

CZ GOOD GOVERNANCE

ANNUAL PROGRAMME REPORT 2021: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Programme Good Governance started in 2019 by signing the Programme Agreement. Currently, there are five predefined projects under implementation. In 2021, the Programme Operator, along with the respective Project Promoters, with those not having the Legal Act issued yet, was dealing with the problem of the mode of payment for services provided by the Project Partner – OECD. Finally, within the Pre-Defined project no. 2 “Evaluation of the public administration performance in the Czech Republic and recommendations for the further strategic development”, the original intention to use the instrument “Financial Gift” was finally replaced by the exception from the public procurement rules being accepted by the Government of the Czech Republic. Consequently, the Legal Act was issued in December 2021. As for the Pre-Defined project no. 3 “Strengthening public financial management and control”, it was not possible to use the exemption from the public procurement rules as within the PDP2 (because of the fact that the Ministry of Finance is not a research institution, as is the case with the Ministry of Interior). For this reason, the Project Partner OECD, following the approval of FMO on behalf of the Financial Mechanism Committee, was removed from the project. The Legal Act shall be issued at the beginning of January 2022.

The change in PDP3 was the core issue related to the second modification of the Programme Agreement that consisted in the removal of Project Partner OECD from the project and initiated a subsequent shift of saved funds to the Small Grant Scheme Call, from Outcome 2 to Outcome 1.

Three other Pre-defined projects have already been implemented from 2020 – PDP1 “Improvement of preconditions for decentralisation and availability of public administration in the territory”, PDP4 “Deepening of the professional qualification of the law enforcement authorities in the field of the fight against corruption, money laundering and terrorism financing” and PDP5 Pre-Defined project “Strengthening the Fight against Corruption by Increasing General Awareness of the Public Sector Focusing on Judges, Prosecutors and Public Administration”. All of the aforementioned projects dealt with planned public procurements, some of which have been already completed (see description in section Performance - Programme Results). Moreover, PDP4 managed to organize respective trainings and travels abroad. However, due to COVID restrictions, some of the project activities were suspended and virtual conferences were held, as was common for the other two implemented projects PDP1 and PDP5.

As far as the Small Grant Scheme is concerned, the Programme Operator launched it on 28 June, 2021 and closed on 14 October, 2021. Six applications were submitted, the quality evaluation to take place in December 2021-January 2022. The Selection Committee is planned in February 2022 and the start of projects implementation in March/April 2022.

No bilateral indicators have been fulfilled within the outcome, as the project promoters of the open call launched in June 2021 should be contracted in Q1 2022. Furthermore, the Pre-Defined project no. 1 bilateral activities were impacted by the COVID-19 travel and safety restrictions. As a result, there was only one output indicator partially achieved.

In view of ensuring the visibility of the programme, the Programme Operator shares all information about the programme in Czech and English (including general information about the EEA and Norway Grants) on the website <https://www.eeagrants.cz/en/programmes/good-governance>. The upcoming events or interesting news are also available on social media (Facebook). The Project Promoters are committed to sharing appropriate information about the programme and its projects on their webpages. Generally, the PO always takes the opportunity to present the Programme and the Grants to an audience to raise awareness. The PO participated in two conferences where it presented the Programme and the Norway and EEA Grants. The first was in August 2021 on “How digitalization helps with the communication with citizens” and the second, launched in November 2021, was the “Modern public administration conference”, where the Programme Operator along with respective PDP representatives took the opportunity to present the Grants, the Good Governance programme and PDP 1,2,3 projects. In addition, the PO presented the Programme and the Grants during a Seminar for applicants (July 2021) related to the SGS 1 Call and during a Training course for external evaluators (December 2021).

In terms of lessons learned, the Programme Operator has fostered its approach towards Project Promoters with regards to flexibility in approving project changes brought about by COVID restrictions. The situation, mainly within the projects PDP1 and PDP4, is persistent as described in APR2020. The restrictions are still causing the delay of activities and affecting the ability to meet the activities’ respective goals. At this stage, we do not anticipate the fulfilment of outcomes and outputs are likely to be jeopardized. Furthermore, online meetings do not equate to in-person meetings, and in 2022 it appears they may be the only alternative in the event of ongoing travel restrictions. Therefore, in the absence of online conferencing, we are likely to see additional delays or modifications of activities.

When setting the SGS Call, the PO intended to ensure the maximum number of bilateral partnerships in SGS projects, and therefore opted for a mandatory partnership with an entity from a donor state. In this case, grant applications had to be submitted in English. At the same time, the PO gave a significant scoring advantage to grant applications that will implement participatory activities in multiple municipalities throughout the country. The combination of these factors seemed to have resulted in a lower number of grant applications submitted.

Apart from COVID-19 related risks, the Programme still faces some risks due to potential lack of political support, namely in the area of fighting against corruption. Generally, the new Government of the Czech Republic takes the fight against corruption seriously, but we cannot with certainty anticipate an impact of specific steps on respective PDP projects.

A quick overview of the situation shows that the Czech Republic’s Corruption Perceptions Index score remains at 54 when comparing to 2020. In 2021, another round of evaluation of the recommendations of the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) took place. The Interim Compliance Report on the implementation of the recommendations was discussed at the 88th plenary session of GRECO, but has not yet been officially published. In 2021, the Police of the Czech Republic registered 95 corruption cases.