



Guidance on Programme Closure

EEA and Norway Grants 2009 – 2014

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List of abbreviations

AA,	Audit Authority
CA,	Certifying Authority
DoRIS,	Documentation, Reporting and Information System
EEA,	European Economic Area
FMO,	Financial Mechanism Office
FPLI,	Final Programme Level Information
FPR,	Final Programme Report
NFP,	National Focal Point
PLI,	Project Level Information
PO,	Programme Operator
POM,	Programme Operator's Manual

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this guidance document is to give the relevant entities, Programme Operators (PO), the National Focal Points (NFP), the Certifying Authorities (CA) and the Audit Authorities (AA), an overview of the main tasks that need to be completed, and by which time, before a final programme report is submitted to the Donors and a programme is closed.

The Regulation on the implementation of the European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 and the Regulation on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 (hereinafter referred to as "Regulations") contain numerous provisions on obligations that the above entities must undertake during programme implementation. It is important that the entities have completed these tasks before the final programme report is submitted. This guidance document highlights the most important tasks and deadlines and should serve as an easy reference document for the entities in order to close a programme successfully.

However, *after* programme closure, there still remain a number of obligations that some of the above entities are responsible for. The guidance document also addresses these obligations.

This document, on the other hand, does not address:

- Closure of the Technical Assistance Fund, closure of the Bilateral Fund at National Level or submission of the Strategic Report, but provides the most pertinent deadlines in that respect
- Closure of programmes directly contracted by the FMO.

This is a non-legally binding guidance document. In the event of any discrepancies between this document and the Regulations, the Regulations prevail.

1 Completion of projects and programmes

It is important to define certain concepts in the Regulations in order to be able to determine the respective deadlines.

1.1 Project completion

Three dates are closely linked to the notion of project completion:

- Final date of eligibility of expenditures: This date is stated in the project contract. This date can be no later than 30 April 2016 for non-extended projects, 30 September 2016 for projects under the scholarship programmes, and no later than 30 April 2017 for extended projects.¹
- Project completion date (physical completion): This is when all the outputs in a project have been completed and all costs have been paid by the Project Promoter.
- Project completion date (approval by the PO): This is the date when the PO has finished all its administrative tasks in relation to the project, such as verification of the final payment claim and approval of the final project report. This is the date referred to in Article 5.12.2 of the Regulations, where the “month of completion of the last project” should be read as the month when the PO has finished all its administrative tasks in relation to the last project, such as verification of the final payment claim and approval of the final project report.

After the final date of eligibility of expenditures in projects, no costs are eligible. All costs have to have been incurred before this date, that is the invoice issued, paid and the subject matter delivered or services performed before this date.² This also applies to the management costs of the project. Therefore, it is important that the project promoter finalizes all administrative tasks and writes the final project report before this date in order for those costs to be eligible.

1.2 Non-completed projects (Article 7.14.6)

If a project cannot be completed before the final date of eligibility (physical completion), Article 7.14.6 of the Regulations provides that the Programme Operator shall ensure that funds are made available to complete the project in a timely manner or otherwise reimburse to the Donors its financial contribution to the project. In other terms, if a project is not reported as completed in the final programme report, the PO will be requested to reimburse the project grant amount.

¹The final date of eligibility of expenditures for projects under programmes in Spain was 31 December 2015.

² In line with Article 7.2.3 of the Regulations the final date for payments of invoices that have been issued in the final month of eligibility of project costs is 30 days after the final date of eligibility.

The NFPs will be requested to provide the FMO with an overview of the non-completed projects by the end of June 2016, in a format to be provided by the FMO.

1.3 Programme Completion

A Programme is completed when the Donors have approved the final programme report (FPR) (Article 5.12.3) and all the outstanding financial obligations have been settled.

According to Article 5.12.2 of the Regulations, the final programme report must be forwarded to the Donors by the Certifying Authority within three months of the completion of the last project under the programme (i.e. approval of the last project by the PO), and not later than two months after the final date of eligibility of programme management costs.

According to Article 5.12.1 of the Regulations, the final programme report must provide an overall assessment of the implementation of the programme and a calculation of the final balance. This implies that all activities under the funds for bilateral relations, complementary actions, the programme's closing event, etc. must have been carried out prior to the submission of the final programme report in order to be captured in this report.

