

Final NGO Programme Report

EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2009-2014

1. Executive summary

Why was the programme needed?

From 2008 to 2010 Latvia experienced deep economic and political crisis that were caused by the credit and housing bubble in so called “fat years”. And when the programme started people still tried to overcome the consequences of the crisis – poverty and social exclusion. In 2009 the percentage of Latvian inhabitants whose income level was below the official threshold for poverty risk was 21%. In that period Latvia experienced huge emigration wave. According to official data more than quarter million people left Latvia in order to ensure better life quality for themselves and their families. NGOs were seen as agents who could help to “fill the gaps” of existing problems in social sector by providing social services, helping people at the risk of social exclusion and ensure equal opportunities.

The NGO programme in Latvia aimed to strengthen civil society sector and ensure better society involvement in decision making processes. Although the number of NGOs was increasing, the number of people, who are members or volunteers in any of NGOs, was still low (around 5% of total population). That could partly be explained by the fact that in 2011 only 15.3% of people in Latvia believed that they can influence the decision making process. NGOs often are a bridge from whole society to government and vice versa. Strong public voice and strong NGOs are necessary to protect the needs of different society groups with different needs. One of these groups is national minorities that composes approximately half of society in Latvia. Lack of language and history knowledge is one of the main barriers to gain Latvian citizenship and be fully able to involve in decision making processes. To strengthen the feeling of belonging common events and integration activities with local society is important as well.

What did the programme achieve?

The EEA Grant programme “NGO fund” invested 10.3 million euros in civil society development, provided welfare and basic services for people at risk of social exclusion and promoted democratic values and human rights.

The Programme was implemented in two sub-components:

1) **„NGO activity support measure”**

The sub-component received 40% of the total programme “NGO fund” financing for the projects. The sub-component supported daily activities of NGOs in the following areas: democracy and participatory democracy; human rights, including minorities’ rights; good governance and transparency; combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination; environment and sustainable development; gender equality and gender-based violence.

2) **„NGO project measure”**

The sub-component received 60% of the total programme “NGO fund” financing for the projects. The sub-programme supported NGO projects in the following thematic areas:

- Social sector activities, including provision of welfare and basic services, local and regional NGO initiatives to reduce social inequalities and to promote social inclusion and gender-equality, including support to children and youth at risk;
- Development of a cohesive society – intercultural dialogue and integration of national minorities, including strengthening of human rights and national identity, awareness-raising informative and educational activities on citizenship issues and language training promoting democratic participation, prevention of discrimination, promotion of tolerance and acquisition of citizenship.

The pre-defined project „Support to sustainable civil society development and improvement of the monitoring system in Latvia” was aimed at delivering a particular outcome – strengthened capacity of NGOs and an enabling environment for the sector promoted.

In total 205 projects in local, regional and national level was supported by EEA Grant. In total there were received 1042 project proposals for more than 40.5 million euros.

Within the programme 79 NGOs had a possibility to ensure their daily actions for 3 years and actively take part in decision making processes in local, regional, national and even international level. With this support NGOs provided 81 consultations in local level and 221 consultations in regional, national and international level on diverse range of legislative acts as well as developed proposals of new legislative acts and lobbied their implementation.

As one of the examples can be mentioned developed “Partnership Development Act” by LGBT and their friends organization “Mozaika”. The Act would allow to register “family” (cohabitation) between two adults by taking all the responsibilities and receiving the same protection that is given to official families (married couples between man and women). Although the “Partnership Development Act” was not approved by Latvian Parliament, it caused a lot of discussions about the human rights LGBT community and all unmarried couples. Recently the “Partnership Development Act” collected 10 000 voices in society initiative platform “ManaBalss.lv” which is the minimum number of votes that needs to be collected for society initiative to be submitted in Latvian Parliament.

Platform “ManaBalss.lv” was one more project that received support within EEA Grant and had an opportunity to keep an active work, develop the online platform, improve the donation system and create an open code that can be used to create similar platforms all over the world. Platform “ManaBalss.lv” is considered as one of the most successful society initiative online platform in the world with a success rate of 50% of all initiatives that has been submitted to the Latvian Parliament. Within the project 418 citizen initiatives were received and 9 initiatives reached 10 000 signatures and were submitted to the Parliament thus promoting democracy and active citizen participation in decision making processes.

Half of the Grant funding within the programme was allocated for projects that were targeted to provision of welfare and basic services to defined target groups, but 10% for projects related to fostering democracy and sustainable development. By providing alternative services to socially vulnerable segments of the population, the programme has fostered improvement in the target group’s situation during the implementation. .

Within the programme 90 innovative and more than 250 non-innovative social services were developed and provided for groups at risk of social exclusion. More than half (66) of innovative social services were available to children, youth and families. 4999 children,

youth and families with children, as well as 3048 other representatives of target groups subject to social exclusion now have increased access to innovative services.

As some of innovative services and ideas created within the Programme can be mentioned:

- Developed training programme for experts on universal design that was created with the support of Norway blind and visually impaired organization (Vest-Agder branch). Trained experts provided 179 consultations including audits and on-spot visits (project No. LV03-0182):
- In cooperation with Iceland project partners NGO “Cerebral Palsy Iceland” developed innovative, interactive game program that helps to discover and develop the skills for children with disabilities.

To promote the cohesive society (sub- programme (“NGO Activity Support Measure”, area: Development of a cohesive society) 22 projects were implemented, reaching 24,412 representatives of various target groups, including 14,189 minority representatives, 4221 children and youth and 1280 non-citizens. According to the Programme final evaluation most actively implemented have been various measures and trainings for minorities, including the Latvian language classes and instruction on Latvian history and culture. Events fostering the gaining of citizenship have also been comparatively actively implemented. For the next period PO suggests to reallocate more funding for cohesive society development with the focus on activities where different ethnic minorities work together to achieve common goals.

One of the biggest achievements within the programme is establishment of “National NGO Fund” in 2015 with annual budget of 400 000 EUR. The Fund is established and financed by the Latvian Government as a result of recommendations that were developed in pre-defined project “Support to sustainable civil society development and improvement of the monitoring system in Latvia”. The “National NGO Fund” aims to strengthen civil society development and democracy as well as to foster society involvement in public processes. As the Programme operator of “National NGO Fund” was chosen Society Integration Foundation. The Programme has provided support for uninterrupted operation of the involved NGOs and sustainability of NGO support.

How were bilateral relations strengthened?

Programme provided the opportunity to strengthen and activate bilateral relations between the Donor countries and the Beneficiary countries, adopting best practices and experience, ensuring the passing on of knowledge, developing sustainable cooperation networks and developing joint innovative ideas. The recipients had access to various instruments that foster bilateral relations.

Common projects with Donor countries were promoted through partner search event at the beginning and “seed money” projects that gave an opportunity to visit potential project partners in order to prepare common project proposal.

Together with representatives of the Donor countries and the Beneficiary countries, 44 partnership projects were implemented, 33 partnerships with Donor country organisations and 12 partnerships with recipient country organisations were formed, 33 “seed money” projects were implemented, and 45 organisations took part in experience-exchange and partnership building activities in the Donor states organised by SIF.

Partnerships projects most often leads to long-lasting partnership and project promoters either have further partnership agreements or plans for other project proposals. Most often the partnership projects were implemented in the social field and Donor partners usually are the ones, who share their experience and best practise. That's because Donor countries non-governmental institutions have long-lasting experience in diverse fields and their professional work most of the times is more targeted to exact target group needs. The experience exchange visits to Norway and Iceland gave not only the opportunity to exchange experience on exact topic of experience exchange visit, but also gain knowledge about management of non-governmental institutions in Norway and Iceland. As very important and useful project promoters recognized the different methods for fund attraction and these visits inspired organizations to use more such tools as crowd funding, donations for exact purposes, selling of small items created by the organization etc.

In some of the cases project promoters recognized that the Donor partners could be involved more actively in the project implementation, but the limited funds for projects does not always allow to allocate enough funding to cover the salaries to experts from Donor countries. In next period there should be paid more attention for Donor partner possibilities to get involved in project actions and gain best experience from non-governmental organizations in Latvia.

Bilateral relations were strengthened not only through projects and experience exchange visits, but as well by several large scale events as "NGO Forum- Riga 2015" in 2015 that brought together more than 250 participants from 34 countries and gave the opportunity to share experience and establish new contacts. The Road map of civil society participation in decision making processes that was developed during the Forum is still important and it was mentioned again as important during the civil society forum "Forum on State of Civil Society and Civic Space in Europe" in November, 2017, during Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

What will be the impact of the programme?

According to the Programme final evaluation project promoters believe that their capacity has increased. Most highly rated was the cooperation capacity with other NGOs, public administration and private sector; capacity of organisation's chief executives; quality of vision and mission; capacity of the members of organisation; quality of governance and decision-making. Personnel policies, existence of ethic's code, capacity of financial and control as well as risk management were ranked as the least improved. According to the NGO self- assessment the biggest positive changes can be seen if the NGO has implemented macro (national level) project.

According to project promoters self- assessment the main factors that influence project sustainability are NGO financial sustainability (opportunities to attract funding for further activity implementation), institutional sustainability (opportunities to keep NGO staff, members and volunteers), political sustainability, accessibility of information and results. Programme has strengthened not only project promoters, but has provided a sustainable impact to whole NGO sector in Latvia as this is the first time in history in Latvia, when the government has created "National NGO fund" that is 100% financed by the Latvian Government.

Complementary actions have given the opportunity to learn and cooperate with organizations and institutions from all beneficiary countries. As well through common

events organizations had a possibility to share their experience and gain visibility in international area.

2. Programme area developments

Civil society development

During Programme implementation period number of non-governmental organizations in Latvia has grown sharply (see the table No.1.1.).

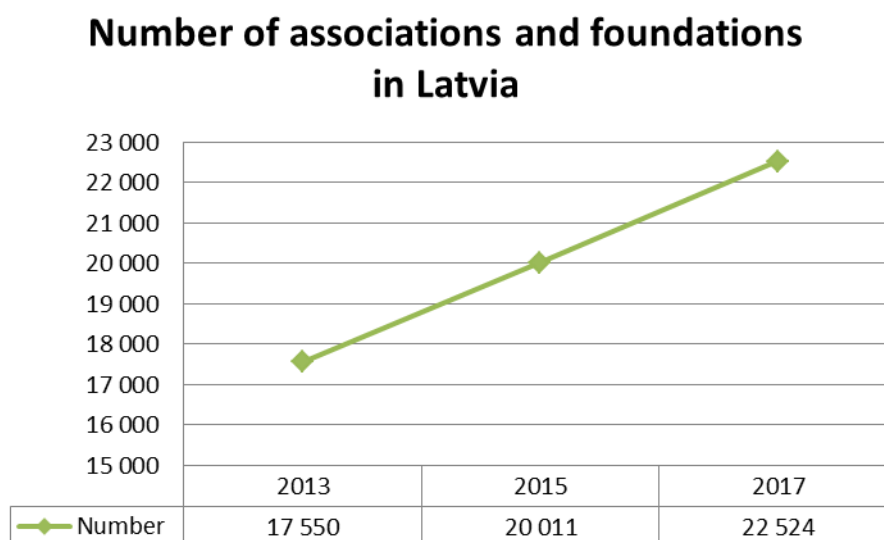


Table No.1.1. "Number of associations and foundations in Latvia"¹.

