



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
**MINISTRY OF COHESION  
AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Iceland  
Liechtenstein  
Norway grants

**EEA FINANCIAL MECHANISM 2014-2021 AND  
NORWEGIAN FINANCIAL MECHANISM 2014-2021**

# **5<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING**

## **FINAL MINUTES**

**Postojna, March 2023**

**Date and time:** 29 March 2023, 9:00 – 14:30

**Location:** Hotel Jama, Jamska cesta 28, 6230 Postojna

**Participants:**

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Norway**
  - Torill Johansen, Deputy Director and Head of Donors Delegation
  - Helene Lindgren Skarpeide, Adviser responsible for Slovenia
  
- **Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway in Hungary**
  - Trine Skymoene, Ambassador of Norway to Slovenia located in Budapest
  - Herman Baskår, Adviser
  - Timea Ruzsbaczký, EEA and Norway Grants programme officer
  
- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iceland**
  - Kristín A. Árnadóttir, Ambassador of Iceland
  
- **Financial Mechanism Office (FMO)**
  - Eva Kløve, Head of Priority Sector Unit
  - Katrine Steinfeld, Head of the Country and Bilateral Unit
  
- **Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development (MCRD)**
  - Aleksander Jevšek, Minister (opening speech)
  
- **Slovenian National Focal Point – Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development (MCRD)**
  - Mojca Aljančič, Head of NFP, Head of Slovenian Delegation
  - Nataša Babuder Rumpret, NFP Coordinator and Bilateral Fund Officer
  - Gordana Stanišič, Evaluation Officer
  - Andreja Štravs, Information and Communication Officer
  - Boštjan Vilhar, Junior Information and Communication Officer
  
- **Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Slovenia – Certifying Authority**
  - Robert Šircelj, EU Funds Management Department
  
- **Budget Supervision Office of the Republic of Slovenia – Audit Authority**
  - Mirjam Novakovič, Head of Sector for Auditing other Funds under shared management
  - Maja Švajger, Coordinator for EEA and Norway Grants

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia**
  - Urban Gantar, Department for European Countries
  
- **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme – Programme Operator MCRD**
  - Silvija Jakopovič, Programme Manager (presentation)
  - Anton Pavlin, Contract Manager (presentation)
  - Dimitrij Kuzmič, Contract Manager (presentation)
  
- **Education programme – Programme Operator MCRD**
  - Silvija Jakopovič, Programme Manager (presentation)
  
- **Control and Evaluation Division (MCRD)**
  - Maja Martinšek, Head of Control and Evaluation Division
  
- **Active Citizens Fund (ACF) in Slovenia – Fund Operator CNVOS**
  - Dr. Emilija Kastelic

### **Proposed Agenda:**

- Opening speeches given by the Minister dr. Aleksander Jevšek, the Ambassador of Norway and the Ambassador of Iceland, approval of the Agenda and approval of Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting
- Combined Strategic and Annual Report 2022 for approval
- Report on directly managed programmes by FMO (Active Citizens Fund)
- Progress of programmes and risk management
- Management and control system issues
- Publicity and communication
- Presentation of projects: Supporting the Green Start-Ups of Tomorrow, Predjama Sustainable, ReMOBIL, The Guardians of Rivers

## 1. Opening speeches, approval of the Agenda, approval of the Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

Ms Aljančič, the chair and Head of NFP, welcomed all participants at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and invited the minister, dr. Aleksander Jevšek to deliver his opening speech. The minister said that Slovenia has come to a point where it fully implements all projects and programmes that are planned in the frame of the current funding period. He pointed out that EEA and Norway Grants, in addition to the available EU cohesion policy funds make an important source of funding that support Slovenia's development. The minister also mentioned that he had personally visited the location of two projects, namely the "Pilot geothermal power plant on the existing gas well" in Lendava, which will contribute to increased energy production from renewable sources and the "Recycling of Rapid Antigen LFIA Tests (COVID-19)" at the University Medical Centre in Maribor.

Ms Aljančič then invited the Ambassador of Norway, Ms Trine Skymoene, and the Ambassador of Iceland Ms Kristín A. Árnadóttir to give their opening speeches.

The Norwegian ambassador emphasized that she was grateful for a good cooperation in the past years. In her opinion the grants provide us with a huge potential to further develop our cooperation. An example of an excellent cooperation is the bilateral event "Women, peace and security", which took place just a day before. She thanked the NFP and PO for their dedicated work. She welcomed the new Head of NFP and wished for a fruitful future cooperation. She stressed that all efforts shall focus on timely implementation of programmes and projects.

