – 2016, 25 HE mobility projects and 6 Inter-institutional cooperation projects were realised. These projects enabled 320 student (145% of the target) and 261 staff mobility (104% of the target). Seventy two student mobility were implemented under EEA grant (120% of the target) and 248 student mobility under Norway grant (155% of the target). Sixty five students were involved in work placements, which represents 59% of the target. The main reason for this low realisation lied in the difficulties for Slovenian students to find the companies in the donor states, where they could do the training. Even majority of those that managed to arrange trainings for themselves, they have done it at HE institutions (e.g. universities, research centres), since it was easier due to good cooperation between Slovenian and donor states HE institutions. This is also the reason for such high results in the realization of student mobility in general. Another reason for high performance is also the fact that grants for students were substantially higher (than for example those within Erasmus+) and most of institutions managed their finances economically and were able to realise more mobility than initially planned with the same amount of the approved grant.

During the period of the programme, the institutions concluded 22 new HE mobility agreements under Norway grant and 12 new agreements under EEA grant. This 340% overachievement of the target was achieved with the help of the preparatory visits and due to the fact that previous cooperation was not so widely spread among Slovenian smaller institutions and institutions from the donor countries. Furthermore, existing cooperation agreements were not sufficient to enable all the mobility, which exceeded initial plans. Many HEIs established new partnerships for mobility and wider cooperation.

#### Output 2.1 - Mobility programme for institutional cooperation effectively implemented

There were 84 teacher and staff mobility realised in 14 projects under Measure 3, which represents 84% of the target and 76 teacher mobility realised, which is 76% of the target. The main reason for the underachieved targets lays in difficulties project promoters had with finding partners and establishing cooperation and in general lower interest in this Measure, especially in the first call in 2013. Another reason was in the fact that all of the projects requested maximum funds available. Therefore, in all/the other two calls in 2014 and 2015, all available funds were distributed, but then due to national legal regulations on allowances, quite some amount of funds stayed unspent even in projects where they realised all planned mobility or even more. Despite the efforts of the PO to encourage them to return the funds during eligibility period, so we could redistribute them in time, the majority of programme promoters claimed that the funds will be spent, but in the end still returned some.

## Output 2.2 - Joint projects identified and implemented by partner institutions

Under Measure 4 there were 6 inter-institutional projects in Higher Education realised and under Measure 5 there were 7 inter-institutional projects in education and training realised. Altogether, this means that we've achieved 130% of the target set in the programme. The interest in such projects under Measure 5 was high since the first Call in 2013, when also the funds from Measure 3 have been redistributed to this Measure. It was evident that the target will be met or even exceeded.

Lessons learned are even closer monitoring of the projects; allowing procedures for PO to decide based on interim report to redistribute funds from low performing projects and redistribute them to reserve list; and to consider targets and realisation of them in the selection of projects in later calls. In the future there should also be more funds available for joint projects because of the very high interest especially in the education and training area. Another positive characteristic of the programme that helped in overachievement of some targets are higher grants for participants of the mobility compared to other similar programmes (e.g. Erasmus+). This allowed also those from the environment with fewer opportunities to participate in the programme and go on exchange to donor countries, where living standard is much higher and more expensive than in Slovenia.

## 4. REPORTING ON PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

### 4.1 OUTPUTS' CONTRIBUTION TO OUTCOMES

When measuring the results of the following outcomes, we did not differentiate between the two financial mechanisms because Measure 2 was financed from both mechanisms, therefore the explanations below are provided for two outcomes jointly.

#### 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 mobility through Measure 2 and 4 received ECTS credits for their activities. This number represents 227% of the target set in the programme. More mobility 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 mobility 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.