As it is represented in table No.1.1. in 4 years number of associations and foundation has increased by 4974 or more than 1200 organizations in a year. This trend partly can be explained by the fact that it is relatively easy to register NGO in Latvia (it needs to have only 2 participants) and part of those NGOs have become professional "project hunters" trying to apply for every available funding. Thus "project hunters" have created a job for themselves and are available to financially maintain themselves and their families. EEA Grant programme could have affected that because it was the biggest and most accessible financial source for NGOs in Latvia, but there is no research that could determine the impact of that.

Even though the number of NGOs has grown and within the LV03 sub-component „NGO activity support measure” there have been more than 6681 new NGO members and volunteers attracted, in general part of inhabitants, who are members and/or volunteers in NGO is still low. According to the [“The Review of the NGO sector in Latvia, 2015”](#) that was developed within pre-defined project in Programme there are:

- 4.7% of population are members of some organization;
- 15.8% of population is involved in some interest group;
- 35.3% of population has been involved in some NGO activities in the last three years;
- 3.6 % of population who has voluntarily done some activities in an association or foundation.

¹ Lursoft data: <https://goo.gl/i4n3jj>

During Programme implementation “The Law on Voluntary Work” came into force (January 1, 2016). Several project promoters have used Programme “Activity support measure” to ensure active participation in development and acceptance of the Law. The Law serves as the basis for several legal enactments, which will protect volunteers the same way as every other person in labour relations is protected².

The Programme has provided an impact on NGO involvement in decision making processes in local, regional, national and international level, especially through “Activity support measure”. 57 NGOs actively took a part in decision making processes by participating in meetings, workshops, preparing suggestions for legislative acts and opinion papers, establishing cooperation networks to better represent society opinion.

Strong public voice is especially important because there is still low public trust in government- according to one of the latest public pools only 12% of society trusts in Latvian Parliament (Saeima), 7% trusts in political parties and 19% trusts in Cabinet of Ministers³.

Sustainable development

Additionally to the developments in NGO involvement in decision making processes, the Programme has supported social justice and sustainable development especially through “NGO Activity Support Measure” area “Social sector activities”. As it is mentioned in section “ 3. Reporting on Programme outcome(s)” this sub-component has provided support to 45 552 representatives of different target groups by developing and providing 303 different services, including 90 innovative services.

Still the support to people at risk of social exclusion is insufficient in Latvia and it will not be enough if NGOs will just try to “fill the gaps” in the system. According to the data 21.8% of people in Latvia in 2015 were at risk of poverty (in 2013: 21.8%)⁴. Especially high risk of poverty is for people older than 65 who do live alone- it has increased from 67.4 % in 2014 to 74.0% in 2015.

To provide the support for people at risk of social exclusion and motivate people to be active, recognize and fight the discrimination several national wide projects have started. One of them is implemented by PO and it will focus on promotion of employment and socioeconomic inclusion of persons subject to risks of social exclusion and discrimination, at the same time fostering the increase of the level of information and understanding in the society as a whole on the issues of prevention of discrimination and of inclusive society (more info: <https://goo.gl/5J1AUj>). The project will provide a synergy with EEA Grant Programme targets. Unfortunately these types of activities are usually project- driven thus endangering sustainability of project results.

In next EEA Grant planning period it would be important to focus on pushing the changes in legislation and actively participating in development of legislative acts concerning social sector in local, regional and national level.

Cohesive society

Within the LV03 programme sub-component “NGO Activity Support Measure” area “Development of a cohesive society”, the PO was addressing the challenges of slow naturalization of non-citizens, insufficient dialogue between minority NGOs and other NGOs

² The “Review of the NGO Sector in Latvia. 2015”: <https://goo.gl/JjWphP>

³ SKDS public pool, December 2016.

⁴ CSP data, 2017: <https://goo.gl/noHqCi>

in Latvia as well as the ethnically divided society. This support received only 10% of total re-granting amount and according to the Programme final evaluation most actively project promoters implemented various measures and trainings for minorities, including Latvian language classes and instruction on Latvian history and culture thus gaining the needed knowledge and skills to gain citizenship and become active member of society.

Comparatively few NGOs implemented projects aimed toward fostering democracy and human rights, including such topics as hate speech, racism and xenophobia, homophobia, antisemitism and gender equality. Most often the projects implemented various measures aimed toward creation of a unified society, social inclusion, spending free time meaningfully and acquisition of information. The implemented measures primarily were aimed toward providing information and certain skills to the target group with the aim of improving their possibilities for more active involvement in cultural life in Latvia.

These issues are still important and topical because:

- in Latvia lives 247 000 non-citizens⁵ (12.07% of total population living in Latvia);
- from all ethnic groups in Latvia 63.51% are Latvians; 26.57%- Russians; 3.34%- Belarusians; 22.43%- Ukrainians etc.

During the evaluation of society cohesiveness policy in 2016 the expert group beside other suggestions mentioned that:

- Civic education for pupils is not effective enough- they lack knowledge of system and principles of civil society, civic participation and skills of cooperation;
- Integration of *Roma* in educational system is difficult, the issue of early school leaving has not been solved;
- There is a lack of intercultural competences between teachers;
- There should not be separate support for events representing separate ethnic minority events. Instead the support should be targeted to common activities without ethnic segregation, specially focusing on youth actions;
- There should be provided support for integration activities- Latvian language courses, trainings about policy development, rights, forms of participation etc.

PO agrees with these suggestions and believes that the report should be taken into consideration in Programme development process for next period. As well PO suggests providing more than 10% for cohesive society actions thus ensuring bigger impact on previously mentioned issues.

As the biggest achievement of the Programme PO considers the development of “National NGO Fund” that is a step towards development of long-term NGO support policy. Additional information about the Fund can be found under section “3. Reporting on Programme outcome(s)”.

Overlapping and synergy

The EEA Grant programme was the most important financial source for NGOs in Latvia and it was the only Grant that allowed to cover daily actions of NGOs in Latvia giving the opportunity to be actively involved in decision making processes in Latvia. Still during the implementation of the programme funding of other programmes and financial instruments were simultaneously available for NGOs. To understand which financial sources LV03

⁵ Society cohesiveness policy, expert group report, 2016: <https://goo.gl/ACygn7>

Programme project promoter used the most the survey was carried out within the Programme final evaluation. The majority (88%) of the surveyed funding receivers' admitted that additionally they have implemented projects co-financed by other programmes. In most cases the respondents have received the support from support measures financed by the government or local government, other EU programmes, other financial mechanism and EU Structural Funds.

Overlapping with other programmes was not detected which could be partly explained by different support measures and different focus. Synergy was fostered by mutually complementary influence on the continuity of NGOs activities⁶.

3. Reporting on Programme outcome(s)

There are 4 main outcomes within the Programme: "Active citizenship fostered", "Provision of welfare and basic services to defined target groups increased", "Democratic values, including human rights, promoted" and "Strengthened capacity of NGOs and an enabling environment for the sector promoted". For each outcome there are 1- 5 relevant outcome indicators.

- The main objective of the programme **"development of civil society"** was supported by sub-component "NGO activity support measure" and pre-defined project. Indirectly the development of civil society was also fostered by "NGO project measure" (f.e., attracted new members and increased the capacity of NGOs).

- **"Active citizenship fostered"**

 - (Sub-component „NGO activity support measure“)

The sub-component "NGO activity support measure" was targeted to strengthen the civil society and active citizenship in Latvia thus as well providing a ground for policy development, action policy initiatives, and decision making, principles of democracy, good governance, and anti-corruption.

The programme supported 79 NGO projects at local, regional and national level, thus reaching representatives of 54,670 different target groups, as well as more than one million society representatives. 57 NGOs were actively involved in decision-making processes locally, regionally and nationally thus being able to represent the opinion of society and exact society groups, strengthening the democracy, transparency and good governance. 17 NGO coalitions and cooperation networks in various fields have been formed and 27 have been expanded. Cooperation in NGO sector is very important to ensure better society opinion representation, more significant and representable impact of possible changes as well as improving cooperation with governmental institutions by offering coordinated opinion and facilitating harmonization of different society interests. The implemented activities have fostered an increase in the number of NGO members and attraction of new volunteers.

Under this outcome there were identified 4 outcome indicators (see table No.3.1.).

⁶ Programme final evaluation, 2017, SAFAGE

Outcome indicator	Baseline (A)	Target (B)	Total project results (C)	Total achievement (D=A+C)	Total achievement (%) (E=D/B)
1. Number of NGOs whose activity is aimed at sustainable development of the organization on local, regional or national level, increased	42	66	79 ⁷	107 ⁸	162
2. Number of NGOs that have increased their participation in policy development and decision making together with the local and national government	28	36	57	85	236
3. Number of newly established or enlarged international/ national/ local NGO coalitions	0	5	44	44	880
4. Number of citizens involved in the NGO activities	1442	4000	5239	6681	167

Table No.3.1.outcome indicators "Active citizenship fostered"

The high degree of achievement can be explained by low expectations during the planning of the indicator value.

NGOs have taken part in discussions/workshops/elaboration of legislative acts for 81 times in local and 221 times in regional or national level. In total 44 NGO coalitions have been established or enlarged thus promoting the cooperation in local, regional, national or international level. With this support NGOs have been able to attract 2510 new volunteers and 2729 members.

In addition to the results defined in the programme, the «NGO Activity Support Measure» projects have achieved five more results⁹:

- 164 development planning documents prepared;
- 197 project proposals prepared for attraction of funding from various financing instruments;
- 189 projects implemented with support of various financing instruments;
- 162 campaigns and events implemented;
- 402 Training activities implemented.

With these additional activities NGOs have been able to ensure a direct impact on their financial stability, establish better communication with target groups and partners (including governmental institutions), as well to gain better visibility in society.

According to non-formal discussions with non-governmental organizations this sub-component of the programme was the favourite one for the biggest and strongest organizations in Latvia. As some of the examples can be mentioned:

- "Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS" who used this support to strengthen PROVIDUS administrative capacity when dealing with public governance monitoring questions and encouraged the development of public involvement in policy making to a great extent, due to articles, blogs, research, opinions.
- LGBT and their friend organization "Mozaika" who used this support to develop "Partnership Development Act" and a lot of human right actions (including partly

⁷ Including project No. LV03-0001, who was terminated after the first year of project implementation, but partly achieved the results

⁸ 14 NGOs received operational grant in previous and this planning period

⁹ Programme Final evaluation, 2017

financed The European Pride 2015 (EuroPride). Although the Partnership Development Act was not adopted by the government, the public debate on necessity of this Act is still strong. Foundation «Latvian Nature Fund» (LFN) in the project «Support to sustainable development through integration of requirements for environmental and nature protection in policy planning documents» (LV03- 0008) took active participation in nature protection and rural development policy. Wider society was involved in the project activities. 944 new members were involved in the activities of the Foundation. Project has strengthened organizations capacity, successfully promoted voluntary work and active citizenship. As well the support has given an opportunity to actively involve in policy development for EU planning period 2014-2020. Environmental protection and nature conservation concerns have been incorporated into policy planning documents and pieces of legislation. Range of meetings with NGOs at different levels took place in order to achieve successful results – 8 national scale NGOs, 7 local scale NGOs and 7 NGOs from other sectors have been involved. During the implementation of the Operational Program LFN came up with position papers on 31 pieces of legislation. As a result environmental protection concerns were taken into account. LFN continued active cooperation with international frameworks, such as European Environmental Bureau (EEB), CEE web for Biodiversity, EKO energy Network and others. In close cooperation with EEB we took active part at the Latvian Presidency of the EU Council.

