

FINAL PROGRAMME REPORT

FM14-21

Portugal

PT-ACTIVECITIZENS Civil Society

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Final Programme Report marks the closure of the Active Citizens Fund (ACF) in Portugal. The Programme, supported by the EEA Grants and implemented by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) and the Bissaya Barreto Foundation (BBF), promoted civic engagement, Human Rights, and support for vulnerable groups and strengthened NGOs.

The Programme's Theory of Change considered that greater civic participation, better understanding and respect for Human Rights, and greater inclusion of all, particularly the most vulnerable, would contribute to a stronger and more united society. Also, by fostering more capable NGOs within a more organized sector, our society would be better equipped to respond to threats to our shared values and, finally, to our democracy.

This period is marked by strategic initiatives, impactful projects, and a steadfast commitment to strengthening civil society in Portugal. Throughout its implementation, the Programme also faced the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected many initiatives and required adaptability and resilience from all involved.

Despite these challenges, the Programme was still able to meet its targets and has surpassed all targets and goals. Several sources allow the Programme's evaluation evidence to be gathered: the external Interim and Final evaluation studies, projects' final reports and external assessments, and the advisory group narratives of impact.

The [external evaluation](#) conducted by Quaternaire Portugal stated that:

1. The support provided by the Programme Management Unit (PMU) was adequate. The PMU covered various management activities, from relations with donors and promoters to quality assurance of supported projects. While the support materials provided were diverse and technically rigorous and very positively evaluated by the promoters, some areas for improvement were revealed in monitoring and control – generally considered excessive.
2. The partnership between the consortium organisations significantly strengthened the Programme's capacity to operate and the impact of its actions, facilitating the transfer of experience and knowledge between the organisations involved. This collaboration was crucial to the Programme's success, particularly in increasing territorial coverage, improving project quality, and achieving the established goals.
3. The Programme generated high awareness of the EEA Grants among Portuguese NGOs and civil society organisations. Most respondents (61.3%) reported participating in some communication and awareness-raising action promoted by the Programme. Of those who participated in communication and awareness-raising actions, the vast majority (94.5%) considered their participation essential for developing the submitted application.
4. A distinctive aspect of the ACF is the mechanism for generating demand, supporting small organisations in preparing applications. The Programme also supports advocacy, using the prestige and capacity of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Both strategies strengthen the ability for intervention and influence of civil society organisations, thus proving the distinction between the Programme and other forms of support and its positive and far-reaching impact.

5. Along that same line, project promoters recognize the Programme for addressing previously uncovered areas and supporting diverse initiatives and organisations. The evaluators stated that the Programme has a wide range of eligibility criteria (activities and expenses), making it particularly relevant in the effort to adapt to the needs of beneficiaries and promote social innovation, revealing it was common to hear from supported NGOs the expression "this could not have been done in another programme." In fact, over 4/5 NGOs stated that they would not have conducted the project without the support of the ACF.
6. The evaluation concludes that the Programme's management model effectively converted activities into achievements and, from there, into first-level results. However, the Programme's influence in transforming first-level results into second-level results and in social cohesion was limited. Project continuity and replication heavily depended on their quality and robustness, showing that the management model had a more indirect role.
7. The evaluators state that the ACF made a relevant and very positive contribution to the empowerment and improvement of the NGO ecosystem in Portugal, better equipping them to face the daily challenges that arise in their activity, but also, thanks to the needs assessment and organizational planning exercises, to assume a more critical and informed position regarding the mission and objectives of their intervention in society, to seek to differentiate themselves.

From the internal reports and external assessments, the 182 projects involved more than 250 NGOs and 24,000 individuals, impacting more than 79,000 beneficiaries. These results were possible through a global allocation of 10.6 million euros, corresponding to 108.3% of the Programme's allocation. This overbooking allowed support to more projects, NGOs, and beneficiaries. Within the results achieved, one can highlight the following:

- More than 3,500 people were educated in civic rights, more than 1,300 volunteers were recruited, more than 100 initiatives promoting access to information on public/private policies were implemented, and 25 NGO-produced evidence-based reports on public/private policies were produced.
- Over 12,500 youths were mobilized for Human Rights activities, more than 2,800 professionals were trained in Human Rights, over 190 Human Rights campaigns were launched, and 14 laws and policies were influenced.
- Participative processes were adopted by 90 NGOs with their beneficiaries; more than 2,100 people benefited from new or improved services, and over 4,800 vulnerable people were empowered.
- More than 2,300 professionals and 320 NGOs were trained, with 223 NGOs adopting effective management procedures, 32 referencing research/evidence in their advocacy work, and 19 less dependent on public funding.

Regarding outreach to underserved areas and target groups, the Fund Operator (FO) surpassed its target, with 75 projects from promoters headquartered outside the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto (over 40%), more than doubling the number of supported projects from the previous financial mechanism. The FO held technical workshops throughout the country, informing about the application process and how to design projects and applications. It also

produced videos on the themes of the technical workshops featuring internal and external experts.

Several workshops were conducted per year according to the project's characteristics, dimensions, duration, and necessities—mandatory project management and thematic workshops. The Programme also provided a mechanism for revising applications and a coaching mechanism for the smallest underserved organisations.

In response to fragmentation, disorganization, and lack of representation, partnerships for large projects were fomented, and increased classification of applications with donor country partners was safeguarded. The Programme organized thematic and peer workshops and other events where networking was encouraged. The Programme also sought to give structure and voice to NGOs defending and promoting Human Rights by creating a new umbrella organisation in this subsector. In 2024, the [Diagnosis of NGOs in Portugal](#), initially conducted in 2014 by the Catholic University of Porto during the previous funding mechanism, was also updated, promoting knowledge about the sector with this longitudinal study.

Partnerships with the National Focal Point and the Norwegian Embassy in Lisbon were also crucial for the Programme. The FO organised study trips and attended events in Norway and Iceland alongside several Portuguese NGOs. The Program tripled its target with 36 projects including cooperation with a donor country entity. Also, EEA Grants brand recognition in Portugal quadrupled in 6 years, with over 1/5 of respondents associating EEA Grants with the Civil Society Programme.

Finally, on a more qualitative approach, an [advisory group](#), established in March 2024, composed of 25 participants from supported projects, played a crucial role in supplementing the evaluation of the Programme's results, supporting communication efforts, and suggesting improvements. Their testimonies helped to better understand the Programme's impact:

"(...) This project has taught me to distinguish, for example, fake news from real news because we didn't read newspapers or watch the news. And that can be seen in the impact the project had. It's good to inform ourselves about what we see and be sure of what we're absorbing."

"The impact of Trainee Reshape in prisons is very positive, and it's good for society in the long term. Because many people have skills they don't know they have."

"The [Youth] Network [for Equality] managed, with the "Click DELETE" project, to influence how the media talks about this phenomenon. Another effect was that issues of SVBI [Sexual Violence Based on Images] entered the political discussion, resulting in the inclusion of certain articles in the Penal Code on SVBI."

Despite a worsening general context, the Programme has surpassed all targets and goals, promoted civic engagement, Human Rights, and support to vulnerable groups, strengthened NGOs, encouraged cooperation, and reached underserved areas and NGOs. As one looks to the future, the lessons learned and the foundations laid by the ACF will continue to inspire and guide efforts to build a stronger and more united Portuguese society.