### 4.2. HORIZONTAL CONCERNS

Projects within Slovene Scholarship Fund did address to some extent the topic of tolerance, respect for the rights of minorities and gender equality. In mobility projects as well as in inter-institutional cooperation projects, beneficiaries reported of individuals' gaining of better multicultural understanding and consequently becoming more open and tolerant towards others, different. There were projects addressing persons with special needs – for example project called Play with me (SI04-0027), carried out by Special Education Centre Janeza Levca Ljubljana or project by Primary School Glazija, focusing on assistance for children with autistic disorder and their families (SI04-0028). Gender equality as well as intercultural dimension and migrations were tackled in the project lead by University of Nova Gorica in a project titled Balancing on the Border (SI04-0031).

### 4.3. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

As mentioned above gender equality was the topic addressed by one of the projects. Quite some projects dealt with the theme of sustainable development, particularly elementary and secondary level schools addressed the issue of green energy, renewable sources, care for environment and biodiversity. Our observation was that sustainable development, education for people with special needs and innovative approaches to teaching and learning at all levels of education were the cross-cutting issues that appeared in many projects.

On this basis we can conclude that the topic of environment, human capital (particularly in the sense of enhancing soft skills) as well as taking care of minorities were the common ground for bilateral cooperation among donor states and Slovenian institutions and that we shared same concerns. In this way the programme's overall aim and objective were well met and placed among our own. We have many declared intentions from our project beneficiaries about their willingness and readiness to continue with joint projects.

#### 4.3. CAPACITY BUILDING

Already in 2014 we received positive feedback from our project beneficiaries on the contribution that the Slovene Scholarship Fund project has brought on various levels; on participants either in mobility or partnership projects as well as on increase of bilateral cooperation. Teachers shared their first hand experiences on improvement of their teaching, introduction of new teaching or working methods, and the personal, linguistic and cultural skills that they received as well as their pupils.

Year later we held a seminar together with other EU programmes dedicated to preparation and implementation of joint study programmes. Apart from the event where participants received much needed practical experiences and advice, we produced the first handbook for HEIs for this international activity.

More concrete capacity building effects were exposed later on at various events, ranging from informal so-called SHARE events, performed together with NGO Fund and National Focal Point as POs for other programmes as well as the final event that highlighted results, impact and effects, also on capacity building.

From the assessment of the projects and from their ongoing monitoring activities we could state that the Programme contributed to increased intercultural, linguistic and personal skills of all young people involved in projects and mobility. We could add the impact the Programme brought on staff in a sense of sharing, producing and implementing new ideas, methods and teaching practices with colleagues from donor states and the wider sharing of this onto their peers at institutions. We also observed the impact on stated increase in bilateral cooperation, mutual understanding and future planning of common project by institutions, that indirectly contribute to the changes in the local community or sector that projects addressed (for example environment).

Last but not least, even the study visits contributed importantly to the strengthened capacity building where we would specially outline the group study visit of secondary (general and VET) principals that took place in Norway. Institutional leadership is namely (as indicated clearly in our studies) the key

element to the successful international cooperation; it all begins or ends with the support from the school principal.

## **5. REPORTING ON BILATERAL RELATIONS**

### **5.1. BILATERAL OUTCOMES**

Within the programme operating years from 2013 to 2017 we have received 92 applications for preparatory and study visits, out of which 30 were rejected due to low quality or incompliance with the programme rules and 62 were approved and realised. The main outcomes of 17 preparatory visits were strengthened bilateral cooperation between the sending and hosting institution and in 92% the plan for joint projects under either Norway or EEA Grants or other similar programmes. After the conclusion of all three calls the Programme Operator opened only the Call for study visits, which was ongoing until all the funds were spent in 2015 and then reopened after the re-allocation of funds from Measures 2-5 to Measure 1. The funds were re-allocated after the first project final reports have been received and it was evident that there were funds that had not been spent. The main outcomes of the study visits were the strengthening of bilateral cooperation, sharing results of projects and good case practices under Norway and EEA grants and concrete plans for future cooperation under other similar programmes. When looking at the indicators we can note that 112 partnership agreements in public sector were conducted, which is 467% of the target. There were also 24 partnership agreements in private sector and the same number in the civil society, which in both cases is 2400%. The reason in such high results lies in the fact that there were higher number of preparatory and study visits realised than previously perceived and that many education institutions cooperated also with organisations from their local environment (companies, NGOs, etc.).

