

EEA collaboration – an idea for your institution?

October 2016

Introduction

“The EEA Grants and Norway Grants are Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway’s contribution to reducing economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area and to the strengthening of bilateral relations with the 15 beneficiary states in Central and Southern Europe.” (Blue Book, <http://eeagrants.org/What-we-do>, accessed 20 September 2016).

“All countries have different needs and priorities. Each country has agreed on a set of programmes with the donor countries based on needs, priorities and the scope for bilateral cooperation.” (<http://eeagrants.org/What-we-do>, accessed 20 September 2016).

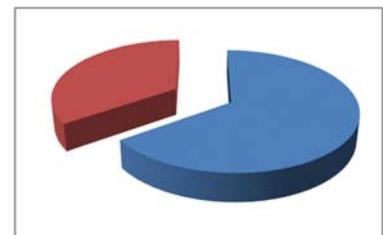
“To encourage strategic and long-term cooperation, more than half of the 150 programmes involve cooperation with public entities from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The donor programme partners (DPPs) play a strategic role in programme planning and implementation as well as facilitating project partnerships.” (<http://eeagrants.org/Partnerships/Donor-programme-partners>, accessed 10 October 20)

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health is DPP for Estonia, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia and The Czech Republic under the Public Health Initiatives Programme. The Norwegian Directorate of Health is DPP for Poland.

In January 2016, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health conducted an anonymous online questionnaire to gain information about the Norwegian EEA partners and their experiences from the partnerships. Some of the results were communicated during the Norwegian experience sharing conference EØS Erfaringskonferanse, held in Oslo in March 2016.

A total of 68 collaborations were registered for the survey in eight of the ten recipient countries in form of projects and bilateral activities with Norwegian institutions.

Some of these institutions are engaged in several countries and some of the staff in these organizations are engaged in several projects in the same country. This means that the survey was sent to a total of 62 different institutions. The Department of International Health and the Department of Health Statistics at NIPH developed the questionnaire using Questback software (www.questback.com).



62 institutions received the questionnaire

33 institutions, i.e. 53.2%, responded

Summary of key findings

The survey consisted of 37 questions, including numeric variables and free text questions. Most of the questions were multiple choice, so that one could tick off more than one answer. The majority of the participants of the survey represent public (health) institutions, NGOs and universities/colleges. Most of the respondents collaborate with the Czech Republic, Portugal and Slovenia. The main areas for collaboration among the respondents are child and adolescent health, mental health and social inequalities.

Over half of the respondents have previous experience in collaborating internationally including with WHO and through the EU health programs and EU Research Framework programs. When asked to evaluate how important and interesting international collaboration was for themselves and the same question was asked about their organisation, the importance weighed heavily for most respondents in both cases. However, respondents seemed to feel that international collaboration was more important to them individually than to the institutions they serve.

The survey has given us valuable responses with regard to motivation, experiences, obstacles, success factors, lessons learned and recommendations. The overwhelming response is positive. Most of the respondents would pursue new partnerships despite the challenges related to heavy bureaucracy, delays, financial issues, language barriers, contractual disagreements and communication and cultural challenges.

100% recommend entering a partnership



Main obstacles

- Delayed start
- Administrative and financial challenges



85% would engage in new partnerships



Success factors

- Focus on a specific scientific problem
- Trust
- Enthusiasts!



Key Responses



Collaboration

The collaboration includes several different activities, see figure 2, with the main ones being scientific advice, study trips to Norway and recipient country in addition to conferences. «Other» includes developing digital solutions, scientific resources, preventive measures and training programmes, quality control and reporting.

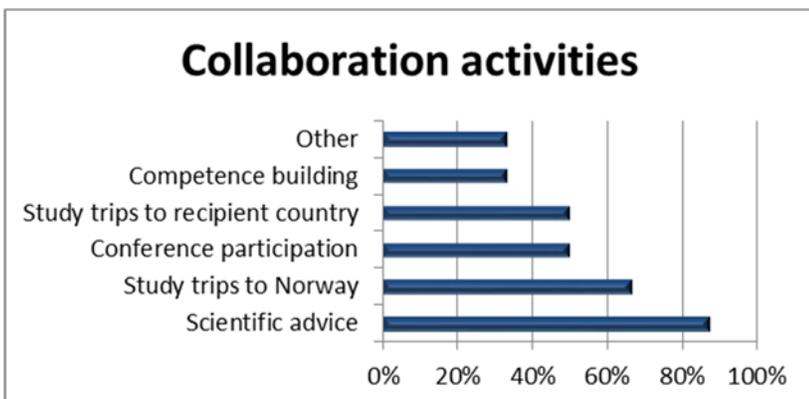


Figure 2: What activities has the collaboration included?



