

# *STRATEGIC REPORT*

## *FM14-21*

Slovakia

Reporting period:

2022

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, implementation accelerated within all Programmes. The number of Projects supported and contracted increased significantly and the first Projects' results are already visible. At the same time, serious external factors strongly affected the smooth implementation and brought many issues for the National Focal Point, Programme Operators and Project Promoters to deal with.

The negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have faded away gradually, allowing the organisation of personal meetings and events. Russia's invasion to Ukraine in February 2022 led, inter alia, to an increase in prices of energies, construction materials and construction works. Municipal and regional elections took place in 2022.

The above mentioned factors has effected the implementation of Programmes and Projects. Some of the Project Promoters decided to terminate the Project Contracts. The SK-GOVERNANCE Programme, which includes cooperation with Ukraine, adapted some activities within the Programme to reflect, as far as possible, to the current needs and possibilities of cooperation with Ukrainian Partners. The increase in prices was most evident in Programmes with Projects involving construction works, mainly SK-CULTURE, SK-CLIMATE and SK-LOCALDEV. Award of funds to already existing Projects, in line with the conditions set by the Donors/FMO, is one of the measures how to assist the Project Promoters with the unforeseeable price increase. New majors were elected by the end of 2022 in 6 out of 14 Projects under the Programme SK-LOCALDEV, though the impact on the implementation of the projects has so far been limited.

Given the factors described above, the NFP has been closely monitoring the implementation of all Programmes in order to identify risks in a timely manner and find proper risk mitigating measures. The status of particular Programmes in terms of contracting, Projects' implementation and disbursement, varies. Programmes SK-INNOVATION and SK-LOCALDEV are the least advanced. The SK-INNOVATION Programme counters a serious delay inherited from the beginning phase of the implementation as well as very high staff fluctuation at the PO's level. The SK-LOCALDEV also counters some delay in comparison to other Programmes and Projects' implementation, due to many of the above-mentioned factors.

In terms of the Programmes Result Frameworks, the progress in increasing values of some indicators achieved in 2022 based on Projects activities is visible as well. Detailed information is provided by the Programme Operators in Annual Programme Reports, some of the results, however, deserve to be mentioned.

Within the SK-INNOVATION Programme, thanks to the support provided, the achievement value of indicator "number of SMEs supported to apply green technologies/processes/solutions" has increased to 6 and in case of indicator "number of SMEs supported to commercialise green technologies/processes/solutions" reached the value 4 (both within Output 1.1). Progress in SK-CLIMATE Programme Projects implemented confirms increased value 43 achieved for indicator "number of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures implemented" (Output 1.1) and 100 achieved for indicator Number of physical climate change responsive measures carried out in schools (Output 1.2). Within the SK-LOCALDEV Programme, values of indicators under Output 2.1 significantly increased, e.g. "number of joint activities between Roma and non-Roma" reached the value 301, "number of Roma people working in the centres" 54, "number of marginalized Roma communities provided with services" 46.

Within the SK-DOMESTIC Programme, results of individual Outputs are demonstrated by reached values of indicators, e.g. “number of awareness-raising campaigns promoting gender equality” (Output 1.1) with value 9, “number of existing counselling centres supported” with value 9, “number of existing places in shelters supported” (Output 2.1) with value 9, “number of lectures and consultations provided to supporting professions” (Output 3.2) with value 32. Positive trend is present in the SK-GOVERNANCE Programme, where the achieved value of indicator “number of enforcement officers trained” (Output 2.2) increased to 17 and indicator “number of best practices transferred in the field of transparency from Slovakia to Ukraine” (Output 3.1) reached the value of 11.

Considering the remaining time for implementation, the NFP carried out, in cooperation with the POs, an assessment of the absorption capacity of Programmes. Based on its results, a proposal for the amendment of the Memoranda of Understanding Amendments was elaborated and approved (in force from 17<sup>th</sup> February 2023), involving reallocations of uncommitted funds to the Programmes with a high absorption capacity (SK-CULTURE and SK-CLIMATE). The reallocated funds can be used to cover price increase as well as for additional activities within the existing Projects.

Regarding the implementation of the bilateral funds at the level of Programmes, slight progress was achieved thanks to launching several bilateral Calls. At the national level, a new approach, which consists in directly addressing umbrella organizations, was agreed in December 2022. The effect of this action should be visible in the first half of 2023.

In the area of publicity, two major activities shall be mentioned. An online educational campaign associated with a competition on Facebook and Instagram has been run by the National Focal Point and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bratislava. The joint reach of this social media campaign was almost 100,000 people. The second excellent example of a publicity activity, which directly strengthened bilateral cooperation at the highest political level, was the State visit of the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR, Mrs. Veronika Remišová and the Minister of Culture of the SR Mrs. Natália Milanová to Norway in November 2022.

## **2. COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS AND EFFECTS OF THE GRANTS**

### **Business and Innovation**

In 2022, the domain of business and innovation in Slovakia experienced relief from the retreating COVID-19 pandemic. However, the outbreak of war due to Russia’s invasion of neighbouring Ukraine in early 2022 brought a lot of new uncertainty into the markets, especially due to extremely increased and volatile prices of some utilities and fuels, as well as certain types of goods. Thus, besides the continued effort of the Slovak Government to improve the conditions for doing business and prepare the implementation of The Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, it had to develop measures to compensate for the energetic crisis. At the same time, this difficult situation further stressed the need for greener and more sustainable solutions brought by the business and innovation sectors.

#### **Business environment**

In the Slovak business environment in 2022, barriers and constraints to business activities prevailed over the supporting factors. The initiatives aimed at its evaluation emphasise high and volatile prices of utilities,

high tax and social security burden, complicated and unstable business legislation, or insufficient availability of qualified workforce as the most problematic areas. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's National Expert Survey, showed a continued slight increase in the overall composite index in 2022, from 4.3 to 4.4. However, this is still in the negative part of the evaluation scale (from 0 to 10, where "5" is a neutral value).<sup>1</sup> For example, experts were positive about improvements in government policies related to bureaucracy and tax burden on business. At the same time, they reflected on the market instability, especially, the increased costs of basic utilities.<sup>2</sup>

Besides reacting to the new crisis resulting from extreme and unpredictable prices of utilities, policymakers in the field of entrepreneurship continued in the effort to reduce bureaucratic and administrative burden, e.g. by preparing the 3<sup>rd</sup> package of anti-bureaucratic measures<sup>3</sup>, improved methodology for assessing the impact of new legislation<sup>4</sup> or for avoiding gold-plating<sup>5</sup>.

Finally, as for the overall economic development, the first preliminary estimates showed an increase in the Slovak economy by 1.7% in 2022. Also, in Q4 2022, gross domestic product at constant prices exceeded GDP values for the same period before the pandemic crisis (Q4 2019). Total employment in Q4 2022 reached 2.435 million persons and increased by 1.1% year-on-year. After seasonal adjustments, the number of employed persons increased by 1.5% compared to Q4 2021.<sup>6</sup>

### Development of the SME sector

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent an essential part of the Slovak economy, creating three-quarters (74.3%) of jobs in the business sector (and 59.0 % of employment in the overall economy). In terms of value-added, SMEs generate around 55% of the value added in the non-financial corporate sector.<sup>7</sup> In 2022, 20,375 new companies were created in Slovakia, which is the second consecutive year-over-year increase (by 3.6% compared to 2021), but the number of newly-created firms still remains below the pre-pandemic year 2019. Next, the number of cancelled companies rose to 3,767, which is an increase of almost 12% compared to 2021 (not considering the entities technically erased from the company register as inactive).

The support of SMEs in Slovakia is fragmented at both, regional and national levels. The public support infrastructure involves a broad spectrum of different institutional actors, each of them operating the support schemes and activities in their specific domains while lacking sufficient coordination.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, for SMEs, it is often difficult to navigate through the different support options.<sup>9</sup> Also, the respondents of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's National Expert Survey indicate that, on average, Government entrepreneurship programs lack sufficiency, especially in terms of the availability of Government assistance for entrepreneurs through single contact points.<sup>10</sup>

### Welfare Technology and Ambient Assisted Living

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gemconsortium.org/file/open?fileId=51147>

<sup>2</sup> Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Slovakia 2022 preliminary findings

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mhsr.sk/podnikatelske-prostredie/opatrenia-na-zlepsenie-podnikatelskeho-prostredia?csrt=1164104061422584515>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mhsr.sk/podnikatelske-prostredie/jednotna-metodika?csrt=1164104061422584515>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mhsr.sk/podnikatelske-prostredie/reforma-goldplating?csrt=1164104061422584515>

<sup>6</sup> <https://lnk.sk/dbei>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/sprava\\_o\\_stave\\_msp\\_2021.pdf](https://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/sprava_o_stave_msp_2021.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://monitoringmsp.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Sprivodca-iniciativami-na-podporu-MSP-2022\\_aktualizacia.pdf](https://monitoringmsp.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Sprivodca-iniciativami-na-podporu-MSP-2022_aktualizacia.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://monitoringmsp.sk/2020/04/03/podpora-verejnej-spravy-pre-msp-je-prilis-komplikovana-a-neprehladna/>

<sup>10</sup> Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Slovakia 2022 preliminary findings

The continuing ageing of the Slovak population will soon bring an increased demand for the care of elderly persons. Many people from older age groups are at risk of being excluded from the information society and its benefits, mainly due to limited digital literacy. The same applies to persons with disabilities.

In Slovakia, the issue of welfare technology (WT) and ambient assisted living (AAL) is only partially reflected in several national-level policies aimed at the elderly or disabled persons. The innovative and technological support for healthy ageing and inclusion of vulnerable persons living alone have not been explicitly mainstreamed on policy levels.

In recent years, attention to welfare technology and AAL has been paid especially by several self-governing regions, municipalities and NGOs in Slovakia, as they are often responsible for implementing social services and some health services. However, instead of long-term and systemic efforts, the implementation of welfare technology and AAL is mostly done through projects with constrained duration and funding. Finally, certain trends could also positively correlate with welfare technology and AAL development in Slovakia, such as the continuous development of innovative start-ups, the popularization of smart home technologies, as well as the rise of social entrepreneurship and its ecosystem.

### Education

The main challenges for Slovakia's education and training system include insufficient investment in education and training, comparatively lower quality of its outcomes, low attractiveness and low remuneration of the teaching profession and related increased shortage of teachers, low participation in early childhood education and care, problematic inclusiveness of education particularly for Roma children and children with special educational needs, high clustering of pupils with special educational needs in fully separate educational settings, increasing rate of early leavers from education and training with inequalities between the regions and for the Roma community, and gaps in learning outcomes depending on socioeconomic status.<sup>11, 12</sup>

To face some of these challenges, Slovakia has been working on several reforms and policy developments at all levels of the educational system, from the curricular reform at elementary schools, through reforms in vocational education and training (VET), to major efforts to improve the quality, governance and internationalisation of higher education. The reforms are built on The Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, The National Programme for Development of Education and Training, The National Reform Programme of the Slovak Republic 2022, The Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education until 2030, The Strategy for Internationalisation of Higher Education until 2030, The Lifelong learning and counselling strategy for 2021-2030, or The Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030.<sup>13</sup> However, in most cases, the real effects of these reforms will only be visible in the forthcoming years.

After the slow return to a pre-COVID regime in 2022, the war in neighbouring Ukraine brought another stress test for the Slovak education system. As Slovakia became home to thousands of refugees, including children, the school network faced a new challenge – integrating Ukrainian children into education through available and quality education that would reflect their specific needs. Almost 10,500 children from Ukraine visited Slovak schools (as of May 2022). This required systematic support at all levels.

<sup>11</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-05/2022-european-semester-country-report-slovakia\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-05/2022-european-semester-country-report-slovakia_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/95cd5f2c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/95cd5f2c-en#chapter-d1e19118>

<sup>13</sup> <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/slovakia/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments>

## Effects of the Grants

The implementation of the “SK-INNOVATION Business Development, Innovation and SMEs” Programme scaled significantly in 2022, with 35 supported Projects being implemented throughout the year.

Due to intensified implementation of the Programme, several potential achievements that can be related to the progress towards reducing social and economic disparities are foreseen. Effects towards reducing social and economic disparities are expected in terms of job creation or improved economic performance of the supported entities. However, as no Projects with related indicators have been completed so far, they could not be yet reported. Thus, concrete effects of the Grants towards reducing social and economic disparities are not yet available to assess.

According to the European Innovation Scoreboard evaluation, Slovakia is an emerging innovator<sup>14</sup>, which means its overall innovation performance is below 75% of the EU average. Thus, the support of the Programme to Slovak enterprises to help them develop innovative green technologies, processes, solutions, products or services, or develop innovative welfare and ambient assisted living technologies, solutions and processes, has the potential to bring important effects. At the same time, the limits of this potential lie in the number of enterprises supported by the Programme.

The Project “Research and development activities of innovative technology of intelligent cultivation line” (BIN 01\_2021\_012) aims to bring innovation into the area of disposable cultivation devices and producers of biological fertilisers, thanks to an intelligent cultivation line for continuous cultivation of effective microorganisms adapted to the soil type, cultivated crop, ecological conditions of a specific place of usage. The development and application of this innovative solution will be accompanied by an application for intellectual property rights. The effect is expected not only in terms of increased competitiveness of the Project Promoter but also in bringing a high-value-added solution to the green agricultural technology sector.

The Project “Development of Smart Furniture with Artificial Intelligence and Medical Devices” (BIN 01\_2021\_010) aims to develop specialised intelligent furniture (movable interior and exterior units with an integrated robotic mechanism) controlled by computer software and artificial intelligence connected to a medical centre. This has the potential to foster the emerging market in Slovakia.

Both areas are not only cutting-edge fields with expected future growth, but they are also highly relevant for Slovakia. In terms of WT and AAL, it is still an emerging, yet very promising and needed sector. In terms of green innovations, while Slovakia reaches the average of EU countries in the development of environmental technologies (measured as the number of environment-related inventions divided by the total number of patents), its performance dropped compared to the 2015 results. In addition, the urgency of the green transition became even more intense in 2022 due to the energy crisis.

In terms of the progress towards strengthening bilateral relations with Donor State entities, certain concrete results at the Project level are already evident. In particular, out of 20 Projects contracted under the Calls BIN SGS01, BIN01 and BIN02 at the end of December 2022, 8 were carried out together with Donor States Partners.

## Climate Change

In January 2022, Slovakia successfully launched the Deposit System for plastic bottles and cans. Slovakia became the first in the region to successfully join the ranks of European countries that

<sup>14</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f0e0330d-534f-11ed-92ed-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-272941691>

motivate behaviour that is more responsible and effectively solve the problem of littering. The deposit system aims to collect 90% or more of plastic and aluminium packaging, recycle it effectively, and then use the material in the production of new packaging<sup>15</sup>. After the first year the return rate of PET bottles and cans exceeded 70%<sup>16</sup>.