The projects under this sub-component have strengthened civil society development in Latvia and fostered more active involvement of NGOs in the decision making and cooperation.

“Provision of welfare and basic services to defined target groups increased”

(«NGO Activity Support Measure», area: Social sector activities)

Most of the funding (50%) was allocated for support of social justice. Within “NGO project measure” 102 projects were implemented, reaching 45,552 representatives of different target groups. 303 different services have been developed, including 90 innovative services. Although the Programme successfully contributed to the social problems in Latvia, the impact of the Programme may be reduced because of the lack of funding for further activities of the NGO. Usually most successful sustainability of project results is for those projects where the NGO has worked together with the local municipality and/or national government through project implementation.

This support measure was aimed to increase the provision of welfare and basic services; to foster local and regional NGO initiatives to reduce social inequalities and to promote social inclusion and gender-equality, including support to children and youth at risk.

Under this outcome there were 3 main outcome indicators identified (table 3.2.).

Outcome indicator	Baseline (A)	Target (B)	Total project results (C)	Total achievement (D=A+C)	Total achievement (%) (E=D/B)
1.Number of new innovative basic and welfare services created to meet needs of defined target group	16	20	24	40	200
2.Number of innovative social services and social measures for children and youth at risk, and families with children that potentially more often	0	38	66	66	174

experience crisis situation					
3.Number of measures aimed at embodiment and integration of the gender equality principle in all areas of life	1	6	14	15	250

Table No.3.2.outcome indicators "Provision of welfare and basic services to defined target groups increased"

Projects under the outcome "Provision of welfare and basic services to defined target groups increased" have contributed toward achievement of the second indicator by developing **40 different innovative basic and welfare services for different target groups and 66 innovative social services that are specially targeted to children, youth and families with children at risk.** The examples of those services are:

- Palliative care for children at home, involving innovative telemedicine technologies;
- Innovative diagnostics methods for children and youth with disabilities;
- Information point and assistance service for families who take care of children with disabilities and serious health condition in e-environment.

Within this Programme **3277 persons from different target groups and 5149 children, youngsters and families with children at risk of social exclusion have received innovative social services.** According to the Programme final evaluation the participants of the focus group and interviews concluded that the programme sub -component "Social sector activities" had too much emphasis upon innovations. But right now the state and municipalities cannot always provide all social support that is needed for target groups. For example, not all of the municipalities have a capacity to provide psychologist, therapies (group/ music/ drawing etc.), practical and emotional support for people with disabilities and elderlies as regular communication, help to buy food or clean the house etc. Introduction of innovative services in social sphere often requires significant resources, which would exceed the available project financing. Development and testing of innovative services requires longer time period than the set maximum implementation period of the projects.

Within projects **496 participants have taken part in measures aimed at embodiment and integration of the gender equality principle** in all areas of life.

Additionally to the achieved outcome indicators under this outcome projects have achieved other significant results:

- 71 social services available to the persons under social exclusion risk;
- 180 social services available to children, youth and families with children at social exclusion risk;
- 628 out of school activities and educational activities.

Project example: «Agency of social services» implemented the project «Support system for Latvian foster families, adoptive parents, guardians, host families» (LV03-0130). Innovative support system was developed for children who had lost parents' care. The project provided services for 1036 member of the target group, including, 130 families with children, 623 guardians and host families, 283 children in foster families. Created support system consists from social worker services, psycho therapist consultations and support groups, consultations in crisis situations, family training and mentoring training. To ensure the support 4 mobile support centres in different regions of Latvia were established and 3000

hours of social work consultations and 3246 hours of psychological support have been provided.

In most of the cases innovations were implemented in the local level by providing services that were not available in exact municipality/ region. Some of these innovations are quite often used in other countries, but for Latvia, these services are still innovative (animal therapy, children/ youth support centres, support systems for people with specific severe disease or disabilities. In most of the cases the services were targeted to children and youth (including children with disabilities).

The programme has given an opportunity to develop the social support system and improve the life quality of people at risk of social exclusion. But the impact of this programme is directly dependant on the non-governmental ability to keep those services bu gaining funding from local municipality or other projects.

“Democratic values, including human rights, promoted”

(«NGO Activity Support Measure», area: Development of a cohesive society)

The smallest amount of funding was granted for support of democracy and sustainable development (10%). NGO project measure thematic area “Development of a cohesive society” was aimed at reaching this aim; related to this aim were various events that SIF implemented from additional funds of the programme. Only 22 projects were implemented within this thematic area reaching 24 412 representatives of various target groups, including 14 189 minority representatives, 4 221 children and youth and 1 280 non-citizens. Implemented projects aimed toward fostering democracy and observing human rights, including on such topics as hate speech, racism and xenophobia, homophobia, antisemitism and gender equality, and four NGOs implemented events fostering the gaining of citizenship rights. Contribution of the projects and additional measures implemented by SIF in support of democracy and sustainable development are rated as satisfactory. The achieved results correspond to the investment made and the interest of NGOs, and the actions implemented in the projects have contributed towards change of motivations of the target group, but the effects have not materialised yet.

Under this outcome there were 2 main outcome indicators identified (table 3.3.).

Outcome indicator	Baseline (A)	Target (B)	Total project results (C)	Total achievement (D=A+C)	Total achievement (%) (E=D/B)
1.Number of NGOs facilitating accessibility to the rights of citizens	0	10	4	4	40
2.Number of NGO’s promoting democratic values, including human rights	0	12	4	4	33

Table No.3.3.outcome indicators “Democratic values, including human rights, promoted”

Both outcome indicators have not been met. According to the Programme final evaluation situation is mainly explained by the low interest and participation of NGOs in this area. Under the area “Development of a cohesive society” the NGOs with a more general profile were more active, which is a situation largely typical to the NGO sector in Latvia. The NGOs often operate within a more general framework, rather than focus upon one specific area. Part of the NGOs lacks specific objectives, and their priorities depend upon support available under programmes. Several organisations supported under the “Development of a

cohesive society” represent such approach. The issue is related to the overall sustainability and financial capacity of NGOs. During the next FM period this should be considered within the context of NGOs sustainability under the «NGO Activity Support Measure» programme.

The overall achievement of output indicators is good. With Programme there were 14 NGOs whose activity is aimed at national minorities and 3 NGOs whose activity is aimed at intercultural communication, promotes tolerance and eliminates discrimination supported. As well 829 people have studied the Latvian language and acquired knowledge about Latvian history and culture; 470 non-citizens have participated in activities promoting acquisition of citizenship.

There can be highlighted 2 main additional results in this support area:

- 96 events aimed at development of united society;
- 112 educational activities.

These activities promoted better communication and understanding of culture, traditions and diversity between different national minorities. Within intercultural communication events Latvians and national minorities representatives had an opportunity to be together, get to know each other as well as train the language skills. Society „Riga Latvian Society” organized intercultural integration club „Culture Charm”. The club has helped the minority representatives and non-citizens to integrate in the Latvian society, has helped to gain better understanding about different cultures and also the hidden, invisible cultural will help in the mutual integration processes.

An organisation of people with disabilities and their friends „Apeirons” in project “United in the society” educated NGOs and representatives of national minorities on democracy and political participation issues, to promote their political participation within their municipalities, attracting society's attention to problem issues, thus strengthening capacity of regional organizations. Thus the project provided not only a multicultural impact, where NGOs representing different national minorities could work together on common issues, but also gave positive social impact and built capacity of several organizations.

Educational activities included informative- educational events for target groups and/ or sector specialists, educational games, intercultural events, experience exchange events and events for wider public. As some of the examples can be mentioned informative seminars about possibilities to start the business or job seeking to ensure better integration in labour market, trainings for specialist working with *roma* children and youth about innovative work methods.

Project example: «Association of Jelgava national culture societies» implemented the project «United for Jelgava» (LV03-0133). The project implemented a large number of activities and cooperated with schools; 300 non-citizens were involved, supporting access to citizenship. The project created an interactive simulation test in e-environment about the history of Latvia and Satversme of the Republic of Latvia.

Strengthened capacity of NGOs and an enabling environment for the sector promoted

Pre-defined project (LV03-0003)

The project provided impact on “NGO Fund” Programme aim through promotion of active civil participation, provision of regular civil society monitoring in Latvia and provided support and lobbying activities for development of National “NGO Fund”.

Both **studies on NGO sector (2013 and 2015)** have ensured regular and quality information on NGO sector development in Latvia, determined current support effectiveness and impact of external events. Developed IT tools (**NGO monitoring system and Participation index**) will serve as a tool for experts to evaluate the development and dynamics of the sector, identify the scope of problems, weaknesses and strengths in the sector. Both tools will be used for improvement of national policy, for planning of various financing instruments and NGO work. They will serve as monitoring tools that would help politicians, ministries and other interested parties to follow up the changes in society and plan the actions according to the changes.

Participation index (www.lidzdaliba.lv) is IT tool, where each person can take a test and measure his/ her own “participation index” (civic activity). To measure the activity each respondent answers a list of questions like “did you vote in last Parliament elections?”, “Are you a member of any NGO?”, “Have you ever submitted proposal about any changes in legislation?” etc. When all of the questions have been replied, the person sees how active he/ she is and can compare his/ her own civic activity with other society groups (f.e., by gender, by age etc.).

NGO monitoring system is a system that helps as a tool for researchers (civil society experts) to measure NGO sector in Latvia and evaluate the development and dynamics of the sector. The system is built taking into account the research methodology of studies that were made within pre-defined project.

Developed “**Human security concept and NGOs role in its operationalization**” includes study on human security and analysis of NGOs role in promoting human security, including elaboration of future work strategy.

The biggest achievement of the project is development of **National NGO Fund** that is financed by Republic of Latvia. It was created as result of developed “**Recommendations about the improvement of the financial support system form the state budget to the NGOs in Latvia**” within pre-defined project. National NGO Fund was approved on 16th of December, 2015 by the Cabinet of Ministers of Republic of Latvia, and the Society Integration Foundation was chosen as the operator of the Fund. First open call of the National Fund was announced on 03.03.2016.and the total budget of the Programme was EUR 400 000. In the first open call there were 66 projects approved (out of 261 project application). For year 2017 the total budget of Programme was EUR 380000 and second open call was announced in the end of 2016. Although the amount is not enough to provide all needed support for NGO sector in Latvia, it still is a step towards stronger civil society in Latvia.

3.2 Horizontal concerns

According to the Programme final evaluation **activities targeted to horizontal concerns are included in 41 projects** (table No.3.2.1.). In some cases the whole projects was dedicated to any of these measures, but most commonly individual activities were implemented.

