

STRATEGIC REPORT

FM14-21

Slovakia

Reporting period:

01 January 2020 - 31 December 2020

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effects of the Grants

Due to the early stage of the implementation, there are no measurable results to report in relation to progress towards reducing social and economic disparities. In respect of strengthening bilateral relations with Donor State entities, positive tendencies can be observed.

Status of Programmes

The implementation of the financial mechanisms was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that started in March 2020. The Programme Operators had to adapt to new working conditions, processes were adjusted to work from home and personal meetings moved to on-line form.

In spite of that, the Selection Committees took place, projects were selected and new Calls for proposal were announced.

At the end of 2020, four out of six programmes seem to be risk-free in terms of being completed by the end of April 2024.

The Programmes of **Culture**, **Climate Change** and **Good Governance and Cross-border Cooperation** Programmes had all planned Calls announced and first selected projects were being contracted. By the end of 2020, the Good Governance Programme already reported 100% of funds contracted, while contracting in the Culture Programme was close to 85%.

The **Local Development and Social Inclusion** Programme also launched all planned Calls for proposals and the selection procedure for the first one started. Considering that the first draft of the Programme (the first Concept Note) was rejected, and that the Programme Agreement was only signed by the end of 2019, the progress made in the implementation of this Programme is considerable .

Unfortunately, the year brought also setbacks, mainly in the **Business and Innovation Programme** and in the **Domestic and Gender-based Violence Programme**. Under the first Programme, only one out of five planned Calls for proposals was launched. Activities under the Education component within the Business and Innovation Programme were postponed to 2021 and the Programme Operator put a lot of effort into preparation of the main Calls and related State Aid Schemes. Under the Domestic and Gender-based Violence Programme, the selection of projects submitted under the Call for Gender Equality organisations (DGV01) took place at the beginning of 2020. However, the implementation of the Programme has been suspended due to a Programme modification proposal made by the Programme Partner, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR, as the relevant public institution in charge of policy area of gender equality and domestic and gender-based violence in Slovakia.

Status of Bilateral Funds

The pandemic has made the implementation of most of the planned bilateral initiatives impossible. Some of the initiatives selected under the Open Call for cultural, political and institutional cooperation were postponed, some have been modified to adapt to the new conditions and one was entirely cancelled. At the Programme level, several calls for smaller scale activities, the so called “travel grants”, were launched. However, due to the travel restrictions, no applications were actually supported. Instead, the Programme Operators have organised several on-line matchmaking events.

Major risks

New risks related to the delays in the implementation of projects were identified in the Programmes Business and Innovation and Domestic and Gender-based Violence. The National Focal Point has closely monitored situation in both programmes and will continue doing so also in the next year. Key risks identified in previous years remain the same and are mainly related to delays in the public procurement.

Changes in political, economic and social context

In February 2020, general elections took place in Slovakia, and a new government was formed. As in the most of the countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the economic, social and political situation in Slovakia.

No major changes that would affect the design and setup of the Programmes supported by the Grants took place.

Changes in the management and control system

Based on the resolution of the Government No. 355/2020 from 4th June 2020, the competencies of the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator were transferred from the Government Office of the SR to new Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Innovation of the SR effective from 1st October 2020.

There were no major changes in the set-up of Management and Control System in 2020. In relation to the transfer of competencies of the National Focal Point effective from October 2020, the Detailed Description of Management and Control System at national level was updated in February 2021.

2. POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Culture

Shortly after the election in February 2020, the Ministry of Culture has started to prepare reform plans focused on the following five fields:

- reform of the tools for the support of culture and creative industry;
- reform of the structure and quality of the library network;

- reform of the care for collections of the memory institutions;
- reform of the monument care; and
- reform of the plurality and credibility of the mass media.

The reforms were to be financed from the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, the EU funds and the state budget. The reform plans were under development by the end of 2020.

The European Commission has been providing tailor-made strategic advice to Slovakia through the [Structural Reform Support Programme](#) (SRSP) to support the development of cultural industries and foster their contribution to Slovakia's economy¹. In March 2020, KEA European Affairs (KEA European Affairs is an international policy design research centre specialised in culture and creative industries) completed a one-year strategic review of Slovakia's policy measures to support the development of Cultural Industries². In cooperation with the European Commission, KEA advanced a set of policy recommendations to the Slovak Ministry of Culture with a view to adapt policies, improve statistics and investment attractiveness of the local cultural and creative industries – the document is titled [Analysis and Recommendations to Boost Growth in Cultural Industries in Slovakia](#).

Systemic funding for culture and arts was available in the following three public funds:

1. Audiovisual Fund (AVF) –allocation of €13.49 mil. for eight calls for proposals in 2020;
2. Slovak Arts Council (FPU) –allocation of €20 mil. for ten calls for proposals, plus €9.5 mil. for the extra two calls for proposals in 2020;
3. Fund for Supporting Culture of National Minorities (KULT MINOR) –allocation of €8 mil. for eight calls for proposals.

The Cultural and Creative Industries are supported by the Integrated Regional Operational Program 2014-2020, Priority Axes 3 (PO3), co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Ministry of Culture of the SR as an Intermediate Body indicated the call for submitting applications to mobilize creative potential in regions. The indicated call was not launched in 2020. The spending for 2020 was €2.34 mil, with the overall spending reaching 11.29 %.

Legislative and financial measures were taken by the Ministry of Culture of the SR to help the cultural sector through the pandemic. The new law has been adopted and ca €10 mil. has been allocated for the independent culture. Despite these measures, arts and culture are one of the sectors most severely hit by the crisis.

Climate Change

The European Green Deal, European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and Next Generation EU were the main drivers for the Slovak climate policy debate in 2020. The new

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/commission-supports-slovakias-cultural-industries-2020-apr-24_en

² <http://keanet.eu/strategic-review-of-slovak-cultural-industries-policy/>

government's position on the European Climate Law in June 2020 indicated support for a less ambitious target for 2030 and climate neutrality than the most ambitious EU countries. The new target to cut EU greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 55 % by 2030 was one of the most discussed climate topics in the Slovak Republic. The online petition "Climate needs you" launched in 2020, also made a significant contribution to this debate with more than 127 000 signatures. The initiative is asking the government to declare support for reducing the emissions of Slovakia by 65 % before 2040, prepare legislation and strategy for carbon neutrality by 2040 and oblige the government to prepare a bonding plan and strategy on how to achieve this.

The new government stated in its Manifesto that to achieve carbon neutrality, the Low Carbon Development Strategy and the National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030 (NECP) shall be reviewed by adopting a climate change law and supporting decentralisation and energy regulation. The Long Term Strategy on building renovations was approved in December 2020. The relevant ministries should incorporate the recent developments and finalise the most important carbon neutrality model soon into the NECP. In November 2020, the Ministry of the Environment updated a decree, setting sustainability criteria and targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from fuels. This will contribute to decreasing emissions in the crucial transport sector.

Slovakia increased the share of renewable energy sources (RES) in the energy mix between 2018 and 2019 by five percentage points from 11.9 to 16.9. Therefore, Slovakia will meet its 2020 target and 19.2 % commitment by 2030. However, due to inconsistency in the reported data in the previous periods, revision of the RES shares since 2010 and update the 2030 RES target and model used in the NECP might be required. The European Commission recommends Slovakia to increase the RES target to 24 % by 2030³.

The Action Plan for the Transformation of the Upper Nitra Coal Region was updated in December 2020 with the most recent measures and projects, i.e. sustainable heating solutions. Cooperation with local stakeholders significantly improved in 2020.

Data from several previous economic crises show that economies significantly increased their emissions afterwards. The support from the Minister of Environment on green recovery measures is therefore vital. Draft of the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan includes reforms and over €2.9 billion climate-related spending by 2026, primarily, in these areas: renewable energy sources and energy infrastructure (€220 million); renovation of buildings (€700 million); sustainable transport (€741 million); decarbonization of industry (€350 million) and Climate change adaptation (€150 million)⁴.

Good Governance and Cross-border Cooperation

Good Governance

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https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/default/files/documents/staff_working_document_assessment_necp_slovakia_en.pdf

⁴ <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/SK/LP/2021/112>

Several important changes were introduced in the public administration in 2020. The Office of Deputy Prime Minister for Investment and Informatization were transformed into the new Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR. The aim of the changes was to centralise and concentrate the agenda of regional development and EU funds at one ministry, to improve the processes and to strengthen the principles of transparency, effectiveness, management, and usefulness. At the same time, the government created a legal framework and institutional ground for Deputy Prime Minister for Legislation and Strategic Planning.

Corruption and its Prevention

Parliamentary elections held in February 2020 were won by political parties that received a strong mandate from the people to adopt changes at government level and to fight against the corruption in state administration.

In March 2020, the police arrested 13 judges for corruption and other crimes, including the former State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic. In addition to the justice sector, almost all former highest-ranking police officials were arrested in 2020. This includes the two latest former police presidents, the former chief of the National Crime Agency, former chief of the Anticorruption Unit, the former Deputy of the Slovak Intelligence Service (SIS) and the chief of the counterintelligence unit under SIS, the former Deputy of the Financial Administration. In addition to judges and police officers, the former special prosecutor was also arrested. In total, more than 20 former high police officials were arrested in 2020. The legal proceedings are currently ongoing, however, several of the accused have pleaded guilty.

While corruption is perceived as a long-term problem in Slovakia, the structural nature of corruption, affecting the judiciary, police and prosecution as the cornerstones of the rule of law, was unexpected. It is therefore unsurprising that the confidence in the judiciary and in law enforcement forces has dropped significantly, and is among the lowest in the EU.

According to the “Corruption Perception Index” issued by the Transparency International, Slovakia was ranked on the 60th place in 2020, which means a shift in position from the 59th place in year 2019⁵. The position of the Slovak Republic deteriorates annually and there is a need for structural changes by improving the efficiency and transparency of the Slovak state institutions through projects addressing the fight against corruption.

Public Procurement

In 2020, the Office for Public Procurement, the highest authority for public procurement in the Slovak Republic, implemented changes and new functionalities in the existing information systems of the Office, required by the directives of the EU.