In June 2022, the Slovak Government approved the new Action Plan for Wetlands for the years 2022-2024. This task results from the Ramsar Convention for the Protection of Wetlands, to which the Slovak Republic acceded in 1990. The Action Plan has 4 strategic objectives: to address the causes of the negative phenomenon of wetland loss and degradation; ensure effective protection and management of the system of Ramsar sites, as well as the wise/sustainable use of all wetlands; respectively support the application and implementation of measures. The proposed measures are expected to significantly improve the state of wetland organisms - plants, animals, habitats occurring in the open country, especially within our 14 Ramsar sites, which are legally territories of international importance and other wetland protected territories<sup>17</sup>.

Climate measures are also reflected in The Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic<sup>18</sup> (adopted in July 2021), primarily focusing on improving the energy efficiency of family houses. In the recovery plan, €528 mil. are allocated for this purpose. An important part of the renovation of buildings is also the reform of the management of construction waste. The reform of construction waste consists of 3 important legislative changes: an amendment to the Waste Act, a regulation of the Government of the Slovak Republic, which regulates the rates of fees for waste disposal in landfills, and an executive decree on construction waste and demolition waste. At the beginning of June, the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved the reform of construction waste, which will increase the rate of recycling of construction materials before they end up in landfills, support the circular economy and save finances within construction sector.

To align current EU ambitions, in 2021 the Ministry of Environment started works on the historically first national climate law, which will help Slovakia reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The legislation will also be a roadmap to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Slovak Government Council for the European Green Deal (EGD) held in January 2023, was devoted to the upcoming legislative changes of the preparation of Climate Act and the related implementation of the Fit for 55 climate package, and the amendment to the Act on Emissions Trading. In order to coordinate the national position on the Fit for 55 Package, 6 working groups (for the fields of energy, industry, agriculture, construction, transport and circular economy) were established. The working groups will deal with individual legislative proposals from the package<sup>19</sup>. The measures of the package will also be transformed into the national legislation of Slovakia through the new law on climate and low-carbon transformation. The role of the law will be, for example, to determine exactly which state bodies and institutions will be responsible for fulfilling individual climate goals. At the beginning of 2023, the climate law was submitted to the interdepartmental comment procedure.

## Effects of the Grants

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.minzp.sk/spravy/zalohovy-system-plastove-flase-plechovky-bol-uspesne-spusteny.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.minzp.sk/spravy/februar/vysledky-zalohovania-za-prvy-rok-prekonali-vsetky-ocakavania-navratnost-prekrocila-70.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.minzp.sk/spravy/vlada-schvalila-novy-akcny-plan-mokrade-roky-2022-2024.html>

<sup>18</sup> [Slovakia's recovery and resilience plan \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/slovakia/recovery-and-resilience-plan)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.minzp.sk/spravy/rada-vlady-europsku-zelenu-dohodu-slovensko-je-odhodlane-splnit-klimaticke-ciele-sucasne-tym-podporit-transformaciu-na.html>



Under the Calls ACC01 and ACC02, cities can improve the quality of public buildings and reduce CO2 emissions via thermal insulation of buildings. The 8 Projects are equally distributed across Slovakia and bring tailor-made climate change solutions respecting the actual needs of the territory.

Under the small grant scheme (Call ACC03), 30 primary and secondary schools incorporate agenda of climate change into the educational process. Primary and secondary schools are helping to raise student's awareness of the climate crisis and ways to prepare for the adverse effects of climate change in everyday life. By implementing these Projects in various types of school and regions, the number of students participating in awareness campaigns is increasing. Such approach helps to reduce social and economic disparities of Slovak students. The physical measures and interventions reflecting climate change implemented are not only improving the quality of well-being in schools and school campuses but are also beneficial for the residents living near school. The goal of several Projects is to increase active mobility and thus changing behaviour of students and their parents, by promoting and campaigning walking and cycling.

In the Call ACC04, 6 Projects were approved, under which 21 wetlands in 6 regions of Slovakia will be restored. Awareness of climate change mitigation and adaptation will also be raised through 3 projects supported under the Call ACC05.

The Projects under the Call ACC04 will contribute to the restoration and strengthening of the ability of degraded ecosystems of wetlands to adapt to climate change and ensure the sustainable fulfilment of their ecosystem services. Moreover, the mitigation of the negative impacts of climate change on the environment will increase the quality of life of the inhabitants. The restoration of wetland ecosystems will lead to the stabilization of the microclimate, the prevention of the consequences of floods, the prevention of erosion and dry, dusty areas, the increase of plant species and thus a greater number of natural pollinators, the increase of animal species and the provision of ecosystem services.

The implementation of Projects can serve as a motivating factor for the region's transition to ecological and sustainable agriculture, which is fully in line with the goals of the new EU common agricultural policy. This will bring an increase in the cultivation of local multi-species crops, an increase in small farmers, and an opportunity will be created for livestock breeding and grazing.

In respect of strengthening bilateral relations with Donor State entities, bilateral cooperation is an important component of the SK-CLIMATE Programme. Of the 6 Projects within the Call ACC04, 3 Projects have actively involved important Norwegian Partners, which is undoubtedly a great benefit for the support of bilateral cooperation, mutual sharing of experience and know-how.

## Local Development

In 2022, the Slovak Government approved the Action Plans for the individual priority areas of the Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation until 2030. The Strategy and Action Plans define the direction of public policies at the level of priorities in order to achieve visible change in the area of equality and inclusion of Roma.

According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, in 2022, the average inflation reached a level of 12.8%. The high price increases were mainly influenced by the rise in energy prices and record increases in the recent history of the Slovak Republic were observed in food and fuel prices. According to European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), as a result of the sharp rise in energy prices, more and more EU citizens and consumers across Europe are falling into energy poverty. This includes also Slovak citizens, as 5.2% of the Slovak population has arrears on their energy bills, which corresponds to more than 283,000 inhabitants. This problem is most visible in the case of multi-member

households. While in the total population of Slovakia, 5% of working people live below the poverty line, in the case of people from Marginalized Roma Communities, it is more than half (57%) of the employed. This proves that the simple fact that someone is employed might not be sufficient for not falling into poverty. The so-called working poverty is a relatively significant phenomenon in the environment of Marginalized Roma Communities.

One of the very important and influential aspects of 2022 were the municipal and regional elections in Slovak Republic. In the municipal elections in 2022, 52 Roma mayors were elected, which is a new record. Before the 2022 elections, there were 44 Roma mayors in Slovakia, and in 2002 there were only 12 of them.

Effect of the war in Ukraine can be identified in several areas. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees data (UNHCR, 2022), 90,600 refugees from Ukraine are in Slovakia. The perception of Ukrainian refugees among the Visegrad Group Member States is mostly positive. However, there are many barriers that negatively affect the integration of people from Ukraine - lack of finances for municipalities, inability to integrate Ukrainian children in the education system, complicated and bureaucratic process of employing refugees, insufficient support for single women with children, language barrier in the offices (MAREENA, 2022).

### Effects of the Grants

Under the Call LDI01, networks of community centres implementing various activities are being set up at municipal level to help improve the access of vulnerable children and young people from disadvantaged areas to a wider range of extracurricular activities, especially in the eastern part of Slovakia. The Projects faced challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing prices, and an uncertain market situation. However, in Spišská Belá, as part of the Project called TogetherCloser (LDI1003), it was possible to create the educational centre Pôjd - a space for informal education, inspiration, and cooperation. The centre was put into operation at the end of May 2022.

The Call LDI02 aimed to support community-level interventions with direct benefits for Marginalized Roma Communities through an integrated approach, i.e. by linking several interventions to improve their status and opportunities in the field of education, employment, health, housing, or non-discrimination. The Project DOM.ov (LDI02015) focuses on several selected localities - villages located in the Košice Region where Roma population lives in segregated concentrations affected by deep poverty. It is based on the "housing ready" approach, where the provision of physical space for housing is combined with targeted social work and education. Clients must go through preparation, financial education and a financial savings phase to qualify for a home loan. The Project Promoter than assists the clients in building the house and also assists the municipality in providing the necessary technical infrastructure to the houses. As part of the process, job counseling to clients is also provided.

The main objective of the last Call LDI03 is to support the capacity building of smaller local organizations through the implementation of local initiatives and the repeated use of proven good practices of local development and social inclusion of marginalized Roma communities in the areas of health, education, employment, housing, and non-discrimination, with a primary focus on non-discrimination. On 8<sup>th</sup> November 2022, the Job Agency of the Banská Bystrica Self-governing Region organized a seminar in Bratislava focused on implementation of temporary compensatory measures by employers and diversity management in the workplace (in the context of employment of Marginalized Roma Communities). The goal of the Project is to increase awareness and better use of temporary compensatory measures in the employment of Roma men and women, especially Marginalized Roma Communities.

The bilateral cooperation within the Projects brings a positive effect on the implementation process. For example, within the Project "Innovative training of teachers with the aim of increasing their intercultural competence in the educational process of Roma pupils", 10 school personnel members

have been trained in cooperation with the Norwegian Project Partner, the European Wergeland Center multipliers in the field of human rights and democratic citizenship.

### Domestic and Gender-based Violence

Violence against women is one of the most serious forms of violation of human rights and interference with human dignity. The COVID-19 pandemic as well as the migration of mainly women and children associated with the war in Ukraine caused by Russian aggression revealed the unpreparedness of the Slovak legal system to respond flexibly to the challenges associated with the necessary protection of women from gender-based violence. The negative consequences associated with the pandemic on domestic and gender-based violence in 2022 were not as significant as in 2021. The war in Ukraine also affected assistance to victims of domestic and gender-based violence. In addition to helping victims of violence from the Slovak Republic, Centers for Victims of Violence in 2022 provided professional assistance and accommodation facilities to victims of war (many of whom suffered violence) fleeing Ukraine. They have provided social, psychological, legal, and financial counseling to mothers and children from Ukraine. They provide them with a Slovak language course and help them find a suitable job so that they can integrate into life in Slovak Republic.

On a European level, the European Institute for Gender Equality has published the annual Gender Equality Index, which evaluates the level of equality in individual countries in the EU. The Slovak Republic received a total score of 56 points in 2022, which is the same as in 2021. The European average is at the level of 68.6 points<sup>20</sup>. It was not possible to measure the level of violence against women in the Slovak Republic due to the absence of relevant data. The European Institute for Gender Equality therefore started its own survey of the level of domestic and gender-based violence in the Slovak Republic, the results of which should be known in 2024<sup>21</sup>.

The Government of the Slovak Republic adopted in January 2022 the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women for the years 2022-2027<sup>22</sup>. The goal of the Government of the Slovak Republic is to focus on ensuring protection and access to long-term assistance for victims. As part of prevention, the Government of the Slovak Republic aims to increase awareness and ensure the systematic collection of data on gender-based violence. The above-mentioned National Action Plan also envisages the adoption of extensive legislation, which, in addition to the obligation of the police force to intervene, would also ensure stricter punishments for offenders and consistent protection of victims.

In March 2022, the Institute for Work and Family Research launched pilot counseling centers in the cities of Humenné, Košice, Nové Zámky, Trnava and Žilina as part of the National Project<sup>23</sup> Family Counseling - psychological counseling services for individuals, couples, and families. The main goal of the National Project is to contribute to a systemic solution in the field of preventing violence against women, mental illnesses, strengthening family relationships and intergenerational communication by creating conditions for providing professional, especially psychological counseling for individuals, couples, and families in solving problems in the family, marriage, intergenerational problems, and interpersonal relationships<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> EIGE. (online). Available at: <<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/country/SK> > Accessed at: 16.02.2023.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> MPSVaR. (online). Available at: <<https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/ministerstvo/poradne-organy/ludske-prava-narodnostne-mensiny-rodovu-rovnost-sr/vybor-rodovu-rovnost/dokumenty-udalosti.html>> Accessed at 07.02.2023.

<sup>23</sup> IVPR. (online). Available at: <<https://ivpr.gov.sk/narodny-projekt-rodinne-poradne-poradensko-psychologicke-sluzby-pre-jednotlivcov-pary-a-rodiny/>> Accessed at: 07.02.2023.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Subsequently, based on the amendment to Act No. 171/1993 Coll. on the police force as amended, which brought into force the obligation of police officers to send a record of reporting an offender to an intervention center, enough intervention centers were established in 2022 to cover all regions of the Slovak Republic<sup>25</sup>. Intervention centers are financed through subsidy schemes of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic and their tasks include evaluating the threat of danger to the life or health of the victim of violence and drawing up a security plan.

### Effects of the Grants

In the area of gender equality, individual project teams have established focus groups and they are launching campaigns as well as educational activities. Since campaigns and educational activities will take place throughout the whole implementation period, only interim results are currently available. 68.61% of the population to be targeted by the awareness-raising activities within the Projects are favorable to gender equality and 54.83% reject gender stereotyping. 57.20% of the students in targeted schools within the Projects are favorable to gender equality and 54.88% reject gender stereotyping.<sup>26</sup> So far, 17 awareness-raising campaigns promoting gender equality have been held (the Programme's target value 15). So far, the lectures specifically focused on gender equality have been provided in 58 schools (target value 89) in 25 districts. 13 of them are the schools with pupils from Marginalized Roma Communities (target value 30). The lectures are planned through the whole Projects' implementation.

Outcome 2 focuses on the protection and support of victims of domestic and gender-based violence. All the Projects already started their implementation by providing the counselling services to victims of violence in May/June 2022. So far, 283 beneficiaries (target value 700) have been provided with the services. A good example is the Project DGV02013 as a joint Project of the NGOs - services providers in the Košice Region – Fenestra Košice, OZ Hana Spišská Nová Ves and Help to Family Michalovce. Altogether 7 new counselling centers are going to be established (target value 15) and 15 new places established of the women's shelters (target value 50).

Outcome 3 focuses on strengthening the protection and support of victims of domestic and gender-based violence. Under Outcome 3 the Pre-defined Project of the Institute for Labor and Family Research "Improving the victim-oriented approach – a tool enhancing the capacity to fight violence against women and domestic violence" is in full implementation from 2022. So far 32 out of 47 planned lectures and consultations were provided to supporting professions. At the end of 2022, 6 training modules for Centers for Children and Family in the field of prevention and intervention in cases of sexual abuse were implemented. More than 1,850 participants took part. At the same time, a specialized course for domestic violence investigators was completed, and on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022 the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic accredited the course.

With regards to the bilateral cooperation, several Norwegian Partners are actively involved, such as the Norwegian organization Sex og Politikk, Alternative to violence, KUN and others. The active involvement of these organizations directly contribute to strengthening bilateral cooperation in this area.

### Culture

The basic legislative framework for the protection of cultural heritage in Slovakia in 2022 did not change. The main policy document in the field of monument protection for the year 2022 in Slovakia

<sup>25</sup> Stop Violence. (online). Available at: <<https://www.zastavmenasilie.gov.sk/news/intervencne-centra-pre-zeny-zazivajuce-nasilie-v-sr/>> Accessed at: 07.02.2023.

<sup>26</sup> Annual Progress Report 2022

was the Strategy on Monument Fund Protection for the years 2017 – 2021<sup>27</sup>, prepared by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic together with its Action Plans for the years 2021-2022<sup>28</sup>.

