REPORT II

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in the performance of the activities under a public procurement with the subject:

"Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments made under the Operational Programme "Good Governance" (OPGG)"

Contract № MS-166 / 21.11.2022, concluded

between Administration of the Council of Ministers and GFK-2016

GFK-2016   **24.04.2024 г.**

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AA	Audit Authority
ACoM	Administration of the Council of Ministers
ACSC	Administrative Court Sofia-city
AEUF	Audit of EU funds
AGCC	Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadaster
AIS	Automated Information System
APC	Administrative Procedure Code
AR	Annual Report (of OPGG)
AR	Administrative Register
ARC	Administrative Reform Council
AS	Administrative Service
ASA	Agency for Social Assistance
BAFS	Bulgarian Agency for Food Safety
BIMIS 2000	Customs document processing system
BRIS	Business Register Interconnection System
BSR	Bulgarian State Railways
BSS	Bulgarian State Standards
CA	Certifying Authority
CA	Customs' Agency
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CCCCIAP	Commission for Countering Corruption and Confiscation of Illegally Acquired Property
CCP	Code of Civil Procedure
CCP	Code of Criminal Procedure
CCU	Central Coordination Unit
CCU	Customs Codes of the Union
CEAS	Customs Export Automated System
CBCJ	Central Bureau of Criminal Justice
CVPOS	Central Virtual POS terminal
CRSP	Central Register of Special Pledges
CTIS	Customs Transit Information System

CF	Cohesion Fund
CFS	Commission for Financial Supervision
CAIS EP	Centralized Automated Information System for Electronic Procurement
CAS	Complex Administrative Service
CPC	Commission for Protection of Competition
CPDP	Commission for Personal Data Protection
CPC	Criminal Procedure Code
CRC	Commission for Regulation of Communication
CR	Commercial Registry
CRRNPLE	Commercial Registry and Registry of the Non-profit Legal Entities
CPA	Classifier of Positions in Administration
DCoM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
DC	District Courts
DI	Diplomatic Institute
DIP	District Information Point
DPEUFI (AFKOS)	Directorate for the Protection of the European Union's Financial Interests (AFKOS)
DPO	District Prosecutor's Offices
EA AA	Executive Agency Automobile Administration
EA AFEU	Executive Agency Audit of the Funds from the European Union
EAFA	Executive Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture
EAFO	European Anti-Fraud Office
EA CAEAF	Executive Agency "Certification Audit of the European Agricultural Funds"
EAS	Electronic Administrative Services
EC	European Commission
ECHR	European Convention on Himan Rights
EESSI	Electronic exchange of social security information
ESGRAON	Unified system for civil registration and administrative service of the population
EU	European Union
ESIF	European structural and investment funds
EIPA	European Institute of Public Administration

EORI	Identification number unique to the customs territory of the European Union
EP	European Parliament
ESF	European Social Fund
EFSM	European Funds for Shared Management
ESSF	Electronic social security file
ERDF	European Fund for Regional Development
EISHRMPA	Electronic Information System for Human Resource Management in Public Administration
EMCS	Excise Movement and Control System
EPRES	Electronic Portal for Requesting of Electronic Services
ESC	Economic and Social Committee
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
EVALSED	European Commission guidelines for the assessment of socio-economic development
GDFSPP	General Directorate Fire Safety and Protection of the Population
GDEP	General Directorate "Execution of Penalties"
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDS	General Directorate Security
GIS	Geographic Information System
HPC	Hybrid private cloud
HRM	Human Resource Management
HIPC	Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices
ICI	Information and communication infrastructure
ICS	Import Control System
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IAMS	Identity and Access Management System of the Customs Agency
IEAS	Internal electronic administrative services
IME	Institute of Market Economy:
IPA	Institute for Public Administration
IP of MoI	Institute on Psychology of the Ministry of Interior
IRA	Interoperability Reference Architecture
ISJC	Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council

ISCCMR	Information system for centralized creation and maintenance of registers
IISSA	Integrated Information System of the State Administration
IAWP	Indicative Annual Work Programme
IPIS	Integrated Pension Information System
JA	Judiciary authorities
LA	Legal aid
LC	Labor Code
LCPSA	Licensing and control of private security activity
LCS	Law for Civil Service
LEI	Law for Electronic Identification
LEPD	Law on Execution of Punishments and Detention
LES	Law on Electronic Services
LeG	Law for eGovernment
LMESIF	Law on the management of the European Structural and Investment Funds
LMEFSM	Law on the management of European funds under shared management
LNPLE	Law on the Non-Profit Legal Entities
LGCWEBE	Law on guaranteed claims of workers and employees in case of bankruptcy of the employer
LSDA	Law on Spatial Data Access
LEDES	Law on electronic document and electronic signature
LESC	Law on Enforcement of Sentences and Custody
LNA	Law on normative acts
LDAFRB	Law on Defense and the Armed Forces in the Republic of Bulgaria
LLA	Law on Legal Aid
LJ	Law on the Judiciary
LPB	Law on private bailiffs
LMIS	Learning Management Information System
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MoAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
MoEG	Ministry of eGovernment

MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MJ	Ministry of Justice
MoTC	Ministry of Transport and Communication
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoRDPW	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
MS	Member State
NA	National Assembly
NAMRB	National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria
NCID	National Center for Information and Documentation
NEMC	National Expert Medical Commission
NDPB	National Development Program of Bulgaria
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
NIICH	National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NLAB	National Legal Aid Bureau
NPLE	Non-profit Legal Entity
NRA	National Revenue Agency
NRP	National Reform Program
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
NSDP	National Spatial Data Portal
NSI	National Statistical Institute
NESC	National Electronic Students Cards
NSII	National Social Insurance Institute
NAVET	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training
OAS	Ordinance on administrative service
OGRIIS	The Ordinance on the General Requirements for Interoperability and Information Security
OICPA	Ordinance on the implementation of the classification of positions in the administration
OTCEPCS	Ordinance on the terms and conditions for evaluating the performance of civil servants
OP	Operational Programme
OPAC	Operational Progrmme "Administrative Capacity"

OPGG	Operational Programme "Good Governance"
OPHRD	Operational Programme "Human Resources Development"
OSEPA	Ordinance on the Salaries of Employees in Public Administration
PA	Priority axis
PA	Partnership Agreement
PAI	Program Access to Information
PC	Penalty Code
PCC	Policy on Climate Change
PE	Policy on Environment
PIC	Personal Identity Code
PPA	Public Procurement Agency
PPA	Public Procurement Act
PPR	Public procurement Register
PRB	The Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria
PR	Property Registry
PS	Penitentiary System
QES	Qualified Electronic Signature
RA	Registry Agency
RAS	Register of the academic staff
RHI	Regional Health Inspectorate
RIA	Road Infrastructure Agency
RIR	Register of information resources
RM	Road Map
PME	Regional Management of Education
SAA	State Agency" Archives"
SAeG	State Agency "Electronic Government"
SAC	Supreme Administrative Court
SBM	Secondary budget manager
SCA	Sofia Court of Appeal
SCC	Supreme Court of Cassation
SG	State Gazette
SA	State aid
SEDE	System for Excise Data Exchange

SJC	Supreme Judicial Council
SFA	State Fund Agriculture
SFIA	State Financial Inspection Agency
SEDS	Secure Electronic Delivery System
SEP	Socio-economic partners
SESS	Secure Electronic Serving System
SFIA	State Financial Inspection Agency
SGEI	Services of General Economic Interest
SDeGRB/SeG	Strategy for the development of e-government in the Republic of Bulgaria/Strategy for eGovernment
SDPA	Strategy for Development of Public Administration
SP	Strategic Priority
SPAEAS	Single Portal for Access to Electronic Administrative Services (egov.bg)
SISC	Single Information System of the Courts
SISMA	Specialized Information System for Monitoring and Analysis
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SEJP	Single e-Justice Portal
SRSS	Structural Reform Support Service
SSC	Social Security Code
STA	Specialized territorial administration
TEMC	Territorial expert medical commission
TMAS	Transformation Model of the administrative service
TFP	Transitional and Final Provisions
TS	Technical specification
USCJR	Updated Strategy for Continuing Judicial Reform
UMIS	Unified Management Information System
UARCGDM	Unified automated register of Control of general dangerous means
UBIS	Unified business information system
UELAS	Unified electronic legal aid system
UIS	Unified information system
UISJE	Unified information system of judicial execution
UISCC	Unified information system for combating crime
UISSO	Unified information system of social security

UISC	Unified information system of the courts
URM	Unified register of mediators
URJ	Unified register of jurors
UISHRM	Unified information system for human resources management
UPAEAS	Unified portal for access to electronic administrative services

3. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared pursuant to Article 25, para. 1, item 1 of the Contract No. MS-166 / 21.11.2022 with the subject "Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments made under the Operational Programme "Good Governance" (OPGG)", concluded between the Administration of the Council of Ministers as the Contracting Authority and GFC-2016 as the Contractor.

In the Technical Specification - Annex 1 to the procurement contract, the Contracting Authority has defined the purpose of the procurement, namely, to carry out an independent analysis to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments made under the OPGG in the period from February 19, 2015[1] to July 31, 2022 and the potential effect of the measures under implementation, such as:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the OPGG investments related to:
   - development of e-government and improvement of administrative services under PA1;
   - administrative reform and training in the administration under PA2;
   - judicial reform, e-justice and judicial training under PA3;
   - Development of citizen control over the administration and the judiciary and of citizen participation under PA2 and PA3;
   - Development of the management and control system for ESIF from the EU under PA4 and PA5.

2. To identify specific recommendations and to formulate measures and indicators in the field of e-governance and digital transformation, to improve the system of management and control of funds in Bulgaria, to increase the involvement of civil society organizations (NGOs and socio-economic partners) in the process of preparation, implementation and evaluation of the programs of the Partnership Agreement 2021-2027 in the programming period 2021-2027.

The scope of the assessment covers the OPGG investments made in the period from 19 February 2015 to 31 July 2022 and the potential impact of the measures under implementation. At the Inception Meeting held on 22 November 2022, it was agreed that the evaluation would be prepared with up-to-date data at the date of the evaluation. This report is based on data as of November 30, 2024.

The OPGG is an instrument to support the implementation of national measures for administrative and judicial reform, for the development of e-government, including e-justice, as well as to ensure the functioning of national horizontal units responsible for the management and control of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). The OPGG is co-financed by

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[1] The date of approval of the OPGG by the EC.

the European Social Fund and the national budget of the Republic of Bulgaria. The total budget of the programme is EUR 280 469 251 after the third amendment of the programme in 2020.[2] The programme has undergone five amendments as the third one also concerned changes in the budget. This third amendment of the OPGG is in implementation of the Decision of the CoM No 256/2020, which resulted in the release of a resource of 105 000 000 BGN from the OPGG, transferred to the OPHRD to support measures to minimize the negative consequences of the epidemic spread of COVID-19. In the fourth amendment of the programme in 2022 (version 5), the budget was not changed. A new Priority Axis 6 *"Cohesion Actions for Refugees in Europe (CARE)"* has been added to address the migration challenges resulting from the war in Ukraine. Funds under this axis amounting to 42.6 million euro have been reallocated from priority axes 1, 2, 3. The amendment also included a change of indicators under priority axes 1 and 5, as well as a transfer of BGN 1.2 million from the technical assistance of the programme (PA5) to the Technical Assistance for the management of ESIF (PA4). The latest fifth amendment of the programme was in November 2023, which added another priority axis - 7 *"Support for SMEs through the SAFE instrument"*[3]. The budget for this PA is 6 779 151,26 BGN and it is expected to support 1028 enterprises.

The measures planned in the OPGG are grouped into five[4] priority axes:

PA 1: Administrative services and e-government;

PA 2: Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business;

PA 3: A transparent and efficient judiciary;

PA 4: Technical assistance for the management of the ESIF;

PA 5: Technical assistance.

The first three priority axes are in line with Thematic Objective No 11 "Strengthening the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration", Investment Priority No 1 "Investing in the institutional capacity and efficiency of public administrations and public services at national, regional and local level to implement reforms and achieve better regulation and good governance" of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013[5] . PA4 and PA5 are priority axes for technical assistance.

The specific objectives of each priority axis are:

PA1	1. Reducing administrative and regulatory burden for citizens and businesses and introducing the principles of "life episodes" and "business events"; 2. Increase the number of electronic services available to citizens and businesses.

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[2] Third Amendment to the OPGG, 31.08.2020

[3] Fifth Amendment to the OPGG 23.11.2023, as the measures under PA7 are not subject to assessment.

[4] A new Priority Axis 6 has been added to the OPGG by a fourth amendment dated 05.10.2022, which is not subject of this analysis and assessment.

[5] Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006

PA 2	1. Increase in the number of administrations implementing organizational development and results-based management mechanisms;
	2. Improving the specialized knowledge and skills of administrative staff and supporting career development mechanisms;
	3. Increase citizen participation in policy making and monitoring.
PA 3	1. Increase transparency and speed up justice through reform of the structure, procedures and organization of the judiciary;
	2. Improving the accessibility and transparency of the judiciary by introducing e-justice;
	3. Expanding the scope and improving the quality of judicial training.
PA4	1. Supporting the horizontal structures responsible for the management and implementation of the ESIF;
	2. Ensuring the effective functioning of UMIS 2020;
	3. Improving public awareness of the opportunities and results of the ESF in Bulgaria and improving the capacity of beneficiaries.
PA5	1. Effective and efficient OPGG management;
	2. Increasing the capacity and awareness of OP beneficiaries.

This Report 2 has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Contracting Authority as set out in the Technical Specification, following the minimum content requirements. The report focuses on the Research Task 1 as formulated in the Technical Specification.

4. RESEARCH TASKS AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

In the ToR of the procurement, the Contracting Authority has defined the scope of the evaluation by referring to the Programme Evaluation Plan (in accordance with the provision of Article 56 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013[6]) as impact evaluation.

The impact of the programme has been assessed in terms of the task of each European Structural and Investment Fund in relation to the objectives of the Union's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, and taking into account the size of the programme in relation to GDP and unemployment in the area concerned, where appropriate. The impact assessment should answer questions of cause and effect by examining the impact of the OPGG investments on the achievement of national and European strategic objectives. It is expected the evaluation to analyze and compare the impact on *e-government* and *e-justice*, on administrative and judicial reforms, and on the management and control system of the funds in Bulgaria, in case of:

- OPGG investments; and

- lack of investment under the OPGG.

In addition to the specific three research tasks, the following questions are included in the scope of the evaluation:

1. What is the impact of the OPGG in terms of the objectives of the ESIF against the objectives of the Union Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (taking into account the size of the OPGG in relation to GDP)?

2. What is the contribution of OPGG support to national and European strategic objectives in the field of *e-government*, administrative and judicial reform, and citizen control and participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring?

The Contracting Authority has **identified three tasks to be performed** by the Contractor for evaluation purposes. For each of the tasks, a minimum set of evaluation questions have been formulated to be answered in order to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments made under the OPGG. This report reflects the work according to the description of the scope of the Evaluation in section 3.1 and Task 1 of the ToR.

The formulated assessment tasks as well as the assessment questions are included in the text below:

Task 1: Analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of investments under PA 1, PA 2, PA 3 *in the justice sector and administrative governance and*

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[6] REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

services, including e-government and e-justice, formulation of specific recommendations, measures and indicators in the field of *e-government* and digital transformation for the programming period 2021-2027.

The contracting authority has also formulated specific evaluation questions, namely:

4.1. What is the contribution of the investments made to the development of administrative services, administrative and judicial reform?

4.2. Which of the investments in administrative and judicial services can be identified as the most effective in terms of their users (end users)?

4.3. Do the implemented measures contribute to more equal access to administrative services and to improved coordination of their provision at national, regional and local level?

4.4. Do the investments lead to improved access to administrative services and equal access to justice for disadvantaged people (disabled, marginalised, unemployed, living in sparsely populated, mountainous and border areas, illiterate or with primary education)?

4.5. What is the efficiency of PA 1 and PA 3 investments, considered as a ratio of inputs to outputs? Which measures can be defined as efficient and which as inefficient? What are the factors influencing the efficiency of investments? Could results be achieved at lower cost by taking a different approach?

4.6. What is the change in the specific area before and after the interventions under the respective OPGG PA? How much of the change is due to OPGG support?

4.7. What is the change in terms of business environment, administrative and regulatory burden after the OPGG investments? How much of the change is due to the support from the OPGG?

4.8. What are the identified unintended effects (positive and negative) of the investments?

4.9. What are the barriers to the development of e- governance and e-justice?

The Contracting Authority has also defined in the ToR the minimum set of normative and strategic documents, as included in Annex 1 to this ToR. The procedures for the provision of grants to be followed in the implementation of each task are listed in Annex 2 to the ToR.

The following evaluation criteria should be taken into account in the evaluation:

- *Relevance* - degree of correlation between the needs and problems in society and the objectives of the programme investments;
- *Effectiveness* - degree of achievement of the objectives set at programme level (achievement of the set outcome and performance indicators);
- *Efficiency* - the extent to which the results/change achieved are consistent with the costs incurred;

- *Coherence* - consistency of the activities implemented through the programme with national and European policies;
- *Impact* - impact of the programme on stakeholders;
- *Sustainability* - determining the sustainability of the results achieved by the projects after the end of the programme funding;
- *Applicability of the assistance* - analysis of the programme objectives and their relevance to social, economic and political changes during the programming period;
- *European Union added value* - changes that can demonstrably be accepted as the result of EU intervention, over and above what could reasonably be expected from national action by Member States. Added value can be demonstrated by showing the role of EU funding for activities that would not otherwise happen, that happen on a larger scale or that happen earlier than they would.

5. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments made under the OPGG raises a number of key issues that the Contractor plans to address. The choice of evaluation methods has taken into account the large number of beneficiary administrations and stakeholders to be evaluated and analyzed and the number of projects implemented. This implies well-chosen methods and tools for information gathering and analysis that cover the scope of the evaluation and at the same time involve the staff in these structures sufficiently little due to their heavy workload.

Relevant to the choice of evaluation methodology are the recommendations based on best practice[7] of the EVALSED guide on the use of evaluation methods and tools, which include the following key guidelines:

- The choice of methods and tools follows directly from the questions to be answered;
- Most methods and tools have strengths and weaknesses that need to be considered. Different methods and tools need to be applied to ensure good quality analyses and reliability of results;
- It is important to distinguish between methods and tools for data collection, for data analysis and for the presentation of results. It is unjustified to use very sophisticated methods to collect data which can then be simplistically analyzed;
- If data does not just exist, it has to be collected. Therefore, it must be clear where the data comes from and what assumptions have been made to collect and process it. The quality of the conclusions and inferences will depend on the quality and characteristics of the data used to arrive at them.

In performing the service, the Contractor shall also apply a triangulation approach through the use of various primary and secondary sources of information and the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. For the purpose of this evaluation, the following types were used:

- Triangulation of information collection methods.

- Triangulation of analysis methods.

- Triangulation of information sources (stakeholders)

- Analyst triangulation.

Theoretical impact assessment

In carrying out this evaluation, the Contractor shall also apply the ***theory of change approach*** identified as good practice in the European Commission's EVALSED Guidelines for Socio-economic Development Evaluation. An evaluation based on a theory of change can provide information on why things work or not and under what circumstances. The main focus is not

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[7]http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/evalsed/guide/methods_techniques/rules_en.htm, the text is not a quote, it has been edited

'how things would have been without' but rather theory of change ('did things happen as expected to achieve the desired change').

- This approach visualizes the results achieved/expected from the programme (programme contribution)
- The impact assessment answers questions related to the drivers and effects of impact by looking at the impact of the OPGG investments on the implementation of the priorities covered by the ToR and national and European strategic objectives under the sectoral policies within the scope of the OPGG.
- The evaluation analyses and compares the impact on e-government and e-justice, on administrative and judicial reforms, and on the system for management and control of funds in Bulgaria. Two scenarios are analyzed: an OPGG investment scenario and a no OPGG investment scenario. This will assess the added value of the programme and its effects at macro and micro level.

A description of the assessment methods follows.

Methods of information and data collection

The following data collection methods were used for the assessment:

- Desk study - analysis of documents and relevant sources of information, including official, publicly available data, data of the Contracting Authority, administrative data, socio-economic data, monitoring indicators, analysis of information from assessments already carried out concerning the OPGG;

- Qualitative methods - focus group, in-depth interviews, case studies;

- Quantitative methods - conducting standardized surveys.

The desk study method is the initial phase of each of the individual assessment processes. With the assistance of the Client, all available documentation related to implementation, monitoring and evaluation was collected, analyzed and indexed. European and national strategic and regulatory documents relevant to the investments made under the OPGG, European and national strategic and regulatory documents governing the management of EU funds, EC guidelines and other documents on the implementation of programme and project evaluations, administrative and reporting documents, including reports on the implementation of procedures and data from UMIS 2020, reports on programme implementation and reports from previous evaluations were consulted. The documents used are presented in Annex 1 to this report.

The qualitative methods used were: focus group, in-depth interviews and case studies. The *focus group* was used as a forum to express individual opinions and assessments, to discuss contentious interests among participants, and to identify potential areas of joint action. With the data obtained from the focus group, a validation (cross-check) of the information that had been gathered through other analysis methods was carried out at a later stage. The focus group was conducted using the scenario/guide for conducting focus groups presented with the Inception Report and approved by the Contracting Authority.

In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders using pre-designed interview guides/scenarios that were presented with the Inception Report. Within the scope of Task 1, interviews were conducted with representatives of the OPGG MA, key stakeholders, beneficiaries.

The quantitative methods that were used included standardized surveys. Within the scope of Task 1, the following quantitative studies were conducted:

- ✓ quantitative research with beneficiaries on the specific procedures covered by Task 1. A comprehensive survey was conducted - the questionnaire was sent to all beneficiaries of projects included in the scope of the evaluation under the individual tasks. Taking into account the type of beneficiaries, The contractor conducted the survey online with programmed questionnaires , in order to cover more fully all beneficiaries. The survey was anonymous, the responses received were stored and aggregated automatically.

- ✓ quantitative survey among the general public, as end users of services provided by the administration and the judiciary - the survey was conducted throughout the country among adult citizens aged 18+. The method of implementation was a face-to-face survey with recording of responses on tablets. The sample was constructed in such a way that it also covered the target group - disadvantaged people as defined in the TC.

- ✓ Quantitative survey among business representatives - The contractor conducted the survey online with programmed questionnaires.

The data obtained from the surveys were subjected to statistical analysis and used to answer the evaluation questions.

The following table summarizes the studies carried out in relation to Task 1 included in this report.

Table 1 Summary data from the methodology applied in the Task 1 evaluation

Quantitative and qualitative research conducted	
	Number
In-depth interviews conducted	15
Focus group held	1
Surveys conducted in the framework of Task 1	
	Number
Beneficiaries covered by Task 1 evaluation	105
Total number of participants in a quantitative survey of the general public	768

Total number of participants in a quantitative survey among business representatives	132

* In-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders working in different areas of the judiciary (including the BAR, Court, SJC), with representatives of the administration and key beneficiaries; with representatives of the MA.

***Focus group with end users of services.

Quantitative research:

Quantitative survey among beneficiaries of the specific procedures covered by Task 1

In order to take into account the opinion of the beneficiaries on the specific procedures falling under the scope of Task 1, a comprehensive survey was conducted - the questionnaire was sent to all beneficiaries of projects included in the scope of the Task 1 evaluation, according to the list of contacts provided by the MA. Taking into account the type of beneficiaries, the Contractor conducted the survey online with programmed questionnaires to be completed in an online environment in order to cover more fully all beneficiaries. The questionnaires were approved by the MA of the OPGG. The survey was anonymous, the responses received were stored and aggregated automatically. The number of responses registered was 105.

The survey is anonymized, and the distribution of the question "Which of the following administrations do you fall into:" is as follows[8] :

	Central Administration	75,8%
	Specialized Territorial Administration (STA)	6,1%
Which of the following administrations do you fall under:	Supreme Judicial Council	9,1%
	Control Authority	3,0%
	Non-executive administration	3,0%
	Food Safety Authority	3,0%

Quantitative survey of the general public (citizens)

The survey includes a nationally representative sample of the country's population. This target group is defined because citizens (together with businesses) are the end users of services provided by the administration and the judiciary. The survey was conducted nationwide among adult citizens aged 18+ and is representative of the adult population of the country. The method of data collection was a face-to-face survey with responses recorded on tablets. The survey was anonymous and the responses received were automatically stored and aggregated. The sample was quota and stratified by main socio-demographic characteristics: gender, age, education, administrative area and type of locality. The sample is constructed to include a target group of disadvantaged people as defined in the TS. Number of responses registered 768. Socio-demographic distribution of the respondents:

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[8] As the survey was anonymous, some of those who participated chose not to answer the question
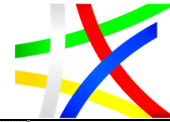
Please indicate your gender:	Man	45,3%
	Wife	54,7%

	18-24г.	9,9%
	25-29г.	6,0%
Please indicate your age:	30-39г.	17,8%
	40-49г.	15,9%
	50-59г.	18,3%
	60+	32,1%

What is the highest education you have completed?	Higher	31%
	Medium	54%
	Basic and lower	15%

	Blagoevgrad	5,0%
	Burgas	8,1%
	Varna	4,7%
	Veliko Tarnovo	2,6%
	Vidin	2,6%
	Vratsa	2,6%
	Gabrovo	2,6%
	Dobrich	2,9%
	Kardzhali	1,6%
	Kyustendil	2,9%
	Lovech	2,9%
	Montana	2,6%
Please indicate the area in which you live:	Pazardzhik	2,3%
	Pernik	2,4%
	Pleven	5,2%
	Plovdiv	7,9%
	Razgrad	2,9%
	Silistra	2,9%
	Sliven	2,6%
	Smolyan	2,4%
	Sofia-city	14,4%
	Stara Zagora	5,2%
	Targovishte	2,6%
	Haskovo	2,6%
	Shumen	2,9%
	Yambol	2,6%

Quantitative survey among business representatives

The contractor conducted the survey online with programmed questionnaires. The number of responses registered was 132. The distribution of respondents according to sectoral classification of main activity is as follows:

Please indicate your organization's main area of activity[9] :	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	5,3%
	Extractive industry	1,5%
	Manufacturing industry	7,6%
	Production and distribution of electricity and heat	0,8%
	Construction	6,8%
	Trade; repair of cars and motorcycles	12,1%
	Transport, storage and post	2,3%
	Hospitality and catering	3,0%
	Creation and dissemination of information and creative products	12,1%
	Finance and Insurance	12,1%
	Real estate transactions	2,3%
	Professional activities and research	5,3%
	Administrative and support activities	19,7%
	Education	9,8%
	Human Health and Social Work	3,0%
	Culture, sport, entertainment	1,5%

Number of employees:	up to 10 persons	59,5%
	from 10 - 50 people	25,2%
	over 50 people	15,3%

Methods for analysis of the collected data

The methods that were used for the analytical activities are based on a theory of change based evaluation approach. The following methods were used:

Methods, techniques and tools for analysis of the collected data include:

- Analysis of intervention logic;

- Evaluation of performance and the extent to which the objectives have been achieved;

- Analysis of indicators;

- Analysis of meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders and target groups;

- Theoretical impact assessment;

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[9] more than one answer is possible, as some companies operate in more than one area of activity

- Causality analysis;

- Contribution Analysis;

- Performance evaluation;

- Evaluation of efficacy;

- Cost-effectiveness analysis;

- Analysis of unplanned effects;

- Gap analysis;

- Qualitative analysis;

- Benchmarking;

- Socio-economic analysis;

- Expert assessment;

- Analytical-descriptive method;

- Method of triangulation;

- Statistical studies to assess the impact of factors influencing programme implementation;

The evaluation matrix is presented in Annex 2, showing the relationship between the evaluation questions for each task, the methods for collecting and analyzing information to answer each evaluation question, and the potential respondents.

In the course of the analysis and the answers to the evaluation questions, the investments are also examined through the prism of the clustering made, namely:

- investment in projects that will deliver reform;
- investment in projects whose implementation will enhance expert capacity;
- investments in projects whose implementation is directly aimed at introducing e-government and e-justice.

6. ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH TASK 1

6.1. What is the impact of the OPGG in terms of the objectives of the ESIF against the objectives of the Union Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth (taking into account the size of the OPGG in relation to GDP)?

The implementation framework, the complex of priorities and planned interventions position the Operational Programme "Good Governance" as a key instrument for the implementation of public policies in line with the European strategic objectives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, insofar as strengthening the institutional environment is a horizontal and key condition for competitiveness, growth and inclusive development.

The OPGG is linked to Strategic Priority 4 Good Governance and Access to Quality Administrative Services of the Partnership Agreement outlining assistance from the European Structural and Investment Funds for the period 2014-2020. The Programme contributes to the achievement of all the sub-priorities of the Agreement in terms of administrative efficiency, e-government, an efficient judiciary and e-justice, respectively within these priority areas the Programme implements the tasks of the ESF related to the Union Strategy Europe 2020.

In the area of eGovernment, OPGG has successfully addressed the establishment of IT infrastructure and the improvement of the capacity of the central administration to operate in an e-environment. Projects have been planned and implemented to develop expert capacity, improve information systems, optimize and re-engineer administrative service delivery workflows in central and territorial administrations.

OPGG also invests in building capacity for partnerships and engagement with civil society, business and the SEP.

The Programme supports interventions aimed at the modernization and reform of the judiciary implementing measures envisaged in the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform of the Judiciary, the Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020[10] and the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2023 and roadmaps for their implementation.

With the implementation of the funded projects, undeniable progress has been achieved in terms of the number, scope and quality of public e-services provided to citizens and businesses, the number of users of e-government services, the transformation towards models of integrated administrative services, the transparency and efficiency of the judicial system. These achievements are the basis for defining the OPGG's contribution to the progress of Bulgaria in achieving the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives as substantial, taking into account the amount of financial resources available to the Programme, its scope and priorities.

However, performance outcomes and the level of change achieved in certain key areas are significantly influenced by various external factors outside the scope of the OPGG. The overall

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[10] Subsequently, the implementation measures became part of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023, Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023 adopted by Decision No. 546 of the Council of Ministers on 18 September 2019.

pace of digitalization, improvements in the judiciary, the quality of the institutional environment and the different rates of modernization of individual administrations and administrative structures are still seen as a challenge.

This part of the analysis examines the performance of the OPGG in the context of the national targets for achieving the EU's Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. A 'theory of change' approach is applied, and working hypotheses are elaborated on the contribution of the OPGG to the overall performance of the country in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy, based on the analyses of effectiveness, efficiency and impact under the different priority axes of the programme so far. The working hypotheses have been analyzed against available evidence and information on achievements and results over the period 2015-2022 in the areas of administrative capacity, e-government and judicial reform to formulate an evidence-based assessment of the impact of the OPGG as a tool for achieving the objectives.

The Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is structured around three mutually reinforcing priorities and five headline targets related to ensuring employment, enhancing R&D activities, climate neutrality, education and poverty reduction. The ambitious agenda to achieve the objectives includes several initiatives, grouped by priority, which outline the European Commission's commitments but also specific areas of action where the contribution of nation states should be strengthened. Below are some of these areas of intervention that are most relevant to the OPGG investment strategy:

- Under the priority "**Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation**" - developing operational strategies for high-speed Internet and providing public funding for areas where needs are not fully met by private investments; establishment of a regulatory framework for coordinating public activities to reduce costs for the development of networks; promoting the use of modern, accessible online services (such as e-government, e-health portal, "smart home", digital skills, security);

- Under the priority "**Sustainable Growth - promoting a more resource-efficient, greener and more competitive economy**" - improving the business environment, especially for innovative SMEs; improving conditions for strengthening intellectual property; reducing the administrative burden on companies and improving the quality of business legislation; working with stakeholders in different sectors (business, trade unions, academia, NGOs, consumer organizations) to identify difficulties and develop

- Under the priority "**Inclusive Growth – fostering a high employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion**" - modernizing and strengthening employment, education and training policies, social protection systems by increasing labour force participation and reducing structural unemployment, as well as increasing corporate social responsibility among the business community.

As stated in the text of the Operational Programme "Good Governance", the Programme's strategy aims to contribute to the achievement of all Europe 2020 priorities, since strengthening the institutional environment is a cross-cutting and key condition for

competitiveness, growth and inclusive development. The OPGG is also one of the instruments which, according to the Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria outlining the assistance from the European Structural and Investment Funds for the period 2014-2020, should address the identified shortcomings of the national context and the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives. At the programming stage, the OPGG is linked to the Agreement's Strategic Priority 4 Good governance and access to quality administrative services, which addresses several sets of challenges in terms of effective public administration and the judiciary:

✓ Administrative services
  - Insufficient scope and integration of the electronic services provided by the administrations – a complex service based on the "one-stop shop" principle;
  - Lack of services grouped by major events in the lives of citizens or the activities of entrepreneurs;
  - Significant bureaucratic burden.
✓ Electronic government:
  - Slow pace of e-government development;
  - Low levels of usability of e-government services;
  - Lack of standardized services provided by municipalities in terms of procedures, documentation and timelines;
  - Organizational problems - lack of a single system integrator, clear human resources strategy in the field, quality control of the projects implemented;
  - Infrastructure issues related to central and local government clouds, inter-departmental sharing of unstructured information, the extent of digitization of key public administration registers, the broadband access network of public service providers, front offices in areas at risk of information isolation;
  - Lack of sectoral working models - e-health, e-education, e-customs, e-procurement, etc.
✓ Administrative structure, strategic planning and inter-institutional coordination
  - Fragmentation of administrative structures;
  - Reform of the territorial units of central government;
  - Fragmentation, lack of coordination and financial security of strategic documents at national level;
  - Negative trends in the implementation of quality management systems in administrations;
  - Restricted practices of inter-institutional coordination - more efficient functioning of regulatory bodies, joint inspections of control and inspection bodies.
✓ Public procurement:
  - Unsustainable legislation;
  - Insufficient administrative capacity;
  - Misapplication of public procurement law;
  - Insufficient scope of ex-ante controls and insufficient effectiveness of ex-post controls.
✓ Partnership governance and anti-corruption:
  - Insufficient influence of civil society in policy development and implementation;

- Limited opportunities for citizen monitoring and control over the activities of the administration;
- Insufficient transparency of the administration's activities - no primary information is published.

✓ Human resource management and administrative capacity
  - Introduction of an integrated information system for the public administration;
  - A dysfunctional system for planning the needs of administrative staff;
  - Deficits in career planning and management of administrative staff, including competency development training;
  - Insufficient capacity at municipal level;
  - Insufficient capacity to manage EU funds, which includes capacity building of structural units responsible for the implementation and management of programmes and beneficiaries on the one hand, and simplifying the application, evaluation, implementation and reporting procedures, improving management systems - on the other.

✓ Judicial system:
  - lack of quality and uniform statistical information;
  - the need for additional capacity for planning, implementation and impact evaluation (ex-ante and ex-post) of judicial policies;
  - Restricted access and promotion of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes (mediation and arbitration), also in view of the need to reduce the workload of specific courts;
  - Insufficient capacity, coordination and institutional interaction, especially in the field of combating organized crime and prevention and counteraction of high-level corruption;
  - Lack of coherence and financial resources to implement the Human Resource Management Strategy in the sector, including the number of staff per district, functions and tasks of judicial officers, assistants and others to technically support magistrates;
  - Lack of e-justice, ensuring faster justice process and security of information.

In line with the identified deficits, two sub-priorities have been formulated under Priority 4 of the Partnership Agreement:

- Administrative efficiency and e-government;
- Efficient judiciary and e-justice.

These are transposed as sets of interventions in the five priority axes of the Operational Programme "Good Governance", outlining a clear link between the implementation of the programme and the contribution of the national state to achieving the Europe 2020 objectives.
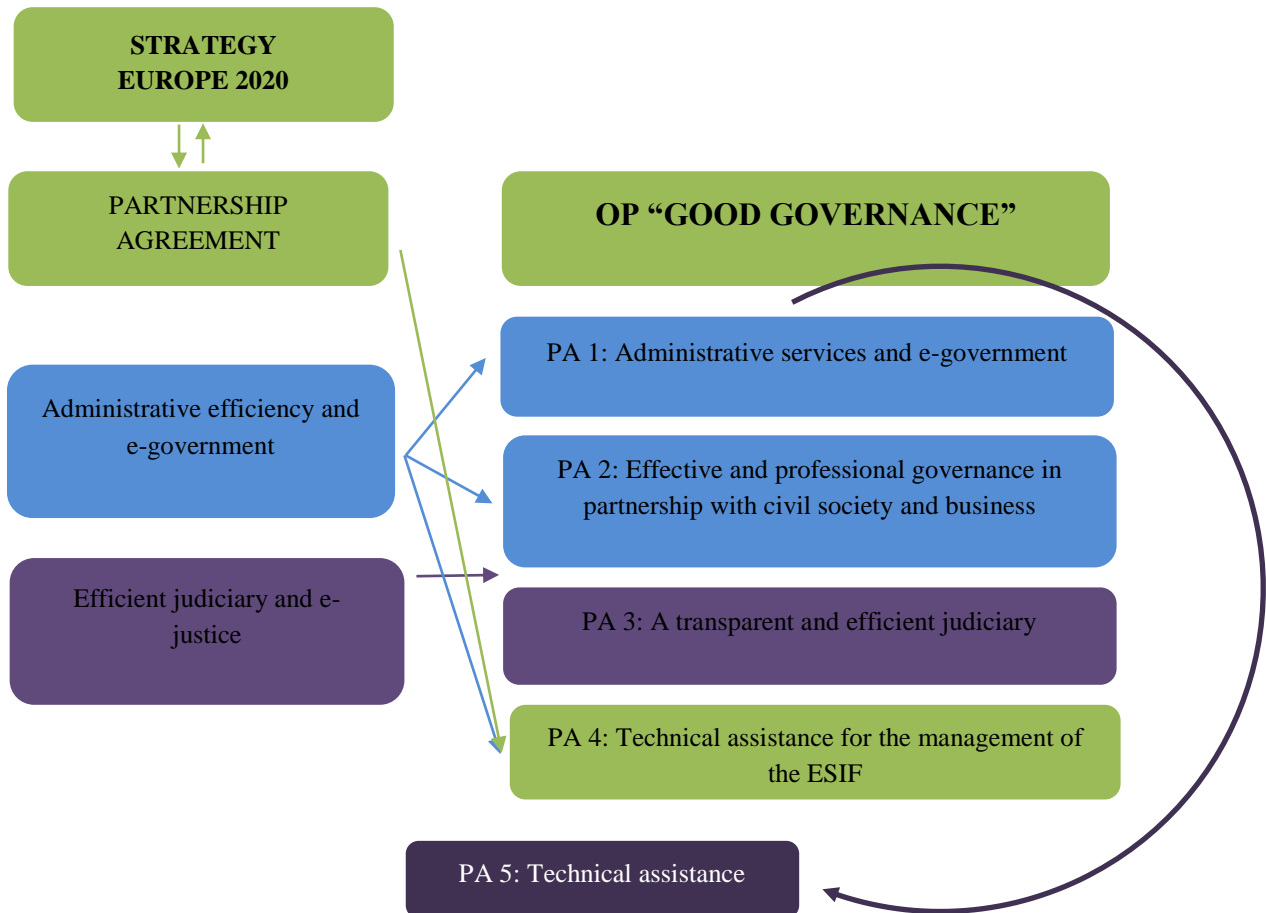
The logic of linking documents and priorities illustrated above is the theoretical framework that positions the OP Good Governance 2014-2020 within the overall commitment of the state to achieve the European strategic objectives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. In terms of assessing the actual contribution of the programme, this logic also justifies the selection of parameters, sources of information and approaches that can be used to assess the impact of the OPGG in terms of the role of the ESF in achieving the objectives of the Union Strategy Europe 2020.

For the purposes of the present evaluation:

- the progress made with regard to the key challenges associated with the OPGG in the Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020 is studied;
- identification of progress or lack thereof is justified against the assessments of the country by several indicators at the global level relevant to the objectives and expected change;

- The findings and recommendations of the Bulgaria Reports on Bulgaria's National Reform Programme are within the focus of the study, which allow to identify the different specific elements of change and to a significant extent the contribution of the OPGG.

The possible evaluation options are limited to two working research hypotheses on the impact of the programme against the Europe 2020 objectives:

✓ *Working Hypothesis 1: The* investments implemented under the OPGG make a significant contribution to the progress of Bulgaria in achieving the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives, taking into account the size of the financial resources and the planned scope of the Programme. Determining the specific contribution of the Programme within the overall ESF framework for Bulgaria in the 2014-2020 period is challenging due to the influence of a complex set of interventions and factors.

✓ *Working Hypothesis 2:* The implementation of the OPGG is in line with the Europe 2020 objectives, but the results of the investments made do not show the expected progress within the timeframe planned. The programme shows a dependence on various factors of the environment which are determinants of change.

The verification of either of the two hypotheses requires an examination of all areas of intervention of the Programme - administrative capacity, partnership with civil society and business, e-government, quality of the judiciary. The scope and degree of implementation of the concrete priorities are **baseline statements** and starting points for research.

In the area of e-government, the Programme successfully addressed the development of information infrastructure and the improvement of the capacity of the central administration to work in an electronic environment through inventory of resources, development and deployment of registers, their integration, implementation of systems to manage the quality of administrative services and standardization and unification of services at local level. Key units of the central administration are covered, such as the Customs Agency, the Registry Agency, The Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadaster (AGCC), NSI, SAeG, NRA, Executive Agency Automobile Administration, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Ministry of e-Government, National Center for Information and Documentation (NCID), National Social Insurance Institute (NSII), Commission for Regulation of Communication (CRC), Commission for Financial Supervision (CFS), Commission for Protection of Competition, "Archives" State Agency (ASA), Bulgarian Agency for Food Safety (BAFS), etc. Projects have been planned and implemented to improve the institutional environment and expert capacity, to improve the information systems and to optimize and re-engineer the work processes for provision of administrative services in the central and territorial administrations. The CAF model has been successfully implemented in 94 administrations. An organizational model for the introduction of the principle of shared services has been developed and tested through two centralized shared services units in the MoH and BAFS. New service delivery standards have been developed and are being introduced, mandatory for all administrations where user feedback is a priority. The programme has also contributed to the development of important strategic and programme documents at

national level - National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, National Environment Strategy, Territorial Just Transition Plans for 8 districts.

OPGG invests in capacity building for partnerships and interaction with civil society, business and SEPs in the form of improved methodological resources, standards for public consultations, a concept for the development of the public consultation portal, support for the implementation of projects to improve citizen participation in the processes of planning, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation.