Number of projects that includes activities towards horizontal concerns

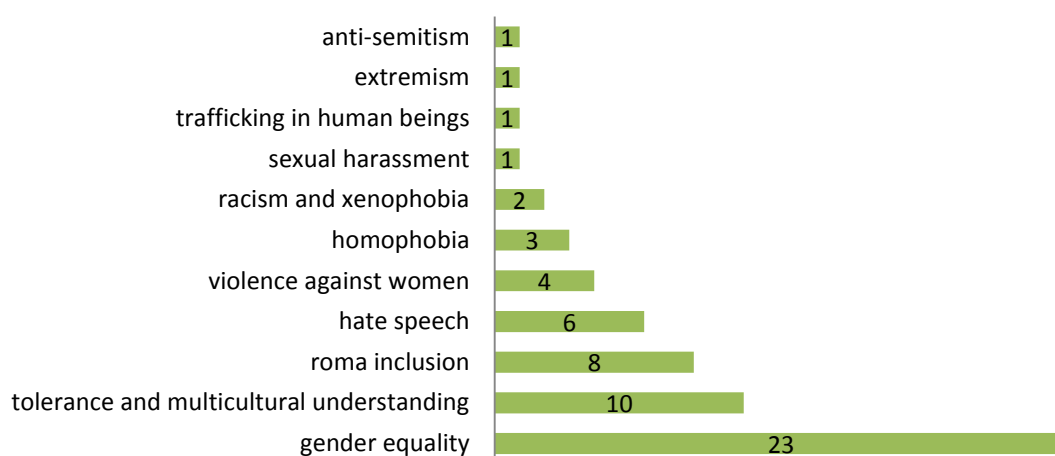


Table No.3.2.1. Number of projects that includes activities towards horizontal concerns

The intensity of activities ranged from individual discussions up to a support programme for several years. For example, Riga Latvian Society (LV03-0147) arranged an interactive discussion and workshops on the topic “Discrimination, benevolence and tolerance”. The society “Shelter: Safe House” (LV03-0011) implemented support measures for reduction of human trafficking in the course of two and a half years. Seven projects implemented activities in several areas, for example, the society “Education development centre” (LV03-0174) included topics on hate speech, racism and xenophobia, tolerance and multicultural understanding and gender equality. The society “Association of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender persons and their friends “Mozaika”” (LV03-0002) dealt with hate speech, tolerance, homophobia and gender equality issues by organizing a campaign "EuroPraid" and creating an online tool for reporting hate crime www.naidanoziegumi.lv, etc. The projects were implemented at all levels in all regions of Latvia.¹⁰

PO ensured that most of the Programme level events include at least one of the topics of horizontal concerns. For example, conference "Gender and Minorities Mainstreaming" included discussions on gender equality (sexual harassment, violence against women, trafficking), homophobia, tolerance, multicultural understanding; programme final event included topics on gender equality and homophobia; bilateral experience exchange visits included all of the horizontal concerns. As well PO was a leader of “NO hate speech movement” and organized several events about it.

Still the Programme final evaluation outlines that the activity of the project promoters regarding the interdisciplinary horizontal concerns of the Donor States was low. Relatively active participation was observed regarding promotion of tolerance, multicultural understanding and inclusion of Roma people, which thematically were related to the PP2 sub-measure “NGO Project Measure”.

To encourage project promoters to target the projects or to include horizontal concerns in project activities PO would suggest adding extra points during the project evaluation if the project covers one or several of these topics in the next planning period.

¹⁰ Programme Final evaluation, 2017

3.3 Cross-cutting issues

In the Programme proposal PO divided 5 cross-cutting issues: good governance; gender equality; environment-friendly actions, economic sustainability and social sustainability (sustainable development). According to the Programme final evaluation in the project level cross-cutting issues “Good Governance” and “Social Sustainability” had the most significant impact (table 3.3.1.).

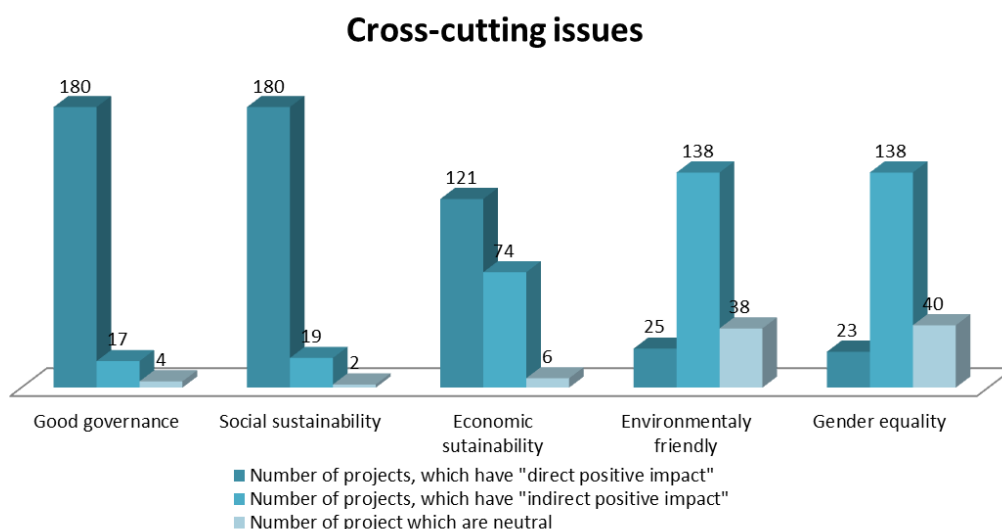


Table No.3.3.1. Number of projects covering the cross cutting issues¹¹

The measures put in place to achieve the results in relation to cross-cutting issues differ from project to project. Project promoters mentions such **measures and activities as:**

- Transparency within the organization;
- Equal salaries;
- Promotion of good governance principles;
- Effective use of organizations financial resources;
- Reduction of waste and other environmentally friendly measures;
- Provision of new workplaces;
- Etc.

As two of **good practice project examples** can be mentioned¹²:

1. The foundation “Public Participation Fund” in the project “ManaBalss.lv (My Voice)” (LV03-0002) by improving and maintaining the website "ManaBalss.lv" provided the only e-democratic tool of this type in Latvia offering a legal electronic participation opportunity for citizens to influence decision-making process and contributed towards all cross-cutting issues.
2. The foundation “Baltic Regional Foundation” in the project “Development of NGO Internet TV” (LV03-0016) created programmes and expert discussions which were broadcasted online in the website www.nvotv.lv reaching a wide

¹¹ Programme Final evaluation, 2017 (the evaluation does not include all projects that are implemented within the Programme)

¹² Programme Final evaluation, 2017

audience. The programmes and discussions dealt with current issues and problem questions which were related to all cross-cutting issues.

In the Programme level PO addressed cross-cutting issues according to the Programme proposal. The programme has contributed significantly regarding the cross-cutting issues “Good governance” and “Social sustainability” and provided a positive impact on wider society at a macro level as a result of activities. The impact of activities regarding the cross-cutting issue “Economic sustainability” was significant, but it was mostly evident at the level of the organisations or at a micro level. The impact regarding “Environment friendly activities” and “Gender equality” was satisfactory, since purposeful activities aimed at solution of problems or their reduction were fragmented and to a lesser degree promoted by the projects.¹³

3.4 Capacity building

Programme level:

In order to help project promoters before the project submission to better prepare project proposal, PO organized **informative seminars and provided individual consultations** for project promoters. During these seminars and consultations project promoters received information on basic rules of the Programme (aim of the programme, supported activities, available funding etc.) as well as practical advices on how to fill the project application form. There were 11 seminars organized in Riga and regions of Latvia, 531 participants took part in seminars. According to the seminar evaluation forms most of the participants evaluate these seminars as very useful and needed to submit the project proposal. During programme implementation there were 248 individual consultations provided about submission of project proposals.

After project approval PO organized kick-off seminars for all project promoters about practical implementation of project- project guidelines, book-keeping, supporting documentation, conflict of interest, practical examples, etc.). During programme implementation period there were 5 kick-off seminars organized and they were highly attended (253 participants) and gave project promoters the possibility to clarify any questions about project implementation. The presentations of all of the seminars were available online in PO web-page (www.sif.gov.lv) together with guidelines for submission of project reports and answers to most frequently asked questions.

Individual consultations for project promoter were offered during all project implementation period and project promoters usually used the option to call or e-mail the unclear questions to their project supervisor. Unfortunately there was no special evaluation about project management capacity before and after the project implementation. But the effectiveness of these activities can be measured by the fact that competition for project grants grew with every open call¹⁴, so the competition for each point within project evaluation was crucial to receive grant. The effectivity of the consultations during project implementation proves with the fact that the number of irregularities was relatively low (25 irregularities in project level).

To ensure experience exchange, introduction with best practise and mistakes as well as to create a ground for networking and common activities, PO organized regular experience exchange events. These events were organized in national (2 events) and international (1

¹³ Programme Final evaluation, 2017

¹⁴ See the section No.6 “Project selection”

event) level. During these events project promoters presented their projects to other project promoters and shared the lessons learned. International event was targeted to bilateral cooperation and the lessons learned from these projects. As some of the lessons learned in bilateral partnership projects were mentioned the need to start to talk with potential partner as soon as possible and to actually involve the partner in project development, activity planning and implementation. The financial aspects were discussed as well. For example, project promoters said that it is hard to involve donor partners in project activities in sufficient level as the salary level in donor countries is very high, but the project grant- relatively low. As well in this period if the project grant was allocated to bilateral partner, the project costs needed to be approved by external audit. As these types of audits are expensive, sometimes the project promoter just “could not afford” to allocate the funding to project partner and instead covered the costs (flight, accommodation etc.) by themselves.

Project promoter’s capacity was also increased in international level through Programme events in Latvia, for example, Programme opening event, “NGO Forum- Riga 2015” in 2015 (more than 250 participants from 34 countries); conference “GENDER and MINORITIES MAINSTREAMING” in 2013 (90 participants, including representatives from donor countries) as well as the Programme final event, which was specially focused on NGO capacity (more info: <https://goo.gl/DbSvSd>). These events gives the possibility to learn from the best and strongest NGOs in Latvia and other countries as well as to establish contacts and share the best practice. PO has also used the opportunity and covered the costs for NGO representatives in international events through Complementary actions thus giving the NGOs the possibility to gain an international recognition, possibility to share knowledge, experience and gaining new contacts.

Project level:

Additionally to the seminars, experience exchange events, consultations and other capacity building measures that were ensured by PO, project promoters could use up to 15% of total eligible costs for activities that focuses on strengthening the capacity and organisational support. Most often the organisations used this funding to develop various strategic and programming documents (operational strategies, capital raising strategies), organisation management, quality and financial management documents, cleaning up of organisational processes and documentation, organise staff training and for covering the costs that are connected to participation in the national and international NGO networks.

According to the Programme final evaluation **project promoters believe that their capacity has increased**. Most highly rated was the cooperation capacity with other NGOs, public administration and private sector; capacity of organisation’s chief executives; quality of vision and mission; capacity of the members of organisation; quality of governance and decision-making. Personnel policies, existence of ethic’s code, capacity of financial and control as well as risk management were ranked as the least improved.

Self-assessment of the recipients of the project Programme was remarkably different in relation to project type. Promoters of MAC (National level) project evaluated their capacity the highest, emphasizing that the fastest growth was observed in relation to ethical questions, skills of target group involvement, quality of decision-making and information management. Promoters of MEC (regional level) project notes that their operational strategy and their capabilities for involving target groups have improved and their internal

communication has improved. Still the quality of administration and capacity of members was viewed as decreased. Promoters of MIC (local level) projects evaluated that the biggest positive changes can be attributed to the improvements in risk management, diversification of funding sources, cooperation with other NGOs and partners, and capacity of members.

At the same time during the project their personnel policies, internal communication and information and knowledge management capabilities have worsened. Project promoters that implemented projects under sub-component “Project programme” noted that the programme has increased their ability to diversify funding sources, improve operational strategy and risk strategy as well as gain better involvement of target groups. The programme also provided positive impact on personal policy and organisation (NGO) administration.