During 2022, the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic was working on an important document called Culture and Creative Industry Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2030<sup>29</sup>. The strategy should bring solutions to urgent challenges, but also identify the priorities of Slovak culture and creative industry including cultural heritage.

There were three new listings added to the Representative Lists of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Slovakia. The Representative List is a listing of remarkable elements of the intangible cultural heritage of Slovakia. The creation of the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Slovakia represents the fundamental step in compiling the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. These are the 3 elements included on the given list in 2022: 1. Babka Bobbing Lace; 2. Kyjatice Toys and 3. Tourists Routes Marking.

Slovakia has been elected as a member of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>30</sup>. Along with Uzbekistan, Slovakia started its four-year mandate on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2022, during the Committee's 17<sup>th</sup> session in Morocco. Slovakia will be even more active in sharing good practice in using intangible heritage to support a sustainable way of life with the international community. UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Committee was created by the Convention of 2003, which Slovakia was among the first countries to ratify in 2006.

In April 2022, UNESCO launched a community-based needs identification for safeguarding living heritage among communities, groups and individuals from Ukraine displaced by the war<sup>31</sup>. Focus was given to 5 neighbouring countries, which were receiving most refugees in the first weeks and months of the war: Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The project was developed following the recommendations of the first coordination meeting in support of safeguarding Ukrainian living heritage, organized by UNESCO online on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic has also offered help Ukrainian cultural and artistic organizations, which need space to safely store their cultural heritage items. Slovak museums and galleries can make available their depositories for temporary storage of art objects, paintings and collections from Ukraine<sup>32</sup>.

In 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic was replaced by an energy crisis, record inflation, the unavailability of building materials, and a military conflict in Ukraine. The mentioned circumstances made renovation and restoration of cultural heritage objects much more difficult. In 2022, the prices of construction materials increased from 20 up to 150%<sup>33</sup>. This is creating the obstacles to the implementation of projects with fixed budgets. In addition, the waiting periods for the delivery of materials for projects under construction continue to be extended, which could extend the completion of the project by several months.

Same as within the area of cultural heritage, the situation in contemporary art in Slovakia was strongly influenced by the above-mentioned major global events. March 2022 brought to the cultural and creative sector (CCS) the gradual lifting of COVID-19 measures after 3 years. This was an important condition for cultural production and consumption in 2022 as the change in the epidemic situation meant the refreshment of the continuous activity of cultural institutions in Slovakia. Another aspect

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.pamiatky.sk/Content/Data/File/sluz\\_predpis/Strategia\\_ochrany\\_pamiatkového\\_fondu\\_2017-2022.pdf](http://www.pamiatky.sk/Content/Data/File/sluz_predpis/Strategia_ochrany_pamiatkového_fondu_2017-2022.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.culture.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Akcny\\_plan\\_2021-2022.pdf](https://www.culture.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Akcny_plan_2021-2022.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/strategia-kultury-a-kreativneho-priemyslu-2030/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/medialny-servis/aktuality-ministerstva-kultury/historicky-uspech-pre-slovensko-v-ramci-svetovej-organizacie-unesco/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/projects/assessing-the-needs-of-living-heritage-safeguarding-among-displaced-communities-from-ukraine-in-five-neighboring-countries-hungary-moldova-poland-romania-and-slovakia-00479>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/medialny-servis/aktuality-ministerstva-kultury/ministerka-kultury-natalia-milanova-poskytla-ukrajine-moznost-bezpecneho-ulozenia-predmetov-kulturnej-hodnoty/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.trend.sk/spravy/navrat-cien-materialov-energie-uroven-pred-krizou-stavbari-neocakavaju>

that strongly determined the CCS sector was the Russian aggression against Ukraine. For cultural organizations, this situation means a new and specific audience characterized by psychological, language, cultural, and social barriers. Numerous civic societies in the CCS reacted to this situation by providing different types of help to Ukrainian migrants (such as cultural/integrational programmes, special programmes for children, language courses, or free entry for cultural events). Some of them tried to support the creators coming from Ukraine that developed the potential of the CCS in Slovakia.

At the political level, negative impact of the economic crisis on cities' and regional budgets for culture can be observed. As a consequence of the growth of energy prices, some stakeholders of CCS had to close their venues during the winter season, e.g. Divadlo Pôtoň, Project Promoter of the Project CLT02023.

The City of Bratislava's abolishment of the donation for culture sector is followed by abolishment or decreasing of donation for culture in other cities in Slovakia. This can have a negative impact especially on independent culture sector in Slovakia in the upcoming years. Especially, in the days when the entities of CCS have to deal with decline in number of spectators as a consequence of a long-term COVID-19 restrictions, as well as worse economic situation.

### Effects of the Grants

All supported 18 Projects (both Pre-defined Projects including) have enhanced the condition of the Slovak cultural heritage by improving the physical conditions of important cultural and natural monuments contributed. The quality of realisation of all ongoing Projects is helping to fulfil the recent cultural policy goal of Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic which is to decrease the so called Monument debt – in 2022 estimated to 5.4 billion euros.

The contribution of the Project results to the reduction of economic and social disparities is still not possible to fully evaluate as the majority of the sites are in the process of renovation and reconstruction. Therefore, the process of creation of the business–entrepreneurship strategies is not finished yet. However, their entrepreneurship potential and potential for cultural co-operation and involvement of local communities was already partly used. Many of the Projects include very interesting entrepreneurship activities<sup>34</sup> which should generate incomes in the near future as well as support the sustainability of the restored monuments and future local development of communities in which they are situated. One of the successful examples is the opening of the "Castanea" patisserie in Modrý Kameň castle. As the majority of sites will be renovated within the next months there is also a potential of increasing the incomes of the sites also from the visits by domestic or foreign visitors. Also the majority of the new jobs which were created are supporting the social and economic development of local communities as the hired people are usually local experts, architects, conservationists or craftsman – white and also blue collars.

The Pre-defined Project "Pro Monumenta II" implemented by the Monuments Office of the Slovak Republic was in its final phase in 2022. The regional inspection teams have been supported by 3 new regional inspectors (as new jobs), 3 new small mobile workshops were purchased, all 3 regional craft work training centres (in Trnava, Banská Štiavnica and Levoča) were renovated, 29 craftsmen trained and 3 bilateral workshops and trainings organised (in Oslo, Trnava and Banská Štiavnica). Altogether 321 cultural monuments were monitored<sup>35</sup>.

The Pre-defined Project "Red Monastery – reborn", implemented by the Monuments Office of the Slovak Republic in 2022 finished with the restoration work and the premises are almost ready for the operations and providing services. These include the premises of future brewery, digital detox camp,

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.eegrants.sk/programy/kultura/projekty/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.promonumenta.sk/>

premises of Cyprián's manufactory with the medicinal herbs production and Monastery school. Also the monastery small gardens were restored<sup>36</sup>. On 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> September 2022, the first joint meeting of this Project took place with representatives of the Norwegian Partners in Slovakia. A part of the meeting was also the seminar attended by many important local organisations from Slovakia such as mayors of Haligovce, Červený Kláštor, Lechnica, local representatives of the church, National Park Pieniny and many others.

All Projects were contributing to the strengthening the bilateral co-operation by organizing common activities, events and visits. For many of the Projects it was finally, after the pandemic years, possible to organise the first personal meetings with the Project Partners and by this to strengthen the friendships and trust between them.

Activities implemented in 2022 under the Calls CLT02 and CLT03 have mediated different areas of contemporary art, especially music, visual art, literature and book industry, performing art, architecture, and design to the general public in Slovakia and Donor States. The aim was to foster their relations to culture and mediate positive values, such as democracy, tolerance, freedom of speech. Especially in the year of culture refreshing after the COVID-19 pandemic, these effects are considered as very important. The Projects helped to fulfil Outcome 2 - Access to contemporary arts improved. Within the Project CLT03033, Bratislava Book Festival (BRaK 2022) took place, approximately 1,500 participants visited the program of the festival with 25 events focused on literature (discussions, readings, lectures, and author's meetings), 5 exhibitions, 5 concerts, 2 performances and 12 events for children. In total more than 80 artists took part of the program.

In 2022 a unique exhibition of Norwegian porcelain called "The history and future of Porsgrund Porcelain Factory" in the Slovak National Museum – Museum of Ľudovít Štúr in Modra. Also, an exhibition of Modra ceramic called "The Story of Modra Ceramics" happened in Porselensmuseet - Telemark Museum (Project CLT02020 "Clay Day - Magic of clay"). This Project has positive effect on the development of community life and fostering the local identity and cultural heritage.

The implementation of Outputs under the Call CLT02 in 2022 supported the integration process of marginalized and disadvantaged communities, helped the debarrierisation of culture, supported well-being, and preserved minority cultural heritage and identity. The Outputs touched also the most vulnerable groups in Slovakia, such as seniors, the Roma community, homeless people, and migrants). For example, Project Promoter and Project Partners of the Project CLT02019 Slovak-Icelandic cooperation in the development of small cultural centre – SLICE organised integrational events for Ukrainian community in Banská Štiavnica.

## Good Governance and Cross-border Cooperation

The Slovak Government has prepared and adopted reforms, several of which are directly related to The Resilience and Recovery Plan of the Slovak Republic<sup>37</sup>. For instance, the media reform that meets the standards outlined in the European Media Freedom Act and improves source protection, transparency in media ownership, and promotes media pluralism<sup>38</sup>. The Integrity Principles, which define the principles of honesty, integrity, accountability, transparency, and decency for central government officials, were developed in 2022 and approved by the Cabinet in January 2023<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> <https://muzeumcervenyklastor.sk/>

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733642/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)733642\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733642/EPRS_BRI(2022)733642_EN.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/56\\_1\\_194041\\_coun\\_chap\\_slovakia\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/56_1_194041_coun_chap_slovakia_en.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Read more at: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/vlada-schvalila-zasady-integrity-pre/691132-clanok.html>

On 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022 the municipal and regional elections were held. This further influenced the context within which existing and future Projects have been implemented. Newly elected representatives of municipalities and self-governing regions will need time to adapt to the existing requirements of the implementation mechanisms. The Government lost majority in the Parliament and elections will be held in September 2023.

The threats associated with disinformation and propaganda have only been amplified by Russia's military aggression in Ukraine. Conspiracies are believed by approximately 50% of the Slovak population<sup>40</sup>. As a response, the Government has adopted strict regulation (blocking) of disinformation websites and has had several successes in detecting espionage activities<sup>41</sup>.

### Corruption and its prevention

Slovakia has improved by 7 places in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) compared to the CPI published in 2021 and rank 49<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries compared<sup>42</sup>. The new Whistleblower Protection Office, established in September 2021, has delivered the first positive results in the form of protected whistle-blowers. A police reform aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the police in fighting corruption entered into force on February 2022. The police and prosecutors continue their efforts to detect and investigate corruption and abuse of power.

### Effectiveness of judiciary

The most important legislative change in justice is the court map reform. It aims at increasing the efficiency of judicial power and ensuring the specialisation of judges was approved by the Parliament in April 2022, effective as of June 2023. The Cabinet has been preparing a major amendment of criminal code, which, for example, is to adjust the level of severity of sentences, provide more room for alternative sentences, reduce penalties for drug users (e.g., marijuana), or more precisely define the crime of rape as an act without the consent of the other person<sup>43</sup>. The changes are perceived as necessary and positive by most professionals.

### Public Procurement

Another of the pillars of reforms in the framework of The Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic is mandatory green public procurement<sup>44</sup> in the procurement of construction works. In August 2022, the Government approved a resolution that requires Ministries and other State institutions to apply green public procurement tools from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 in public procurement related to the construction or reconstruction of land structures above €30,000. According to the Ministry of Environment of the SR, green public procurement helps to mitigate the climate crisis and supports the sustainable use of natural resources. The strategic goal for Slovakia is to achieve a 50% share of "green" contracts implemented by state administration bodies out of the total volume of contracts concluded by them for selected product groups. According to Envirostrategy<sup>45</sup>, this share should reach up to 70% of the total value of public procurement in 2030.

### Cross-border cooperation Slovakia – Ukraine

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/GLOBSEC-Trends-2022.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22861617/two-slovaks-arrested-and-charged-with-bribery-and-espionage-in-cooperation-with-russian-spies.html>

<sup>42</sup> <https://transparency.sk/sk/plan-posunut-slovensko-v-rebricku-vnimania-korupcie-sa-naplnil-spolovice/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/karas-v-novele-trestneho-zakona-odstr/682410-clanok.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.minzp.sk/obehove-hospodarstvo/environmentalne-manazerstvo/zelene-verejne-obstaravanie/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.minzp.sk/iep/strategie-materialy/envirostrategia-2030.html>



The military aggression of Russia against Ukraine that began on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and the ongoing war in the neighboring state of Slovakia represented the major event influencing the context of Slovak political, economic, and social development in 2022.

President of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová visited Ukraine in May 2022 and the key political representatives of Slovakia have continued to show support for Ukrainian fight for freedom. Ukraine is now considered to be a viable adept for future EU and NATO membership by the current Slovak state representatives and an important component of European security. This year has also showed the strong public support and direct citizens' actions of assistance and help to Ukraine and refugees escaping the war that will further materialize in the deepening of civil society ties between Slovakia and Ukraine.

The Russian war against Ukraine and post-COVID situation also brought economic changes. The major ones have been the energy crisis and the consequent growing inflation rate. Anti-inflation package was passed in Parliament in May 2022 and the maximum gas and electricity prices were approved, saving costs of consumers. In addition to the approximately one hundred thousand refugees from Ukraine, many of whom entered the job market and supported the economic growth of Slovakia.

The law „Lex Ukraine“ was adopted by the Slovak parliament (in March) and allowed further decisions to be taken vis-a-vis the Russian aggression. The changes included the easing of employment opportunities, support of housing, the access to health care for Ukrainian citizens and so on.

### Effects of the Grants

The protection of minors in family law disputes is the scope of the Project implemented by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic. The Project is closely linked to the court map reform, which entry into force has been postponed to June 2023. The first study visits on knowledge transfer from Norwegian National Courts Administrations took place and educational activities for judges, prosecutors, and mediators were launched in 2022. The Project has a great potential to improve the conditions of one of the most vulnerable groups when interacting with the justice system. The extent to which the Project will be effective will depend heavily on the final number of judges, prosecutors, and mediators who undergo the training.