In 2016 also a group study visit to Norway has been organised with 10 headmasters of secondary schools, who visited 4 different school centres in order to get familiar with education system, the good case practices in school management, curriculum development and examples of successful projects under EEA and Norway grants. The participants also networked with the goal of establishing possible future partnerships. The results of the study visit are future cooperation with the hosting institutions through Erasmus+ or other similar programmes; implementing new ideas, good case practices in participants' work and personal growth and development of their professional and personal competences.

The activities under Measure 1 have proven to be very important in such programmes as are the Norway and EEA Grants. They offer opportunities to strengthen bilateral cooperation, to find new partners, to share and gain new knowledge, experiences, good case practices not only to institutions that have participated in the programme under Measures 2-5, but also to those that did not manage to obtain funds for the projects under EEA and Norway Grants. The outcomes are wider, including more education institutions and offering them such opportunities. We consider the re-allocation of funds that were left from finished projects from Measures 2-5 resulted in positive outcomes, more mobility, wider effect, more future partnerships and collaborations between Slovenian and donor



states education institutions. We believe that the outcomes could have been even bigger if had there been more flexibility allowed in such re-allocation of funds (including the distribution between the 2 mechanisms) and not only 5 %, which resulted in more than 100.000 EUR of unspent funds and at least 10 unrealised study visits.

## 5.2. DONOR PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMMES

The first thing we would like to emphasize is the fact and necessity in all of our selected projects to have a donor state partner institution. In this way we aimed to increase bilateral cooperation in each and every project. Due to this obligation of having a partner from Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway in each project, the PO established close cooperation with DPPs in every donor state. Because of our excellent relationship that we managed to establish during these years, our project beneficiaries and study visits participants received quality partners from donor countries.

Apart from this direct impact of our good relationship with DPPs enabling projects' implementation, we as the PO formed very positive relation with all three DPPs which enabled us to communicate continuously, meet every year at cooperation committee meeting as well as discuss issues that occurred as we went along the implementation of the programme. In this way we were able to adapt, adjust and run the programme as smooth as possible.

Due to our personal and professional relationship that we created in these years with DPPs particularly with Veena Gill (SIU), Marion Kindle Kuehnis (AIBA) and Viðar Helgason (RANNIS) we see it as a firm and solid basis for the potential future programme.

## 5.3. COMPLEMENTARY ACTIONS

With the support of the complementary action funds the Programme Operator (PO) prepared and organized a national conference addressing the issue of Joint programmes (November 2014). The event, that represented synergy between Slovene Scholarship Fund, Erasmus+ and CEEPUS programme, was composed of a morning plenary session and afternoon session - two workshops on how to prepare and how to implement a joint degree. Eighty two participants attended the event and they assessed the event as very useful and informative. As accompanying material a comprehensive, practical manual in Slovene language was prepared describing certain phases of the preparation and implementation of a joint programme (published also on-line). Both activities were identified and prepared with the intention to enhance the objectives of the programme. Joint programmes were result of a good partnership and ensure long-term cooperation. At the same time the aim of these programmes was to offer an "upgraded" curriculum which builds on existing subjects/courses and allows students to build on the knowledge, competencies and strengthen international employability. The event and publication were recognised as good practice for the promotion of a programme and of its activities and possible results.

The PO prepared and organized 3 so called SHARE workshops (in 2014, 2015 and 2016), where the main purpose was for the small group of participants in an informal setting to share their experiences and knowledge on different topics regarding their projects under the programme or wider. The last

two were organised in cooperation with CNVOS (PO for NGOs), where Project Promotors (PP) of Norway and EEA Grants networked with PPs of Erasmus+ and Europe for Citizens programme, shared their good case practices and brain-stormed about the possible future co-operations and projects under one of the programmes. It was first event where we focused on those first on the reserve list, missing only a little in order to be successful. Both events were evaluated as very useful and well prepared. The participants (50 all together) got the opportunities to network and share their experiences from different programmes, develop their projects further, perhaps add a partner or think of a more appropriate programme to apply for in the future.