The Ministry of Justice of the SR prepared new law on judicial protection in public procurement that has been subject to inter-ministerial proceedings by the end of 2020. The aim is to create

⁵ <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/svk>

a faster and more effective means of reviewing and correcting errors in the public procurement processes.

Beside these smaller scale reforms adopted by the Ministry of Justice of the SR and the Office for Public Procurement, there have been some further proposals for the amendment of the Public Procurement Act, however, these have not materialised by the end of 2020.

Effectiveness of Judiciary

One of the main ambitions of the new government was to start the reform process, mainly in justice and set up new anti-corruption measures, which would strengthen the good governance principles in everyday life.

The Ministry of Justice of the SR has also prepared laws to tackle the effects of pandemic. One of the most important measures to help entrepreneurs was the creation of the so-called temporary protection of entrepreneurs. New protective measures, such as the so-called small, low-cost, rapid bankruptcy or informal corporate restructuring were also introduced.

The Ministry of Justice of the SR has started the preparation of major reforms, which should lower the potential corruption rate in justice system and in public procurement procedures.

The major judiciary reforms planned by the Government are the reform of constitutional law in the field of justice and the reform of the judicial map. Both reforms will have huge impact on whole judicial system in the Slovak Republic.

The reform of constitutional law in the field of justice was approved in December 2020 and covers mainly the following areas: reform of the composition of the Judicial Council of the Slovak Republic, inspections of the property of all judges and inspections of judicial competence and reform of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic.

The aim of the reform of the judicial map is the specialization of judges, the improvement of the quality of decisions and, in longer term, also faster and more predictable court decisions. Reforms could be seen as Ministry's new tool for an improved judiciary in order to break the corruption ties.

Cross-border Cooperation Slovakia - Ukraine

President of the Slovak Republic Mrs. Zuzana Čaputová welcomed her Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky in the Presidential Palace on September 24, 2020. It was the highest official meeting of the heads of these states in last years. President Zuzana Čaputová noted that Slovakia supports the integration of Ukraine in the EU, and both politicians declared mutual relationship as very good and with so much more potential.

The Slovak government has also expressed the support for Ukraine and declared strengthening the mutual relations as one of the priorities of the foreign policy. This is very important not only for the economic and industrial cooperation, but is based on people's interest too.

According to statistics of the Human Rights League published in June 2020, the highest number of foreigners living and working in the Slovak Republic is citizens of Ukraine.

In connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Slovak Republic has provided material and technical help from the SlovakAid programme for Ukraine in May 2020. The assistance was provided upon a request from the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs⁶.

Local Development and Social Inclusion

The pandemic has affected the whole world in an unprecedented way - economically, socially, culturally and also in the field of human rights. While it has affected all people living in Slovakia, the biggest negative impact can be seen in vulnerable groups such as marginalized Roma communities, seniors, single-parent families, low-income groups, people with disabilities, people without homes, immigrants from third countries or other groups of socially and health-disadvantaged people of Slovakia. It revealed and deepened existing social inequalities.

Children from vulnerable backgrounds and Roma communities have had great difficulties engaging in distance education during the pandemic. According to the Institute for Educational Policy, up to 52,000 pupils did not participate in distance learning in the first wave of the pandemic at all. The worst situation was in schools with a high proportion of children from socially disadvantaged environment. A survey by the non-governmental organization eduRoma shows that on average 60 % of Roma pupils had any or only very rare contact with a teacher during distance learning. Moreover, up to 60 % of children from Roma households do not have access to the Internet and 55 % of children from Roma households do not own a smartphone, contrary to the children from ordinary households, who own a smartphone in 95 % of cases. This situation during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the existing educational gap. Many children who did not take part in distance education because of their social background are now at risk of falling out and the differences in education caused by the social environment will be exacerbated. From among the OECD countries, Slovakia is one of the countries with the highest correlation between the socio-economic background and pupils' performance.

Regardless of the coronavirus pandemic, the Roma population still suffers from a high risk of poverty and social exclusion. As the study from April 2020 by the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies found out, the Roma people in Slovakia reached 87 % of at-risk-of-poverty rate (which includes 53 % of Roma people who are employed) compared to 13 % in the general population. There are public work schemes run by municipalities where almost half of the unemployed Roma people participate. It is often the only available income for them; however, these public service schemes do not provide or improve relevant skills or experience for the Roma participants to be able to enter the open labour market later and escape from unemployment by finding a well-paid job.

On the other hand, there are positive examples of projects and initiatives on local, regional and national level, which successfully address social inclusion of Roma population. More than

⁶ https://www.mzv.sk/web/kyjev-en/news/-/asset_publisher/olsKsldtEfpB/content/slovensko-v-boji-s-pandemiou-covid-19-podporuje-svojho-klucoveho-partnera-ukrajinu/10182?_101_INSTANCE_olsKsldtEfpB_redirect=%2Fweb%2Fkyjev-en%2Fnews

100 social enterprises were registered in 2020, and a significant majority is of the work-integration type. Many of them are run by local municipalities.

At the end of 2020 the Ministry of the Interior of the SR announced a call aimed at completing engineering networks in municipalities with the presence of marginalized Roma communities with the total allocation of €17 mil. from the EU funds.

In 2020, a new Government Plenipotentiary for the Roma Community was appointed. On 22 July 2020, the Office of the Plenipotentiary organized the first meeting of the Steering Working Group for the preparation, revision and update of the Slovak Republic Strategy for Roma Integration until 2030. They focus on 5 key areas - housing, education, health, employment and non-discrimination.

Business and Innovation

In 2020, the most significant factors at the national level affecting business and innovation sector included the change of the government and the spread of a pandemic COVID-19. The first brought to the table fresh discourse in some policy areas (including policies towards business environment), together with first concrete policy and legislative changes. However, the latter strongly affected practically all areas of social and economic context in Slovakia, and tested not only the resilience of the business sector, but also the responsiveness of government bodies in providing support to businesses harmed by the crisis.

Business environment

Business environment in Slovakia in 2020 was characterized by chronic prevalence of barriers and impediments of business activity over its supportive factors. Different evaluations are unequivocal in pointing out the most problematic areas: administrative, bureaucratic and regulatory burden, relatively high tax and social security burden, complicated and unstable business legislation, problematic law enforcement, and insufficient availability of qualified workforce. Yet, the overall rankings of business environment indicated signs of optimism and Slovakia seemed to start rebounding. For example, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2020 (preliminary findings) indicated slight improvements in assessment of government entrepreneurship policies and programmes⁷.

While responding the COVID-19 pandemic employed large proportion of policy makers' capacity, the declared interest in improving conditions for doing business brought first results. The Ministry of Economy introduced two packages of measures aimed at improving the business environment by reducing bureaucracy and administrative burden on businesses. The first package was approved in July and has been gradually introduced into effect, while the second one has been presented in a proposal stage in late 2020.

At the same time, however, the resources to support businesses negatively affected by pandemic are limited. Around one third of businesses have not been provided with

⁷ <https://www.gemconsortium.org/economy-profiles/slovakia-2>

government assistance⁸. Majority of interviewed entrepreneurs considered the possibilities and conditions related to government assistance as insufficient. Also, they indicated that support they received was too low to compensate the drop of sales. While businesses would expect quick and simple help, they complained about limited eligibility, unfavourable ratio of administrative difficulty vs. amount of financial support, lack of available information and ambiguous instructions. This is evidenced by data from surveys covering both 1st and 2nd wave of the pandemics, as well as many narratives from self-employed and business owners.^{9 10 11}

Development of the SME sector

SMEs in Slovakia represent 99.9 % of the total number of business entities in Slovakia (96.9 % being micro enterprises). They employ almost three quarters of the labour force in corporate economy and contribute by creating more than a half of the value added in the Slovak economy¹². In 2020, the number of newly-created firms decreased by 7.6 % and the number of cancelled firms slightly increased by 1.1 %.

In general, SMEs were most harmed by the negative influence of COVID-19 pandemic, as the average self-reported change in monthly sales compared to one year ago (in the 2nd wave of pandemic) was -29 % for small firms and -22 % for medium firms, compared to -13 % in case of large businesses¹³. According to the analysis on business registration data, 15 660 companies (mostly SMEs) and more than 41 500 sole proprietors were directly affected by the crisis¹⁴. On the other hand, SMEs also indicated resilience and adaptability when coping with the negative effects of the pandemics. For example, more than 4 in 10 businesses from the mostly affected sectors indicated they adapted their product and related services in response to the changing conditions.

Welfare Technology and Ambient Assisted Living

The continuing fundamental change in population demographics implies significant increase of demand in care of elderly and persons with disabilities in the close future. Many people from these target groups are at risk of being excluded from the information society and its benefits.

In Slovakia, the issue of welfare technology and ambient assisted living is reflected (however, not explicitly covered) in several national-level policies. The innovative and technological support for healthy ageing and inclusion of vulnerable persons living alone have not been mainstreamed on policy levels and it didn't change in 2020 either. Also, Slovakia has not yet

⁸ https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/content/dam/enterprisesurveys/documents/covid/country-profile-Slovak-Republic--Round-2_English.pdf

⁹ http://monitoringmsp.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COVID_2.vlna_sprava.pdf

¹⁰ http://monitoringmsp.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COVID_2.vlna_sprava.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.alianciapas.sk/2020/12/15/prieskum-o-aktualnej-situacii-podnikatelov-pocas-druhej-vlny/>

¹² <http://monitoringmsp.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Report-on-the-State-of-Small-and-Medium-Sized-Enterprises-in-the-Slovak-....pdf>

¹³ https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/content/dam/enterprisesurveys/documents/covid/country-profile-Slovak-Republic--Round-2_English.pdf

¹⁴ <https://finstat.sk/analyzy/analiza-sektorov-priamo-ohrozenych-koronavirusom>

joined the European Commission co-funded “Active and Assisted Living Programme” (AAL Programme) which aims to reinforce the European market for Ambient Assisted Living products and services.

In the last years, the attention to the field welfare technology has been paid by several municipalities and NGOs in Slovakia, where projects have been implemented on local or regional levels. There seem to be two key streams comprising the topic of welfare technology: implementation of smart city solutions, and improving social services for communities. The good examples of municipalities focusing on welfare technology implementation include City of Trnava and City of Prešov.