The Public Procurement Office of the Slovak Republic (PPO) implements the Project “Responsible public procurement” to promote the principle of value for money in public procurement. During the implementation of the Project, the PPO organised several workshops and seminars in this area (the use of MEAT criteria - Most Economically Advantageous Tender). These are important activities that increase the competences of civil servants, and thus enable the application of criteria and the idea of value for money in public procurement in practice. Although the trend in using MEAT criteria in public procurement procedures is positive, its utilization was still relatively limited and most public entities tend to assess bids only based on the price or cost criterion. Moreover, the positive trend in utilization of MEAT criteria by public entities in Slovakia, has been slowed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the war against Ukraine, which caused urgency in procurement of goods in many cases. According to the OECD<sup>46</sup>, MEAT criteria are most frequently used for the procurement of public works, however, when applied, the criteria are sometimes subject to criticism (e.g., bypass road of the City of

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<sup>46</sup> OECD. 2022. Strengthening value for money in the public procurement system of the Slovak Republic. Available online: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/public-procurement/Strengthening-value-for-money-procurement-system-Slovak-Republic.pdf>

Prešov<sup>47</sup>). In 2022, the Project delivered the first methodology containing the legal definition of the MEAT criteria for the assessment of bids and the advantages of their application, as well as 2 documents on examples of good practice from Slovakia. Other upcoming methodologies and workshops in 2023 have the potential to further drive the use of MEAT criteria in public procurement.

The Project “Improving the Integrity of the Public Administration” set ambitious goals in terms of corruption cases detected, improvements in perception of corruption (CCI, CPI). The Anti-Corruption Programme of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic was updated according to the OECD recommendations. As mentioned above, the Integrity Principles were approved by the Cabinet in January 2023. The adopted policies may have a positive impact on enhancing integrity of public administration in Slovakia. Moreover, the Cabinet has set a further milestone to prepare a code of conduct for Cabinet members, secretaries of state, and their political advisers, but the plan to adopt it by the end of September 2023 is likely to remain unfulfilled due to the early elections in September 2023.

The Projects aiming at support of institutional collaboration between public sector of Slovakia and Ukraine have been considered essential with regard to future membership of Ukraine in the EU. The Project GGC01005 “The Secure and Inclusive Border between Slovakia and Ukraine – SIBSU”, implemented by the Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic (and its Partners), not only allowed the exchange of best practices among the border guards and tax officers, increased the awareness of border issues in borderland, and affects the socio-economic development of the region. The management of refugees in a consequence of war was a successful lesson learned. The exchange of experts, built on previous, well-functioning ties between the Partners, will with high probability last longer than the support of the Project.

The implementation of the Project GGC01009 “Future of Public Administration”, which aims at closely cooperate with the University of Kharkov in exchange of knowledge and experience in good governance, was negatively influenced by Russian aggression against Ukraine that limited the potential positive impact on Ukrainian students who were unable to participate in the Project due to war. Ukraine will need state-building capacity even more than ever after the war, and this Project has the potential to contribute to capacity building by transferring experience to the younger generation of civil servants in Ukraine.

The rising awareness of the accountable and transparent public institutions is an asset of the Project. The sharing of know-how from Norway and Slovakia to Ukraine has been beneficial and followed the goal of possible integration of Ukraine into the EU. The approximation of Ukraine towards EU has been significantly strengthened in the effect of the aggression and will likely enhance the value legitimacy of the EEA Financial Mechanism. Most of the activities implemented within the Project have been face-to-face oriented (workshops, meetings, visits etc.) and were complicated by the war breaking down, just months after the COVID-19 pandemic had declined.

### 3. STATUS OF PROGRAMMES

#### General

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<sup>47</sup> Read more at: <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/financie/hodnota-za-peniaze/blogy-uhp/2022/kriteria-verejneho-obstaravania/?forceBrowserDetector=blind>

The status of particular Programmes, in terms of contracting, Projects' implementation and disbursement, varies. In 2022, implementation increased and accelerated in all Programmes implemented in Slovakia. Various external factors have a negative impact on the smooth implementation of Projects, mainly the effects of COVID-19 global pandemic and Russia's invasion to Ukraine, increase in prices of energies, construction materials and construction works. This impacted each Programme in a different way, but as the result, it also led to withdrawal from the Project Contracts of already implemented Projects.

Considering the remaining time for implementation and the absorption capacity of individual Programmes, the NFP carried out in cooperation with the POs an assessment of the absorption capacity of Programmes. Based on its result a proposal for Memoranda of Understanding Amendments was elaborated and approved (in force from 17<sup>th</sup> February 2023), involving reallocations of non-allocated funds to the Programmes with a high absorption capacity (SK-CULTURE and SK-CLIMATE).

### **SK-INNOVATION Business Development, Innovation and SMEs**

All the five Calls planned have already been launched and all selection processes were completed.

Out of the 20 contracted Projects until the end of December 2022 under Outcome 1, 8 Projects are carried out with Norwegian Project Partners. One additional Project under Call BIN SGS01 with Norwegian Partner will be contracted at the beginning of 2023. All Projects within the education component (Outcome 2) have a Donor Project Partner following the obligatory condition of both Calls. Hence, 11 Projects in BIN SGS02 (NFM) have Norwegian Project Partners. Two Projects under Call BIN SGS03 (EEA FM), which will be contracted at the beginning of 2023, involve Donor Project Partners from Norway and 1 from Iceland.

Under Call BIN SGS01 (NFM) with an original allocation of €1,058,824, five Projects were implemented in 2022. After 2 Project Promoters terminated the Project Contract (in total amount of €284,931), 1 Project from the reserve list in the amount of €160,488 was contracted in May 2022. Based on the Programme Agreement Modification No. 3, additional 2 Projects from the reserve list will be contracted in early 2023.

Under Call BIN 01 (NFM) with an original allocation of €11,578,235, thirteen supported Projects have started their implementation in 2022. In December 2022, 1 Project Promoter decided to terminate the Project Contract in the amount of €433,674.50. Based on the Programme Agreement Modification No. 3, in January 2023, the PO contracted the Project from the reserve list in the amount of €1,457,009.18.

Call BIN 02 (EEA FM) had an allocation of €5,415,882. The Selection Committee (SC) recommended 6 Projects for support in the total amount of €3,443,907. By the end of August 2022, the PO contracted 3 Projects, in the amount of €2,164,351. 2 Project Promoters decided not to conclude the Project Contract. Only 1 implemented Project has a Norwegian Partner. All 3 Projects under this Call started implementation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2022.

Call BIN SGS02 (NFM) with the original allocation of €2,470,588 was closed on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022. Thirteen Project Applications were submitted, the SC recommended 11 Projects for support for €1,914,117 and there are no Projects on the reserve list. By the end of November 2022, all 11 Projects were contracted and implementation started. All Projects have Norwegian Project Partners, as a Donor Project Partner was a mandatory condition.

Call BIN SGS03 (EEA FM) with the allocation of €1,058,824 was launched on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2022, 3 Project Applications were submitted in the total amount of requested Project Grant €578,737. The Projects have 2 Norwegian Project Partners and 1 Partner from Iceland. The SC was held on 14<sup>th</sup> September

2022, all 3 Projects were recommended for support with no Projects on the reserve list. All Project Contracts will be signed in the course of Q 1 of 2023.

In order to disburse the most of the allocated funds on the Programme, Programme Agreement Modification No. 3 was drafted and approved, entering into force on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The PO could support 4 additional Projects from the reserve list of Calls BIN SGS 01 (3) and BIN 01 (1). Hence, the number of supported Projects would increase from total supported 35 projects (21 – innovation, 14 – education) in the amount of €14.43 mil., to 39 projects (25 - innovation, 14 - education) in the amount of €16.88 mil.

2 Calls (BIN BF02 and BIN BF03) were open within the Bilateral Fund, but without committing any funds (altogether 7 Applications were submitted, but all of them were rejected due to low quality). It was agreed by the Cooperation Committee that a new Call within the Bilateral Fund would be prepared. This Call would be available also for networking and B2B events organized by the DPPs or PO. This Call (BIN BF04) was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

The PO did not face as high staff fluctuation as in the previous years, also thanks to a mitigation action, as the management of the Research Agency introduced the Stabilization Action Plan.

In 2022, the NFP continued in depth monitoring on the implementation progress of the Programme. The PO, in the majority of cases, was able to meet the set milestones (launching of the Calls, contracting the Projects).

Despite the aforementioned mitigation actions, the status of the implementation of this Programme was not satisfactory. As of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, the level of contracting was 66% (the average in other programmes is 94%) and the level of disbursement was 16% (the average is 33%). Out of the 17 bigger Projects (with Project Grant exceeding €200,000) in 11 Projects public procurements have not started yet. As a result, €4.2 mill. was uncommitted in the autumn 2022. The PO refused to redistribute uncommitted funds especially due to capacity reasons and lengthy internal processes. Thus, the NFP proposed to reallocate €4.2 mill. to other Programmes with better absorption capacity. This reallocation was approved in February 2023 and the whole allocation of this Programme was decreased by €4.2 mill.

## **SK-CLIMATE Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**

The year 2022 brought within the SK-CLIMATE Programme on the one hand tangible results and on the other hand new challenges to deal with. Having all the Calls for Proposals closed, the level of contracting is over 90% of Programme's allocation and 48 Projects are being implemented covering both of the Programme's Outcomes.

After closing the selection procedure within the 2 last Calls for Proposals launched (Calls ACC05 and ACC04) and contracting the supported Projects in Q1 2022, small non-distributed finances were in line with the Addendum No. 2 to the Programme Agreement with effectiveness from 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022 re-allocated in favour of the SGS Call ACC03 and 2 more Projects under this Call were supported.

Since the Project Promoters within the SK-Climate Programme represent the public sector, local authorities, schools and non-governmental sector the unpredictable increase in the prices for energy, construction materials and construction works in 2022 significantly complicated the smooth Projects' implementation. Many Project Promoters expressed their concerns that they will not be able to handle the increase in prices. Despite the maximum efforts, one of the Projects within the Call ACC02 will not be implemented. The City of Košice as the Project Promoter after careful consideration decided to withdraw from the Project Contract as the real prices resulted from the public procurement significantly exceeded the Project Budget planned when drafting the Project. The Project Grant of almost €1.4 mil. (NFM) was retransferred to the SK-Climate Programme's allocation. The Programme

Operator discussed the most feasible options for the most efficient use of the remaining allocation within the Cooperation Committee. After considering the criteria set by the Financial Mechanism Office by the letters of 9<sup>th</sup> June 2022 and 28<sup>th</sup> October 2022, the Call for award the additional funding to already approved Projects was drafted, with relevancy for the Call ACC02 and SGS Call ACC03 (both from NFM). This Call was announced in January 2023 and is intended for Projects with significant infrastructure components.

Within the reallocation among the Programmes prepared by the NFP, the SK-CLIMATE Programme was identified as a Programme with one of the highest absorption capacity (based on the online research done by the PO in October 2022). At the same time, the SK-CLIMATE Programme was one of the most advanced. Thus, the NFP proposed to reallocate resources to– SK-CLIMATE and SK-CULTURE in a fair and transparent way, i.e. by the same percentage of their respective absorption capacity. Based on this proposal, additional €2.5 mill. were requested to be reallocated to the SK-CLIMATE Programme (€2.5 mill. represents approximately 65% of the declared additional absorption capacity). This reallocated amount, approved in February 2023, allows to extent the relevancy of already launched Call to award the additional funding for further Calls and eligible Applicants implementing Projects within Calls ACC01 and ACC04.

Within the Programme, the bilateral component is considered successful. There are totally 21 Projects implemented in cooperation with the Partners from Donor States and the Pre-defined Project “Climate change and environment education centre (Living Lab) in D्रोpie” of the Project Promoter Slovak Environment Agency is implemented in bilateral partnership with 2 Project Partners. In the year 2022, the most appropriate activities under the Bilateral Funds were discussed and agreed under the Cooperation Committee and shall be implemented in 2023.

### **SK-LOCALDEV Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion**

The implementation of 26 Projects continued during year 2022 (9 Projects – LDI01/Local Development, 9 Projects – LDI02/Roma Inclusion, 7 Projects - LDI03/Small Grant Scheme and 1 Pre-defined Project LDIPP001).

Originally, 9 Projects were supported within Call LDI01, in total amount of €6,068,911 and 7 of them with a Donor Project Partner from Norway involved. One of the Projects implemented by Municipality Rožkovany (LDI01002), with Project Grant €465,500, decided to terminate the Project Contract due to problems with obtaining the building permit for the investment activities. The agreement on the termination of the Project was signed in January 2023. Currently, 8 Projects are being implemented within the Call LDI01 in the amount of Project Grant €5,603,411. The status of the implementation of Projects under Programme component LDI01-Local Development depend very much on the public procurement process. As the situation regarding the public procurement process within these Projects was not satisfied, the NFP decided to conduct an ongoing monitoring, followed by regular monitoring. The regular monitoring was started also after the regional elections in October 2022, as new majors were elected in 6 out of 14 Projects, and some of them were thinking of termination of relevant Project Contract or of significant modifications. The regular monitoring started in December 2022 and will be finalized in April 2023.

Within the Call LDI02 there are 9 projects implemented in the total amount of €6,453,399 and 5 of them are in partnership with a Donor Project Partner from Norway. Based on the reallocation in 2022 from the Outcome 1 (because of lack of the Projects in good quality under Call LDI01) by more than €1.5 mill., 4 additional Projects from the reserve list could be supported and contracted.

In January 2023, 1 Project Contract for the Project by Municipality Betlanovce (LDI02013) was terminated based on the requests of the PO, with the Project Grant of €974,535. In February 2023

Project LDI02029 (Project Promoter eduRoma) from the reserve list was contracted in the amount of €443,902. 9 Project Contracts have been concluded within the Call LDI02 in the amount of €5,922,766.

In the Call LDI03, there are 7 Projects supported in amount of €1,133,802 and 5 of them are implemented in partnership with a Donor Project Partner from Norway. Supported Projects are implemented very well. There are no construction works in the Projects. The activities are focused on working with the Roma community, where the emphasis is placed on the areas of health, employment, housing and financial literacy.

Even though the NFP requested the reallocation of €1.4 mill. from this Programme, the Programme still has enough uncommitted funds. These uncommitted funds (minimum €627,080) will be used to cover the increased market prices through a restricted Call (Projects from Calls LDI01 and LDI02) which should be launched in spring 2023.

Within the Programme, the bilateral component is considered successful. There are totally 15 Projects going to be implemented in cooperation with the Norwegian Partners and the Pre-defined Project “Innovative education of teachers to increase their intercultural competences in the education process of Roma pupils” of the Project Promoter National Institute of Education and Youth (legal successor of the National Institute for Education) is implemented in bilateral partnership as well. Due to unsuitable situation and restrictions affecting travelling due to COVID-19 the bilateral Calls LDI02 and LDI03 were not launched. Using of the bilateral funds was discussed and agreed on the Cooperation Committee in January 2023.

### **SK-DOMESTIC Domestic and Gender-based Violence**

In 2022 all 9 Projects within the Outcome 1 (Call DGV01) were being fully implemented and €1,530,703 committed. The Programme directly supports 9 organisations active in the field of gender equality as Project Promoters or Project Partners and nearly 20 organisations benefited from the Projects through conferences or other events. The mutual cooperation of 2 Project Promoters with their Donor Projects Partners from Norway (KUN and Sex og Politikk) proved successful mostly in area of expertise exchange and best practices transfer. There were 17 awareness-raising campaigns promoting gender equality and addressing the status of women in society launched by Project Promoters, with 1 Project Promoter dedicating smaller campaigns also at women from marginalised Roma communities on the occasion of the International Day of Women and Roma Day.