4. Reporting on bilateral relations

4.1 Bilateral outcomes

Within the Programme funding for bilateral relations was available for these types of activities:

- **search for partners** for donor partnership projects prior to or during the preparation of a project application, the development of such partnerships and the preparation of an application for a donor partnership project;
- **networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, technology, experience and best practice** between project promoters and entities in the donor states;
- medium and macro projects within the NGO project measure as an additional source of funding for **facilitating partnerships between organizations** from Latvia and from the donor states, based on applications submitted by the project promoters in stage I of the project selection.

The Programme overreached the indicated bilateral outcomes within the Programme:

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Totally achieved</i>
<i>Number of project partnership agreements in beneficiary civil society</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Level of satisfaction with partnership (perceived as stimulating/enriching/enabling)</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>88%</i>

Table No.4.1.1. Bilateral indicators

Programme and project level

As the main events and measures that facilitated Latvian NGO cooperation with representatives from donor countries and other Beneficiary countries PO would like to highlight:

- Programme opening event (November 2012), where the potential Norwegian NGO partners were also presented and actively participated. The opening event was organized using the method of **Partner search**.

- **Close cooperation established with Royal Norwegian Embassy in Latvia.** The Embassy has been an active advisor and financial support for almost every bigger event in the Programme (including “NGO Forum- RIGA 2015).
- **Close cooperation established with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Norway) as well as with the Icelandic Human Rights Centre (Iceland).** Both involved parties ensured remarkable support for experience exchange visits and other Programme events.
- **Experience exchange event** „Bilateral cooperation within projects supported by EEA grant "NGO Fund" – impact and recommendations" (2014). Over 100 participants from NGOs from Norway, Iceland and Latvia, as well as different representatives from local and national institutions took a part in the seminar.
- **“NGO Forum - Riga 2015” as part of the EU Presidency** that was organized in cooperation with non-governmental organization “European Movement – Latvia” and Royal Norwegian Embassy in Riga. The forum brought together high level officials, NGO representatives and other interested parties not only from Latvia, donor countries and beneficiary countries, but from all over Europe. "In Norway we believe that healthy civil society is the basis of a good country. Active civil society does not mean strikes and protests, but rather continued discussion and listening to different opinions, including those not matching the view of the government. The Road Map developed in Riga is only the beginning for social involvement in decision-making, and I hope it will bear fruit at both the national and EU-wide level," stated **Ingvild Naess Stub**, State Secretary of the Norwegian EU and EEA Minister, during the forum.
- Implemented **33 “seed money” projects.**
- **Organized five experience exchange visits** in the end of 2016 and in the beginning of 2017- three to Norway and two to Iceland. 45 non-governmental organization representatives took part in experience exchange visit that gave an opportunity not only to share experiences and good practices, but also to establish contacts and to discuss possible future cooperation. The visits were to 36 organizations (NGOs, local government and state institutions).

Extent of cooperation

<p><i>There are 44 partnerships established in projects (two projects have 2 partnerships). From all of the partnerships 32 are with partners from donor countries (from them 29 from Norway and 3 from Iceland); 12 - with partners from other beneficiary countries and Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus. In most of the cases the partners are NGOs and usually the partnership is based on the best practice and experience exchange (project partner is more involved in 1-2 project activities- seminars/ conferences/ workshops).</i></p>
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<p><i>The project promoters recognize that the cooperation is limited because of the small project funding and differences between salaries and other costs in Latvia and donor countries.</i></p>
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<p><i>As good practice examples can be mentioned projects:</i></p>
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- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>LV03-0182 where “An organisation of people with disabilities and their friends „Apeirons”” together with project partners- Norway blind and visually impaired association (Vest-Agder brunch) within the project developed ideas for universal</i> |
|---|

design introduction in Latvia. One of the main results of the project is trained expert team of competent and knowledgeable specialists in universal design.

- *LV03-0100. Project promoter together with NGO "Cerebral Palsy Island" and Department of Welfare of Riga Municipality have fostered integration of children with disabilities in society by reducing their social exclusion and helping to prepare for school. During the project implementation children had the possibility to participate in various trainings that stimulated communication and cognitive abilities. In cooperation with "Cerebral Palsy Island" project promoter developed innovative, interactive game program "PUZNIS" (P- skill; U- and; Z- knowledge; N- evaluation; I-interactive; S- game).*

Shared results

The PO has identified that within projects very often the best practice from donor countries and other project partners is transferred to Latvia. For example, the Norwegian Blind Association who was the partner of Liepaja Society of the Blind in project "Be active and get involved!" (LV03-0097), actively involved in development of social rehabilitation and cognitive center "Soul Relieve Garden". During the project territorial zoning and technical draft project of social rehabilitation and educational center in the rural environment "Soul Relieve Garden" was created. There were regular consultations both by telephone and electronically as well as Norwegian partners visited Liepaja Society of the Blind. In accordance with the established technical draft project and territorial zoning even after the end of this project cooperation will continue, attracting funding for the further implementation of "Soul Relieve Garden" project. Similar examples can be found in other projects as well.

Improved knowledge and mutual understanding

According to the Programme final evaluation mutual projects with institutions from the Donor countries have resulted in enrichment of knowledge and mutual understanding as well as promoted the exchange of good practice.

The knowledge and best practice transfer has been facilitated through projects, common events, experience exchange event and visits. Involved parties very highly appreciate the opportunity to learn, establish contacts and gain new ideas.

Latvian NGOs especially highly rated the opportunity to visit NGOs in Norway and Iceland in the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017. The previous experience shows that Norway and Iceland NGOs most likely will sign for common future projects only if they know the NGO from before. So this might be a good ground for common projects in the future.

Wider effect

The Programme final evaluation emphasizes that cooperation with organizations from the Donor countries and the Beneficiary countries promoted economic and social sustainability of projects. Partners cooperated during organization of visits, offered support for development of mutual training courses and methods. The majority of funding receivers (58% of respondents) admit that cooperation will go on also after the completion of the project.

Social and economic sustainability of bilateral relations is also proved by the opinion of funding recipients in the focus group discussion and project examples (e.g., projects «Family care – safe basis for development of a child» (LV03-0166) and «Sustainable environment for introduction of psychosocial rehabilitation of cancer patients in Latvia» (LV03-0143)).

«We positively evaluate bilateral cooperation and its sustainability, because any partnerships which have been forming in a longer time period leave lasting results».

Till 30th of April, 2016, **almost all** of the projects with bilateral partners **ended their activities successfully**. There is **one exception** (project LV03-0181), where right now there is started the criminal proceeding about the **possible fraud**. In this case project promoter submitted the project application with the signatures of the project partner - Drobak Municipality from Norway. During the project implementation the PO identified the cases of falsification of signatures and documents. Right now there are no documents that confirm any cooperation between project promoter and Drobak Municipality. For the next planning period the PO recommends to assess the need to improve the project evaluation proceedings to make sure the project partner's signature is authentic.

Contribution of activities implemented at the level of the Programme and projects toward achievement of aims set by the Programme and EEA Financial Mechanism was very high. It was promoted by purposeful spending of the allocated funding which enhanced cooperation and achievement of mutual aims / outcomes between Latvia, Donor countries and Beneficiary countries. Bilateral relations promoted economic and social sustainability at the level of projects – in most cases cooperation will continue after the completion of the project.

During the experience exchange visits to Norway and Iceland non - governmental organizations **emphasized the role of social networking**. After visits number of NGOs admitted that they should not save funds for organization public relations and must communicate and cooperate with other organizations more. The visits gave an opportunity not only to share experiences and good practices, but also to establish contacts and to discuss possible future cooperation. Although the main purpose of the visit was good practice transfer and promotion of cooperation between Latvia and the donor countries, after the visit Latvian NGOs acknowledged that such experience and good practice exchange would be needed between the Latvian NGOs as well. Number of NGOs admitted that they have already started to work on common ideas with other participants from Latvian NGOs.

The SIF believes that bilateral relations between the donor countries and the NGO sector in Latvia are strengthened both on programme and project levels. Within the cooperation projects there is a great possibility for the NGO sector to take over the good practice and experience of donor countries, to ensure knowledge transfer, to build sustainable cooperation networks and to develop common innovative ideas.

4.2 Complementary actions

The aim of the complementary actions is to gain knowledge and exchange experience with other programme operators and entities. Participation of PO staff in the events organized by other POs has raised the capacity of Latvian NGO Fund programme team in several aspects:

- **BETTER COMMUNICATION and NETWORKING:** within this measure NGOs and PO have been able to get to know organization and institution representatives that deal with the common issues. International level events allow exchanging contacts for further communication and give a ground for further cooperation. This is a chance to get necessary contacts and create important networks, used in the daily management of the Programme. PO especially appreciates the opportunity to meet other PO representatives in person and the chance to discuss different topics concerning Programme implementation.

- **DEEPER KNOWLEDGE:** on several NGO programme target group needs, used afterwards in the consulting of project promoters and in the monitoring process.

- **ADVOCACY:** Exchange of experience about the development of NGO sector in the beneficiary states and possible financing models gave the additional arguments to lobby the NATIONAL NGO FUND idea to Latvian government.

- **DISSEMINATION:** Through participation in the seminars/conferences and organized events within the Programme. The PO has always offered to find best project practise examples and relevant organizations that could share their knowledge and best practise in international arena. As well PO always invites representatives from other beneficiary countries to share their stories with Latvian NGOs.

- **NO HATE SPEECH MOVEMENT (NHSM):** PO is the National coordinator of NHSM in Latvia. Within this campaign PO has organized video competition; trainings for youngsters and journalists; managed Facebook accounts and implemented other activities.

- **BIG EVENTS:** Than have given not only the ground for networking, communication, experience and best practise exchange, but also promoted EEA Grant “NGO fund” programme and emphasize the importance of NGO work in national and international level. For example, during forum “NGO Forum - Riga 2015” the Road Map for the involvement of citizens in decision-making at both the national and European Union level has been elaborated and adopted.

*The **added value** of the participation in the bilateral events is:*

- *comprehension of the programmes,*
- *experience exchange,*
- *developed contacts with stakeholders,*
- *promotion of project partnerships within NGO programmes,*
- *distribution of EEA project results.*

5. Reporting on sustainability

Programme and project level

According to the project agreement project promoter must ensure the sustainability of project results for two to five years. Five year obligations are used if renovation or repair of premises has been covered from the project grant. Already in the project application project promoters describes how the sustainability of project results will be ensured. The same applies to the final report- project promoter describes, how the sustainability of project results will be ensured as well they indicate how NGOs, governmental or other institutions can benefit from project results.

Usually in the reports project promoters mentions that all of the project materials will be available at least two years after the end of the Programme as well as the sustainability will be provided by the capacity building actions within the projects (gained knowledge and experience, attraction of new members and volunteers). Within the Programme **as a target group NGOs have indicated 139 NGOs and 17 261 NGO** members and volunteers.

Within **“Activity support measure”** there have been 164 development planning documents prepared, 197 projects proposals prepared for attraction of funding from various financing instruments and these proposals have resulted in 189 implemented projects. Project promoters have implemented 402 training activities. With this support measure the support has been provided for 79 NGOs development and daily operations. PO considers that this support has successfully helped NGOs to gain greater stability and allowed to plan long-term actions for the existence of NGOs.