With regard to the judiciary, the OPGG is implementing measures aimed at human resources development, e-justice, improving the quality of training, introducing tools for the modernization of the judiciary, effective judicial control and unification of the practice of the courts, involving NGOs and professional organizations in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies, among others.

The degree of implementation of individual projects and procedures for provision of grants, as well as their effectiveness in terms of results achieved, impact on target groups and efficiency of the funds spent is addressed in other parts of the OPGG evaluation. This part of the analysis focuses on the contribution of the Programme within the overall framework of ESF support to national objectives for sustainable and inclusive growth.

An up-to-date assessment of the effects of the implementation of OP "Good Governance" on the country's macroeconomic indicators is included in the Ministry of Finance's report "EU Funds in Bulgaria", prepared as of November 2022. The assessment was developed with the CIBILA 2.0 tool and takes into account the short-term effects of the actual implementation of the EU co-financed programmes by mid-2022.[11]

Figure 1. Macroeconomic Indicators

Macroeconomic indicators	Impact as of 2022
GDP	0.1%
Export of goods and services	0.2%
Import of goods and services	0.2%
Current account (% of the GDP)	-0.07 p.p.
Private consumption	0.1%
Private investment	0.2%
Employment (age 15 - 64)	0.1%
Unemployment rate (age 15 - 64)	-0.06 p.p.
Average salary	0.1%
HICP inflation	0.1%
Budget balance (% of the GDP)	0.03 p.p.

Source: MoF, SIBILA 2.0

In terms of GDP, the share of the effects of the OPGG implementation is negligible compared to the overall impact of the absorption of ESF support, which is estimated at a 10.6% increase compared to the No EU funding scenario. The simulation though confirms that investments under the different priority axes of the programme have positive impacts on all

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[11] European Union funds in Bulgaria. Assessment of the Macroeconomic Effects of the Implementation of the Programmes Co-financed with EU Funds, Report, MoF, 2022

macroeconomic indicators, including prices and external sector, labour market and productivity. Of course, the reported effects are seen in direct relation to the volume of OPGG funding, which amounts to only 2.1% of total ESF support for the period 2014-2020. Several **indicators** identified as challenges in the Partnership Agreement and addressed by the OPGG interventions are examined on the first place:

- 32.3% share of shadow economy (2011)
- 27% of citizens use e-government services (second to last among EU member states)
- Corruption index - -1.5 (2010)
- Justice Index - -2.1 (2010)

Exploring progress in overcoming these challenges can provide a basis for drawing conclusions towards the possible impact of the implementation of OPGG interventions.

Share of the shadow economy in Bulgaria

The relationship of OPGG investments to this indicator can be traced in terms of ensuring well-functioning systems for data sharing between institutions and coordination of governance. However, it should be borne in mind that this is only one of the tools that can be applied in relation to recording of breaches of legislation in this area. Effective tools for preventing and countering the shadow economy are outside the scope of the Programme's interventions and therefore its capacity for impact is significantly limited. According to a report of the Subcommittee on Taxation of the European Parliament, as of November 2022, the share of the shadow economy in Bulgaria is the highest among EU countries, amounting to 33.1% of GDP.[12]

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[12] Taxation of the Informal Economy in the EU, Study requested by the FISC committee of the European Parliament. Nov 2022

Figure 2. Share of Shadow Economy

Figure 2.2: Size of the Shadow Economy of 31 European Countries in 2022 (in % of official GDP)

IPOL | Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies
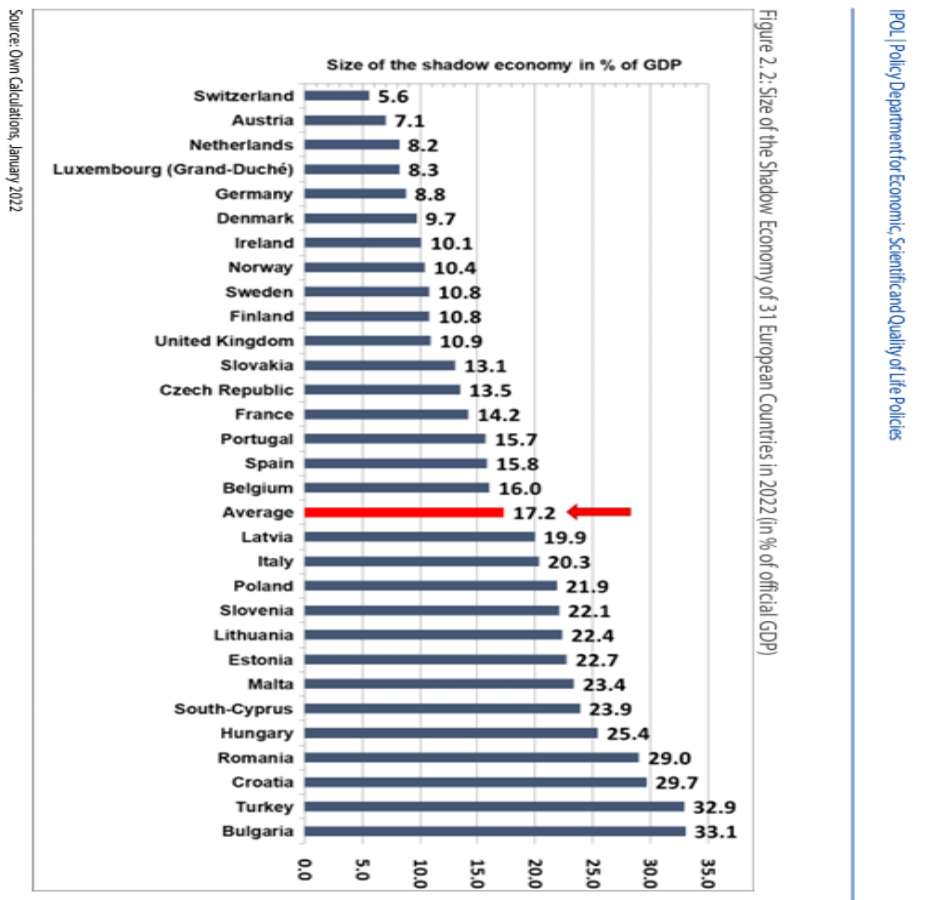
Source: FISC, EP

The report notes a general trend towards an increase in the share of the shadow economy in the 36 countries surveyed, due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the subsequent economic recession and rising cost of living. The trend is typical for Eastern and Central European countries such as Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Latvia. Lithuania and Poland. The dynamics for Bulgaria during the period of implementation of the Operational Programme are as follows:

	2011	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Share of the shadow economy	32.3	30.6	30.2	29.6	30.8	30.1	23.9	32.4	33.1
EU average	19.6	18.3	17.9	17.3	17.0	16.3	17.9	17.4	17.3

Source.

The composite index "Economy in the light", which is measured by the Industrial Capital Association in Bulgaria, indicates significantly lower values for the share of the shadow economy, probably related to a different calculation methodology. According to a 2021 report of the organization, the Economy in the Light Index is 78.4, i.e. the share of the grey economy

does not exceed 22% of GDP. In any case, the share of the informal economy in Bulgaria remains the highest among European countries. A positive trend of lightening of the economy was registered in the period 2017 - 2019, but was interrupted as a result of the pandemic and post-pandemic situation in the country.

Share of administrative services accessible electronically

Bulgaria's performance has improved significantly in terms of the share of administrative services for citizens accessible electronically and related to major events in people's lives. The index for Bulgaria in 2022 is 58.55, compared to 6.94 in 2017 and an EU average of 74.63. Services accessible to businesses are rated 76.23, compared to 11.86 in 2017 and an EU average index of 81.71. Given the thematic interventions of the OP Good Governance, the contribution of the Programme to the positive trends registered is indisputable. The introduction of effective and accessible e-government is of course a function of many factors, including digital skills, maturity of legislation, etc., but it can nevertheless be expected that further development of the effects of the e-services and infrastructure developed with the support of the OPGG will be observed in the long term.

Corruption index

The next indicator that is associated with OPGG interventions is the Corruption Perception Index, which expresses the correlation between the economic situation, corruption and citizens' attitudes towards public institutions. At the design stage of the Programme, the expected strong anti-corruption effect of the planned measures is linked to an increase in citizen participation and citizen monitoring of the activities and policies implemented by the administration, to the improvement of the administration's capacity for complaint management, case prevention and administrative arbitration. Along with the implementation of projects supporting citizen participation in governance, the conditions for corruption prevention are also created through the OPGG-funded projects for the development of information systems in the administration, the optimization of electronic registers, the digitalization of the public procurement and contracting process, which are making a real contribution to increasing the transparency and predictability of decision-making and service delivery. Countering corrupt practices is also at the core of the measures implemented under PA 3 of the Programme related to the introduction of e-Justice, including the development of the Unified Court Information System, the Unified Crime Prevention Information System, the Centralized Court Enforcement Information System, the improvement of attestation procedures in the judiciary, the capacity of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council for corruption prevention, etc.

However, the implementation of the planned interventions has had a limited effect against the background of a number of factors in the socio-economic environment. In the reports of the international organization Transparency International the value of the index for Bulgaria in 2012 is 41 points, while the average level of the index in the EU 27 - 53.6 points. In 2022, a marginal increase of 2 points or 43 is noted, while maintaining the penultimate place among

EU countries (63.11)[13]. The score is justified by the following reasons: the fragmentation of political life and the ongoing political crisis; political corruption, which leaves unresolved the issue of lobbying in the legislative process; and the lack of visible and effective action to implement the Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021-2027.

Quality of the justice system

The assessment of the quality of the justice system in Bulgaria can be demonstrated through several international indices. The Rule of Law Index examines the quality of the judiciary in 142 countries based on key indicators, including open government, level of corruption and transparency, guarantee of human rights, civic participation, business environment, etc.[14] The latest assessments for Bulgaria from 2023 rank the country 59th, with the lowest values in the composite assessment being the sub-indices on corruption and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Between 2015 and 2023, the country did not demonstrate significant progress.

Figure 3. Rule of Law Index for Bulgaria
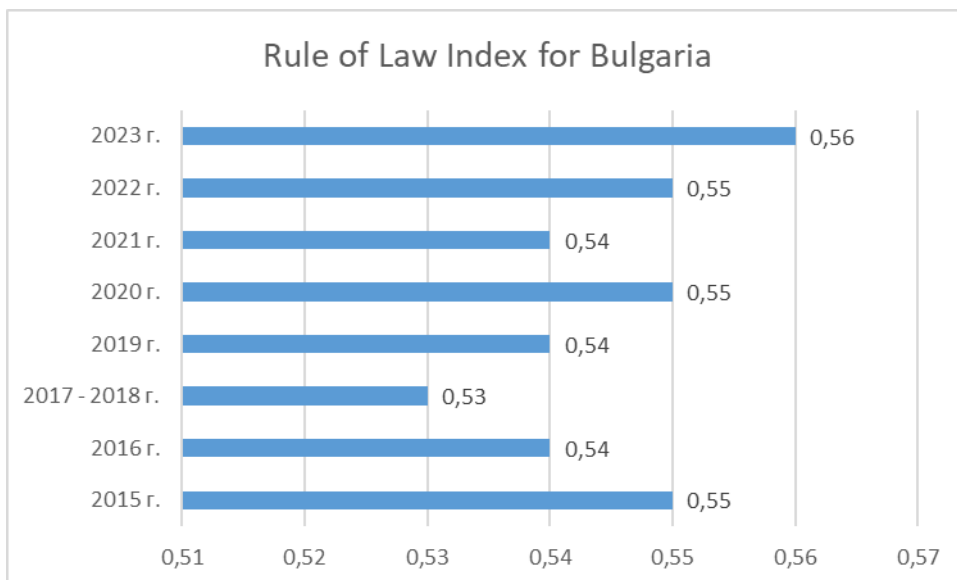
Source: The Rule of Law Index

The EU Justice Scoreboard is a source of information on various indicators related to the functioning of the justice system. Data on the extent to which citizens and businesses in Bulgaria perceive the system as independent are discussed below, insofar as increasing trust in institutions and in the judiciary in particular is part of the OPGG's target-setting framework. According to the survey, the views of the citizens and the businesses on the independence of the judiciary tend to be on the negative spectrum and remain at the low levels of trust from 2016, with the exception of some improvement in the assessment by businesses.

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[13] chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://transparency.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CPI_2022_Informatsia.pdf

[14] https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2023/Bulgaria/

Figure 4. Independence of the Judiciary in Bulgaria - Citizens' Opinion
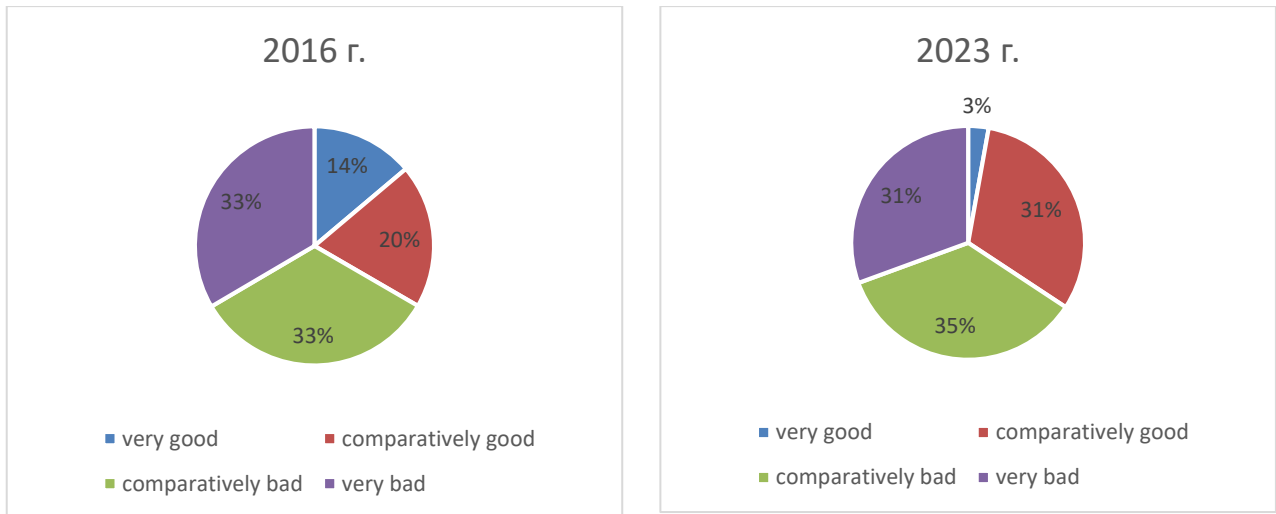
Figure 5. Independence of the Judiciary in Bulgaria - the Business Opinion
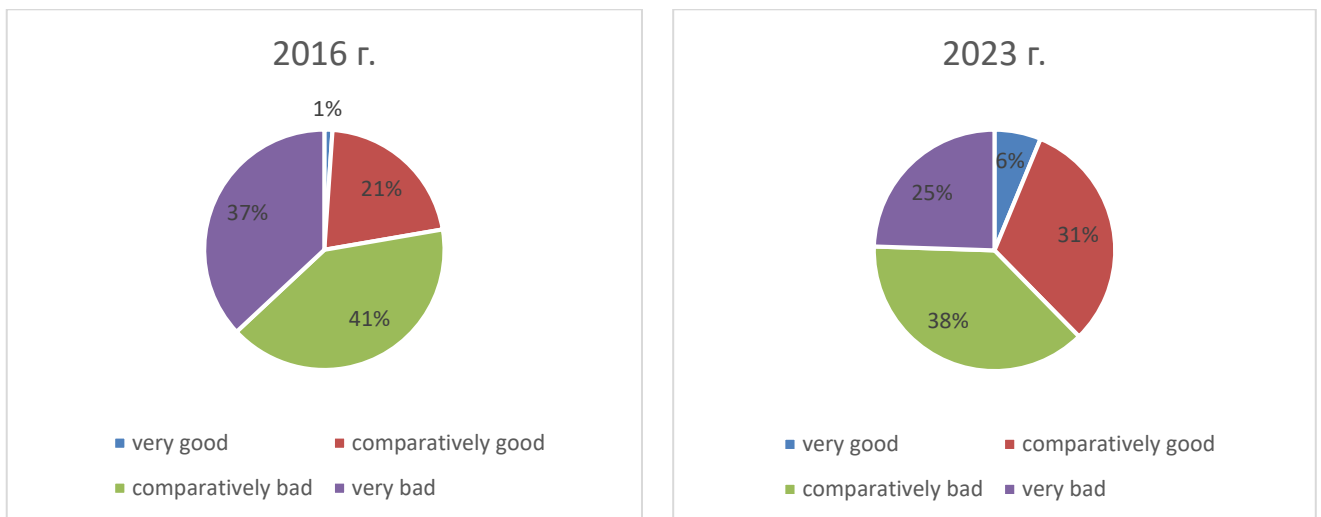
Source: EU Justice Scoreboard

Recent editions of the Justice Dashboard also measure the level of efficiency of justice systems through the eyes of business. In 2022, 57% of businesses believe that Bulgaria's justice system is somewhat or completely ineffective, while this percentage drops to 53% in 2023. The share of business representatives giving a positive assessment is 43%. The main reasons for the low assessment of efficiency are related to lack of confidence in the quality, efficiency or independence of the judiciary (29%), unpredictability and non-transparency of court decisions (27%), frequent changes in legislation (24%), difficulties in achieving fair compensation or protection of property (18%). In terms of e-justice, Bulgaria ranks second to last in the EU, the only areas pointed being online information on court fees, access to electronic files of completed and ongoing cases.

In conclusion, the following summary can be drawn from the review of the challenges identified as key to the implementation of the OPGG:

- For the period 2015 - 2022, undeniable progress has been made in terms of the e-services provided to citizens and businesses, respectively the share of those who use them. With 1826 different categories of e-services introduced under the Programme, the users of e-government services increased from 27% in 2017 to 34% in 2021.
- The share of the shadow economy and the corruption index remain high under the strong influence of factors such as economic recession and political instability. The impact of OPGG implementation on these two indicators is limited, taking into account the fact that the main reasons for the lack of progress are beyond the scope of the Programme's interventions.
- In terms of improving the quality and efficiency of the judiciary, progress can be reported thanks to the implemented interventions related to human resources development, introduction of e-justice, improvement of the quality of training, introduction of instruments for modernization of the judiciary.

The above conclusions can be compared with the findings and recommendations of the European Semester Reports for Bulgaria on the assessment of the structural reforms and the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances.

The country report for 2020 [15] points to traditional areas of deficiencies or slow progress, such as:

- The development of the business environment, the main obstacles to which are the shortage of labour, the lack of qualified personnel and weak administrative capacity;
- Slow digitalization processes;
- The quality of the institutional framework, which has a negative impact also at regional level;
- A lag in the pace of e-government adoption, the main obstacle to which is outdated legislation and the difficulty of the public sector to attract and retain IT specialists;
- The lack of effective coordination between actors in public procurement policy-making and the limited use of the e-procurement platform;
- Challenges to the quality of public services;
- The lack of convincing results in prosecutions of corruption cases, balancing the workload of the courts and reforming the prosecution service.

However, the assessments in the Report are indicative of OPGG's contribution in areas where progress is reported. In this respect, several findings in the Report are important. The Programme's investments are highlighted as instrumental in improving the system for sharing information from different registries. The contribution of the OPGG to the introduction of new e-services, to achieving some improvement in the development of e-government, mainly in the provision of services to enterprises, to improving the quality of public services through

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[15] Commission Staff Working Document, Bulgaria 2020 Report, https://www.minfin.bg/bg/867

standardization and unification of procedures[16]. OPGG's contribution is also noted in terms of progress on the reform to improve the efficiency of the judiciary, mainly related to efforts to rebalance the court workload, provide online access to published court decisions, stimulate and promote alternative dispute resolution methods. [17]

The 2023 report for Bulgaria [18] confirms the findings related to low levels of digitalization of public services, overall efficiency and digital transformation of administration, which remain below the EU average. The main challenges for the justice system include the lagging digitalization process, low trust and insufficient information to assess the effectiveness of the system.[19]

For the purpose of the analysis, it should be noted that insofar as the reports under review contain and identify positive progress in the areas related to public administration and the judiciary, these findings are clearly justified by the investments under the OP Good Governance. It is not by chance that one of the conclusion articulated is that the improvements in public administration and e-government are largely dependent on EU support. With regard to the other findings, it should be borne in mind that not a small number of projects, respectively e-services, are completed at the end of 2023 and their effects will become visible in the following year.

Verification of working hypotheses

The above observations related to the role of the OPGG in the progress of Bulgaria in implementing key reforms in the administration and the judiciary are a basis for a positive assessment of the impact of the implementation of the Programme in terms of the objectives of the EU Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth "Europe 2020". In adopting this assessment, two main clarifications should be made:

- The contribution and impact of the Programme shall be reported and assessed within the overall framework of EU support to Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020, taking into account both the share of OPGG in the overall financial framework and the synergistic impact of the various investments under other sectoral programmes;
- The ambiguous assessment of progress in various key areas such as digitalization, administrative capacity and quality of the judiciary demonstrate the strong dependence of the effects of the OP implementation on a number of factors related to the legislative environment, reform initiative and support, political and economic imbalances.

For the period 2015 - 2022, with the implementation of the OPGG-funded projects, undeniable progress has been achieved in terms of the number, scope and quality of public e-services provided to citizens and businesses, the number of users of e-government services, the transformation towards integrated administrative service models, transparency and efficiency of the judicial system. These achievements are the basis for verifying part of the statements

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[16] Ibid. 72

[17] Commission Staff Working Document, Bulgaria 2020 Report, https://www.minfin.bg/bg/867, pp. 75

[18] Commission Staff Working Document, Bulgaria 2023 Report, https://www.minfin.bg/bg/867

[19] Ibid. 70

formulated in *Working Hypothesis 1*, namely "*a significant contribution to Bulgaria's progress towards achieving the Europe 2020 objectives, taking into account the size of the financial resources and the planned scope of the programme*".

However, the results of implementation and the level of change achieved are insufficient to fully achieve the ambition due to a number of environmental factors outside the scope of the Programme - a finding that partially verifies the conservative assessment of the level of "*progress within the planned time horizon*" of *Working Hypothesis 2*.

6.2. What is the contribution of OPGG support to national and European strategic objectives in the field of *e-government*, administrative and judicial reform, and citizen control and participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring?

The Operational Programme "Good Governance" has a key role in the overall toolbox for the implementation of the objectives in the field of e-government, administrative and judicial reform, citizen control and participation in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies at national level.

The ambition of the Programme and the results of its implementation have contributed to the implementation of all key priority areas for the development of the institutional environment, the judiciary and civic participation included in the national framework of strategic documents. With few exceptions, over 75% of the financial resources for the implementation of the respective measures and priorities part of the National Development Programme and in the vast majority of sector strategies are provided under the OPGG.

The results of the OPGG implementation demonstrate sufficient evidence of the irreversibility of the transformation process in terms of e-services provided to citizens and businesses, improved knowledge and capacity to manage the information infrastructure, positive change in efficiency and quality of service at different levels and in different sectors of government. The models and improvements to the institutional environment introduced with the support of the OPGG justify the expectation of viability, future development and upgrading within national governance systems, independently of EU support.

In response to the evaluation question, two research hypotheses were formulated:

- ✓ *Research Hypothesis 1: The* OPGG is a key instrument for financing and implementing national and sector strategies in the areas of e-government, administrative and judicial reform, citizens' control and participation in policy developing, implementation and monitoring. The contribution of the Programme is substantial and fundamental, and beyond the progress made builds a dependency on EU funding and support for the process of reforms.

- ✓ *Research Hypothesis 2*: The OPGG serves as a complementary tool and horizontal basis to support national efforts to reform the administrative sector and the judiciary, to introduce a successful e-government model, and to stimulate citizens' control and participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring. OPGG support is

the basis for creating viable models that build on and develop independently of the EU support.

Each of these hypotheses is verified through an analysis of the relevant objectives at national and sectoral level set by several **key strategic documents:**

- ✓ National Development Programme for Bulgaria 2020;
- ✓ National Reform Programme (Three-Year Action Plan for the Implementation of the NDP Bulgaria 2020);
- ✓ Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020 (SDeGRB) and Roadmap to SDeGRB;
- ✓ Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020 (SDDA) and Roadmap for the Implementation of the SDDA;
- ✓ Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform of the Judiciary (ASCRJ) and Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the ASCRJ;
- ✓ e-Government and e-Justice Implementation Strategy in the Justice Sector 2014-2020 (eGeJIS) and eGeJIS Implementation Roadmap;
- ✓ National Strategy for the Development of the Public Procurement Sector and Implementation Plan.

National Development Programme for Bulgaria 2020 (NDP)

The National Development Programme of Bulgaria is a framework document that formulates the vision for the development of the country towards 2020 as *"a country with a competitive economy, providing conditions for full social, creative and professional realization of the individual through smart, sustainable, inclusive and territorially balanced economic growth."* The priority is aimed at ensuring an optimal institutional environment and the provision of efficient public services as necessary conditions for a favorable business environment and economic growth. E-government, open government and a streamlined and well-prepared administration are highlighted as the leading factors for competitiveness and growth on which the policies are focused.

The priority is structured in 5 sub-priorities, 1 of which addresses the structure and functions of the administration, and 4 - the concept, vision and quality of the administrative services provided:

- ✓ Sub-priority 6.1 Improving the institutional environment;
- ✓ Sub-priority 6.2 Administration of knowledge;
- ✓ Sub-priority 6.3 Result-oriented administration;
- ✓ Sub-priority 6.4 User-oriented administration;
- ✓ Sub-priority 6.5 Administration applying the principles of open government.

The extent to which the OPGG contributes to the concrete sub-priorities can be assessed by reviewing the Programme's alignment with the main impact areas:

Sub-priority	Area of impact	OPGG
6.1. Improving the institutional environment	Achieving a flexible and adaptive administrative structure that responds to dynamic changes in the environment and the policies implemented	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0006 Creation of uniform rules for conducting functional analyses on horizontal and sectoral policies
	Development of accountability and transparency of the judicial system	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0005 Initiatives to implement the 12 principles of good governance of the Council of Europe's Strategy for Local Innovation and Good Governance
	Expanding the range of services provided by the private sector and NGOs	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0008 Creating models for optimal administrative structures of municipalities
	Reform at the district level of government	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0009 Introducing the principle of shared services in the organization and operation of central administration
	Development of a new model of organization of the territorial units of the central administration	
	Accelerating the decentralization process	
	Effective response to corruption	
	Administration committed to environmental protection	
6.2. Administration of knowledge	Development of a human resources planning system	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0004 Improving the efficiency of recruitment in the civil service
	Attracting and retaining highly qualified professionals in the administration	BG05SFOP001-2.004 Enhancing the expert capacity of administrative staff
	Continuous development and enrichment of the professional qualities and skills of civil servants	BG05SFOP001-2.006 Specialized training for central administration

	Encouraging and stimulating the mobility of civil servants	BG05SFOP001-2.012 Development of the analytical capacity of the Energy and Water Regulatory Commission BG05SFOP001-2.015-0001 Improving the knowledge, skills and qualifications of municipal employees BG05SFOP001-2.015-0002 Conducting specialized training for civil servants BG05SFOP001-2.017 Trainings for administrative staff organized by the Institute of Public Administration BG05SFOP001-2.019 Specialized trainings for the territorial administration
6.3. Result-oriented administration	Improving the management of administrative structures and units	BG05SFOP001-1.001-0003 Building a statistical base and an information system for monitoring European and national strategies and regional policy
	Creating a unified practice for strategic planning in the administration	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0010 Improving the policy implementation process in Bulgaria
	Consistent development of a result-oriented state budget	BG05SFOP001-2.010 Improving financial management and control systems and the internal audit function in the public sector
	Development of a system to identify existing and potential risks in the work of the administration	BG05SFOP001-2.013

		Increasing the efficiency of the transposition of EU law into Bulgarian legislation and public regulation BG05SFOP001-2.023 Support for the preparation of spatial just transition plans for eight districts
6.4. User-oriented administration	Development of e-government and public sector services	BG05SFOP001-1.001-0002 Transformation of the administrative service model
	Streamlining the legislation development process and introducing smart regulation	BG05SFOP001-1.001-0001 Inventory of information and communication infrastructure for e-government needs
	Reducing and phasing out complicated service delivery procedures	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0011 Electronic system for managing the operation of the administration of the Ombudsman
	Reducing the administrative burden in selected priority areas by 20% in two stages	
	Review of all regulatory regimes established by special law	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0012 Building capacity for impact assessment in public administration
	Introduction of cost-based fees	BG05SFOP001-2.002 Introduction of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in administrations
	Introduction and validation of integrated administrative services	
	User orientation and capacity improvement in the system of the Ministry of Interior	BG05SFOP001-2.003-0001 Effective application of EU State aid rules to services of general economic interest (SGEI)
	Ensuring equal access to administrative services	BG05SFOP001-2.007

		Improving the system for feedback from users and improving the quality of administrative services
		BG05SFOP001-2.014 Developing the capacity to implement and apply the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in administrations
		BG05SFOP001-1.002-0002 Upgrade of the Customs Agency's core systems for provision of data and services to external systems - BIMIS 2020 (Phase 1)
		BG05SFOP001-1.007-0001 Upgrade of the Customs Agency's core systems for data and service provision - BIMIS (Phase 2)
		BG05SFOP001-1.025-0001 Upgrade of the Customs Agency's core systems for data and service provision - BIMIS (Phase 3)
		BG05SFOP001-1.002-0003 Upgrade of the Commercial Register for integration with the EU Commercial Register data exchange platform, incorporation of the register of non-profit legal entities, integration with the property register, single entry point and transfer of the Central Register of Special Depths
		BG05SFOP001-1.002-0004 Upgrade of the Property Register for integration with the Cadastral Register and provision of additional e-services
		BG05SFOP001-1.002-0005

Creation of cadastral data in digital form and development of the electronic administrative services of the Geodesy, Cartography and Cadaster Agency

BG05SFOP001-1.002-0008
Alignment of the NSI information assets with Eurostat requirements and migration to hybrid cloud

BG05SFOP001-1.002-0010
Development of public registers for e-government budget and project control and a portal for access to e-government software development resources

BG05SFOP001-1.002-0011
Upgrading the NRA's core systems to provide data and services to internal and external systems

BG05SFOP001-1.002-0014
National Spatial Data Portal (INSPIRE)

BG05SFOP001-1.002-0016
Upgrading of the registers maintained by the Executive Agency "Road Transport Administration" for periodic inspections of the technical compliance of vehicles and of training and tests for acquiring the driving license. Building a new model of control activity based on risk assessment

BG05SFOP001-1.002-0018
Development and implementation of an electronic information system "National Register of Seizures"

BG05SFOP001-1.002-0019

		Establishment of a technological environment for real-time data provision from the Centralized Register of Motor Vehicles to the AIS of the EA RTA, the NRA, the municipal administrations and the RIA; refactoring of the AIS of CDM (Control of dangerous means); implementation of the AIS Private Municipal companies and development of new electronic administrative services. BG05SFOP001-1.002-0022 Development of a GIS-based electronic platform "Single Information Point" BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001 Upgrading of horizontal and central e-government systems in connection with the implementation of the Single Model for requesting, paying for and providing e-administrative services BG05SFOP001-1.005-0001 Upgrading and development of the State Hybrid Private Cloud for e-government needs BG05SFOP001-1.006-0001 Establishment, upgrade and integration of information systems and registers of NCID to improve the process of providing administrative and reference services BG05SFOP001-1.008-0001 Development and implementation of the Institutional Architecture of the NSII for priority processes related to pensions and provision of electronic administrative services BG05SFOP001-1.010-0001

		Building and developing the information systems and registers of the CRC to improve regulatory and control activities and enhance the quality of administrative services BG05SFOP001-1.011-0001 Development of a Unified Information System (UIS) for the needs of the Financial Supervision Commission BG05SFOP001-1.013-0001 Development and implementation of an Interoperability Reference Architecture (IRRA) and an Information System for Centralized Recordkeeping and Maintenance (ISCRM) BG05SFOP001-1.013-0002 Cloud e-services for administration BG05SFOP001-1.014-0001 Development of the information system and the public register of the Commission for Protection of Competition BG05SFOP001-1.015-0001 Development and implementation of an e-archiving system BG05SFOP001-1.016-0001 Optimization and computerization of records and work processes in BAFS BG05SFOP001-1.017-0001 Establishment, upgrade and integration of electronic registers of the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NCID) in the field of higher education

		BG05SFOP001-1.020-0001 Development and implementation of the NSII Architecture for processes related to cash benefits, allowances and guaranteed claims BG05SFOP001-1.024-0001 Establishment of a national solution for the electronic exchange of social security information EESSI BG05SFOP001-1.029-0001 Development of electronic administrative services and implementation of additional functionalities in automated information systems in the Ministry of Interior
6.5. Administration applying the principles of open government	Providing full access to information collected and generated using public means ("open data")	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0001 Improving processes related to the provision, access and re-use of public sector information
	Strengthening civil society and increasing the effectiveness of public consultations	BG05SFOP001-2.001-0002 Administration and civil society - partnership in governance
	Increasing the transparency of institutions	BG05SFOP001-2.011 Improving the concession policy
	Enhancing transparency in budget forecasting, planning and execution	

As can be seen from the table above, the OPGG instruments address all of the sub-priorities of NDP Priority 6. The indicative total financial resource for the implementation of the priority is BGN 358 million, of which BGN 53.8 million is national funding and BGN 304.9 million is European funding. The NDP sets out several indicators that measure progress in implementing the priority:

- a share of essential public services for citizens fully accessible online;

- a share of essential public services for businesses fully accessible online;

- share of the population using e-government services;

- share of enterprises using e-government services.

Progress on these indicators is considered in the analysis of the OPGG contribution to the Europe 2020 national targets[20] . The results of the implementation of the OP, the focus and the scope of investments justify the undisputed contribution of the OPGG. On the other hand, the distribution of the funding sources of the National Programme, namely 85% - European and 15% - national funding, is a demonstration of the significant dependence of the implementation of reforms on the access to European funds.

National Reform Programme (Three-Year Action Plan for the Implementation of NDP Bulgaria 2020)[21]

The three-year action plan for the implementation of the NDP for the period 2018-2020 includes measures for the respective period in all sub-priorities under Priority 6 at a cost of 436 644 973 BGN. In terms of funding sources, excluding the funds for building communication connectivity of all administrations, which amount to over BGN 303 000 000, over 74% of the funding for the planned measures is provided by OPGG support (partly from OPAC) and 25% - shared by OPGG and the State Budget.

Updated e-Government Development Strategy in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023 (EGDSRB) and Roadmap to EGDSRB[22]

The vision of the Republic of Bulgaria in the field of e-government until 2023, according to the EGDS, combines several elements:

- Transformation of the model of providing user-oriented electronic administrative services by changing the technological and administrative processes behind them, resulting in a reduction of the administrative burden for citizens and businesses;

- Building a modern digital administration;

- High level of network and information security;

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[20] p. 27 of the Report, Share of citizens using e-government services

[21] Three-Year Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2020 in the period 2018 - 2020, https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=765.

[22] Updated e-Government Development Strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023, https://e-gov.bg/wps/portal/agency/strategies-policies/e-management/strategic-documents

- High quality support for shared e-government resources.

The goal is to achieve an irreversible digital transformation of the public administration in the Republic of Bulgaria by 2023. Without being exhaustive in listing the measures and actions envisaged in the Strategy to achieve the vision, it is necessary to point out a few specific objectives with a horizon of 2023, which outline the framework for impact: ensuring interoperability of information resources by default; ensuring reliability and network and information security of e-government information resources; ensuring digital solutions, information systems and shared e-government resources; optimization of work processes in the administration and reshaping the model of data provision to digital by default; facilitating interaction and thrust building between users and administration, public institutions, persons with public functions and organizations providing public services; trans-border administrative e-services.

The scope of the Strategy is fully transposed into the OPGG framework of interventions. The updated Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated EGDS includes 90 measures, divided into 2 strategic and 6 specific objectives with an implementation period 2019 - 2023. More than 75% of these are earmarked for funding under OP Good Governance.

The projects funded under EGDS include:

- BG05SFOP001-1.001-0001 Inventory of information and communication infrastructure for the needs of e-government with the scope of introduction of the Adapted methodology for inventory of ICT resources of central, regional and municipal administrations, information system for audit and register of information resources.
- BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001 Upgrading of the horizontal and central systems of e-government in relation to the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of electronic administrative services - the achievements of the project are mostly related to the introduction of the model of integrated administrative services and reducing the administrative burden for citizens and businesses by building a system for managing electronic forms and upgrading the functionalities of the various modules of the Unified Model for e-government.
- Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.002 "Priority Projects in Implementation of the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2016-2020" - The procedure financed projects for the development of the institutional architecture, information registers and electronic services of the Customs Agency, the Registry Agency, the State Registration Agency, the State Enterprise Agency, the State Agency for the Development of the Information System, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Transport, the National Statistical Institute and the National Revenue Agency.

Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020 (SDSA) and Roadmap for the Implementation of the SDSA[23]

The framework of the Strategy brings together several strategic objectives in the field of administrative development:

- Strategic Objective 1. Effective Governance and Rule of Law includes the following areas of action: establishing a sustainable regulatory framework; strengthening control over the implementation of laws and limiting the environment for unregulated and corrupt practices; improving planning and programme and results-based budgeting; improving the institutional structure; improving the coordination and structure of local administration; improving the performance of the control, regulatory and revenue bodies; introducing systems for quality management and control in the central and local administration.

- Strategic Objective 2. Governance in partnership with citizens and business, with areas for action: effective dialogue with citizens, their organizations and the media; improving service delivery processes; establishing partnerships for a better business environment - a workable mechanism to prevent the growth of regulatory and administrative burdens.

- Strategic Objective 3. Open and accountable governance with measures in the following areas: improving data sharing and public awareness, opening up data; improving monitoring and evaluation of policies; strengthening accountability of managers and employees and compliance with ethical standards; initiatives for environmentally responsible administration.

- Strategic Objective 4. Professional and expert management, which is achieved by: assessing and planning staff needs; improving recruitment; career development policies; improving skills; improving capacity to participate in EU decision-making process and the implementation of the commitments of Bulgaria; developing human resources units and introducing new technologies into the work of the administration.

The implementation of the OPGG contributes to the achievement of all the objectives of the Strategy by supporting projects related to the improvement of management systems at different levels of central and territorial administrations, the introduction of e-services and e-government, the improvement of the quality and efficiency of administrative services, the reduction of administrative burdens for citizens and businesses, the stimulation of the participation of citizens and businesses in the process of development, implementation and monitoring of public services, the quality and expertise of the public administration and the quality of the public services.

Key to the implementation of the Strategy are OPGG funded projects such as:

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[23] Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020 (SDDA) and Roadmap for the Implementation of the SDDA, https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/103.

- BG05SFOP001-1.001-0002 Transformation of the administrative service model - the project addresses basic aspects of the transformation of the administrative service model, including improvement of the internal administrative systems for access to more than 60 registers used by the administration, a complete review of the existing administrative regimes, services, files and registers, reform of the existing model of organization and maintenance of registers, analysis and identification of services of the "episodes of life" and "business event" type, unification and standardization of the registers and registers.

- BG05SFOP001-2.001-0001 Improving the processes related to the provision, access and re-use of public sector information - an open data portal with 540 public organizations and a platform for access to public information were created under the project.

- BG05SFOP001-2.001-0002 Administration and Civil Society - partnership in governance focusing on improving the mechanisms for interaction between the administration and civil society, updating of the Public Consultation Portal, analysis of good practices and mechanisms to promote civic engagement.

- BG05SFOP001-2.002-0001 Introduction of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in the administrations and BG05SFOP001-2.014-0001 Introduction of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in the Bulgarian administration - within the framework of both projects, the CAF model was introduced in 94 administrations, a communication campaign was carried out to promote the model, a methodological basis was developed for the implementation of the model in the administrations and the evaluation of its application.

- BG05SFOP001-2.007-0001 Improving the quality of administrative services by introducing higher standards and improving the user feedback system, aimed at developing new and updating existing standards for the quality of administrative services, developing reporting forms and a methodology for measuring and surveying user satisfaction, developing a guide for drafting a Customer Charter, at improving the use of mobile and landline telephones in the provision of administrative services.

- BG05SFOP001-2.010 Improvement of financial management and control systems and the internal audit function in the public sector - the project analyses and validates good practices in the field of financial management and control and internal audit in the public sector.

- BG05SFOP001-2.015-0001 Improving the knowledge, skills and qualification of municipal employees - the project implemented by the NAMRB involved over 5 800 municipal employees in face-to-face trainings and over 1000 in distance trainings; 15 trainings for trainers have been conducted; 20 training modules have been developed.

- projects to strengthen the capacity of national training institutions and projects to enhance the professional competence of civil servants.

Indicative of the OPGG's contribution to the overall implementation of the Strategy are the measures planned and the resources allocated in the Roadmap for the Implementation of the

SDSA 2015-2020, in which for all the measures that require financial resources (amounting to a total of 124 415 000 BGN), the indicated source of funding is OP "Good Governance".

Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform in the Judiciary and Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the USCRJ[24]

The overall objective of the Strategy is to build on the efforts to modernize the judiciary and to complete its reform by:

- Achieve effective guarantees for the independence of the courts and the judiciary;

- Ensure good governance of the judiciary and high efficiency of its functioning;

- Develop the potential of the human resources of the judiciary and ensure the high motivation, competence and social responsibility of judges, prosecutors and investigators;

- Implement a modern and effective criminal policy through the necessary institutional and regulatory reforms;

- Ensure every citizen's full right to a fair process and effective protection of human rights.

The ambitions for the implementation of the judicial reform are formulated in 6 strategic objectives:

- ✓ Strategic Objective 1: Ensure the independence of the court and the other organs of the judiciary through effective measures against corruption, political and economic pressures and other dependencies, including addressing the institutional causes of undue influence on and through the Supreme Judicial Council, support for judicial self-governance, measures to prevent corruption in the judiciary.

- ✓ Strategic Objective 2: The human capital of the judiciary - a key resource and focus of the reform, which includes reform of Law education, ensuring credibility in competitions for the appointment and promotion of magistrates, improving the quality of the National Institute of Justice, effective attestations, introducing the fair process principles in disciplinary proceedings against magistrates, predictable rules for determining remuneration, surveys of the opinions of judges, prosecutors and investigators on issues related to administration of the judiciary.

- ✓ Strategic Objective 3: Effective administration of the judiciary, including capacity building for research related to the management and performance of the judiciary, regulation of the workload of magistrates and the structures of the judiciary, introduction of programme budgeting and long-term planning tools, e-justice.