Obstacles

Several obstacles were predefined in this question and the respondents could tick off for several of them. This resulted in most institutions responding that “Delayed start” was the main obstacle, followed by administrative and financial challenges. The least important challenge was scientific disagreement in the partnership. The delayed start in most of the programmes is mainly attributed to heavy bureaucracy, changing political landscapes and lack of human resources and capacity.

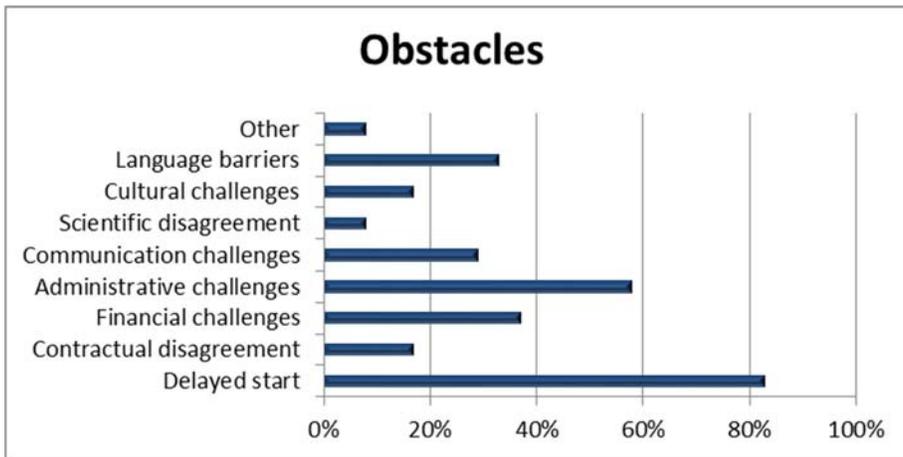


Figure 3: Which obstacles has the collaboration run into?



Progress

An overwhelming majority of the respondents rated the progress of the project they are involved in as “Good” (66,7 %) and about a third of the respondents gave a “Fair” rating (29,2 %). On the whole, project progress was rated as “Good” or “Fair” which indicates overall satisfaction with how the project is progressing despite the many obstacles defined in the previous section.

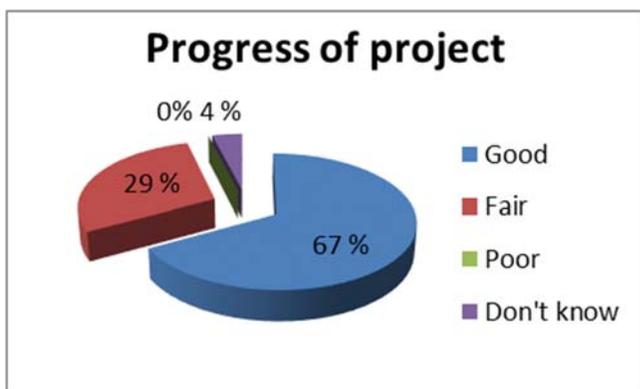


Figure 4: How would you rate the progress of the project?



Contribution

The question of whether or not the respondents view their contribution as useful to the project or not yielded 96 % answering “Yes to a large extent”/“Yes, to a small extent”. No one responded “No” to this question, which can be an indicator of a successful partnership with mutual benefits.

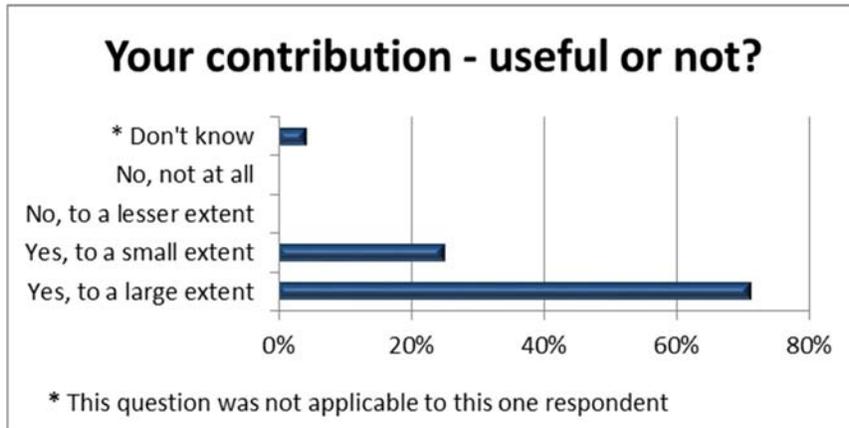


Figure 5: Do you experience that your contribution is useful?



