



Annual Programme Report FM14-21

Czech Republic
CZ-ENVIRONMENT Environment, Ecosystem and Climate Change

2021

A. Executive Summary

Under the Environment, Ecosystem and Climate Change Programme (hereinafter referred to as the “Programme”) two large two-round open calls were launched and closed, evaluation process for two small grant schemes was completed and almost 100 grant agreements from Norway Grants were concluded.

At the moment, we record a delay of about 6 months compared to the originally planned timeline. This delay is caused by the ongoing updating of technical and legislative conditions on the basis of which subsequent calls from the Programme may be announced, as well as by extending the deadlines for concluding grant agreements and subsequent implementation of projects due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In March 2021, we successfully completed the process of increasing the total allocation of the Programme by EUR 2,32 million from Norway Grants, which was confirmed by the issuance of an Addendum to the Programme Agreement, which, with 15 % national co-financing from the State Environmental Fund of the Czech Republic (hereinafter referred to as the “PO”) amounts to a total increase in the allocation of EUR 2 729 412 (approximately CZK 71 000 000). This increase was used to support 11 applications placed in the projects pool of the SGS-3 Oslo call (EUR 365 000) and 3 applications in the 4A -Bergen Call (EUR 2 000 000). The remaining funds were allocated for the 3B-Call Trondheim (EUR 173 353). The surplus funds from the SGS-1 Rondane call (EUR 474 545) were also transferred to the projects pool in the Call-2A Tromso call, which made it possible to support a total of 6 projects from this call.

In the first half of 2021, we focused mainly on the announcement of two major two-round calls, **Call-1 Rago and Call-3B Trondheim**, which focus on innovation in the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems and the issue of removing pharmaceuticals residues from surface waters, as well as the application evaluation process of the applications in the calls closed in the second half of 2020 and early 2021. From June to December 2021 we worked on concluding contracts with project promoters. By the end of 2021, for the projects in the **SGS-1 Rondane, SGS-3 Oslo, Call-2A Tromso, Call-4A Bergen**, and for the most projects in the **SGS-4 Reine** the contracts were issued. In total, almost 100 contracts for the provision of subsidies from the Programme have been concluded.

The projects within these calls are in a very early stage of implementation and only in several cases, the first interim monitoring reports and the first payments requests have already been submitted. At the moment, they are being checked by project managers. In the case of the call SGS-3 Oslo, final monitoring reports have also been submitted for several short projects, which are also currently being reviewed by project managers. However, no project was officially finished by the end of 2021.

Both two-round calls **Call-1 Rago and Call-3B Trondheim** are currently at the stage of evaluation of applications submitted by the applicants with the consent of the Expert Committee to the second round of the call. The results will be known in the first quarter of 2022, when the Selection committees will take place. Both calls received great interest from applicants and the required allocation in the first round of the call significantly exceeded the total allocation. Although the Expert Committee did not recommend some project proposals for the second round of the call, the required allocation of received applications in the second round still exceeds the available funds by several tens of percent.

Within the communication of the Programme, we have been actively cooperating with project promoters to promote their projects, not only through a new information campaign, which we launched at the beginning of 2021, but we also cooperate on sharing communication materials of our Project Promoters. Even in 2021, the communication activities of the Programme were significantly affected by the ongoing pandemic, and therefore the website and social networks remain the primary communication tools. The communication was also initiated by project promoters, who implemented many activities aimed at promoting the projects and also the Programme.

Due to the fact, that the approved projects have already entered the implementation phase, we prepared a series of on-site monitoring visits for 2022, which will be carried out by projects managers and other representatives of the Programme. The Monitoring plan was prepared based on the recommendations of the Selection Committee, recommendations from project managers in cases where doubts appear, and also based on random selection.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic still affects the implementation of projects and bilateral initiatives, but the communication activities as well, measures have been implemented on the part of both the Programme Operator and the project promoters to minimize the impact of the pandemic on the achievement of the Programme's objectives and implementation timeline. These measures include, for instance, the transfer of communication activities to the online environment, enabling the extension of the implementation phase of bilateral initiatives or the changes in the particular timelines of some projects.

Bilateral cooperation is the part of the Programme, which was affected the most by the ongoing pandemic, significantly reducing the possibility of foreign travels. However, the allocation of the **Trolltunga call** was depleted before the planned closing date of the call (June 2020) and the Programme Operator has generally noted great interest in projects involving international cooperation not only with the Norwegian partners.

Within the lesson learned, we noted several topics suitable for discussion at the NFP and FMO level for the next period. These comments concern the significant differences in the administrative process of the Norway Grants and other grant titles, the issue of eligibility of certain expenditure and excessive administrative complexity, which increase significantly when there is higher number of projects supported from the Norway Grants.

The overall risk of the implementation of the Programme has not changed within the updated table Risk Management, there was only minor re-evaluation of certain risks following the ongoing Covid – 19 pandemic.

In 2021, the parliamentary elections took place in the Czech Republic; their results will determine the direction of climate and environmental protection policy for the coming years. Moreover, the Czech Republic will hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2022.

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