- ✓ Strategic Objective 4: Modern and effective criminal justice policy, through modernization of the regulatory environment, reform and development of investigative bodies, improving the effectiveness of the prosecution service, specialized prosecution and courts, capacity to provide expertise, penitentiary reform.

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[24] Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform in the Judiciary and Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the ASCRJ, https://justice.government.bg/home/index/9888d99d-1602-493e-a167-7491ede8543b

✓ Strategic Objective 5: Ensure the rule of law, protection of human rights, access to justice and the humanity of justice, including ensuring institutional capacity for effective judicial protection of human rights, introducing direct constitutional appeal after civil and expert discussion, developing the legal aid system, evaluating and changing the court fee system, introducing and promoting restorative justice approaches, a child justice system focused on prevention, ensuring of effective protection and humane corrective measures.

✓ Strategic Objective 6: Increase the credibility of the judiciary through public participation and transparency, including increasing the transparency of the selection process, work and accountability in the SJC, ensuring real public participation in the administration of justice through the institution of the jury members, transforming the budget procedure into an instrument for transparency and public scrutiny, strengthening the transparency of the judiciary and the dialogue with citizens.

As evidenced by the Implementation Roadmap for the Updated **SCRJ**, the OPGG addresses priority actions under each of the strategic objectives. The contribution of the Programme to the progress of the introduction of e-Justice, respectively to the achievement of Strategic Objective 3 Efficient administration of justice is of particular significance. The achievements in this area are related to the implementation of the Unified Court Information System, which covers various functional modules for the organization of case management processes and related procedural actions, allows access to external systems and registers, ensures transparency and traceability of court cases, and enables the management of electronic cases. The e-Justice support environment, which is being implemented with the support of OPGG, focuses on improving and facilitating citizens' access to e-services and e-justice by implementing a single system - a unified portal in the Justice Sector and providing real-time, centralized and authorized access to electronic content and to the unified websites of the courts.

The OPGG supports the implementation of projects for the optimization of internal processes through reform of the structures, procedures and organization of the judiciary, including development and expansion of the application of alternative means for resolution of legal disputes, development and implementation of adequate rules and procedures for the appointment, appraisal and career development of magistrates and judicial officers, expansion of the scope and improvement of the quality of training in the judiciary.

In the Updated Roadmap for the implementation of the **USCRJ**, a total indicative resource expected to be provided under the OPGG of BGN 10 000 000 is indicated. It should be borne in mind that, in line with the principles of integrated planning, the financial resource indicated in the Updated Roadmap for the implementation of the **USCRJ** does not valuate the measure under Specific objective 3 "Sustainable improvement of the quality of the activities of the NIJ and consolidation of its achievements" under Strategic Objective 2 and Specific objective 5 "e-Justice" under Strategic Objective 3. They are funded respectively through the NIJ Action Plan[25] and through the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Strategy for the

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[25] Specific objective 3 "Sustainably enhance the quality of NIJ's activities and consolidate its achievements"

Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014 - 2020 and the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014 - 2020. [26] The financial resources under the OPGG, are directed towards the implementation of measures under the following specific objectives:

- ✓ overcoming the institutional causes of undue influence on and through the Supreme Judicial Council;

- ✓ pursuing a systematic policy for the prevention of corruption in the judiciary;

- ✓ reform of law education and internships as a guarantee for high incoming qualification and motivation of the human capital of the judiciary;

- ✓ introducing changes in the attestation process - effective attestations based on the unified comprehensive standard that assesses in depth all aspects of the work of a judge, a prosecutor, an investigator;

- ✓ introducing the principles of just process in disciplinary procedures against magistrates;

- ✓ Knowledge-based governance - capacity for research related to the governance and performance of the judiciary;

- ✓ the judiciary budget - an instrument for effective governance, accountability and reform;

- ✓ introducing long-term planning tools;

- ✓ development of the institutions of the judiciary;

- ✓ update of the criminal policy;

- ✓ modernizing and improving the regulation and organization of case-law expertise;

- ✓ penitentiary reform;

- ✓ effective judicial protection of human rights;

- ✓ development of the legal aid system ;

- ✓ court fees - evaluation of the court fee system and analysis of possible changes;

- ✓ ensuring real public participation in the administration of justice through the institution of the jury;

- ✓ strengthening the transparency of the judiciary and the dialogue with citizens.

Strategy for the Implementation of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014 - 2020 (SIeGeJJS) and the SIeGeJJS Implementation Roadmap[27]

The strategy sets the framework for the objectives of e-government in the justice sector, such as the provision of high quality, cost-effective and easily accessible e-administrative services and access to justice oriented to citizens and businesses. The key dimensions of e-

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[26] Specific objective 5 "e-Justice"
[27] Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014 - 2020 (SEJJEP) and SEJJEP Implementation Roadmap**,** https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/99.

government in the sector are related to the use of electronic documents; broad public electronic access to information; use of electronic identity and electronic signature, provision of complex administrative services electronically, facilitated access to justice and services for citizens and businesses, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration, increasing transparency and accountability, reducing corruption, enabling the participation of civil society structures.

The **SIeGeJJS** Roadmap is essentially an action plan with a horizon up to 2020, which foresees a series of measures divided into 5 strategic objectives:

- ✓ Strategic Objective 1: Operational capacity building to ensure the phased introduction and implementation of e-justice in the justice sector.
- ✓ Strategic Objective 2: Reliable and secure e-communication between the judiciary and the executive power, citizens and business. Centralizing resources by leveraging the government hybrid cloud.
- ✓ Strategic Objective 3: Equal and as close as possible to citizens and businesses access to e-justice and e-government electronically and making it the preferred method over the traditional paper-based system.
- ✓ Strategic Objective 4: Operating electronic content by magistrates and officials through shifting from the use and maintenance of paper to electronic documents and files and providing legal basis for their use in accordance with the adopted strategic documents in the sector.
- ✓ Strategic Objective 5: Access and communication between registers only electronically in providing citizens and businesses with comprehensive administrative services.

The measures included in the Roadmap are planned to be financed mainly under the OP Good Governance, which is indicative of the role of the Programme for the overall implementation of the Strategy dedicated to introduction of e-government and e-justice in the sector. The total indicative funding under OPGG for all strategic objectives of the **SIeGeJJS** 2014-2020, amounts to 34 923 800 BGN.[28] Only the measures related to the structuring of a specialized unit for centralized coordination and implementation of the e-Justice policy and a unit in the SJC for the establishment and maintenance of the IT infrastructure, information systems and services are foreseen to be financed from the state budget. The financial resources under the OPGG are directed towards the implementation of the following measures:

- ✓ technological, training and organizational means for the implementation of developed internal rules and policies for the use of information resources in the judiciary system in accordance with the Law on e-Government, the Regulation on the General Requirements for Interoperability and Information Security and in accordance with the

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[28] Roadmap for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020, https://www.eufunds.bg/sites/default/files/2018-11/e-justiceRM.pdf. Funding for the measures under Strategic Objective 5. Access to and communication between registers only by electronic means when providing citizens and businesses with the CAO , is implemented under Priority Axis 1 "Administrative Services and Good Governance".

rules and standards set out in the Strategy for e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014 - 2020 and the Roadmap for its implementation;

- ✓ phased provision of resources to the judiciary structures with the necessary technical means and system software for the implementation of e-justice;

- ✓ inventory and analysis of the state of the IT and communication infrastructure, information systems and services of the judiciary system;

- ✓ further development of the virtual private network covering the buildings of the sector, ensuring reliable and secure information exchange for the structures of the judiciary system;

- ✓ phased migration of existing distributed resources, systems and services of the judiciary system structures to the e-governance;

- ✓ phased provisioning of new system and application services on the Hybrid Private Cloud (HPC) for the needs of the judiciary system entities;

- ✓ secure and reliable access channels (mobile and fixed intranet access) to e-services and e-justice for citizens, as well as for officials and magistrates to work in an electronic environment;

- ✓ further development and centralization of the portals of the judiciary system for citizens' access to information, e-services and e-justice;

- ✓ analysis of the regulatory framework, existing technological processes, means for collecting and summarizing statistical information. Analysis of e-justice initiatives and existing strategic and legal documents at European level;

- ✓ establishment of an Unified Information System of the Courts (UISC) and training of magistrates and staff to operate the system;

- ✓ redesign of the AIS in the MoJ and the units authorized to carry out operations to move towards the use and exchange of only electronic documents and electronic content in the sector and training of staff in the use of electronic documents;

- ✓ redesign of UIS-2 in the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria (PRB) to move towards the use of electronic documents within the PRB and between the PRB and other government institutions. Provision of electronic services and information to citizens. Training of magistrates and officials in working with electronic documents;

- ✓ further development of the Integrated Information system for Counteraction to Crime (IISCC) and provision of public access to information in the core of the system, related to the Open Data initiative, and in the provision of CASs (Complex Administrative Services);

- ✓ development of videoconferencing facilities and their use in pre-trial and trial phases; cross-border cooperation in the administration of justice;

Subsequently, the implementation measures became part of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023, Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023 adopted by Decision No. 546 of the Council of Ministers on 18 September 2019. With the update of the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2023[29] , the measures envisaged for the justice sector have been integrated into the overall framework of e-government development objectives, thus ensuring coordination and compatibility of the individual strategic documents. The approach chosen in the Updated Roadmap to integrate and systematize measures that have so far been part of other (including sectoral) roadmaps is to achieve an unified vision for the implementation of e-government targeted at citizens and businesses. This approach aims to minimize (or even eliminate) the possibility of stand-alone solutions that are not conceptually linked to the eGovernment Architecture, the Updated eGovernment Development Strategy and the Single Model for Requesting, Paying for and Delivering eServices.

National Strategy for the Development of the Public Procurement Sector for the period 2014 - 2020 and Implementation Plan[30]

The main objective of the Strategy is to increase the efficiency and legality of public procurement, and 5 impact areas have been identified to achieve this: legislation and its implementation, publicity and transparency of public procurement, strengthening administrative capacity and professionalism in the sector, control system. Increasing publicity and transparency through the introduction of fully electronic procurement methods and tools is one of the sub-objectives of the impact areas. The introduction of a fully electronic procurement model is linked to the establishment of a national model and the development of a public procurement portal. The National Strategy and its plan do not contain an estimate of the financial resources needed and the possible sources of financing for the envisaged measures. The role of OPGG in the implementation of the Strategy and its priorities is assessed on the basis of implemented projects co-financed under the operational programme.

Within the framework of the OPGG support, 3 projects have been implemented related to the development of the administrative capacity of the Public Procurement Agency for: improvement of the efficiency of the ex-ante control procedures, development of the implementation and maintenance of the Centralized Automated Information System "Electronic Public Procurement", comprehensive review and evaluation of the public procurement system in Bulgaria. The total support under the Programme for the three projects amounts to BGN 9 055 507,98. The investments contribute to four out of the five priority areas of impact in the public procurement sector: enforcement of legislation, publicity and

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[29]Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2019 - 2023, https://e-gov.bg/wps/portal/agency/strategies-policies/e-management/strategic-documents.
[30] National Strategy for the Development of the Public Procurement Sector in Bulgaria for the Period 2014 - 2020 and Implementation Plan, https://www2.aop.bg/#

transparency of public procurement, strengthening of administrative capacity and professionalism in the sector, improvement of the control system.

The main effects of the implementation of the projects in terms of the objectives of the sector strategy are mainly measured by the full digitalization of the public procurement cycle through a fully functioning centralized information system for e-procurement as well as by the prevention of unlawful practices in the application of the regulatory framework, by improving the mechanisms for ex-ante control and facilitating the access of contracting authorities to information on good practices and standardized templates for procurement documents.

Verification of working hypotheses

The review of the main documents that form the strategic framework in the field of administrative capacity development, e-governance and quality of the judiciary leads to the conclusion of the dominant role of the Good Governance OP, both in terms of planning and implementing strategies to address the challenges and in providing the necessary resources and investments. The National Development Programme and the vast majority of the national sector strategies plan and implement the achievement of the objectives for the development of the administration, the judiciary and e-government with the dominant funding from the ESF and in particular the Good Governance OP. With few exceptions, over 75% of the financial resources for the implementation of the measures and priorities in the reviewed national strategy documents are provided by the operational programme. In this sense, the study confirms partially the formulated *Working Hypothesis 1* of the OPGG as "*a key instrument for financing and implementing national and sectoral strategies in the field of e-government, administrative and judicial reform, citizen control and participation in the process of policy development, implementation and monitoring*."

Indeed, the period of investment under consideration is characterized by a significant dependence on the availability of EU funds to achieve the national objectives of strengthening administrative capacity, accelerating digitalization processes, reforming the judiciary and improving the environment for civil society development.

However, the second part of the formulated *Working Hypothesis 1* "The *Programme's contribution is substantial and fundamental and beyond the progress made builds a dependence on EU funding and support for the reform process*" should be approached with reservations. The analysis of the role of the OPGG in achieving national objectives in the areas of e-government, administrative and judicial reform, citizen control and participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring demonstrates ample evidence of the irreversibility of the transformation process in terms of e-services provided to citizens and businesses, improved knowledge and capacity to manage the information infrastructure related to public services. The OPGG interventions follow the general and specific "theories of change" set out in the strategic and programme documents at national level and invest in capacity building at different levels and in different sectors of government. Essentially, investments in capacity (technological, expert and instrumental) ensure at great scale the sustainability of the results achieved, including cumulating additional effects in the long term. In this sense, the

OPGG-supported models and improvements to the institutional environment justify an expectation of viability and future development and upgrading within national governance systems, independently of the support from the EU.

Factors of the external environment that influenced OPGG

A number of external factors influence the implementation of the Programme. During the period 2020-2023, these are the unprecedented pandemic of Covid-19, the military conflict in Ukraine, political crises and frequent changes of governments (6 governments in total from May 2021 to June 2023), rising inflation, which reached double digits (10.5%) by July 2022, gradually increasing in the following months, reaching 16.5% in March 2023. This is paralleled by an increase in labour wages of around 10% per annum, etc. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the performance of individual institutions, impacted project implementation and disrupted supply chains in many sectors. Among the direct effects of the pandemic on the implementation of OPGG projects was the suspension of training and public events for a period of time, thus the pandemic contributed to difficulties in dialogue and dissemination of information (mainly by hindering the organization of public events) and dissemination of project results, although operationally the work was carried out online, which ensured smooth management of the Program. At the same time, the OPGG and the other programmes have ensured a rapid reallocation of the contribution from the European Structural and Investment Funds by transferring funds between the operational programmes for the 2014-2020 Programme period to support measures to minimise the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic. The provision of Article 2 of Regulation 2020/558 allows Member States to transfer the financial resources available for programming for 2020 under the Investment for Growth and Jobs objective between the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF) so as to provide Member States with additional flexibility to reallocate resources to deliver tailor-made measures to counter the public health crisis. With Decision No 256 of 14 April 2020 the Council of Ministers provided for reallocation of the contribution from the European Structural and Investment Funds by transferring funds between the 2014-2020 operational programmes to support measures to minimise the negative impact of the epidemic spread of COVID-19. In line with the OPGG decision, EUR 105 000 000 have been transferred to the Human Resources Development Operational Programme.

This, in turn, lead to a change in the target values of the programme indicators due to a reduction in resources and the inability to achieve the previously planned indicator values.

Another factor that has a significant impact on the implementation of the programme is related to the regulatory framework, which has to ensure the legality of the funded procedures. An important step in this respect are the changes in the Law on e-Government[31] , through which

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[31] Addendum. - SG 102/2019 in force from 29.11.2019

it is defined that the activities on system integration[32] are carried out by "Information Services" JSC. The company has been designated to act as a public contracting authority. Decision 727/5.12.2019 of the CoM, designates the administrative bodies which, in the performance of their functions related to system integration activities, are to entrust the implementation of such activities to "Information Services" JSC. This fundamentally changes the approaches for implementation of OPGG contracts by institutions that provide for development of information and communication systems. As the change introduced is not in line with the State aid rules, it lead to the impossibility of financing measures foreseen for OPGG support and some of the projects were terminated or no longer eligible for funding under the programme.

The national scheme for electronic identification, provided for in the Law on Electronic Identification, has not been established, which limits the access of citizens and businesses to EAS, including cross-border ones. The current legislation in the Republic of Bulgaria provides that the persons referred to in Art. 1 and 2 of the LES are obliged to provide citizens and organizations with the possibility to identify themselves when requesting EAS under the Law for Electronic Identification Act (LEI) or by means of electronic identification, determined by a decision of the Council of Ministers, issued and maintained by administrative bodies. No change has been made to the Administrative Register in order to enter the means of electronic identification and their level of security in a field specifically created for this purpose.

Political instability in Bulgaria (2020-2023) at the end of the programme is characterized by frequent changes of governments (regular and caretaker). Thus, continuity in their actions and policies are often interrupted, leading to delays in project implementation, strategic decision-making and uncertainty in the administration. This political instability results in frequent changes of operational decisions during the implementation of activities and, in some cases, in the termination of projects.

Task 1: Analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of investments under PA 1, PA 2, PA 3 *in the justice sector and administrative management and services, including e-government and e-justice, including* the formulation of specific recommendations, measures and indicators in the field of *e-government* and digital transformation for the programming period 2021-2027.

The subject of the evaluation in this assignment are procedures funded under the first three priority axes of the OPGG[33] :

PA 1: Administrative services and e-government;

PA 2: Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business;

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[32] which include the provision of services for the establishment, maintenance, development and monitoring of the performance of information and communication systems used by administrative authorities, as well as activities that ensure the performance of these services

[33] In OP Good Governance 2014-2020 - Fourth Amendment (Bulgarian language) of 05.10.2022 a new priority axis 6 has been added, which is not the subject of this analysis.

PA 3: A transparent and efficient judiciary;

These priority axes are in line with Thematic Objective No 11 "Strengthening the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration", Investment Priority No 1 "Investing in the institutional capacity and efficiency of public administrations and public services at national, regional and local level to implement reforms and achieve better regulation and good governance" of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013[34] .

- **Priority axis 1 "Administrative services and e-government"**

PA 1 aims to achieve two specific objectives:

1. Reducing administrative and regulatory burden for citizens and businesses and introducing the principles of "life episodes" and "business events";

2. Increase the number of electronic services available to citizens and businesses.

The main target groups are: administrations at all levels, according to Article 38 of the Law on Administration; employees employed in all levels of administration; citizens; business.

Types of beneficiaries that are supported: Central administrations

Priority Axis 2 "Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business"

PA 2 aims to achieve three specific objectives:

1. Increase in the number of administrations implementing organizational development and results-based management mechanisms;

2. Improving the specialized knowledge and skills of administrative staff and supporting career development mechanisms;

3. Increase citizen participation in policy making and monitoring.

Main target groups: The administrations at all levels, according to Art. 38 of the Administration Act; employees engaged in official and labor relations in administrations at all levels; citizens; business; magistrates for trainings in PPL

Types of beneficiaries actually supported: central, specialized territorial administrations, civil organizations and their associations, socio-economic partners.

Priority Axis 3 "Transparent and Effective Judiciary"

PA 3 aims to achieve three specific objectives:

1. Increasing transparency and speed up justice through reform of the structure, procedures and organization of the judiciary;
2. Improving the accessibility and transparency of the judiciary by introducing e-justice;
3. Expanding the scope and improving the quality of judicial training.

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[34] Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006

Main target groups: Magistrates, court staff, SJC, SJSI inspectors, investigating bodies pursuant to the CCP, employees of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), legal practitioners, citizens, business, members of the Program Council and NIJ teaching staff.

Types of beneficiaries who have actually received support under the Programme: the Supreme Judicial Council, Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council, Supreme Administrative Court, Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of Justice, General Directorate "Execution of Penalties", National Legal Aid Bureau, National Institute of Justice, non-governmental and professional organizations, operating in the field of justice.

The Contractor has taken into account the Annex No. 2 included in the ToR, entitled Number of contracts and funds of the evaluated measures as of 20.07.2022 with a breakdown by tasks and priority axes. A list of the procedures to be surveyed within the scope of the evaluation task, including guidance on the procedures to be surveyed under PA 1, is included with this report.

The Contractor has also taken into account the commitment made in the Inception Report to work with up-to-date data at the time of the evaluation. In this sense, changes in procedures and projects, such as terminated projects, have been examined:

- Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.002 is included in the list of 19 projects. By the date of the evaluation 7 of the projects have been terminated, so 12 projects are included in the evaluation;

- Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.018, under which one contract BG05SFOP001-1.018-0001 was terminated;

- Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.019, under which one contract BG05SFOP001-1.019-0001 was terminated;

- Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.023, under which one contract BG05SFOP001-1.023-0001 was terminated;

- Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.026, under which one contract BG05SFOP001-1.026-0001 was terminated;

- Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.027, under which one contract BG05SFOP001-1.027-0001 was terminated.

Accordingly, these procedures and projects were not analyzed in the evaluation.

6.3 Evaluation question 1.1 What is the contribution of the investments made to the development of administrative services, administrative and judicial reform?

Contribution of PA 1 and PA 2 investments

The investments under PA 1 worth 230.5 million BGN for the development of administrative services and administrative reform have made a significant contribution to regulatory reform, simplification, revision and consolidation of existing legislation, leading to:

- **Increased administrative efficiency** through the introduction of e-government, simplification and automation of processes, improved information systems and more efficient data management, better alignment of policies and legislation to avoid unnecessary regulations or burdensome administrative procedures;
- **Improved services to citizens and businesses** as the investments have led to more accessible and convenient services for citizens and businesses through the introduction of electronic document management, online services for administrative procedures and simplification and reduction of bureaucracy, thus reducing the time for their provision and therefore the costs;
- **Increased transparency and reduction of corruption.** Increasing transparency in the work of the administration and improving accountability leads to reduction in corruption and abuse of power. The investments made in better data management systems, e-procurement (CAIS EP), electronic service delivery are just some of the elements that lead to greater transparency and accountability;
- **Supporting economic growth:** improved administrative services and justice create the opportunity for a more business-friendly environment. This can support economic growth through easier market access, faster registration procedures and other business services.

An audit of all administrative services and existing registers has been carried out, as a result of which the exchange of information and data between institutions and organizations providing public services has been optimized, a concept for reform of the existing model of organization and maintenance of registers in the public administration has been developed - consolidation, elimination of redundant registers, avoiding duplication of data. Initiatives to standardize and unify procedures for the provision of municipal services, with a particular focus on those for business, reducing administrative and bureaucratic activities, time and information requirements were supported.

With a view to introduce integrated administrative services, the administrations at central, regional and local level are supported in carrying out optimization and reengineering of work processes in the provision of administrative services according to a unified methodology developed by the Council of Ministers under OPAC. Service delivery processes have been described and reorganized, including for the introduction of services based on the principle of "life episodes" and "business events". Accessible services have been developed, delivered through different channels, with citizens and businesses at the center.

As a result of the OPGG investments, 1085 administrative regimes have been supported and simplified, 61 legal acts have undergone impact assessment, 135 administrations have been supported to introduce integrated administrative services, 17 municipal services have been supported for standardization, 7 control, revenue and regulatory authorities have been supported to develop organizational and analytical capacity, including to carry out joint inspections, 435 e-services have been supported for their transactional delivery as well as 117 registries. As a result of the support, the Centralised Automated Information System for Electronic Procurement (CAIS EP) is operational.

PA 2 investments are an important element in achieving a modern and efficient administration through good human resource management. OPGG responds to these issues with measures that cover the entire human resource management cycle - from the selection of quality employees, through adequate career development and guidance, to the continuous upgrading of their skills. Training and an effective learning environment are provided, linking the knowledge and skills acquired to the nature of the work and the needs of the administration itself. The projects implemented are mainly in the area of training and capacity building of training institutions, while other measures have been partially implemented due to various regulatory changes during the implementation of the programme. OPGG investments have made a significant contribution to improving the knowledge, skills and qualifications of a very large number of administrative staff - over 60 000 individual staff have been trained. The capacity of the training organizations has also been enhanced - modern facilities, IT capabilities, digitalization of processes, and more than 223 training modules have been created or upgraded for the administration. Projects contributing to the introduction of shared services and quality management systems have been supported. Support has also been provided for capacity building for partnership and interaction with civil society, business and the SEP in the form of improving the methodological basis, standards for public consultations, a concept for the development of the public consultation portal, support for the implementation of projects to improve citizen participation in the processes of formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and legislation. The necessary normative and methodological prerequisites have been created to ensure administrative services of high standards and in line with the needs of citizens and businesses. The functional analysis methodology has been updated and pilot analyses of 6 sectoral policies have been carried out. The toolbox for the financial management and control and internal audit functions in the public sector has been updated.

On the basis of the information on the implementation of some important indicators under PA 2, it can be clearly stated that the OPGG investments have contributed significantly to raising the administration to a higher level of development - 94 administrations have been supported to implement quality management systems, 174 administrations have been supported to implement organizational development mechanisms.

In order to assess this, an analysis of the contribution of OPGG investments to the development of administrative services, administrative and judicial reform is made through several steps:

1. **Define a theory of change by identifying the objectives, specific procedures and projects (implemented activities) through which the investments were made;**
2. **Gathering qualitative information to track results;**
3. **Analysis of the results achieved by tracking the implemented activities and indicators (performance evaluation).**

This method determines the contribution of one or a set of interventions to the development of a change. The aim is to produce a robust, evidence-based narrative of the results obtained. Contribution analysis can be carried out during the implementation of interventions, at their completion or afterwards.

The evaluation of the contribution of the investments made under the OPGG to the development of administrative services, the administrative and judicial system includes an analysis of the objectives achieved, performance measurement and results of the projects funded under it. A theory of change approach has been applied to assess the programme's contribution.

The OPGG addresses many of the challenges and needs set out in European and national strategic documents in the priorities and their respective specific objectives. The programme priorities cover the main needs for change and systemic improvements. The OPGG is programmed to contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy and the achievement of all its objectives, and this is also expressed through the alignment and contribution to the horizontal priority in the Partnership Agreement (PA): Good governance and access to quality administrative services.

OPGG support is aimed at improving the quality of and access to administrative services, reducing administrative burdens, introducing tools and procedures for monitoring and evaluation of public policies, management and development of human resources in the administration, etc. and addresses the fourth horizontal priority of the Partnership Agreement, namely: good governance and access to quality administrative services.

OPGG programming has addressed two major weaknesses identified in a number of European and national documents[35] :

- Relatively unattractive administrative environment and judiciary, including a high share of grey economy and corruption;
- unfinished reforms in the judiciary and public administration.

These weaknesses are horizontal in nature and impact on the delivery of public activities. The main objective of the OPGG is to reduce these weaknesses, thus making a significant contribution to the achievement of the strategic objectives of Europe 2020 and Bulgaria in particular.

Strategic framework

*The OPGG is highly **relevant to** the EU's main strategic document "EUROPE 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth".*

Priority axes 1 and 3 of the programme are in line with the strategic objective of "smart growth through building a knowledge based and innovation economy (digital society)". OPGG responds to this objective in two ways:

- ✓ by setting itself the tasks related to the reform of the administration by introducing a comprehensive administrative service for citizens and businesses together with the introduction of e-government and e-justice. The implementation of this task is expected to significantly improve the performance of the administration and indirectly stimulate business development and competitiveness. The achievement of these objectives should

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[35] Partnership Agreement 2014 - 2020, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/partnership-agreement-bulgaria-2014-20_bg, European Commission Directorate-General for Regional Policy, Measuring the quality of government and subnational variation, DG REGIO, 2010, Global Competitiveness Report 2012 - 2013, World Economic Forum

directly lead to the achievement of the Digital Society through the expansion of the share of e-services offered;

✓ setting out to improve regulation on business, directly addressing the overall goal of smart growth.

The OPGG is also in line with the second strategic objective of sustainable growth by promoting a greener and more resource-efficient and competitive economy. PA 1 interventions contribute to reducing the administrative burden on business, which in turn has a positive impact towards achieving sustainable growth.

The OPGG is in full compliance with the Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria outlining the assistance from the ESIF for the period 2014-2020. The programme corresponds directly to Strategic Priority 4 "Good Governance and Access to Quality Administrative Services", which is aimed at strengthening the institutional environment and offering more efficient administrative services to citizens and businesses. The programme contributes to two other strategic priorities as spill-over effects:

- Strategic Priority 1 "Education, Skills and Employment for Inclusive Growth". The OPGG addresses this priority by creating the conditions for improving the quality of employment in the public administration and in the judiciary by improving human resource management systems. This effect is rather incidental and its relative weight in the OPGG should not be artificially reinforced.
- Strategic Priority 2 "Research, Innovation and Investment for Smart Growth". The strategic priority to which the OPGG directly responds is a cross-cutting one and progress towards its achievement is relevant for the realisation of all other priorities. It contains two sub-priorities:
  - o "Administrative Efficiency and Quality Judiciary", to which PA 1 (Strategic Objectives 1 and 2), 2 and 3 correspond;
  - o "Access to quality administrative services and effective implementation of eGovernment and e-Justice" to which PA 1 and 3 respond.

The strategic and regulatory framework in the area of e-government has been dynamic during the programme implementation period, with many of the changes related to the implementation of key projects supported under the OPGG.

The measures envisaged in the Strategy for the Development of the State Administration (2014 - 2020) are aimed at the implementation of priority No. 6 "Strengthening the institutional environment for higher efficiency of public services for citizens and businesses" of the National Reform Programme BG2020. The Roadmap to the Strategy specifies the measures and the deadlines for their implementation, the financial resources required, the sources of funding, the expected results, the performance indicators and the responsible institutions. It is the main instrument for planning the reforms in the administration, the source of funding of which is OP "Good Governance". The Strategy foresees 35 interventions under 17 measures to be funded under the OP. Detailed information on the OPGG's contribution to the implementation of the Strategy for the Reform of the Government Administration (SRGA) (2014-2020) and its

Roadmap is provided in Annex 5 to the report. Already at the start of the programme, changes were made to the SRGA Roadmap, which was updated by Decision No. 1033 of the Council of Ministers from December 30, 2015.

The e-Government Development Strategy (eGDS) in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014 – 2020) [36] covers the development of all four communication and service areas: (1) "Administration – Citizens"; (2) "Administration – Business"; (3) "Administration – Administration"; and (4) "Administration – Employees". The strategy and its roadmap are the main documents that provide the vision for the development of e-government in the country. The e-Government Development Strategy 2014-2020 and the Roadmap for eGovernance (RmeG) were initially in force until 18 September 2019, when the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023, the Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023 and the Concept for Registry Reform were adopted by Decision No. 546 of the Council of Ministers. The purpose of the update was to reflect the main changes in the field that had occurred together with the new trends and requirements at European level. In the roadmap, the measures are related to the specific strategic objectives, regardless of the source of funding, and a phasing of the upgrade and development of the systems is foreseen in order to ensure continuity, manageability and systematicity. The main funds for the implementation of the measures are foreseen to be provided by the OPGG (See Annex 5). A new update of the Strategy was to follow in 2021, with a period of validity until 2025. By Decision No 872 of the Council of Ministers of 14 October 2016, the E-Customs Sectoral Strategy 2016-2020 and its Roadmap were adopted in relation to Bulgaria's commitments as an EU Member State and in relation to the amendments to the LeG. In 2018, the E-Customs Sector Strategy was updated in relation to Bulgaria's commitments as a Member State and in relation to the continuation of the work of the Customs Agency as an OPGG beneficiary on the implementation of an approved project proposal under Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.007 "Upgrading of the Customs Agency's Core Systems for Data and Service Delivery - BIMIS (Phase 2)".

A sectoral strategy for the development of e-government in the National Social Insurance Fund – "e-Insurance" 2018-2023, developed by the National Social Insurance Fund as a complementary document to the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020 and its Roadmap, has been adopted.

The Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020 is a natural continuation of the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020 in the field of justice. In the package of priority projects for the period 2016-2017 in the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014-2020), 30 measures in 13 priority areas are set for funding under the OPGG.

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[36] Adopted by MCM No. 298 of the Council of Ministers from 02.04.2021 with previous update until 2023 (DCoM No. 546 of 18.09.2019).

The many changes in the roadmaps and strategic documents lead to delay in the implementation of projects and there was no tangible progress at the beginning of the programme. In an audit[37] carried out by the Court of Auditors, the audit report states that there were delays in the start-up of the PA 1 procedures of the programme, and these are a consequence of the delayed adoption of the roadmaps for the SDeG and the SRGA. The MA has created appropriate conditions for the evaluation and contracting of project proposals, and has made systematic efforts to continuously increase efficiency for the implementation of PA1 of the programme. Recommendations have also been made on how to overcome delays.

Changes in the regulatory framework

In addition to the dynamics in roadmaps and strategic documents, the implementation of the programme has been accompanied by many changes in the regulatory framework. In 2016, amendments to the LeG were adopted, in 2017 the Ordinance on General Requirements for Information Systems, Registers and Electronic Administrative Services[38] and the Ordinance on the Exchange of Documents in the Administration[39] were adopted. The Law on Electronic Identification and the Regulations for its implementation have also been adopted, as well as the Law on Cybersecurity and its by-laws. The State Agency for Electronic Government (SAEG) has been established as a body for the development and implementation of the state policy on e-government, as well as the State Enterprise "Single System Operator". A legal definition of CAS was introduced by the amendments to the Administrative Procedure Code (APC) in 2014[40]. In relation to the complex administrative services, the Administrative Services Ordinance (ASO) was amended in 2015[41], which regulates the interaction between administrative bodies and the ways of requesting and receiving administrative services.

Substantial changes in the Law for e-Government, which entered into force in July 2016, the new sub-legislation and the structuring of the SAeG lead to changes in the procedure for approval of project proposals, including new requirements for prior approval of the terms of reference by the SAeG. A permanent working group had been established with the participation of the MA and the CCU to coordinate the actions of the different bodies with regard to the projects and activities co-financed by ESIF, as well as to discuss specific cases and issues related to the validation procedure by the SAeG.

Based on the analyses and results of the project BG05SFOP001-1.001-0002 "*Transformation of the Administrative Service Model*", funded by OPGG, a comprehensive transformation of the administrative service model has been undertaken. The changes were

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[37] on the basis of Art. 1(3), Art. 6 of the Court of Auditors Act in 2019 in relation to the implementation of audit assignment No. 290 of the Court of Auditors' Audit Programme for 2019, https://www.bulnao.government.bg/media/documents/od-op-dobro-upr-0221.pdf

[38] Adopted by P.M. No. 3 as of 9.01.2017, promulgated in State Gazette No. 5 as of 17.01.2017, in force as of 1.03.2017, amended and supplemented in State Gazette No. 66 as of 10.08.2018, in force as of 10.08.2018, No. 4 as of 14.01.2020, in force as of 14.01.2020.

[39] Adopted by PMS No. 3 of 09.01.2017.

40 SG 27/2014, in force from 25.03.2014 in § 1, item 5 of the Additional Provision of the APC

[41] Amended and supplemented by SG 27/14 April 2015

launched by Decision No. 704, 2018 of the Council of Ministers.[42] The decision eliminated some administrative services from the Administrative Register and entered new services, launched amendments to laws and regulations, and took measures to provide administrative services as internal administrative services.

The amendments to the Administrative Procedure Code (APC) of 2018 enabled the electronic submission of requests, signals, proposals, complaints, protests, applications, claims and their annexes. In the transitional and final provisions of the APC, with the envisaged amendments to the *Law on Administration, a* definition of "administrative service" and "public service" was provided..

The amendments to the Administrative Register Ordinance of 2019 defined level 3 and level 4 of service provision and regulated the entry in the Administrative Register of the templates of forms related to the provision of an administrative service/issuance of the individual administrative act (Article 25 item 6); information on the Administrative Service Centre, such as address, e-mail address, contact telephone numbers, opening hours (Art. 25 item 4); and fees or prices of the service, including in the case of electronic delivery, the basis for their determination and the means of payment (Art. 25 item 10).

At the end of 2018, the Cyber Security Law was adopted[43] , and in 2019, the Regulation on Minimum Requirements for Network and Information Security was adopted[44] .

Amendments to the Law on e-Government from the end of 2019 (Art. 7) oblige administrative authorities, as part of the budget process, to agree in advance with the SAeG the expenditure in the field of e-government and for the information and communication technologies they use, providing documents and information for the three-year budget forecasts.

Additional amendments to the Law on e-Government[45] (§ 45. of the Transitional and Final Orders) determine that the activities on system integration [46] are carried out by "Information Services" JSC. The company was designated to act as a public contracting authority. Decision of the CoM 727/5.12.2019 designated the administrative bodies which, in the performance of their functions relating to system integration activities, should entrust the performance of those activities to Information Services plc. This lead to changes in the overall scheme of implementation of the OPGG contracts executed by the institutions included in the decision of the Council of Ministers particularly concerning the construction of information and communication systems. Some of these bodies were beneficiaries or potential applicants of OPGG. The change introduced was not in line with the State aid rules, which resulted in the impossibility to finance measures under the OPGG (e.g. a project of the Ministry of Health, which has been terminated; the Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadaster, the National

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[42] RMS No. 704/2018 of 5.10.2018.

[43] SG 94 of 13 November 2018.

[44] PMS No. 186 of 26.07.2019.

[45] Addendum. - SG 102/2019 in force from 29.11.2019

[46] which include the provision of services for the establishment, maintenance, development and monitoring of the performance of information and communication systems used by administrative authorities, as well as activities that ensure the performance of these services

Revenue Agency, the Registry Agency, which were no longer eligible for funding under the programme).

In order to resolve the issue regarding the compliance of the legal change with the State Aid (SA) rules, it was decided to outsource the system integration services to Information Services JSC as a Service of General Economic Interest (SGEI). For this purpose, it was necessary for the Ministry of Transport and Communications to do a notification to the European Commission, and only after its positive opinion could the aid be granted. This notification was delayed, although the MA had repeatedly drawn the attention of the responsible institutions to the adverse consequences that its delay entails for the programme. As this issue was being resolved slowly (moved from 2020 to 2021-2022), the MA of the OPGG was in a practical impossibility to ensure the legal financing of certain procedures. This caused delays in the opening of new procedures and the implementation of already approved key projects/activities that had been awarded to Information Services for a total cost of about 17.5 million BGN (MoH, AGCC, RA).

6.3.1. Contribution of PA 1 investments

A theory of change model for priority axis 1 is also presented in the following figure.

Table 2 Theory of Change PA1.

Specific objective	Needs analysis	Identified potential for impact	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
Reducing administrative and regulatory burden for citizens and businesses and introducing the principles of "life episodes" and "business events"	Weaknesses in administrative services; Insufficient integration and coordination between administrative structures in service delivery, lack of integrated services Low degree of automation of services provided; administration does not take into account customer preferences regarding access channels Different practice of services provided; Lack of standardization of municipal services in terms of procedures, with processes of their provision in need of re-engineering. The practice of smart regulation is not known and applied in Bulgaria Burdensome legal and regulatory environment for doing business, existence of quasi-regimes Lack of sustainable practices for joint inspections by control and inspection bodies. Challenges related to strengthening analytical capacity, improving control	Introduction of smart-regulation principles. Review of all regulatory regimes to minimise administrative burdens, including by limiting gold plating in transposition of EU legislation Strategic intervention to standardize municipal services in terms of procedures, documentation and timelines. Implementation of impact assessments, including on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Regularly collect feedback from administrations to take into account customer preferences regarding access channels and service satisfaction. Improving the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the public procurement system. Effective monitoring of the implementation of legislation Supporting the independence of regulatory authorities and their optimal functioning Support the organisational and analytical capacity of revenue authorities at central and municipal level to improve revenue collection and reduce administrative burden and build sustainable mechanisms and practices for joint controls and inspections, including risk-based. Enhancing coordination between responsible institutions and preventing the informal economy	Reviews and optimisation of regulatory regimes Reviews of existing legislation in relation to regulatory reform Conducting legislative impact assessments Undertaking a comprehensive review and reform of the registry system Optimisation and re-engineering of work processes with a view to introducing integrated administrative services Standardization and unification of administrative services at municipal level and creation of reference models for key municipal services Creation of single service delivery centers Establishment of mobile groups of staff to provide administrative services to people from vulnerable groups Building administrative capacity, improving procedures and practices, putting in place effective systems for risk management, implementation of coordinated and joint controls, etc. Improving the performance of control, regulatory and revenue authorities	**For result:** Number of standardised municipal services implemented in all municipal administrations Functioning electronic tendering system (e-procurement) Proportion of administrative and intra-administrative services used more than 5,000 times per year that are level 3 and 4 **For performance:** Number of legal acts for which impact assessments have been carried out Administrations supported for the introduction of integrated administrative services Number of municipal services supported for standardisation Control, revenue and regulatory authorities supported to develop organisational and analytical capacity, including to carry out joint inspections State HPC development projects Number of supported registers

mechanisms and carrying out effective risk-based controls	Establishment of a predictable and stable regulatory framework and effective regulatory and supervisory activity.	Methodological assurance of the procurement process	Supported e-services for their delivery in transactional mode Number of projects for the development of sectoral e-government systems (e-procurement, e-health, e-customs, e-archiving, e-security, etc.)

Specific objective	Needs analysis	Identified potential for impact	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
Increasing the number of services available to citizens and businesses electronically	The need to develop and complete central systems and e-government infrastructure Need to link all key registries The need to build sectoral e-systems: e-procurement, e-customs and e-health. Need to create conditions for consolidation of the websites of central and municipal administrations through federated portals to the Single Portal for Access to Electronic Administrative Services (SPAEAS). Need for development and implementation of electronic identification (e-ID)	Achieving a workable mechanism for inter-agency exchange of structured information. Implementing measures to open up information sources and make available structured information collected and generated using public funds ("open data"). Strategic interventions in line with the implementation of the regulatory and registry reform, which will streamline work processes in the administration. Putting a special focus on e-services, e-procurement, e-customs and e-archiving. Optimization in the corporate architecture of the Customs Agency Implementation of the national competency framework for the customs profession, contributing to the creation of a fully functioning operational model and alignment of actions within the EU. Support the NRA to further develop its information systems to ensure high revenue collection.	Performing an IT audit in the administration Completion of the State HPC Phased migration of administrations' electronic systems and services to the HPC Digitisation and conversion into electronic structured information of registers and archives in the administration Ensuring interoperability and automatic data exchange between information systems and registers Development and completion of information systems and services in line with the ongoing reform of the administrative service model Opening to the general public of records and information in machine-readable format, the collection and generation of which are public funds used ("open data") Establishment of an online system and a call center to provide assistance with e-services Organisational building and development of a Single System Integrator Introduction of e-procurement Upgrading e-tables	**For result:** Number of standardised municipal services implemented in all municipal administrations Functioning electronic tendering system (e-procurement) Proportion of administrative and intra-administrative services used more than 5,000 times per year that are level 3 and 4 and are based on the state's HPC **For performance:** Number of legal acts for which impact assessments have been carried out Administrations supported for the introduction of integrated administrative services Number of municipal services supported for standardisation Control, revenue and regulatory authorities supported to develop organisational and analytical capacity, including to carry out joint inspections State HPC development projects Number of supported registers Supported e-services for their delivery in transactional mode Number of projects for the development of sectoral e-government systems (e-

				procurement, e-health, e-customs, e-archiving, e-security, etc.)