In August 2016 the PO also enabled a study visit of 2 members of National Selection Committee to the DPP, concretely Icelandic national agency Rannis, where they extended their knowledge of the programme and how it runs in other beneficiary countries. In August 2016 another study visit was enabled for 2 employees of the PO working on the programme to the same institution, where they presented the results of the programme and brainstorm on the future generation.

Throughout the programme the PO hosted different delegations (from Lithuania, Hungary, as well as a delegation from the donor countries) where practices in managing the Fund were exchanged and good projects and cases were presented.

## **6. REPORTING ON SUSTAINABILITY**

The main sustainable outcome of the programme is definitely the strengthened cooperation between Slovenia and donor countries. The programme has largely contributed to stronger relations and cooperation between different teachers, administrative staff, headmasters, students from Slovenia, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and also other beneficiary countries. This lead also to stronger cooperation between institutions, which is evident in new projects under other programmes such as: Erasmus+, Europe for Citizens and national programmes. All project promotors have reported the intention of future cooperation with their project partners and from preparatory/study visits 92% of the participants plan the future cooperation. However better cooperation was also reached on national level between CMEPIUS and DPPs, between CMEPIUS and Norwegian embassy, between CMEPIUS and National Focal Point – Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, CNVOS and REC (POs for the NGO Fund).

Other sustainable outcomes are the knowledge, the competences and the experiences that all the participants of mobility, project coordinators and consequently their schools, faculties obtained and are now using in their everyday work, life either in form of teaching materials, teaching methods, approaches, organisation of work, organisation changes on institution level, new education programmes, etc.

Higher grants for participants in mobility enabled individuals from weaker social and economic background to participate and improve and develop new competences, new knowledge and even new work opportunities gained through mobility. We have evidence that at least two students from

project SI04-0006 after their traineeship in Iceland received offers to work or study at postgraduate programme there.

Many successful Slovenian Scholarship Fund projects turned into wider institution's projects, involving more staff and students (not only those directly taking part in the project). Such examples were noted at School Centre Srečko Kosovel Sežana (SI04-0046), High School Tolmin (SI004-0045, SI04-0026), Centre Janez Levč Ljubljana (SI04-0027), Primary School Alojzij Šuštar (SI04-0030). Another examples were faculty projects evolving into new modules or even new study programmes – such was the case at University of Nova Gorica (SI04-0036, SI04-0031) and University of Ljubljana (SI04-0044, SI04-0038, SI04-0048).

Last, but not least, we've organised the final outreach event together with the PO for NGOs and National Focal Point in order to comprehensively promote the results of the projects in Slovenia. The event with creative presentations of results (and joint compendium) was very successful with over 100 guests and wide media coverage also had sustainability elements. Before the event all the mentioned actors also prepared the compendia where all the financed projects were presented. It was distributed at the event and remains available at all POs for further use and dissemination.

## **7. PROJECT SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **7.1. PROJECT SELECTION**

During Programme period there have been three calls announced and for each of them Programme operator performed all activities related with the preparation of the call: information day, workshops for applicants, technical review of applications received, evaluation process with external evaluators and approval by National selection committee.

#### Call 2013

The PO received:

- 13 applications for mobility projects in higher education,
- 5 applications for mobility projects for educational staff in general and vocational education and training,
- 2 applications for inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education, and
- 8 applications for inter-institutional cooperation projects in education and training.

And the PO approved:

- 6 mobility projects in higher education,
- 5 mobility projects for educational staff in general and vocational education and training,
- 2 inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education, and
- 2 inter-institutional cooperation projects in education and training.