Added value

This was a question targeted at the individual responding on behalf of the Norwegian partnering institution. These answers therefore reflect personal views of the respondents. It is clear that the main benefit from participating in EEA and Norway Grants partnerships is the wide international network (87,5% of the responses) that comes with the partnership. A close number two are the scientific or professional benefits (nearly 71 %). Again there is a clear indication, reflected in this response that despite the many obstacles experienced, the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages or challenges.

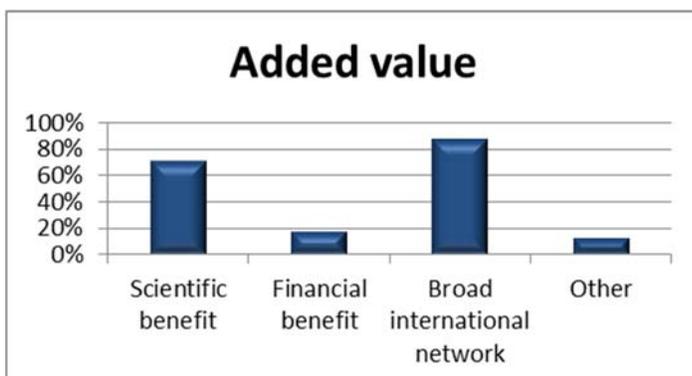


Figure 6: What is the added value for you to participate in an EEA partnership?



Lessons learned

“The collaboration has been of mutual benefit. The scientific resources developed during the collaboration are also relevant for Norway. It has been useful to view well-known public health challenges in another national context where other solutions have been found. This has given ideas for use in a Norwegian national context. “

This first free-text question gathered a variety of responses with three main areas emerging:

- 1) The cultural differences are seen as both positive in a learning context and challenging with regard to the project's progression
- 2) Delays due to different cultural formalities, administrative systems and political processes and the need to be patient
- 3) Mutual benefits through scientific exchanges

In addition, the degree to which Norwegian participation varies and depends on how much the Norwegian partner is asked to actively engage and participate in the collaboration. Others responded that language is important as well as a certain degree of humbleness.



Synergies

“Has resulted in bilateral contact in similar disciplines and thematic subjects beyond the project and project period. The collaboration has given room to discuss Norwegian practice and system development within the main area of the collaboration.”

The main three responses emerging from this free-text question are:

- 1) The network has expanded and resulted in overlaps into other networks and bilateral collaborations within adjacent thematic disciplines, including EU-funded projects
- 2) The collaboration has been useful in a Norwegian context
- 3) The collaboration has contributed to new mutual research projects

In addition it is worth noting that the partnership has strengthened the collaboration *within* some of the recipient countries themselves.



Recommendations

“Explore the possibilities! Set aside time for building relationships! Don’t expect big results from your efforts, but share willingly of your knowledge and experience! Remember that there are many competent people in the partnering institutions, and that our contribution may first and foremost be to contribute with knowledge about “our system”, its positive sides and good solutions, but also its deficiencies. Contribute to motivation and empowerment in decision-making processes and the choices that have to be made, and cheer on in the implementation process!”

The respondents gave a number of recommendations, falling into three main categories: a) do your homework, b) put enough resources into the project and c) go for it!

Transcribing the responses into these three main categories, the recommendations are:

- a) Conduct a thorough review of the country and partner institution before you decide to go into a partnership agreement and make sure the goals and responsibilities are crystal clear. Ask others for advice!
- b) Ensure that your institution can provide adequate staff and resources to handle the significant amount of administrative paperwork and the technical/scientific tasks
- c) Take the opportunity to engage in interesting partnerships and relations with a good dose of idealism, enthusiasm and diligence!



Reflections from NIPH

As Donor Programme Partner we see that if incentives are in place for bi-lateral collaboration through calls for project proposals, the number of Norwegian partners increases significantly.