Finally, there are several positive trends that might also work in favour of welfare technology and ambient assisted living development, such as continuous development innovative start-ups, as well as the rise of social entrepreneurship and its ecosystem.

Education

Despite several ongoing and initiated reforming efforts, the education system in Slovakia has made only a limited progress in improving its quality and inclusiveness. Among the main challenges are insufficient investment in education and training, comparatively lower quality of its outcomes, low attractiveness and low remuneration of teaching profession, the increasing rate of early leavers from education and training, and problematic inclusiveness of education particularly for Roma children and children with special educational needs.

On a positive note, Slovakia reported an increased employability of Vocational Education and Training (VET) graduates, and increased (yet still insufficient, especially for SMEs) participation in dual education at secondary level. Introduction of dual VET and professionally-oriented bachelor studies into tertiary education is progressing.

In relation to tertiary education, the main challenges remain the fragmentation of school network, high outflow of secondary school graduates, limited teaching quality, lack of internationalisation and job market orientation. In response to the above mentioned challenges, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport continued in implementation of the national programme for the development of education 2018-2027, while the new representation has presented its own set of strategic measures in late 2020, and partially started with its implementation. The priorities are related to digitalization, reducing bureaucracy, financing of the school network, and liberalization of the textbook market.

The education system was substantially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly due to school lockdowns and sudden need to switch to distant teaching that uncovered uneven preparedness of schools for this mode of operations. Most of the schools managed to cope with the unprecedented circumstances rather quickly and to compensate (at least partially) the traditional teaching. As for the tertiary education, Slovak universities and their students seemed to adapt to distant forms of education rather well, despite initial struggles on both

students' and teachers' sides. Yet, satisfaction with online distant learning and perception of its outcomes as equivalent to traditional forms varies considerably across disciplines¹⁵.

Domestic and Gender-based Violence and Work-Life Balance

The pandemic or rather various anti-pandemic measures, such as confinement, self-isolation obligations, limiting opening hours for businesses and services and lockdowns in particular have had a negative impact on the situation of women and overall gender equality across the society. Data on the number of calls to the National Helpline for Women Experiences Violence shows that number of calls to the Helpline increased by almost half (48 %) in 2020. The number of women contacting the helpline for the first time increased by 37 % compared to the previous year. However, the Police Forces statistics do not show a significant increase in partner or domestic violence compared to 2019. In May, the Police Forces launched a smartphone app "Helping to protect" focusing primarily on victims of domestic and partner violence to enable quick contact with the police in an emergency. For now, the app is available in the Self-Governing Region of Trenčín.

With 55.5 out of 100 points, Slovakia ranks 25th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index in 2020. Slovakia has scored 12.4 points below the EU's average score. Since 2010, its score has merely increased by only 2.5 points. Slovakia's ranking has dropped by two places since 2010¹⁶. The unadjusted gender pay gap for 2020 remains high, at 19.4 %¹⁷.

The availability and accessibility of counselling and emergency housing services for women experiencing violence have not noticeably progressed compared to the previous year. Compared to the Standards of the Council of Europe, just one-third of the recommended number of specialized counselling centres is available and slightly over 45 % of the recommended number of available beds in specialized emergency shelters is ensured. In 2020, an issue with insufficient sustainable funding of safe women housing (shelter services) and support services has arisen again. Due to lack of systemic support, several key NGOs providing safe women housing (shelter services) and support services may be unable to secure sufficient funding to continue their operations.

In 2020, evaluation reports on the implementation of the National Gender Equality Strategy for 2014-2019, its action plan for 2014-2019, and the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women 2014-2019 have been adopted. The National Gender Equality Strategy and the National Action Plan for Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women were being prepared. In fall 2020, the Slovak Republic adopted its first National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution no. 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the years 2021 - 2025.

In 2020, Act no. 544/2010 Coll. Act on Subsidies within the competence of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (MLSAF SR) has been amended. This Act included the only specialized governmental subsidies specifically dedicated to gender

¹⁵ <https://srvs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Dotazn%C3%ADk-COVID-19-SRVS-SAAVS-prezentacia-vysledkov-prieskumu.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/SK>

¹⁷ https://ivpr.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TS_Den-rovnosti-v-odmenovani-2020_final.pdf

equality promotion initiatives. The amendment resulted in renaming the subsidies scheme and broadening its focus and eligible applicants, which is likely to lead to a reduction of specialized financial support to relevant gender equality focused NGOs, as already shown in late 2020¹⁸.

New national project Gender equality in the workplace has been launched by the MLSAF SR. The goal is to raise awareness among employers and employees as well as the public about the advantages of supporting and mainstreaming gender equality into the workplace. The special focus is on the reconciliation of work and family life via implementing diverse measures to support better work-life balance for the employees. Additionally, the project will introduce gender audits as a tool to better analyse the existing situation and help employers on their path to a more gender-equal workplace.

3. EFFECTS OF THE GRANTS

Even though, because of the early stage of the implementation, there are no measurable results to report in relation to progress towards reducing social and economic disparities and strengthening bilateral relations with Donor State entities, several, mostly positive tendencies can be observed, indicating strong correlation especially with the objective of strengthening bilateral relations.

Firstly, the bilateral cooperation at Programme level is excellent, as shown in Annex 3 to this Report. The statements of the Donor Programme Partners and the Programme Operators show genuine appreciation of each other's work and a lot of mutual respect. Secondly, this cooperation also resulted in an unexpected turnover of donor partnership projects. In several calls, such as the Cultural Heritage Call (CLT01), the Climate Change Calls (ACC01 and ACC02), the vast majority of successful Project Applications has a partner from the Donor States, even though partnership in these calls was not mandatory.

The cooperation at international level between the National Focal Point, the foreign ministries, embassies and missions of the Donor States is also excellent. There is a lot of mutual respect and trust, helping to resolve even difficult sensitive issues such as those in the Domestic and Gender Based Violence in a civilised and amicable manner. The flexible and professional approach and timely response of the FMO, along with the long-lasting experience of the National Focal Point makes the daily implementation of the Grants even easy(ier).

The National Focal Point considers the contribution of the EEA and Norway Grants to the bilateral relations between Slovakia and the Donor States as a "success story" and believes that irrespective of contracting, disbursement, irregularities and other quantifiable indicators of success, the unquantifiable elements of mutual respect and trust have already been attained.

4. STATUS OF PROGRAMMES

SK-INNOVATION Business Development, Innovation and SMEs

¹⁸ <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22577137/conservative-ngos-received-gender-equality-despite-experts-recommendations.html>

In 2020, the Call BIN SGS01 (Call for startups) has been launched. Delays have been observed in launching four calls for proposals (BIN 01, BIN 02 and two calls for educational component). The National Focal Point has followed the situation closely, including conducting regular monitoring of the Programme focused on risks assessment and implementation of the communication plan. For more information see part 8.1 of this Strategic Report.

The Programme Operator declares that the delays have not endangered the Programme implementation. Nevertheless, the National Focal Point is aware of the situation and identified the possible time constraints in the implementation of the projects. For the planned response see Annex A, Risk Assessment and Management Plan.

The overview of the Call launched in 2020 can be found below.

Call ID	Call launching	Call closure	Allocation	No. of submitted project applications	Requested grant amount
BIN SGS01 – Small Grant Scheme on the support of newly established businesses (NFM)	29.06.2020	23.10.2020	€ 1,058,824	31	€ 5,264,123

Under the Call, the Programme Operator organized an on-line information seminar in July 2020 where 38 potential applicants from Slovakia attended, three of them actually applied under the Call. Out of the 31 applications submitted, 10 include Norwegian partners. Half of the applicants with Norwegian project partners declared that they found the partner through the Donor Programme Partner's (DPP) database and the DPPs support, several applicants developed previous partnership cooperation, few of them found partner at matchmaking events or with the support of the Norwegian Embassy in Slovakia. The Programme Operator is in the process of the evaluation of the submitted applications and plans to contract the approved projects in August 2021.

There were no changes in addressing the special concerns set in the Memoranda of Understanding in the Programme set-up. Conditions set in the Programme Agreement will be reported on after the conclusion of the selection process of the last call.

SK-CLIMATE Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

In 2020 the Programme Operator selected projects under three Calls for proposals opened at the end on 2019 and launched two remaining Calls for proposals in December 2020. Due to the high interest of potential applicants, some of the Calls were extended:

Call ID	Call opened	Allocation	No. of submitted project	Requested grant amount	No. of approved project
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			applicat ions		applica tions
ACC01 – Action plans for mitigation and adaptation implemented by local authorities in urban areas (ClimaUrban) – EEA FM	29.11.2019 - 28.02.2020*	€ 4,176,838	7	€ 9,358,745	3
ACC02 – Action plans for mitigation and adaptation implemented by local authorities in urban areas (ClimaUrban) – NFM	29.11.2019 - 28.02.2020*	€ 5,152,207	8	€ 11,021,818	3
ACC03 – Awareness raising on climate change mitigation and adaptation carried out by schools (ClimaEdu) – NFM	31.12.2019 - 28.02.2020	€ 1,000,000	123	€ 5,296,786	28
ACC04 – Restoration of degraded wetland ecosystems (ClimaLocal) – NFM	15.12.2020 – 31.03.2021	€ 4,800,000	TBD	TBD	TBD
ACC05 – Awareness rising on climate change mitigation and adaptation (ClimaInfo) - NFM	15.12.2020 – 26.02.2021	€ 876,838	34	TBD	TBD

*extended deadline

The Programme has shown excellent results in strengthening the bilateral cooperation with the Donor States, exceeding the initial expectations in this regard. All of the 6 Projects Applications approved under the Calls ACC01 and ACC02 include cooperation with donor project partners from Norway and one of them from Iceland as well. In case of the Call ACC03, 5 from 28 Project Applications will be implemented with a project partner from Norway.

Based on the agreement between the Donors and the National Focal Point resulting from the Mid-term Review carried out at the beginning of 2020, additional funds were re-allocated to the Call ACC02 from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism's reserve. The re-allocation became effective in 2021 and allowed the Programme Operator to support 3 additional project applications. Complete data will be provided in the Strategic Report 2021.