In order to assess the contribution, a review of the procedures and projects programmed and implemented, the results achieved and their effectiveness was carried out by measuring the degree of achievement of the output and result indicators. For this purpose, data on project implementation and reported results by beneficiaries presented in their technical reports as well as OPGG annual reports were used. A detailed description of the published, contracted and implemented procedures is included in Annex 5 of the report, describing the objectives of the procedure, beneficiary and partners, alignment with the objectives of the main strategic documents to which they contribute, and a description of the results achieved.

The following table shows the procedures, contracts concluded, contracts implemented and contracts terminated:

Table 3. PA 1 contracts concluded, executed and terminated (as of 30.11.2023)

№	Procedure number	Name	Contracts concluded	Contracts/contracts in progress	Discontinued
1	BG05SFOP001-1.001	Data structuring and analytical activities in the implementation of the strategic documents for the development of public administration, the development of e-government and the introduction of e-government in the justice sector	2	2	0
2	BG05SFOP001-1.002	Priority Projects in Implementation of the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2016-2020	19	12	7
3	BG05SFOP001-1.003	Improving the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of the public procurement system	2	2	0
4	BG05SFOP001-2.001	Strategic projects in implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020, PE, PCC and NATURA 2000	2	2	0
5	BG05SFOP001-1.004	Upgrading horizontal and central e-government systems	1	1	0
6	BG05SFOP001-1.005	Upgrading and development of the State Hybrid Private Cloud for e-government needs	1	1	0
9	BG05SFOP001-1.006	Establishment, upgrade and integration of information systems and registers of NCID to improve the process of providing administrative and reference services	1	1	0
10	BG05SFOP001-1.007	Upgrade of the Customs Agency's core systems for data and service provision - BIMIS (Phase 2)	1	1	0
11	BG05SFOP001-1.008	Development and implementation of the Institutional Architecture of the NSII for priority processes related to pensions and provision of electronic administrative services	1	1	0

12	BG05SFOP001-1.010	Building and developing CRC's information systems and registers to improve regulatory and control activities and enhance the quality of administrative services	1	1	0
13	BG05SFOP001-1.011	Building and developing CRC's information systems and registers to improve regulatory and control activities and enhance the quality of administrative services	1	1	0
14	BG05SFOP001-1.013	Implementation of priority measures from the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2023.	2	2[47]	0
15	BG05SFOP001-1.014	Development of the information system and the public register of the Commission for Protection of Competition	1	1	0
16	BG05SFOP001-1.015	Development and implementation of an e-archiving system	1	1	0
17	BG05SFOP001-1.016	Optimisation and computerisation of records and work processes in BAFS	1	1	0
18	BG05SFOP001-1.017	Establishment, upgrade and integration of electronic registers of the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NCID) in the field of higher education	1	1	0
19	BG05SFOP001-1.018	Establishment of a unified public register for spatial planning, investment design and construction permitting and an information system for its maintenance	1	0	1
20	BG05SFOP001-1.019	Establishment of a property management system, including a unified register of state and municipal property	1	0	1
21	BG05SFOP001-1.020	Development and implementation of the NSII architecture for processes related to cash benefits, allowances and guaranteed claims	1	1	0
22	BG05SFOP001-1.023	National Geospatial Platform	1	0	1
23	BG05SFOP001-1.024	Establishment of a national solution for the electronic exchange of social security information EESSI	1	1	0
24	BG05SFOP001-1.025	Upgrading the Customs Agency's core systems for data and service delivery - BIMIS (Phase 3)	1	1	0
25	BG05SFOP001-1.026	Implementation of CAIS "Corruption Risk Analysis"	1	0	1
26	BG05SFOP001-1.027	Planning, coordination and control of the development and renewal of information resources in the administration	1	0	1
27	BG05SFOP001-1.029	Development of electronic administrative services and implementation of additional functionalities in automated information systems in the Ministry of Interior	1	1	0
	Total		**47**	**35**	**12**

[47] Project BG05SFOP001-1.013-0002 was closed ex officio by the MA without implementation

The terminated projects are worth nearly 49 million BGN - a significant share of the priority axis budget (23%) and 9% of the programme budget. The reasons are of a different nature and are discussed in the statement below.

The third amendment of the OPGG[48], in implementation of the Decision of the CoM No. 256/2020, released a resource of 105 000 000 BGN from the OPGG, that was transferred toe OPHRD to support measures to minimize the negative consequences of the epidemic spread of COVID-19. The significant reduction of funds had also an impact on some of the indicator targets that should have been achieved by 2023, resulting in the dropping or reduction of indicator targets under PA 1 and PA 2. Specifically for PA 1[49] the budget was reduced by 27.36 million BGN. The funds were part of the budget foreseen for the implementation of the measures of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2019-2023. Within PA 1, resources are reserved for the financing of the procedures foreseen in the IAWP 2020, the implementation of Phase 2 of the Project "Upgrading of Horizontal and Centralized Systems of e-Government in Connection with the Implementation of the Unified Model for Requesting, Payment and Provision of Electronic Administrative Services" of the State Agency "Electronic Government" (SAeG), as well as for the implementation of measures under the Concept for the Registry Reform and other measures of the PCIU, which are of high maturity and have a significant importance for the development of e-government. The reduction in financial resources also has an impact on the target values of the indicators to be achieved by the end of 2023.

Specifically, the changes made were: eliminating indicator *R1-1 "Number of life episodes and business events services implemented"* as a direct consequence of the reduction of the OPGG PA 1 budget. Under the project "Transformation of the administrative service model" with the beneficiary ACoM, an analysis of the possibilities for introducing "Life Episodes" and "Business Events" services was carried out and a catalogue of 10 priority services was developed, in line with the first activity of the measure "Provision of administrative services based on "Life Episodes" and "Business Events" of the road map of the SDPA. However, due to the reduction of the PA 1 budget, the second activity of the measure "Implementation of services based on the principle of "Episodes of Life" and "Business Events" foreseen in the SDPA, with an estimated budget of BGN 5 million, which foresaw the implementation of the target value of indicator R1-1, had not been implemented under the OPGG.

The target value of indicator *O1-8 "Supported e-services for their delivery in transactional mode"* has also been reduced (from 850 to 750 pcs.) as a result of the reduction of the budget of PA 1 of OPGG, since the available funds related to the implementation of this

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[48] Decision No 433 of 29.06.2020 of the Council of Ministers, https://www.eufunds.bg/sites/default/files/uploads/opgg/docs/2020-09/Programme_2014BG05SFOP001_4_0_bg.pdf
[49] https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/4861

indicator have been reduced by 16 million BGN, which does not allow the electronification of approximately 100 administrative services[50] .

The value of *indicator O1-9 "Number of projects for the development of sectoral e-government systems (e-procurement, e-health, e-customs, e-archiving, e-security, etc.)"* has also been reduced (from 15 to 13) as a direct consequence of the reduction of the budget of OPGG PA 1. At the time of the change (2020), 9 projects had been contracted under the OPGG for the development of sectoral e-government systems, implementing the measures of the RMEG. Out of the 6 additional measures related to sectoral systems foreseen in the updated RMEG, it was assessed that measure 42 "Introduction of Electronic Invoicing with prior analysis and evaluation of the impact of the introduction, including analysis of the e-invoicing implementations already made" (with an estimated OPGG budget of €7.5 million) would not be implemented. Measure 48 "Implementation of the NHIS - Stage 3" (with an estimated budget of BGN 6 million), with the Ministry of Health as the responsible institution. The estimated total cost of the two operations amounts to BGN 12,5 million. In this context, the target value of the indicator has been reduced from 15 to 13 pcs.

A change has been made to the name and reporting method of indicator *R1-3 "Number of supported priority electronic services, including intra-administrative, transaction-level and/or payment-based government HSS used more than 5,000 times per year".* The changes included: change of the name – "Share of administrative and intra-administrative services used more than 5,000 times per year, which are at level 3 and 4[51] and are based on the state HPC"; change in the way the indicator is reported, instead of the number, the share (%) of services used more than 5,000 times per year, which are at level 3 and 4 and are based on the state HPC is reported; change in the baseline value of the indicator from 193 pcs. Change in the target value of the indicator from 418 to 225 (by subtracting the baseline value) and change in the resulting target value of the indicator from 225 to 100% of services used more than 5 000 times in 2020, in line with the data reported by the administration in 2021.

The fourth amendment[52] to the OPGG also relates to terminated projects. The existence of unfulfilled measures from the roadmaps for the implementation of the e-government and administrative reform strategies financed under PA 1 of the OPGG, the increasingly short period of eligibility for expenditure under the OPGG (31.12.2023), the risk of loss of programme funds, the critical delay in the implementation of key projects, as well as the

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[50] Within the OPGG, the financing of measure 48 "Implementation of the NHIS - Stage 3, with an estimated budget of BGN 6 million and responsible institution Ministry of Health, which foresaw the implementation of approximately 30 EASs, some of which were internal administrative, was cancelled. The available budget under the OPGG for the implementation of measures under the Concept for Registry Reform (Measure 3 of the RMEG) had also been reduced by BGN 10 million, with the estimated funds under this measure reduced from BGN 35 million to BGN 25 million. As a result, some of the projects foreseen for implementation under this measure will not be supported under the OPGG, resulting in a reduction in the number of electronic administrative services under the programme by a further 70 pcs.

[51] Level of provision under the Administrative Register Ordinance. For each administrative service entered in IISDA, a level of provision shall be indicated.

[52] https://www.eufunds.bg/sites/default/files/uploads/opgg/docs/2022-10/1.%20Programme_2014BG05SFOP001_5_0_bg%20%281%29.pdf

structural changes brought about by the dynamic political environment in the country are the reasons for the MA to analyse and monitor the risk of loss of funds and the implementation of the programme indicators. The fourth amendment of the programme was adopted by Decision No. 639 of the Council of Ministers from September 02, 2022 and the EC Decision from October 05, 2022.

The changes under PA 1 are in relation to the identified risk projects implemented by MeG, NSII, MoC, MoJ, MRDPW and BAFS. The MA took a number of actions to stimulate beneficiaries to take urgent action in relation to the implementation of activities and the achievement of the planned indicators under the programme. The MA prepared a monthly Report on the implementation of the measures foreseen in the Risk Register. In spite of the efforts made by OPGG, some of the projects are significantly delayed and may not be implemented in the remaining programme period. As a consequence, the MA took actions to release the grants from the identified projects at risk. It was intended that the financial resources released would complement the resources for the purposes of Decision of the CoM No328/2022. This also leads to changes in some indicators as it is not possible to achieve their target value. The target value of the following indicators has been changed:

- ✓ **O1-5 Control, revenue and regulatory authorities supported for the development of organisational and analytical capacity, including for joint controls** - the value has been reduced from 15 to 12 pcs as a consequence of the termination of administrative contract No BG05SFOP001-1.026-0001-C01/14.01.2022. Implementation of CAIS "Corruption Risk Analysis" with beneficiary CCCCIAP with target value of the indicator 1 pc and expected termination of administrative contract No BG05SFOP001-1.013-0002- C01/07.04.2021 "Cloud e-services for administration" with beneficiary MeG with target value of the indicator 3 pc.
- ✓ **O1-6. Projects for the development of the state HPC** - the value has been reduced from 4 to 2, this change is a consequence of the termination of administrative contract № BG05SFOP001-1.002-0007-C01/21.03.2017 "Completion of the National Health Information System (NHIS) - stage 1 and stage 2" with beneficiary MoH with a target value of the indicator 1 pc, as well as due to the expected termination of administrative contract No BG05SFOP001-1.002-0017-C01/ 18.08.2017 "Digitisation of the archive of immovable cultural property of global and national importance, establishment of a specialised information system, electronic register and public portal" with beneficiary Ministry of Culture with target value of indicator 1 pc.
- ✓ **Indicator R 1-5 Functioning NHIS** is dropped due to the termination of the project of the Ministry of Health, in connection with the envisaged by the Decision of CoM No. 727/5.12.2019, the award of the system integration services to "Information Services" JSC, which leaves unresolved the issue of compliance with the rules for state aid in the provision of grants to administrative bodies falling within the scope of Decision of the CoM No. 727/5.12.2019.

The main contribution of PA 1 investments can be summarised as follows:

Table 4. Main contribution of the implemented investments under PA 1 (completed as of 30.11.2023).

№	Beneficiary	Results achieved
	Updated Single Portal for access to electronic administrative services, providing access to over 1800 services *Upgraded horizontal and central electronic control systems* **Upgraded State Hybrid Private Cloud (SHPC)**	
	Council of Ministers	Package of 1566 streamlining measures approved of work processes Regulatory amendments made and reduced the administrative and regulatory burden on citizens and businesses (1215 measures implemented or about 80%) Open Data Portal
	Registry Agency **Single portal for requesting electronic administrative services**	*Upgraded:* • Commercial Register and Register of Non-Profit Legal Entities and • Property Register *Created:* • **Single portal for requesting e-administrative services of the Registry Agency** *Developed:* • **33 electronic administrative services related to** the registration of circumstances concerning commercial companies and non-profit legal entities, making inquiries through remote access from the Property Register, issuing certificates and issuing certified and uncertified copies of acts
	Customs Agency **Administrative services of the Customs Agency**	*Created:* • **13 new registers and 2 upgraded registers:** Unified registration of traders for electronic communication with the CA and the EC, Customs representation, Transit, Importation, Temporary storage, Reporting of customs debts, Collateral, Documents processed on paper, Disposal of goods, Unified registration and identification of economic operators - EORI) *Developed:* • **4 electronic administrative services** related to the registration of traders for electronic communication with the Customs Agency and the European Commission, customs representation and

№	Beneficiary	Results achieved
		updating of data used for the issuance of EORI number • **100% availability of information systems ensured**
	Public Procurement Agency **CAIS "Electronic Public Procurement"** **Administrative services of the Public Procurement Agency**	*Established:* • **The Centralised Automated Information System "Electronic Public Procurement" (CAIS EOP)** *Developed:* • **3 e-administrative services** related to public procurement
	Executive Agency "Automobile Administration" **Administrative services**	*Upgraded:* • **12 registers and databases** administered by the Executive Agency "Automobile Administration" for periodic technical inspections of road vehicles and for training and driving license tests *Realized:* • **9 e-administrative services related to** conducting driving tests, etc.
	Commission for Protection of Competition **Electronic services of the CPC**	*Upgraded:* • **Register of the Commission for Protection of Competition and new information portal** *Developed:* • **6 e-administrative services** related to initiation of proceedings, submission of notification of concentration, and complaints to the CPC
	Commission for Regulation Communications **Measuring quality of service for internet access** **Service Tariff Comparison Tool** **Mechanism to limit instances of unconscious roaming**	*Created:* • Mechanism for measuring and monitoring the quality parameters of the Internet access service provided over fixed and mobile networks • Tariff comparison tool for electronic communications services • Mechanism to limit instances of unconscious roaming *Upgraded:* • Licensing and registers information system, including 8 registers (and their sub-registers)
	Ministry of the Interior **Portal for electronic administrative services of the Ministry of Interior**	*Upgraded:* • Vehicle Register and • Register "Control of General Dangerous Goods" *Established:* • **The automated information system "Licensing and control of private security activity"** *Developed:*

№ Beneficiary	Results achieved
	• **18 electronic administrative services related to** the issuance of driving licenses, registration of vehicles, acquisition of firearms and non-firearms and private security activities.
Ministry of eGovernment **Single portal for access to electronic administrative services - egov.bg**	*Updated:* • Single portal for access to electronic administrative services *Created:* • *1826 e-services, of which 1215 e-administrative services by category* --Business *and entrepreneurs; Civil rights and legal order; Taxes and fees for citizens; Health and health insurance; Work, pension, social assistance, etc.* • *502 administrations joined*
Ministry of Transport and Communications **GIS-based electronic platform "Single Information Point"**	*Established:* • **GIS-based electronic platform "Single Information Point"** providing access to information on existing physical infrastructure suitable for deployment of electronic communications networks, as well as planned and ongoing construction activities *Developed:* • **6 electronic administrative services** related to the provision of information on electronic communications networks, submission of applications necessary for the deployment, maintenance and improvement of networks, etc.
National Revenue Agency **Portal for electronic services**	*Updated:* • **Portal for electronic services** *Upgraded:* • Register of liabilities • Register of obliged persons
National Centre for Information and Documentation (NCID) **Portal for electronic services and registers**	*Created:* • Register of issued D visa certificates, • A single register of all active, interrupted and graduated undergraduate and postgraduate students, • Joint register of professional qualifications, • Joint Registry for Academic Recognition *Upgraded 5 registries including:* • Register of higher education institutions, • Register of scientific activity, • Register of academic staff, • Register of issued APOSTILLE certificates

№	Beneficiary	Results achieved
		10 electronic administrative services related to the issuance of certificates for recognition of educational and scientific degrees, admission of candidates for studies in higher education institutions and scientific organizations and issuance of APOSTILLE certificates of educational and certification documents issued by institutions in the system of pre-school, school and vocational education and training, by higher education institutions and scientific organizations, by the Ministry of Education.
	Agency of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadaster (AGCC) **Creation of cadastral data in digital form and development of the electronic administrative services of the State Cadastral Cadaster Commission**	*Cadastral registers completed and improved:* • with numerical data for 96 settlements covering an area of 8 581 ha. • by correcting an obvious factual error in a non-urbanised area of 993 344 ha., with an affected area of 2 543 ha.; Four registries upgraded
	Ministry of Justice **Development and implementation of an electronic information system "National Register of Seizures"**	*Established:* • Single entry point information system for seizures with electronic public sale module included *Developed:* • **4 e-administrative services** related to the provision of reports on attachment by bailiff, existence of attachment on property and change of status of attachment
	State Archives Agency (SAA) **Development and implementation of an e-archiving system**	*Created:* • E-archiving system for valuable electronic documents • Insurance fund on optical media in the SAA. Digitized 1983 media of audio-visual documents (1100 slides, 287 glass records, 462 gramophone records, 25 magnetic tapes, 24 audio cassettes, 4 filmstrips and 81 videotapes) and imported into the System of e-archiving of valuable electronic documents.
	Results to be achieved by the end of the programme	Institutional architecture of the NSSI for the processes related to pensions, cash benefits, allowances and guaranteed claims Uniform national registers of BABH by areas of control Unified Information System of the FSC

Source: OPGG, https://eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/13498 and UMIS 2020

Effectiveness achieved in implementing PA 1 is measured by the extent to which the objectives have been achieved as measured by the outcome indicators. The indicators for priority axis 1 and their performance are presented in the following table:

Table 5 PA 1 indicators (as of 30.11.2023)

№	Indicator	Target value 2023	Verified value in ISMS as of 30.11.2023.	% implementation
O1-1	Number of supported administrative regimes reviewed for simplification	700	1085	**155%**
O1-2	Number of legal acts for which impact assessments have been carried out	65	61	**94%**
O1-3	Administrations supported for the introduction of integrated administrative services	103	135	**131%**
O1-4	Number of municipal services supported for standardisation	20	17	**85%**
O1-5	Control, revenue and regulatory authorities supported to develop organisational and analytical capacity, including to carry out joint inspections	12	7	**58%**
O1-6	State HPC development projects	2	1	**50 %**
O1-7	Number of supported registers	100	117	**117%**
O1-8	Supported e-services for their delivery in transactional mode	750	435	**58%**
O1-9	Number of projects for the development of sectoral e-government systems (e-procurement, e-health, e-customs, e-archiving, e-security, etc.)	13	5	**38,46%**
R1-2	Number of standardised municipal services implemented in all municipal administrations	20	17	**85 %**
R1-4	Functioning electronic tendering system (e-procurement)	1	1	**100%**
R1-6	Proportion of administrative and intra-administrative services used more than 5,000 times per year that are level 3 and 4 and are based on the state's HPC	100 %	0	**0%**

Source: OPGG MA, data as of 30.11.2023.

For PA 1, all indicators have been agreed, with indicators O1-4 and R1-2 agreed and 85% implementation rate achieved. Indicators O1-1, O1-3, O1-7 and R1-4 are fully implemented. As regards the indicators O1-2, O1-5, O1-6, O1-8, O1-9 and R1-6 partially implemented as of

30.11.2023, no risk of non-implementation is expected for these indicators as they have been agreed and the projects expected to contribute are yet to be reported.

In this sense, it can be noted that the objectives of the priority axis, as measured by the indicators achieved, have been effectively achieved. The Managing Authority has been able to find flexible solutions and to negotiate the funds despite the many difficulties, risks and changes that have occurred during the programme implementation period (described in the text).

In order to highlight the contribution of the implemented investments, information from external sources has been used in addition to documentary analysis, thus highlighting the effects achieved by the implementation of the projects.

The Case study for **Bulgarian ESF co-funded project: "Evaluation of the progress of ESF support to public administration" of the European Commission[53]** examines the project BG05SFOP001-1.001-0002 "Transformation of the administrative service model" (TMAS). The report presents the background and objectives of the project; main challenges and difficulties during implementation; key developments in the implementation process; results and impacts achieved; and lessons learned and the contribution of the ESF.

The Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020 envisages a thorough transformation of the provision of administrative services, and the Roadmap to it envisages the introduction of complex administrative services as an innovative form for the benefit of citizens and businesses. It is envisaged that as a result of the implementation of the CAS model, the administration will first of all start offering electronic services, and at a later stage the services will be grouped on the principle of "episodes of life" and "business events".

TMAS is designed to support the achievement of specific objective 1 of OPGG Priority Axis 1, namely "Administrative services and e-government" and to contribute to the achievement of two of the defined outcome indicators of the programme – "administrations supported to introduce integrated administrative services" and "number of standardised municipal services". TMAS is designed to address the deficit of complete and structured information on administrative services, regimes, information sets and registers. It is designed to answer many open questions at the time of implementation - how many and which services exist, how they are provided, what documents are required, what fees are charged and on what legal basis.

The transformation of the administrative service model is a huge reform, but it does not only affect the administration. The Law on Administrative Services for Individuals and Legal Entities, adopted in 1999, provides for the application of the provisions on administrative services, in addition to central and local administrations, to organisations providing public services. However, such a large-scale inclusion of public service providers in the service and

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https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi69rn0krqEAxUzXvEDHXZlCtkQFnoECBMQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fsocial%2FBlobServlet%3FdocId%3D22646%26langId%3Dbg%26usg=AOvVaw0RPD4td7erYyoI8hYQvfEE&opi=89978449

regimes inventory activities carried out under the TMAS was done for the first time and consequently provoked a very large reaction among them.

As a partner in the project, the NAMRB has implemented one of the main activities, started in early 2016, in which the working procedures have been analyzed and the applications and processes for providing municipal administrative services have been unified. This activity overcomes the existing heterogeneous practices in the provision of the same administrative services in different municipal administrations. Following a prioritization process, 17 services have been selected for which the required documents, forms and templates for requesting and receiving services, as well as the deadlines for their provision, have been harmonised. Required documents, forms and templates for requesting and receiving the services, as well as the deadlines for their provision have been harmonised. The forms were approved by amendments to the Administrative Services Ordinance in July 2019.

The main activities implemented (6) include:

- Development of electronic forms (user interface) for requesting and obtaining by the administrations electronic certificates from the registers integrated in RegiX;
- Conduct a large-scale inventory of: (1) administrative services and regimes and their compliance with the requirements of the legislation[54] ; (2) existing information sets and registers involved in the work processes of providing administrative services; (3) identify the administrative services provided by public service providers[55] , ensuring the implementation of the rules for the organization of administrative services by them;
- Analysis of the state of registers in the public administration and preparation of a Concept and Roadmap for registry reform;
- Analysis of practices and construction of services based on the principle of "life episodes" and "business events"; and
- Selection of priority services provided by municipalities and development of unified procedures and forms for requesting and providing them

The main activities of the project have been completed, with the baseline activity and main achievement of the project being the extensive inventory of all regimes, administrative services and registers and the inclusion of 50 administrations in the pilot exchange of information from the registers maintained by different administrations. Documents and procedures for 17 services provided by municipal administrations were unified and are now mandatory. A Concept for Registry Reform has been developed, outlining the scope and stages of the relevant next steps.

However, due to a reduction in the PA 1 budget, the second activity of the measure "Implementation of Life Episodes and Business Events Services" foreseen in the SCRDA, with

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[54] Assessment of compliance with the forecasts and requirements of the APC and the Act on Limited Administrative Regulation and Administrative Control of Business Activity
[55] Public service providers are typically utility companies, internet and telecommunications companies. The project also considers hospitals, schools and kindergartens, banks, notaries as public service providers.

an estimated budget of BGN 5 million, has not been implemented under the OPGG, but models for the implementation of the 10 Life Episodes and Business Events services identified with the support of the OPGG have been developed in two stages with projects at the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) of the European Commission[56] . These activities have been funded through the project "Support for Public Administration Reform", with the beneficiary being the Administration of the Council of Ministers and a grant from the European Union Structural Reform Support Programme, which ended in May 2021. A package of documents has been developed for sending for inter-ministerial coordination a draft Decision of the Council of Ministers on the approval of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Episodes of Life "Childbirth", "Intra-country Relocation", "Starting a Business", "Hiring and Employee", "Closing a Business". Again in 2021, work has started on the implementation of 5 new life episodes – "Issuance of a Driving License", "Purchasing a Car", "Loss of Job", "Purchase of a real estate" and "Getting married". The activities are in the framework of the project "Advancing Public Administration Reform" funded by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service.

The project ends implementation at the end of 2023 and while the benefits are already being realised, the potential for future development is high. And to date, the visible effects are increased exchange of information necessary for the provision of administrative services and reduced service times for citizens and businesses between administrations. The measures taken to simplify and harmonise services with regulatory requirements will reduce the burden on business and the costs of carrying out economic activities. The project is also expected to have a long-term impact through the adoption of regulatory amendments ensuring quick and easy administrative services to citizens and businesses.

Specifically, the benefits are reflected in the adopted package of measures for the transformation of the administrative service model, approved by Decision of the CoM No. 704 of 2018, with the responsible institutions reporting periodically to the Administrative Reform Council. The summary report as of 31.12.2020 shows that 78% of the envisaged measures have been implemented (1215 out of 1566 measures). By the end of 2022, 80% of the measures have already been implemented. The rest are in the process of implementation.

The reduced administrative and regulatory burden is reflected in:

- Introduced ex officio collection of information (including compliance with the one-time data collection and creation requirement, as well as the provision of administrative services as internal administrative services) for 254 services;
- Removed from the administrative register as 238 services continue as an activity;
- Advanced access channels and the possibility to combine these channels when requesting and receiving 80 services;
- Reduced required documents from applicants to 60 services;
- Reduced period for 32 services

[56] https://www.gov.bg/special/bg/administratsia/byudzhet/byudzhet-na-ms/podroben-otchet-za-izpalnenieto-na-programniya-byudzhet-na-ministerskiya-savet-za-2021-g

TMAS is complemented by another key project for improving administrative services, supported by OPGG - BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001 "Upgrading of horizontal and central systems of e-government in connection with the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of administrative services", implemented by the State Agency e-Government" (SAeG subsequently transformed into MeG). It further upgrades the e-Government systems developed during the period 2007-2013 and creates a long-term solution for the provision of internal administrative services by upgrading and integrating existing information systems in a way that allows automated retrieval of evidence and circumstance from registers. As a result of the project implementation, standard rules and procedures related to the implementation of the Unified Model for Requesting, Paying and Providing Electronic Administrative Services have been developed along with a prototype e-forms management system integrated with the e-service and e-payment systems and implemented, an interface for payment request and notification has been built, the eAuthentication (eAvt) system has been upgraded, the eService system has been upgraded, and the ePayment system has been integrated with the POS terminal. Also, the system for inter-register exchange (RegiX) has been upgraded, 52 registers have been supported by building new and upgrading existing adapters, 80 administrations have been supported for the introduction of CAS. Another outcome of the project is the upgrade of the Single Portal for access to electronic administrative services. New administration website templates have been updated or created (for administrative structures established by law, for executive agencies, for ministries). As a result, e-forms have also been developed for the EASs, integration of the information systems of public administration structures with horizontal e-government systems has been established, 470 EASs have been upgraded to level 3 or 4 as a result of the e-forms developed and published under the activity.

Establishment and upgrading of the basic horizontal systems of e-government such as the Secure Electronic Serving System (SSES) (upgraded), the Electronic Messaging Exchange System (EMES) (upgraded), the RegiX platform for access to registry authentication reports (upgraded), the Unified Model for requesting, paying and providing electronic administrative services (Unified Model), etc. has allowed administrations (including municipalities) to build automated communication connectivity of their IS through the SOES and to create communication access to them for citizens and businesses through the SSEB.

The ever-expanding registry certificates simplify a number of administrative procedures and services. The implementation of a number of internal administrative services using the established horizontal communication connectivity systems also contributes to this.

The simplification of procedures, services and processes on the one hand and their digitisation on the other are parallel processes. The replacement of the paper document by the electronic document and modern IC technologies provide ample opportunities for the development of business processes in a short time and with minimal influence of the subjective factor in their implementation. As an example, 206 services and procedures implemented on the basis of the Single Model have been developed and are being implemented by municipal administrations through the eGovernment Portal in a short timeframe. In these cases, the

provision of certification documents by applicants has been replaced by the use of registry certification references.

Key issues for the improvement of the management of the administrative processes and the systematic work of the municipalities in order to facilitate the access to the provided administrative services in their broadest spectrum and increasing their quality are:

- Administrative use of register references in the provision of administrative services.
- With the creation of the platform for providing registry certification references RegiX and the gradual increase of the registers connected to it, the municipalities have optimized the provision of services and procedures for citizens and businesses by removing the requirement for applicants to provide certification documents, the data from which are contained in the references on the platform. E.g. in the exercise of some of their statutory powers, municipalities have implemented procedures such as setting a fee for a social service provided. Since the changes were introduced, they have been able to carry out the procedure without requesting proof of the income of the person using the service, but obtain the necessary information ex officio from RegiX.
- The scope of electronic administrative services has been extended.
- Municipalities have made significant progress in making EAS available through the eGovernment Portal and the Secure Electronic Delivery System (SEDS). Their use provides certain conveniences to the users such as quick application, time saving as they do not need to visit the municipality, no transport costs especially if the applicant is outside the municipality. An increasing number of municipalities provide citizens and businesses with the opportunity to pay for services provided by the municipality or for their obligations to the local budget through a virtual POS terminal of the horizontal payment system, the transaction being free of charge for citizens and businesses.
- On the other hand, however, the lack of an e-identification tool accessible to the population and limited knowledge or lack of basic computer literacy mainly among adults in small settlements hinders the use of EASs.

Based on PA 1 case study data as of October 2023, real-time information: https://analytics.egov.bg indicates the following:

- ✓ 502 joined the Single Administration Model;
- ✓ Number of administrations connected to the Electronic Payment System - 602;
- ✓ Number of services developed under the Unified Model - 1224;
- ✓ Number of e-services requested through the Single Model by citizens and businesses for 2022 - 68385 pcs., for 2023 - 74717 pcs. for comparison to 2019 were 2500 pcs.

Interest from citizens and businesses is steadily growing, as evidenced by the public information on the website www.egov.bg.

Status Report and Annual Plan for the Development and Renewal of Information Resources in the Administration and Information Resources of the Unified Electronic

Communications Network of the State Administration for National Security Needs[57] of the MeG examines the strategic framework of information resources and their status in the administration. According to the report, as of December 31, 2022, information on 1,712 electronic services has been published on the Single Access portal upgraded under the OPGG, of which 1,132 EASs have been implemented through centralized and unified requesting. More than 1 600 e-forms and supporting documents have been developed for requesting them, with 272 new EASs for centralised requesting published on UPAEAS for 2022. Information on 580 EASs provided in a decentralised way through developed portals of administrations - Ministry of Interior, Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre, Customs Agency, National Social Insurance Fund, National Revenue Agency, etc. has also been published. At the end of 2022, the services of 501 administrations, of which 49 are central, 302 municipal and district, 27 regional and 123 specialised territorial administrations, will be provided centrally. Again, the same report discusses centralised systems for e-government - they are designed to assist administrations in the process of improving the quality of service to citizens and businesses. For the most part, they allow multiple administrations to work with a single system installation (multi-tenant solutions). At this stage the following centralised systems are operational:

Inter-register Data Exchange Environment, upgraded with OPGG funding: in 2022, efforts continue to expand the possibilities for the exchange of data as internal electronic administrative services (EASS) between administrative authorities through the Inter-register Data Exchange Environment. The total number of query users is close to 1 100. 82 main registers administered by 28 central administrations - ministries and executive agencies - are connected to the environment and 218 queries to the registers have been implemented.

By the end of 2022, the total number of queries made to registers is 221 549 749, with 75 872 201 queries made during the reporting period. According to the 2022 system logs:

- The Public Procurement Agency is the institution[58] with the most enquiries - 14 651 689;

- The Ministry of Interior provided the most data - 21 455 115;

- The Bulgarian Identity Documents Register is the most frequently accessed - 17 678 146.

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[57] https://egov.government.bg/wps/portal/ministry-meu/ministry/ministry-report
[58] In the Interregister Exchange environment there are users (consumers of queries) and providers of queries

Figure 6. References and records visited, 2022.

Total Number: 221 549 928
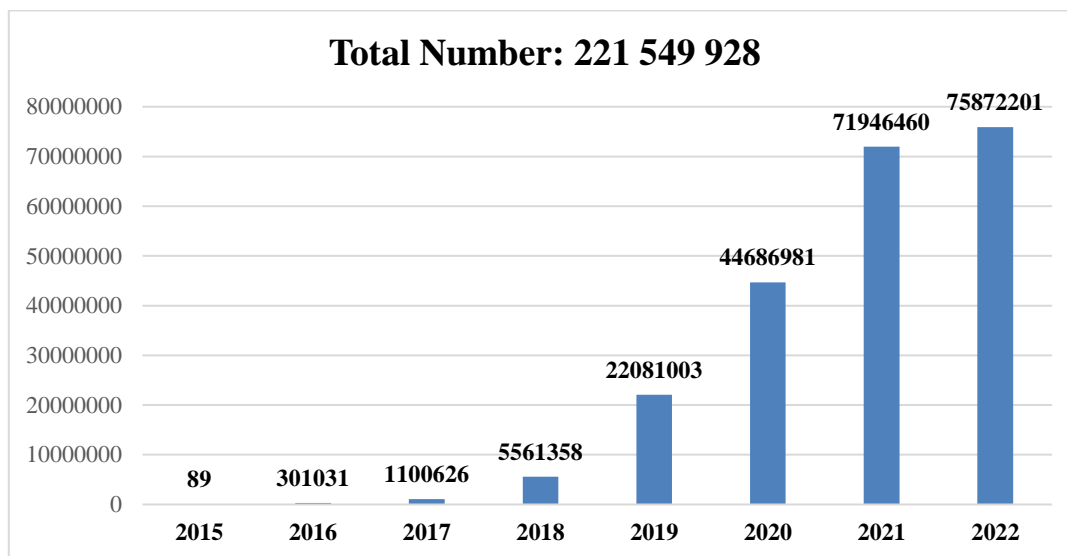
Figure 7. Top 5 most visited administrations
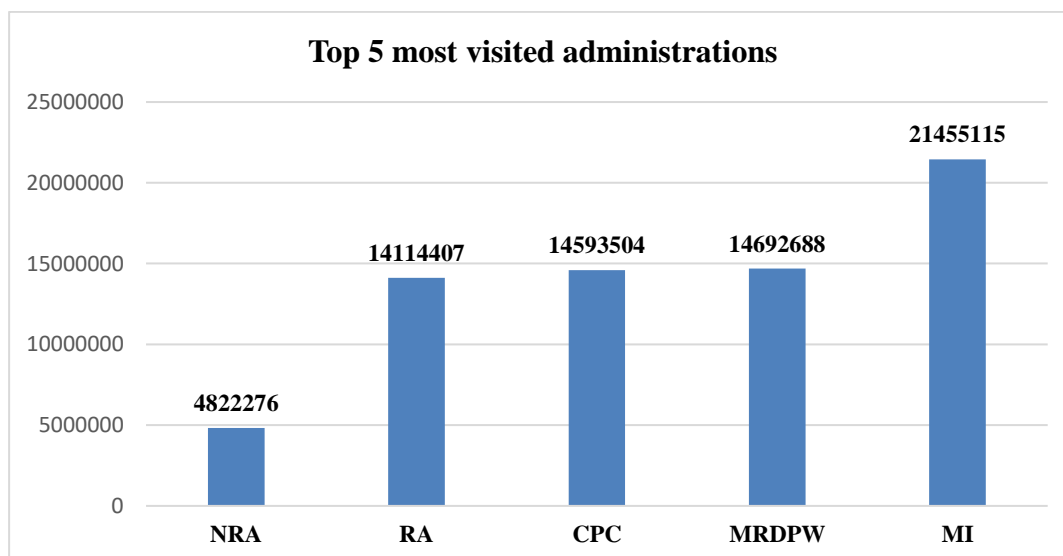
The information annex, available at https://info-regix.egov.bg/main, publishes the data on the registers connected and the operations to access them, as well as statistical and reference information on the use of the system. The developed and implemented administrative application is actively used, at the electronic address: https://admin-regix.egov.bg/main and the client application: https://client- regix.egov.bg/main.

All municipal administrations are connected to the Inter-Register Data Exchange Environment. The increased use of the Inter-Register Data Exchange Environment is due to its popularisation among users as well as to the legal requirements obliging the administrative

bodies and the persons referred to in Art. 1 and 2 of the EMA to provide the EAA in order to reduce the administrative burden for citizens and businesses.

State Hybrid Private Cloud (SHPC)

Project BG05SFOP001-1.005-0001 "Upgrading and development of the State Hybrid Private Cloud for e-Government needs" is in line with SO **1 Transformation of administration and public institutions into digital, Specific objective 1.3. Ensure digital solutions, information systems and shared resources for e-government, Measure 32 (Information Technology and Knowledge Industries)** Upgrade and develop a State Hybrid Private Cloud for e-government (Stages 1 and 2) - Implement commitments under the e-Government Act and Implement integrated measures and achieve baseline cyber security of shared infrastructure and upgraded systems.

The investments under OPGG PA 1 with project BG05SFOP001-1.005-0001 Upgrading and development of the State Hybrid Private Cloud for e-Government needs with beneficiary SAeG have contributed to the construction of the engineering infrastructure of the Center for Data Processing 2 (CDP), the supply and installation, testing and commissioning of equipment for the CDP, the supply, installation and implementation of software for the CDP, the migration of an existing information and communication system and service of SAeG to the CDP. In addition, 30 SAeG staff and 20 users of the HPC have been trained. Server equipment was also delivered, installed and commissioned for the needs of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MAFF), included in the shared cloud infrastructure for cloud service provision, and for the needs of the Registry Agency, included in the shared cloud infrastructure for cloud service provision. As part of the activities, a repository for backup copies of data from critical e-government systems and registries has been built and put into operation .

The SHPC is one of the main components of the shared resources of e-government, through which information resources (hardware and system software) are provided and configured to build information systems providing e-services to citizens and businesses. Their effective use depends heavily on the provision of sufficient resources to maintain a high level of technology and to develop a critical mass of users and services. The scope of the SHPC includes data centers.

The construction of the State Hybrid Private Cloud and the gradual increase in capacity, according to the needs, facilitates the administrations in the electronification of the services they provide to citizens and businesses.

Given the characteristics of existing information systems and various technological limitations, not all system and application services can be implemented and/or deployed in a fully virtual environment. The architecture of the public private cloud is hybrid and allows the integration of specific hardware that, due to technological or licensing constraints, is not amenable to virtualisation, as well as existing IT infrastructure, in order to preserve the

investments made to date. Capacity has been increased in stages, according to resource needs and current technological developments, with a view to efficient and effective management.

The benefits of building a public private cloud are reduced capital and operational costs, improved services to businesses and citizens, faster delivery and provisioning of required resources, manageability, interoperability, scalability, resilience, high level of information security and increased cyber-security.

At the end of 2022, the information resources provided by SHPC are:

- Eighty (80) ministries and departments have been provided with 1,217 virtual machines and 1,188 TB of disk space;
- 78 ministries, agencies and municipalities were given 2,492 mailboxes from email;
- There are 1 601 users (ministries, agencies and municipalities) of the Electronic Messaging System (EMS);
- 28 ministries, agencies and municipalities make copies of data in the data repository of the e-Government Infrastructure Agency, and 628 TB of the available 800 TB have been made available for this purpose;
- Colocation of infrastructure in data centers is used by 4 ministries and departments.

Analytical report "Analysis of the expected effects on the business environment of projects funded under the OPGG, prepared by the Institute for Market Economics Foundation, November 2022.[59] The preparation of the report was commissioned by the MA in connection with a planned information campaign on the results achieved under the OPGG and their impact on society, in September 2022, with the analysis focusing on the expected effects on the business environment of projects implemented with OPGG support. The scope of the contract includes 4 key e-government related projects as follows:

- BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001 "Upgrading of horizontal and central systems of e-government in relation to the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of electronic administrative services";
- BG05SFOP001-1.002-0011 "Upgrading of NRA core systems for providing data and services to internal and external systems";
- BG05SFOP001-1.002-0002 "Upgrade of the Customs Agency's core systems for the provision of data and services to external systems - BIMIS 2020 (phase 1 and 2)";
- BG05SFOP001-1.003-0002 "Development, implementation and maintenance of a unified national electronic web-based platform: the Centralised Automated Information System "Electronic Public Procurement"".

The study used the Impact Analysis method. The impact assessment aims to determine whether the implementation of the specific projects has had a positive impact on the business environment in Bulgaria, whether there have been unplanned impacts and to what extent these have influenced the overall impact.