#### Call 2014

The PO received:

- 11 applications for mobility projects in higher education,
- 8 applications for mobility projects for educational staff in general and vocational education and training,
- 4 applications for inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education, and
- 14 applications for inter-institutional cooperation projects in education and training.

And the PO approved:

- 8 mobility projects in higher education,
- 5 mobility projects for educational staff in general and vocational education and training,
- 2 inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education, and
- 3 inter-institutional cooperation projects in education and training.

### Call 2015

The PO received:

- 10 applications for mobility projects in higher education,
- 6 applications for mobility projects for educational staff in general and vocational education and training,
- 2 applications for inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education, and
- 9 applications for inter-institutional cooperation projects in education and training.

And the PO approved:

- 7 mobility projects in higher education,
- 4 mobility projects for educational staff in general and vocational education and training,
- 2 inter-institutional cooperation projects in higher education, and
- 2 inter-institutional cooperation projects in education and training.

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 has been 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). We set the maximum amount of the grant in regards to the number of students enrolled – applicant institutions that have more than 5.000 students could apply for up to 150.000 EUR, institutions that have less than 5.000 students could apply for a maximum grant of 50.000 EUR. This

ensured more projects approved and wider geographical spread. The additional national priority was set in order to extend the diversity of education institutions included in the programme; to stimulate applications and projects that have not received funds in the previous Call, such applications received additional 5 “national” points.

## 7.2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The actual implementation of the projects was supported by the following activities of the PO:

- meetings for the project promoters before signing the contract (to explain all the rules, obligations and give advice on implementation activities);
- constant advising and monitoring via email and phone;
- control and monitoring visits; by midterm and final reports;
- different events (e.g. SHARE events), where project promoters could share their experiences, challenges and good case practices.

As already explained above, after the first call in 2013, the PO realised that the distribution of the funds was not done in most feasible way. Therefore, the additional national priorities were introduced in the next two calls. These helped in reaching most suitable distribution of the available funds in order to obtain larger number of institution involved with realistic numbers planned for the mobility and funds needed, while still giving high priority to the quality of the project applications.

Other challenges in the implementation of the projects were: finding project partners in Measure 2, where the coordinator did not have to specify partners in the application; collaboration with partners – changes of leadership of the partner institution lead to termination of cooperation; low interest for incoming mobility - especially students; and absorption of the funds.

The PO offered support for the challenges with partners taking advantage of the relations with donor programme partners and embassies in order to connect different institutions and create networks and with encouraging and promoting the use of preparatory visits under bilateral funds. These actions were successful in all cases but one, where the school that had a mobility project approved lost their partner and despite all efforts could not find other partner and the project was terminated.

The low interest in mobility of students from donor countries was the challenge that was present not only in Slovenia, but also in other beneficiary countries. It was the issue that was discussed at many POs and DPPs meetings, but without any successful solution beside additional promotion of the opportunities at the donor states institutions either through DPPs, direct study visits to institutions and promotional materials that were sent directly to the institutions. One major reason for low interest of the students from donor states lies the fact that majority of the HE programmes are in Slovenian language due to national legislation.

Because of the economic management of the funds of the mobility participants the project promoters spent far less funds than initially planned in the application, despite the fact that they realised more mobility than envisaged. The PO dealt with the challenge with the close monitoring of the projects and their absorption of the funds and based on the feedback reallocated the funds to projects on the reserve list or to Measure 1. This action was somewhat successful but not as much as

it could be due to the programme rule, which allows only 5% of the funds from other measures to be reallocated to the bilateral fund. Therefore we would kindly suggest to FMO to consider the flexibility of this rule for the next generation of the programme, as well as the necessary distribution between both financial mechanisms.