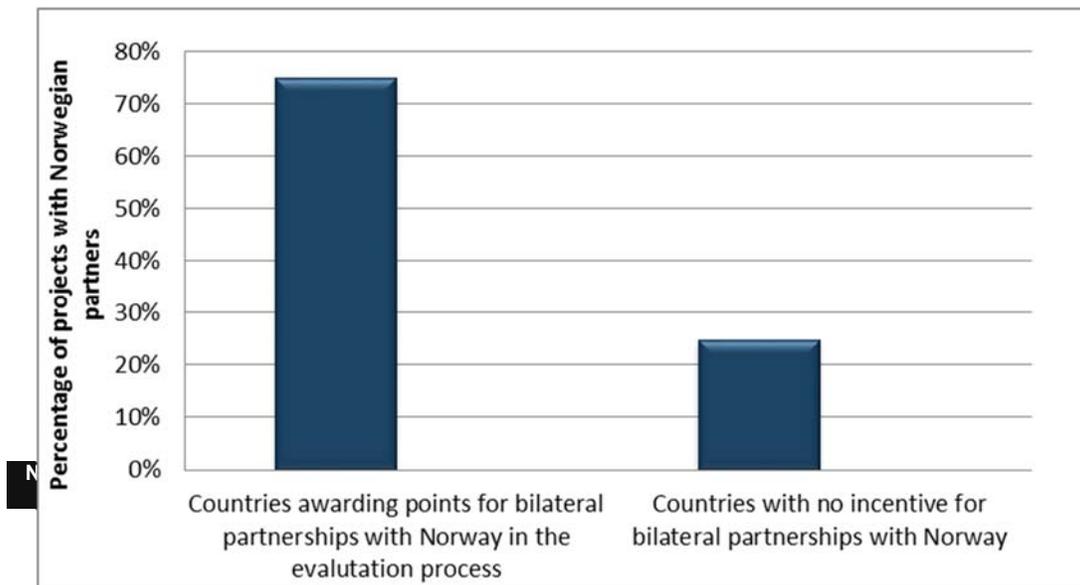
Some recipient countries award extra points in the evaluation of the project applications, see Figure 7 below. This figure is not part of this survey, but was developed by NIPH in 2015 to illustrate the consequence of using incentives in the evaluation of applications. In this example, two out of four countries give 5 points out of 100 in their evaluation of applications to those applicants who have found Norwegian partners. The figure shows that 75 % of the projects in these two countries have in fact Norwegian partners. On the other side, the figure shows that only 25 % of the projects in the other two countries have Norwegian partners. This is due to the fact that they did not include the same incentive (5 points for having found a Norwegian partner) in their evaluation of applications.

Although this statistical number is small, it indicates that there is a clear correlation between the incentive and number of projects with Norwegian partners.

As Donor Programme Partner we recommend that an evaluation is conducted to register the quality of the partnerships. As Figure 7 and our experience have shown, the incentive seems to function with regard to an increase in the number of Norwegian partners, but it does not reflect the *quality* of the partnerships.

An evaluation may reveal how we can discern already at the application stage which partnerships may be sustainable and relevant in contrast to partnerships that have been established solely to earn the extra five points. We would like to find out which criteria determine sustainable bilateral relations of mutual benefit with regard to scientific collaboration and development.

Figure 7: Number of projects with Norwegian partners in 4 recipient countries



Annex 1 — Questionnaire in Norwegian

Questback-undersøkelse til norske partnere som samarbeider under EØS-midlenes Folkehelseprogram

Hensikt med kartleggingen: Innhente norske partners erfaringer fra samarbeidet under EØS-midlenes folkehelseprogram

Momenter i undersøkelsen:

Bakgrunnsinformasjon

1. Type bedrift/organisasjon/tema/fagfelt/samarbeidsfelt/hvilke land samarbeides med
2. Tidligere erfaringer fra internasjonale prosjekter

Oppstartsfasen

3. Hvordan oppstod første kontakt
4. Hva var motivasjon som førte til EØS samarbeid

Prosjektfasen

5. Type samarbeidsaktiviteter
6. Opplevelsen av samarbeidet / karakterisere samarbeidet
7. Fremgang i prosjektet
8. Største hindringer

Erfaringer

9. Verdien av den norske partneren
10. Merverdien - Får den norske partneren noe igjen for samarbeidet
11. Hva er det viktigste du har lært av dette samarbeidet
12. Synergier av samarbeidet

Refleksjoner

13. Ville du gått inn i EØS samarbeid en gang til
14. Ville du anbefale andre å gå inn i EØS samarbeid
15. Hva er avgjørende faktorer for å lykkes med samarbeidet
16. Hvilke råd ville du gi til andre som er interessert i EØS samarbeid
17. Er internasjonalt samarbeid nyttig for deg/din organisasjon – hvorfor?