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[59] https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/11689

According to the analysis, the main conclusions regarding the achieved/expected direct and indirect effects of the 4 key projects studied are related to: reduction of administrative costs and time, cost and time savings for citizens and businesses, improvement of the quality and access to administrative services, increase of trust and transparency in the provision of administrative services, optimization of internal processes in the administration, significant improvement of the public procurement process (increased standardization of the public procurement process), improvement of the quality of the public procurement process, improvement of the quality of the public procurement process, improvement of the quality of the public procurement process, improvement of the quality of the public procurement process, improvement of the quality of the public procurement process, improvement of the quality of the public procurement process, improvement

The report also looks at the effect of the projects as an increase in trust in the institutions and greater transparency of the administration. As many institutions, including municipal administrations, have transparency ratings and assessments, it is on this basis that it is assessed whether trust in them has increased. The link between replacing a paper-based process with an electronic one and increasing transparency and reducing opportunities for abuse comes mainly through the elimination of face-to-face communication with administration representatives and the absence of cash-in-hand payments. While assessing levels of corruption is difficult even at the national level, the ranking of so-called active transparency produced by the Access to Information Programme (AIP) allows for a fairly detailed look at the transparency of institutions from a civil society perspective. The ranking is based primarily on the ability (and willingness) of individual institutions to respond to electronically submitted requests, as well as to requests for access to public information and the extent to which they publish information on the Internet. The AIP assessment is based on over 100 individual transparency indicators, depending on the institution.

Within the projects under consideration, the Customs Agency is the most active participant in inter-regional exchange and achieved an active transparency rating of 89.5% in 2022, which is also one of the largest improvements in the country. It cannot be argued that the high level of transparency is a direct consequence of electronification alone; another possible explanation is that the most transparent institutions are generally those that develop e-services first. However, the link between the two can hardly be dismissed.

The recommendations made as a result of the analysis of the above projects are related to the need to introduce a unified model for personal identification, which on the one hand would lead to overcoming the need to maintain the different standards applied, as well as to increase security and ensure the prerequisites for more active and widespread use of electronic services; more active promotion of the developed systems / services; accelerating the process of inclusion of administrative units in the common ecosystem (unified model);

Again, according to the IME study, the operation of the CAIS EPP, developed under the PPA project, has led to an overall improvement in confidence in the platform (CAIS EPP),

which encourages participation and leads to an increase in bids submitted. In the long term, this increases competition, the choice of contracting authorities is greater and prices that are closer to optimal are achieved. Statistics on new registrations show a positive trend. The most active registration period is in 2020, when the CAIS EPP was launched, but new registrations are also observed in subsequent years. Before the mandatory use of CAIS EPP, 6663 contracting entities and 30 857 contractors were registered as of December 31, 2019. In 2022, a total of 3,107 profile registrations have been made in CAIS EPP[60] , of which: 2,728 business entities (4,343 in 2021) and 379 contracting entities (1,533 in 2021). The registrations of new organisations and users are decreasing compared to the previous two years, which can be attributed to the fact that most actors in the public procurement market are already registered in the system.

The PPA periodically publishes surveys in areas relevant to the development and improvement of the public procurement environment in the country. In 2022, 3 surveys have been published – "What helps you in working with CAIS EPP?", "What way of communication with the CAIS EPP User Service Centre would you choose?", "Survey on the quality of service from the CAIS EPP User Service Centre". A total of 1 076 opinions were received[61] , on the basis of which the PPA is planning and implementing optimizations in the call center's work organization in order to improving the service to end users of the platform. Data on the Public Procurement Portal's traffic for 2022 are as follows: number of unique users visiting the EPP Portal - 184 186; number of sessions - 1 222 676; number of page views - 1 676 479; unique page views - 1 407 599; average number of sessions per user - 6.64; average number of pages viewed per session - 1.37.

On the basis of data in the Public Procurement Register (PPR), the Agency monitors the state and development of the national public procurement market and periodically publishes information. The total number of public procurement contracts announced in 2022, all published in the EPP Portal, is 21 955. Over the last three years (2020, 2021 and 2022), there has been an increasing trend in the number of public procurement notices, with a 13% increase in 2022 compared to 2021. In 2022, 82 055 tenders were submitted through the EPP Portal. This compares with 86 382 in 2021. The total number of concluded public procurement contracts published in CAIS EPP in 2022 is 30 338, with a total value of BGN 20 262 756 418,91.

Another effect of increased confidence from all participants is an increase in the likelihood that innovative products and services will be offered by bidding companies, as there is more certainty that bids will not be rejected for bureaucratic reasons.

Publishing easily accessible, understandable and timely information on all stages of the procurement process increases transparency. This in turn improves competition, increases efficiency and reduces the threat of unfairness or corruption. Minimising the risk of fraud, corruption and mismanagement of public funds leads to a "level playing field" for all bidders, thereby promoting competition.

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[60] Annual reports on the activities of the PPA for 2022 2021, 2020 https://www2.aop.bg/aop/annual-reports/
[61] Annual Report on the Activities of the AOP, 2022

The automation of a number of steps in the system prevents the deliberate anticipation of requirements, most often purely bureaucratic, that were possible before the CAIS EPP. Opportunities for error, abuse and manipulation in the application process are greatly reduced.

The contribution of the OPGG funded projects of the Customs Agency should be pointed out as extremely significant.007-0001 "Upgrade of the Customs Agency's Core Systems for Data and Service Delivery - BIMIS (Phase 2)" and BG05SFOP001-1.025-0001 "Upgrade of the Customs Agency's Core Systems for Data and Service Delivery - BIMIS (Phase 3)".

With the implementation of the projects, the Republic of Bulgaria, as a Member State of the EU, fulfils its obligation under Article 1 of Decision No 70/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on a paperless environment in customs and trade and Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/2151 of the European Commission establishing a Work Programme on the development and implementation of the electronic systems provided for in the Union Customs Code (UCC) by building secure, integrated, interoperable and accessible electronic customs data exchange systems.

The optimization of the processes in the Customs Agency and their digitalization is one of the strategic objectives of the Bulgarian Customs Administration and is an important prerequisite for achieving the necessary administrative capacity for the implementation of European legislation in the field of customs, which undoubtedly leads to the improvement of the internal administrative, information and communication infrastructure.

In the framework of Phase 1, the Institutional Architecture of the Customs Agency has been implemented for all main customs processes (import, export and transit) and critical auxiliary customs processes as a tool for meeting national and European requirements for the development of electronic customs. 4 new e-administrative services related to the registration of traders for electronic communication with the Customs Code of the European Commission (EC) have been developed. 10 new registers have been created: Unified registration of traders for electronic communication with the CA and the EC, Customs representation, Transit, Import, Temporary storage, Recording of customs debts, Collateral, Paper documents, Disposal of goods, Unified registration and identification of economic operators - EORI).

The Phase 2 and 3 projects have continued the process of transforming the customs administration into a digital administration. Under Phase 2, the AM Identity and Access Management System (IAMS) has been upgraded and aligned with the Union's functional requirements, ensuring that the requirements related to identity checks are met, ensuring the necessary levels of security in providing access to information systems in the exchange of information. The possibility for economic operators to have a single and uniform registration for all CA and DG TAXUD information systems, self-management by economic operators of electronic registration and use of the primary registers of the public administration (RegiX). A private cloud environment of the Customs Agency has been built as a flexible, easily manageable and extensible solution, ensuring fault tolerance; load balancing, automated management of hardware resources and compliance with the maximum response time for services.

With regard to the Customs Investigation and Intelligence activity, the Risk Analysis, Risk Information Processing, Administrative and Criminal Proceedings, Cash Declaration and Administrative and Criminal Proceedings modules have been created and have achieved:

- A transformation towards a qualitatively new way of organising business processes in Member States' customs administrations;

- Automation of risk analysis activities to enable the efficient allocation of limited resources to carry out inspections, focusing efforts on prevention and analysis of customs documents, goods, vehicles and persons that pose a risk, are of high economic importance to the country and are most likely to breach regulatory provisions when applying the common risk management methodology;

- Exchange of operational information for the prevention, intelligence, detection and investigation of administrative offences and criminal offences within the competence of the customs authorities; pre-trial proceedings, anti-fraud and protection of intellectual property rights;

- Monitoring of the administrative penalty proceedings and follow-up of appeals against the issued penalty decrees;

- Automation of the control of cash, precious metals and precious stones;

In the framework of Phase 3, the module "National Implementation of the Import Control System 2 (ICS2 Release 1)" has been implemented. The Import Control System 2 (ICS2) is a large-scale advance cargo information system where customs administrations receive information on all goods entering the EU before their arrival. In this way, customs can better manage risk by selecting in advance which cargo should be thoroughly checked. At the same time, the system facilitates legitimate trade, as legitimate economic operators pass through customs controls faster. The EU's new advance cargo information system ICS2 supports the implementation of this new regulatory regime for customs safety and security aimed at better protecting the single market and EU citizens. Economic operators have to declare safety and security data in ICS2, through a Summary Entry Declaration, as until now this obligation has been in place for all air carriers. From March 2024 it is also to be introduced for land (road and rail) and waterborne maritime transport.

The Import Control System 2 achieves the following effects:

- EU citizens and the internal market are better protected against security and safety threats;

- It creates an opportunity for EU customs authorities to better identify high-risk shipments and intervene at the most appropriate point in the supply chain for inspection;

- Proportionate and targeted customs measures at external borders in crisis response scenarios are supported;

- Cross-border exemption for legitimate trade is facilitated;

- The exchange of information between economic operators and EU customs authorities is simplified.

As part of the activity, the CA Institutional Architecture has been developed and implemented with respect to the Risk Analysis Module (MAR) - reflecting changes arising from the Import Control System, the Customs Automated Export System (CASS) and the Customs Transit Information System (CTI2). Automation of aviation security risk management activities, pre-arrival security and safety risk management activities and information retrieval and analysis processes has been carried out, using shared analysis services - the EU level analytical tool (SSA).

Bulgaria is one of the first Member States to have implemented the Import Control System 2 and to have reflected the changes in the Risk Analysis module.

The Excise Movement and Control System (EMCS) has been upgraded to ensure the computerisation of the simplified electronic administrative document and the necessary adaptations in accordance with EU Directive 2020/262. The adoption of the Common Excise Duties Directive allows both economic operators to use the facilities provided for in the legislation and the customs administration to control the processes.

New types of registrations of economic operators who only send or receive excise goods with excise duty paid document e-AD have been introduced within the scope of the new regime by creating 4 new registers in the System for Excise Data Exchange (SEDE):

A new trans-European centralised import clearance system has been set up as part of the Customs Import Information System. The new system reduces the number of customs clearance procedures resulting in reduced administrative burden, cost savings with centralised processes and transparency since all authorised importers are linked, optimising logistic flows at EU level and increasing process efficiency.

The realised effects of the Customs Agency projects are:

- Improved administrative services for businesses and citizens as participants in the single European customs environment;

- Phased implementation of commitments to implement European legislation and initiatives to create a paperless environment and fully electronic customs - through the subsequent development and implementation of the CA Institutional Architecture to cover core and ancillary business processes;

- Fast and easy access for all stakeholders to core and ancillary business processes - a guarantee of competitiveness for economic operators and border security;

- Increased reliability of CA systems through:

  ➢ Reducing downtime, which contributes to a better business environment and competitiveness for economic operators - for the last six months the uptime of the CA core information systems (NCTS, ECS, ICS, EORI, CSRD) that have been built/upgraded under the above projects is 100%;

> ➢ Reducing the error rate in the exchange of messages between the customs information systems of the Republic of Bulgaria and EU Member States, as well as between the CA and economic operators.

The realized benefits of the project for citizens and businesses are:

- Increased security and safety of goods entering the European market;

- Better results in the fight against smuggling, trafficking in human beings and money, and other illegal practices;

- Speeding up the work of legitimate businesses whose cargo is processed faster through border crossings and with fewer formalities;
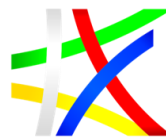
- Unification of procedures across Member States.

The realised benefits for the administration are:

- More possibilities to analyse large amounts of information;

- Systems with increased speed, 100% availability and a high level of network and information security;

- Better connectivity at EU level;

- Phased transition to the use of cloud environment and cloud architecture.

Within the framework of the project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0011 of the NRA, the main information systems providing electronic services in the Agency as well as the register of obligations and the register of obliged persons have been upgraded, which has ensured easier exchange of information between the internal systems as well as with the systems at national and cross-border level and has improved the quality and speed of the administrative services provided to natural and legal persons. Within the project, a completely new e-services portal of the Revenue Agency has been built, where users can benefit from more than 160 e-services. Customers of the NRA no longer have to apply for access to the services if they want to use them for themselves. The NRA portal associates access to the services with individuals rather than their QES, resulting in the relief that no additional paperwork needs to be submitted to the NRA to access the agency's services when changing QES. Authorization for access to business-to-business services now occurs without agency staff intervention.

As a result of two projects of NCID BG05SFOP001-1.006-0001 "Establishment, upgrade and integration of information systems and registers of NCID to improve the process of providing administrative and reference services" and BG05SFOP001-1.017-0001 "Establishment, upgrade and integration of electronic registers of the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NCID) in the field of higher education" the following results have been achieved:

Electronic apostilles have been introduced. Bulgaria is one of the few countries in the world where such a project has been implemented (the introduction of e-Apostilles is currently

applied in only a few countries in the world, Bulgaria being the first in the EU). The project is very popular among users.

NCID provides the possibility to issue e-Apostilles of educational and certification documents issued by the education system *(by higher education institutions, by institutions in the system of pre-school, school and vocational education and training and by the Ministry of Education and its units)* in **apostille.bg.** The electronic system has two components - the issuance of an e-Apostille in electronic format with a digital certificate and the maintenance of a Register of issued Apostilles (e-Register). The innovation was made possible by linking all documents found in the registers for secondary education (since 2007) and for higher education (since 2012), which are scanned and stored electronically. The procedure is fully digitised from the submission of the request, through the payment of the service to the receipt of the certified documents, and the affixing of the electronic apostille is a one-off process, unlike the paper version. The new electronic service reduces the time and cost of issuance, guarantees the origin and authenticity of documents, eliminates the possibility of forgery, and facilitates authenticity checks of both paper and e-Apostilles in an electronic environment. By mid-September 2023, more than 6,000 e-apostilles[62] have been issued both to authenticate educational documents for the application of Bulgarian citizens to foreign universities and to legalize the diplomas of foreign citizens who have completed their education in Bulgaria.

A unified register of all current, interrupted and graduated students and postgraduates has been created - users of the register are all higher education institutions, state and municipal institutions, employers, foreign diplomatic missions, students, etc. By merging the registers, standardization of the information maintained, automation of work processes and provision of service data exchange has been achieved. In connection with the establishment of the merged register, the Register of Academic Staff (RAS), which contains data on PhD graduates, has been upgraded with additional functionalities. The upgrade has maximised the computerisation of processes and optimised the work of the administration. For the first time, the possibility of providing reports combining information from the different registers, showing the relationship between the number of students and the number of students and the professional field of study, etc., has been implemented. The reports can be used by external systems and institutions in connection with their functions.

The unified register is upgraded with a new module National Electronic Student Card, uniquely identifying students in the Republic of Bulgaria. The development of the student card in a technologically innovative way as an electronic card, which is nationally recognized, allows it to be easily linked to other national and European systems in order to implement automated electronic services, for example, to perform electronic verification of student/doctoral student quality, check the current status of students/doctoral students, create automated interfaces for the implementation of internal electronic services with the systems of Sofia Municipality, Urban Mobility Center, Bulgarian State Railway, libraries, etc. The effects achieved are as follows:

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[62] According to OPGG, https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/13645

- Overcoming traceability difficulties when a student moves from one university to another, from one major to another, including within the same university, or when enrolled in more than one major at different universities, as each person has a single unique number rather than several;

- Reducing the administrative burden and ensuring the credibility of student status. The issuance of the National Electronic Students Cards (NESC) is conditional on a person's entry in the statutory Joint Register of all current, interrupted and graduating undergraduate and postgraduate students, which is a prerequisite for data security and reliability;

- Equal treatment, equal privileges for all students - being a student at a minimum also entitles you to reduced fees for using the BWA, public transport, museums and other privileges. With NESC, undergraduate and postgraduate students can easily authenticate their status through their mobile device to universities, research organisations, student canteens, museums, theatres, etc. Issuing, downloading and using the NESK is free of charge and the card is valid for the entire period of study.

An example of a greatly improved business environment and greater transparency in the administrative system are the projects implemented by the Registry Agency: BG05SFOP001-1.002-0003 "Upgrade of the Commercial Register for integration with the platform for data exchange between Commercial Registers in the EU, embedding of the register of non-profit legal entities, integration with the property register, single entry point and transfer of the central register of special pledges" and BG05SFOP001-1.002-0004 "Upgrade of the property register for integration with the cadastral register and provision of additional e-services". All the main effects to which the investments contribute are described in Annex 5. The main results achieved are:

Under project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0003 "Upgrading of the Commercial Register for integration with the EU Commercial Registers data exchange platform, embedding of the register of non-profit legal entities, integration with the property register, single entry point and transfer of the central register of special pledges":

- A central registry of NPLEs (NGO) has been established and is part of the CRRNPLE;
- 20 new e-services have been implemented by the RA related to the registration/change of circumstances/declaration of acts of NGOs;
- An entirely new and updated portal of the RA for requesting electronic administrative services (EPRES) has been built in order to strengthen the interoperability and integrity of the information systems of the Commercial Register and the Register of Non-Profit Legal Entities (CRRNPLE) and the Property Register (PR), as well as new electronic services have been implemented. https://portal.registryagency.bg/
- Users can work with a wider range of devices, including mobile devices and operating systems, subject to manufacturers' requirements to use the latest up-to-date versions of their working devices;

- The Commercial Register is linked to the Business Register Interconnection System (BRIS). The interconnection between the registers ensures the cross-border exchange of data between them and facilitates the access of citizens and businesses to information on companies. The information transmitted relates to the opening or closure of liquidation, insolvency and striking-off proceedings of companies from the registers. The information made available on the European e-Justice portal through BRIS is collected in real time from the business registers of the Member States, without any charge to companies.

Under Project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0004 "Upgrading of the property register for integration with the cadastral register and provision of additional e-services" the following results have been achieved:

- Sub-legislation and internal rules are aligned with e-government practice;
- The relevant functionalities for e-management of the Property Register Module in the Integrated Cadastre and Property Register Information System have been developed;
- 13 new e-services have been implemented, including internal administrative services related to registration of application, notification, issuance of certificates, transcripts and references;
- The remote access module (one-stop-shop) has been upgraded and the functionalities for internal and external users of the system have been improved. A new functionality for authentication of users using paid and free access has been developed, as well as an update of the user interface;
- Public access to all new e-services implemented under Activity 2 is provided through the EPRES portal at: https://portal.registryagency.bg

In support of the information presented, the evaluations of the beneficiaries of the OPGG PA 1 interventions, who have expressed their opinion on the contribution of the developed/upgraded information systems/electronic administrative services, are clear:

- Almost 100% agree with the statement that this has led to better and faster service

- Almost 90% believe that this leads to greater transparency and accessibility of the administration's work

- Over 90% say this contributes to increased end-user confidence

- Over 90% indicate that this is reflected in a reduction in administration costs - over 90%

- Almost 100% believe it leads to reduced costs for citizens and businesses and

- Over 90% said that it contributes to increasing the number of end-users due to reducing administrative burdens.

While the contribution of PA 1 investments has been significant, a number of difficulties and problems have been identified in the implementation process. Many of the difficulties are related to delays in the implementation of projects with beneficiaries MeG, MoI, MoJ, MoRDPW, MoC and BAFS due to delays in the preparation of technical specifications and

procurement; appeals against contracting authority acts; incorrect implementation of procurement contracts; /regulatory changes. Some of the projects have been terminated due to inability to implement them (for example, the project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0007 "Completion of the National Health Information System (NHIS)" with beneficiary MoH, due to a change in the Law on e-Government[63] (§ 45. of the Transitional and Final Orders), stipulating that the activities on system integration[64] shall be carried out by "Information Services" JSC). Other implementation difficulties are related to the impact of external environmental factors (described in the introduction to the evaluation assignment). The bottlenecks and problems identified by the MA are presented in the "Analysis of the risk of loss of funds and non-achievement of indicators" prepared by the OPGG MA in early 2020[65], and are discussed in more detail in this report in Evaluation question 1.9. What are the barriers to the development of e-government and e-justice?

The dynamic political environment and continuous changes in the last three years (a series of parliamentary elections, alternating caretaker governments and one regular government, all with short mandates, and long periods of a non-functioning National Assembly) have hampered key reforms, and in some places there is a lack of continuity in terms of projects under implementation (e.g. Under project BG05SFOP001-2.022-0001 "Development of a unified, efficient resource management system in the system of the Ministry of Interior" with the beneficiary MoI, the resource management system developed and delivered in early 2021 has not been implemented in a production environment, which has led to the project ending in 2022 without actual implementation).

Another challenge that hinders implementation is the formal expression of commitment to implement the measures included in the roadmaps for the implementation of the national strategies, but in reality a lack of willingness to present project ideas or to implement the projects, as shared in the qualitative research.

Both the regulatory changes made during the implementation process and the lack of regulatory changes required in order to implement certain projects hinder the implementation of the programme. For example, such a project is BG05SFOP001-1.002-0009 Implementation of CAIS "Civil Registration" and CAIS "Address Register". An example of regulatory changes that have had a negative effect on already approved projects is the amendments to the Electoral Code made on 23.12.2022, namely the repeal of §145 of the Transitional and Final Provisions (TFP) regulating remote e-voting, which led to the elimination of the need for financing the project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0015 "Development and implementation of a pilot system for remote e-voting" of the MeG for e-voting, in view of which the project was terminated.

Another challenge that posed difficulties was related to the closure of the SAeG and the establishment of the MeG. Although the effect of the establishment of the MeG was positive,

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[63] Addendum. - SG 102/2019 in force from 29.11.2019

[64] which include the provision of services for the establishment, maintenance, development and monitoring of the performance of information and communication systems used by administrative authorities, as well as activities that ensure the performance of these services

[65] https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/9949

given that a new administrative structure was being created, as well as the necessary regulatory changes in a number of laws and regulations related to e-government, such a change raised risks of delays in the implementation of the measures and actions planned in the e-Government Strategy and its roadmap, as well as for the implementation of the projects funded under the OPGG. According to the OPGG Annual Implementation Report for 2022, the closure of the SAeG/establishment of the MeG and the preceding and accompanying processes had led to a fatal delay in the procurement and a revision of the approach for the implementation of certain activities (4 MeG projects were partially or fully at risk, as possible appeals of the acts of the contracting authority could lead to the impossibility of implementation within the eligible timeframe until 31.12.2023).

Electronic identification

The national scheme for electronic identification, provided for in the Law on Electronic Identification, has not yet been established, which to a certain extent limits the access of citizens and businesses to EAS, including cross-border ones.

The current legislation in the Republic of Bulgaria provides that the persons referred to in Art. 1 and 2 of the LeG are obliged to provide citizens and organisations with the possibility to identify themselves when requesting EAS in accordance with the Law for Electronic Identification (LEI) or by means of electronic identification, determined by a decision of the Council of Ministers, issued and maintained by administrative bodies. By the end of 2023, no change has been made to the Administrative Register with a view to entering the electronic identification means and their level of security in a field specifically created for this purpose.

According to IISSA, 590 administrations have declared that they provide access to EAS with more than one means of electronic identification. According to the information, 63% of the administrations require QES, 20% - Personal Identity Code (PIC) and 17% - username and password or other means.

Under the OPGG a contract has been concluded with the Ministry of Interior for the implementation of the project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0006 "Development of the pilot system for electronic identification and deployment in productive mode" for the implementation of measure 78[66] - "Development of the pilot system for electronic identification and deployment in productive mode". The project was terminated in 2020 due to an appeal of the Selection Decision of the tender. The measure was removed from the scope of the OPGG and it was intended to be financed with the state budget.

Cross-border electronic identification

A significant problem is identified, related not only to the lack of a national scheme for electronic identification, but also to the strong limitation of the possible means of identification to qualified electronic signature, NRA PIC and NSII PIC. These limitations are by no means related to technological problems, but are mainly the result of a lack of political will to solve

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[66] Measure 78 of the Updated SEA Implementation Roadmap

the problem.

In this report, the bottlenecks are addressed in greater detail in Evaluation Question 1.9. What are the barriers to the development of e-government and e-justice?

6.3.2. Contribution of PA 2 investments

Priority Axis 2 "Effective and Professional Governance in Partnership with Civil Society and Business" focuses on the following specific objectives:

- Specific objective 1: Increase in the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms;
- Specific objective 2: Improving the specialised knowledge and skills of administrative staff and supporting career development mechanisms;
- Specific objective 3: Increase citizen participation in policy making and monitoring.

Main target groups: administrations at all levels, according to Article 38 of the Law on Administration; employees employed in all levels of administration; citizens; business.

Types of beneficiaries under PA 2 are central, specialised territorial administrations, civil society organisations and their associations, socio-economic partners.

The PA 2 indicator system includes 5 performance indicators (1 general and 4 specific), 3 result indicators to measure the achievement of the specific objectives.

Specific objectives 1 and 2 are the subject of evaluation in this evaluation task.

A theory of change model for Priority Axis 2 is also presented in the following figure.

*Table 6 Theory of Change **PA 2 "Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business"***

Specific objective	Needs analysis	Identified potential for impact	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
Increasing the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms	Quality policy development, implementation and results orientation Strategic planning and programme budgeting Coordination in the implementation of sectoral policies Quality performance management systems in administrations Structural analysis and structural changes in the administration for better governance Targeted support for decentralisation with a view to achieve an efficient distribution of administrative functions	Development of a uniform and standard practice for strategic planning. Development of high quality strategy documents Improved capacity of the administration to formulate result-oriented policies and develop strategic documents. Supported the methodological and information support for the implementation and reporting of the results-based budgeting, and more great accountability and feedback to the planning and decision-making process. Improve coordination in the implementation of sectoral policies. Improving strategic planning and policy implementation processes, which are cross-sectoral in nature, by stimulating mechanisms for cross-sectoral cooperation (working groups, joint actions, etc.) at national level, as well as cooperation between national, regional and local administrations. Improving monitoring of policy implementation. Consolidating and streamlining the structure of the administration and for an efficient distribution of functions between central, regional and local levels.	Support joint strategic planning initiatives for policies for which more than one institution is responsible, with a particular focus on ensuring mechanisms for their subsequent joint implementation. Support for strategic planning at municipal level. Implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system for public policies. Procurement activities statistical and sociological information for good governance. Establish effective mechanisms for collecting information, databases and using them for management decision making.	Administrations supported to implement quality management systems Number of functional reviews by sector/policy Number of new/updated training modules for administration supported Trained administration staff **Result indicators** Number of supported administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms Administrative staff who have successfully completed training with a certificate

		Supported decentralisation to achieve an efficient distribution of administrative functions. Outsourcing of functions from the administration to business and NGOs as a key opportunity for more efficient service delivery.		
Improving the specialised knowledge and skills of administrative staff and developing career development mechanisms	Introduction of effective methods for career development of administrative staff Coaching and internal exchange of experience in administrations Investment and resource needs of IPA and other public training organisations	Support to carry out training needs assessments prior to training. Investing in resources and establishing the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) as a a training tool for the administration and a think tank. Enhanced specialised qualification of public administration representatives on foreign and EU policy issues, qualification and selection and career development of the Ministry of Interior system staff, capacity at municipal level through the organisation of specific trainings.	Activities on human resources management in the administration and the professionalism of civil servants. Creation of training programmes and delivery of training by IPA Alternative forms of training delivery, including through the possibilities of new technologies. Strengthening the IPA's expert capacity to become an information and research center and a generator of ideas for the development of the administration. Assessment of training needs, curriculum improvement and development of training content; development of new modern forms of training; monitoring of the effectiveness of the trainings conducted; creation of an online library of training and information materials; support for providing the necessary conditions for the trainings. Strengthening the capacities of the Academy of the Ministry of Interior, the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of	Administrations supported to introduce quality management systems Number of functional reviews by sector/policy Number of new/updated training modules for administration supported Trained administration staff **Result indicators** Number of supported administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms Administrative staff who have successfully completed training with a certificate

| | | | Foreign Affairs, and the NAMRB in order to transform them into information and qualification centers for the development of the administration and the employees of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the municipalities, respectively Administration. Support to the Institute of Psychology of the Ministry of Interior to improve recruitment methods in the Ministry of Interior. | |

In order to assess the contribution, a review of the procedures and projects programmed and implemented, the results achieved and their effectiveness was carried out by measuring the degree of achievement of the output and result indicators. For this purpose, data on project implementation and reported results by beneficiaries presented in their technical reports as well as OPGG annual reports were used. A detailed description of the published, contracted and implemented procedures is included in Annex 5 of the report, describing the objectives of the procedure, beneficiary and partners, budget of the procedure/project, alignment with the objectives of the main strategic documents to which they contribute, and a description of the results achieved.

The following table shows the procedures and the contracts concluded, the majority of which have been implemented.

Table 7. PA 2 procedures, status as of November 30, 2023.

№	Procedure number	Name	Contracts concluded	Contracts/contracts in progress	Terminated contracts
1	BG05SFOP001-1.001	Data structuring and analytical activities in the implementation of the strategic documents for the development of public administration, the development of e-government and the introduction of e-government in the justice sector	1	1	0
2	BG05SFOP001-2.001	Strategic projects in implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020, PE, PCC and NATURA 2000	9	9	0
3	BG05SFOP001-2.002	Introduction of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in administrations	1	1	0
4	BG05SFOP001-2.003	Effective application of EU State aid rules to services of general economic interest (SGEI)	1	1	0
5	BG05SFOP001-2.004	Enhancing the expertise capacity of administrative staff	5	4	1
6	BG05SFOP001-2.005	Increasing the efficiency of the transposition of EU law into Bulgarian legislation and public regulation	0	0	0
7	BG05SFOP001-2.006	Specialised training for central administration	47	41	6
8	BG05SFOP001-2.007	Improving the system for feedback from users of administrative services and improving the quality of administrative services	1	1	0

9	BG05SFOP001-2.008	Comprehensive review and evaluation of the national public procurement system in Bulgaria	1	1	0
10	BG05SFOP001-2.010	Improving financial management and control systems and the internal audit function in the public sector	1	1	0
11	BG05SFOP001-2.011	Improving the concession policy	1	1	0
12	BG05SFOP001-2.012	Development of the analytical capacity of the Energy and Water Regulatory Commission	1	1	0
13	BG05SFOP001-2.013	Increasing the efficiency of the transposition of EU law into Bulgarian legislation and public regulation	1	1	0
14	BG05SFOP001-2.014	Developing the capacity to implement the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in administrations	1	1	0
15	BG05SFOP001-2.015	Trainings for administrative staff organized by the Diplomatic Institute of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria	2	2	0
16	BG05SFOP001-2.016	Development of the National Environmental Strategy and the development of the Unified Information System for NATURA 2000	2	2	0
17	BG05SFOP001-2.017	Trainings for administrative staff organised by the Institute for Public Administration	1	1	0
18	BG05SFOP001-2.018	Identifying high potential employees in the civil service	0	0	0
19	BG05SFOP001-2.019	Specialised training for the territorial administration	66	60	6
20	BG05SFOP001-2.022	Establishment of a unified, efficient resource management system in the system of the Ministry of Interior (completed without implementation)	1	1	0
21	BG05SFOP001-2.023	Support for the preparation of spatial fair transition plans for eight districts	1	1	0
22	BG05SFOP001-2.024	Increasing the expert capacity of the Ministry of Interior staff through specialized training	1	0	1

23	BG05SFOP001-2.026	Organisational development of the ESC and strengthening the role of organised civil society	0	0	0
24	BG05SFOP001-2.027	Improving the inspection control carried out by the State Financial Inspection Agency	1	1	0
			146	**132**	**14**

The effectiveness achieved in the implementation of PA 2 is assessed by the extent to which the objectives have been measured by the indicators. The indicators for Priority axis 2 and their performance are presented in the following table:

Table 8 Indicators under PA 2 (indicators under the NGO/SEP procedures are excluded) as of November 30, 2023

№	Indicator	Target value 2023	Verified value in ISMS as of 30.11.2023.	% implementation
O2-1	Administrations supported to introduce quality management systems	93	94	**100%**
O2-2	Number of functional reviews by sector/policy	6	6	**100%**
O2-5	Number of new/updated training modules for administration supported	100	223	**over 100%**
O2-6	Trained administration staff	105 000	153 717	**over 100%**
R2-1	Number of supported administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms	175	174	**100%**
R2-2	Administrative staff who have successfully completed training with a certificate	85%	98 %	**100%**

At the time of the evaluation, all indicators had been achieved and some had been significantly overachieved.

In this sense, it can be noted that the objectives of the priority axis as measured by the indicators have been achieved in an effective manner.

The main contribution of the investments under this priority axis is related to: 1) increasing the number of administrations applying organisational development and results-oriented management mechanisms and 2) improving the specialised knowledge and skills of administrative staff and developing career development mechanisms:

Increasing the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms

Under the OPGG, two IPA projects have been implemented to introduce the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in 94 administrations. The implementation of the CAF model is set as an important priority in a number of national strategic and programme documents for the development of the Bulgarian administration until 2020. The IPA projects include the implementation of a set of interrelated and complementary activities on the implementation of this tool for total quality management in public administration and a large-scale campaign for its promotion among Bulgarian institutions and organizations. The projects are discussed in detail in **PA Case Study 2:** Introducing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in administrations.

The main activities of the projects focus on:

- Conducting general training on CAF to develop knowledge of the model and the benefits of its application in the administration.
- Capacity development of the CAF Resource Centre at IPA.
- Implementation of the CAF model in 94 administrations (under both projects), including training on a specialised training programme developed to support administrations in the process of implementing the model.
- Capacity building for external evaluation on CAF implementation.
- Promotion of CAF in administrations.

According to the qualitative research, potential organisations are showing increased interest in implementing the CAF. The model has been introduced in central administrations (ministries, state and executive agencies, etc.), regional, municipal and specialised territorial administrations. Improvement plans have been made. Reports have been produced by the CAF Resource Centre on how the implementation process has progressed and how the plans are being implemented.

Based on the analyses performed in the PA 2 case study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- As a result of the implementation of the two OPGG-funded projects, the CAF model has been successfully introduced in **94 administrations**, which are implementing the model as a mechanism for organisational development and results-based management.
- Municipal administrations have shown the most interest in implementing CAF in both projects. During the in-depth interview, the IPA representative shared that at the regional and local level, the implementation of CAF was easier as there was better recognition and understanding of CAF by the organizations, while at the national level it was necessary to convince the management of the organizations of the benefits of the model.

A report on the results of a survey on the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the quality model "Common Assessment Framework CAF" among the administrations that have

implemented it in the period 2017 - 2020[67] , prepared by IPA experts, shows in an indisputable way the effectiveness and benefits of the implementation of the CAF model in the Bulgarian administration. The use of the model provides public organisations with:

- Ability to perform a self-assessment of the organisation based on a set of criteria that are widely accepted in the public sector across Europe;
- Ability to trace the cause-effect relationship between enabling factors/causes (what the organization does) and outcomes/consequences (what the organization achieves in its activities);
- A means of determining and measuring the progress and achievements of the organization;
- Ability to ensure consistency and continuity in the development of the organization and the necessary changes in its improvement process;
- A means to motivate employees by involving them in the improvement process;
- Opportunity to promote and share good practice both between different structures within an organisation and between different organisations;
- A means of improving the quality of management in the organization by implementing necessary improvement measures.

In conclusion, IPA has provided all the necessary prerequisites to ensure the sustainability of the implemented projects. According to the information gathered by IPA during the qualitative research, the institute continues to work by providing know-how and advice to the administrations free of charge. The IPA has consultants with practical experience and knowledge of the new features of CAF 2020 and its relationship with other management tools, and is able to support the implementation of the model in new administrations interested in doing so. As a result of the analysis carried out, it was found that for a small number of administrations, evidence of ex-post self-assessments was available. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that the supported administrations support the implemented model, and it is the institutional will and commitment that is a crucial success factor.

In the context of support for organisational development of the administration, other key projects with significant contribution under PA 2 should also be addressed. Within the framework of Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.001 "Strategic projects in the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020, PE, PCC and NATURA 2000", the ACoM has implemented projects addressing a number of measures in the Roadmap for implementation of the SDPA under its four strategic objectives as follows:

Project BG05SFOP001-2.001-0002 "Administration and Civil Society - Partnership in Governance" is in implementation of Roadmap for SDPA, Strategic Objective No. 1 "Effective Governance and Rule of Law", Objective 1.1 "Creation of a Sustainable Regulatory Framework", Measure "Improvement of the Practice of Public Consultation on the Public Consultation Portal www.strategy.bg" and Strategic Objective No. 2 "Partnership Governance

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[67]   https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/publicationscaf#cbp=/bg/prouchvane-na-efektivnostta-efikasnostta-i-ustoychivostta-na-modela-za-kachestvo-obshcha-ramka-za

with Citizens and Business", Objective 2.3 "Partnership for a Better Regulatory Environment". The project has updated the standards for public consultations (the last updated ones were from 2010). The Administrative Reform Council (ARC) has approved the Standards on 16.9.2019, which is a step forward in efforts to improve the practice in the administration to ensure citizen participation in decision-making and norm-setting processes. The Rules, Procedures and Criteria for the Designation of CSO Representatives in Consultative Bodies developed under the project have also been approved. These are intended to provide a sound basis and a unified approach in the practices for involving citizen expertise in consultative bodies. The rules contain model procedures and criteria for involving civil society. The project also promotes proactive and innovative forms of engagement with the civil sector, and has developed a Handbook on Crowdsourcing and Civic IT Support, and a Handbook on Civic Participation, and has developed a training programme for the implementation of the civic participation tools, with 200 central administration staff trained. In order to create the conditions for a better regulatory environment, the project has developed a Concept for co-regulation and self-regulation of the main economic sectors. This relates to functions and activities that could be derived from the public sector and regulatory regimes that could be administered by organisations external to the administration (e.g. sectoral). An annex to the Concept Note is the Standards for Implementing Alternative Regulatory Approaches. The Standards were approved by the CAR on 3.12.2020 and represent a document that is expected to serve as a basis for a broad public debate on alternative regulation of business activity - a different institutional and normative regulation from the conventional for the Bulgarian environment.

Project BG05SFOP001-2.001-0004 "Improving the efficiency of the selection of civil servants in the public administration" is in implementation of roadmap for SDPA, Strategic Objective 4 "Professional and expert management", Objective 4.2 "Improving the selection", measure "Introduction of a centralised first stage of the competition for recruitment to the public administration" and the National Reform Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria - measure "Introduction of a centralised stage of the competitions for civil servants".

In line with good international practices, our legislation has adopted the fundamental principle that appointments to the civil service should be made by competition. This principle is in most cases compromised by the impossibility of qualitatively assessing candidates at the entrance through the available tools and procedures. This leads to an inability to select the most suitable candidate effectively and qualitatively. In this regard, the adopted amendments to the Civil Servants Act (CSA) (State Gazette No. 57 of 22 July 2016) introduced two stages of the civil service competition, the first of which is centralised, which ensures transparency and objectivity in establishing the competencies required for civil service, as well as standardisation in the assessment of competencies at entry.

The project aims both to improve the selection of civil servants and to promote job opportunities in the civil service. The project has developed tests for centralised recruitment in the civil service (tests on general competences, basic knowledge and computer skills). A Testing Platform has also been developed, through which the tools for the implementation of the competitions for civil servants have been created in accordance with the law. The project

has also created a Portal for Jobs in the Public Administration (jobs.government.bg) in order to better organize and coordinate the search for staff and to better position the public administration as an employer.

Paragraph 15 of the Final Provisions of the 2020 State Budget Law of the Republic of Bulgaria amended the Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria (in force from 20 December 2019), repealing all provisions related to the centralised stage of competitions for civil servants. The amendment was made on the proposal of a Member of Parliament, without coordination with the stakeholders and public consultation. This legal amendment has called into question the practical application of the results already achieved by the project.

In relation to the unforeseen circumstances, the MA has requested the beneficiary to outline options for alternative use of the developed tests and platform. In this respect, amendments have been made to the Regulation on competitions for civil servants and selection for mobility, introducing the 'centralised stage' as an option for administrations when conducting competitions and selection for promotion and mobility.

The specific situation illustrates the negative impact of the lack of sustainability in the policies on the projects related to their implementation. It also highlights the problem of the practice of MPs/groups of MPs submitting draft laws to the National Assembly for discussion without applying the requirements for public consultation.

Project BG05SFOP001-2.001-0006 "Establishment of unified rules for conducting functional analyses of horizontal and sectoral policies" is in the implementation of Roadmap for SDPA, Strategic Objective No 1 "Effective Governance and Rule of Law", Objective 1.4 "Improvement of Institutional Structure", Measure "Establishment of a new model for functional review of structures and implementation of horizontal policies".

As a result of the implementation of the project, an analysis of the application of the Unified Methodology for Functional Analysis and the Manual for its implementation was prepared, after which both documents were updated and approved by the CAR by decision of 26.3.2019 (https://www.strategy.bg/Publications/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&categoryId=&Id=264&y=&m). Based on the updated methodology, functional analyses have been conducted under the following horizontal/sectoral policies within the project:

- Road Safety (covering the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and the State Agency for Road Safety);
- Preservation and presentation of immovable cultural heritage (covers the MoJ and the NIICH);
- Vocational Training and Education (covers the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Vocational Education and Training Agency);
- Disaster Risk Reduction (covers the Ministry of Interior - GDFSPP);
- Control environment in the public sector (covers MoF, SFCA).

As a follow-up to the ACoM project, a direct grant procedure entitled "Functional analyses on horizontal and sectoral policies" is foreseen in the IAWP 2020, in line with the

Roadmap for SDPA. Under this procedure, 8 administrations identified by the CAR are to be supported to carry out functional analyses of related sectoral/horizontal policies, also identified by the Council. By a Decision of June 2020, the CAR revoked the decision approving the administrations to be funded as specific beneficiaries under the OPGG to carry out the functional analyses. The rationale for the decision relates to the spread of COVID-19, the resulting extreme negative impacts, and the need to finance emergency measures to support affected vulnerable populations and economic sectors. In the context of the pandemic, the OPGG has been amended to reduce the target value of indicator O2-2 "Number of functional reviews by sector/policy".

Outside the scope of the OPGG, the updated Unified Methodology has been applied to carry out functional analyses in the systems of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications and the Ministry of Environment and Water.

Project BG05SFOP001-2.001-0009 "Introduction of the principle of shared services in the organisation and operation of the central administration" is in implementation of Roadmap for SDPA, Strategic Objective No 1 "Effective governance and rule of law", Objective 1.4 "Improvement of the institutional structure", Measure "Consolidation of the general administration".