As one of the **good practise examples** can be mentioned **project no. LV03-0026** implemented by Society „Watermarks“. With the project support project promoter initiated **formation of “Upper-land Rural NGO association”** that unites regional NGOs. The platform is used for facilitation of everyday work for member organizations and exchange of information that included the information about latest events and available financial sources. Thanks to the work of expert team project promoter has been able to submit 18 project proposals and to implement 14 of them. Developed operational plan and implemented projects have helped to attract tourists. In 2016 the local association have been visited by 3000 guests. The main income society gets from glass processing workshop and souvenirs. These additional activities allow keeping society’s basic functions- maintain facilities, organize events and co-finance smaller projects.

Within **“NGO project measure”** it is harder to ensure the project sustainability because the projects were mainly focused to development of social services/ training programmes/ study materials etc. As the main barrier for sustainability NGO mentions the lack of funding. According to the sustainability reports, the majority of NGOs continue provision of the services to the target group utilising their own funding, attracting donations or municipal funding. Programme Final report indicates that the effects of changes often are not visible in a short term.

In **pre-defined project** (LV03-0003) as the most important sustainability results is considered the **establishment of National “NGO fund”**. More information about the fund can be found in section “3.Reporting on Programme outcome(s)”.

Bilateral

According to the Programme final evaluation mutual projects with institutions from the Donor countries have resulted in enrichment of knowledge and mutual understanding as well as promoted the exchange of good practice. Cooperation with organisations from the Donor countries and the Beneficiary countries promoted economic and social sustainability of projects. The majority of funding receivers admit that cooperation will go on also after the completion of the project. Most often funding recipients connect sustainability of cooperation outcomes with the contribution via knowledge, technology, experience and good practice examples. Contribution toward sustainability is linked also with knowledge transfer and systemic development. Additional information and best practise examples can be found in section “4.Reporting on bilateral relations”.

Regional

Projects have invested in regional development by providing social services and participation in decision making processes.

Programme allowed to invest in development of innovative social services, especially for children and youth with disabilities. The sustainability of these results depends on NGOs capacity and ability to provide these services in the future. According to the final reports and impact reports it is easier to continue the activities if the project promoter cooperates with local municipality during the project implementation. Then most often the municipality continues to support the provision of established social service.

The regional sustainability is also strengthened through NGO participation in decision making processes (additional information can be found in section “3.Reporting on Programme outcome(s)”.

In the Final Programme evaluation the **main factors that influence project sustainability are NGO financial sustainability** (opportunities to attract funding for further activity implementation), **institutional sustainability** (opportunities to keep NGO staff, members and volunteers), political sustainability, accessibility of information and results.

6. Project selection and implementation

6.1 Project selection

The project proposals and requested funding amount several times exceeded total available funding for the projects (table 6.1.1.)¹⁵. The biggest competition was for the “NGO project measure” area “Development of a cohesive society”, where the requested funding in 3rd Open call exceed the available funding more than 11 times. PO explains this situation with the fact that for this support are there was allocated only 10% of total Programme funding for the projects.

In 1st Open call under “NGO project measure” total requested funding exceeded available Grant for 3.5-7.86 times. Less than 1/5th of project proposals were approved within this support measure. With each Open call the competition for project grows. There can be noticed special interest for local level (MIC) projects. That could be explained with the low capacity of NGOs working in these sectors.

Relatively lover was the competition in “Activity support measure”, where the requested Grant exceeded available financial funding for 2.71 times. Harder was the competition for

¹⁵ Table includes terminated projects

the national level (MAC) projects. That means that organizations are willing and capable to implement long-term projects that are relatively *expensive* for Latvian NGOs.

This huge interest for this funding means that EEA Grant is very important and needed support for Latvian NGOs and there is not available equivalent support in any other regional or national measures.

1st Open call						
NGO project measure						
	Available funding (EUR)	Number of project proposals	Total requested funding (EUR)	Exceeds available funding X times	Approved project proposals	Approved project proposals (%)
Social sector activities	2 750 368,70	298	9 914 489,88	5,13	54	18%
MEC/MAC	2 397 757,20	182	8 535 801,72	3,56	35	19%
MIC	352 611,50	116	1 963 054,00	5,56	19	16%
Development of a cohesive society	549 413,90	84	4 285 651,56	7,80	12	14%
MEC/MAC	478 976,40	52	3 766 364,91	7,86	8	15%
MIC	70 437,50	32	519286,95	7,37	4	13%
Activity support measure						
Activity support measure	3 760 435,00	206	10 195 906,81	2,71	80	39%
MAC	2 256 261,00	150	7 980 691,88	3,53	51	34%
MIC	1 504 174,00	56	2 215 214,93	1,47	29	52%
2nd Open call						
Social sector activities	1 909 693,86	239	10 562 983,73	5,53	37	16%
MEC/MAC	1 660 679,26	131	8 742 061,48	5,26	24	18%
MIC	249 014,60	108	1 820 922,25	7,31	13	12%
Development of a cohesive society	310 515,95	70	3 307 703,15	10,60	7	10%
MEC/MAC	266 319,58	40	2 811 518,60	10,56	5	13%
MIC	44 196,37	30	496 184,55	11,23	2	7%
3rd Open call						
Social sector activities	233 233,32	110	1 821 641,40	7,81	15	14%

(MIC)						
Development of a cohesive society (MIC)	42 667,15	35	511 534,84	11,99	3	9%

Table No.6.1.1. Competition within Open calls

The process of project selection and evaluation was organised according to the rules of the Programme, national legislation and internal procedures. No deviations from the procedure have been identified. Project Evaluation and Monitoring committees (four – one for each outcome) were established in time and represent relevant sector expertise and experience of work on/with civil societies.

6.2 Project implementation

The challenges that occur during project implementation usually are not directly linked to the project size or project promoter location. It more depends on project team investment and attention. There are micro projects that implements their first project, perfectly implements project activities and submit reports in good quality. And there are large scale projects that have difficulties with project implementation because of the large number of projects within the NGO and relatively small number of staff numbers.

As one of key factors for successful project implementation is dedicated, targeted and accurate project team, where the team members do not change during project implementation.

As the **main challenges** for project implementation project promoters' mentions:

1. **Relatively hard financial and content reports.** Even the PO uses risk-based management, there are available report examples, forms, frequently asked Q&A as well as the consultations, and project promoters still consider that the reports should be easier. Especially implementing smaller projects, project promoters say that there should be higher ceiling for administrative costs. PO has also received the suggestion not to submit the reports at all if the project activity can be monitored during the on-spot visit (eg trainings, courses, social service).
2. **Co-financing.** Sometimes NGOs takes loans in the banks to co-finance the project activities. NGOs suggest that there should not be NGO co-financing within the programme and the costs would be 100% covered by the EEA Grant and National government funding.

In the next **period PO suggests to use on-line tools for reporting in project level, if possible**. It would reduce the administrative burden and reduce needed resources for preparing the reports and monitoring them. As well it would be more environmentally friendly approach.

From the administrative side project completion was complicated for PO because of the changes in human resources and sometimes the representative of project monitoring team saw the project for first time, when received the project final report. It caused extra administrative work and caused difficulties on information submission in DORIS and internal IT system. It could be changed with better planning of human resources in next period.

The project completion was even more difficult because quite often project promoters did not respect the deadlines of project report submission. As most frequent reasons were mentioned illness, lack of capacity, overload in other projects etc. In these cases PO tried to keep client- friendly approach and never actually used any penalties. There was only one case, when the final report was never submitted even several times the NGO promised to submit it "next Monday" (Irregularity No.IR-0703).

For next period PO would suggest to use penalties more often otherwise it seems like reminders (calls, e-mails, and official letters) and proposed individual consultations do not motivate project promoters to submit reports on time.

7. Monitoring and audit

7.1 Monitoring

According to the Regulation and Programme proposal PO ensured the project monitoring actions:

1. PO **provided consultations** for project promoters before the project submission and during the project implementation. Consultations were available via phone, e-mail or in person. Before the open calls regional consultation and seminars were organized. Each project was assigned to one person within project monitoring team thus ensuring information continuity and facilitating communication between PO and project promoter.
2. In total **78 on-spot monitoring visits** were carried out by PO in 63 projects (30% from all projects). 42 visits were planned; 36 visits were unplanned. 31 visits took place within "Activity support measure"; 2 within pre-defined project; 37- "NGO project measure", support area "Social sector activities"; 8- NGO project measure", support area "Development of a cohesive society". Most (59) of the on-spot monitoring visits received "Positive" evaluation and did not receive any remarkable comments or recommendations. 19 visits were rated "with objections". Most often **comments and recommendations for the projects promoters were:**
 - To systemize documentation;
 - To ensure the project number on all of the project invoices;
 - To arrange properly the project information section on the organization's web page;
 - To provide precise information about the staff costs.

Most of all recommendations were implemented by the end of each report period. There are only few cases when the required changes were more serious. For example, to re-evaluate the possibility to reach projects targets and change planned activities if necessary; to ensure the common book-keeping policy for the NGO (according to Latvian legislation); to improve project book-keeping; to return in project account the amount that was paid for services that were not related to project activities.

3. Ensured **regular project monitoring** (informative reports, interim reports, and final reports). Projects were monitored according to the risk-assessment.

PO will ensure the follow-up monitoring. Right now the **PO has conducted 8 follow-up on-spot monitoring visits.**

7.2 Audit

After submission of each Interim Financial Report the CA audited all Programme costs (including payments to project promoters).

Additional audits within the Programme:

1. In 2014 the Audit Authority carried out an audit on established **management and control systems** within EEA Financial Mechanism program "NGO Fund"; no significant deviations were identified.
2. In 2014 the Internal Audit Division carried out audit on **initiation, preparation of tender documentation, tender management and contracting** within "NGO Fund"; no significant deviations were identified.
3. In 2015 Auditing authority carried out **Project Audit**. Audit included project costs included in IFR No.4 (01.01.2014.-30.04.2014.), IFR No.5 (01.05.2014.-31.08.2014.) and IFR No.6 (01.09.2014-31.12.2014); in total there were 10 projects inspected. Audit recognized that the project applications do correspond to established regulations (compliance, administrative assessment, quality assessment, specific evaluation criteria) and in general the expenditure is justified and attributable to the EEA Grant Programme "NGO Fund". There were only one irregularity (IR-0295) found for the total amount of EUR 231.00 (the project promoter bought an asset within the project, but it was not unpacked until the monitoring visit; the planned depreciation was reduced according to the actual depreciation).
4. In **2016 systems audit** of the PO was carried out by Moore Stephens LLP by request of the Financial Mechanism Office. The audit conclusion is that "In our opinion the Management and Control Systems set up and operated by the Entity were seen to be designed in compliance with all the regulatory / contractual requirements were proportionate and operated effectively in the period from 16 August 2012 to 13 January 2016". The audit concluded with only 2 management control findings that were rated as the 3rd level priority (Specific remedial action is desirable).

8. Irregularities

There were 29 irregularities detected within the Programme (3 at Programme level; 26- at project level). In the **Programme level the irregularities** are for the total amount of EUR 4244.92 (from it the EEA Grant: EUR 3843.15). Two irregularity cases concerns programme management (salary calculation and programming costs). And one irregularity case concerns Bilateral fund (IR-0101). In this case the project promoter did not submit the supporting documents for the *seed money* project.

Project level irregularities mainly are for small amounts. Most often the problems are with insufficient documentation and incompletely complied publicity measures. The biggest and most serious irregularity cases are included in the table No.8.1.below¹⁶. The financially biggest irregularity cases most often are related to insufficient project documentation (including the case when project promoter just did not submit the project final report even after repeatedly requests from PO). In three of the cases the criminal proceedings were

¹⁶ In the table PO included all of the irregularities where the part of EEA Grant exceeds EUR 3000.00.

started (IR-0202; IR-0298/IR-0299; IR-0345) because of the significant aberrations of project agreement and possible scam (falsification of signatures, documents and other fraudulent activities).