With respect to the pre-defined project *Climate change and environment education centre (Living Lab) in Dropie*, the Programme Operator provided the Financial Mechanism Office with

the information necessary for fulfilling the pre-eligibility condition in May 2020. The pre-eligibility condition were considered fulfilled by the FMO in May 2020. In order to fulfil general condition No. 1 stated in the Annex I of the Programme Agreement, the Programme Operator announced public procurement for a legal entity independent of and unrelated to the Programme Operator to carry out the appraisal foreseen in Article 6.5.3 of the Regulation. The public procurement was completed on 31st December 2020, when the contract between the Programme Operator and the successful legal entity entered into force.

There are no other special concerns related to the SK-Climate Programme.

SK-LOCALDEV Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion

In 2020 within the Local Development and Inclusion Programme, three calls were launched:

Call ID	Call opened	Allocation	No. of submitted project applications	Requested grant amount	No. of supported project applications	No. of contracted projects as of 31.12.2020
LDI01 – Open Call on the multifunctional youth centers	15.07.2020 – 30.10.2020	€ 7,700,000	20	€ 16,209,549	-	-
LDI02 – Open Call on community-based interventions	08.09.2020 – 15.01.2021	€ 6,000,000	-	-	-	-
LDI03 – Open Call on capacity-building	18.11.2020 – 01.03.2021	€ 1,247,059	-	-	-	-

At least one donor project partner from Norway is involved in 8 out of 20 project applications submitted under the Call. Due to high interest and on-going COVID-19 restrictions, closure of the LDI02 Call was extended from the end of November 2020 to mid-January 2021. Along with the Calls, Information Day on each Call was held in online. About 35 participants joined each meeting.

In September 2020, an online matchmaking event was held in connection with the Call LDI01 launching. Three Norwegian organizations presented their organization and aim of cooperation in the meeting. About 17 people registered to the meeting, less than 10 eventually participated in.

The project contract for the pre-defined project *“Innovative education of teachers to increase their intercultural competences in the education process of Roma pupils”* implemented by National Institute of Education was signed on 7th September 2020. The project is being implemented in cooperation with the European Wergeland Centre, as the Nansen Centre for Peace and Dialogue decided not to continue with the Project because of internal organization issues and COVID-19 situation. One of the first educational activities successfully implemented within the project was the Training for Trainers in Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship. As part of the activity: Preparing teachers for the language exam in the Romani language an analysis of legislative documents dealing with the education of pedagogical staff was performed.

With respect to the conditions set out in the Memoranda of Understanding, there have been no changes since the last reported set-up of the Programme.

SK-DOMESTIC Domestic and Gender-based Violence

So far, only one Call for proposals was launched under the Programme:

Call ID	Call opened	Allocation	No. of submitted project applications	Requested grant amount	No. of supported project applications	No. of contracted projects as of 31.12.2020
DGV01 – Open Call on the support of organisation promoting equality between women and men a work life balance	18.07.2019 1 st deadline - 15.10.2019 2 nd deadline - 31.03.2020	€ 1,440,000	11	€ 1,914,122	0	0

The Selection Committee in its two meetings (on 8th January 2020 and on-line on 27th May 2020) recommended 9 project applications for support. By the end of 2020, final decision on supporting the project applications submitted within the Call DGV01 has not been issued by the Programme Operator yet. Discussions regarding support of these projects have been held at the national level with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR as the Programme Partner and as the relevant public institution in charge of policy area on gender equality and domestic and gender-based violence in Slovakia.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR has proposed the reallocation of funds from the Work-life balance Programme Area into the Domestic and Gender-based Violence Programme Area, by increasing the allocation set for support of women's shelters and counselling centres.

This situation has influenced all components of the Programme – pre-defined projects and remaining Calls for proposals. The Programme Operator declares that the Calls on services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence (DGV02 and DGV03) are prepared for further steps. Regarding the Call DGV04 focused on specialised services to vulnerable groups such as victims of rape, sexual violence, victims with addictions etc., there is intention to split the allocation of this Call to two components: pre-defined project focused on the transfer of know-how between Norway and Slovakia in the field of Sexual Assault Units and an open Call for specialised services (such as organisations working with drug addicts, or focused on work with perpetrators etc). Nevertheless, the National Focal Point is aware of the situation and identified the possible lack of time for project implementation as a potential risk. For the planned response see Annex A, Risk Assessment and Management Plan.

The project contract for pre-defined project DGVPP001 "HER STORY" implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR was concluded in February 2020, but the actual implementation has not started and the Project will most likely not be implemented.

Implementation of the pre-defined project DGVPP002 "Improving the victim-oriented approach – a tool enhancing the capacity to fight violence against women and domestic violence" by the Institute for Labour and Family research has not started either. The signing of the project contract depends on the unfolding of the above mentioned situation related to the proposed reallocation.

Special concerns set in the Memorandum of Understanding are reflected in the Programme Agreement.

SK-CULTURE Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation

The progress in the Culture Programme implementation is seen as stable and continuous in terms of both Outcomes projects within calendar year 2020.

During year 2020, the projects from previous Calls were evaluated and selected and the last Call was opened:

Call ID	Call opened	Allocation	No. of submitted project applications	Requested grant amount	No. of supported project applications	No. of contracted projects as of 31.12.2020
CLT01 – Open Call on the support of restoration and revitalization of cultural heritage	26.07.2019 – 29.11.2019	€ 10,539,725	66	€ 58,968,436	19	12
CLT02 – Call on the support of contemporary art and culture	26.07.2019 – 31.12.2019	€ 1,500,000	35	€ 6,074,596	9	7
CLT03 – Call on the support of contemporary art and culture	30.10.2020 – 25.02.2021	€ 1,500,000	-	-	-	-

Since March 2020, Covid-19 related restrictions caused that the Programme Operator put in place new forms of communication and visibility measures to ensure further smooth implementation of the Programme. The Programme Operator was able to provide the system for on-line meetings and to carry out all the necessary Selection Committee meetings, Cooperation Committee meetings, events and seminars, including two Information Days and Matchmaking event related to the Call CLT03.

The ambition of the Culture Programme in terms of bilateral cooperation is to have at least 30% of the projects under the Outcome 1 “Cultural heritage conditions enhanced” (Call CLT01) implemented in partnership with entities from the Donor States. These expectation were vastly exceeded, since 18 out of 19 approved projects (94%) include at least one donor project partner.

The donor project partnership under the Outcome 2 “Access to contemporary arts improved” is obligatory and all 9 approved projects within this outcome include at least one donor project partner.

Both pre-defined projects under the Culture Programme are implemented by the Monument Board of the SR. “ProMonumenta II” in its second year of the implementation continues with its activities. No delays were observed except for publicity and bilateral cooperation activities affected by the pandemic. These were postponed to 2021. The project contract for the second pre-defined project entitled “Red Monastery – Reborn” came into force in July 2020.

According the special concerns stated in the MoU in terms of Culture Programme, the Cooperation Committee continued with its regular meetings. In year 2020, face-to-face meeting of Culture Programme Cooperation Committee members took place in February 2020 in Lillehammer and 2 *per-rollam* meetings were conducted.

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

The two Calls planned under the Programme dedicated to find projects fostering institutional cross-border cooperation with Ukraine related to good governance, accountable institutions, transparency and contributing to improved integrity and accountability of public administration were launched in September 2019:

Call ID	Call opened	Allocation	No. of submitted project applications	Requested grant amount	No. of supported project applications	No. of contracted projects as of 31.12.2020
GGC01 – Open Call for Proposals on fostering institutional cross-border cooperation with Ukraine	16.09.2019 – 31.01.2020	€ 2,000,000	11	€ 5,829,205	5	5
GGC02 – Small Grant Scheme Call for	16.09.2019 – 15.01.2020	€ 500,000	1	€ 166,202	0	0

<p>Proposals on fostering institutional cross-border cooperation with Ukraine</p>							
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Based on the decision not to support application received under the Call GGC02, the Programme Operator requested reallocation of funds to the Call GGC01. The total allocation of all 5 supported projects is € 2,500,000. Since all the pre-defined projects are also contracted, the programme has therefore reached 100% of contracting in 2020 already.

COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new challenge into the activities of pre-defined project GGCPP001 with the project promoter Government office of the SR named “Improving Integrity of the Public Administration/IIPA”. Some of the project activities have been postponed by several weeks, but the whole year 2020 was dedicated to preparatory work within the Activity 1 - the Integrity Review of the Slovak Republic. In October 2020, online fact-finding meeting was organized with the participation of several key Slovak stakeholders.

The pre-defined project GGCPP002 with the project promoter Ministry of Justice of the SR named “Enhancing the efficiency of the justice system through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties” is being implemented since March 2020. Six inter-ministerial meetings promoting cooperation on the protection of the rights of the victim were organised. However, the implementation of the Activity no. 1 – Establishment of family law-courts is postponed, because the new Judicial map of Slovak courts is being revised.

The project contract for pre-defined project GGCPP003 with the Public Procurement Office as the project promoter named “Responsible public procurement” was signed on 5th March 2020. In 2020 the Project Promoter mainly focused on visibility of the project and Analysis of usage of MEAT criteria in Slovakia, which is being implemented with OECD as the project partner.

Within pre-defined project GGCPP004 named “TRIGLAV – Strengthen the fight against CBRN threats at the Slovak-Ukrainian border” with the Ministry of Interior of the SR as the project promoter has been a delay in signing the partnership agreement with all of the project partners – one Norwegian partner and four Ukrainian partners. The delay was caused by the administrative and competence issues at the Ukrainian side. The partnership agreement is supposed to be signed early in 2021.

5. STATUS OF BILATERAL FUNDS

The 5th meeting of the Joint Committee for Bilateral Funds (JCBF) originally planned to be held in March 2020 was postponed due to the pandemic and was later conducted as a per rollam meeting in May. The main focus of the agenda was reporting of the actual state of the Fund for Bilateral Relations prior to the Annual Meeting 2020.

The next, 6th meeting of the JCBF took place on 1st December 2020. As the Work Plan was valid until the end of 2020, the main agenda of this meeting was to update the Work Plan for 2021 – 2022 and to discuss a call specific designed for online bilateral initiatives. All members of the JCBF agreed to continue in pursuing the objectives of the political, institutional and cultural cooperation until the end of 2022, as the main ambitions of the Fund for years 2018 – 2020 were heavily affected by the pandemic. Updated Work Plan includes slight revision of the implementation system, resulting mainly from the implementation practice. The JCBF has allocated €200,000 to the abovementioned Call for online bilateral activities to be launched in 2021. The Call FBRTG01 has been closed and the implementation period of all pre-defined initiatives has been extended due to pandemic restrictions.