The project addresses the existing pattern of organisation and functioning of general administration structures, which are characterised by high costs, heterogeneous practices and poor coordination of activities. The project activities include a detailed analysis of the existing situation in the areas of human resources management, financial and accounting activities and IT activities and the development of a model whereby administrations are progressively freed from performing non-core general and support activities in order to concentrate on their core functions. The aim is to create a model where one unit or administration provides shared services to other administrations.

The activities foreseen for implementation within the project included the consideration of different possible approaches, choosing the most appropriate organisational model, taking into account the specificities of the areas and activities to be implemented by the principle of shared services.

The project explored the possibilities of bringing the functions of the general administration to the level of the first authorising officer and developed an organisational model for the introduction of the principle of shared services and a roadmap for its introduction, adopted by the CAR.

Although criteria have been developed for the selection of pilot administrations for the introduction of the model, they were selected on a voluntary basis by the Council of Ministers

for the pilot introduction of the shared services model in Bulgaria[68] . These were the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Bulgarian Agency for Food Safety. Although one of the potential advantages was the commitment of the leadership at government level, the limitation that came up were that both the MoH and the BAFS were not among the leading organizations in Bulgaria in terms of adequate ICT infrastructure and resources available to spread the reforms, and have repeatedly stressed their reservations about the shared services model.

None of the central offices of the pilot administrations use the state human resource management information system EISHRMPA; BAFS did not have HRM Information System at all and most functions were performed manually, and the MoH used different HRM Information Systems at central and Regional level. The government does not have an IT system to manage financial and accounting activities, and consequently the pilot administrations did not have one, which was a major challenge for implementing a sustainable shared service solution in the area of financial and accounting activities.

It was planned that the model is implemented through the establishment of shared service units in the MoH for human resource management activities and the BAFS for financial and accounting activities and human resource management. In MoH this was implemented by amending the Staff Regulations and creating a separate unit. In BAFS, the functions of the staff in the existing Directorate for Human Resources, Training and Qualifications and the Directorate for Financial and Economic Activities have been complemented. This was done by updating the job descriptions of the staff in these units.

As part of the project's activities, the public administration facilities with representative and social functions were analysed and proposals for improving their management model with a view to the possibilities for shared services had been prepared.

With regard to the legal representation of the administration, an analysis and proposals to improve the existing situation in terms of shared services had also been prepared.

A methodological framework was also developed to allow the most effective use of the opportunities provided by shared services to optimize the work of the administration, as well as the development and implementation of a change management mechanism.

The benefits of implementing the model are indisputable and can be seen in different aspects - organizational, financial, material and technical. Clearly, strong political will and leadership is needed for its wider implementation, as well as the implementation of a timely and sustainable change management mechanism to ensure the successful delivery of the transformation.

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[68] According to the reports on the implementation of the project activities (the analytical documents have been developed by a World Bank team), by decision of the Council of Ministers, administrations have been selected that have voluntarily decided to pilot shared services. These administrations, the MoH and the BABH, expected to receive additional resources in terms of staff and new computers, but their expectations were not realised as the Shared Services programme did not plan for additional ICT infrastructure and staff to support the pilot implementation. The pilot administrations have been approved by the Administrative Reform Council by Protocol No. 44 0 dated 25.10.2017, in respect of the MoH and Protocol No. 45 dated 21.02.2018 in respect of the BABH.

The project "Improvement of the system for feedback from users of administrative services and improvement of the quality of administrative services" of the ACoM under Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.007 was implemented following the Roadmap for the SDPA, Strategic Objective No. 2 "Partnership management with citizens and business", Objective 2.2 "Improvement of service delivery processes", measure "Introduction of CAS". The project focuses on administrative services and aims to create a toolbox for improving their quality. As a result of its implementation, existing standards for the quality of administrative services have been updated and 11 new common standards of a binding nature have been formulated. The new standards are regulated in the Administrative Services Ordinance, amended and supplemented in 2020 and 2021 as a result of the project. The Customer Charter Development Guide and the Customer Satisfaction Measurement and Management Methodology, updated under the project, had been approved by Decision of the CoM from April 10. 2020. The project also updated the methodology for conducting a mystery shopper survey, based on which a pilot monitoring of 15 administrative services provided by different administrative structures was carried out. As a result, specific recommendations for improving administrative services were made to the administrations concerned.

The changes introduced in the Administrative Services Ordinance as a result of the project implementation are in the following key areas:

- Introduction of new quality standards for administrative services, harmonised with modern quality requirements and tailored to consumer needs;
- Regular provision of user feedback and research and management of service satisfaction. Feedback methods are defined, some of which are mandatory. An obligation to publish an annual report assessing user satisfaction for the previous year;
- Introduce common rules on communication with consumers (written, including electronic, and oral, including telephone).

According to the above, the project has created the necessary regulatory and methodological prerequisites for providing administrative services at high standards and in line with the needs of citizens and businesses.

Under two projects of the Ministry of Finance BG05SFOP001-2.003-0001 "Effective implementation of EU State aid rules in the provision of services of general economic interest (SGEI)" and BG05SFOP001-2.010-0001 "Improvement of financial management and control systems and the internal audit function in the public sector" the toolbox in the area of provision of SGEI by municipalities and the exercise of financial management and control and internal audit functions in the public sector has been created/updated.

The activities under the first project included analyses of the existing practice and organisation in the provision of services of general economic interest by municipalities, the related legal framework and of good practices applied by EU Member States in the field, rules and manuals on the conditions under which public funds are provided and spent in the implementation of SGEI, as well as model contracts for the award of such services, have been developed.

The activities of the second project included analyses of good practices in the field of financial management and control and internal audit in the public sector in leading EU countries and of the existing state of activities in in Bulgaria, the Internal Audit Manual, the Methodological Guidelines on the elements of FMC and three guidelines in the field of financial management and control in the public sector concerning ex-ante control, ex-post performance assessments and risk management were updated.

Improving the specialised knowledge and skills of administrative staff and supporting career development mechanisms

A total of 5 procedures have been funded under PA 2, aimed at improving the knowledge and skills of civil servants through training, in line with SO 2 "Improving the specialised knowledge and skills of civil servants and developing career development mechanisms" of PA 2 and measures of the Roadmap of the SDPA, mainly under Strategic Objective 4 "Professional and expert management".

The main beneficiaries of the training projects under a total of 3 procedures for the direct grant provision (BG05SFOP001-2.004, BG05SFOP001-2.015, BG05SFOP001-2.017) are the IPA (2 projects), the NAMRB (2 projects), the Diplomatic Institute under the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2 projects) and the Institute of Psychology of the Ministry of Interior (1 project).

The OPGG has seen a qualitatively new approach (compared to OPAC) to providing support for improving the professional competence of civil servants. The support is mainly provided through direct grant procedures to the identified key institutions that have training functions in relation to certain target groups and thematic areas (IPA, NAMRB, the Diplomatic Institute and the Institute on Psychology of MoI). This centralised approach ensured a more efficient process for identifying the needs of the target groups in line with current priorities and better coordination and coherence between the different beneficiary institutions. Under a total of 7 projects of IPA, NAMRB, the Diplomatic Institute and the Institute on Psychology of MoI, trainings have been conducted for more than 40 thousand civil servants at all levels, covering priority topics for each of the target groups (municipal officials, MoI system officials, etc.) according to the functional competence of the target group. E.g. under the NAMRB projects the topics are closely related to the functions of the municipal administrations, the MoI IP addresses the needs of the system related to the current processes in social, political, economic, financial and migration aspects. The IPA projects focus on themes related to e-governance and digital skills acquisition in line with OPGG interventions in this area and the overall e-governance development policy. In addition to the core activity of organising and delivering training for civil servants, through the OPGG projects, training organisations have also received support to build their capacity to prepare and implement a variety of training modalities, and some have also received support for process logistics and analytical capacity. With the support of OPGG, IPA, as the lead institution for professional and service training of civil servants under the Civil Servants Act, has upgraded its information system to fully digitize the processes of organizing, conducting and administering training.

Under 2 other procedures, but on a competitive basis (BG05SFOP001-2.006 and BG05SFOP001-2.019), support had been provided to a total of 101 central and specialised territorial administrations/territorial units of executive administrations. Through these projects, the beneficiaries were supported to organise and conduct as well as to participate in specialised training for over 15 thousand of their staff. The Guidelines for the application of the procedures specified as "specialised" training those that cover topics directly related to the specific activities of the territorial units/structures concerned, and that were not offered within the framework of the projects of the training institutions (IPA, the Diplomatic Institute, MoI IP). In general, the specialised trainings proved to be very useful for the individual administrations, since on the one hand their employees were trained in strictly profiled areas where they could not do so within the framework of other trainings, and on the other hand - the administrations could hardly allocate funds for trainings on such a scale (the maximum amount of the grants provided being 200 thousand BGN). With these two procedures a synergetic effect was achieved, as the range of trainings conducted by the training institutions had been complemented with more specialized ones that the administrations need.

Information on the specific results achieved by all PA 2 projects is presented in Annex 5 to this report.

As an illustration of the results achieved and the contribution of the implemented OPGG training to the administration, the long-term outcome indicator "participants whose labour market situation is improved within six months after leaving the operation" can also be examined. This indicator is defined in Annex I of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 (as amended by Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046) and covers the effects six months after the participant has left the operation (or the trainees have completed the training).

The information on this contribution is contained in the analytical reports of three surveys conducted by Alpha Research in three periods: March 2019, September-October 2020 and September-October 2022.[69]

Three training periods for the administration were studied (2016 to 31 July 2018, 1 August 2018 to 29 February 2020 and end of 2019 to 31 December 2021).

For all three periods, the survey respondents most actively participated in trainings conducted by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) - 63%, 65% and 64% respectively for each of the periods. The next significant proportion were respondents who indicated that they had been trained by their own administrations - 22%, 28% and 27% respectively. The high proportion of those indicating that they had received training organised by the administration in which they work is probably due to the fact that OPGG's PA 2 had implemented two competitive selection procedures which have supported over 100 administrative structures to provide training to their own staff. Participation in NAMRB training was indicated by 16% in the first survey and about 10% in the third survey. Participation in trainings of the other

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institutions (IPs at the Ministry of Interior and DIs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) was indicated by between 1 and 4% for all three surveys.

The total number of participants registering an improvement in their labour market situation (improvement in qualitative or quantitative measures, e.g. an increase in participants' qualifications, which should make them more competitive) for the first period was close to 22% (2,461 respondents), for the second period 19% of participants (2,477 respondents) and for the third period 17% (2,200 respondents).

The studies have also examined what improved labour market position could relate to and it appeared to be mainly in performing functions that require higher competencies, skills or qualifications and in taking up a job position with more responsibilities. For some of those trained, this is reflected in taking up a position involving promotion. Significant differences were observed by type of administration: participants from central executive administration structures, regional administrations and some specialised institutions were more likely than others to have improved their situation in the direction of a job requiring higher competences and/or promotion, and those from municipal administrations in the direction of a job with more responsibilities.

In the first survey, respondents indicated that their improved labour market position was mostly reflected in performing functions that require higher competences, skills or qualifications (51% of those who improved their situation) and in taking up a job with more responsibilities (40% of those who improved their situation). For a quarter, the improvement in situation was in taking up a position involving promotion.

*Figure 8. Changes in the Labour Market position*
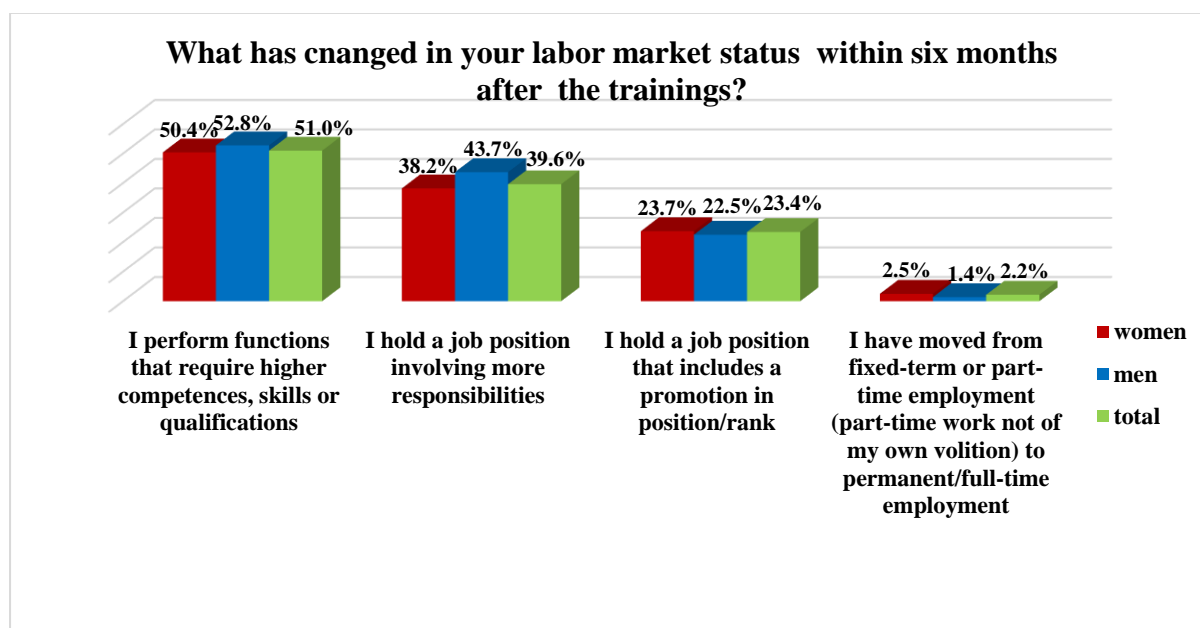
Again, the type of improvement for both men and women is identical. Significant differences were observed by type of administration: participants from central administration structures of the executive branch, regional administrations and some specialised institutions marked improvement more than all others in respect of functions requiring higher competencies and/or promotion, and those from municipal administrations improved in the direction of a job with more responsibilities.

In the second survey, the improved labour market situation is again mostly reflected in performing functions that require higher competences, skills or qualifications (54% of those who improved their situation) and taking up a job with more responsibilities (38% of those who improved their situation). For just over one-fifth, the improvement in status was in a position involving advancement in job title/rank.

In the most recent survey, those who expressed an improvement in their labour market situation reported positive change again in terms of performing functions that require higher competences, skills or qualifications (51% of those who improved their situation). Next, as indicators of improvement of the situation indicated taking a job position involving more responsibilities (39% of those who improved their situation) and taking a position involving promotion (30%). More men than women reported engaging in functions requiring higher competencies, skills or qualifications as a consequence of training. Positive changes related to promotion/ranking were reported more by representatives of central administration structures.

For all three surveys, there was a statistically significant difference between the type of administration in which participants were employed and the extent to which they perceived their labour market situation as improved.

Figure 9. Changes in labour market situation
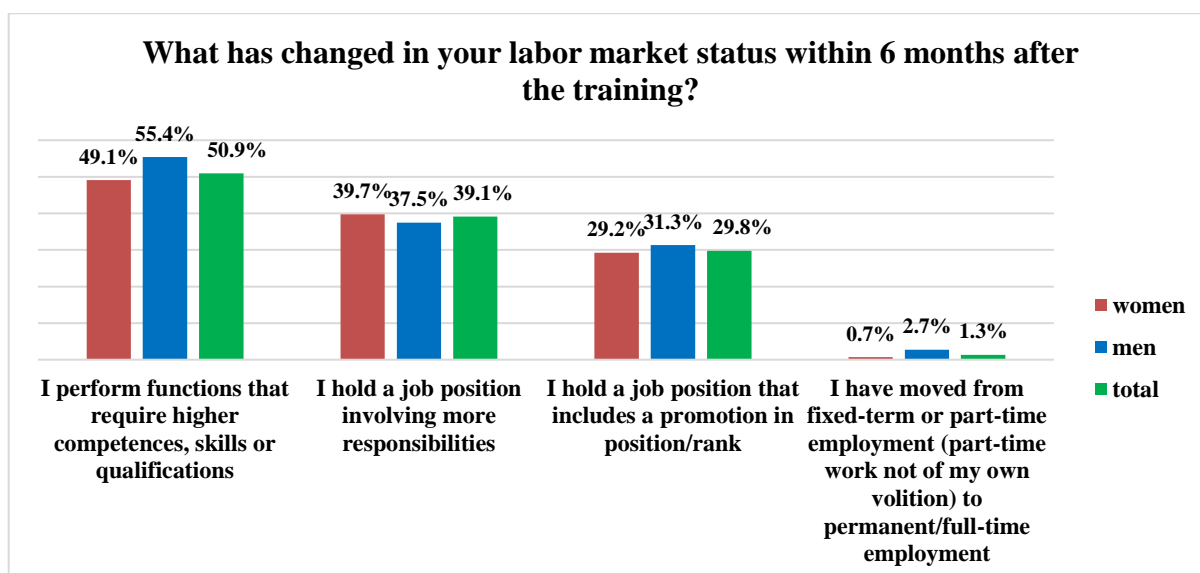
In the first study, significant differences were observed by type of administration: Participants from the central administration structures, regional administrations and some

specialised institutions have improved their situation more than all others in respect of functions requiring higher competences and/or promotion, and those from the municipal administration in respect of a position with more responsibilities. In the second survey, there is also a similar correlation: municipal administration representatives are the most convinced that their situation on the labour market has improved within 6 months of the training (23%), especially compared to central administration representatives, among whom the proportion registering an improvement is the lowest (17%).

In the third survey, the distributions are similar: representatives of municipal and regional administrations are the most convinced that their situation on the labour market has improved within 6 months after the training (23% and 21% of representatives of the first and second type of institutions think so, respectively). By comparison, among the representatives of the central administration and the specialised territorial administrations the share of those registering an improvement is under 16%, and among the administrations of a single authority such assessments are the least frequent - only in 10% of cases.

Based on the participants' evaluations, we can say that the contribution of the OPGG trainings to improving the labour market situation is indisputable:

In the first survey, 81% (or 2,234 of all participants) who experienced such an improvement stated that their participation in the program more or less contributed to it. In the second survey, 82% (or 2019 people of all participants) for whom there was such an improvement stated that their participation in the program more or less contributed to it, and in the most recent survey, 78% (or 3152 people of all participants) who reported such an improvement stated that their participation in the program more or less contributed to it.

The overall satisfaction of the participants with the OPGG trainings in the periods studied is another indicator for positive contribution. The contribution of the OPGG trainings in the first period of the programme implementation (2016 - 31st July 2018) is correlated with the subjective satisfaction of the participants. The majority (94%) - both those who improved their situation and those for whom no change occurred - were more or less satisfied. In the second period studied, participants expressed subjective satisfaction - 93% felt more or less satisfied. These were both those registering an improvement in their labour market situation and those reporting no specific positive change. In the most recent survey, 92% said they were more or less satisfied. A large proportion of those expressing subjective satisfaction are participants who report no specific positive change in their labour market situation.

Additionally, in analysing the contribution of the measures implemented under the OPGG in support of the administration, the annual reports[70] on the state of the administration were reviewed. The state of the administration reports assess and examine the development of the administration, including an assessment of the performance of the staff. Elements of these have been examined in search of a link between positive changes in the labour market status of civil servants who have participated in training and improved their skills, to test the

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[70] https://www.strategy.bg/Publications/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=81

hypothesis whether this has also indirectly contributed to better labour market performance or affected turnover in the administration.

The performance review is based on two indicators: the achievement of predefined objectives (or the performance of direct duties and tasks) and the demonstrated competencies required for the performance of the job in accordance with the relevant competency framework and job description. The annual performance evaluations are graded in five degrees. For each grade of the annual performance appraisal, Articles 16 and 17 of OTCEPCS specify the criteria to be achieved in the two evaluation indicators. For example, the highest grade of "Exceptional Performance" is to be awarded only when the appraisee has met all the objectives of his/her individual work plan in excess of the requirements/criteria set out therein, where some of the objectives met have contributed significantly to improving the performance of the administrative structure or administrative unit and, at the same time, has demonstrated, in all competencies, knowledge, skills and behavior significantly in excess of the requirements.

The distribution of final annual scores received in 2022 is as follows:

- "Outstanding performance" - 9 020 evaluations;
- "Performance exceeds the requirements" - 36 894 evaluations;
- Performance fully meets the requirements" - 23 768 evaluations;
- Performance does not fully meet the requirements - 706 evaluations;
- "Unacceptable performance" - 48 evaluations.

According to the annual reports[71] for 2022, 70,419 employees (91.42%), of those covered by the OTCEPCS evaluation (77,029 employees in total), were evaluated for their job performance: of these, 43,653 were tenured and 26,766 under an employment relationship. The number of civil servants not assessed under OTCEPCS is 48 613. (Due to the lack of at least 6 months actually worked during the period of evaluation, a total of 5,650 employees were not evaluated, including 3,476 civil servants and 2,174 in an employment under labour contract. Civil servants who have not worked for at least 6 months are most often newly hired - 2,620 (46.37%) or those taking leave for pregnancy, childbirth and raising a child - 1,720 (30.44%).)

A total of 5 650 staff, including 3 476 ex officio and 2 174 salaried staff, were not appraised. The employees who have not worked for at least 6 months are mostly new recruits - 2 620 (46.37%) or those taking leave for pregnancy, childbirth and parental leave - 1 720 (30.44%).

Performance appraisal in line with regulatory requirements is an important indicator of performance and a manifestation of managerial competence. The following graph shows performance ratings by year.

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[71] https://iisda.government.bg/annual_report/623

Figure 10. Distribution of scores across years, 2019-2022, State of the Administration Report, 2022
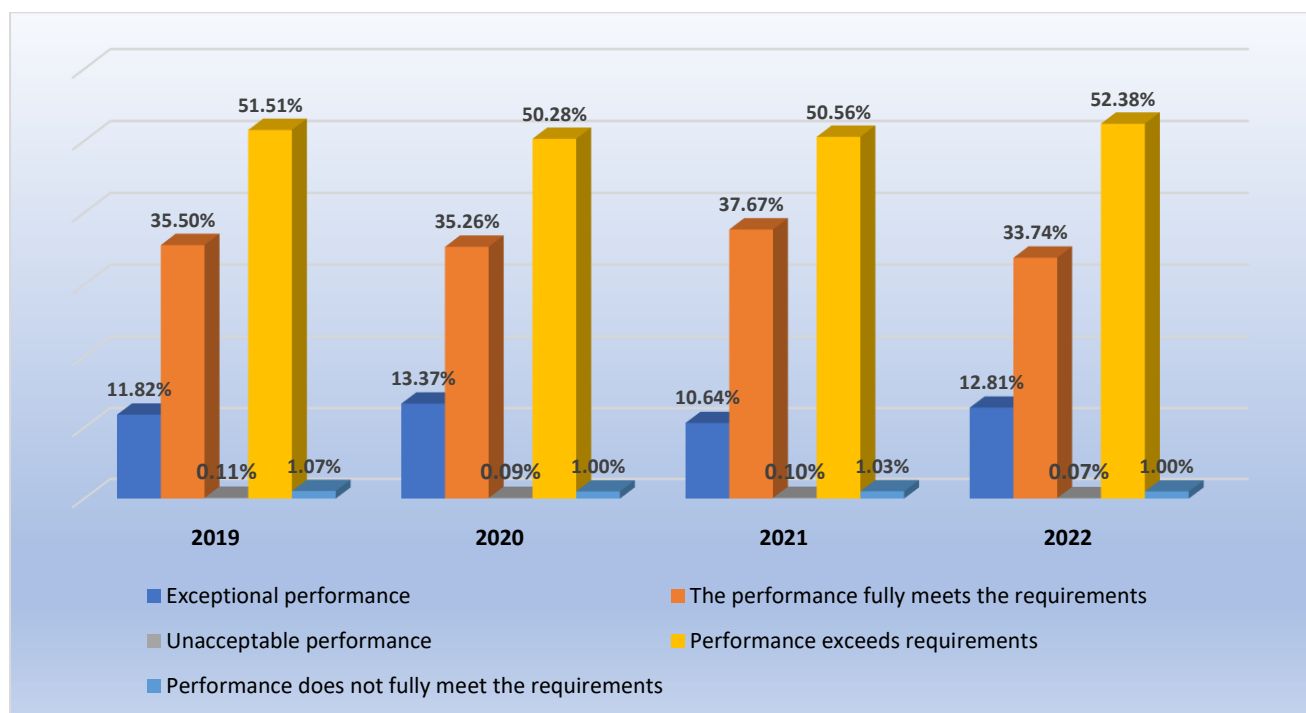
It is noteworthy that the shares of ratings vary very little over the years - for example, for outstanding performance the ratings range from 10.6% to 13.37%. Thus, it can be concluded that the performance of the employees moves in similar ranges, with small outliers - unacceptable performance or performance that does not meet the requirements.

In addition to the performance evaluations in the State of the Administration reports the chapter on Human Resources contains a section on Termination of Employment. The analyses included in this section provide information on the reasons for terminations and turnover in the administration.

According to the data for 2022 (the annual reports of the administrations validated in IISPA), a total of 11 055 employment contracts were terminated in 2022. Of these, 4 118 were terminations of service under the LSC, 5 649 terminations of employment under the Labour Code, 1 259 terminations of employment under the Law for Ministry of Interior and 29 terminations of employment under the Law for Ministry of Defense.

In this reporting year, out of the total of 4 118 service relationships terminated under the Law for Civil Service, most were by mutual consent - 1 834 or 44.54%, followed by terminations due to acquired entitlement to retirement pension - 587 or 14.25%.

Table 9. Turnover in administrations, 2019 - 2022

Indicators/years	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total number of civil servants/employees	131 762	131 704	131 970	132 005
Civil Servants/Employees with terminated legal relationships	11 992	9 745	10 219	11 055
Average turnover	9,1%	7,41%	7,74%	8,37%
Council of Ministers	15,94%		28,7%	20,77%
Regional administrations	13,87%	13,86%	23,40%	43,54%
Administrations of State Commissions	16,3%	12,46%	20,93%	20,97%
Ministries	4,36%	4,32%	5%	6,11%

Data from the state of the administration reports

The data show that average turnover decreases in 2020, then increases in 2021 and 2022, but below the 2019 figures. Turnover in ministries stands out as significantly lower compared to other administrations.

From the information presented on employee evaluations and turnover, no clear conclusion can be drawn about the relationship of the training provided and increased quality in administration to improved job performance or reduced turnover. Factors of the external environment (the COVID-19 crisis and the volatile political environment) also have an impact that offset the effects of OPGG investments.

Further summary information on the contribution of the OPGG (Priority Axis 2) investments is also contained in the results of the survey among the administration (beneficiaries of the interventions) carried out in the framework of this contract. The beneficiaries' assessment is strongly positive, with positive responses on the contribution of the interventions ranging from 30 to 80%. First of all, the contribution to the improvement of the specialised knowledge and skills of the administrative staff and to the capacity building of the training organisations (IPA, NAMRB, Institute of Psychology at the Ministry of Interior, Diplomatic Institute) stands out - 80% positive responses. The increase in the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms was highlighted - 70% positive responses. Significantly less approval was given to the statement "The implemented interventions in this priority contributed to improving human resource management processes in the state administration and to creating mechanisms for career development" - 30%.

In conclusion, the target values of the indicators for the considered specific objectives under PA 2 have been achieved and it can be categorically stated that the OPGG investments have contributed significantly to raising the administration and administrative services to a qualitatively new, higher level of development (capacity enhancement, organisational development, quality management systems, introduction of integrated administrative services and standardised services).

6.3.3. Contribution of PA 3 investments

The programmed procedures under PA 3, which fall within the scope of the evaluation, help to address identified key problems for the judiciary related to delayed reforms, poorly organized structure, procedures and organization, technologically lagging modernization and introduction of e-justice, inefficient budget spending, etc. The implemented interventions realize the efforts at the state level for the modernization and reform of the judiciary in implementation of measures envisaged in the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform in the Judiciary, the Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020[72] and the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2023 and roadmaps for their implementation. The contributions of the investments made under the OPGG to the reforms in the judiciary are in terms of:

☐ Achieving effective guarantees for the independence of the courts and the judiciary;

☐ Ensuring good governance of the judiciary, high efficiency of functioning, accessibility and accountability, including through the introduction of e-justice;

☐ Developing the potential of the human resources of the judiciary and ensuring the high motivation, competence and social responsibility of judges, prosecutors and investigators by supporting the National Institute of Justice to expand the scope of training in the system;

☐ Implementation of a modern and effective penal policy through the necessary institutional and regulatory reforms;

☐ Ensuring every citizen's full right to due process and the effective protection of human rights.

Thanks to the investments made under the OPGG[73] 28 e-services of the judiciary have been implemented, 52 new and improved existing tools for the modernization of the judiciary have been introduced, 30 267 magistrates, judicial officers and employees of the judicial and investigative bodies have been trained under the Code of Criminal Procedure with obtaining a certificate, 115 analyses, studies, researches, methodologies and assessments related to the activities of the judiciary have been developed, etc.

Through the implementation of the projects under the procedures, which include measures for the implementation of judicial reform, a basis is created for the judiciary to become an effective guarantor of the rule of law in the Republic of Bulgaria. This is achieved by: reforming criminal policy; promoting alternative forms of dispute resolution; taking measures to regulate the workload; improving efficiency and effectiveness in the work of the system; improving access to justice by establishing mechanisms to assess and monitor

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[72] Subsequently, the implementation measures became part of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023, Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023 adopted by Decision No. 546 of the Council of Ministers on 18 September 2019.

[73] data as of 30.11.2023

efficiency, independence and transparency; increasing accountability for the use of budgetary resources in the judiciary; improving and updating policies and rules relating to the attestation of

The introduction of e-Justice, through the measures supported under the OPGG, contributes to improving accountability, increasing efficiency within the system and facilitating access to justice by citizens and businesses. The inventory carried out in the sector of the state of the information and communication infrastructure, information systems, services and registries forms the basis for the subsequent implementation of the envisaged reforms. The main objective of the digitisation measures in the sector is to implement and provide high quality, cost-effective and easily accessible electronic services. A key investment in the introduction of e-Justice is the development and implementation of the Single Information System for Courts (SISC), used by 151 courts in the Republic of Bulgaria, through which electronic document management, including electronic case management, has been introduced. Through the developed Central automated information system "Judicial Status", a central database on criminal records has been established for the first time, uniting 113 databases of the district courts and the database of the Central Criminal Records Bureau at the Ministry of Justice, as well as a database of convicted Bulgarian citizens abroad, creating a fully centralized criminal record in Bulgaria. An electronic criminal record certificate service has also been implemented. Other portals and information systems have also been built and upgraded. Electronic Public Register of Recusals, Unified Jury Register; Specialized Information System for Monitoring and Analysis (SISMA); Unified Information System 3 (UIS 3) for electronic document circulation in the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria; Unified Information System for Counteracting Crime, etc. In addition to the developed and/or upgraded information systems, registers and portals, the purchase and installation of equipment was also financed.

Investing in human resource development at NIJ and continuing education for the Institute's staff in line with identified needs is a key element of establishing the Institute as a modern forensic training institution. The investments directed and made at NIJ in terms of expanding the scope and improving the quality of judicial training contribute to upgrading and developing a variety of training modalities that promote the use of electronic resources and the conduct of practical and interactive sessions aimed at actively engaging learners in the learning process. The trainings contribute to deepening the specialisation of those working in the administrative courts, as well as helping to establish a uniform and non-contradictory practice. Furthermore, the implementation of the activity involves a significant investment in human resources, which is a top priority of the European Commission, respecting the principle of lifelong learning and continuous acquisition of new knowledge, skills, experience and practices. The exchange of professional knowledge and contacts not only contributes to the improvement of the qualifications of those working in the field of administrative justice - magistrates, judicial assistants, judicial officers and other representatives of the target groups, but also ensures the sustainability of the results. With the OPGG investment, a Learning Management Information System (LMIS) has been built and implemented and a model for

paperless in-person training has been developed, which makes a lasting contribution to environmental protection. In addition, the implementation of a learning management information system creates prerequisites for sustainability in the quality of training offered by NIJ after the completion of the implemented project activities. Following the implementation of the LMIS, the administration of the training process has been taken to a new level, the positive effects of which will affect both NIJ staff and trainees.

The investments that have been implemented are aimed at improving the capacity of human capital in the judiciary, expanding the application of information and communication technologies, creating and implementing e-services for citizens and businesses, as well as increasing transparency through the implementation of relevant reforms.

The quality, independence and efficiency of the justice system are important structural elements for sustainable growth and social stability and are essential for effective enforcement. In this respect, the measures set out in PA 3 of the OPGG directly correspond to the Council's Specific Recommendation No 5 to the State on improving the quality and independence of the judiciary and strengthening the fight against corruption. The insufficient efficiency of the Bulgarian judiciary, including weaknesses in investigative and judicial practices related to the fight against organised crime and corruption, transparency of appointments, high level corruption, etc., have been highlighted in the reports under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. The Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Bulgaria's progress under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism of 22 January 2014 (COM(2014) 36 final) notes the need to take decisive measures to make progress in the areas of:

- ✓ the fight against corruption;
- ✓ cases related to organised crime and high-level corruption;
- ✓ disciplinary practice and the integrity of magistrates;
- ✓ appraisals, promotions and appointments in the judiciary;
- ✓ consistent practice by the judiciary;
- ✓ caseloads and delays;
- ✓ Weaknesses in coordination between different bodies and in the allocation of responsibilities;
- ✓ the need to improve financial investigation capacity for organised crime;
- ✓ the need to continue work on the introduction of e-justice.

The OPGG programming has reflected the identified deficits by implementing project activities that have brought about change in the relevant sectors through investments in systems, registers and electronic services directly aimed at introducing e-justice, as well as investments related to increasing transparency and speeding up the administration of justice through reform of the structure, procedures and organisation of the judiciary. The strategic approach set out responds to the challenges outlined by comprehensively covering all aspects of the process of reforming and modernising the judiciary - strategic and structural development, human resource management and the introduction of e-justice.

Regarding the reform of the judiciary, the investments foreseen and implemented under PA 3 are derived from the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform in the Judiciary as well as the Roadmap for its Implementation, which contains the specific measures under the six objectives of the Strategy until 2020.

The support for the National Institute of Justice as the main institution responsible for providing quality and adequate training for magistrates and judicial officers is based on the Guidelines for the activities of the National Institute of Justice 2014-2020, approved by the NIJ Board in May 2014, as well as the European documents in the field of judicial training. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council "Building trust in justice across the EU. A new dimension for European judicial training' (COM (2011) 551 final) highlights the fact that building a European judicial culture with full respect for the principle of subsidiarity and judicial independence is key to the effective functioning of the European judicial area and judicial training is an essential element of this process. The European Parliament Resolution of 14 March 2012 on judicial training 2012/2575(RSP) emphasizes the potential of new technologies in judicial training, as well as the need for multilingual training and the need to coordinate the training provided at European level. In this context, investments have been made to improve the professional development of magistrates and judicial officers so as to create opportunities for exchanging experiences with other Member States and participating in cooperation networks. The main highlights of the strategic development of judicial training relate to the development and improvement of technological and information systems related to judicial "e-learning", as well as the reinforcement of training of trainers and the implementation of good European practices.

For the successful implementation of e-Justice, a Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020 and a roadmap for its implementation have been developed and adopted. It is a fundamental document for the unified formation, planning, implementation, coordination and control of the policy in the sector, conducted by state institutions in cooperation with citizens, business and professional organizations. The document has been developed in accordance with the programmes of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria for the development of e-government and the European Commission 2020 initiative and reflects the importance of the processes for the development of accessible and effective e-justice. In this regard, investments have been made to introduce e-justice. Subsequently, the implementation measures became part of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023, the Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019 - 2023 adopted by Decision No. 546 of the Council of Ministers on 18 September 2019. With the update of the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2023 , the measures envisaged for the Justice sector are integrated into the overall framework of the e-government development objectives, thus ensuring coordination and compatibility of the individual strategic documents.

Table 10 PA Theory of Change 3.

Specific objective	Needs analysis	Expected results	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
Increasing transparency and speeding up the administration of justice by reforming the structure, procedures and organisation of the judiciary	Need to optimize the structure of the judiciary authority and the provision of judicial statistics, improvement of strategic planning and management of the judiciary with regard to the excessive length of criminal proceedings and the lack of an effective remedy; non-compliance with statutory time limits in the preparation of judicial Acts. Reforms in the sector are also hampered by the lack of a monitoring and evaluation system. Bulgaria is among the three EU member states in which alternative means of resolving legal disputes are the least developed There is an imbalance in the load of the courts and the prosecution. A comprehensive human resources policy is lacking. Attestation procedures and disciplinary regulation continue to fall short effective in providing positive career selection and motivation.	Improving the performance of the judiciary to achieve faster, fairer and more efficient justice, by not optimising the structure of the judiciary and providing judicial statistics, improving strategic planning and management of the judiciary. Updated legal framework for transparent and effective justice. A new model for statistical reporting in justice sector bodies Reform of the procedures for appointment, appraisal and career development of magistrates and judicial officers Introduction of programme budgeting in all judicial authorities Disciplinary proceedings in line with international standards and recommendations	Analyses, studies, methodologies and evaluations supporting reform of the structure, procedures and organisation of the justice sector, including to enhance the independence of the judiciary ☐ Analysis and evaluation of the current statistical reporting system and creation of a new model for statistical reporting in the authorities of the justice sector ☐ Optimising the court map ☐ Upgrading and expanding the scope and introduction of programme budgeting in all judicial authorities ☐ Measures to balance the workload of magistrates ☐ Evaluation and reform of the procedures for appointment, appraisal and career development of magistrates and judicial officers ☐ Developing a toolkit for assessing the effectiveness of the SCC and the SAC for unifying the practice of the courts for achieving predictable and quality justice ☐ Restructuring disciplinary proceedings to comply with international standards and recommendations	Common performance indicators Introduced new and improved existing tools for the modernisation of the judiciary Number of cases filed electronically Magistrates, judicial officers and employees of and investigating authorities under the Code of Criminal Procedure, successfully completed training with certificate

General and programme-specific performance indicators Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary system Judiciary supported to introduce programme budgeting Number of institutions audited for IT and the communication infrastructure |

| | The development of an integrated policy for prevention of conflict of interest and corruption in the judiciary. | | | ☐ Preventing conflict of interest and corruption within the judiciary by establishing electronic registers for declaration of an extended range of circumstances and effective control mechanisms, including periodic checks on the existence of corruption risks
☐ Development and expansion of alternative means of legal dispute resolution, including the conduct of information campaigns
☐ Reform of criminal and penitentiary policy to limit criminal repression through administrative and criminal sanctions
☐ Development of new regulations and organisation of expertise
☐ Developing mechanisms and tools for feedback and evaluation by citizens who have used services from the authorities of the judiciary;
☐ Joint action by the judiciary and the executive authorities involved on specific criminal and administrative justice topics (e.g. tax and customs offences, trafficking in human beings and valuables, money laundering and counterfeiting, etc.)
☐ Activities to improve interaction with NGOs and professional organizations for more active involvement in | Number of supported electronic services of the judiciary
Developed by SISC
Trained magistrates, judicial officers, employees of the investigative authorities under the Criminal Procedure Code |

			the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies and proposals for improvements in the judiciary.	
Improving the accessibility and accountability of the judiciary by introducing e-justice	The Bulgarian judiciary is lagging behind in ensuring electronic communication and exchange of information between the courts and the parties to the cases. As of 2014, the legal framework does not suggest the possibility of using the electronic document, the electronic signature or the exercise of procedural rights in electronic form in the judicial system. The actual launch of e-justice for citizens and businesses is not possible before the adoption of the necessary amendments to a number of legal Acts - Law on the Civil Procedure, Code of Civil Procedure, Code of Criminal Procedure, etc. optimising the activities of justice sector bodies for Ensuring interoperability, workflow optimization, improving the current regulatory framework, etc. by building and implementing a unified system for electronic	Streamline and improve processes in the system through the implementation of SISC Improve service quality, reliability, transparency, accountability and the rule of law through the implementation of e-justice investments. Facilitating the use of e-services in the judiciary by creating the possibility of centralized access, which will facilitate citizens, administrative bodies and legal entities and reduce their cost. Building and implementing a unified e-justice system. Further development and implementation of the Unified Information System for Countering Crime (UISCC). The introduction of e-Justice for citizens and businesses will result in high quality and accessibility to justice and services 24/7, as well as saving time and money. For the authorities the judiciary will be achieved by limiting opportunities for corruption through objective means of control and analysis, objectivity in the allocation of cases and centralisation of all information services, their management and control.	☐ Inventory and analysis (audit) of IT and communications infrastructure, information systems and services. ☐ Purchase and installation of communications equipment to further develop the virtual private network covering the buildings of the sector, ensuring reliable and secure information exchange ☐ Migration of existing resources, systems and services to the hybrid private cloud for e-government ☐ Development and implementation of paperless SISC, training of magistrates and staff in its operation ☐ Developing new and expanding the capabilities of existing e-services provided by the justice sector ☐ Further development of the UISCC and linking it to e-government and e-justice systems, including departmental systems. AIS that provide data and exchange information ☐ Applying video conferencing technologies in the justice sector	Common performance indicators Introduced new and improved existing tools for the modernisation of the judiciary Number of cases filed electronically Magistrates, judicial officers and employees of and investigating authorities under the Code of Criminal Procedure, successfully completed training with certificate General and programme-specific performance indicators Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary system Judiciary supported to introduce programme budgeting Number of institutions audited for IT and the communication infrastructure

	Justice.			Number of supported electronic services of the judiciary Developed by SISC Trained magistrates, judicial officers, employees of the investigative authorities under the Criminal Procedure Code
Expanding the scope and improving the quality of judicial training	The availability and accessibility of professional training for magistrates and judicial staff However, it is insufficient, especially with regard to continuing education. Bulgaria is among the eleven EU member states where the only compulsory training for magistrates is initial training continued investment for Strengthening and developing the capacity of the NIJ so that it is able to respond adequately to increasing training needs of the judiciary to address its identified weaknesses, shortcomings and deficits The NIJ needs to expand its activities while at the same time, through the programme, being supported and training for system employees that NIJ cannot cover.	Investments in .Improving the effectiveness of justice through investment in the human factor Implemented trainings to enhance the professionalism of the investigative bodies under the Criminal Procedure Code to address weaknesses in the pre-trial phase of the administration of justice. Continued investment to improve the professional development of magistrates and judicial officers, to exchange experiences with other Member States and to participate in cooperation networks. Developing and improving technological and information systems related to judicial "e-learning", as well as strengthening the training of trainers and applying good European practices.	☐ Enhance and expand NIJ curricula, including regional and distance learning, training of trainers and implementation of good European practices, ☐ Exchange programmes for magistrates and judicial staff, including on-site visits/internships in European judicial institutions ☐ Development of research and analytical activities and publications in the field of administration of justice for the needs of training ☐ Developing and improving technology and information systems related to judicial "e-learning," including improvement of electronic registers ☐ Organisational development of the NIJ, including implementation of a management and quality control system for judicial training and developing a communication strategy for judicial training ☐ Developing and establishing institutional links with European and national networks and institutions related to the judicial	Common performance indicators Introduced new and improved existing tools for the modernisation of the judiciary Magistrates, judicial officers and employees of and investigating authorities under the Code of Criminal Procedure, successfully completed training with certificate General and programme-specific performance indicators Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary system Trained magistrates, judicial officers, employees of the investigative authorities under the Criminal Procedure Code

| | | | training
☐ Developing NIJ's capacity to manage and implement European instruments related to judicial training | |
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We will explore the contribution of the programme through the following strands:

- ✓ investments aimed at judicial reform;
- ✓ Investment in systems directly aimed at introducing e-justice;
- ✓ Investing in enhancing expert capacity in the judiciary.