SPØRSMÅL:

1. Hvilket land samarbeider du med? (Flere x)

- a. Tsjekkia
- b. Estland
- c. Portugal
- d. Slovenia
- e. Polen
- f. Bulgaria
- g. Romania

2. Hva slags organisasjon representerer du?

- a. Offentlig helseinstitusjon
- b. Privat bedrift
- c. Frivillig sektor
- d. Universitet / høgskole
- e. Forskningsinstitutt
- f. Annet - TEKSTBOKS

3. Hvilket fagfelt handler samarbeidet om? (flere x)

- a. Sosial ulikhet
- b. Mental helse
- c. Barn og unges helse
- d. Smittevern
- e. Ernæring
- f. Register/informasjonssystemer
- g. Annet - TEKSTBOKS

4. Har du tidligere erfaringer med internasjonale samarbeidsprosjekter? (flere x)

- a. Ja ALTERNATIVER:
 - i. EU rammeprogram (Horizon 2020)
 - ii. EUs helseprogram (SG Sante)
 - iii WHO
 - iv. Annet TEKSTBOKS
- b. Nei

5. Hvordan oppstod den første kontakten med prosjektpartner?

- a. Faglig bekjentskap fra tidligere
- b. Møttes på konferanse
- c. Direkte henvendelse på e-post
- d. Direkte henvendelse på telefon
- e. Ble kontaktet av Folkehelseinstituttet eller Helsedirektoratet
- f. Annet TEKSTBOKS

6. Hva var viktigste motivasjonsfaktor for at beslutningen om samarbeid ble tatt?

- a. Økonomisk utbytte
- b. Faglig utbytte
- c. Interesse for å bidra internasjonalt
- d. Nettverksbygging
- e. Annet TEKSTBOKS

7. Hva har samarbeidet bestått av? (Flere x)

- a. Faglig rådgivning
- b. Studieturer til Norge
- c. Konferansedeltakelse
- d. Studieturer til mottakerland
- e. Kompetansehevende kurs
- f. Annet TEKSTBOKS

8. Hvordan opplever du samarbeidet på følgende punkter på skala fra 1-5, hvor 5 er svært bra?

- a. Personlige møter
- b. Kommunikasjon (e-post og telefon)
- c. Leveranser
- d. Administrasjon
- e. Faglig relevans
- f. Sosialt

9. Hvordan vurderer du fremgangen i prosjektet?

- a. God
- b. Middels
- c. Dårlig
- d. Vet ikke

10. Har prosjektet opplevd noen av disse hindringene? (Flere x)

- a. Forsinket oppstart
- b. Uenigheter rundt kontrakter
- c. Finansielle utfordringer
- d. Administrative utfordringer i forbindelse med for eksempel dokumentasjonskrav
- e. Kommunikasjonsutfordringer
- f. Faglige uenigheter
- g. Kulturelle utfordringer
- h. Språkbariærer
- i. Andre - TEKSTBOKS

11. Oppleves ditt bidrag som nyttig?

- a. Ja, i stor grad
- b. Ja, i liten grad
- c. Nei, i mindre grad
- d. Nei, ikke i det hele tatt
- e. Vet ikke

12. Hva er merverdien for deg å delta i EØS samarbeid? (Flere x)

- a. Faglig utbytte
- b. Økonomisk utbytte
- c. Bredt internasjonalt nettverk
- d. Annet - TEKSTBOKS

13. Hva er det viktigste du har lært av dette samarbeidet

- a. TEKSTBOKS

14. Har samarbeidet medført andre synergier

- a. TEKSTBOKS

15. Ville du gått inn i EØS-samarbeid en gang til?

- a. Ja
 - b. Nei
- Hvorfor ikke? TEKSTBOKS
- c. Vet ikke

16. Ville du anbefale andre å gå inn i EØS-samarbeid?

- a. Ja
- b. Nei

17. Hva mener du er avgjørende faktorer for å skulle lykkes med et slikt samarbeid? (skala 1-5?)

- a. Felles fagforståelse
- b. Felles utfordringer
- c. Kultur og språkforståelse
- d. Tillit
- e. Tidligere fagfelle bekjentskap
- f. Ildsjeler
- g. Egeninteresse
- h. Konkret problemstilling
- i. Tidligere erfaring med internasjonal prosjektadministrasjon
- j. Andre TEKSTBOKS

18. Hvor nyttig og viktig vurderer du internasjonalt samarbeid til å være for din organisasjon på en skal fra 1-5 hvor 5 er svært nyttig?

- a. 1-5

19. Hvor nyttig og viktig vurderer du internasjonalt samarbeid til å være for deg på en skal fra 1-5 hvor 5 er svært nyttig?

- a. 1-5

20. Hvilke råd ville du gi til andre som er interessert i EØS-samarbeid?

- a. TEKSTBOKS