Status of the Calls

The Open Call FBR01 focused on “cultural cooperation” and “political and institutional cooperation” with allocation of €180,000 supported 6 initiatives in total, all of them in the field of cultural cooperation. This Call was closed on 21 January 2020 after its allocation was reached. The National Focal Point offered to the Beneficiaries the possibility to extend the implementation until 31st August 2021, which was the last day of eligibility under the Call. Most of them accepted this offer. In several cases the initiatives are being adjusted to the current pandemic situation. By the end of 2020 only one Beneficiary definitely decided to cancel the implementation of the initiative.

In general, the proposed activities are mainly organisation of cultural events such as concerts, exhibitions, organisation of workshops and masterclasses in music, dance etc. Interesting example is activity of Jessenius Faculty in Martin of Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia and University of Akureyri, Iceland that aims to target potential Icelandic students of medicine in Slovakia by introducing the Slovak culture and language in summer course and a series of exhibitions in Iceland.

As mentioned above, taking into consideration the COVID-19 situation in Europe in March 2020, the Call FBRTG01 for travel grants was postponed since 12th March 2020 and definitely closed in December 2020 based on decision adopted on the 6th JCBF Meeting.

Call ID	Allocation	No. of submitted applications*	Requested amount	No. of supported application	Contracted amount	No. of rejected application	No. of applications on reserve list
FBR01 – Open Call: cultural, political and	€180,000	11	€309,563	6	€154,806	5	0

institutional cooperation							
FBRTG 01 – Call for smaller scale activities – travel grants	€50,000	13	€39,636	4	€13,660	9	0

Status of the pre-defined Initiatives

The implementation of pre-defined initiative No. 1 “Strategic cooperation of the National Theatres” has been interrupted during the first phase of preparation of implementation due to the pandemic. Other pre-defined initiatives have not started in 2020 (No. 2 Accompanying /business/ activities related to State Visit of the President of the Republic of Iceland in Slovak Republic; No. 4 Accompanying activities /events on the occasion of Celebration of 300 years of Principality of Liechtenstein 2019 /optional/ and No. 5 Reducing the Gender Pay Gap).

As reported in the previous Strategic Report, the pre-defined bilateral Initiative No. 3 “SK Presidency in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – 2019” was implemented and completed in 2019.

Bilateral funds allocated to the Programmes

At the beginning of 2020, the Programme Operators of SK-Domestic and Gender Based Violence, SK-Culture and SK-Good Governance and Cross-border Cooperation applied for additional funds via Expressions of Interest in the total amount of €366,400, that were approved by the JCBF. In addition to the amounts already reserved for the Programmes in the Memoranda of Understanding, the total amount of funding reserved for Programmes from the Fund for Bilateral Relations is €996,400. The amount of €528,000 (25%) was actually disbursed to the Programme Operators, while €66,446 (12.5%) was disbursed by the Programme Operators to the Beneficiaries.

The COVID-19 pandemic and strict prevention measures heavily affected the implementation of plans of the Programme Operators in the area of bilateral relations, many were postponed, some taken into on-line form. For example, there were several on-line matchmaking events organised, within the Business and Innovation Programme (where the main organising entity was DPP Innovation Norway), or under the Local Development Programme, where the matchmaking event was related to the launching of the Call LDI01. None of the planned activities indicated in the Expressions of Interest for the year 2020 were conducted. There were several Calls for proposals for Travel Grants announced at the Programme level at the beginning of 2020, but no initiatives were conducted due to travel restrictions since March 2020:

Programme	Call ID	Call opened	Allocation	No. of submitted applications	No. of supported applications	Contracted amount	Disbursed amount
Climate	ACC_BF01	10.2.2020 postponed from 16.3.2020	€ 50,000	2	0	€ 0	€ 0
Business and Innovation	BIN_BF01	3.3.2020 – 31.1.2020	€ 30,000	1	0	€ 0	€ 0
Culture	CLTB_F01	4.6.2019 - 15.1.2019	€ 30,000	12	9	€ 28,757	€ 25,814
	CLTB_F02	4.6.2019 – 18.1.2019	€ 43,182	17	14	€ 42,435	€ 42,230
Domestic and Gender-based Violence	DGVB_F01	4.6.2019 – 15.1.2020	€ 10,000	6	3	€ 6359	€ 5,377
Good Governance and Cross-border Cooperation	GGCB_F01	19.8.2019 - 29.1.2019	€ 25,000	1	0	€ 0	€ 0
Local Development	LDI_BF01	31.7.2020 –	€ 40,000	0	0	€ 0	€ 0

		28.9. 2020					
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6. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

a. Management and control systems (MCS)

The Detailed Description of Management and Control System (hereinafter “DDMCS”) at national level accompanied by the Audit Report and the Opinion has been acknowledged by the FMO on 29 March 2019 as meeting the minimum requirements as requested by Article 5.7.5 of the Regulations.

On 1st October 2020, the competencies of the National Focal Point were transferred from the Government Office of the Slovak Republic to the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, based on the government resolution No. 355/2020. As a result of this transfer, the position of Director of the Department of Management and Control of the Bilateral Financial Instruments was left unoccupied and for the time being was the department managed by the Director of EEA and Norway Grants Department.

On 1st December 2020, the Section of Financial Programmes was renamed to the Section of Operational Programme Technical Assistance and other Financial Mechanisms. The Department of Management and Control of the Bilateral Financial Instruments and its tasks has been transformed to the Financial Management Unit under the Department of EEA and Norway Grants. In order to reflect the abovementioned changes as well as other changes reflecting the transfer to the Ministry, the DDMCS at national level was updated to version 1.5 on 1th February 2021.

In 2020, the Certifying Authority carried out coordination of financial management of the EEA Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014 – 2021 at national level in accordance with the tasks and responsibilities specified in Management and Control System. The Certifying Authority provided comments to the relevant amendments to the Programme Agreement drafts. Other methodological support referred to the issues of payment of fees in bank accounts, use of budget lines in the framework of the transfer of funds from the financial mechanisms, of bank accounts and bank reconciliation as a result of delimitation of the Programme Operators / National Focal Point from the Government Office of the Slovak Republic to the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, options of overbooking calls, etc.

In the first quarter of 2021, the Certifying Authority plans to update the *Funding and Financial Management System of the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism for the 2014 – 2021 programming period, version 3.0*. The update clarifies certain provisions following the guidelines and opinions from the Financial Mechanism Office (manual of IT GrACE, Guidance for completing the forecast of likely payment applications, guidelines following COVID-19 outbreak, etc.) as well as some provisions following implementation practice.

No information on significant changes in the setup of Management and Control System or staffing at the Audit Authority was reported by the respective authority.

b. Complaints

On November 11th 2020, an inquiry related to the selection procedure of the Call DGV01 under the Domestic and Gender Based Violence Programme was received via the national complaint mechanism created at the webpage www.eeagrants.sk.

The National Focal Point assessed the inquiry and concluded that it does not represent complaint in terms of national legislation. For further assessment the Financial Mechanism Office was consulted. As a result, the National Focal Point established that the inquiry does not meet the definition of a complaint according to the Regulations and it was forwarded for processing to the respective Programme Operator in December 2020.

c. Irregularities

As of 31st December 2020, no irregularities were reported to the Financial Mechanism Office, i.e. the reports on irregularities submitted to the Financial Mechanism Office did not contain any irregularities. The irregularities detected and reported to the Irregularities Authority met the criteria under the exemption regime under Article 12.5 of the Regulations (irregularities reported to the Donors upon request only).

d. Audit

The audits of designation

In the period lasting from May 2019 to February 2020, the Audit Authority carried out the audit of designation No. A936 (at the level of the Programme Operator – Government Office of the Slovak Republic). The audit of designation No. A936 identified 1 non-financial systemic finding (related to the administrative financial control and compliance with the national Act No. 357/2015 Coll. On Financial Control and Audit and of Change and Amendment of Some Acts).

In the period lasting from December 2019 to February 2020, the Audit Authority carried out the audit of designation No. A1012 (at the level of the Programme Operator – Research Agency). The audit of designation No. A1012 identified 1 non-financial systemic finding (related to the administrative financial control and compliance with the national Act No. 357/2015 Coll. On Financial Control and Audit and of Change and Amendment of Some Acts).

In the period lasting from December 2019 to March 2020, the Audit Authority carried out the audit of designation No. A1013 (at the level of the Programme Operator – Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic). The audit of designation No. A1013 identified 1 non-financial systemic finding (related to the administrative financial control and compliance with the national Act No. 357/2015 Coll. On Financial Control and Audit and of Change and Amendment of Some Acts).

The system audits

In the period lasting from November 2020 to February 2021, the Audit Authority carried out the system audit No. A1035. The system audit No. A1035 focused on the verification of the effective functioning of the management and control system at the level of the National Focal Point and Programme Operators. The system audit No. A1035 identified 2 non-systemic findings at the level of the National Focal Point - Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, 5 non-systemic findings at the level of the Programme Operator - Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, 5 non-systemic findings at the level of the Programme Operator - Research Agency and 5 non-systemic findings at the level of the Programme Operator - Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic. Among the most serious findings, identified by the system audit No. A1035, were the following ones:

- failure to ensure the payment of the Interim payment to the Programme Operator within 15 working days from the receipt of the Interim payment from the Certifying Authority (National Focal Point - Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic),
- insufficient dealing with the possible existence of state or de minimis aid in relation to the calls for bilateral relations for the establishment and development of partnership (Programme Operator - Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic),
- insufficient verification of the completeness of the evaluation sheets from the evaluation of project applications (Programme Operator - Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic),
- failure to publish the call for proposals and its annexes in the national language on the website (Programme Operator - Research Agency),
- unclearly definition of the eligibility criteria in the call for proposal (Programme Operator - Research Agency),
- insufficient dealing with the possible existence of state or de minimis aid in relation to the calls for projects (Programme Operator - Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic).