All Projects within the Outcome 2 (Calls DGV02 and DGV03) were approved when the selection process was concluded in 2022. 7 Projects under Call DGV2 focused on support of existing services and local intervention teams started their implementation in May – June 2022 by providing the counselling services to victims of violence. In December 2022, the Project DGV02016 aimed at increasing the provision of legal support to victims of domestic and gender based violence with allocation €458,512 was terminated following the decision of the Project Promoter. Under the Call DGV3 aimed at improvement of quality of services in order to meet required European standards, including specific services for children victims, 3 Projects were approved and Projects Contracts concluded in autumn 2022 with €1,361,178 committed. 1 Project has a bilateral partnership with a Norwegian Project Partner (Alternative to Violence). In 2022 the Projects supported altogether 9 existing counselling centres in 7 regions and 85 existing places in women’s shelters; counselling services to 283 victims of violence were provided and 12 counselling centres and women shelters managed to meet the European standards. It is, however, expected that the target values of some indicators will not be achieved due to several reasons, including overambitious expectations of the Programme, significant

delays in the Programme implementation and COVID-19 related restrictions which effected the Grants spending (around 15%). Projects under Call DGV03 started their implementation towards the end of 2022 and will be in full implementation in 2023.

The Pre-defined Project DGVPP002 implemented by the Institute for Labour and Family Research (“Improving the victim-oriented approach – a tool enhancing the capacity to fight violence against women and domestic violence”) within the Outcome 3 has progressed significantly since June 2022. The activities of the Coordination and Methodological Centre for Domestic and Gender-based Violence under the Institute for Labour and Family Research are supported and strengthened in order to support integrated multiagency response system to victims of domestic and gender-based violence in line with the CoE Standards.

The Pre-defined Project for the creation of the Sexual Assault Centre in Bratislava (SAC PDP) with the allocation of €1,200,000 was, unfortunately, cancelled in 2022 due to personnel and capacity unavailability of the Project Promoter and limited time for the Programme modification and the Project implementation. The uncommitted funds were proposed to be reallocated from the Programme to other Programmes with the higher absorption capacity.

In December 2022 the Bilateral Call DGVBF04 was launched with allocation €95,126.95 € and is aimed at strengthening the bilateral relations between Norway and Slovakia through activities, such as networking, exchanges, sharing and transfer of knowledge, technology, experience and best practice between the Slovakian and Norwegian entities active in the field of domestic and gender-based violence.

The partnership within bilateral Partner in DGVPDP002 has even wider impact when considering the development of joint strategies and procedures on the protection of women and children experiencing violence, which contributes to enhanced collaboration between the Slovak Republic and Norway.

## **SK-CULTURE Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation**

During year 2022, the Projects from Calls CLT01 (cultural heritage) and CLT02 (contemporary art and culture) were implemented. The Projects within Call CLT03 (contemporary art and culture) were contracted in full allocation – 3 Projects out of 11 were contracted from reserve list.

The PO focused on the implementation phase of all Projects contracted within the Calls CLT01 (19 Projects contracted, but 1 Project CLT01029 Renovation of Ľubovňa Castle was terminated in January 2023, so 18 Projects in implementation) for heritage component, CLT02 (9 Projects implemented) and CLT03 (11 Projects implemented) for contemporary and living art component, as well as both Pre-defined Projects. The progress achieved towards the Programme objective is visible not only by the results of investment Projects (CLT01 Projects and Pre-defined Project “Red Monastery – Reborn”), but also by the many events carried out within CLT02 and CLT03 Projects. The Pre-defined Project “Pro Monumenta II” is in its final phase. The process of Outcomes and Outputs achievements has fully started within this Programme.

All Projects implemented under the Calls CLT02 and CLT03 contribute to the Outcome 2 “Access to contemporary arts improved”. In 2022, the Project Contracts for all CLT03 Projects were concluded (11 contracted Projects, 3 of them from reserve list) and altogether 20 Projects are implemented within both Calls.

Bilateral cooperation is an important pillar of the expected results of both Pre-defined Projects which relate to the know-how transfer. The risk of delays regarding the bilateral meetings and workshops with the DPP in the “Pro Monumenta II” was mitigated. 2 out of 3 planned bilateral activities (craftsmen workshops and trainings) were organised in 2022 (one was held in Oslo in initial phase of the Project). The ambition and challenge of the Programme in terms of bilateral cooperation is to have at least 30% of the Projects within the Call CLT01 under Outcome 1 implemented in partnership with the Donor Project Partner (DPP), which was achieved. Altogether, 17 out of 18 Projects are implemented with at least one DPP, which means 94% of cultural heritage projects are being implemented in partnership with the Donor State entities which is extraordinary setup. The Donor partnership within projects under the Outcome 2 is obligatory and all 20 implemented Projects include at least one DPP. With regards to the bilateral Output 1, indicator *Number of project involving the cooperation with donor project partner* – 39 of supported cultural projects include cooperation with the DPP, the target value of the indicator will be achieved.

On 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022, the Bilateral Calls CLTBF04 to strengthen bilateral cooperation in field of cultural heritage management and CLTBF05 to strengthen bilateral cooperation in field of contemporary culture and living art were launched.

During 2022, the Pre-defined bilateral initiative CLTBFPI-01 was implemented by the Slovak Arts Council in partnership with Arts Council Norway and 2 exchange residencies took place. In December 2022, the Pre-defined “*Bilateral Initiative on Historic Parks and Gardens*” CLTBFPI-02 of National Trust Slovakia planned in cooperation with Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren) and Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra was approved and it was contracted in February 2023.

According to MoU the Programme shall contribute to greater awareness about the culture of social, ethnic and cultural minorities and groups, including Roma population. 2 Projects under the Outcome 1 (call CLT01) are directly focused on Jewish cultural heritage monuments reconstruction and restoration (Projects of the Synagogue in Trenčín and Vila K in Nitra). Altogether 16 Projects from Call CLT01 should promote the culture and heritage of minorities by organising event focused on raising awareness about minority culture. The Projects under the Calls CLT02 and CLT03 are *inter alia* focused on the organising events focused on raising awareness about minority culture.

The specific condition stated in Programme Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is that 70%<sup>48</sup> of the total expenditure of the Programme shall be available for infrastructure (hard measures).

Within the reallocation among the Programmes, prepared by the NFP, this Programme, together with the SK-CLIMATE Programme, was identified as a Programme having very high absorption capacity (based on the online research done by the PO in October 2022). At the same time, this Programme was one of the most advanced by far. Thus, the NFP proposed to reallocate resources to this Programme in a fair and transparent way, i.e. by the same percentage of their respective absorption capacity. Based on this proposal additional €4.0 mill. was requested to be reallocated to this Programme (€4.0 mill. represents approximately 65% of the declared additional absorption capacity). This reallocated amount, approved in February 2023, would be redistributed among already approved Projects under all 3 Calls to cover the increased prices or to finance additional activities. The PO launched the relevant Call on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023 with the deadline on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

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<sup>48</sup> Due to price increase, the NFP suggested within the requested reallocation to increase the percentage of the total eligible expenditure of the programme which may be used for infrastructure (hard measures) from 60% to 70%. This increase was approved in February 2023.



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

The Programme area Good governance, accountable institutions and transparency is being implemented through 1 Call and 3 Pre-defined Projects. Altogether, 5 Projects are being implemented within the Call GGC01 in amount of €2,500,000 and 3 of them are being implemented in partnership with a Donor Project Partner from Norway. Within the Project GGC01008 implemented by Agency for the Support of Regional Development Košice, 2 significant results were accomplished in 2022. Due to ongoing war in Ukraine and a completely changed situation in Uzhhorod, the original transport model created in 2021 had to be modified to new situation in Uzhhorod (increase of inhabitants and transfer of the industry from the east of Ukraine to the west). This transport model was presented to the responsible authorities of the city of Uzhhorod and the Zakarpattia Region during the Round table meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2022 in Uzhhorod.

The Programme area Effectiveness and efficiency of the judicial system and strengthening rule of law is being implemented through 1 Pre-defined Project GGCPP002. In Q4 2022, reconstruction works started at 8 Partner courts with the aim of creating special monitoring and interrogation rooms enabling interaction between minors in a friendlier environment, which should positively affect minors, including their participation in court proceedings. In May 2022, the first study trip to Norway with the cooperation of Norwegian National Courts Administrations aimed at prevention of secondary and repeated victimization in court proceedings for judges and prosecutors was realized.

A lesson learned is connected with the ongoing war in Ukraine. The first months of the war significantly hindered the implementation of Projects with Ukrainian Partners. Project Promoters (Call GGC01) revised their Projects budget and helped their Ukrainian Partners through humanitarian aid in the amount of €287,539. This initiative was met with gratitude and appreciation from Ukrainian Partners. It has shown the importance of relationships in harsh situation like this, as the relationships between Partners grew stronger and strengthened even more than anticipated.

Bilateral Outcome is being fulfilled through 3 Projects within Call GGC01 and the Pre-defined Project GGCPP004 in cooperation with a Donor Project Partner from Norway. Altogether 4 out of 9 Projects are being implemented in trilateral partnerships between Slovakia, Ukraine and Norway.

Taken into account the ongoing war in Ukraine, implementation of initiatives within Call GGCBF03 dedicated to people-to-people initiatives in the Slovak-Ukrainian border region contributing to strengthen the trilateral cooperation among Donor States, Slovakia and Ukraine is not consider appropriate.

As no applications were received in GGCBF02 and GGCBF03 Calls, the Cooperation Committee agreed in April 2022 on cancellation of the Call GGCBF03 and reallocation of its allocation to the Bilateral Fund Call GGCBF02 (with minor modifications). The before mentioned reallocation shall be administrated in Q1 2023.

### **4. STATUS OF BILATERAL FUNDS**

In the course of 2022, the implementation of the Bilateral Fund was slightly more progressive than in 2021. Regarding the “contracting” (contracting not in the sense of the signing the Contract, but in the sense of allocating the money to special predefined initiatives or, upon the Express of Interest, to the PO) the progress improved from 50.55% as of the beginning of January 2022 (6<sup>th</sup> January 2022) to 95%. The drawing of the funds improved from 8.07 % (6<sup>th</sup> January 2022) to 10.6%.

The significant progress in the contracting (in the sense of approving the idea of the initiative in the Work Plan) was made by proposing (especially the Migration Office's predefined initiative in amount of €500,000) and approving several new pre-defined initiatives.

The progress in the drawing is not satisfactory, the majority of initiatives are only in the planning phase (mainly at the Programme level). The situation at the Programme level might improve in 2023 as several Calls were published at the end of 2022 and are planned for 2023 and the long-time planned activities, postponed because of COVID-19, should be realized in 2023. The drawing at the national level will also be higher in 2023 as several predefined initiatives as well as all the initiatives from FBR02 (Call for online initiatives) will be financially completed. Initiative Creative Industry Košice, n.o. (CIKE) could be stated as an example of a good initiative. Within this initiative, 6 online workshops focused on creative and culture sector were organized in close cooperation with the Norwegian partner UrbanSpace Lab. As of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2022, altogether 16,325 people saw the English version of online workshops.

### **Meetings of the Joint Committee for Bilateral Funds in 2022:**

The 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Joint Committee for Bilateral Funds (JCBF) was conducted as an online meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The main purpose of this meeting was the presentation and the discussion on the newly proposed predefined bilateral initiative (Initiative No. 7) "Bilateral cooperation in the area of asylum and migration" proposed by the Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the SR, as a reaction on the war in Ukraine in amount €500,000. This proposal was agreed by all JCBF's members and the Work Plan was modified. The fully developed Grant Application was not submitted in 2022. The NFP organized several meetings with the representatives of the Migration Office to facilitate the application preparation process. In spite of this effort and due to the lack of staff at the Migration Office, it does not seem realistic that the initiative will be implemented in full extent.

The 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the JCBF was conducted as a per rollam meeting between 22<sup>nd</sup> June – 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022. The Grant Application of initiative No. 6, "Initiative More Human Approach into Human Rights Education in Slovakia", was discussed and approved. The proposal of the new predefined initiative, Initiative No. 8, "Joint Scientific Conference on Global Change", proposed by the University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Košice, was also discussed.

The 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the JCBF was conducted as a per rollam meeting between 17<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022. The main purpose of this meeting was the discussion on the following Grant Applications: Strategic Cooperation of National Theatres (Initiative No. 1); Reducing Gender Pay Gap (Initiative No. 5); Joint Scientific Conference on Global Change (Initiative No. 8). All 3 submitted Grant Applications were approved.

The 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the JCBF was conducted as an online meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022. The meeting was focused on the status of the implementation. A new approach - directly addressing line ministries and other "umbrella" organizations was agreed. This new approach should bring more strategic ideas for bilateral cooperation rather than small simple initiatives. If this new approach does not bring enough proposals for the strategic cooperation, the NFP will draft an open call. The Expression of Interest sent by the Programme Operator for SK-CLIMATE Programme in the amount of €60,000 to cover expenses for schools to take part in EduClima study tour to Norway was also discussed and approved. Another of the discussed topics was the necessity to revise the implementation system. The JCBF took note that the revision of the system was not necessary.

### **Status of the Calls lunched by the National Focal Point**

Calls **FBR01** and **FBRTG01**, launched in 2019, generated altogether only 9 implemented or partially implemented initiatives in a total amount of €65,485. These Calls as well as the implementation of the relevant initiatives were heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Call ID	Allocation	No. of approved applications	No. of implemented/partially implemented applications	Contracted amount	Paid amount	%
<b>FBR01</b>	€180,000	7	6	€154,806	€56,245	36,3
<b>FBRTG01</b>	€50,000	6	5	€ 14,048	€ 9,240	67,6

Call **FBR02** was prepared as a reaction to the pandemic situation and the Call was focused on on-line bilateral activities. The Call was launched in 2021 with the total allocation of €200,000. Only 4 Grant Applications were finally implemented (9 Applications were submitted, 5 Applications were approved and 1 Application was cancelled by the JCBF) in the total amount of €106,006.

Call ID	Allocation	No. of implemented applications	Contracted amount	Paid amount as of 31th December 2022	%
<b>FBR02</b>	€280,000	4	€143,450	€106,006	73,9

### Status of the pre-defined initiatives

In the course of 2022, two new initiatives were proposed, discussed and subsequently approved. The initiative “Bilateral Cooperation in the Area of Asylum and Migration” (Initiative No. 7) and the initiative “Joint Scientific Conference on Global Change” (Initiative No. 8).