Although **all of the irregularities have been taken out of the IFR** (Interim Financial Report) and **none of these costs are eligible within LV03 Programme**, the PO considers it may take 3 to 5 years until all of the funding is recovered. The funding recovery process is difficult because usually NGOs do not have reserves in the bank accounts and/ or property.

Table No. 8.1. "Irregularity cases within programme LV03"

No.	Irregularity case	Project number (DORIS)	Total amount of non-compliance, EUR (EEA Grant)	The ground of non-compliance	Actions taken by PO
1.	IR-0056	LV03-0139	10254,50	Project content did not correspond to the EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 Programme „NGO Fund“ principles of gender equality. The irregularity was detected by FMO.	Project was terminated and all of the costs were taken out of the IFR and none of the costs are eligible within EEA Grant programme.
2.	IR-0100	LV03-0105	3096,93	The PP ¹⁷ did not provide reliable documentation about the costs incurred within the project (rent of premises, catering)	PO prepared the amendments in the Project agreement and reduced the total eligible costs.
3.	IR-0202	LV03-0167	10 419,89	PO has detected cash withdrawals from the project account.	PO has terminated the project agreement; project is stopped. The criminal proceeding was started within the project and court decision was in favour of PO. Now the case is forwarded to bailiff. The amount was withdrawn from IFR#8 and none of the costs are eligible within the Programme.
4.	IR-0263	LV03-0105	4 677,06	The PP did not provide reliable documentation about the costs incurred within the project (salary of project coordinator, equipment costs)	PO prepared the amendments in the Project agreement and reduced the total eligible costs.
5.	IR-0298;	LV03-0105	19851,03	The PP ² did not provide <u>reliable</u> documentation or	PO and PP has signed agreement to stop the

¹⁷ Project promoter

	IR-0299			any documentation at all about part of the costs incurred within the project (administration costs, communication costs, and individual rehabilitation plan development).	project implementation. Part of the costs has been approved within the project (additional information can be found I Annex No.3). The total project eligible costs are reduced by the total amount of discovered irregularities. The criminal proceeding has started for the possible illegal activities accomplished by a board member.
6	IR-0345	LV03-0181	39388,77	The PO detected possible falsification of documents (including falsification of signatures).	There are started criminal proceedings about possible fraud. The project is terminated and all of the costs are considered as ineligible. The amount was deducted from IFR #10 and none of the costs are eligible within the Programme.
7.	IR-0703	LV03-0193	17 099,99	Project promoter did not submit documentation about the costs incurred within the project.	Project is terminated and all of the costs are considered as ineligible. The amount was deducted from IFR#13 and none of the costs are eligible within the Programme. The case has been forwarded to bailiff to recover the funding from the project promoter. Till December, 2017, only 654.90 EUR have been recovered.

Immediate irregularity on project LV03-0105 where 3 cases of a possible fraud has been detected has been submitted to FMO (16.04.2018.).

Additionally to the measures taken during project monitoring and audits PO has taken several actions to remedy the costs incurred by irregularities:

- Regular payment or final payment reduction;
- Project termination;
- Funding recovery (administrative acts; letters and reminders to project promoters about the debt; bailiff);
- Criminal and administrative proceedings;
- Fund reallocation to other projects.

9. Assessment of Results-based Management framework

PO on the regular basis monitored project and Programme results according to the aims, objectives and indicators of the Programme. The project results were filled in PO electronic management system thus giving the opportunity to measure the Programme results of completed projects.

PO organized regular meetings with Programme team to discuss Programme progress and needed improvements of the result recording in the IT system.

Programme midterm evaluation was carried out in 2015 by the request of EEA Financial Mechanism (2009-2014) as an independent formative evaluation. In 2017 there was published the final "Evaluation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism Programme «NGO Fund» in 2009 – 2014 period". The evaluation was funded by the LV03 Programme and it was carried out by independent company "SIA SAFEGE Baltija". The company was chosen in the procurement procedure.

Further recommendations¹⁸:

1. In general the targets and indicators set in the Programme were appropriate and useful to measure Programme and sub-programme objectives. But for the future PO recommends to decrease the number of indicators by setting maximum two outcome indicators for each support measure.
2. As LV03 Programme was already started when the indicators were introduced, at the beginning the project proposal forms and project report forms did not include the section about planned outcome and output indicators within the Programme. The PO has recognized that it would be easier and more effective to put a separate section about outcome and output indicators in project forms. It would help during project evaluation and monitoring process as well it would be easier for project promoter to follow-up with the project results.
3. PO received a lot of comments about the fact that Programme outcome indicators under Programme outcome "Provision of welfare and basic services to defined target groups increased" were defined as innovative social services. Programme promoters suggested not to "push" for innovations because development of

¹⁸ According to PO and Programme final evaluation

innovative social service needs a lot of time and sometimes it is not possible to provide it in the project implementation time. As well often NGOs highlights the importance and need of already developed social services and emphasizes that it is more important to keep the social service level.

Project follow-up monitoring is described in section No.7 “Monitoring and audit”.

10. Risk management

At the beginning of the Programme there were 12 risks identified. Risk monitoring plan was revised on regular basis and additional risks were added if necessary. A risk assessment has been conducted for all identified risks, mitigation actions were provided.

Internal risks

There were 8 operational (internal) risks identified in 2017. As the ones, who have the highest impact on Programme were: **risk of corruption within SIF (PO); Conflict of interest within SIF (PO); Financial flow to projects insufficient for cash-flow; Increase of administrative work for PO because of the additional requirements from Programme supervisory institutions, including changes and additional fields in DORIS system.**

To avoid the risk of corruption PO organized regular seminars for PO employees. Last seminar was organized on 4th of December, 2015. Other administrative actions were taken as well- developed code of ethics, signed declarations of conflict of interests. All project promoters were informed about conflict of interests in kick- off seminars and informational materials. These risks were managed successfully because PO or any supervisory institution has discovered corruption or conflict of interest within PO.

Other organizational risks were mitigated by careful planning of Programme budget and well developed Programme procedures. There were no additional requirements from Programme supervisory institutions as well.

External risks

There were 5 risks identified in 2017 that would have the most significant impact of the Programme: **The project do not achieve the planned results** (the risk was identified in both sub-programmes); **Approved project promoters don't reach enough amount of target group; Activities within pre-defined project are not implemented according time frame; The partner's role in project is unclear and/or understood differently in the donor and beneficiary states** (for projects with bilateral partners).

To mitigate (rule out) these risks several actions were taken:

1. In the project proposal evaluation process one of the criteria was planned results of the project (are they well defined, measurable and objectively verifiable and correspond to the Programme and sub-programme targets and planned results);
2. In project evaluation PO took into account project promoter experience in working with defined target groups;
3. Regular project monitoring and communication with project promoters was provided (including interim reports), provided support by PO (if necessary);
4. Developed and used standard partnership agreement form;
5. Awareness raising activities during informative seminars, individual consultations in order to explain the meaning of partnership and its added value to the project.

In external level in separate cases the risks did risk occurred and some of the indicators were not achieved. The reasons for that are described in section “3.Reporting on Programme outcome(s)”.

According to the Programme final evaluation “The risk-management system implemented has been proportional and appropriate in relation to attaining the programme’s results and aims. The risks identified have, as a whole, complied with ensuring attainment of the programme’s aims. In most cases measures implemented to mitigate risks have been proportional and appropriate for effective management of risks identified. Only in individual cases have risk manifestation and possible risks not been sufficiently accurately assessed, which also affected the effectiveness of measures implemented to mitigate risks”.

11. Information and publicity

In the project level:

To ensure the publicity and information requirements in project level the PO included publicity rules in the presentations in seminars, sent reminders during project implementation and ensured that the visibility guidelines are available online in PO web-page. In general the publicity requirements were highly respected, the irregularities were discovered only in few projects.

As a specific case can be highlighted project number **LV03-0001** that was implemented by foundation “The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism”. The project run for one year and then **project promoter asked to terminate the agreement because of the publicity requirements**. As the association promotes themselves as independent journalists they found it as a burden to publish their articles with logo and information of the financial source. The main reason was that project promoter considers that a logo confuses readers by letting them think that this is a promotional article.

Within the Programme final evaluation¹⁹ the questioner for project promoters to find out which communication tools they consider as most effective. According to the survey as the **most effective methods were recognized** information about the project on the organisation’s website (28 answers out of 49), placing of information on organisation’s social network accounts (19 answers) and information events about the project (conference, seminar, workgroup, etc.), as well as a closing event (both 11 answers). Less often cited were disseminated press releases to mass media, which was the third most common communications measure among the most effective methods (9 answers).

Most common publicity measures/ events in projects were:

- Information about project on web site of organisation;
- Project closing event;
- Press releases;
- Information about the project in social networks;
- Project information event (conference, seminar, work group meeting);

¹⁹ “Evaluation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism Programme «NGO Fund» in 2009 – 2014 period”

- Project opening event;
- Project photo gallery on web site of organisation;
- Etc.

Unfortunately project promoters relatively rarely used such tools as infographics, promotional videos, PR campaigns and participation in big public events (f.e., annual city festivals). PO explains that with the fact that services of professional PR agencies are very expensive and as the funding is limited, project promoter would rather invest more in project content than in the publicity.

As very successful and interesting project publicity cases can be mentioned two projects:

- **TU.ESI.LV (LV03-0140)**. The project seeks solutions on how to hold on to youth and inspire them to live in Latvia. During the project the lifestyle blog tuesi.lv was created. After the project conclusion lifestyle blog has grown and developed into something broader, becoming one of the most important projects of Latvia's LV100 centennial celebrations. It shares inspiring stories about the accomplishments, views and attitudes on life of Latvia's youth.
- **"Ensuring the operations of idea implementation platform idejuarmija.lv" (LV03-0110)**. Within the project collective investment platform projektubanka.lv was established. The platform encourages Latvia's residents to express their ideas and to receive both moral and financial support for their implementation. Project initiative "Project bank" uses crowdfunding principles and has funded 23 projects that have attracted the support of 1893 funders (data from 24 February 2017).

Other interesting projects are marked in DORIS system as best practise projects.

In the Programme level:

The Communication Plan was fulfilled and all of the planned communication activities were carried out. There are some small displacements from the plan, but they did not affect the implementation of Communication Plan. With the funding that was allocated to the publicity the PO has been able to promote the EEA Grant in wider range than it was planned (f.e., organization of the "NGO forum- Riga 2015" during the Latvian Presidency and participation in conversation festival LAMPA in 2016). This was possible because of the PO successful cooperation with Royal Norwegian Embassy in Riga and other partners.

To ensure all of the information about the Programme and project separate section in PO web-page was developed: <https://goo.gl/ZnQXV3>. In this section all the information about the programme and supported projects is available. As well there can be found all the informative materials prepared within the projects.

As **most successful** publicity events in Programme level PO would like to highlight:

- The Programme **launch event** with a **partner search forum** that took place on November 14, 2012 informing the media and the society about the EEA Grants programme „NGO Fund” aimed at supporting non-governmental organizations in Latvia. More than **300 people** attended this event, including representatives of NGOs from donor countries.