When examining implemented judicial reform procedures and investments to implement e-justice, the following procedures will fall within the scope of our analysis[74] :

Procedure code	Name of the procedure
BG05SFOP001-1.001	Data structuring and analytical activities in the implementation of the strategic documents for the development of public administration, the development of e-government and the introduction of e-government in the justice sector
BG05SFOP001-3.001	Strategic projects in implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform in the Judiciary and the Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020.
BG05SFOP001-3.004	Introduction of programme budgeting in the judiciary
BG05SFOP001-3.005	Efficiency of judicial review and unification of the practice of the courts
BG05SFOP001-3.007	Improve and update policies and rules related to the appraisal and remuneration of judicial officers and introduce guarantees for public participation in the selection of jurors by municipal councils
BG05SFOP001-3.008	Development and implementation in the judicial system of software for the accelerated creation and reproduction of deeds and other documents through dictation and automatic voice-to-text conversion and accompanying processing systems

Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.001 Structuring of data and analytical activities in the implementation of the strategic documents for the development of public administration, development of e-government and introduction of e-government in the justice sector

At the time of programming of procedure BG05SFOP001-1.001 "Structuring of data and analytical activities in the implementation of the strategic documents for the development of public administration, development of e-government and introduction of e-government in the justice sector", there is no complete picture of the resource provision and the state of ICT in the justice sector. For this reason, the programmed interventions under project BG05SFOP001-1.001-0004 "Inventory and analysis of the state of information and communication infrastructure, information systems, services and registers in the Justice Sector", are aimed at examining the identified deficits in the system, and based on their implementation, the first

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[74] according to the scope set out in the TC, the procedures related to extending the scope and improving the quality of training in the judicial system are discussed later in the presentation.

comprehensive and exhaustive review (inventory) of the information and communication infrastructure (ICT), information systems, services and registers is being carried out through through an expert on-site survey of the building stock in use in the sector. The aggregated data from the review provides information on the status of the information and communication infrastructure, information systems and services and related processes. The aim of the project is to use the inventory to assess the capacity and resources required to service existing processes, and to benchmark the desired state in the context of the envisaged reforms. The types of registers, the type of information stored in them, the consistency of the information, as well as the degree of semantic compatibility and the possibilities for linking with other registers in the context of the complex administrative services are analysed. An audit of the IT and communication infrastructure of 385 institutions was carried out.[75] The contribution of the project implementation is fundamental for the follow-up e-Justice implementation, as its main programming design by the OPGG, is also to contribute to the coherence of the results of the different projects and sustainability in their implementation through a multiplier effect. The review and analysis of the technical capacity in the justice sector is also a prerequisite for the implementation of the measures foreseen in the national strategy documents for the introduction of e-justice, such as various registries, systems, portals. The contribution of the implemented activities lays the foundation for the sustainability of the results of the projects, which are based on the analysis for building a modern e-justice system.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3.001 Strategic projects in the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary and the Strategy for the introduction of e-government and e-justice in the justice sector 2014-2020.

The projects covered by the procedure BG05SFOP001-3.001 "Strategic projects in the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary and the Strategy for the introduction of e-government and e-justice in the justice sector 2014-2020" include reforms of key elements of the judiciary, which are among the strategic priorities of the country, with the optimization of the judicial map and the introduction of e-justice at the forefront, as well as measures for reform in the structure, procedures and organization of the judiciary.

The implementation of project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0001 "Creation of a model for the optimization of the court map of Bulgarian courts and prosecutor's offices and development of a Single Information System of Courts", with SJC as the beneficiary, aims to create a model for the reorganization of the court map of district courts and prosecutor's offices and to provide a roadmap for the rationalization of courts and prosecutor's offices at all levels in order to increase quality and efficiency in general, including the reallocation of resources where appropriate, based on a comprehensive analysis of the workload of the judicial structures and specific socio-economic factors, and providing appropriate technological solutions for this. As a result of OPGG's support, analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary have been implemented (21 issues) concerning:

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[75] Judiciary bodies (courts, prosecution offices, investigations) and executive administrations in the Justice Sector (JS) where an inventory of the state of IT and communication infrastructure and information systems has been carried out.

- ✓ Analysis of court card reforms in EU Member States;
- ✓ analyses of the current state of the individual judicial structures;
- ✓ reports on the functioning of reformed structures in groups of 2 RS and 2 RP;
- ✓ analysis to derive proposals for optimising the judicial map;
- ✓ a report containing a detailed description of SISC functionality at process level;
- ✓ Analysis of procedures and workflows related to case management at the district, circuit, and appellate court levels and linkages between them;
- ✓ a set of maps of streamlined processes related to electronic case management and access;
- ✓ A report with specific recommendations for integration between SISC and other SS or SA systems;
- ✓ analyses of the regulatory framework, existing technological processes, means for collecting and summarizing statistical information.

As a result of the supported analyses, studies, researches, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary, instruments for the modernization of the judiciary have been introduced through the approval of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council, namely:

- ✓ Model of optimization of the judicial map of district courts and prosecutor's offices;
- ✓ Roadmap for reorganization of judicial structures at district and appellate level.

With the development of a model for the optimization of the judicial map, the efforts made so far in the implementation of the OPGG interventions have been built upon in the following areas:

- The best practices and applied methodologies in other EU Member States (MS), which have reformed the judicial map in recent years, have been studied, and an expert assessment has been made on the overall effect of potential measures that could be taken - independently or in the context of other reforms, as well as on the applicability of these practices in the Bulgarian judicial system, taking into account the national specificities of procedural legal relations. The analysis is complemented by on-site visits to two MS for which the research has shown the greatest similarity of legal systems and the existence of implemented effective solutions;
- On the basis of the identified good practices in other EU Member States and the primary analyses of the SJC, criteria have been defined and detailed studies on the current state of the district, regional and administrative courts and their efficiency and effectiveness, together with the influencing socio-economic and administrative-territorial factors, including such detailed studies, have been prepared. The detailed analyses and field visits will assess the possibilities for reorganisation and/or consolidation of selected specific judicial districts or groups of judicial districts;
- Recommendations have been made for the reorganization of the RS and RP maps, with detailed reasons for each reorganization model. The results achieved are illustrated in concrete proposals for amending and supplementing the current legislation, with motivation and impact assessment included, in order to make the proposals for change sustainable.

All reports and analyses produced will serve as a matrix and model against which future proposals for changes in the structure of the judicial districts will be made to improve overall quality and efficiency, including reallocation of resources where appropriate. Through the model created for the reorganisation of

the judicial map of district courts and prosecution offices, and a roadmap for the rationalisation more generally of courts and prosecution offices at all levels, OPGG interventions contribute to the stated objectives of reforming key elements of the judicial system to improve quality and efficiency overall, including reallocation of resources where appropriate. The implemented investments also contribute to the objectives set for the assessment of the efficiency of individual judicial structures and the reform of the judicial map, as set out in the Updated Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform of the judiciary. Fundamental to achieving the objectives of improving the accessibility and accountability of the judiciary through the introduction of e-justice is the development and implementation of a Single Information System for the Courts (SISC)[76] . The aim is on the one hand to unify the work processes in the judiciary, but also to introduce uniform rules in case management, which should lead to time savings, faster administration of justice, transparency, publicity and access to justice. All 151 courts in Bulgaria work with the system, except for the administrative courts and the Supreme Administrative Court, which use the Unified Case Information System (UCIS), developed entirely with OPAC funding. The filing system has been operational in the Supreme Administrative Court since the beginning of 2022 and is expected to be operational in all administrative courts in early 2024, with the sole exception of the Administrative Court Sofia-City (ACSC)[77] , where it should also be implemented by mid-2024. Work is also underway on the integration being developed between SISC[78] and EDIS, aimed at exchanging the electronic case folders of the general and administrative courts in cases of appeal, jurisdictional dispute, etc.

SISC covers all case management processes in the district, circuit, appellate, military courts, Court of Military Appeals, and Supreme Court of Cassation. The contribution of the OPGG investment is in significantly streamlining the workflow and increasing the efficiency of magistrates and court staff. SISC provides the ability to work remotely from anywhere in the world through a secure channel accessible via qualified electronic signature (QES). At the time of writing, SISC has 38 modules and:

- ✓ has been implemented in 151 courts in Bulgaria, excluding the administrative courts and the Supreme Administrative Court;
- ✓ More than 1.3 million cases have been filed in the system[79] ;
- ✓ More than 4 million e-judgments have been issued[80] ;

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[76] A case study section has been prepared to accompany this report which examines in detail the implementation of the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0001

[77] Due to the high workload and higher occupancy, the tests took longer

[78] The SISC preparation technically foresees the possibility to connect to EDIS

[79] according to the data submitted by the OPGG MA Third meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Technical Assistance Programme of 14.11.2023 - presentation "OPGG Implementation and Closure" https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/14176 and according to the technical reports to the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0001

[80] according to the data submitted by the OPGG MA Third meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Technical Assistance Programme of 14.11.2023 - presentation "OPGG Implementation and Closure" https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/14176 and according to the technical reports to the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0001

✓ The system is actively used by more than 10 000 users, including nearly 2 000 judges, more than 4 600 court staff, 3 100 jurors and more than 600 summons officers. The work of the summons officers is also supported by the mobile application for the service of documents part of SISC[81] .

SISC, through the upgraded Single e-Justice Portal (SEJP), implements functionalities allowing citizens to exercise their procedural rights before all the authorities of the judicial system, as well as to request the making of authenticating statements by these authorities. The system also integrates the functionality for random allocation of cases, in the context of the specificities for a reorganised and/or merged court resulting from the reform of the judicial map. The system ensures a paperless process for the management of court cases from their initiation to their final resolution, including the review of higher instance acts, with courts exchanging cases electronically. Within the framework of the project implementation, investments have been made to achieve technological and semantic compatibility by extending the scope and maximum application of domestic and international classifiers in line with the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020, the European e-Justice and the adopted roadmap, as well as the sector's commitments to EU initiatives.

Analyses and an overview of the main prerequisites and constraints for the implementation of a specialized information system, including tools for analysis and monitoring of factors related to the socio-economic development of judicial districts and the workload of courts and prosecutor's offices (SISMA), have been prepared. The analyses lay the foundations for the analytical activities and workflow planning of SISMA in order to produce statistical reports and monitor the development of the judicial map in real time. As a result, Specialized Information System for Monitoring and Analysis (SISMA) has been built - it enables automated collection and processing of statistical data from the judiciary, including SISC, prosecution and investigation systems, the National Statistical Institute and other bodies. This system enables the competent authorities to take informed decisions on the reorganisation of the judicial map of Bulgaria and to analyse the current state of the judicial structures. The investment contributes to the improvement of the effective management of the individual judicial structures on the basis of organisational statistics at the level of the judicial structure, administrative and expert management information, socio-demographic structure of the population, economic activity, technological infrastructure, administrative and other public services offered by the public and private sectors, etc. SISMA enables access to essential elements of judicial statistics without violating existing rules for accessing, completing and correcting the data, and thus ensures greater transparency in judicial management. With a view to the overall functioning of the system, the necessary integration and exchange of data with external information systems approved by the Supreme Judicial Council and relevant to the criteria examined for the development of the quality of justice is ensured. When information is received from the UIS/SISC, it is processed in real time. In the case of integration with other information systems of the judicial system, the processing of information is carried out with regard to the time intervals at which the data can be received - in real time or at a specific time/interval. Access by judicial authorities is ensured and the SJC has adopted appropriate access rules for

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[81] according to officially announced data from Information Service https://www.is-bg.net/bg/news/315

this purpose. Internal organisation has been established in the SJC administration by assigning tasks to a specific unit of the administration.

Within the framework of the implementation of the described investments, the relevant trainings of 1,797 magistrates, judicial officers and investigators were carried out in accordance with the Criminal Procedure Code as follows:

- ✓ 364 trained in the operation, maintenance and administration of SISC - of the training of trainers type;
- ✓ 1,400 trained to use SISC - not included in train the trainer sessions;
- ✓ 33 trained to operate, maintain and administer SISMA.

A key element for achieving real reform in the judiciary is the creation of preconditions for quality justice based on highly qualified, motivated and independent magistrates. The high professional skills and integrity of magistrates are key to the accountability of the judiciary. These principles are also enshrined in changes to the Judiciary Act (JA) aimed at real reform in the justice sector.[82] . In the framework of the implementation of the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0002 "Improvement of attestation procedures and disciplinary practice in the judiciary", with the beneficiary SJC, an analysis of the procedures for the formation of remuneration and additional remuneration of magistrates in the EU Member States and an analysis of disciplinary practice and international standards have been implemented. As a result, three key instruments for the modernisation of the judiciary have been put in place:

- ✓ a model of an individual development plan and guidelines to it - allowing planning of personal development taking into account the need to improve professional qualifications and competence, as well as guidelines to it containing specific mechanisms for increasing motivation and carrying out evaluation and self-assessment;
- ✓ a model for the formation of magistrates' remuneration and fringe benefits - a prerequisite for the creation of an effective model for the formation of magistrates' remuneration and fringe benefits, setting objective rules and stability and predictability in their formation;
- ✓ A standard for disciplinary proceedings - its implementation is a key prerequisite for effective reform.

The contribution of the OPGG intervention on judicial reform related to human capital, which is a key resource and focus of the reform, is that it creates a mechanism for linking the policy on remuneration and other benefits of magistrates to the prevention of corruption. Thanks to the investments made, a model has been developed for the formation of the basic salary and all other payments and benefits which

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[82] As a consequence of the measures envisaged in the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Judicial Reform, the norm of Article 30a of the Law on the Judiciary (Journal of Laws No. 28/2016) has been amended by introducing for the first time an individual plan for professional development of the magistrate to be kept in the personnel file of each judge, prosecutor and investigator. The development of the individual plan is linked to the development of guidelines to the individual plan, which contain specific steps and mechanisms for increasing motivation, methods for carrying out evaluation and self-assessment and identifying opportunities for improvement and specific steps for increasing the professional qualification of magistrates.

minimises individual discretion on the part of the administrative authority and which provides for an adequate mechanism for automatic updating.

In response to the set objectives to improve the accountability and accessibility of the judiciary through the introduction of e-justice, the PRB is implementing project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0003 "Introduction of e-justice in the PRB through electronic document management, provision of open data and e-services for the CAO to citizens and institutions", related to improving information services. Through the redesign of the Unified Information System 2 (UIS-2), which has been upgraded to UIS-3, a phased transition to electronic document management in the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria is being enabled. The intervention contributes to the provision of more and better electronic services for citizens, businesses and public institutions. A number of information security and interoperability measures have been implemented to ensure the expansion of electronic statistical reporting in the Public Prosecution Office and the provision of open data on the work of the Public Prosecution Office. Measures have been implemented to further develop the Unified Information System for Countering Crime (UISCC) and to provide public access to information on the core of the system, linked to the Open Data initiative as well as in the provision of the CAO. As a result of the implemented interventions, 13 services and internal queries are provided (4 pcs of internal administrative e-services for the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria provided through the UISCC). Within the framework of the project implementation, 8 trainings of magistrates and judicial officers were conducted in the country. The total number of magistrates and court officials trained was 261. The contribution of the OPGG investments was in terms of:

- ✓ Provided a reliable environment for paperless workflow and electronic content handling ;
- ✓ providing more and better e-services;
- ✓ providing open data.

As part of the reform related to the modernization of the judiciary, interventions have been implemented to build an effective model for the acquisition of legal capacity. As a result of the implementation of the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0004 "Developing the potential of the human resources of the judiciary by building an effective model for the acquisition of legal capacity" of the Ministry of Justice, the following analyses and documents have been implemented:

- ✓ Analytical report on the regulatory framework and European practices for the traineeship programme and the aptitude test;
- ✓ A comparative-analytical report on good European practices for the internship programme and the theoretical-practical examination;
- ✓ Evaluation report on the models of the apprenticeship programmes; criteria on the examination case study;
- ✓ test question selection methodology;
- ✓ an improved model of theoretical-practical examination.

The following tools have been introduced for the modernisation of the judiciary: two models of internship programmes have been tested in two judicial districts out of a total of 20 graduates; an improved model of the theoretical-practical examination, including the development of criteria and an algorithm for

the case study for the practical examination for the acquisition of legal capacity and a methodology for the selection of test questions.

The project was preceded by a measure to be implemented with funds from the state budget, the purpose of which was to analyze who, why, and how would be accredited and to align programs and processes related to the law degree program, but which was not implemented. Since the measure with the internship program implemented under the OPGG appears to be an afterthought, it has largely failed to realize its design due to the fact that university programs no longer assume practice and there is no way to adequately translate all of this into a normative framework. Hence the impossibility of this measure, in terms of regulation, being as modern as possible and really being useful to the students who are going on internships, so that they are not in the role of couriers between the court and certain institutions, but have a mentor who can take them on in each of the areas in which these young people are required to undertake internships. Such contradictions are observed in the implementation of interventions that are logically linked to other measures foreseen to be implemented with state budget funds in the GOK.

One of the strategic goals of the Judicial Reform Strategy Update is to create a modern penitentiary system (PS). The Roadmap to it foresees the development of a Strategy for the development of the PS in Bulgaria for the period up to 2025. The only document in this area, at the time of programming of the OPGG interventions, is the Concept for the Development of the GDIN, approved by the Minister of Justice in May 2014. It lists priorities with no implementation measures. Budgetary constraints are evident in much of the facilities. Social and training activities are poorly developed as a tool for making sense of the execution of punishment and reintegration. Staff in detention facilities face major challenges due to the criminogenic environment, which requires quality training and specific skills and knowledge. In view of the recent trends related to the fight against terrorism and radicalisation and the unresolved problems in the management of detention facilities, a new document based on the evaluation of the Concept for the Development of the DGIS and the functional analysis of the DGIS funded by OPAC is required. In order to implement the Law on Execution of Sentences and Detention and to implement electronic monitoring of offenders with certain types of sentences, it is necessary to provide the relevant equipment. In response to the identified deficits, OPGG financed interventions implemented by the Ministry of Justice concerning the modernization of the penitentiary system in Bulgaria, through the implementation of the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0005 "Modernization of the Penitentiary System in Bulgaria". As a result of the investments, an assessment of the implementation of the Concept for the Development of the DGIN as of May 2014 was carried out. A draft Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System in Bulgaria for the period up to 2025 has been developed, and the Strategy has been approved and entered into force by the Order of the Minister of Justice of 2019. The step is fundamental in terms of establishing the foundations of a modern penitentiary system. Thanks to the support of the OPGG, an electronic monitoring system for offenders and documents for the operation of the Control Centre in the General Directorate for the Execution of Penalties, provided for by amendments to the Law on the Execution of Penalties and Detention in Custody (Law on the Execution of Penalties and Detention in Custody), have been implemented. The purchase and installation of the electronic monitoring system is necessary because at any moment such a measure can be imposed on a convicted person or a person under house arrest, and in practice it cannot be

implemented without it. The electronic monitoring was formulated in the Law on Execution of Punishments and Detention in 2016 and, thanks to the activities implemented under the OPGG, is becoming a reality in 2019. The modernization of the penitentiary system is a strategic goal. It enables more effective control over prisoners and more effective integration into society, as the devices, the so-called "bracelets", do not keep individuals away from their families. There are three categories of persons who are subject to monitoring: prisoners who are placed in open-type prison dormitories, persons with probationary measures "restriction of free movement" and "compulsory registration at their current address", and persons with a measure of "house arrest". 200 stationary devices and 200 personal identification devices for radio-frequency monitoring and 50 satellite monitoring devices for at least 250 offenders were purchased. The purchase of these devices will enable a minimum of 500 offenders to be monitored within 1 calendar year. Since their deployment, the number of persons to whom electronic monitoring has been applied is[83] :

- ✓ for 2019 - 43;
- ✓ for 2020 - 219;
- ✓ for 2023 - 129.

The implemented electronic offender monitoring system fulfils the following main objectives:

- ✓ Imprisonment as a last resort;

- ✓ Reducing the cost of living for persons in detention.

The development and improvement of the penitentiary system in Bulgaria is an important part of the reform of the judicial system in the country, and the contribution of the OPGG investment is aimed at ensuring a modern penal policy, effective counteraction to crime and humanization of the penal enforcement system.

In response to Specific Objective 1: Criminal Policy Update [84] of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform of the judiciary and in order to achieve improved and modern legislation in the field of criminal justice, investments have been made under the OPGG project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0006 "New Concept for Criminal Policy", with the Ministry of Justice as the beneficiary. On the basis of numerous analyses, assessments and discussions, a new Criminal Policy Concept for the Republic of Bulgaria has been developed, defining the main challenges for criminal policy with a five-year implementation period 2020-2025, approved by a decision of the Council of Ministers. The contribution of the OPGG investments to the judicial reform in the part related to a modern and effective criminal policy is that through their implementation the foundations have been laid for its alignment with the European trends, taking into account the recommendations of the EC reports under the Cooperation and Evaluation Mechanism from 2008 until now for the adoption of a new Criminal Code.

The development of an efficient, secure and coherent electronic environment for the enforcement process , is linked to the provision of centralised electronic access to data on the initiation, movement and

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[83] based on data from the MoJ Programme Budget Implementation Reports

[84] Strategic Objective 4

closure of enforcement cases . The bailiffs use different information systems (IS), from different developers, through which the statutory registers are maintained - cases filed, incoming and outgoing registers of incoming and outgoing documents and the log of actions performed (the Rules of Court Administration and Regulation No 4 of 6.02.2006 on the official archives of private bailiffs). In addition to the lack of a unified IP of the judicial execution in the Republic of Bulgaria, identical documents are registered under different names and described with different contents by different SIs, which creates confusion and ambiguity for users. The existence of separate IPs at the CJ does not facilitate the parties to the cases as they do not have remote access for consultation. In response to the identified shortcomings and in order to achieve the objectives set out in the Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2023, Strategic Objective 2: "User-centered e-administrative services", Specific Objective 2.1 "Facilitating interaction and building trust between the user and administrations, public institutions, persons performing public functions and organisations providing public services", are real. The implementation is carried out through the implementation of the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0007 "Enhancing guarantees for a fair process in enforcement proceedings through the establishment of an information system", with the beneficiary Ministry of Justice. The information system provides centralized electronic access to data on the initiation, movement and closure of enforcement cases in the Republic of Bulgaria and the system marks the beginning of the process of building an efficient, secure and coherent electronic environment for the enforcement process. Seven e-services have been developed for citizens and businesses:

- ✓ Provision of a reference to a document produced and served from the outgoing register of a bailiff's office;
- ✓ Provision of a reference to an incoming document with a reliable date from the incoming register of a bailiff's office;
- ✓ Provision of a statement of foreclosures by a bailiff;
- ✓ Provide a statement of mortgagee notification letters retrieved from a bailiff's office;
- ✓ Providing a reference to the records of the disclosure of sales of movable and immovable property from the bailiff's office for registration in court;
- ✓ Provision of a statement of fees and costs charged by a bailiff;
- ✓ Provision of a statement of sums received and transferred in execution proceedings.

A methodology has been developed for control over the activities of bailiffs through the use of the established ICJIS, approved by order of the Minister of Justice, and training has been conducted for the application of the methodology. A proposal has been made to the Minister of Justice to take the necessary actions for the development and adoption of the necessary normative changes in the Law on the Judicial Enforcement, the Law on the Human Rights and Freedoms and in the sub-legislative acts on their implementation in order to make the developed CCIS mandatory for bailiffs. Ordinance No. N-1 of 17 January 2022 on the information system of judicial enforcement was adopted in order to create a legal possibility to use the developed unified information system of judicial enforcement (CISJ) in the Republic of Bulgaria. The establishment of the information system is an important stage in the process of establishing electronic judicial enforcement. Enforcement affects the interests of a wide range of persons and

institutions: creditors, debtors, third parties, public and private bailiffs performing enforcement functions, control bodies under the Judiciary Act and the Private Bailiffs Act, etc. In view of the large number of potential users, the implementation of the judicial enforcement information system has a significant effect in line with the objectives set for facilitating interaction. The contribution of the OPGG investment is in the following areas:

- ✓ Facilitating operational processes, increasing administrative capacity to deliver more services;
- ✓ improving efficiency and transparency in the work of enforcement authorities and responding to the growing interest in access to electronic services;
- ✓ Discipline the executive process by creating and using uniform nomenclatures of concepts, document types, electronic forms, etc.;
- ✓ Reduce consumable and communication costs;
- ✓ the automation of the processes facilitates the parties to the cases by enabling them to follow the movement of documents in the cases as quickly and simply as possible and to track the status of an enforcement case from any point on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria or outside it;
- ✓ contributes to better service to citizens and businesses by the judiciary.

In order to realize the goals of modern and efficient justice in the service of citizens and businesses, an essential prerequisite is the construction of a single centralized portal that provides users access to e-justice through a single point. Till the time of programming of OPGG interventions, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Secondary Budget Officers (SBOs) have separate websites through which information is provided to citizens and businesses. Each has been developed at different times with different visions and means. There is also a lack of integration of the different sites with other e-government and e-justice portals, such as the Single e-Justice Portal of the Judiciary; the European e-Justice Portal of the European Commission; the Single e-Administrative Services Portal, etc. The implementation of the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0008 "Further development and centralisation of portals in the executive authorities of the Justice Sector for access of citizens and businesses to information, e-services and e-justice" of the Ministry of Justice, enables the creation of a Single Executive Portal in the Justice Sector, through which a single entry point for citizens to access the services provided by the structures of the executive authorities is implemented. For electronic administrative services, the possibility to request, pay for and receive the same in real time shall be ensured if no action by an official is required for their provision. In the framework of the project implementation, an analysis based on similar portals for citizens' and businesses' access to information, e-services and e-justice, and a review of best practices for the implementation of portal solutions has been carried out and a report with the architecture of Unified e-Justice Portal of the Executive Branch in the Justice Sector has been prepared. As a result, the Single Executive e-Justice Portal in the Justice Sector has been built, achieving the goal of a single point that provides users with access to e-justice. Following an expert study, the project has identified two e-services that have been developed and implemented, namely the filing of citizen complaints and the issuance of duplicate legal capacity. Two trainings have been implemented: for 8 administrators from the MoJ and its divisions and for 12 staff trainers from different directorates in the MoJ and its divisions. The contribution of the OPGG support was in the following areas:

- ✓ implementation of a single entry point to information and services provided by the executive in the justice sector - increases the accessibility of services;
- ✓ easing the administrative burden on citizens and businesses by reducing the time it takes them to request services, which is also a factor in increasing their accessibility.

Streamlining processes to achieve effective governance leading to greater transparency is an essential part of judicial reform. Prior to the OPGG intervention, there was no electronic exchange of documents between the MJ, the HRA and other administrations, contrary to the LeG and the LeDeS. There is no integration between the automated information systems used in the MJ and the second-level authorising officers to ensure intra- and inter-agency exchange of electronic documents only. Clerical systems are used whose main purpose is to identify paper documents, to describe them with metadata and to allow a description of their movement. The sector's executive authorities use a number of systems that have been set up in connection with the fulfilment of the regulatory obligations of specific laws, such as: 'Bulgarian Citizenship', 'CRLNC', 'Mediators', 'International Adoption', etc., and no integration has been established between them and the clerical systems in order to move fully towards electronic data exchange. The investments implemented under the OPGG project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0009 "Redesign of the AIS in the Ministry of Justice and the second-level authorising officers in order to switch to the use and exchange of only electronic documents and electronic content in the sector by the executive authorities. Training of staff in the use of AIS and electronic documents", allow to review the existing automated document management systems in the Ministry of Justice and the second-level authorising officers and to select the system to be redesigned. The selected AIS has been upgraded in order to move towards electronic document management and to provide citizens, businesses and external entities with the possibility to request and provide electronic administrative services. The upgraded automated document management information system is used for the electronic exchange of data by Ministry of Justice and the second-level authorising authorities, between different departments, as well as by citizens and businesses for requesting electronic administrative services, and four electronic services for citizens have been implemented. Four e-administrative services were implemented for citizens and businesses: providing access to public information; issuing certificates of social security income; issuing certificates of social security length of service; clarifying differences between an issued certificate of social security income and data on the insured person from the information system of the National Social Insurance Institution. 8 administrators and 367 key users, with the role of trainers, were trained by the Ministry of Justice and the second-level authorising authorities on the use of the AIS and electronic documents. The contribution of the OPGG investments made is in increased administrative productivity and transparency due to the use of the AIS and the electronic portal with services for businesses and citizens.

Streamlining processes related to the judicial status of citizens , is an important part of the reform related to improving the accessibility and accountability of the judiciary by introducing e-justice . Pending the implementation of the OPGG interventions, the issuance of "Judicial Status" certificates (Certificates of Criminal Records) has been implemented through decentralized systems serving 113 criminal records offices in all courts. The local databases of the Criminal Records Offices are updated manually, based on the court bulletins, making the process extremely unreliable, labor-intensive and difficult to control. The

Ministry of Justice operates a Central Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), which runs four separate systems, making it very difficult for staff to operate. In response to the identified deficits described above, a Central automated information system "Judicial Status" has been established with the support of OPGG through the implementation of project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0010 "Implementation of Central automated information system "Judicial Status"". This is one of the most successful interventions that have taken place in the sector. Through the development of Central automated information system "Judicial Status", a central database on criminal records has been established for the first time, bringing together 113 databases of district courts and the database of the Central Criminal Records Bureau at the Ministry of Justice, as well as a database of convicted Bulgarian citizens abroad, creating a fully centralised criminal record in Bulgaria. For the first time, citizens can apply for a criminal record certificate from any regional court in Bulgaria, without being restricted by their place of birth or residence, which reduces the administrative burden for them. The scope of the electronic criminal record certificate has been expanded - any Bulgarian citizen can apply for it, regardless of their criminal record . The certificate can be applied for and issued by and for any Bulgarian citizen regardless of the existence of criminal records/administrative penalty tickets under Article 78a of the Penal Code, amnestied and rehabilitated. The possibilities for authentication have been expanded - in addition to QES, it is also possible to use the personal identification code (PIC) of the NRA and the National Social Insurance Institution, as well as a cloud-based (mobile electronic signature). Innovative is the possibility provided to the courts to have information on sentences passed by foreign courts against Bulgarian citizens. Four internal administrative electronic services have been implemented in relation to judicial status: electronic criminal record bulletin; electronic criminal record report; electronic notification of rehabilitation time; electronic notification of changed judicial status. One electronic administrative service for citizens has been implemented: electronic criminal record certificate. The exchange of criminal record data between Member States has been facilitated and accelerated. According to the latest report on the use of the system[85] , a total of 147 880 criminal records have been issued, 83.62% of which are e-official criminal records (issued ex officio), 12.39% e-criminal records (electronically requested by citizens) and 3.99% issued over the counter. An amendment has been made to Regulation No. 8 of 26.02.2008 on the functions and organisation of the activities of the criminal record bureaus (State Gazette No. 67 of 28.07.2020, in force as of 1.01.2022 - amended by State Gazette No. 108 of 22.12.2020) in order to regulate the system. The contribution of the OPGG support to the reform related to improving the accessibility and accountability of the judiciary by introducing e-justice is in the following areas:

- ✓ streamlining processes related to the judicial status of citizens;
- ✓ reducing the administrative burden - any citizen can apply for and obtain their criminal record from any criminal record bureau in the country;
- ✓ Extended scope - any Bulgarian citizen can apply for an electronic criminal record, regardless of their criminal record.

The implementation of the activities programmed under the OPGG related to the introduction of a system for monitoring and regulating the workload of magistrates and the judicial administration,

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[85] August 2023.

establishing a standard for working conditions in the judicial authorities and increasing the efficiency of their work, are implemented through the implemented project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0011 "Introduction of a system for monitoring and regulating the workload of magistrates and the judicial administration, establishing a standard for working conditions in the judicial authorities and increasing the efficiency of their work". The contribution of the OPGG support is in terms of the following results achieved, which are directly related to the workload in the judiciary, namely:

✓ Interim evaluation of the methodology for measuring the severity of different types of cases;
✓ Developed a model to integrate the workload rate setting mechanism with other planning processes;
✓ Developed a methodology for measuring the workload of the judicial administration by developing objective criteria, including a mechanism for determining the workload norm of the employees in the administration of the judiciary;
✓ Developed an analysis of working conditions in courts and prosecution offices;
✓ Developed and implemented a standard for working conditions in the courts and prosecution;
✓ Mechanism for implementation of the adopted standard and monitoring of its implementation developed and implemented;
✓ An analytical report containing an analysis identifying the factors leading to an increase in the length of cases and files;
✓ A procedure has been developed to monitor the length of cases and measures to increase the efficiency of their handling, as well as a permanent mechanism to assess the impact of the application of the procedural codes in order to ensure guarantees for effective justice;
✓ An analysis of the procedural laws and the drafting of proposals for legislative changes to overcome the factors leading to delays in cases and an assessment of the effect of the application of the amended procedural rules in terms of speed, liquidity and efficiency of law enforcement and administration of justice;
✓ A package of proposals for amendments and additions to procedural laws was prepared, which, after approval by a decision of the Plenum of the SJC, was sent to the Minister of Justice with a view to exercising a legislative initiative, after which a working group was formed to take action on amendments and additions to the Civil Procedure Code.

The developed documents have been discussed, agreed and adopted by decisions of the competent committees, colleges and some of them by the SJC Plenum. The practical implementation and application of the approved models, standards, methodologies and mechanisms is to be carried out, which will lead to a reduction of workload and improvement of working conditions in the courts and prosecution offices in the Republic of Bulgaria in the long term.

The contribution of the implemented investments to the development of the judicial reform are in the direction of efficient administration of the judiciary, creating conditions for achieving:

✓ Effective implementation of a model for taking into account the burden of different types of court cases and files and the additional service activities of judges, prosecutors and investigators;

✓ An integrated policy on workload normalization for magistrates and administration and linking the planning process to the norm;

✓ Fair workload of judges, prosecutors and investigators; creating conditions for improving the quality of justice.

As a result of the project implemented by SJC BG05SFOP001-3.001-0013 "Further development and centralization of the portals in the JJC for citizens' access to information, e-services and e-justice", the implemented Unified e-Justice Portal was upgraded by migrating the websites of 180 courts in order to unify and centralize the information from the websites of the courts in the Republic of Bulgaria, by updating them in accordance with the changes in the regulatory framework. The project provides the necessary centralized information for the effective use of the developed new electronic service: for the application for the issuance of an enforcement order under Article 410 of the Civil Procedure Code. In connection with the streamlining of the Single e-Justice Portal from September 2022, SISC has extended the scope of documents that are published for citizens and lawyers in SEJP. Currently, the full set of documents in each case is published in SISC for cases handled in SISC. The objectives and activities of the project directly address Strategic Objective No. 3 "Equal and as close as possible to citizens and businesses electronic access to e-Justice and e-Government and making it the preferred option over traditional, paper-based documents" of the Roadmap to the Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020. The number[86] of cases accessed through the SEJP exceeds 176,000 and the number of cases accessed electronically from the end of March 2023 to the end of May is more than 15,800, which marks an increase of more than 700% on a monthly basis, compared to the period from November 2015 to 26 March 2023. Following the optimisation of the system, electronic summons read through user profiles are over 1,500, a fourfold increase on the previous 8 years. The data shows that after the optimization of the portal, the passive access of citizens and businesses to electronic cases has increased dramatically. SEJP's new functionality for active access to cases, through the electronic filing of procedural actions, has enabled lawyers and litigants to successfully file over 2,400 electronic documents.[87] At the time of writing, members of the public and interested parties are now also able to access electronic court cases via the eCase mobile app. The mobile application provides any user with a registered account access to all court cases with free public access, cases with private participation, viewing of all attached electronic documents, service of electronic court documents, etc. Access to e-Case court cases is provided by a one-time pairing of the application with a registered account on the Single e-Justice Portal via QES. In order to comply with the requirement for a more comprehensive introduction of e-Justice, the integration of the Single e-Justice Portal with the OPAC-built Case Management System, mainly used by the court administration and installed locally in each of the courts, has been carried out. The existing registers and information have been fully transferred to the e-Justice portal, following the unification of the integrated systems (based on an analysis of the need for changes in the software). Information from the of 131 courts has been integrated into the Single e-Justice Portal of the Judiciary. The contribution of the OPGG investment is that

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[86] according to official statistics of "Information Service" - https://www.is-bg.net/bg/news/321

[87] according to official statistics of "Information Service" - https://www.is-bg.net/bg/news/321

centralisation of information provides an opportunity to facilitate the way in which citizens and businesses, as well as stakeholders - lawyers and litigators - access information. The electronic case folder without deleted personal data will facilitate not only the aforementioned, but also the administration in the judiciary - clerks, secretaries and others.

Pursuant to Specific Objective 2 of the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform in the Judiciary – "Regulating the Workload of Magistrates and the Judiciary Structures" and Strategic Objective 1: Transforming the Administration and Public Institutions into Digital ones, Specific Objective 1.3. of the Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2023, interventions aimed at reducing the workload , including through the relaxation of procedural rules, increased use of alternative forms of dispute resolution and the introduction of e-justice are programmed and implemented. The project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0014 "Promoting the use of mediation as an alternative dispute resolution method", implemented by the Ministry of Justice, is a response to identified deficits related to mediation. Iin particular the fact that until the implementation of the project the Ministry of Justice maintained a Unified Register of Mediators (URM), which also maintained information on training organisations, but lacked information on the specific competencies of mediators, information on their activities, disputes resolved through mediation, information on the costs that the parties would pay for In the framework of the OPGG support, an analysis of the current state and best practices in the field of mediation, including the use of online and cross-border mediation, has been developed and approved by the Minister of Justice. On the basis of discussions with stakeholders, a report with recommendations has been drafted to justify the need for the implementation of measures and policies, including a draft normative act, on the basis of which necessary legal changes have been made to Regulation No. 2/15.03.2007 on the conditions and procedure for the approval of organisations that train mediators; on the requirements for training mediators; on the procedure for the registration, de-registration and deletion of mediators from the unified register of mediators and on the procedural and ethical rules for mediator conduct. As a result, a centralized electronic mediation portal has been developed and implemented - the implemented project is an extremely important step on the way of promoting mediation as an effective way to resolve disputes and providing the opportunity for online mediation procedures without the need for physical presence of the parties. The mediation procedure can be initiated entirely online, by submitting an application by the interested party in the dispute and selecting a mediator registered in the Unified Register of Mediators in Bulgaria.

3 electronic administrative services have been developed:

- ✓ registration in the Unified Register of Mediators and issuance of a certificate to the registered mediators;
- ✓ removal of a person from the Unified Register of Mediators;
- ✓ Approval of mediator training organisations and issuing of orders to approved trainers.

Developed 3 e-services on:

- ✓ declaring the termination of the activities of a mediator training organisation;
- ✓ change of the registered circumstances of the mediator;

✓ a change in the circumstances under which an order approving a mediator training organisation was issued.

Trainings have been implemented for administrators from the Ministry of Justice and 27 employees from 22 registered mediator training organisations and one mediation center. 5 pilot mediation centers have been established - 1 PA in each appellate district. After a series of working meetings with the presidents of the appellate courts in the country, in order to specify the most suitable locations in which to establish the mediation centers, the courts in the cities of Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo, Vratsa, Dobrich and Sliven were identified. This part of the project activities was implemented by SJC, which also provided the technical equipment for the centers. The contribution of the OPGG interventions is in terms of:

✓ modernisation of the judiciary - by improving existing procedures (instruments);
✓ Encouraging the use of alternative forms of dispute resolution through e-justice - the system in place has had an impact in terms of accessibility to end users;
✓ creates an opportunity to reduce the workload in the judiciary.

In accordance with the amendments and additions to the e-Government Act (amended and supplemented by SG No. 50 of 1 July 2016), the sub-legislative acts to the Act are amended. The Regulation on the general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services (in force as of 01.03.2017) was adopted by Decree No. 3 / 09.01.2017, according to which changes also occurred in the "Ordinance on general requirements for interoperability and information security''. The changes are in view of the identified problems and risks related to information resources and the need to introduce clearer requirements for them so that they can meet challenges in terms of workload, information security and protection of personal data. In line with the requirements in the Law on e-Government and "Ordinance on general requirements for interoperability and information security'' on monitoring, capacity planning and implementation of network and information security standards for the use of information resources in the executive structures of the Justice Sector, OPGG funding has been granted for the implementation of project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0015 "Technological, training and organisational means for the implementation of developed internal rules and policies for the use of information resources in the executive bodies of the Justice Sector", with the beneficiary Mi In the implementation of the activities under the contract, the following results were achieved:

✓ A technological solution for control and monitoring of access to information systems has been implemented in the following structures of the executive power in the justice sector, using a public key infrastructure - Ministry of Justice, Security Directorate General, General Directorate for the Execution of Penalties, National Legal Aid Bureau and Central Register of Pledges. No implementation of public key infrastructure has been carried out in the Registry Agency;
✓ Hardware components for public key infrastructure (USB tokens) have been delivered - 1090 pcs, but the 200 pcs for the Registry Agency have not been delivered to the Agency and will not be used by it;
✓ 5 trainings were held for IT specialists from the MJ and the structures of the Ministry of Justice; 42 IT specialists from the structures of the executive power in the justice sector were trained.

The contribution of the implementation interventions under OPGG is in terms of the implementation of strategic objective 1 of the Roadmap to the Strategy for the introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020. The implementation of the project fulfils the requirements of Directive (EU) 2016/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 2016 on measures for a high common level of network and information systems security in the Union, as well as the requirements of the Law on e-Government and "Ordinance on general requirements for interoperability and information security''.