## 8. MONITORING AND AUDIT

### MONITORING

The PO implemented monitoring of the projects under Norway and EEA grants on different levels and ways:

- Analysis of Midterm and Final reports – both reports were consisted of the questions regarding the implementation of the project content, organization and finance absorption. The midterm report had a space for the questions, issues the PPs were dealing with to the PO, based on which further actions were taken. The midterm reports were also the basis for the next payment due to their absorption of the funds;
- Monitoring in periods of three months (via email, phone, meetings, events) – every project promotor was contacted every three months in order to follow the implementation of the project, the realization of mobility and any possible challenges;
- On spot checks during the action;
- On spot checks upon completion – for 5% of the projects on the spot checks were done by the POs control department during the action and another 5% of the projects upon the completion, where all the documentation was checked as well as the management of the project;
- Monitoring visits – monitoring visits were done by the programme coordinator, who was checking more the content part of the implementation of the project and offered guidance on any raised issues;
- Desk check of supporting material upon completion – desk check, where all the documentation that supported the implementation of the project and the costs was controlled, was done by the programme coordinators.

Type of Measure	Analysis of final reports		Desk check of supporting material		On the spot check during the action		On the spot check (audit) upon completion	
	plan	realised No° of projects	plan	realised	plan	realised	plan	realised
Preparatory Visits/Study Visits	100%	52	100%	52	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mobility in HE	100%	25	100%	25	3	10	1	3
Mobility in education/training	100%	14	100%	14	3	10	1	3
Cooperation projects in HE	100%		100%		3	5	1	3

		6		6				
Cooperation projects in education/training	100%	7	100%	7	3	6	1	4

For the purpose of regular monitoring of projects the PO also used an internal IT tool for project management named Mobius. Detailed information especially that related to finances, outputs and outcomes, about each project was entered into the tool with the aim to facilitate monitoring and reporting. Attached to this report is a table: Monitoring plan for all three calls 2013, 2014 and 2015.

The main findings of the monitoring were as already described under the previous question: the challenges in collaboration with partners, low absorption of funds and also low mobility realization rate, weak reporting on dissemination of the results, missing documentation. The latter were solved with additional guidance and supplement documentation.

#### EXTERNAL AUDITS:

1. In April 2014 the Audit Authority performed a System Audit of management and control system. The system is in line with the Regulations Art. 4.7 and 4.8.
2. In the period between 5 January 2015 and 23 January 2015, the Audit Authority performed an audit of the expenditure under second and third interim financial reports.

Main findings related to an inconsistency with the Guide on eligible costs issued by NFP. CMEPIUS declared part of staff cost for additional work to the programme. Payment for these part-time activities followed the formal procedure requested for public bodies in Slovenia. The procedure was in accordance with the Slovene legislation (Decree laying down the share of salary for work performance to be paid for the increased work load to civil servants in the public sector ) and for activities already employed persons were engaged who have knowledge and skills to implement the programme. The additional salary for increased work load cannot be higher than 20 % of person's basic salary. Main part of the salary (100 %) for three employees (programme manager, financial manager and coordinator for Measure 1) was financed from national budget and a small part (two employees who were assessing Measure 1 applications) from Lifelong Learning programme, the surplus (up to 20 %) was declared under SI04. The Audit Authority (AA) found that increased workload ineligible as it did not demonstrate a proper calculation of the value of the hourly rate and consequently of the claimed amounts under the heading staff costs. Therefore total amount of EUR 4.618,70 was excluded. However later in the mid 2016 the NFP changed the manual and additional payments for employees who are already 100 % financed from the national budget were made eligible. These costs were still not recognised under SI04 retroactively.

3. In the period between 22 February 2016 and 15 March 2016 the Audit Authority performed an audit on Management and control system.

Main findings: PO has set up an adequate system for the implementation of the programme. The opinion of the AA was that procedures should be defined in one document to make it more

transparent. All the recommendations will be taken into the consideration with next programme if relevant. Final conclusion was that the system is adequate but it could be improved.

4. In the period between 4 April 2016 and 23 May 2016 the Audit Authority performed an audit of expenditure under fifth and sixth interim financial reports.