The list of the predefined initiatives:

Initiative ID	Beneficiary	Completion Date	Title of Initiative	Approved amount	Status
<b>FBR-PDI-001</b>	Slovak National Theatre	2023	The Strategic Cooperation of National Theatres	€39,622	The initiative was implemented at the beginning of December 2022. In 1. Q 2023 the financial settlement will be done.
<b>FBR-PDI-002</b>	Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the SR	2022	Accompanying /business/ Activities related to State Visit of the President of the Republic of Iceland in the Slovak Republic	€15,000	Cancelled by the JCBF. The amount €15,000 is reserved for another bilateral initiative, preferably between Slovakia and Iceland.
<b>FBR-PDI-003</b>	Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the SR	2019	SK Presidency in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – 2019; SK Presidency in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	€30,000	Completed in amount of €5,353.
<b>FBR-PDI-004</b>	Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Justice and Culture of the	2024	Accompanying Activities / Events on the Occasion of Celebration	€20,000	Planned

	Principality of Liechtenstein		of 300 Years of Principality of Liechtenstein		
FBR-PDI-005	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of SR	2023	Reducing the Gender Pay Gap	€15,000	The initiatives were contracted at the end of 2022. The initiative is planned to be implemented and financially settled in 2023.
FBR-PDI-006	Open Society Foundation	2023	More Human Approach into Human Rights Education in Slovakia	€45,000	The initiative was contracted in September 2022. The initiative is planned to be financially settled in 2023.
FBR-PDI-007	Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic	2024	Bilateral Cooperation in the area of asylum and migration	€500,000	The Grant Application was not submitted in 2022.
FBR-PDI-008	University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Košice	2023	Joint Scientific Conference on Global Change	€39,810	The Grant Application was approved at the end of 2022. The initiative is planned to be implemented (05/2023) and financially settled in 2023.

### Bilateral funds allocated to Programmes

During the year 2022, the following Expressions of Interest from the Programme Operators at the Programme level were submitted and approved by the JCBF:

- Proposed changes in Expression of Interest under Good Governance and Cross-border cooperation Programme - cancellation of Call GGCBF03 and subsequent reallocation of €50,000 from Call GGCBF03 to Call GGCBF02;
- Proposed formal correction in Expression of Interest under the Domestic and Gender-based Violence Programme;
- Newly submitted Expression of Interest for €60,000 submitted by the Programme Operator for the SK-CLIMATE Programme. The Expression of Interest covers the planned organisation of SK-Climate EduClima Study tour to Norway with the involvement of approximately 20 schools from Slovakia.

Several Calls at the Programme level were launched at the end of 2022:

Programme	Call ID	Call opened	Allocation	No. of submitted applications	No. of supported applications	Contracted amount	Disbursed amount
Culture	CLTBF04	15. 12. 2022 – 15.12.2023 (or till the moment of contracting the whole allocation)	€25,000	0	0	€ 0	€ 0
	CLTBF05	15. 12. 2022 – 15.12.2023	€20,000	0	0	€ 0	€ 0

		(or till the moment of contracting the whole allocation)					
<b>Domestic and Gender-based Violence</b>	DGVBF04	20. 12. 2022 – 20.12.2023 (or till the moment of contracting the whole allocation)	€95,127	0	0	€ 0	€ 0

## 5. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

### a. Management and control systems (MCS)

The Detailed Description of Management and Control System (DDMCS) at national level accompanied by the Audit Report and the Opinion was acknowledged by the FMO on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019. The update of the DDMCS version 1.6 was approved on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2022. The DDMCS version 1.6 is updated in its part related to handling of complaints concerning the National Focal Point. The new Anti-corruption Unit (instead of the previous Control unit) was introduced. The ongoing monitoring system conducted by the NFP was also introduced.

The respective authorities reported no information on significant changes in the setup of Management and Control System of the Audit Authority or the Certifying Authority.

A detailed overview of staffing is provided in Annex D.

### b. Complaints

The NFP received no complaints in the year 2022.

### b. Irregularities

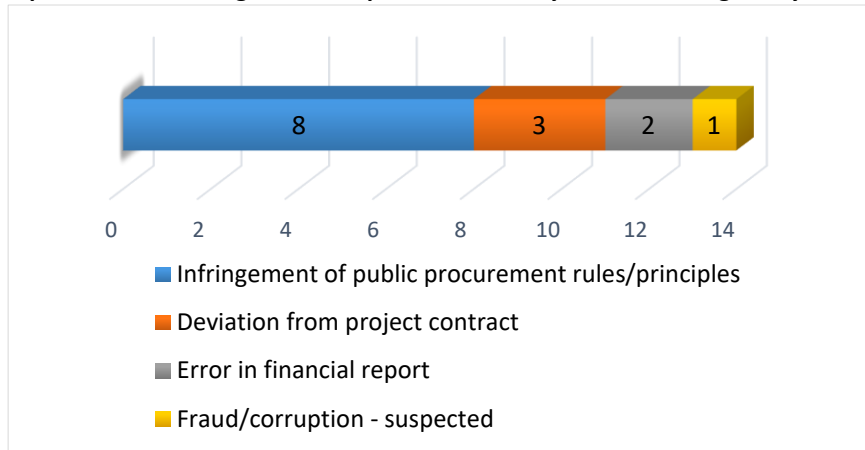
The Irregularities Authority reported 14 irregularities to the FMO via GrACE system for the year 2022. These are the first cases reported by Slovakia in the implementation of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021. 6 cases were closed during the 2022. The most irregularities were reported for the SK-CULTURE Programme and the most common nature of irregularity was the infringement of public procurement rules/principles.

**Table: Number of irregularities reported in 2022 by Programme**

Programme	Number of cases	Out of which as of 31.12.2022	
		Open	Closed
<b>SK-Climate</b>	4	2	2
<b>SK-Culture</b>	6	5	1
<b>SK-Governance</b>	2	0	2
<b>SK-Innovation</b>	1	0	1
<b>SK-Localdev</b>	1	1	0

TOTAL	14	8	6
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Graph: Number of irregularities reported in 2022 by Nature of irregularity



#### d. Audit

##### System audits

In the period lasting from May 2022 to February 2023, the Audit Authority (AA) carried out the joint audit No. 22-021, included system audit and audit on Projects in one audit. The system part of this audit was focused on the verification of the effective functioning of the management and control system at the level of the NFP and the Programme Operator (PO) – Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. Within the system audit there were identified 3 systemic findings with high risk, 1 non-systemic finding with medium risk and 1 non-systemic finding with low risk. Among the most serious findings, identified within the system audit No. 22-021, were the following ones:

- The NFP did not send to the AA populations for the sample selection (for audit on Projects) by the agreed deadline and the populations sent by the NFP was not reliable.
- The NFP published updated version of the methodological guideline on their website without any relevant audit trail on the previous version.
- The NFP did not update the document Management System for the EEA FM and NFM (approved in 2019) following the finding identified in audit No. A936. Furthermore, the document does not comply with all requirements for sample selection as stated in Regulations on the implementation of the EEA FM and NFM and Financial Guidance. The NFP has not updated their Guideline on irregularities and rules for financial corrections for the EEA FM and NFM as well.
- The NFP updated Guideline for Project Promoters and Project Partners and added benefit for recreation as another eligible item within the staff costs, whereas the AA considers this expenditure as ineligible.

In the period lasting from April 2022 to December 2022, the AA carried out the joint audit No. 22-022, i.e. it included system audit and audit on Projects in one audit. The system part of this audit was focused on the verification of the effective functioning of the management and control system at the level of the PO – Research Agency. Within the system audit there were identified 2 non-systemic

findings with medium risk and 3 non-systemic findings with low risk. Among the most serious findings, identified by the system audit No. 22-022, there were the following ones:

- The PO did not organise trainings focused on conflict of interest for Project Promoters.
- The PO did not meet deadline for entering contact data into the GrACE.

### **The audits on Projects**

In the period lasting from May 2022 to February 2023, the AA carried out the joint audit No. 22-021, i.e. it included system audit and audit on Projects in one audit. The part of the audit on Projects was focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the NFP and the PO – Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. Within the audit on Projects there were identified 14 financial findings with high risk, 2 non-systemic findings with high risk, 1 systemic finding with high risk, 3 systemic findings with medium risk, 6 non-systemic findings with medium risk and 1 non-systemic finding with low risk. Among the most serious findings, identified by the audit on Projects No. 22-021, there were the following ones:

- The PO did not identify the ineligible expenditure in the Interim Financial Report (IFR) - levies related to remuneration from Agreements on Work Activities that were not related to the NFM.
- The PO insufficiently performed administrative verification of the Interim Project Report (IPR) and on the spot verification, because ineligible staff costs in the IPR were not identified (incorrectly calculated the amount of percentage involvement in the implementation of the Project and in case of reporting 2 different activities on several days, there was in some cases an overlap of the time of their performance, which led to double reporting of hours worked on the Project).
- The PO did not perform administrative verification of public procurement for the low-value contract included in the IPR.
- The PO insufficiently performed administrative verification of the IPR:
  - the PO did not identify ineligible VAT for graphic design of the website provided by the foreign student and ineligible staff costs,
  - the PO did not identify ineligible expenditure for waste storage and removal,
  - the PO did not identify that beneficiary did not meet the eligibility criteria set in the Guidelines for Project Promoters,
  - the PO did not identify the violation of the principle of non-discrimination, equal treatment and the principle of transparency.
- The PO insufficiently performed on the spot verification, because in the IPR discrepancy between claimed expenditure and actually delivered goods and works PO did not identify.
- The PO did not identify a conflict of interest in the contract outside the scope of the public procurement law within the IPR:
  - the Project Promoter directly awarded the contract to the person with whom this Project Promoter participated in the Project (statutory body of the Project Partner),
  - the Project Promoter directly concluded 2 contracts with a company with the Project Promoter was personally connected through a statutory representative,
  - the Project Promoter issued order to the hotel that statutory representative is at the same time a Deputy Mayor of the Project Promoter,
  - the Project Promoter issued 5 orders to 2 companies that were personally connected with the Project Promoter.
- The PO performed administrative verification of public procurement (a low-value contract and contract addendum) for an unreasonably long time within the IPR.
- The PO identified ineligible expenditure in the IPR after the sample selection by the AA (the PO carried out on the spot control at the Project Promoter location and found out that the company invoiced construction works that had not been delivered).

In the period lasting from April 2022 to December 2022, the AA carried out the joint audit No. 22-022, i.e. it included system audit and audit on Projects in one audit. The part of the audit on Projects was focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the PO – Research Agency. Within the audit on Projects No. 22-022 there was identified 1 non-systemic finding with high risk and 1 financial finding with high risk. Among the most serious findings, identified by the audit on Projects No. 22-022, there were the following ones:

- The PO insufficiently documented the methodology for calculating the simplified cost option of the staff costs in the IFR and also did not provide sufficient documentation with the historical data necessary for the calculation of the simplified cost option,
- The PO identified ineligible expenditure in the IFR before the sample selection by the AA (contributions from supplementary pension savings included in the management costs in the IFR).

In the period lasting from September 2022 to February 2023, the AA carried out the audit on Projects No. 22-053. This audit focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the PO – Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic. Within the audit on Projects there were identified 3 financial findings with high risk, 1 systemic finding with medium risk and 1 non-systemic finding with medium risk. Among the most serious findings, identified by the audit on Projects No. 22-053, there were the following ones:

- The PO insufficiently performed administrative financial control, because ineligible staff costs in the IPR was not identified (ineligible staff costs that overlapped in time with activities reported in another Project, the weekly limit of hours worked was exceeded by 1 hour, the discrepancy in the timesheets between the stated number of hours worked on the Project and the stated time of work on the Project for individual days),
- The PO did not perform on the spot verification in relation to the IPR and did not identify ineligible staff costs (beneficiary claimed expenditure resulting from the signed Agreements on Work Activities, which overlapped in time with activities resulting from Employment Contracts).

In the period lasting from May 2022 to August 2022, the AA carried out the audit on projects No. 22-044. This audit focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the Certifying Authority. Within the audit on projects No. 22-044 no findings were identified.

In the June 2022, the AA ensured the performance of the audit on Projects No. 22-045. This audit focused on the verification of the eligibility of expenditure declared at the level of the AA. Since the selected sample consisted of expenditure declared by the AA (including expenditure of the Government Audit Office), the AA 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. 22-045 to verify this expenditure. Within the audit on Projects No. 22-045 no findings were identified.

## 6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### a. Monitoring

During 2022 the National Focal Point conducted the following on-going monitorings:

In January 2022 Regular Monitoring of the SK-CLIMATE Programme carried out by the National Focal was finalized. The monitoring was conducted from October 2021 till January 2022. The monitoring was focused on compliance of the Programme with the legal framework and implementation rules of the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021. The FMO was informed about the findings and recommendation on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022, the overall result was satisfactory.



Since October 2022, all Programmes have been regularly monitored at Project level. Based on this, the NFP obtained an overview of the status of all Programmes and used this information as a basis for the proposed reallocation of uncommitted funds among Programmes. This regular monitoring at Project level continues also in 2023.

Within the LOCALDEV Programme, due to the delays in the Projects' implementation, which resulted in a very low drawing of funds (only 3% as of October 2022), the NFP decided to conduct an ongoing monitoring in July 2022. Within this monitoring, the delays in Projects' implementation, especially in activities related to construction works, were confirmed. According to the PO, the delays are related to the lack of materials and goods, as well as price increases due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine. The PO actively communicated with the Project Promoters to identify the actual status of the delays in the Projects. The NFP recommended to the PO to continue in close communication with the Project Promoters. Due to the identified delays in the implementation, as well as due to the fact that after the regional elections in October 2022, new majors were elected in 6 out of 14 Projects, the NFP decided to start regular monitoring of this Programme. The monitoring interview with the PO took place on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The NFP also selected a sample of Projects for on-site visits as part of the monitoring. Based on the completed Monitoring Questionnaires, the requested documentation submitted by the PO, and interviews with the PO and Project Promoters, the draft monitoring report is being prepared by the NFP. The monitoring report will summarise the main findings and will formulate recommendations.

## **b. Evaluation**

In the autumn of 2022, the NFP prepared the terms of reference for the evaluation of the Programmes. The original amount of €17,000 per each Programme, budgeted at the very beginning of the implementation, seems to be insufficient. Within the reallocation of uncommitted funds between Programmes prepared by the NFP, an additional amount of € 100,000 for evaluation was requested. The request for the reallocation was sent to the FMO in December 2022. The reallocation was approved in February 2023, the NFP will start with the public procurement process in the near future. Because of the time factor, the NFP will procure all evaluations as one single order in one public procurement process. It is planned, due to the lengthy public procedure process, that the contract with the winning bidder might be signed in Q4 2023. The evaluations of all programmes should be completed in 2024.