In the period lasting from December 2020 to February 2021, the Audit Authority carried out the system audit No. A1043. The system audit No. A1043 focused on the verification of the effective functioning of the management and control system at the level of the Certifying Authority. The system audit No. A1043 identified no findings.

The audits on projects

In the period lasting from June 2020 to November 2020, the Audit Authority ensured the performance of the audit on projects No. A1032, in cooperation with the Government Audit Office. The audit on projects No. A1032 focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator – Government Office of the Slovak Republic/ Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. The audit on projects No. A1032 identified 3 findings:

- 1 systemic finding (related to the National Focal Point/ Programme Operator – failure to ensure the correct keeping of analytical records in terms of Internal Manual of the National Focal Point and Internal Manual of the Programme Operator),
- 1 financial finding (related to the National Focal Point/ Programme Operator - inclusion of the ineligible expenditure in the Interim Financial Report: the item relating to refreshment in the total amount of 451.83 EUR was included in the Interim Financial Report No. 2 for Governance programme and the same amount was included in the Interim Financial Report No. 4 for bilateral fund as well),
- 1 non-systemic finding (related to the National Focal Point/ Programme Operator - insufficiently addressed the possible existence of state aid in relation to the Call for Small-Scale Activities – Travel Grants under the bilateral fund).

In the period lasting from May 2020 to August 2020, the Audit Authority carried out the audit on projects No. A1038. The audit on projects No. A1038 focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the Certifying Authority. The audit on projects No. A1038 identified no findings.

In June 2020, the Audit Authority ensured the performance of the audit on projects No. A1039. The audit on projects No. A1039 focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the Audit Authority. Since the selected sample consisted of expenditure declared by the Audit Authority, the Audit Authority requested the Department of Internal Audit of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, as an independent body, to perform audit on projects No. A1039 and to verify this expenditure. The audit on projects No. A1039 identified no findings.

7. COMMUNICATION

The achievement of communication indicators stated in the Communication Strategy for the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021 in the Slovak Republic during the 2020 is evaluated in the updated Communication Strategy included in the Annex E to this Strategic Report.

The National Focal Point shares every publicity activity of the Programme Operators at the national webpage www.eeagrants.sk/www.norwaygrants.sk, on its [Facebook profile](#) and on its [YouTube channel](#) with the aim to achieve the best communication results and create positive image of the Grants . The National Focal Point closely cooperates with the Communication Department at the Ministry and tries to continuously search for interesting "project stories", ideas or sources of information for their further high-quality communication and promotion.

In 2020 the National Focal Point started with the creation of introductory videos about pre-defined projects implemented in Slovakia. These videos were developed in last quarter of 2020 and their promotion was planned as part of Facebook campaign “Grants in a nutshell” launched at the beginning of 2021. The ambition is to have a short clip presenting basic fact on each supported project. The National Focal Point cooperates on this activity with the Programme Operators.

The National Focal Point also closely cooperates with the Norwegian Embassy in Slovakia. The Embassy has amassed the data from the National Focal Point and created a virtual map

including information about all projects supported by the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovakia since 2004. This web tool is regularly updated with information on new projects supported in the current programming period.

The Facebook page EEA and Norway Grants in Slovakia was also involved in the Christmas campaign of the Royal Norwegian Embassy with the title “Advent reading”. During the Advent season, the National Focal Point shared 24 videos published at the Royal Norwegian Embassy Facebook profile, each video representing a chapter from the Christmas book, read by famous Slovak actors. The author of this book is popular Norwegian writer Maja Lunde who together with an award-winning illustrator Lisa Aisato created an unforgettable Christmas story. This activity is a result of the excellent cooperation between the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Slovakia, the National Focal Point and the Slovak National Theatre.

The National Focal Point also contributed to the communication initiative called “Norwegian Days” organised by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Slovakia. At the beginning of June 2020, a discussion show “Pod Lampou” (Under the lamp) broadcasted online an “evening discussion” with H.E. Nervik and Mr. Mojžiš, representing the EEA and Norway Grants and its presence in the Slovak Republic. This show is part of programming structure of Slovak well-known opinion forming weekly magazine Týždeň. The broadcast has almost 7,000 recipients and is still available via Facebook. This activity can be considered as the one of the highest-attended communication measures of the year.

It is necessary to emphasise that dealing with all types of media representatives at national and regional level was significantly improved. At the same time, the communication through Facebook was greatly enhanced. The increase of likes on Facebook during 2020 was significant – more than 23.6% in comparison with data from 2019. Number of followers was increased by more than 28.7%. Some posts reached more than 3,000 views. Interesting information is, that achievement of 1,000 likes of our Facebook profile came exactly on the Norwegian National Day on 17 May 2020.

In relation to substantial strengthening of sharing of all communication ideas between the Programme Operators and Royal Norwegian Embassy in Slovakia, the National Focal Point created a new communication forum called "Communication network of the Grants". This working group is similar to the "Monthly Catch-up Meetings", which was created by the FMO for regular communication with the National Focal Points. The representatives of Active Citizens Fund are also invited to the meetings. creating the network, the National Focal Point aims to lead a systematic, continuous and effective communication of the Grants in Slovakia as well as significant enhance the quality of communication. This group meets on a monthly basis and the meetings are held several days before the scheduled “Monthly Catch-up Meetings” with the FMO.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

a. Monitoring

The National Focal Point carries out monitoring continuously, through each and every phase of the EEA and Norway Grants implementation. With all Programmes running, the National

Focal Point performed mostly compliance-based monitoring of the activities performed by the Programme Operators. This was focused mainly on:

- Calls for Proposals
- Selection process
- Verification of Annual Programme Reports and Interim Financial Reports.

Within these compliance checks, the National Focal Point verifies if:

- the Principles of Implementation are being followed;
- the Principles of Cooperation are being followed;
- the Legal Framework is being complied with;
- the results are likely to be achieved;
- the risks are being continuously evaluated and mitigation measures are being taken.

In 2020 the regular monitoring of the Programme Business and Innovation was carried out. The monitoring was focused on risks assessment and implementation of the communication plan and was performed from July till November 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the National Focal Point avoided on-site visit and the monitoring was conducted via questionnaire filled out by the Programme Operator and communication via e-mail.

The main finding of the National Focal Point was related to staffing, i.e. unoccupied positions within the project team. For this reason, the National Focal Point formulated a recommendation to ensure that the position of head of the finance unit is filled as soon as possible, but no later than before the start of projects implementation. In addition, the National Focal Point recommended to the Programme Operator to pay increased attention to the risk management of the Programme as well as to the timely implementation of the declared mitigation measures.

The overall result of the monitoring of the Business and Innovation Programme is “Good”, which means the implementation of the Programme is proceeding according to plan or with a slight delay, some improvements are needed. Some shortcomings have been identified. These shortcomings have little impact on the implementation of the Programme. Formative mid-term evaluation of the Programme is planned in 2022.

Planned monitoring of the Domestic and Gender-based Violence Programme was not conducted, as the Programme was suspended for most of 2020.

b. Evaluation

According to the evaluation plan included in the Annex B to this Strategic Report, the first evaluations (mid-term) will be conducted in 2022. The plan was updated in terms of budget, reflecting the reallocation of the reserve into the Programmes Climate Change and Culture.

9. ISSUES FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING

There is no special proposal for the discussion at the Annual Meeting suggested.

ANNEXES

- A. Risk assessment and management plan**
- B. Evaluation plan**
- C. Cooperation with Donor Programme Partners and International Partner Organisations**
- D. Technical assistance report**

Annex A: Risk assessment and management plan

SK-INNOVATION			Overall level of risk 3
Risks	Previously planned response	Actual response	Planned future response
Wide – range results framework set in the Concept Note causing complications in application of respective State Aid rules within the Programme.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme and will provide further support to the PO with preparation of the State aid scheme as well as preparation of the Calls for proposal.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary. The State Aid Scheme was prepared by the PO at the end of 2020.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme and will provide further support to the PO with preparation of the Calls for proposal.
Lack of time for project implementation	New risk identified in 2020.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary and closely monitors the development of the Calls.	The NFP will create adequate pressure on the PO to announce the Calls for proposals as soon as possible to mitigate the delay in implementation.
Implementation difficulties due to COVID-19 pandemic	New risk identified in 2020.	General information on potential situations arising from the spread of COVID-19 with an impact on the implementation of projects under the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 were published at the national website in August 2020. The NFP helped the PO to organise on-line seminar for potential applicants under BIN SGS01 in July 2020, on-line Cooperation Committee meeting in October 2020, provided technical equipment and assistance,	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme and provide further assistance if needed.

		including sharing of best practice in organisation of on-line events.	
SK-CLIMATE			Overall level of risk 1
Risks	Previously planned response	Actual response	Planned future response
Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary.	NFP will invite the PO to seminar on public procurement organised for the Project Promoters and further monitor the developments under the Programme.
Implementation difficulties due to COVID-19 pandemic	New risk identified in 2020.	The NFP encouraged the PO to implement mitigation measures suggested in the FMO letter on COVID-19 implications from April 2020; General information on potential situations arising from the spread of COVID-19 with an impact on the implementation of projects under the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 were published at the national website in August 2020.	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme and provide assistance if needed.
SK-LOCALDEV			Overall level of risk 1
Risks	Previously planned response	Actual response	Planned future response
Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary.	NFP will organise seminar on public procurement for the Project Promoters and further monitor the

			developments under the Programme.
Implementation difficulties due to COVID-19 pandemic	New risk identified in 2020.	The NFP encouraged the PO to implement mitigation measures suggested in the FMO letter on COVID-19 implications from April 2020; General information on potential situations arising from the spread of COVID-19 with an impact on the implementation of projects under the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 were published at the national website in August 2020.	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme and provide assistance if needed.
SK-DOMESTIC			Overall level of risk 3
Risks	Previously planned response	Actual response	Planned future response
Low interest from potential applicants in open calls due to other available funding mechanisms and low capacity of the organisations active in the area.	NFP will continue targeted promotion of the Programme among potential applicants.	Due to the negotiations on the focus of the Programme that took place in 2020 the NFP postponed its activities related to promotion of the Programme and closely followed the development.	NFP will continue targeted promotion of the Programme among potential applicants.
Lack of time for project implementation	New risk identified in 2020.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary and closely monitors the development of the Calls.	The NFP will create adequate pressure on the PO to announce the Calls for proposals as soon as possible to mitigate the delay in implementation.