The FPR may thus not be submitted as long as bilateral activities, complementary actions, closing events, etc., are implemented. The final date of eligibility for such activities and actions is the final date of eligibility of the programme, therefore it is likely that several activities will still be implemented beyond three months of the completion of the last project. POs may thus submit the FPR via the Certifying Authority after all projects, activities and events within the programme have been implemented beyond these three months, but no later than two months after the final date of eligibility of programme management costs.

2 Programme Closure

Before and after a final programme report is submitted to the Donors, many tasks need to be completed by the PO, NFP, CA and AA. The below chapters provide guidance on the main tasks and when they need to be completed.

Annex I and II to this guidance document include 2 timelines with relevant deadlines for programme closure in case of non-extended and extended projects.

2.1 Important deadlines

Programmes with non-extended projects:

- The final date of eligibility of project costs is stated in the project contract (never later than 30 April 2016 and 30 September 2016 for scholarship programmes (Art. 7.14.3 of the Regulations).
- The final date for payment of invoices that have been issued in the final month of eligibility of project costs is 30 days of the final date of eligibility. If the final date of eligibility of project costs is 30 April 2016, invoices that have been issued in April 2016 may be paid until 30 May 2016 (Art. 7.2.3 of the Regulations).
- 15 days after the approval of the final project report by the PO, the PO must enter information about the completed project into Doris (Art. 6.3.7 of the POM (Annex 9 to the Regulations)).
- The final date of eligibility of programme costs is 30 April 2017 (management costs, complementary actions and bilateral fund at programme level) (Art. 7.10.1 of the Regulations).
- The Certifying Authority shall submit the final programme report to the Donors after all activities under the funds for bilateral relations, complementary actions, the programme's closing event, etc., have been implemented (see section 1.3 above), and not later than two months after the final date of eligibility of programme management costs, i.e. 30 June 2017 (Art. 5.12.2 of the Regulations). This implies that the PO must submit the FPR to the Certifying Authority well in advance to give the Certifying Authority enough time to certify the financial annex to the report.
- A final programme report for Technical Assistance shall be submitted by the NFP no later than 15 November 2018 (Art. 2.7.1 of the TA Agreement).
- The final Strategic Report shall be submitted by the NFP to the Donors within 4 months of the submission of the last FPR, but no later than 30 June 2018 (Art. 2.2.5 of the Regulations).

- The Audit Authority shall submit to the Donors an annual audit report and a closure declaration at the latest by 31 December 2018.³

Programmes with extended projects:

- The final date of eligibility of project costs for an extended project is stated in the project contract (never later than 30 April 2017 (Art. 7.14.4 of the Regulations)).
- The final date for payment of invoices that have been issued in April 2017 is 30 May 2017 (Art. 7.2.3 of the Regulations).
- 15 days after the approval of the final project report by the PO, the PO must enter information about the completed project into Doris (Art. 6.3.7 of the POM (Annex 9 to the Regulations)).
- The final date of eligibility of programme costs is 31 December 2017 (Art. 7.10.1 of the Regulations).
- The Certifying Authority shall submit the final programme report to the Donors not later than two months after the final date of eligibility of programme management costs, i.e. no later than 28 February 2018 (Art. 5.12.2 of the Regulations). This implies that the PO submits the FPR to the Certifying Authority well in advance to give the Certifying Authority enough time to certify the financial annex to the report.
- A final programme report for Technical Assistance shall be submitted by the NFP no later than 15 November 2018 (Art. 2.7.1 of the TA Agreement).
- The final Strategic Report shall be submitted by the NFP to the Donors within 4 months of the submission of the last FPR, but no later than 30 June 2018 (Art. 2.2.5 of the Regulations).
- The Audit Authority shall submit to the Donors an annual audit report and a closure declaration at the latest by 31 December 2018.⁴

2.2 Tasks of the Programme Operator

There are many tasks that a PO must undertake before closing a programme. Those tasks entail management and control duties, i.e. overseeing that the Project Promoters are taking the right steps in finalising their projects as well as other administrative tasks, including financial obligations, reporting and communication obligations.