The Ambassador of Iceland thanked for a valuable cooperation as well and wished to continue this path. A great example of bilateral cooperation, that also herself was a part of, is a "Research on equal opportunities in national diplomacies" carried out in 2019. In the negotiations of the three EFTA states with the EU for the next financial period, Iceland supports the same priority sectors as it did for the current period. The Ambassador of Iceland supported the Norwegian colleague's opinion regarding the importance of assuring sufficient capacity of NFP and PO for timely implementation of programmes and projects.

After opening remarks Ms Aljančič introduced the agenda and proposed the Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting to be approved.

**Conclusion 1.1** *The participants of the Annual Meeting adopted the agenda.*  
**Conclusion 1.2** *The participants of the Annual Meeting approved the Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting.*

## 2. Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report 2022 for approval

Ms Babuder Rumpret started her presentation with the overall budget breakdown of EEA and Norwegian Grants in Slovenia and pointed out that Combined Strategic and Annual Report 2022 mainly reflected the progress made in the implementation of the two programmes managed by the Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development. These are the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme and the Education programme to which the majority of funds is allocated. She also explained that there were also other programmes being implemented in Slovenia by other programme or fund operators, e.g. the Active Citizens Fund,

which is implemented by CNVOS / Centre of NGOs in Slovenia and the Social Dialogue – Decent Work, which is implemented by Innovation Norway.

Ms Babuder Rumpret pointed out that 2022 was a challenging year since both programmes were launched on the project level and two changes of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have been made. The first change of the MoUs that was approved in June 2022 related to the allocation of the reserve funds to the Climate change mitigation and adaptation programme and organisational changes within the Government Office for Regional Development and Cohesion Policy (GODC). The second one that was approved in November 2022 related to the reallocation of 500,000 EUR from the Climate programme to the Active Citizens Fund. Also, 150,000 EUR from the management cost of the Climate programme and 150,000 EUR from the management cost of the Education programme were reallocated to the Bilateral Fund. She also presented the changes in the operational setup of GODC in June and December 2022, which resulted in another request to change the MoUs in January 2023, which the FMO replied to on 25 January 2023 requesting clarifications.

Ms Babuder Rumpret also highlighted that on 3 June 2022, a new Slovenian government was established, however, the opposition asked for a referendum on the government act, which foresaw three additional ministries and transformation of two government offices into a ministry. Following the referendum outcome, the Government Office for Development and Cohesion Policy was transformed into the Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development (MCRD) on 24 January 2023. She explained that following this transformation, the internal reorganisation of the ministry was necessary since the ministry became responsible for much broader scope of work areas and presented the organisational setup of MCRD that came into force on 14 March 2023 pointing out that the separation of functions between NFP and PO is maintained. She also added that when all the changes are in place, another change of the MoUs will be proposed. Ms Babuder Rumpret also presented an overview of Human Resources at the NFP and the PO and explained that the currently vacant position of the Head of the Financial Mechanisms Division would be filled by 1 April 2023.

Ms Babuder Rumpret also briefly presented the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme and the Education programme progress in 2022 pointing out that programme and projects that are being implemented within the programme will be presented later on by the programme coordinator and project managers. She explained that the programme budget within the Climate programme increased to EUR 15,659,500, resulting in 17 projects (16 projects under the Call for Proposals and one pre-defined project). She also highlighted the bilateral aspect of programme implementation.

Within the Education programme also all available funds were committed to 22 projects selected under the Call. Both pre-defined projects were implemented according to the plan. The bilateral aspect of Education programme is also well represented on programme and project level.

Ms Babuder Rumpret continued with presentation of activities under the Fund for Bilateral Relations. In 2022, four additional bilateral initiatives were approved. She also presented the current state of play of Bilateral initiatives: 3 bilateral initiatives have been completed, 2 are supposed to be finalized in the first half of 2023 and 3 are currently under way. One bilateral initiative is being implemented in the framework of the Climate programme in the area of circular economy.

At the end of her presentation, Ms Babuder Rumpret highlighted the lessons learned in the last year and how lessons learnt in the previous year have been applied.

Ms Johansen thanked the NFP for submitting the Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report for 2022 on time. The report is well written and reflects the progress made in 2022. She emphasized how little time there is left for implementation, and how important it is in this phase to address any issues in the projects quickly and efficiently. Referring back to the reorganisation, Ms Johansen expressed that the donors hope the reorganisation does not impact implementation and encouraged the NFP and PO to closely follow the implementation of projects and secure sufficient staff. She underlined that the Donors and the FMO are available to provide support to Slovenia to fulfil the programmes' and projects' ambitions. Also the monitoring of the implementation (administrative and on-site) will be crucial to achieve all planned results.

