

ANNUAL PROGRAMME REPORT

FM14-21

Portugal

PT-ACTIVECITIZENS Civil Society

2021

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic, even with a high vaccination rate in Portugal, continued to severely affect people's lives, the economy, and the social conditions and had a major impact on the work of the CSOs. On the positive side, the Programme was awarded an additional 0.5 million euros from the EEA Grants reserve to Portugal, making available larger allocations for the 2021 and 2022 calls to help NGOs respond to the increased needs of a post-pandemic more vulnerable society.

The Active Citizens Fund Programme based on the experience already acquired in the previous year managed to pursue its activities almost as planned, with the team working often from home, even during the hardest period of lockdown, between January and May. The main limitation was related to on-site monitoring visits, but they were replaced by closer contact with the promoters using e-mail, phone, and online meetings. However, the pandemic cut visibility to some Programme and project initiatives and obliged to postpone others, which is a setback for the ACF development and notoriety in Portugal.

The Portuguese NGOs could adapt to the new reality and found different ways to reach their target groups, mainly converting the usual face-to-face into online activities. However, most projects slowed down and needed more time and money to successfully be completed. This situation had consequences on the Programme's management because it delayed project closures and increased the number of projects running at the same time.

This is the main reason why, after 3.5 years of implementation, the Programme has not shown yet significant results: out of the 121 projects approved, only 27 projects have already been completed and the results validated. Of those, 23 were small projects consisting of elaboration of NGO needs assessments and action plans, but yet without the means to strengthen the sustainability of those organisations.

However, the monitoring and reporting system set up for the Programme allows the FO to carefully follow the developments of the funded projects and to confirm that, as a rule, all contracted targets are being achieved. On the other hand, due to the result-oriented management since 2018, the contracted projects under the 13 calls already decided, exceed for almost all indicators the figures agreed with the FMO for the entire period. As 4 new calls have been launched in 2021 and another set shall be open in 2022, the FO is quite confident that all targets will be met by the end of the Programme. To achieve so, it was decided that the 2021 calls – the last ones to open for large projects, where the impact is higher – should give priority, in the selection process, to projects contributing to the few indicators where the contracted figures have fallen short of the Programme ambitions.

The launch event of the 2021 calls took place, as planned, on September 1st, in Lisbon, in a mixed session (face-to-face and online), followed by 8 offline technical workshops in different cities of the country, including in Azores and Madeira.

As a consequence of the pandemic, the pre-defined project “Education for Citizenship” obtained a time extension and an additional grant to allow for one more school year of work. Due to the atypical year of 2020, even if activities online have been implemented, the project needed more time to get effective results regarding the metrics and the work done by the NGOs in schools.

51 projects have been contracted in 2021 as a result of the 2020 calls, 90 projects approved under previous calls have been carried out in 2021 and 181 applications have been admitted under the 2021 calls, launched on September 1st.

The 2021 calls, for large projects, covered the 4 Outcomes, with a total appropriation of € 1 850 000. A global amount of 11.5 million euros has been requested and currently, the evaluation and selection procedures are taking place, expected to be finalised in early March.

Under Outcome 4, targeting the sustainability of the Civil Society organisations, there are at this stage results worthy to be highlighted: up to 2021, 38 organisational needs assessments and action plans have been completed in projects under Outcomes 1, 2, and 3 and further 63 under Outcome 4, surpassing the contracted target of 95 for the entire programming period. As a result, 57 projects are currently implementing their capacity-building measures.

Bilateral cooperation was promoted over 2021 in the calls launch session and all workshops around the country, as well as on the Programme's website. Only 2 new initiatives have been approved under the dedicated call for Bilateral Cooperation Initiatives, but one of them dropped because, due to the pandemic, there were no conditions to implement the activities in the field. However, 27 entities from the Donor Countries are involved as formal partners in 26 projects approved under the 2018, 2019, and 2020 calls.

The ACF Portugal continued its active monthly cooperation with the other FOs in the ACF Community for Action, Poland and Romania leading the group.

The website of the Active Citizens Fund in Portugal has been the most effective way of continuously ensuring visibility for donors, and has had, between January and December, a total of 181 454 page views and 55 040 unique visitors. Between August 31st and September 30th, the increase of sessions and page views, related to the calls 2021 was 11 222 and 37 568 respectively.

The media partnership established between the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and national television (SIC) has been contributing to the visibility of the ACF through the presentation of different supported projects. The projects, the ACF, and the EEA Grants have also been strongly disseminated in regional and national newspapers. The Programme has also participated in the #CivilSocietyStartsHere campaign with some of its projects. The plan was to showcase inspiring ACF projects and bring visibility to the Donors' contribution to civil society in the Beneficiary States.

The overall risk score of the Programme of 2.45 wasn't changed from the previous year since the increase in the overall risk probability was compensated by a decrease of the overall consequence to the Programme's results.