Ineligible expenditure in the amount of EUR 6.345,00 because of over-calculated subsistence allowances for monthly stays of students for a period less than 1,5 months. Ineligible cost were reimbursed in total. PO made additional checks for the already closed projects and found no other irregularities.

Subsistence allowances of administrative and teaching staff exceeded the actual accommodation costs paid by the faculties. The project promoter (University) reimbursed to the faculties the actual accommodation costs incurred by their administrative and teaching staff, but declared subsistence allowances in the maximum value in its payment claims and retained the surplus. Ineligible cost were reimbursed in total. PO made additional checks for the already closed projects and found that PP did not have proofs for additional EUR 5.774,39. Request for reimbursement was sent and funds were reimbursed in total.

The amount of 6.345 EUR (finding 12) and amount of 5.774,39 EUR (finding 13) have been reimbursed in total in due time and both of the findings are closed. These amounts have been deducted from the total eligible costs and included in final balance. Neither for finding 12 nor for finding 13 was the irregularity case opened since all the funds have been reimbursed and cases are closed.

5. In the period between March and April 2017 the Audit Authority performed an additional audit of implementation of recommendations from the previous audits.

Final conclusion was that the system is adequate but it could be improved.

#### INTERNAL AUDIT:

Being the implementing agency for European Commission and the Ministries the PO is subject to constant monitoring of the internal and external Audit Services; all procedures are public and supervised internally and externally. Due to its small size PO hired the services of an external expert in order to carry out the internal audit function.

## **9. IRREGULARITIES**

No irregularities were detected apart from already mentioned under point 8 (2. and 4.).

## **10. RISK MANAGEMENT**



During the programme cycle, we encountered the following risks: lack of interest from eligible institutions for Measure 3 in Call 2013; poor implementation of the project or activities; delays of payment from NFP to PO at the beginning of the programme period; change of staff and reallocation of funds. All of these risks were already correctly assessed in the risk assessment and tackled with the provided mitigations.

The low interest of eligible institutions was tackled with additional promotion (events, announcements, preparatory workshops) before the next Call, which resulted in the higher number of applications in the next two calls.

There were quite some changes of the staff in the period of the programme implementation, which were mitigated by the clear written procedures for the programme, planned and informative transitions and close cooperation with the management that was constantly participating in the programme.

Based on the absorption of the funds there were some reallocations, which were done accordingly to the rules of the programme and always advised with FMO and DPPs. These allocations were: from one Call to the next for the same Measure; from approved projects to those on reserve list, based on the monitoring reports for the same Measure and the same Call year; or from Measures 2-5 to bilateral fund under Measure 1 based on final reports.

When the challenges with the implementation activities were detected via one of the monitoring tools, the PO organised meetings on problematic topics, delivered on the spot visits to offer guidance or other needed activities. In majority cases such actions were successful in mitigating these risks.

## **11. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY**

The PO performed all activities related to information and publicity with reference to Communication Plan provided in the Programme proposal.

All information regarding the programme and all calls were published on PO's web site, in Slovene (<http://www.cmepius.si/razpisi/nfm.aspx>) and in English (<http://www.cmepius.si/en/higher-education/eea-and-norway-grantsII.aspx>). The calls were also advertised in national daily and local newspapers. The PO also organised general info-day for all target groups with the aim to present the basic characteristics and regulations of the programme. Workshops grouped by type of applicants were prepared before the deadline of each call. Promotion of the calls and programme was also done via email and at other CMEPIUS events (national and international conferences, annual school meetings for headmasters, etc.) with the supporting promotional materials and short presentations of the programme and opportunities. For the promotion of the programme, calls and later on projects and their activities also PO's and National Focal Point's Facebook pages were used.

In 2014 a special national event was organized titled "the Purpose and meaning of joint programmes" and 3 Share events were organised in each year from 2014 to 2016. These activities are already described in the Complementary action paragraph.