2.2.1 Financial obligations

Submission of the final programme report:

³ As regards the reference to an annual audit report in Chapter 2.1, this should be read as the final audit report. – information from FMO on 13 may 2016 (email)

⁴ As regards the reference to an annual audit report in Chapter 2.1, this should be read as the final audit report. – information from FMO on 13 may 2016 (email)

The PO must provide a calculation of the final balance in the FPR which implies that all its administrative tasks must have been completed previously. This includes the administrative tasks related to the projects and the verification of the final payment claims. Note that the FPR shall be forwarded to the Certifying Authority (CA) with enough time to certify the financial annex before 30 June 2017. In cases where extensions have been granted, the deadline is 28 February 2018.

The following tasks must be completed before submitting the FPR to the CA:

- The project expenditures shall be verified by the PO. Any reimbursement of funds from Project Promoters to the PO, and payments of funds by the PO to Project Promoters should be settled and reported in the final balance.
- All the tasks related to the bilateral activities, complementary actions and management costs must be completed and reported in the final balance.
- The incurred expenditures for the last reporting period and the final balance shall be reported in the financial annex to the FPR. The DoRIS user manual for the Final Programme Report indicates how the final balance should be calculated.⁵ The final balance shall take into account the total eligible expenditure, any payment to the programme, the co-financing sources, total interest earned, funds reimbursed from the Project Promoters to the PO, and unduly paid amounts to be recovered due to irregularities.

The Donors shall approve the report no later than two months following the receipt of the report as well as all relevant documents and necessary information. All pending irregularities cases must be remedied and closed in order for the Donors to approve the report.

When an irregularity case is still pending two months after the final date of eligibility of the programme costs, the CA must submit the FPR to the Donors. The Donors cannot, however, approve the FPR until the irregularity case has been finalized and they have received all the necessary information in that regard.

After approval of the final programme report:

The final balance payable to the PO or to the Donors shall be transferred/reimbursed no later than one month after Donors' approval of the final programme report. Any interest earned on the bank account of the PO between the date of the final programme report and the reimbursement date shall be included in the reimbursement.

The PO shall ensure that the supporting documents related to the programme expenditures are kept for at least three years from the closure of the programme, i.e. from the Donors' approval of the final programme report.

⁵ <http://eeagrants.org/Results-data/Toolbox-for-programmes/Guidelines-and-manuals>

2.2.2 Reporting obligations

2.2.2.1 Completed Project Level Information

The PO must ensure that the completed project level information (PLI) is submitted to the FMO through Doris at the latest two weeks after the final project report is approved by the PO.

The completed PLI includes the summary of project results and bilateral results as well as the financial information.

All the relevant information on what to include in the completed PLI and how to enter it into Doris is explained in the Doris User Manual on Project Level Information, which is accessible on <http://eeagrants.org/Media/Files/Toolbox/DoRIS-PLI>

2.2.2.2 Final Programme Report (FPR)

According to Article 5.12 of the Regulations, the Programme Operator shall, through the Certifying Authority, submit a final programme report to the Donors and the NFP as described in Annex 9 of the Regulations.

The PO must submit the FPR through Doris to the CA well within the deadline stipulated in Article 5.12.2 of the Regulations (chapter 1.3 above) to allow the CA enough time to review the final balance. The PO shall respect any deadline set in this respect by the CA in cooperation with the NFP.

Furthermore, in some Programme Implementation Agreements between the NFP and POs, internal deadlines are set whereby the PO is obliged to submit the FPR to the NFP before it is submitted to the CA. These deadlines must be respected by the PO.

The PO should use the annotated template for the FPR available on the portal at

<http://eeagrants.org/content/download/11539/153849/version/2/file/Final+Programme+Report+Annotated+template+Final.pdf>

The annotated template is drafted to guide the POs to produce results-based final programme reports, in line with the requirements of the legal framework and of the Programme Operators' Manual (POM).

2.2.3 Monitoring obligations

The PO must make sure that the monitoring of the projects as provided for in the monitoring plan, annexed to the annual report, is finalized before the final programme report is submitted to the CA.

