



Annual Programme Report FM14-21

Czech Republic
CZ-ENVIRONMENT Environment, Ecosystem and Climate Change

2023

A. Executive Summary

The Environment, Ecosystems and Climate Change Programme (the 'Programme') is entering the final phase of implementation. In the first half of 2023, we completed the selection of supported projects for the last calls (SGS-2 Svalbard and Call-4B Stavanger). In the second half of the year, we completed the contracting and advance payments.

Currently, 97 projects are being implemented. 68 projects have been completed, mostly falling under small grant schemes. In June 2023, the eligibility of expenditure was closed for the SGS-4 Reine call, which implemented small-scale projects aimed at raising public awareness and education on ecosystem and biodiversity protection, air and water pollution and climate change adaptation at regional level. A total of 28 projects have been implemented in this call, for most of which we have also completed the final monitoring report and the indicators achieved have been evaluated. The implementation of most of the projects in the SGS-3 Oslo, focusing on the development of adaptation strategies at regional and local level, has also been completed. 38 final monitoring reports were approved. Some of the first projects in calls SGS-1 Rondane and Call-4A Bergen were also completed.

Completed projects indicate that in most cases the programme objectives will be exceeded in terms of the indicators set. This is because in many cases the projects cover a much wider area than we expected when we set the indicators at the time of the programme preparation. We have adjusted the originally intended focus of some calls depending on the current situation and the environmental protection objectives of the Czech Republic. This was necessary to minimise overlap with other grant programmes. But there are also other reasons why some indicator targets have been exceeded. In the case of the SGS-4 Reine call projects, project promoters often used media with a high number of followers for promotion. And some of the projects are a continuation of traditional campaigns that have a high viewership. These include documentaries broadcast by Czech Television or the nationwide Adapterra Awards competition. Such projects significantly increase the values achieved in the indicators - for example, the number of people reached by the information campaign.

In Annex 1, only data on completed projects are reported; for this reason, for some indicators we still record zero as the achieved value. However, the values we have from the interim monitoring reports show that the target value of most indicators will be achieved/exceeded.

We are not currently experiencing any significant modifications in implementation due to price increases or supply shortages related to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic or the ongoing war in Ukraine. In terms of administration, we are repeatedly confronted with inconsistencies between the conditions of different subsidy programmes administered by the State Environmental Fund of the Czech Republic. The significant differences in the rules and eligibility of expenditures in the different subsidy programmes are confusing for the beneficiaries. This often complicates the administration of monitoring reports and payment requests. For the future period of the EEA and Norway Grants, we would therefore like to focus on simplifying of procedures as well as the issue of personal expenses in projects. In the case of some types of applicants (e.g. universities), we have noticed repeated problems with reporting and documenting these expenses. This significantly slows down the process of payment claims on the part of beneficiaries and their administration on the part of the programme operator.

We continuously monitor the implementation of projects through interim monitoring reports and on-site visits. In 2023, we conducted 18 monitoring visits. No serious irregularities were detected during the checks. A total of 27 programme projects have been subject to a monitoring visit during the programme implementation period, and we therefore consider that our monitoring plan, which established that a minimum of 10% of all supported projects must be inspected, has now been fulfilled.

In the framework of the support of international cooperation in environmental protection within the EEA and Norway Grants, we organised a meeting of the programme operators of green and energy programmes, the so-called Green HUB. The meeting took place in Prague and Český Krumlov with the participation of representatives of eleven European countries. The aim of the meeting was to exchange experiences with the administration of green programmes, share

examples of good practice and discuss possibilities for further cooperation at the level of programmes and future projects. We would like to keep this platform for the next periods of the EEA and Norway Grants. The Green Hub activities also included an information campaign aimed at spreading awareness of the fact that the EEA and Norway Grants do not only operate in the Czech Republic, but also support interesting projects in other European countries and that these countries are interested in cooperation in the field of environmental protection and energy.

In the area of promoting bilateral cooperation between the Czech Republic and Norway, we have started the preparation of a bilateral initiative for mayors of Czech and Norwegian municipalities. The initiative will focus on sharing experiences in the field of green solutions and adaptation to climate change. Its implementation should take place in 2024.

The biggest public communication event in 2023 was the Europe Day on Střelecký ostrov in Prague. We cooperated with the PO of the CZ-RESEARCH programme, the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, to prepare the promotional stand. Our aim was to create a positive association between the EEA and Norway Grants and environmental protection. We consider the activity to be very successful given the number of visitors to the stand. In December, we opened the registration of participants for an international expert conference that we are preparing for June 2024. This conference will focus on presenting innovative projects in ecosystem and biodiversity conservation and projects aimed at removing micropollutants from water. Representatives of NFP, FMO, DPP but also POs of other green programmes, representatives of universities and research institutions from the Czech Republic and abroad or the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic were invited. The aim is not only to present the projects themselves but also to open new ways in international cooperation on specific topics. As part of the communication of the Programme, we have prepared a series of documentary videos about the supported projects in 2023. We plan to publish the videos in the first half of 2024.

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