Implementation difficulties due to COVID-19 pandemic	New risk identified in 2020.	The NFP encouraged the PO to implement mitigation measures suggested in the FMO letter on COVID-19 implications from April 2020; General information on potential situations arising from the spread of COVID-19 with an impact on the implementation of projects under the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 were published at the national website in August 2020.	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme and provide assistance if needed.
SK-CULTURE			Overall level of risk 1
Risks	Previously planned response	Actual response	Planned future response
Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary.	NFP will organise seminar on public procurement for the Project Promoters and further monitor the developments under the Programme.
Implementation difficulties due to COVID-19 pandemic	New risk identified in 2020.	The NFP encouraged the PO to implement mitigation measures suggested in the FMO letter on COVID-19 implications from April 2020; General information on potential situations arising from the spread of COVID-19 with an impact on the implementation of projects under the EEA and Norway Grants	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme and provide assistance if needed.

		2014-2021 were published at the national website in August 2020.	
SK-GOVERNANCE			Overall level of risk 2
Risks	Previously planned response	Actual response	Planned future response
Difficulties related to meet the EU standard implementation rules on the side of Ukrainian project partners.	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary.	NFP will organise seminar on implementation rules for the Project Promoters and further monitor the developments under the Programme.
Implementation difficulties due to COVID-19 pandemic	New risk identified in 2020.	The NFP encouraged the PO to implement mitigation measures suggested in the FMO letter on COVID-19 implications from April 2020; General information on potential situations arising from the spread of COVID-19 with an impact on the implementation of projects under the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 were published at the national website in August 2020.	NFP will monitor the developments under the Programme and provide assistance if needed.

Programme Information				Evaluation Information							
Programme # and title	Sector	Duration (Start/End)	Budget (EUR)	Type of Evaluation Formative/ Summative Impact/ Implementation	Evaluation Objectives Reason and learning goals	Timing Mid-term or Final Evaluation (ex post) Year	Data needs and collection methods Reports; interviews; surveys; other	Evaluation Start/End Date	Evaluation Budget (EUR)	Past Evaluations (if any): Type and Completion Date	Learning and Knowledge Sharing Who will benefit from the evaluation? How will findings be shared?
Business Development, Innovation and SMEs	Innovation, Research, Education and Competitiveness	TBD	23,529,412	Formative / Implementation	Relevance / Coherence, Efficiency	Mid-term Evaluation	Reports, interviews, analysis / surveys (TBD)	2022	17,000	N/A	<p>Evaluation Report and its summary for general public will be published at the NFP webpage and distributed to all relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Result of the evaluation will be shared across sectors and other partners from BS and DS.</p> <p>Depending on the findings, the NFP will request response from relevant subjects how will be the findings taken into account for future decision making process.</p>
Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion	Social Inclusion, Youth Employment and Poverty Reduction	TBD	17,647,059	Summative / Impact	Impact / Sustainability	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2024	17,000	N/A	
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy	TBD	21,430,588	Summative / Impact	Impact / Sustainability	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2024	17,000	N/A	
Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation	Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance, and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms	TBD	23,071,765	Summative / Impact	Impact / Sustainability	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2024	17,000	N/A	
Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency / Cross-border Cooperation	Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance, and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms	TBD	10,000,000	Summative / Impact	Impact / Sustainability	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2024	17,000	N/A	

Programme Information				Evaluation Information							
Programme # and title	Sector	Duration (Start/End)	Budget (EUR)	Type of Evaluation Formative/ Summative Impact/ Implementation	Evaluation Objectives Reason and learning goals	Timing Mid-term or Final Evaluation (ex post) Year	Data needs and collection methods Reports; interviews; surveys; other	Evaluation Start/End Date	Evaluation Budget (EUR)	Past Evaluations (if any): Type and Completion Date	Learning and Knowledge Sharing Who will benefit from the evaluation? How will findings be shared?
Domestic and Gender-based Violence	Justice and Home Affairs	TBD	10,588,235	Formative / Implementation	Relevance / Coherence Effectiveness	Mid-term Evaluation	Reports, interviews, analysis / surveys (TBD)	2022	17,000	N/A	

Annex C: Cooperation with Donor Programme Partners and International Partner Organisations

Business Development, Innovation and SMEs

Programme Operator and Partners

Programme Operator:	Research Agency Innovation Norway (IN)
Donor Programme Partners:	Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (DIKU) National Agency of International Education Affairs (AIBA)

The PO stated that all DPPs have played a key role in advising on the use of the Fund for Bilateral Relations, approving the Bilateral Activity Plans and assisting in the project partner search. The PO sees the benefit in the ability and the competence of the DPPs and partners who were able to react quickly to the new situation and began to organize online seminars and digital matchmaking events, which provided an opportunity to search for partners through their own websites and promoted links of companies operated in the programme focus areas.

Within the Business part of the Programme, the DPP Innovation Norway has not provided the NFP with their assessment of cooperation, but there were many joint activities carried out in 2020. The PO participated as a co-organizer at three matchmaking and B2B events organized by the Innovation Norway and focused on searching potential business partners from the donor states. First event took place in Oslo, others were due to the COVID-19 pandemic taken into digital format.

The participation of DIKU and AIBA is crucial especially to the Educational part of the Programme. Both DPPs feel that despite the slow start of the Programme in previous year, 2020 was constructive regarding communication and cooperation and progress within the educational part of the Programme has been made. They are happy that the PO have worked results oriented to find solutions to some of these challenges, both in terms of an added focus to digital activities in the open call but also by transforming the bilateral travel grant to a grant for small scale initiatives. Although the launch of the call is delayed, DIKU is assessing the education component as low risk and believe the call is on track to be published in early 2021 which will ensure adequate time to carry out the selection and implementation of projects.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Programme Operator and Partners

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

The PO has not provided the NFP with assessment of their cooperation with the DPPs, but from the monitoring of the NFP and information on joint activities performed in 2020 it is safe to assume the cooperation is smooth and successful.

All three DPPs stated that cooperation and communication with the PO works very well and is good in all aspects. According to their opinion the PO seems to be very well organized, professional, works systematically and efficiently, and the programme seems to be running well. Meetings in the Cooperation Committee and Selection Committee run smoothly and are well prepared – also during the COVID-19 crisis. There have been several fruitful discussions, and the PO has been open-minded and willing to include DPPs advice and suggestions.

Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation

Programme Operator and Partners

Programme Operator:	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic
Donor Programme Partners:	The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (RA)
	Arts Council Norway (ACN)

The close cooperation between both DPPs and PO representatives included mainly sessions of Cooperation Committee (both in person in February 2020 in Norway and per rollam) and Selection Committee of Culture Programme. Due to Covid-19 restrictions all Selection Committee meetings were organized in on-line format in March and April 2020 with active and fruitful participation of all DPPs’ representatives. Both DPPs provided the PO with the expertise on the eligibility of potential donor project partners and the opinions on the level and quality of proposed partnership.

The Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren) states that despite 2020 being a challenging year for bilateral cooperation, the Culture Programme progressed without much delays and the projects from Call CLT01 are now ready to start their implementation. They find that the cooperation with the PO works very well and that the communication is good. The Arts Council Norway highlights quick adaptation of the PO to the pandemic COVID-19 situation by introducing digital and accessible way of communicating (through MS Teams), which the ACN has used as best practice example for other POs. ACN also appreciates the POs willingness to use digital tools such as MS Teams even for more unofficial topics. There are a few reflexes which are not quite in place (related to the PO notifying ACN as DPP at an early stage when issues arise with donor state entities), but for the most part they experience the cooperation as very good and there is also an improvement here. DPP have a high level of confidence and trust in the PO, and look forward to continue the good cooperation in the implementation phase of the selected projects in CLT02 and in the process ahead for CLT03.

Domestic and Gender-based Violence

Programme Operator and Partners

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

The Programme Operator very much appreciates continued excellent cooperation with the DPP and IPO and the benefits from this partnership. The DPP and IPO are voting members of the Selection Committee and also members of the Cooperation Committee. This fact PO appreciates very much due to high competence and expertise of these partner organisations. The PO draws from this excellent cooperation with both partners also in open discussions on the future direction of the Programme.

From the perspective of the DPP, the excellent dialogue between the PO and the DPP has been a success story – even with the challenges COVID-19 represents. The digital meeting mode has been professionally executed from the side of the PO, and the quality of work has been maintained on a high level. However, they look forward to direct contacts and to overcoming the temporary obstacles in bilateral developments. The long experience from the previous period and the stability in the staff in PO has facilitated the exchange. The PO has worked extremely hard to prepare the calls and involved the DPP when appropriate. Despite the challenging situation with potential changes in the Programme, the collaboration has been active and fruitful.

The Council of Europe states that the relationship with the PO continues to be positive and productive. Communication by the PO has been regular and consistent, which was particularly useful as problems with implementation became apparent in 2020. Regarding the current challenges in implementation, the PO has sought to provide balance to the role while also trying to maintain agreements with the donor and stakeholders. The Council of Europe remains committed to assisting Slovakia to obtain programme objectives, focusing on its delivery in line with European standards. As IPO, the CoE looks forward to CC meetings by video or face-to-face as safety measures allow.

Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency / Cross-border Cooperation

Programme Operator and Partners

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

the Programme. During the Cooperation Committee Meeting in September 2020, the OECD shared some helpful and valuable ideas on how to effectively manage the digital ways of communication and the importance to consider new ways of management in the future. The OECD also expressed their opinion not to wait with the launch of the open calls within the bilateral fund as it is challenging to predict how long the pandemic will last, but rather to adapt the calls, so the initiatives can be implemented in digital/online ways.

The overall cooperation, day-to-day communication as well as communication through the Cooperation Committee with the DPP – the Norwegian Barents Secretariat – is very good. The DPP was proactive in the selection of the experts for the projects' evaluation, during the Cooperation Committee Meetings throughout the year as well as during the Selection Committee Meeting. The PO especially appreciates the experience with the cross-border cooperation with Russia during COVID-19 pandemic the DPP shared at Cooperation Committee Meeting as well as the ideas and improvements how to implement the projects during the pandemic. The PO found the discussion very helpful and inspirational for the implementation of the projects within the programme.