## **ANNEXES**

- A. Risk assessment and management plan**
- B. Evaluation plan**
- C. Cooperation with Donor Programme Partners and/or International Partner Organisations**
- D. Technical assistance report**
- E. Communication summary**
- F. Communication Strategy-Slovakia**
- G. List of the Calls**

Iceland  
Liechtenstein  
Norway grants

Norway  
grants

## Annex A: Risk assessment and management plan

Programme name	Overall level of programme risk	Risks description	Actual responses	Planned response in the next 12 months
<b>SK-INNOVATION</b>	<b>3</b>			
		Wide – range results framework set in the Concept Note causing complications in the implementation due to the broad range of the implemented projects.	The NFP continually and closely monitors the implementation of this Programme. In autumn 2022, the NFP started the monitoring not only at programme level but also at projects' level. The NFP provides professional support to the PO with the implementation process.	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme as well as projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.
		Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP continually and closely monitors the implementation of this Programme. In autumn 2022, the NFP started the monitoring not only at programme level but also at projects' level. The NFP provides professional support to the PO with the implementation process. The actual situation in the Programme	The NFP will continue with close monitoring of the Programme implementation at programme as well as at projects' level. This will be done on a monthly basis.

		implementation resulted in the request of reallocation of 4,2 MEUR from this Programme to other Programmes implemented in the SR.	
	High fluctuation of the PO employees resulting in insufficient institutional and management experience at the PO level.	In 2022, the staffing situation was better than in the past. The PO prepared and implemented a plan for stabilisation of the employees. Even though the staffing situation is better, the NFP considers staffing situation at the PO as a weak point of the implementation of this Programme.	Within the above-mentioned monthly monitoring, the NFP will monitor also the staffing situation of the PO. In the period of the implementation, it is crucial that the PO will stabilize and, if needed, also strengthens its capacities, especially in the field of the control of public procurements and project payments.
<b>SK-CLIMATE</b>	<b>2</b>		
	Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary and monitors the developments under the Programme. The NFP started to monitor the development under the Programme also at projects level in autumn 2022.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.

		Significant market prices increase on construction materials and equipment endangering the successful implementation of the projects.	The NFP prepared a request for the reallocation of the unspent funds among the programmes implemented in the Slovak Republic. Based on this request, the SK-CLIMATE Programme should receive additional 2,5 MEUR. This amount would be used especially to cover increased market prices.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.
		Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP started to monitor the development under the Programme also at projects level in autumn 2022.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.
<b>SK-LOCALDEV</b>	<b>2</b>			
		Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary and monitors the developments under the Programme. The NFP started to monitor the developments under the Programme also at projects level in autumn 2022.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.

		Significant market price increase of construction materials and equipment endangering the successful implementation of the projects	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary and monitors the developments under the Programme. The NFP started to monitor the development under the Programme also at projects' level in autumn 2022.	Even though the NFP requested the reallocation of 1,4 MEUR from this Programme, the Programme still has enough uncommitted funds. These uncommitted funds (minimum 627 080 EUR) will be used to cover the increased market prices through a restricted call which should be launched in spring 2023.
		Lack of interest and/or motivation of project promoters to implement projects. After the regional elections in November 2022, new majors were elected in 6 out of 14 projects and, sadly, the implementation of project is not a priority for all of them.	The NFP started to monitor the developments under the Programme also at projects' level in autumn 2022.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.
		Delays in schedule such as delays of construction works due to weather conditions, problems with the supplier, delays in public procurement etc.	The NFP started to monitor the developments under the Programme also at projects' level in autumn 2022.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a monthly basis.
<b>SK-DOMESTIC</b>	<b>2</b>			
		Lack of time for project implementation	The NFP started to monitor the development under the Programme also at projects' level in autumn 2022.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis.
<b>SK-CULTURE</b>	<b>2</b>			

	Difficulties related to public procurement resulting in delays and ineligible expenditures.	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary and monitors the developments under the Programme. The NFP started to monitor the development under the Programme also at projects' level in autumn 2022.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis.
	Significant market price increase on construction materials and equipment endangering the successful implementation of the projects	The NFP prepared a request for the reallocation of the unspent funds among the programmes implemented in the Slovak Republic. Based on this request, the SK-CULTURE Programme should receive additional 4 MEUR. This amount would be used especially to cover the increased market prices.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis.
	Delays in time schedule such as delays of construction works due to weather conditions, problems with the suppliers, delays in public procurement etc. – 3.00	The NFP provides the PO with consultations whenever necessary and monitors the developments under the Programme. The NFP started to monitor the developments under the	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis.

			Programme also at projects level in autumn 2022.	
<b>SK-GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>2</b>			
		Russia's invasion in Ukraine	The NFP is prepared to take immediate actions in order to provide direct support for Ukrainian partners or adjust the projects in response to the situation, if needed.	The NFP will continue to provide the PO with consultations whenever necessary and will monitor the developments at both levels (programme as well as projects) under the Programme on a quarterly basis. It was agreed with the PO that if planned activities cannot be implemented due to the current situation in Ukraine, the Project Promoters would submit a request for a change in the projects to the PO.



Programme Information				Evaluation Information							
Programme # and title	Sector	Duration (Start/End)	Budget (EUR)	Type of Evaluation Formative/ Summative	Evaluation Objectives Reason and learning goals	Timing Mid-term or Final Evaluation (ex post)	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	2019 - 2024	23,529,412	Summative	Effectiveness	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, analysis / surveys (TBD)	2023- 2024	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	2019 - 2024	17,647,059	Summative	Relevance	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2023- 2024	17,000	N/A	
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy	2019 - 2024	21,430,588	Formative	Efficiency	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2023- 2024	17,000	N/A	
Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation	Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance, and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms	2018 - 2024	23,071,765	Formative	Relevance	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2023- 2024	17,000	ex-post evaluation of sustainability, impact and partially relevance and effectiveness 2018	
Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency / Cross-border Cooperation	Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance, and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms	2018 - 2024	10,000,000	Formative	Efficiency	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, surveys (TBD)	2023- 2024	17,000	N/A	

Programme Information				Evaluation Information							
Programme # and title	Sector	Duration (Start/End)	Budget (EUR)	Type of Evaluation Formative/ Summative	Evaluation Objectives Reason and learning goals	Timing Mid-term or Final Evaluation (ex post)	Data needs and collection methods Reports; interviews; surveys; other	Evaluation Start/End Date	Evaluation Budget <sup>i</sup> (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	2018 - 2024	10,588,235	Formative	Relevance	Final Evaluation	Reports, interviews, analysis / surveys (TBD)	2023- 2024	17,000	N/A	

<sup>i</sup> Within the reallocation prepared by the NFP, an additional amount of €100,000 for evaluation was requested. The original amount €17,000, budgeted at the very beginning of the implementation, actually seems to be insufficient. The request for reallocation was sent to the FMO in December 2022. The reallocation was approved in February 2023, the NFP will start with the public procurement process in the near future. Because of the time factor, the NFP will procure all evaluations as one single order in one public procurement process. It is planned, due to the lengthy public procedure process, that the contract with the winning bidder might be signed in the Q 4 2023.

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

The cooperation of the Programme Operators with Donor Programme Partners and/or International Partner Organisations in individual Programmes is formalised within Cooperation Committees and Selection Committees where the representatives of DDPs and IPOs are represented.

The National Focal Point has the opportunity to follow this cooperation during these meetings and could assess it as highly beneficial and constructive. But to obtain a full, comprehensive picture, the National Focal Point approached separately all involved parties and offered the opportunity to express their opinion on the cooperation in the course of 2022.

### Business Development, Innovation and SMEs

#### Programme Operator and Partners

Programme Operator:	Research Agency
Donor Programme	Innovation Norway (IN NO)
Partners:	Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-DIR NO) National Agency of International Education Affairs (AIBA LI)

The PO considers the cooperation with the DPPs as very professional and expert. The cooperation between the PO and the DPPs has been very active since the start of the Programme implementation.

In the year 2022 the involvement of the DPPs was focused mainly on approval of the Calls for Proposals (BIN SGS03, BIN BF04), participation in Project selection process, advising on the use of the Fund for Bilateral Relations, assisting in Project Partner search, evaluating the submitted Grant Proposals under the Bilateral Fund and organizing match-making/networking events.

The DPPs organized, in cooperation with the PO, on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022 an online match-making event "Matchmaking for the Slovak Education Call – EEA and Norway Grants (EØS-midlene)". The matchmaking was attended by 80 participants, out of which were 47 Slovak, 33 Norwegian. Based on experience, the PO considers matchmaking events as an effective tool for developing and strengthening of Project Partnerships, all submitted Projects under the education component found relevant Project Partner either in Norway or in Iceland.

The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills expresses satisfaction with the cooperation with the PO. The jointly organized activities will continue in the year 2023 and a joint webinar on Vocational Education and Training is being planned to be held in Q1 2023.

The National Agency of International Education Affairs as DPP assesses the relation to the PO as very good and in most of the parts very open. In their opinion, the Research Agency might not be the appropriate agency to run an education programme, even though the PO tries its best.

The NFP has not received response of the Innovation Norway.

## Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

### Programme Operator and Partners

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

The PO states that the cooperation with the Donor Programme Partners continued to be intense, constructive and highly professional. In 2022, the focus in the area of bilateral cooperation shifted on the planning of activities covering the cooperation at the Programme level. These activities are scheduled for the period of the year 2023 to April 2024.

The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate highlights on strategic and Programme level the study visits held during the Cooperation Committee Meetings in Norway and in Slovakia in the year 2022.

The NFP has not received response of the Directorate for Civil Protection and the Norwegian Environment Agency.

## 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 and Culture Norway (ACN) (former name Arts Council Norway)

The PO's cooperation with the Donor Programme Partners, Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage and Arts and Culture Norway, continued in year 2022. The cooperation was mainly focused on the sessions of the Cooperation Committee.

The PO stated that the cooperation has been marked by the frequent changes on the position of the contact person on the side of both DPPs. The PO does not consider these changes appropriate in the context of their cooperation.

Both DPPs' institutions co-organized very fruitful and interesting networking meeting for the Culture Programme Operators in June 2022 which took place in Lithuania – in Vilnius and Kaunas.

The Norwegian Directorate for Culture Heritage assess the cooperation with the PO as generally good. But in 2022, a certain lack of information and contact with the PO was noticeable, e. g. in case of a cancelled Project when the DPP received information only after this Project was cancelled. Despite the request, the Cooperation Committee Meeting was not organized.

However, the cooperation with the Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic as the Project Promoter of the Pre-defined Projects (Pro Monumenta II and the Red Monastery – reborn) is strong and close.

The Arts Council Norway states that the contact between the DPP and the PO has been scarce.

In 2022 they have learnt about Pre-defined Project bilateral part. The Slovak Arts Council/Arts Council Norway exchange has been very rewarding, but also challenging in terms of proof of expenditure. The Norwegian Partners are still experiencing challenges regarding proof of expenditure, the proof of expenditure is interpreted in the strictest possible way by the PO and/or the Project Promoters, which causes problems for the Norwegian Partners. The ACN are working extensively to guide the Norwegian Project Partners, but there is the risk of losing good Project Partners, both in this period and the next.

## 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

Within the Programme, in terms of bilateral cooperation, the PO benefits from the excellent cooperation with the Norwegian Directorate of Health as Donor Programme Partner and Council of Europe as the IPO which both in 2022 continued to provide valuable strategic advice via monitoring the Programme's progress in Cooperation Committee meetings or providing direct support in various areas. In 2022 the Programme Operator participated in two conferences for SYNERGY Network against gender-based and domestic violence members which were organised and partially funded by the CoE; the Slovak Republic plans to host a SYNERGY conference and meeting in December 2023.

The Norwegian Directorate of Health as DPP enjoys the cooperation with trusted Partners in Slovakia. They appreciate how the PO managed the challenges with COVID-19 as an obstacle in the process of organizing face-to-face meetings. The PO has succeeded in sharing all the necessary information as well as updates in the Programme. They look forward to cooperating in a more active phase in the Programme implementation, namely study visits and on-site meetings.

From the perspective of the Council of Europe, the relationship with the PO continues to be positive and productive, and the PO is impressively able to manage the various needs which emerge within the Cooperation Committees. Communication has been regular, and guidance from the CoE is frequently sought out. The PO is committed to the topic and very present in the bilateral SYNERGY Network meetings to exchange experience. The CoE remains committed to assisting Slovakia to obtain Programme objectives, and supporting Slovak authorities to end violence against women.

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

### 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)

Within the Programme, the PO cooperates with the Norwegian Barents Secretariat as Donor Programme Partner and with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as IPO. OECD is also a Project Partner to 2 of the Pre-defined Projects GGCPP001 and GGCPP003. The PO is satisfied with the communication and contribution of the DPP and IPO to the implementation of the Programme. They are both active members of the Cooperation Committee.

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat mentioned a very positive impression of the cooperation with the PO in 2022. A good flow of information is experienced within the Programme. The PO is very easy to contact, always providing with good, thorough replies, what contributes to good mutual trust and understanding, and therefore a very fruitful cooperation.

The Council of Europe states that the cooperation with the PO is satisfactory.

## 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

Within the Programme, the PO cooperates with the Council of Europe as IPO. In general, the cooperation with IPO is considered very good and smooth. CoE is represented in the Cooperation Committee and Selection Committee as well.

The NFP has not received statement from IPO.

## Annex E: Communication summary

### 1. Best projects

The Project that can be mentioned as the best practice example is the Pre-defined Project "Pro Monumenta - prevention by maintenance" from the SK-CULTURE Programme ([SK-CULTURE-0001](#)).

One of the most successful Projects implemented under the SK-CULTURE Programme is the Pre-defined Project entitled "Pro Monumenta II." which is carried out by the Monuments Office of the Slovak Republic. It is a continuation of the Pre-defined Project "Pro Monumenta" (from the previous programming period 2009-2014). This Pre-defined Project is aimed at completing a sustainable system of preventive inspections of immovable monuments in the Slovak Republic, so that at least 100 inspections per year are carried out and the construction of 3 small training centres (in Trnava, Banská Štiavnica and Levoča) for traditional craftsmanship procedures used in the restoration of monuments. Within the Pre-deproject Pro Monumenta II., prevention is executed through maintenance of monuments. 3 teams of experts were created, who were able to not only assess the structural and technical condition of the monuments but also to repair their small defects on site. For this purpose, experts were trained and provided with material and technical equipment (mobile workshops). The uniqueness of the Project lies in the fact that it brings an immense contribution to the strengthening of bilateral relations as it is realized in partnership with Donor Partner from Norway - Riksantikvaren. The implementation of this Project was initiated by the Norwegian side and it provides know-how on how to establish a similar system in Norway.

### 2. Visibility of the Grants and the Donors

In the course of 2022, the NFP realized a mid-term communication activity which consisted of an online and an offline part. The online part represented the educational campaign associated with the competition on Facebook and Instagram which lasted almost one month (from 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022 – the Constitution day in Norway till 12<sup>th</sup> June 2022). The campaign was focused on information about the life, geography and traditions of the Donor States as well as about the objectives, results and position of the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovakia. The campaign combined videos with static graphical content and many animated elements. The joint reach of this social media campaign was almost 100,000 people. The aim was to have at least 600 questionnaires completed. Even though the aim was not reached, slightly more than 300 questionnaires were submitted, but the reach of the campaign was enormous.



The draw of winners was a part of a press conference (offline part) of Ambassador of Norway, H.E. Terje Theodor Nervik, and the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR, Mrs. Veronika Remišová. The press conference took place on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2022 in the premises of House of Art Fatra Žilina where the Project “Let's retune to the new wave - House of Art Fatra Žilina” is being implemented. The press conference was a part of the Annual Meeting.