In October 2016 the final outreach event was organised with the POs for NGOs (CNVOS and REC) and National Focal Point in order to promote the results of the projects with wide media coverage and over 100 participants from Slovenia and Norway present. Another result of the cooperation with National Focal Point and CNVOS the booklet/compendium with the results and descriptions of all projects funded by the programme in all areas in Slovenian and English languages was released. The e-version of the booklet is published also on the webpages of the POs and the NFP ([http://www.cmepius.si/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/SODELUJEMO\\_ZA\\_SKUPNE\\_CILJE\\_web.pdf](http://www.cmepius.si/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/SODELUJEMO_ZA_SKUPNE_CILJE_web.pdf)). The booklets were sent to all project promoters, DPPs, FMO and are being distributed at different CMEPIUS events.

Every December the PO awards the best projects in Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus+ at celebration called Apples of Quality. In 2016 the PO has included also the award for best projects within Slovene Scholarship Fund. Three projects were thus awarded: University of Nova Gorica for their Measure 2 project, Secondary school Tolmin for their Measure 5 project and Biotechnical centre Naklo for their Measure 3 project. All of the best projects were also described in the specially printed brochure that the PO prepares yearly. Furthermore, shortlisted projects for Apples were selected to be used for further promotion and dissemination at various PO's communication channels.

During the period of the programme the good case practices among projects were presented at different visits from DPPs, FMO and Norwegian Embassy as well as at all the DPPs and POs meetings. The results of Slovene Scholarship Fund and the best projects were also presented at outreach final events in Brussels (June 2016, organised by SIU), in Tallinn (March 2017, organised by Estonian national agency) and in Bucharest (March 2017, organised by Romanian national agency). During the period the PO was also visiting different events organised by Project Promoters as part of their projects, where the programme, opportunities and (expected) results were presented.

## **12. CONDITIONS SET IN THE PROGRAMME AGREEMENT**

### **12.1. COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS**

When implementing the Slovene Scholarship Programme we complied with all the conditions outlined in the Programme agreement and we have also followed the conditions set by the NFP and FMC.

A bilateral indicator reflecting the increased knowledge of the cooperating countries and education systems has been developed.

Bilateral indicators, outcome and output indicators have been reported on in the annual Programme report.

The indicators under section 1 above have been revised and submitted to the FMO for approval prior to the first disbursement to the projects.



## 12.2. CHANGES TO THE PROGRAMME

During the whole implementation period, PO did not modify the programme significantly; changes were related to the actual implementation of the calls – based on the response rate from beneficiaries as mentioned before, the PO reallocated budget from one measure to another and at the end in order to use the remaining funds from the project beneficiaries, the PO reallocated funds to bilateral funds. The PO also introduced study visits after all calls were completed and preparatory visits were no longer appropriate measure allowing for better bilateral relations.

<b>Budget heading</b>	<b>Original Budget</b>	<b>Last Agreed Budget</b>
Programme management	184.500,00	196.250,00
Increased higher education student and staff mobility between Beneficiary and EEA EFTA States	203.754,00	171.535,00
Increased higher education student and staff mobility between Beneficiary States and Norway	1.010.264,00	946.523,00
Increased and strengthened institutional cooperation at all levels of the education sector (school education, higher education, vocational training/education and adult education) between Beneficiary and EEA EFTA States	439.170,00	447.567,00
Increased and strengthened institutional cooperation within the higher education sector between the Beneficiary States and Norway	244.725,00	261.988,00
Fund for bilateral relations	56.504,00	123.043,00
Complementary action	21.000,00	21.000,00
Preparation of programme proposal	10.671,00	2.682,00
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.170.588,00</b>	<b>2.170.588,00</b>

## 13. ATTACHEMENTS TO THE FINAL PROGRAMME REPORT

- 1) Project list
- 2) List of irregularities
- 3) Audit overview

Ljubljana, September 2017

dr. Alenka Flander  
Director