- From 2nd to 3rd March in 2015 PO in cooperation with non-governmental organisation “European Movement – Latvia” and in close cooperation with Royal Norwegian Embassy in Riga **organised forum “NGO Forum - Riga 2015” as part of the EU Presidency.** The aim of the forum was to strengthen the role of civil society in European and national decision-making processes. More than 250 participants from 34 countries participated in the “NGO Forum- Riga 2015”. More information can be found: <https://goo.gl/cXOfSx>
- **Participation in conversation festival LAMPA** on 2nd of July, 2016. LAMPA is the only festival and national- level event in Latvia that is specially focused on active society involvement in social and political processes. The festival stands for the same values as the EEA Grant Programme “NGO Fund”. Society Integration Foundation in cooperation with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Riga together with five non-governmental organizations presented the project results within the EEA financial mechanism programme ‘NGO Fund’. Non-governmental organizations not only showed some of the activities carried out within the projects, but also invited to take part in workshops. Festival visitors were able to engage in project activities, find out about NGO activities and “NGO Fund” programme. For more information and photos visit <https://goo.gl/kSkOch>.

Through all activities organized by PO all visibility requirements were respected by:

1. Using Programme logo and reference to the Programmes in presentations;
2. Using Programme logo and reference to the Programme in all representative and informative materials;
3. All information about Programme in PO’s web-page was marked according to the visibility requirements;
4. There was one light object developed and used in all biggest Programme events to ensure the visibility (photo: <https://goo.gl/N4PbJ7>).

As **lessons learned** PO recognizes the **need to use more interactive tools** as much as it’s possible (Infographics, short videos, face-to-face actions, participation in the events). It is easier and more effectively to reach the NGOs and society with the tools that they use on a daily basis (Facebook, Twitter).

It would also be **useful to promote the results with society through the local public events.** Here as a good practise can be mentioned participation in conversation festivals “LAMPA”. Through this event everyone could actually take part in the some of the activities that were organized within projects. This gives an opportunity not only to promote EEA Grant, but also to inform society about local NGO actions and possibilities to get involved.

The Programme final report points out that the most successful communication tools to provide information about open calls were through information in web-page, informative seminars, e-mails and web-page: www.eeagrants.lv²⁰.

²⁰ By starting the Programme the PO did not use Social networks very often. Social networks have become as one of the most popular and commonly used communication tool only for last few years.

As only difficulty promoting “EEA Grant” PO in informal conversations sees the lack of understanding between “Norway Grant” and “EEA Grant”. Informally they are often seen as a common Grant.

12. Programme Agreement

12.1. Compliance with conditions

Herby SIF confirms that the programme LV03 has been implemented according to the conditions of Programme Agreement:

- 1) The Grant Offer is subject to any comments or observations by the European Commission in relation to the screening process.;
- 2) Bilateral indicators and outcome indicators were reported in the annual reports.

12.2. Changes to the programme

There are **following changes** made to the implementation agreement:

Modification #2- in force 21.03.2014

In November, 2014, **PO asked for a permission to redistribute the finances between activities under funds for bilateral relations.** The changes were requested to increase the funding for B measure (networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, technology, experience and best practice between project promoters and entities in the Donor States) from 6% to 72.1%. Accordingly the funding was decreased for A measure (search for partners for donor partnership projects prior to or during the preparation of a project application) from 7% to 3.3% and C measure (funding for facilitating partnerships between organisations from Latvia and from the donor states between first and second stage of project evaluation) from 87.0% to 24.6%.

The need for these changes was because there were planned international experience exchange events within the Programme (bilateral experience exchange event in December, 2014 and “NGO Forum- RIGA 2015” within Latvian Presidency, etc.). As well these changes were needed because the funding for other measures could not be used anymore (partner search event took place in November, 2012 (measure A) and there were no additional open calls planned to use funding for measure C.

Modification was made in Annex II Operational Rules section 5. “Additional mechanisms within the programme” subsection 5.1 Funds for bilateral relations of the Programme Agreement - changing financial distribution among the activities as follows: 3,3% of total funds for bilateral relations for the „A” activity, 72,1% for „B”, and 24,6% for „C”

Modification #3 - in force 25.07.2016

In June, 2016, **PO asked for a permission to redistribute the finances as follows:**

The PO suggests these modifications in the Programme:

- Because of the incurred irregularities in 2015 within the Programme management costs for the total amount of EUR 2213.00, the PO would like to reallocate this funding to Programme Complementary actions in order to improve competence of PO and to foster experience exchange within similar administrative organisations.

- To reallocate EUR 6 000.00 from savings from the completed projects to complementary actions in order to cover the costs of the workshop about the best Programme management practise and lessons learned in this planning period as well as the new ideas for new planning period in other Beneficiary countries.
- To reallocate EUR 12 500.00 from savings from the completed projects to complementary actions in order to partly cover the costs for the Programme final evaluation.

These changes have been approved and came into force on 25th of July, 2016.

13. Attachments to the Final Programme Report

Attached:

1. Annex project list;
2. Annex Irregularities;
3. Non-completed projects

Annex No.3

Non-completed projects

There are two projects within LV03 Programme (LV03-0001 and LV03-0105), where the activities were not completed fully and the project agreement was stopped. According to the management and control system of the LV03 programme, project can be stopped either by the side of project promoter or the side of PO. In both of these cases PO evaluated project report and the activities that were provided within the project. PO approved the costs partly according to the rules of management and control system. In both cases Article 7.14.6 of the Regulation is being requested. According to PO request the Financial Mechanism Committee agreed to waive its right to reimbursement of the incurred project grant in LV03-0001 (EUR 7,583) and LV03-0105 (EUR 33,529) on the basis of 'viable and identifiable components' which have been completed.

LV03-0001

Project title: Non-governmental organization support program

Project promoter: Foundation "The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica"

Project partner: Transparency International Latvia

Signature date of project contract: 27/08/2013

Planned start: 09/07/2013

Planned end: 30/04/2016

Project completion/termination date: 15/03/2014

The project's aim was to carry out high-quality investigative studies in the area of economics, health care and social issues and to improve ability of Latvian journalists to write about economic issues in order to provide high-quality information to Latvian population and contributing to involvement of wider public in social and political processes.

Target group: NGO, NGO members, volunteers, Latvian journalists, whistle-blowers, Latvian inhabitants

Main activities: studies on social and economic issues in Latvia, including pan-Baltic studies, internship opportunities students (volunteers), seminars for journalists and public activists.

Achieved results:

The objective was achieved by producing 3 major articles and a documentary about “Baltic drug traffickers”; 3 articles and 2 TV news videos on working conditions on low wage earners in Latvia; 3 articles and 2 smaller news videos and a 40 min long TV program on health issue problems in Latvia. In addition, Re:Baltica shared it’s know-how on how to write about economics with more than 15 Latvian journalists and organized the seminar for Baltic journalists on media legal protection. In all of these activities 3 students-volunteers were involved. It provided platform for journalists in order to establish new contacts and networks and learn innovative journalism techniques.

Sustainability:

According to the information provided by the project promoter, it was planned that, after the end of the operational program, the project promoter would be able to raise funds to continue activities started within the project, thus ensuring financial sustainability of the operational program. The use of project studies for political decision-making (problem analysis, recommendations for public servants and politicians, etc.) could ensure the political sustainability of the operational program.

Termination

On 2nd December, 2013, PO received a letter from project operator a request to stop the project activities and terminate the agreement. As the reasons to terminate the agreement project promoter mentioned:

- Foundation “The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism” actively and quickly reacts to the changes and events in Latvia and other countries. As these events are not predictable, the actives can change accordingly and it is difficult to implement previously drafted project activities. The same applies to human resources- it is hard to plan their workload and prepare the amendments for work agreements accordingly.
- As project promoter represents the organisation as independent, it is impossible to respect publicity requirements of EEA Grants. Putting logos and/ or reference about the financial support can be translated as the “ordered article”. And this may lead to potential loss of trust.
- There is too much of an administrative burden for the project implementation.

As some of project activities were started were still in the implementation phase, project promoter asked to terminate the agreement after 15th of March, 2014. PO accepted the request on project termination and evaluated the report of activities within the project.

According to the stipulations of the agreement, in case of termination of the agreement the project promoter was entitled to the part of financing covering the actually incurred costs for the actually implemented activities. No irregularities have been detected.

Following the management and control system of the LV03 programme, as eligible was recognized 8910 EUR (EEA Grant: 7583 EUR; National co-financing: 399 EUR and project promoter's co-financing: 928 EUR). Project eligible costs were calculated proportionally to the achieved results.

LV03-0105

Project title: The Reducing of Social Exclusion and Invalidisation of Children with Autism and Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Project promoter: Association Latvian Autism Center

Project partners: Foundation Nordic-Baltic Organisation for Professionals Working with Children and Adolescents; Foundation Centre Dardedze

Signature date of project contract: 15/11/2013

Planned start: 01/11/2013

Planned end: 29/02/2016

Project completion/termination date: 17/09/2015

The project's aim was social inclusion and integration of children with autism, reduction of social exclusion and abuse risks, increasing the chances of potential educational programmes.

Target group: children with autism and their families, specialists who are in contact with autistic people.

Main activities: The preparation and implementation of an individual rehabilitation plan for 25 children; contact training groups for 8 adolescents; educational workshops for 10 specialists - the introduction of the Norwegian contact training program in Latvia; the development of innovative methodology for the prevention and detection of violence against children with autism.

Achieved results:

Improved the mental health of 25 children; improved the awareness of 60 nursery teachers and teachers about autism; 10 professionals have obtained the management of the Norwegian contact work program and 8 adolescents have taken part in training exercises. As a result of the project can be mentioned the improvement of mental health both working directly with children and adolescents involved in the project, as well as during training of specialists who will continue to work with people with mental disorders in the long run.

Sustainability:

The innovative methods introduced within the project; trained specialists will contribute in the long-term by promoting the education and integration of people with special needs in society and the public awareness about autism was raised. Within the project mental health of children was improved as well as understanding of autism problem within parents and over specialists was raised. It fostered the reduction social isolation of families as well as violence against children. Project results in the long-term will help autistic people to attended comprehensive schools and later to join the labor market.

Termination

Termination of project agreement was proposed by PO because there were suspicions about possible fraud by the board member of Association Latvian Autism Center. Right after the board member recognized the possible consequences of his actions, he left the organization. Other members and employees of NGO "Association Latvian Autism Center" provided informative support during whole investigation period and tried to reduce the financial damage that has been made to the NGO and EEA Grants. As the board member, against whom the criminal proceedings were initiated, resigned, the new board member took over the responsibilities and agreed on the termination of the contract.

As suspicions of fraud rose in connection with alleged unlawful acts by a former board member SIF has submitted documents to the law enforcement authorities. A criminal case has been initiated against the former board member and the accountant involved in the project. The investigation is still on-going. After the investigation, NGO "Association Latvian Autism Center" plans to recover ineligible project costs from its previous board member.

Since some of the projects activities were implemented and evidenced by documents, the project promoter submitted the Project Final Report based on which SIF could calculate the fraction of the eligible project costs in proportion to the results achieved, it means that the costs within the project were approved for the activities that were implemented according to the project plan and based on proven and eligible costs. The achieved projects results can be used in the future, thus ensuring the sustainability of the project.

Following the management and control system of the LV03 programme, as eligible was recognized 39216 EUR (EEA Grant: 33529 EUR; National co-financing: 1765 EUR and project promoter's co-financing: 3922 EUR). Project eligible costs were calculated proportionally to the achieved results.