**Conclusion 2: Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report for 2022 is approved and will be published on the dedicated website ([www.norwaygrants.si/](http://www.norwaygrants.si/) [www.eeagrants.si](http://www.eeagrants.si/)).**

### **3. Report on directly managed programmes by FMO (Active Citizens Fund)**

Ms Steinfeld presented the implementation under the Active Citizens Fund in Slovenia pointing out that the programme is progressing well being managed by a competent Fund operator with strong ties to the civil society. She explained that all four calls are closed and most of the projects are in implementations (63 projects selected from a total of 342 applications) while 59% of funds were disbursed highlighting that the ACF Slovenia is also the first Fund Operator that has launched the call under the new pilot scheme for organisational grants. The Donors are looking forward to seeing how this flexible funding model will benefit the five civil society's organisations supported under this programme. She also emphasized the strong demand under the ACF calls the Donors take as an encouraging sign their support to the Slovenian civil society is well invested.

Ms Steinfeld continued with presentation of the Social Dialogue – Decent Work programme. Slovenian entities are cooperating in two projects (Decent work for all and Strong Social Dialogue to Facilitate Adaptation to Change) selected within two calls for proposals. Both projects include Norwegian project partners, are in the phase of implementation and have no specific related risks. All funds under this programme have been exhausted.

Ms Steinfeld then presented an overview of the Fund for Youth Employment. The Donors are satisfied with its implementation. 34 projects have been selected through two open calls for proposals. Seven projects include Slovenian entities, two of which in the role of lead partner.

Ms Steinfeld presented also an overview of the Fund for Regional Cooperation. Five Slovenian entities cooperate in four projects. No future open calls are predicted, since almost all of the funds have been exhausted.

Ms Johansen and the Donors are aware of the ACF's good work. Regarding the programmes managed by the FMO, participation and cooperation of the Slovenian entities in the projects are among the highest.

**Conclusion 3: *The participants of the Annual Meeting were informed about the progress of the directly managed programmes by FMO (Active Citizens Fund).***

#### **4. Progress of programmes and risk management**

Ms Jakopovič presented the general state of play regarding the programmes Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation and Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeship and Youth Entrepreneurship in 2022 (Selection Committee meetings, start of projects, on-line workshops for beneficiaries, signing of contracts and advanced payments, Cooperation Committee meetings, submissions of the first interim partners reports) and then proceeded to the presentation of each programme.

##### Education programme – progress in 2022

The key milestone in 2022 was the selection of 22 projects under the Call for Proposals while both pre-defined projects (BlendVET and Children's House (Barnahus) under the programme were further implemented according to the plan foreseen for 2022.

By the end of 2022, the contracting process was finalized, leading to the commitment of all funds available under the Education programme. All advance payments were disbursed to all eligible Project Promoters by the end of 2022.

Most of the projects were selected under Outcome 1 (Improved institutional cooperation at all levels of formal and informal education), namely 11. 7 project were selected under Outcome 3 (Education and social environment to support disadvantaged groups improved) and 4 under Outcome 4 (Improved work-life balance).

In particular, the project Children's House (Barnahus) should be highlighted as an example of best practice. In 2022, the Project Promoter mainly focused on the implementation of activities related to the renovation and equipping of the premises of the Children's House. The premises of the Children's House in Ljubljana were officially inaugurated on 27 May 2022.

Bilateral relations were additionally strengthened through the involvement of the Donor Project Partners in 22 projects implemented under the programme (21 projects selected under the Call for Proposals and one pre-defined project). Very efficient project-level bilateral cooperation can be found under the project BlendVET, which brings together five project partners from Donor States.

##### Climate programme – progress in 2022

In 2022, the whole programme budget was committed, resulting in 17 projects (16 projects under the Call for Proposals and one pre-defined project) which will make a contribution to the green transition of Slovenia in the field of renewable energy, e-mobility, circular economy and management of ecosystems.

Since Slovenia is a frontrunner in the field of circular economy, it is not unusual that most of the projects were selected under outcome 3 (Increased application of circular economy principles) namely 6. 5 project were selected under Outcome 2 (Enhanced sustainable mobility management) and 3 under Outcome 4 (Improved management of ecosystems under climate change pressure. In the frame of outcome Increased renewable energy production, only three projects (2 selected through an open call and pre-defined project INFO-GEOTHERMAL) are being implemented but all of them are very relevant on a national scale, particularly in current challenging times when Slovenia is seeking for new sources of renewable energy and speed up green transition towards climate neutrality.

All projects started mostly in June and July 2022, all contracts have been signed and all advance payments disbursed. The majority of projects already submitted their first interim progress report by the end of November 2022.

The bilateral component is well represented on programme and project level. The pre-defined project INFO-GEOTHERMAL includes one Donor Project Partner from Iceland while 14 out of 16 projects selected under the Call for Proposals involve a Donor Project Partner from Donor States, i.e. 12 from Norway and two from Lichtenstein.

Mr Pavlin and Mr Kuzmić gave a brief overview on the projects being implemented within the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme and the main activities performed in the frame of those projects in the year 2022.