2.2.4 Communication obligations

The PO must make sure that the requirements in Annex 4 to the Regulations – Information and Publicity Requirements and the Communication and Design Manual – are fulfilled before the programme can be closed. This includes that the following is done:

- Information about the programme and the financial mechanism, including its existence, the objectives, the possibilities for and actual bilateral cooperation with Donor State entities, the implementation and the overall impact of support from the financial mechanism through the programme is made known to the citizens of the Beneficiary State, beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders.
- Information on results and impact from the programme and the financial mechanism support must be presented on the programme's website.
- Information on all funded projects, including contact information, a description of the projects and their duration, the amount of funding allocated and information about cooperation with Donor State entities, is available on the programme's website.
- The information and publicity measures are implemented in accordance with the Communication Plan.
- At least two major information activities on progress and impact from the programme and the financial mechanism has been held.
- Ensure that Project Promoters have fulfilled their information and publicity obligations, including:
 - that information has been provided to the widest possible audience about the existence, the objectives, any bilateral cooperation with Donor State entities, the implementation and the impact of the support from the financial mechanism to the project;
 - that the information and publicity requirements are implemented in line with their publicity plan;
 - that the required number of information activities on progress, achievement and results of the project is held;
 - that those taking part in the project have been informed of the funding from the relevant programme and the financial mechanism;
 - that information is made available on the website including about the projects, its achievements and results, cooperation with Donor State entities as well as pictures; and
 - that a billboard is put up for projects where that is required, and later replaced by a permanent commemorative plaque.

2.3 Tasks of the National Focal Point

2.3.1 General

The NFP has the overall responsibility for reaching the objectives of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2009-2014 as well as for the implementation of the Financial Mechanisms in the Beneficiary State.

This implies that the NFP must ensure that POs comply with all their obligations, including those described in previous sections of this guidance document.

2.3.2 Irregularities

The NFP shall follow up on irregularity cases and make sure that they have been closed before the PO submits the FPR (Article 11.1.1 of the Regulations). In cases where it is not possible to close an irregularity case before submission of the FPR, the FPR must still be submitted to the Donors, but the Donors will not approve the FPR until the irregularity case has been closed. See further chapter 2.2.1 above.

2.3.3 Communication obligations

The NFPs shall ensure that communication of the EEA and Norway Grants is carried out in line with the requirements set out in Annex 4 of the Regulations, until the closure of the Financial Mechanisms in the Beneficiary State.

The NFP has the obligation to organise a closing event for the EEA and Norwegian FMs 2009-2014 (Article 4.3.4(b) of the Regulations).

2.3.4 Post-completion obligations:

In Annex I of the Programme Agreements various post-completion obligations have been set, which the NFP is responsible for. An FPR cannot be approved by the Donors unless the NFP has guaranteed that those obligations have been or will be met. Besides guaranteeing compliance with the post-completion obligation, the NFP also needs to provide a short description of how the obligations will be met.

2.3.5 Obligation to keep documents available:

All supporting documents regarding expenditure and audits on programmes must be kept available for the Donors and the EFTA Board of Auditors for a period of at least three years following the Donors' approval of the final programme reports (Article 8.8.3 of the Regulations). The Beneficiary State shall ensure that the supporting documents are kept either as originals or in versions certified to be in conformity with the originals on commonly accepted data carriers

The NFP shall also ensure an audit trail for the Technical Assistance and the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level (Article 3.4 of the TA Agreement).

2.4 Tasks of the Certifying Authority

The Certifying Authority is responsible for certifying the final balance and for submitting the FPR to the Donors.

Before donor approval of the final programme report:

The Certifying Authority shall ensure that amounts recovered following the cancellation of all or part of the financial contribution for a programme or project are reimbursed to the Donors (Article 4.5.1 of the Regulations).

The Certifying Authority shall declare in the FPR and include in the calculation of the final balance payment any interest earned on the PO accounts for funds intended for regranting during the year in which the final programme report is submitted.

2.5 Tasks of the Audit Authority

The Audit Authority shall submit to the Donors a final audit report and a closure declaration at the latest by 31 December 2017. In cases where extensions have been granted, the deadline for the final audit report and closure declaration shall be 31 December 2018.

The final audit report shall be accompanied also with the audit opinion. The final audit report will cover the audits carried out after 1 July 2017.

The closure declaration will support the final audit report and will assess the validity of the application for payment of the final balance claimed in the final programme report.

