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## Context

The Blue Growth Innovation and SMEs Programme, with the Directorate-General for Maritime Policy of the Ministry of Economy and Maritime Affairs (DGPM) as the Programme Operator (PO), aims to increase value creation and sustainable growth in the Portuguese blue economy, as well as research, education, and training in marine and maritime areas.

### Blue Growth Innovation and SMEs Programme

Programme Area 1 Business Development, Innovation and SMEs	Programme Area 2 Research	Programme Area 3 Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeships and Youth Entrepreneurship
 4 Calls + 3 Small Grant Schemes (SGS)	 1 Call + 2 Pre-Defined Projects	 1 Call + 1 SGS + 1 PDP
34,7 M€ grant available 	5,4 M€ grant available** 	1,9 M€ grant available** 
 118 received applications	 63 received applications**	 73 received applications**
62 approved applications* 	8 approved applications* 	40 approved applications* 
 26,2 M€ approved amount	 9,4 M€ approved amount	 5,4 M€ approved amount
64% financial execution rate 	90% financial execution rate 	73% financial execution rate 
 97 % average material execution rate	 98 % average material execution rate	 100 % average material execution rate

**Fund for Bilateral Relations:** support for initiatives that contribute to partnerships, as well as for strategic cooperation, networking, exchange, and sharing between Portuguese entities and those from the Donor States.

Source: EY-Parthenon, based on the Blue Growth Programme's MFEE 2014-2021 Quarter Report for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2024. Note: \*not withdrawn; \*\*excluding PDP.

## Evaluation objectives



The evaluation covered the entire national territory, including autonomous regions, and focused on the period from 2018 to 2024 (until September). The study aimed to evaluate whether the specific objectives of the Programme were achieved, to assess the synergy with the Environment Programme, to evaluate the monitoring and oversight mechanisms of the Programme, and to evaluate the outcome of the bilateral relations between the national partners and the partners from the Donor States.

## Methodology

The impact evaluation used the "Theory-Based Evaluation" method as well as the "Theory of Change" (ToC), which develops a plausible narrative about how the interventions trigger a set of outcomes, that is, how the policy is expected to work.

The ToC was tested throughout the evaluation process by means of a comprehensive consultation with the different agents involved in the Programme, using various qualitative and quantitative techniques for information collection, processing, and analysis. In addition to document and data collection, the following methods were employed:



1 Survey  
(to project promoters)



9 Case Studies



5 Interviews



3 Focus Groups

## Main conclusions

### Effectiveness



The performance of the Blue Growth Innovation and SMEs Programme, in terms of achieving the targets of the output and outcome indicators, is generally positive, and there are evidences of a strong convergence between the scope of the supported projects and the specific objectives of the Programme. The programmatic adequacy was well reflected in the Calls, resulting in generally high levels of total demand and of qualified demand.



The effectiveness of the Programme is associated with the coherence between the strategic approach determined in the objectives and the territorial and sectoral context, and with the considerable limitations of alternative sources of public and private funding for research, innovation, knowledge transfer and valorisation projects in the blue economy.



The pandemic stands out as one of the main limiting factors to the launch and development of the supported projects. Other constraining factors include the extension of deadlines for the analysis of applications and Execution Reports, difficulties in accessing equity and debt capital necessary to implement the project, high turnover of specialised HR, and limitations of technical resources for legal and administrative support.

### Coherence



The alignment approach between the Blue Growth Programme and the Environment Programme did not result in obvious synergies at the project level, but rather at the intervention level along the value chain, from a circular economy perspective, and among complementary target audiences.



Given the wide range of the potential complementarity between the Programmes, there could be more synergies by allowing for greater flexibility in the management of the synergy funds and introducing incentives for the application of consortia or of integrated projects to both Programmes.



The cooperation efforts between the Blue Growth Programme and the Environment Programme throughout the implementation period are demonstrated by several joint communication events, allowing for the promotion of potential partnerships and future projects.

### Operational Efficiency



The main limitations of the Programme's monitoring procedures are related to their efficiency, as they generated high administrative costs for the Operator and the promoters, disproportionate to the value of the fund being executed.



Despite the overall positive assessment, the set of indicators would benefit from a more detailed description of the scope of each indicator and the explicit statement of the time horizon for their calculation. The main limitations to the effectiveness of the monitoring methodology are related to the qualitative interpretation of the results.

### European Added Value



The projects supported by the Blue Growth Programme are mostly characterised by the adoption of partnerships with national and/or Donor States entities, which fostered the complementarity of technical skills and knowledge sharing, and the mobilisation of administrative skills.



The partnerships with Donor States entities played an important role in strengthening the internal skills of the promoting entity in technical areas relevant to the project.



Factors such as the clear definition of the role, responsibility, and activities of the partner entity contributed to the success in developing partnerships. The interest and preparation of conditions for sustaining the partnership are evident in most of the supported projects.



The loss of funding specifically allocated to partnership-related activities, the high turnover of human resources, and the loss of institutional memory can contribute to a gradual decrease in the frequency and quality of the exchanges and the sharing.

## Recommendations

1. Promote the integration and complementarity of the support instruments for innovation, research, and education to enhance the Programme's impacts and minimise efficiency losses.
2. Boost the R&D and Innovation ecosystem, favouring the coverage of the entire innovation cycle and projects with high potential for economic value creation.
3. Strengthen the mechanisms for the dissemination of the information about the Programme, simplify the language in the communication materials and initiatives, and ensure the suitability of channels and content to the target audiences, particularly among the business promoters.
4. Restructure the coordination mechanisms with the Environment Programme.
5. Consolidate the measures for simplification and promotion of operational efficiency in the implementation of the Programme, from the perspective of both the Operator and the beneficiaries.
6. Improve the Programme's monitoring system by expanding and enhancing the set of indicators and by anticipating the resource needs for the Programme's impact evaluation.

The complete information on the evaluation study can be found at [www.eeagrants.gov.pt](http://www.eeagrants.gov.pt)