Ms Johansen stated that there are some very interesting projects being implemented under the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme and the Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeship and Youth Entrepreneurship programme with interesting results and that the Donors are glad to see that all of the projects are in the implementation phase. She was pleased to see various forms of monitoring. . She praised the efforts and good work of the PO and encouraged the NFP and the PO to do more on the spot visits. She also reiterated the importance of having sufficient dedicated staff in the final critical phase of programme implementation.

Mr Pavlin presented the risk assessment. The main risks detected are: late selection of projects and consequently limited time for implementation, shortage of staff and unforeseen institutional changes, possible delays in the award of public procurement and rising prices due to the energy crisis and the war in Ukraine. In order to mitigate these risks, several measures were put in place, among which regular monitoring of projects by Contract Managers, workshops for Project Promoters on eligibility of expenditure rules and other programme requirements, on-site visits of projects etc.

**Conclusion: *The participants of the Annual Meeting were informed about the progress of programmes and risk assessment.***

## 5. Management and control system issues

Ms Švajger presented the 5<sup>th</sup> Audit report in the reference period of July 2021 to June 2022. She explained that altogether seven audits have been performed (two system audits and 5 audits of projects) were performed and no ineligible expenditure and no suspicion or fraud was



detected and reported. The result of audits of expenditures gives assurance on the legality and regularity of the expenditure declared to the Donors.

Ms Johansen expressed pleasure the Audit Authority detected no irregularities. She pointed out the importance of forecasts on likely payments to be as realistic as possible

## 6. Publicity and communication

Mr Štravs outlined the main activities in publicity and communication in 2022, challenges in this area and plans for 2023. The main activities in 2022 were related to the selection of projects and start of project implementation (websites and social media, media coverage). At the national level, activities were carried out in accordance with the Communication Strategy. Activities mainly supported the regular tasks of the NFP. The redesigned website and two social media campaigns have been launched in 2022.

Hacked and taken over Facebook page in December 2022 was a big challenge. Many efforts were made to contact Facebook and settle the issue. Therefore a new page was created in the end of January 2023.

She also presented communication within the Climate and Education programmes and the plans for 2023 (Citizens' Summary, focus on bilateral initiatives, promotional material, activities on the website and social media).

Ms Johansen praised the commitment to the work which has been done and encouraged to communicate about more advanced projects and also to actively include the embassy in the communication activities.

## 7. Presentation of projects

In the afternoon programme projects were presented by Project promoters as follows:

- Presentation of Bilateral initiative *Supporting the Green Start-Ups of Tomorrow* by Primorski tehnološki park (Fund for Bilateral Relations)
- Presentation of project *Predjama Sustainable* by Municipality of Postojna
- Presentation of project *ReMOBIL* by Posoški razvojni center and Norwegian partner
- Presentation of project *The Guardians of Rivers* by KUD Center 21 (Active Citizens fund)

## Conclusions and closing remarks

Ms Aljančič thanked everyone for the very productive discussion while Ms Johansen expressed her gratitude for the well-organised Annual Meeting. She inquired about the possibility of organising an open call for proposals within the Bilateral Fund and about the prospect to carry out the bilateral initiative on environmental data proposed by Norwegian partners.

Ms Babuder Rumpret explained that the national decree on implementation of EEA and Norwegian grants in Slovenia does not foresee an open call for proposals within the Bilateral Fund, since this was not initially agreed with the Donors due to a low amount allocated to the Bilateral Fund and a not so good experience with open calls for bilateral initiatives in previous financing period. She explained that the preparation of the national decree took almost 2 years and that the amendment of the decree would also take a substantial amount of time, not taking into account the time needed for the amendment of the Bilateral Fund Work Plan and the amendment of the NFP guidelines for the Fund for Bilateral Relations, the preparation of the open call and the selection of projects, which would leave almost no time for the implementation of projects since the final date of eligibility within the Fund for Bilateral Relations is 30 April 2025. She stated that for all of the mentioned reasons the open call is not feasible to be implemented within the Fund for Bilateral Relations.

Ms. Babuder Rumpret also expressed her doubts that the Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Energy and the Slovenian Environment Agency would be in a position to be involved in the implementation of the bilateral initiative on environmental data management to the extent proposed by Norwegian partners. Nevertheless, the NFP will once again contact them and provide the final answer as soon as possible.

Ms Johansen encouraged the NFP to try to absorb the Bilateral Fund. She also stated that in Brussels plans for the 4<sup>th</sup> FM period are starting to take place. She concluded with wishing the Slovenia all success in the implementation phase, underlining the importance of good cooperation and information sharing with all parties.

In line with the Regulations, the NFP will publish the minutes of the meeting on the dedicated website ([www.norwaygrants.si/www.eeagrants.si](http://www.norwaygrants.si/www.eeagrants.si)).