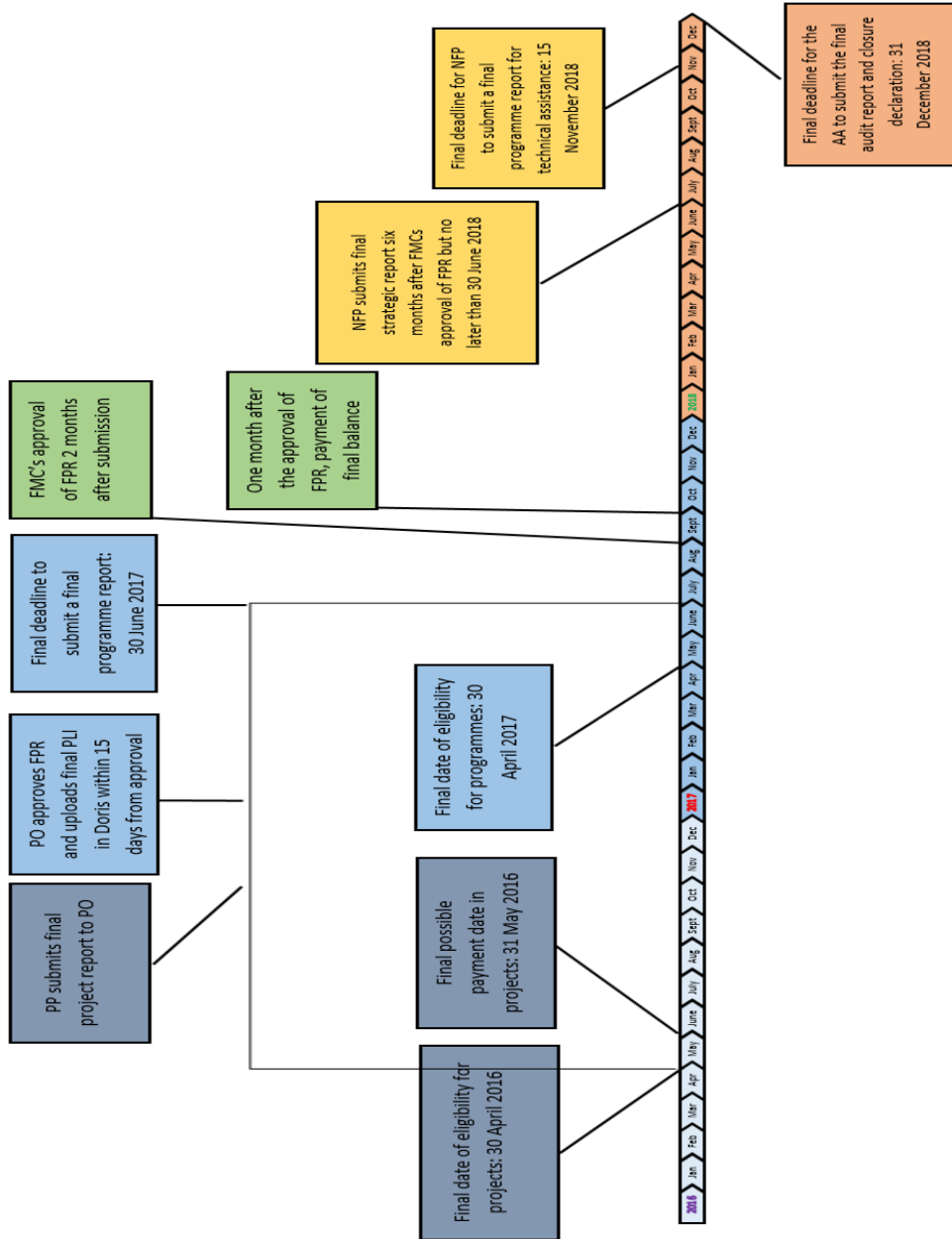
The Audit Authority can use the guidance provided by the European Commission in the following documents:

[COMMISSION DECISION of 30.4.2015 amending Decision C\(2013\) 1573 on the approval of the guidelines on the closure of operational programmes adopted for assistance from the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund \(2007-2013\)](#)

[ANNEX to the Commission Decision amending Decision C\(2013\) 1573 on the approval of the guidelines on the closure of operational programmes adopted for assistance from the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund \(2007-2013\)](#)

ANNEX 1

Time Line for programmes with non-extended projects



ANNEX 2

Time Line for programmes with extended projects