From the OECD 2020 Annual Report: "The cooperation with the [Slovak] PO has been fruitful, including through input on the selection criteria for the small grants scheme and the participation (as an Observer) in the Selection Committee. The PO has been highly reactive to communications from the OECD, including to those that aimed at finalising the administrative details related to the two PDPs in which the OECD is involved." In addition, the OECD representative stated that all meetings held throughout 2020 were extremely well organised by the PO, despite the challenging circumstances brought about by the pandemic.

Fragments from Norwegian Barents Secretariat annual progress report for 2020:

"This cooperation with our Programme Operator (PO) goes back to the previous FM period and has always been functioning very well, which was also the case in 2020. The Barents Secretariat has been in frequent communication with the PO throughout the year, both via e-mail and video calls. The PO approaches every meeting in a highly professional and well-structured manner and always takes the DPP's advice into account. The DPP sees this as a very important factor in the programme implementation."

"At the moment, the main risk in the programme is the lack of in-person contact due to COVID-19. Because of this, it is difficult to have joint activities and thus reach the full potential of the cooperation, both on the programme level and project level. The PO has taken some measures to improve the situation through digital solutions (video meetings). The DPP believes that video meetings present a good temporary solution to these circumstances, but hopes that the COVID-19 situation will improve in the second half of 2021."

Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion

Programme Operator and Partners

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

During 2020 the Cooperation Committee where the Council of Europe is a member met three times. The calls texts drafts were subject to the Cooperation Committee reviews. The Council of Europe provides the PO with valuable comments to the calls draft and selection criteria. The PO appreciate a lot their experience and knowledge, as well as international best practise and their advices and point of view from a different level.

The representative of the Council of Europe reported that they have established a very positive and constructive cooperation with the Programme Operator. The PO takes a highly participatory approach to the management of the Programme and is very open to the Council of Europe expertise on youth work for social inclusion, Roma inclusion and quality inclusive education, all key themes of the Programme. The PO has a very good assessment of the needs of the target groups, existing externally funded initiatives and areas in need of further support, which results in a strategic and sustainable approach. It works very closely with all relevant Government agencies in the thematic areas tackled by the Programme, but also with non-governmental organisations and experts, an approach that the CoE actively promote and support. To conclude, the work of the Programme Operator stands out for its professionalism, organization and expertise in the areas tackled by the programme, as well as for its participatory approach to the development and implementation of the Programme. The CoE is pleased to act as an IPO within this Programme and to be able to contribute to the achievement of its social inclusion objectives.

The Communication Strategy for the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021 in the Slovak Republic

Revised version 1.4, March 2021

Elaborated by the National Focal Point



Introduction:

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

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

This update of the CS reflects mainly current timeframe of implementation (2021). The next update of the CS will be carried out in 2022 when majority of the Calls for proposals is expected to be closed and implementation of projects will be ongoing.

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

1. Objective

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

The partial aims shall be:

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

2. Target groups

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

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

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

Communication network with the POs: At the beginning of 2021, the NFP created non-formal working group *“Communication network of the Grants”*, consisting of the NFP and all POs (in case that the NFP is also the PO a member of the working group is relevant project manager) and the Norwegian Embassy. The working group will meet regularly, in order to substantially strengthen sharing of all communication ideas. By this way, the National Focal Point would like to bring very systematic, continuous and effective approach to the communication of Grants in Slovakia.

3. Strategies

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

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

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

TARGET GROUP	Type of provided information	Type of communication channels
1. General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “basic” information about the new period of the EEA and Norway Grants - information about the actual status of the implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants and achieved results and outcomes - information about cooperation (what could be achieved together or what has been already achieved) among the Slovak Republic and the Donors states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - media (print media, on line media, TV and radio); - websites: www.eeagrants.sk or www.norwaygrants.sk - Social media – Facebook - major information activities organized by the NFP - brochures and leaflets

<p>2. POs and potential project promoters, FMO/FMC, DPPs, and IPOs and partner entities from the donor states</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about the actual status of the implementation, specially about the calls - Information about the approved, contracted and implemented projects and bilateral activities - Information about the possibilities of bilateral cooperation, especially about the call under the BF - Information about the new guidelines - Information about the achieved results and outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - media (print media, online media, radio, TV); - websites: www.eeagrants.sk or www.norwaygrants.sk - Social media – Facebook - major information activities organized by the NFP - workshops and seminars focused on rules and requirements of the EEA and Norway Grants -matchmaking seminars focused on possibilities given by the BF - study trips - events organized mainly for youth to bring together young people from Slovakia and from the Donor states to introduce them different projects supported by the EEA and Norway Grants, to give them the opportunity to make new contacts and to get to know Slovakia and the Donor states (events such as Herkules on bicycle organized in the summer of 2016) - brochures and leaflets
<p>3. Professional public and media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about the actual status of the implementation, - Information about the approved, contracted and implemented projects and bilateral activities - Information about the possibilities of the bilateral cooperation, - Information about the achieved results and outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - media (print media, online media, radio, TV); - websites: www.eeagrants.sk or www.norwaygrants.sk - Social media – Facebook - major information activities organized by the NFP / for media press conferences - study trips - direct emails - brochures and leaflets

4. Major activities

The NFP will, during the whole implementation period, organize several publicity activities. The NFP will coordinate its publicity activities with the POs` publicity activities and with the Royal Norwegian Embassy`s publicity activities to avoid possible duplicity. As the minimum, the following publicity activities are planned to be organized by the NFP:

Activity	Preliminary term	Target Group	The aim	Communication channels
1. Launching conference(s)	IV. Q 2018	All target groups	partial aims a), b) and c)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - websites: www.eegrants.sk or www.norwaygrants.sk - Social media – Facebook - for media press conferences - direct emails - leaflets
2. Closing conference(s)	2024	All target groups	partial aims b) and d)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - websites: www.eegrants.sk or www.norwaygrants.sk - Social media – Facebook - media press conferences - study trips to visit selected projects - direct emails - brochure
3. Other activities will be organized based on progress in the implementation, needs and opportunities. The NFP is fully aware of the minimal requirement to organize at least three major activities.	2019 - 2023	All target groups	All partial aims	

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

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

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

The total traffic at the above mentioned webpages in 2016: A total of 121,142 page views and 34,321 visits were recorded, with returning visitors accounting for 45.20% and new visitors of the website accounting for 54.80%.

The NFP administers a profile on Facebook under the title “EEA and Norway Grants Slovakia”. At the end of May 2017, the Facebook profile had 540 likes. In addition, it is allowed to publish a link to news published by any other entity on NFP’s Facebook account.

For the time being, the NFP does not administrate any account on LinkedIn, Twitter or Instagram. The NFP as part of the Government Office has to follow the internal rules concerning PR, including social media.

6. Department responsible for implementation of measures including contact person

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

The main contact person:

Head of the Strategic Actions Unit of the Grants

Martina Szabóová

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Email: martina.szaboova@vicepremier.gov.sk

The deputy contact person:

Bilateral Funds and Publicity Manager

Boris Striženec

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7. Plan for evaluation

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

Indicators of the overall aim	Units	Target value	Source of information	Deadline for next evaluation
Number of processed questionnaires	number	4500	Annual Projects Reports and Final Projects Reports	2022, 2024
Percentage of respondents who knew of the EEA and Norway Grants prior to completing the questionnaire.	%	70 %	Annual Projects Reports and Final Projects Reports	2022, 2024
The number of respondents who correctly answered at least three questions from the questionnaire.	number	65 %	Annual Projects Reports and Final Projects Reports	2022, 2024
Number of respondents who were able to answer the question "which countries contribute to the EEA Grants"	number	55 %	Annual Projects Reports and Final Projects Reports	2022, 2024
Indicators of the partial aims	Units	Target value	Source of information	Deadline for evaluation
Major activities including press conferences	number	3	Invitation, program, attendance sheet	2019 2022

				2024
Total number of web page view per year	number	150,000	Google Analytics	1Q 2022
Increased total number of likes on Facebook	number	1,500	Facebook Statistics	1Q 2022
Brochure about the achieved results and outcomes	number	400	List of participants of events where the brochure will be distributed, distribution list	2024

8. Evaluation of achieved values of indicators

Due to the complications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there are delays in many Programmes implemented and thus the first evaluation of Indicators of the overall aim stated in chapter 7 will be in 2022, when it is expected that majority of projects to be supported within the programming period will be already contracted and in the phase of implementation.

Indicators of the partial aims	Baseline	Target	Achieved	Comment
Major activities including press conferences	0	3	1	Launching Conference of the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021, November 2018; due to the status of implementation of the Programmes in 2020, the major activity was postponed, as there would not have been sufficient information to communicate.
Increased total number of web page view	121,142	150,000*	178,001	Google Analytics for period 01/2020 – 12/2020
Increased total number of likes on Facebook	540	1,200*	1,198	Facebook Statistics at the end of February 2021; number of “followers” was 1,297.
Brochure about the achieved results and outcomes	0	400	0	

* target value was set for period until 2021. New target value for reporting period until 2022 was set in the chapter 7.

Annex 1: SWOT analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dominantly positive connotations linked to the EEA and Norway Grants; - Simpler administration procedures of the projects financed by the EEA and Norway Grants in comparison with the Structural Funds; - Experienced team at the NFP with implementation of EEA and Norway Grants (the NFP's team has been working with these grants since programming period 2004-2009); - Close and good cooperation with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bratislava and the FMO; 	<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase the overall awareness of general public about opportunities, results and impact brought by the EEA and Norway grants ; - To support development of partnership between Slovak and Donor State Entities through effective communication; - To promote the simpler administration procedures of the projects financed by the EEA and Norway grants in comparison with Structural Funds; - Promote the high degree of transparency through effective communication;
<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low interest of media in "project success stories"; - Limited budget for publicity 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negative experiences of potential applicants with the Structural Funds / other types of foreign financial aid from the past (particularly demanding financial management, etc.); - Complicated process of public procurement which might potentially be a threat when the NFP has to procure some publicity services; - COVID-19 pandemic and related strict measures preventing travelling and personal meetings (such as conferences and workshops etc.)

Annex 2: Baseline and target values

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

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

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