Another excellent example of the offline communication activity was the state visit of the Minister of Culture of the SR Mrs. Natália Milanová and the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR, Mrs. Veronika Remišová to Norway. This state visit took place from 13<sup>th</sup> till 15<sup>th</sup> of November. A photo exhibition at Konserthusete comprised of the all reconstructed historical monuments from the Call CL001 and some selected Projects focused on the living art from the Calls CLT02 and CLT03 were part of the state visit. Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR, Mrs. Veronika Remišová visited also fortress Akerhus where she met the representatives of the DPP - Riksantikvaren. The state visit ended with the concert of the State Chamber Orchestra Žilina, the Project Promoter of Project CLT01005 “Let's retune to the new wave - House of Art”.

<https://www.teraz.sk/kultura/slovenska-kultura-sa-predstavi-v-oslo/674207-clanok.html>

<https://enrsi.rtvs.sk/articles/news/308835/slovak-culture-presented-in-oslo>

**Published promotional videos on Projects on [www.eegrants.sk](http://www.eegrants.sk) and YouTube in 2022:**

With the SK-LOCALDEV Programme, Calls LDI01 and LDI02 Projects (9 videos):

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYoKgE1yAl3bnibvD0unq\\_dCj-QVhLx0U](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYoKgE1yAl3bnibvD0unq_dCj-QVhLx0U)

Within the SK-GOVERNANCE Programme, Call GGC01 Projects (6 videos):

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYoKgE1yAl3aazm2CwmGEYcBdj\\_nf8Auc](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYoKgE1yAl3aazm2CwmGEYcBdj_nf8Auc)

### 3. Media coverage

*Local:*

<https://www.seredonline.sk/2022/01/04/vicepremierka-remisova-vdaka-grantom-ehp-a-norska-chranime-pamiatky-pomahame-kulture-a-rozvijame-obciansku-spolocnost/>

*Regional:*

<https://kosicednes.sk/sponzorovany-obsah/projekt-dom-ov-vytvara-nove-susedstva/>

*National:*

<https://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/13982/333020#2576> - starts at 42:16

### 4. Website and social media

Link to the National Focal Point's (EEA and Norway Grants) webpage	Total number of page views in the reporting year
<a href="https://www.eegrants.sk/">https://www.eegrants.sk/</a> ; <a href="https://www.norwaygrants.sk/">https://www.norwaygrants.sk/</a>	171,543

### 5. Visuals



<https://www.eealibrary.org/collection/preview/410-The%20Strategic%20cooperation%20of%20national%20theatres%20%28SR%20and%20NO%29%20-%20bilateral%20initiative?collectionAccessKey=ce9522bd-2688-409c-9bd4-7bed588832ef>

# ***Communication Strategy***

## ***for the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021 in the Slovak Republic***

***Revised version 1.6, March 2023***

***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 (2023). The next update of the CS will be carried out in 2024.

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) and from July 2023 in close cooperation with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Vienna.

### 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 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 the 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: In the course of 2022, the NFP regularly organized meetings of the 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), the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Slovakia, and the representatives of Active Citizens Fund. This way, the National Focal Point ensures 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

Provided information is to 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"> <li>- “basic” information about the new period of the EEA and Norway Grants</li> <li>- information about the actual status of the implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants and achieved results and outcomes</li> <li>- information about cooperation (what could be achieved together or what has been already achieved) among the Slovak Republic and the Donors states</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media (print media, on line media, TV and radio);</li> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eegrants.sk">www.eegrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> <li>- major information activities organized by the NFP</li> <li>- brochures and leaflets</li> </ul>
2. POs and potential project promoters, FMO/FMC, DPPs, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information about the actual status of the implementation, specially about the calls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media (print media, online media, radio, TV);</li> </ul>

TARGET GROUP	Type of provided information	Type of communication channels
IPOs and partner entities from the donor states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information about the approved, contracted and implemented projects and bilateral activities</li> <li>- Information about the possibilities of bilateral cooperation, especially about the call under the BF</li> <li>- Information about the new guidelines</li> <li>- Information about the achieved results and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eegrants.sk">www.eegrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> <li>- major information activities organized by the NFP</li> <li>- workshops and seminars focused on rules and requirements of the EEA and Norway Grants</li> <li>- matchmaking seminars focused on possibilities given by the BF</li> <li>- study trips</li> <li>- 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)</li> <li>- brochures and leaflets</li> </ul>
3. Professional public and media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information about the actual status of the implementation,</li> <li>- Information about the approved, contracted and implemented projects and bilateral activities</li> <li>- Information about the possibilities of the bilateral cooperation,</li> <li>- Information about the achieved results and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media (print media, online media, radio, TV);</li> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eegrants.sk">www.eegrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> <li>- major information activities organized by the NFP / for media press conferences</li> <li>- study trips</li> <li>- direct emails</li> <li>- brochures and leaflets</li> </ul>

#### 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.

In 2022, the NFP realized a mid-term communication activity, which consisted of an online and an offline part. The online part was an educational campaign associated with the competition on

Facebook and Instagram, which lasted almost one month (17th May 2022 – the Constitution day in Norway – 12th of June 2022). The campaign was focused on information about the life, geography and traditions of the donor countries as well as about the aims, results and position of the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovakia. The campaign combined videos with static graphical content and many animated elements. The joint reach of this social media campaign was almost 100,000 people. The aim was to have at least 600 questionnaires completed. Even though the aim was not reached, slightly more than 300 questionnaires were submitted, the reach of the campaign was enormous.



The draw of winners was a part of a joint press conference (offline part) of Ambassador of Norway, H.E. Terje Theodor Nervik, and the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR, Mrs. Veronika Remišová. The press conference took place on 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2022 in the premises of House of Art Fatra Žilina where the project 'Let's return to the new wave - House of Art Fatra Žilina' is being implemented. The press conference was a part of the Annual Meeting.

The following table shows major past and future publicity activities organized by the NFP.

Activity	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"> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eegrants.sk">www.eegrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>- Social media – Facebook for media press conferences</li> <li>- direct emails</li> <li>- leaflets</li> </ul>
2. Mid – term publicity activity – Educational campaign associated with the competition on Facebook and Instagram. This was	May-June 2022	All target groups	a), b), d)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- websites: <a href="http://www.eegrants.sk">www.eegrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a></li> <li>-</li> <li>- Social media – Facebook</li> </ul>

finalized by the the press conference of Ambassador of Norway, H.E. Terje Theodor Nervik, and the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR, Mrs. Veronika Remišová.				- for media press conferences
3. Closing conference(s)	2024	All target groups	partial aims b) and d)	- websites: <a href="http://www.eegrants.sk">www.eegrants.sk</a> or <a href="http://www.norwaygrants.sk">www.norwaygrants.sk</a> - Social media – Facebook - media press conferences - study trips to visit selected projects - direct emails - brochure

### 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 is being provided.

There is 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](http://www.eegrants.sk) and [www.norwaygrants.sk](http://www.norwaygrants.sk). Under this webpage, there are 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 programmes the most important information is being published along with a link to their official webpages. The NFP cooperates with all POs to ensure that actual and appropriate information are being 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 recorded traffic at the beginning of programming period, in 2016, was 121,142 page views and 34,321 visits. After several years, the traffic has significantly increased to 171,543 page views (195,000 in 2021) and 48,143 visits (57,564 in 2021) were recorded for the whole year 2022. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe a slight decrease in the number of visitors compared to 2021, which is mainly due to the announcement of calls in 2021.

The NFP administers a profile on Facebook under the title “EEA and Norway Grants Slovakia”. The original number of likes on Facebook has been significantly increased (from 540 likes at the end of May 2017 to 1,686 at the end of 2022). At the end of 2022, the number of followers of the Facebook profile was 1661.

For the time being, the NFP does not administrate any account on LinkedIn, Twitter or Instagram. The NFP as part of the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the SR 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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## 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 be regularly 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	1,000	On-line questionnaires	end of 2024
Percentage of respondents who knew of the EEA and Norway Grants prior to completing the questionnaire.	%	70 %	On-line questionnaires	end of 2024
The number of respondents who correctly answered at least three questions from the questionnaire.	number	65 %	On-line questionnaires	end of 2024
Number of respondents who were able to answer the question “which countries contribute to the EEA Grants”	number	55 %	On-line questionnaires	end of 2024
Indicators of the partial aims	Units	Target value	Source of information	Deadline for evaluation



<b>Indicators of the overall aim</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Target value</b>	<b>Source of information</b>	<b>Deadline for next evaluation</b>
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	2024
Increased total number of likes on Facebook	number	1,700	Facebook Statistics	2024

## **8. Evaluation of achieved values of indicators**

Due to the complications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there are delays in several Programmes implemented and thus the first evaluation of Indicators of the overall aim stated in chapter 7 will be in 2024, 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.

<b>Indicators of the overall aim</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Target value</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Number of processed questionnaires	number	1,000	694 (338 questionnaires were received before the educational campaign and 356 were received during the educational campaign in 2022)	In 2022, an online survey was carried out as part of a midterm activity linked to an educational campaign on grants.
Percentage of respondents who knew of the EEA and Norway Grants prior to completing the questionnaire.	%	70 %	54,76%	In 2022, the online survey was carried out as part of a midterm activity linked to an educational campaign on grants.
The number of respondents who correctly answered at least three questions from the questionnaire.	number	65 %	46,11%	In 2022, the online survey was carried out as part of a midterm activity linked to an educational campaign on grants.
Number of respondents who were able to answer the question "which countries	number	55 %	71,76%	In 2022, the online survey was carried out as part of a midterm activity linked to an educational campaign on grants.

contribute to the EEA Grants”				
<b>Indicators of the partial aims</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Major activities including press conferences	0	3	2	Launching Conference of the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021, November 2018. The mid-term conference was held in June 2022 and was combined with an information campaign about the grants. The closing event is planned in 2024.
Increased total number of web page views	121,142	150,000	171,543	Google Analytics for period 01/2022 – 12/2022
Increased total number of likes on Facebook	540	1,500	1,686	Facebook Statistics at the end of 2022;

Annex 1: SWOT analysis

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

## 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:

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>EEA and Norway Grants period 2009 – 2014 (baseline)</b>	<b>EEA and Norway Grants period 2014 – 2021 (target for the year 2021)</b>	<b>EEA and Norway Grants period 2014 – 2021 (target for the year 2022)</b>
Number of processed questionnaires	3,725	4,500	1,000
Percentage of respondents who knew of the EEA and Norway Grants prior to completing the questionnaire.	53 %	70 %	70 %
The number of respondents who correctly answered at least three questions from the questionnaire.	59 %	65 %	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 %	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.

The set target value for indicator “Number of processed questionnaires” (4,500) proved to be very ambitious. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, it was necessary to change the way this survey is conducted. The physical / personal events are practically not carried out since 2020, therefore the project promoters cannot distribute and collect the questionnaires during the events as it was in previous programming period. As the focus of obtaining these data could not remain solely on the project promoters, instead of the originally planned source of information (Annual Project Reports, Final Project Reports), an on-line questionnaire was created by the National Focal Point.

As the electronic questionnaire, which is anonymous, is based solely on a willingness of public to complete it, the target value of the abovementioned indicator has been reduced. Other target values, reflecting raised awareness on the Grants in Slovakia remain unchanged. The electronic questionnaire is disseminated through all possible communication channels to all target groups of communication at all levels of implementation.

### **SK-INNOVATION**

**BIN01:** Open Call for Proposals on the support of innovation and business development

**BIN02:** Call for Proposals on the Support of Innovation and Business Development

**BINSGS01:** Small Grant Scheme Call on support of newly established business (start-ups)

**BINSGS02:** Small Grant Scheme Call on institutional cooperation between higher education institutions, upper-secondary schools and private sector

**BINSGS03:** Small Grant Scheme Call for proposals for international mobility between higher education institutions, upper-secondary schools and private sector

**BINBF01:** Bilateral Call on travel grants

**BINBF02:** Open Call for proposals for bilateral initiatives under the education component

**BINBF03:** Call for Proposals for bilateral initiatives

### **SK-CLIMATE**

**ACC01** and **ACC02:** Open Call on Action plans for mitigation and adaptation implemented by local authorities in urban areas

**ACC03:** Small Grant Scheme Call on awareness raising on climate change mitigation and adaptation at schools

**ACC04:** Open Call on restoration of degraded wetland ecosystems

**ACC05:** Open Call on awareness raising on climate change mitigation and adaptation

### **SK-LOCALDEV**

**LDI01:** Open Call on local development, poverty reduction and Roma inclusion (services and infrastructure for children and youth provided)

**LDI02:** Local development, poverty reduction and Roma inclusion (services to marginalized Roma communities provided and/or capacities of organisations active in social inclusion of marginalised Roma communities increased)

**LDI03:** Call on local development, poverty reduction and Roma inclusion (services to marginalized Roma communities provided and/or capacities of organisations active in social inclusion of marginalised Roma communities increased)

**LDIBF01:** Call on local development and inclusion bilateral relations

### **SK-DOMESTIC**

**DGV01:** Open call on the support of organisation promoting equality between women and men a work life balance

**DGV02:** Open Call for Proposals on the Support of Intervention Teams at Local Level on Services for Victims of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, Including Children

**DGV03:** Open Call for Proposals on Improvement of the Quality of Services so that They Meet the Required Standards, Including Specific Services for Children Victims

**DGVBF04:** Open Call for bilateral initiatives between Slovakia and Norway in the field of Domestic and Gender-based Violence

**DGVBF01:** Open Call for bilateral relations for establishing and development of the partnership - Support of organisations promoting equality between women and men and work life balance

**DGVBF02:** Call for bilateral relations for establishing and development of partnership - Support of intervention teams at local level on services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence, including children

**DGVBF03:** Open Call for Bilateral Relations for Establishing and Development of the Partnership - Improvement of the Quality of Services so that They Meet the Required Standards, Including Specific Services for Children Victims

## **SK-CULTURE**

**CLT01:** Open call on the support of restoration and revitalization of cultural heritage

**CLT02:** Call on the support of contemporary art and culture

**CLT03:** Call on the support of contemporary art and culture II

**CLTBF01:** Open call for bilateral relations for establishing and development of the partnership – Heritage Component

**CLTBF02:** Open call for bilateral relations for establishing and development of the partnership - Arts Component

**CLTBF04:** Open Call to strengthen bilateral relations between Donor States and Slovakia in field of cultural heritage management

**CLTBF05:** Open Call to strengthen bilateral relations between Donor State and Slovakia in field of contemporary culture and living art

## **SK-GOVERNANCE**

**GGC01:** Open Call for Proposals on fostering Institutional cross-border cooperation with Ukraine

**GGC02:** Small grants scheme call for proposals on fostering institutional cross-border cooperation with Ukraine

**GGCBF01:** Open Call for bilateral relations - establishing and developing partnerships with potential donor partners

**GGCBF02:** Bilateral Call in the area of transparency, good governance and responsible public institutions aimed primarily at digital cooperation

**GGCBF03:** Bilateral Call dedicated to people-to-people initiatives in the Slovak-Ukrainian border region contributing to strengthening trilateral cooperation among donor states, Slovakia and Ukraine