Specific objective 3 "Systematic policy for the prevention of corruption in the judiciary" of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy, and in particular measure 1.3.1, provides for the implementation of an integrated policy for the prevention of conflict of interest and corruption within the judiciary. In response to this objective, the ISJC and the SJC are implementing project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0016 "Provision of software and methodological support, and administrative capacity building of the ISJC for the prevention of corruption and the judiciary", with the support of the OPGG. As a result of the implementation of the set activities by the ISJC, on the basis of Article 54, para. 1, item 10, in conjunction with item 8 of the Law on the Judiciary:

- ✓ Internal rules for integrity and conflict of interest checks on judges, prosecutors and investigators, for checks on actions of judges, prosecutors and investigators that undermine the prestige of the judiciary and for checks on violations of the independence of judges, prosecutors and investigators;
- ✓ Internal rules for the verification of the financial declarations of judges, prosecutors and investigators

They are binding for the inspection teams of the Inspectorate when carrying out the verification of the property declarations of judges, prosecutors and investigators.

An electronic public register of SJC referrals has been developed and implemented. The introduction of the recusal register gives publicity to cases where the court recuses itself or refuses to recuse itself from hearing cases. The establishment of the register lays the foundation for the subsequent full implementation of measure 1.3.1. "Integrated policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest and corruption within the judiciary. Electronic registers for the declaration of an extended range of circumstances, including de facto cohabitation, affiliation to non-public organisations, etc." under Specific Objective 3 "Systematic policy for the prevention of corruption in the judiciary" of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary. The implemented product allows for fully machine exchange of data with UCIS and SISC. The project foresees the construction and development of an electronic public register of electronic declarations of circumstances related to the prevention and establishment of conflict of interest and asset declarations . Several procurement procedures have been carried out under the Public Procurement Act. In three of the procedures, contractors have been selected and awarded a contract. All three contracts were terminated for non-performance. The remaining procedures were terminated by a decision of the contracting authority to terminate them because the tenders submitted did not comply with the conditions previously announced for

the performance of the contract. For these reasons, at the time of this evaluation, no register has been developed.

In the framework of the project implementation, trainings have been conducted for Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council staff on the use of the internal rules and for judicial officers, system administrators and other IT experts from the SJC and the judiciary involved in the process of operation and maintenance of the register of recusals.

The contribution of the investments made under the OPGG is in the following areas:

✓ An electronic public register of recusals has been created - A real tool for the prevention of conflict of interest and the fight against corruption in the judiciary;
✓ the internal rules drafted and adopted contribute to achieving the objectives of increased effectiveness in the prevention of conflicts of interest and guarantees for effective investigation of magistrates;
✓ increasing the administrative capacity and qualification of the trained officials for successful and effective work in carrying out the inspections under Chapter Nine, Section I "a" and I "b" of the LJ (the training on the internal rules on), respectively acquired knowledge and skills for working with the register of recalls.

It should be noted that the development and implementation in the ISJC of an electronic public register of electronic declarations of circumstances related to the prevention and establishment of conflicts of interest and asset declarations, which is an important part of achieving the objective of renewing and unifying all measures for the prevention of conflicts of interest in a coordinated policy within the judiciary with guarantees for transparency and preservation of the independence of the judiciary, has been unsuccessful.

Strategic Objective 4 "Modern and Effective Criminal Policy" of the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Reform in the Judiciary provides for the implementation of activities to modernise and improve the regulation and organisation of expertise. The organization of expert examinations and the activities of experts are regulated in the Criminal Procedure Code, the Criminal Code, the Judiciary Act and Regulation No. 2 of 2015 on the registration, qualifications and remuneration of experts. The Ordinance regulates the conditions to be met by the specialists approved as expert witnesses, the procedure and terms for changes to the lists, including the de-listing of expert witnesses, ethical rules of conduct, etc. There is no clear regulation of the status of expert witnesses, who and in what order carries out verification of compliance with the ethical rules, and their professional responsibility is not regulated. This fragmentation in the regulation leads to the fact that in some judicial districts there is a lack of experts in certain areas, especially for some complex expert opinions, which significantly hampers the judicial process and often leads to its delay. In response to the identified shortcomings and in order to achieve the objectives set out in the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform of the judiciary, project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0017 "Improvement of the model of forensic expertise" , with the Ministry of Justice as beneficiary, has been financed for implementation. Within the framework of the project implementation, it is foreseen to prepare an analytical report on the current models of expertise and the organisation of the work of experts

in the Bulgarian and European legal framework, including an assessment of the effectiveness of the commissioned expertise and an assessment of the need to build a specialised institutional capacity for the organisation and commissioning of particularly complex, expensive and/or requiring rare specialties expertise, including a new model of expertise and the organisation of the work of experts, which will be normative and/or The same has not been done. An automated information system (AIS) "Unified Register of Experts" has been established, which builds on the existing register[88] and avoids fragmentation in the selection of specialists. This allows pre-trial and trial authorities to quickly and easily find experts with the appropriate specialty. The information system is regulated by Article 402a of the Judiciary Act (SG No. 86 of 2020, in force as of 01.01.2021) and the amendments to Ordinance No. 2 of 29 June 2015 on the registration, qualifications and remuneration of experts, in force as of 01.04.2022, repealed by Ordinance No. N-1 of 14 February 2023 on the registration, qualifications and remuneration of experts, which currently regulates the matter. The contribution of the interventions implemented under the OPGG to the continuation of the reform of the judicial system in particular to the strategic objective of a modern and effective criminal policy , is along the following lines:

- ✓ Partial modernisation of the organisation of expertise;
- ✓ Enhancing access to specialised knowledge and analysis of the court and pre-trial bodies with guarantees of efficiency and competence, prevention of corruption and reasonable cost.

As part of the reform related to the modernization of the judiciary and in response to identified deficits in cross-border cooperation, with the support of OPGG, interventions have been implemented under project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0019 "Development of videoconferencing facilities and their use in the pre-trial and trial phases, including cross-border cooperation in the administration of justice" with the beneficiary Ministry of Justice. Videoconferencing allows for remote questioning of witnesses, experts and officials in real time, with interrogation sites in courts and detention facilities. Until the OPGG interventions were implemented, our country was one of the few member states that did not meet the recommendations for cross-border cooperation through the use of videoconferencing facilities. The following analyses and documents have been implemented in the framework of the implementation of the set project activities:

- ✓ analytical report based on the analysis of the available data collected on the subject and the activities undertaken so far;
- ✓ Implemented a survey on the activity and workload of courtrooms and related processes in the DGIN and the GDO, through direct interviews and questionnaires;
- ✓ an assessment of courtrooms and prisons on the feasibility and effectiveness of videoconferencing;
- ✓ A detailed plan with a total of 26 proposed videoconferencing-equipped rooms and one central component, the Videoconferencing Room Construction Plan, has been prepared, along with technical specifications for the supply, installation and commissioning of the necessary equipment.

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[88] specialised software for monitoring and control of experts, developed under OPAC

The planning activity is mainly based on the results of the project: "Inventory and analysis of the state of the communication infrastructure, information systems, services and registers in the justice sector", in the part concerning the available hardware equipment. The planning is in line with the recommendations of the EC projects "Implementing Transnational Use of Videoconferencing", SHAKE project, and also builds on the implemented OPAC SJC project, where 2 halls were built in Sofia City Court and Sofia Prison. Technological equipment for videoconferencing was delivered and installed, and 26 videoconferencing rooms were put into operation. A manual of rules for the use of videoconferencing was developed and approved by the SJC Plenum. As a result of all the activities carried out, 56 courts across the country are actively using the videoconferencing systems set up by the Ministry of Justice. The points are located in 20 judicial chambers, in which several courts using the system are located, and another six in penitentiary facilities. In order to use videoconferencing as efficiently as possible, the necessary legal changes have been adopted and additional funding for development has been provided in the National plan for reselience and recovery. The system also proved extremely useful during the COVID-19 pandemic. The contribution of the investments made under the OPGG has been along several lines:

✓ New modern tools have been introduced in the sector to meet strategic objectives;
✓ As a long-term contribution, the project is expected to lead to significant financial savings, as just bringing one defense witness from abroad to a court hearing or the travel costs of experts travelling across the country is estimated to cost several thousand euros;
✓ The implementation of the project aligns the proceedings with the Council Recommendations[89] .

Specific objective 4: Development of the legal aid system of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy, and in particular measures 5.4.1 and 5.4.2, foresee the implementation of activities to improve the systems for monitoring and evaluation of the quality of legal aid and facilitate access to primary legal aid. In response to the stated objectives the National Legal Aid Bureau is implementing project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0020 "Strategic reforms in the National Legal Aid Bureau" , as a result of which the systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of legal aid offered and facilitating access to primary legal aid are being improved in line with the Roadmap to the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of Judicial Reform. In order to align the legal aid system with the actual needs of the persons using it, including persons from vulnerable social groups, an assessment of the implementation of the Legal Aid Act has been carried out and a nationally representative survey on the need for legal aid has been conducted.

Improved the tools for assessing the quality of the legal aid provided through:

✓ standards for the provision of legal aid developed and approved, including guidelines for their implementation;
✓ unified procedures for the provision of legal aid and criteria and approaches for admission to legal aid have been developed, including a developed mechanism for the ex officio collection of

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[89] 'Promoting the use and sharing of best practices on cross-border videoconferencing in the field of justice in the Member States and at EU level' (2015/C 250/01), Directive 2013/48/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22.10.2013, Directive 2014/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3.04.2014 on the European Investigation Order in criminal matters, Regulation (EU) 2015/2421 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16.12.2015.

information on the social status of eligible persons - the procedures and mechanism have been approved and are mandatory for implementation;

✓ A mechanism for the most accurate planning of legal aid funds and control over their use has been developed and is validated and mandatory for implementation.

A software product has been developed and implemented to create a Unified/Single Electronic System for Legal Aid to automate and present in electronic form all the steps in the management of legal aid, synchronizing and coordinating the work of the different bodies in the system in one with better control by the National Legal Aid Bureau of the work of lawyers and bar councils. The Unified Electronic System for Legal Aid assists the National Legal Aid Bureau in all its functions under the Legal Aid Act, including registering requests for legal aid, appointing and assigning counsel, accounting for and payment of legal aid provided, maintaining a register of legal aid provided, etc., in accordance with Article 8 of the Legal Aid Act. The OPGG investment in the establishment of the EES contributes to improving the process for managing and accounting for the legal aid budget. The Unified Electronic System for Legal Aid is web-based, with WEB access for all authorized persons and with all steps of the provision and reporting of legal aid included. The system works independently in the National Legal Aid Bureau and in each of the Bar Associations, gradually involving all other parties in the legal aid process, namely courts, prosecutors' offices, lawyers. Qualification training programmes have also been developed in the framework of the project, and 265 lawyers have been trained, including junior lawyers. The contribution of the investments made under the OPGG related to the reform in the development part of the legal aid system is in the following areas:

✓ Guidelines have been developed, introducing common minimum and European standards for the provision of legal aid (unification of the legal aid system);
✓ Increasing the qualification and specialization of lawyers providing legal assistance through their participation in the trainings based on the developed qualification training programs;
✓ The development of the Unified Electronic System for Legal Aid contributes to making the legal aid process electronic, which in turn contributes to increasing the quality of legal aid and improving the legal aid reporting process;
✓ optimising legal aid costs;
✓ Facilitating access to legal aid for eligible persons.

The updated strategy for the continuation of the reform of the judiciary provides for the conduct of periodic surveys on citizens' satisfaction with the judiciary as well as its independence. According to Article 30 of the Law on the Judiciary, the Supreme Judicial Council is obliged to prepare annual reports on the independence and transparency of the judicial authorities. In response to the identified deficits and the objectives and measures set out in the Updated Strategy Roadmap, OPGG supports investments under project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0022 "Effective Access to Justice", with the Ministry of Justice as beneficiary, related to:

✓ Assessment of satisfaction with the judiciary - The updated strategy requires such surveys to be conducted periodically, but in the absence of a methodology, the results of the periodic surveys are

difficult to compare. In this regard, the OPGG supports interventions to develop a methodology with specific criteria so that citizens' satisfaction with the judiciary can be defined ambiguously;

- ✓ Introducing measures to enhance judicial independence - The updated strategy for the continuation of the reform of the judiciary requires a study on the independence of the judiciary - a self-assessment and an external evaluation. The OPGG supports project interventions related to the analysis of the surveys conducted to date on the independence of the judiciary, on the basis of which a report on the quality and adequacy of the surveys is prepared, which also covers relevant international and European experience and the development of a questionnaire toolkit for the assessment and analysis of independence in two parts - for the judiciary, as a self-assessment and for persons outside the judiciary - lawyers and citizens, resulting in a developed methodology for the analysis of factors leading to dependence of the court
- ✓ Development of a model for assessing access to justice for citizens and businesses - in line with the objectives set out in the Updated Strategy Roadmap measure 3.4.1 "Standard and system of measures for assessing access to justice for citizens and legal entities";
- ✓ Introduction of a methodology for the evaluation of the implementation of the Code of Civil Procedure, Code of Criminal Procedure and Code of Administrative Procedure - in accordance with the objectives set in measure 3.4.6 "Introduction of a mechanism for the evaluation of the impact of the implementation of the CCP, the CCP and the CAP" of the Updated Strategy Roadmap.

On the basis of the studies conducted and the analyses and methodologies developed, the following tools for the modernization of the judiciary have been implemented:

- ✓ Methodology for a Public Opinion Survey on Satisfaction with the Judicial System by order of the Secretary of Justice;
- ✓ Methodology for the preparation of an annual report on the independence and transparency of the judiciary, with a decision of the SJC to introduce;
- ✓ A model for assessing access to justice for citizens and businesses with an order for implementation by the Minister of Justice;
- ✓ Methodology for the evaluation of the implementation of CCP, CCP and the CAP - order for implementation issued by the Minister of Justice;

Trainings on the application of the Methodology for the analysis of the factors related to the independence of the judiciary were held, training 59 experts from the SJC Administration and magistrates from the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, Supreme Court of Cassation, Supreme Administrative Court and courts.

OPGG's contribution through the investments made is in the following areas:

- ✓ A permanent mechanism has been developed to evaluate the effect of the application of the CCP, CCP and the CAP, which is a prerequisite for ensuring guarantees for effective and fair justice;
- ✓ A mechanism for permanent independent monitoring of the factors questioning the independence of the judiciary and debate on them has been established;

✓ The investments made in terms of introducing measures to enhance the independence of the judiciary have contributed to increased accountability and transparency of the SJC, which in the long term should also lead to increased confidence in the judiciary.

With regard to the efficiency achieved under the examined procedure *BG05SFOP001-3.001 Strategic projects in implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary and the Strategy for the introduction of e-government and e-justice in the justice sector 2014-2020*, measured by the achieved indicators, we report the following data:

Table 11 Indicators achieved under the procedure

№	Indicator	Target value	Agreed value	Verified value in UMIS	% implementation
O3-1 Programme specific indicator	Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported	92	92	78	84,78%
O3-2 Programme specific indicator	Projects for the implementation of joint actions	6	6	6	100%
O3-4 Programme specific indicator	Projects for the promotion and development of alternative dispute resolution methods	1	1	1	100%
O3-6 Programme specific indicator	Number of supported e-services of the judiciary	23	23	28	121.74%
O3-7 Programme specific indicator	SISC designed	1	1	1	100%
O3-8 Programme specific indicator	Trained magistrates, court officials, officials of the investigating authorities under the Criminal Procedure Code	4308	4308	3449	80.06%

R3-1 Programme specific indicator	Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary	45	45	35	77.78%.
R3-3 Programme specific indicator	Magistrates, court staff and employees of the investigating authorities under CPC who successfully completed training with a certificate	994	994	1215	122.23%
O3-12 Individual per procedure	Number of projects for phased migration to hybrid private cloud and/or for phased provisioning of new services and systems	6	6	6	100%
O3-14 Individual per procedure	Projects to further develop Unified Information System for Combating Crime (UISCC)	1	1	1	100%

The performance data for the indicators and the values achieved and verified[90] , point to a very high degree of effectiveness, which is also consistent with the results achieved and the contribution of the interventions we have discussed in the procedure statement.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3.004 Introduction of programme budgeting in the judiciary

Any reform should be accompanied by an adequate budgetary framework and priorities for future spending, spending and reporting. According to specific objective 3 "Judiciary Budget - an instrument for effective management, accountability and reform" of Strategic Objective 3 "Efficient administration of the judiciary "of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary, measure 3.3.1 provides for the introduction of programme budgeting for each structure of the judiciary institutions and orientation of the budget towards achieving results and linking the financing to the set objectives, activities, workload and objective assessment of the development of the judiciary. In this context, Measure 5.5.1 provides for an assessment of the part of the judiciary's budget that is formed by fees and an analysis of the cost of the service provided. The budget of the judiciary is drawn up on a historical basis rather than through programme budgeting in accordance with clear objectives and a plan which must be financially secured. The need to introduce new models for the development and efficient management of the judicial budget has been identified. The existing approaches and mechanisms for resource allocation among the judicial authorities are different, this is dictated by the objective differences

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[90] as of 30.11.2023 according to the data of the OPGG MA and the EMIS

in their activities. The decentralised management model of the courts also leads to different approaches to the formulation of their annual budgets, and the subjective factor may be decisive. There is a growing need for increased resource inputs, increased remuneration of magistrates and capital investments aimed at increasing service capacity in line with the growing number of cases. It is not uncommon to find courts where resourcing does not correspond to increasing activity, thereby compromising the fundamental need to keep the system viable and calling into question the pattern of resource assessment and planning. In programmatic interventions based on analysis, the OPGG correctly identifies that the focus should be on the productivity and efficiency of the relevant judicial bodies, which requires programme-oriented planning and budgeting that makes the link between inputs and outputs. The change sought through the introduction of programme-based budgeting in the judiciary is the introduction of a new approach to budget preparation and implementation with a focus on efficiency and cost/benefit in order to improve the organisation of work and increase efficiency in the judiciary through proper planning and spending of budgetary resources. It should be noted that programme budgeting is in its second iteration, it has its first iteration already under OPAC[91]. Programme budgeting, apart from being linked to legislative amendments, is also directly dependent on the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance.

As a starting point for the implementation of the project activities, an assessment of the implementation of programme budgeting and an analysis of European practices for results-based budgeting in the judiciary were prepared. In the framework of the implementation of the activities related to the development of a methodology for programme budgeting in the judiciary, the following were developed:

✓ Concept for the Judicial Branch Program Budgeting Model, which defines the goals of program budgeting in the Judicial Branch, the number and scope of budget programs and subprograms, and the methods of linking each program's funding to the goals, activities, caseloads, and expenditures by type of case and docket, approved by the SJC Budget and Finance Committee;

✓ Concept for a system of non-financial performance indicators by budget programmes and sub-programmes, as defined by the chosen programme budgeting model, approved by the SJC Budget and Finance Committee;

✓ Concept for a Methodology for Estimating Costs by Case Type, Defining Cost Targets and Indicators by Case Type, which will describe the case types included in the budget process, methods for determining direct and indirect costs by case type, and methods for defining cost indicator targets, as approved by the SJC Budget and Finance Committee;

✓ Methodology for Programme Budgeting in the Judiciary, adopted by decision of the Plenary of the SJC.

In the framework of the activities to evaluate the court fee system, the following results were achieved:

✓ Estimate of the part of the budget of the judiciary that is formed by fees

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[91] The procedure builds on the results achieved under Priority Axis 1 "Good Governance", under Priority 1.5 "Transparent and Effective Judiciary" of OPAC in the programming period 2007-2013.

- ✓ Analysis of the cost of the service provided, including in mediation, and its adequate reflection in the court fee system
- ✓ Methodology for determining the cost-based amount of court fees, including in mediation
- ✓ Approved by the SJC Plenary and submitted to the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Finance proposals for amendments to the legislation on the court fees system to take action to improve the legislation under the Law on Normative Acts.

Regarding the activities carried out related to the improvement of the legal framework for the introduction of programme budgeting in the judiciary, the following results have been achieved:

- ✓ Review of the legal framework for budgeting in the judiciary, including internal regulations and rules for the activities of the judiciary related to the budget process;
- ✓ Legal analysis of the acts, including proposals for regulatory amendments for the introduction of programme budgeting according to the developed Methodology for Programme Budgeting in the Judiciary;
- ✓ Approved by the SJC Plenum and submitted to the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Finance proposals for amendments to the legislation at national level for the introduction of programme budgeting in the judiciary, for taking action to improve the legislation in accordance with the Law on Normative Acts;
- ✓ Drafted amendments to internal acts related to the introduction of programme budgeting in the judiciary, adopted by the SJC Plenary;
- ✓ Plan for the introduction of programme budgeting in the judiciary, adopted by the SJC Plenum;
- ✓ Prepared guidelines for the judiciary on the budget procedure for the preparation of the 2025 Budget Estimates adopted by the Budget and Finance Committee of the SJC;

Changes are expected in the legislation to regulate programme budgeting in the judiciary.

A budget programme reporting software product approved by the Commission for Professional Qualifications and Information Technology has been developed and implemented, including at the secondary authorising officers with budget appropriations. A Manual for the use of the Software has been developed and training on the use of the Software has been provided to SJC administrative staff.

Trainings were held for the employees of the judicial authorities on the developed Methodology for Program Budgeting in the Judiciary. 588 Judiciary staff were trained.

The project evaluation identified poor coordination between the SJC and the executive, i.e. the SJC should initiate the process of introducing programme budgeting, but the legislative initiative is not with them. At the same time, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Justice are not included as partners in the project. The two ministries are only involved in the implementation of the activities in the form of coordination of ready deliverables, which does not have the expected effect that could be achieved if the project was implemented in partnership with the structures that ultimately have the legislative initiative to implement the changes. This inevitably leads to delays in the implementation of some of the project

activities, which could have been foreseen already at the level of the project idea, especially as regards the activities related to the improvement of the legal framework for the introduction of programme budgeting.

The contribution of the investments made under the OPGG, when the process of adoption of the regulatory framework is completed, will be in terms of:

✓ A new model of performance-based budgeting has been introduced in each structure of the judiciary;
✓ increasing the transparency of the budget of the judiciary and the efficiency of the management of budgetary funds.

Indicator O3-3 "Judiciary supported to introduce programme budgeting" - 180 (which will lead to 100% implementation of the target) is to be reported.

Table 12 Indicators achieved under the procedure

№	Indicator	Target value	Agreed value	Verified value in UMIS	% implementation
R3-1 Programme specific indicator	Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary	5	5	3	60%
O3-1 Programme specific indicator	Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported	11	11	11	100%
O3-3Programme specific indicator	Judicial authorities supported for the introduction of program budgeting	180	180	0[92]	0%
O3-8Programme specific indicator	Trained magistrates, court officials, officials of the investigating authorities under the CPC	638	638	588	92.16%.

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[92] According to the OPGG data, indicator O3-3 "Judiciary bodies supported for the introduction of programme budgeting" -180 (which will lead to 100% implementation of the target) is to be reported.

The efficiency of the management and the correct process of the administration of the judiciary are a priority for the reform of the judiciary. Judicial review is one of the most essential legal factors for reliable legal protection of citizens' rights and freedoms in their relations with the public administration, as well as for ensuring legality in the activities of the administrative apparatus. Violation of the right of access to a court, part of which is the requirement for effective judicial review, is among the most significant violations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), having a negative impact on the rule of law, democracy and upholding the rule of law, the guarantor of which is precisely the courts and the legal validity of their final judicial decisions. The identified deficits are addressed by the programming of procedure BG05SFOP001-3.005 "Efficiency of judicial review and unification of the practice of the courts". The procedure is in implementation of measures 5.1.3 and 5.1.4. included in specific objective 1 "Effective judicial protection of human rights" of Strategic Objective 5 "Guarantee the rule of law, protection of human rights, access to justice and the humanity of justice" of the Updated Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform of the judiciary. In the framework of the implementation of the activities, a study-analysis of the effectiveness of the judicial review of the acts of the local administration was prepared (the case law of the Supreme Administrative Court and the administrative courts in the period from 2014 to 2018), and a report was prepared summarizing the reasons for the non-implementation of court decisions by which administrative acts were confirmed or annulled and the ways to overcome them according to the legislation in force. The report sets out recommendations aimed at avoiding unlawful acts and omissions in order to increase the effect of the enforcement of judicial acts, and proposes specific measures to assist the process of enforcement of judicial decisions by local administration bodies. The analysis also includes a review of cases in which the court has refused to review a contested administrative act and the effective implementation of judicial review and the full exercise of the right of access to a court. On the basis of the activities carried out, the Rules for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the jurisprudence of the administrative courts with regard to the effective judicial review and the right of access to court have been drafted and approved by order of the Chairman of the Supreme Administrative Court, allowing for timely measures to initiate procedures for requesting the adoption of an interpretative decision in case of identification of contradictory or incorrect jurisprudence.

The contribution of the OPGG investments is in the following areas:

- ✓ the possibility of ongoing external monitoring of the effectiveness of the unification of practice by the highest instances;
- ✓ streamlining the work of administrative bodies in implementing the law;
- ✓ reducing the number of appealed acts of local self-government bodies and municipal administration.

Regarding the efficiency achieved under the examined procedure *BG05SFOP001-3.005 "Efficiency of judicial control and unification of the courts' practice"*, measured by the achieved indicators, we report the following data:

Table 13 Indicators achieved under the procedure

№	Indicator	target value	Agreed value	Verified value in UMIS	% implementation
R3-1 Programme specific indicator	Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary	1	1	1	100%
O3-1 Programme specific indicator	Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported	3	3	3	100%

The performance data for the indicators and the values achieved and verified[93], point to a very high degree of effectiveness, which is in line with the results achieved and the contribution of the intervention that we discussed in the procedure statement.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3.007 "Improving and updating policies and rules related to the appraisal and remuneration of judicial officers and introducing guarantees for public participation in the selection of jurors by municipal councils"

The efficiency of the management and the correct process of the administration of the judiciary are a priority for the reform of the judiciary. OPGG has programmed two interventions aimed at creating real conditions for improving the performance of the administration of justice. The focus is on human resources, ensuring sustainability and capacity building through the introduction of uniform, clear and objective rules for the career development of judicial officers, the formation of their remuneration and fringe benefits, the evaluation of their performance through performance appraisal and the creation and introduction of mechanisms and rules to ensure real public participation in the administration of justice through the institution of the jury, with safeguards against conflicts of interest.

The interventions programmed with regard to the appraisal of judicial officers respond to the identified deficits of the Methodology for the appraisal of judicial officers, which do not meet the modern requirements for direct linkage to the final result of the administration's activity. With the implementation of the SJC project BG05SFOP001-3.007-0002 "Improvement of the procedures for attestation and remuneration of judicial officers in the Republic of Bulgaria", a change is being implemented in terms of providing an opportunity to improve the status of judicial officers through the development and introduction of common criteria for their attestation, taking into account the specificities of the type of judicial authority/employer, the development and introduction of modern methods for the management and

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[93] as of 30.11.2023 according to the data of the OPGG MA and the EMIS

evaluation of the performance of duties and linking the evaluation of the performance of judicial officers to the performance of their duties. The performance of judicial staff should be based on objective rules contributing to their career development and better recruitment. In order to fill this deficit of more objective rules and criteria, the project has developed:

- ✓ Analysis of the Status of Judicial Officers, Containing Proposals and Recommendations for Changes in the Process of Attestation of Judicial Officers in the Republic of Bulgaria - Due to the heterogeneity of the duties, functions and activities of the different types of judicial officers in the and the specificities of the respective bodies of the judiciary, in accordance with the current classifications, a thorough analysis of the status of judicial officers was carried out;

- ✓ Rules for the appraisal of judicial officers, taking into account the specificities of the type of judicial authority concerned - in order to improve the appraisal process for judicial officers, it should be based on clear principles, uniform criteria and rules, taking into account the specific requirements of the different levels and bodies of the judiciary, as well as the heterogeneity and specificities of the duties, functions and activities of the different types of judicial officers. The Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council adopts the Rules on the appraisal of judicial officers in the Republic of Bulgaria, on the conditions and procedure for appraisal of judicial officers and the conditions for promotion and downgrading.

The project is expected to develop a software product for electronic appraisal of judicial officers by the end of 2023.

Increasing the confidence in the court and guaranteeing the defendants an independent and impartial trial by ensuring public participation in the selection of the jury is another objective in the programming of the procedure and implementation of the SJC project BG05SFOP001-3.007-0001 "Ensuring real public participation in the administration of justice through the institution of the jury", in implementation of measures 6.2.1 "Transparency and public participation in the selection of the jury by the municipal councils", 6.6.2.2 "Transparency of the jury and guarantees against conflict of interest" and 6.2.3 "Debate on the possibilities to further increase public participation through the institution of the jury" of the Updated Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform of the judiciary will provide the opportunity for the improvement of the institution of the jury. An assessment has been made of the current legal framework and the practice of EU Member States with regard to ensuring real public participation, the ethical rules observed by jurors and the declaration of the presence/absence of conflict of interest. Taking into account the Relevance Report on the opinions and suggestions received from the public hearings, the SJC Plenary approved the proposals to ensure genuine public participation in the administration of justice through the institution of the jury, introduced by amendments to the Judicial Service Act and Regulation 7 on Juries, where applicable. Amendments to Jury Regulation 7 concerning updated Ethical Principles and Rules of Conduct for Jurors and a unified Declaration on the presence/absence of conflict of interest of jurors were adopted, approved and introduced by the SJC Plenary. A Unified Jury Register has been developed and implemented. The Register is accessible to the public on the website of the Single e-Justice Portal. An External User Guide to the register is also available on the SEJP website. In each court, judicial officers' profiles have been set up for accessing the Register

and for entering information and documents. Training of 150 magistrates, court officials, investigators has been conducted in accordance with the Criminal Procedure Code on the use of the system.

The contribution of the investments made under the OPGG is in enabling the creation and introduction of mechanisms and rules to ensure real public participation in the administration of justice through the institution of the jury and in providing safeguards against conflicts of interest. With the implementation of the Unified Jury Register, thanks to the support of the OPGG, it is possible to track the profile of each juror, the intensity of participation in the trial, compliance with the requirements for random selection of the main and reserve jurors, as well as all the requirements provided for in the Judicial Power Act and the regulations concerning the jury.

Table 14 Indicators achieved under the procedure

№	Indicator	Target value	Agreed value	Verified value in UMIS	% implementation
R3-1 Programme specific indicator	Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary	6	6	5[94]	83.33%
O3-1 Programme specific indicator	Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported	4	4	4	100%
O3-8Programme specific indicator	Trained magistrates, court officials, officials of the investigating authorities under the CPC	150	150	138	92%.

[94] Under project BG05SFOP001-3.007-0002, a foreseen software product for electronic attestation of judicial officers is being developed and this is expected to be completed at the end of 2023, which is reported in indicator R3-1 Programme specific indicator

R3-3Programme specific indicator	Magistrates, court staff and employees of the investigating authorities under CPC who successfully completed training with a certificate	150	150	138	92%.

The data on the performance of the indicators and the values achieved and verified[95], point to a very high degree of effectiveness, which is also consistent with the results achieved and the contribution of the interventions under the procedure.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3.008 Development and implementation in the judicial system of software for accelerated creation and reproduction of acts and other documents through dictation and automatic voice-to-text conversion and accompanying processing systems

The problem with the workload of judges and prosecutors is the focus of a number of structurally defining documents including the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary, the Report of the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe on Bulgaria's progress under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism of 13.11.2018, the results of an empirical study on the workload of judges in Bulgaria adopted by the SJC, the latest annual analyses of the the collegiate judges of SJC on workload, the annual reports of the Supreme Court of Cassation and the larger courts, etc. In response to the identified deficit, the OPGG funded project BG05SFOP001-3.008-0001 "Development and implementation in the judiciary of software for accelerated creation and reproduction of acts and other documents through dictation and automatic voice-to-text conversion and accompanying processing systems" with the beneficiary being the Supreme Judicial Council. The procedure and the project contribute to:

- ✓ Increased efficiency in the administration of justice through the introduction of a system for recording and converting audio-speech into text in the implementation of the procedural obligations of magistrates and judicial officers;
- ✓ Reducing the workload of magistrates and court staff by saving time in typing, processing and transferring information;
- ✓ Increasing the trust in the judiciary by citizens and businesses by improving the effective administration of justice .

The introduction of software for dictation and automatic conversion of the voice recording into text, respectively for automatic annotation of each opinion, provides magistrates with a tool for accelerated input /digitalization/ of acts. The software allows, instead of manually typing the acts, to generate dictation-based auto-typed text, allowing quick formatting, searching, referencing and many other options for additional

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[95] as of 30.11.2023 according to the data of the OPGG MA and the EMIS

word processing (including making translations) and references to all key segments of the acts. The software solution allows for the introduction of the institution of "electronic reasoning", i.e. the delivery of judgments in open court. It ensures efficiency and transparency in the work of the judges, as it allows the court clerks not only to record but also to reproduce the speeches in a hearing in the required protocol, quickly and easily, in full and with fewer errors. The time taken to type, process and transfer information in each case is reduced by integrating the software with SISC. Improved quality of work, faster document turnaround, ability to work remotely, equipment independence. SJC has accepted the results of the project, and the built software has been uploaded to SJC servers and the necessary tests have been performed. The software is in the process of being implemented, after which the magistrates and staff will be trained to use it.

The biggest advantage of introducing voice-to-text software in the work of the courts is the time saved by magistrates (judges, prosecutors and investigators) and court clerks, which will have a direct effect on the speed and quality of justice. The benefits of introducing specialised software (including time and financial savings) are not only for the parties in a case, but for the judicial system as a whole. In addition to time savings, better accountability and credibility in the justice system will be achieved by increasing the efficient administration of justice, which in the long term would lead to increased trust in the judiciary by citizens and businesses. Last but not least, it should be noted that after the implementation of the programme in the courts, it will be made available to over 640 state institutions that have already stated that they want to work with it. These include the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of the Interior. These institutions will have the opportunity to train themselves in the software on their specific expressions and terms. All this will make the implemented intervention sustainable not only for the judiciary but also for the whole administration, which will contribute to efficiency, openness and transparency to the public thanks to time savings and process optimisation. No indicators have been verified under the procedure and this is still to be done.

Investments related to the creation of conditions for improving the professional development of magistrates and judicial staff and a sustainable increase in the quality of training are an essential element of the continued reform for the modernisation of the judiciary. The projects in these procedures are implemented by the NIJ, which is the institution entrusted by the Judiciary Act with the training of judicial personnel. In this regard, NIJ is supported through OPGG funding to expand activities towards building analytical and organisational capacity to provide the necessary scope and quality of training for the judiciary.

When we examine implemented training procedures in the judiciary, the following fall within the scope of our analysis[96]:

Procedure code	Name of the procedure
BG05SFOP001-3.002	Enhancing the competence of magistrates and judicial officers through effective training at the National Institute of Justice

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[96] according to the scope set out in the proposal

BG05SFOP001-3.006	Sustained improvement of the quality of the National Institute of Justice's activities and raising the competence of magistrates and judicial officers through effective training

Thanks to the OPGG investment, for the first time a unified e-learning environment is being created for organisers, learners and trainers at all stages of the preparation, delivery and reporting of training activities. An information system for the management of the training process and the creation of conditions for its development and implementation in a paperless environment has been developed and implemented. The system has functionalities for registering participants, accepting and processing requests; ranking; generating letters, calendars, schedules, etc.; publishing materials; document templates (lists, boards, programmes, etc.); issuing certificates; reporting; providing various reports; summarising surveys; archiving; allocating training rooms; monitoring deadlines, etc. The implemented information system covers the management of the entire training process - digitalization of training courses, access to training, obtaining certificates through the platform. This type of training methodology is entirely new to the judiciary and has been achieved thanks to OPGG's investment. In the training delivery phase, the e-learning environment created (by providing an online connection to the in-person training environment), provides access to an additional number of magistrates and judicial officers, beyond the limited in-person group. These are the new participants in the training process, who have remote access to the training through its online broadcasting via the provided equipment. Through the possibility of recording the learning process, the electronic paperless learning environment has the capacity to become a resource for self-study available to every judge, prosecutor, investigator, judicial officer, which represents a tool to stimulate the improvement of individual qualification, including in the working environment. Building a culture of working in a digital environment is seen as an essential contribution of OPGG support. In the developed e-learning portal, the total number of registered users exceeds 7,000 and it is reported that the system has so far registered 50,000 entries/requests during the period of use.

In terms of the target group covered and the difficulties in implementing the activities - first of all they are in adapting to the digitalization process, adapting to the training and methodologies. The traditional face-to-face form of training is preferred by a significant number of magistrates who are reluctant and even distrustful of the online formats offered, especially before the pandemic. The challenge for NIJ is to overcome the stereotypes and change attitudes towards e-learning by building on digital skills and competencies and developing a culture of judicial learning. Through the investments made, the community of judicial trainers is being developed and strengthened through the formation and upgrading of teaching skills of judges, prosecutors, investigators and/or judicial officers, other representatives of the project's target group, potential and established NIJ temporary trainers. The investments made under the OPGG have had a significant impact, as thanks to the information system set up, international experts have been able to be involved, whose hosting would have been more complex and costly to organise if it had been done conventionally. Many new trainers who are just entering the field are also involved in the trainings.

The Beneficiary identifies the development of e-learning resources as a key investment made under the OPGG and which are continuously used after the completion of the training through the NIJ e-learning portal.

Judicial training standards have been developed to develop the key skills and competencies needed to exercise the powers of all levels of authorities within the judiciary. The Judicial Training Standards are a tool for strategic planning of NIJ's training activities, on the basis of which the Institute's sustainable curricula and programmes will be developed.

On the basis of the recommendations and expectations of the judicial authorities, a Draft Amendment to the Internal Rules for the Organization and Procedure of the Training Activities at the National Institute of Justice was prepared and approved by the NIJ Board at a meeting held on 02.12.2019. A new Chapter Nine "Regional Training Program" is created, which supersedes the current Internal Rules on the Organization and Procedure for the Implementation of the Regional Training Program for Courts and Prosecutor's Offices. This completes the process of consolidating the training activities of the NIJ into a single act, which was launched in 2017 with the aim of codifying and unifying the norms governing the Institute's training activities.

A "Handbook of Court Procedures for Stabilisation and Commercial Insolvency Proceedings" has been developed. The electronic format of the Handbook is available on the NIJ Extranet page as well as in the Virtual Reading Room maintained within the Institute's distance learning platform for magistrates.

The process of evaluation of judicial training has been improved in accordance with the methodology of the European Judicial Training Network, in line with the Kirkpatrick evaluation model, introducing 4 levels of evaluation - reaction, learning, behavior, result. Evaluation forms have been developed for the first three levels of this model, and evaluation guidelines have been formulated for level 4 - the so-called systemic effect of training, focusing on its overall impact on an individual judicial authority or the judicial system as a whole.

More than 13 757 magistrates, judicial and investigative officers under the Criminal Procedure Code and other officials have been successfully trained in various areas, with 29 339[97] participating in training. These trainings provide quality professional training to magistrates, judicial officers and other persons in the system with a view to enhancing their qualifications and improving the efficiency of justice. Foreign language training has also been implemented as a tool for strengthening judicial cooperation within the European Union. Improving the foreign language skills of magistrates and judicial staff is a key instrument for the creation of an area of freedom, security and justice based on mutual recognition of judicial decisions and mutual trust in the EU. The Strategic Plan of the European Judicial Training Network 2021-2027 highlights the role of national training institutions in providing basic levels of language training to members of the professional community, and the courses delivered respond to this stated priority. The trainings implemented in related judicial schools, the EU Court of Justice, Eurojust, OLAF, Europol and other European or international institutions or organisations represent cross-border training activities in a specific thematic area, which are of key importance for building mutual trust between those working in the judiciary.

If we look at the indicator "participants whose labour market situation within six months after leaving the operation is better", the contribution of the OPGG investments can be traced through surveys

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[97] A participant may participate in more than one training

conducted among those who have undergone PA 3 training in three follow-up periods - from 2016 to 31 July 2018 , from 1 August 2018 to 29 February 2020 and from the end of 2019 to 31 December 2021[98] . The following key observations are outlined in the reports produced:

⇒ The trainings conducted under PA 3 of the OPGG between 2016 and 31 July 2018 resulted in an improvement in the labour market situation within six months of the training for 25% of the participants**.** The improved labour market situation is mostly reflected in performing functions that require higher competences, skills or qualifications (73% of those who improved their situation). Next in the hierarchy, but with significantly lower weighting, were improvements towards a job position involving more responsibilities (27% of those who improved their situation) and a position involving promotion/rank (21%). The contribution of the OPGG training to the improvement of the labour market situation is unequivocal: the majority of the 74% who experienced such an improvement state that their participation in the programme more or less contributed to it. The contribution of the OPGG trainings in this first period of programme implementation (2016 to 31 July 2018) is also evident in the subjective satisfaction of those who have undergone them. The majority (95%) - both those who have improved their situation and those for whom no change has occurred - are more or less satisfied;

⇒ The trainings conducted under PA 3 of the OPGG between August 1, 2018 and February 29, 2020 resulted in an improvement in the labour market situation within six months after the training for 24% of the participants. The improvement in the labour market situation of the participants was mainly reflected in the performance of functions requiring higher competences, skills or qualifications (68% of those who improved their situation). For 28%, the improved situation consisted of taking up a position with more responsibilities. Next, 20% of those who improved their situation stated that they held a job position involving promotion/rank. The contribution of the OPGG training to the improvement of the labour market situation is unequivocal: the majority of the 73% who experienced such an improvement state that their participation in the programme more or less contributed to it. The contribution of the OPGG trainings in the period August 1, 2018 to February 29, 2020 is unequivocally stated by those who have undergone them. The majority (96%) - both those who improved their situation and those for whom no change occurred - are more or less satisfied with their participation in the training(s);

⇒ The trainings conducted under OPGG PA 3 in the period from the end of 2019 to 31.12.2021 resulted in an improvement in the labour market situation within six months after the training for 24.5% of the participants. The greatest improvement in participants' labour market situation was in performing functions requiring higher competencies, skills or qualifications (61% of those who improved their situation). For 30% of those reporting an improvement, it consisted of taking up a position involving more responsibilities. Next, 28% of those who improved their situation stated that they held a job position involving advancement in position/rank. The contribution of the OPGG

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[98] The surveys were conducted by Alpha Research Agency and the relevant reports were produced, which we refer to for the study of the long-term outcome of the indicator

training to the improvement of the labour market situation is unequivocal: the majority of the 80% who experienced such an improvement state that their participation in the programme more or less contributed to it. The contribution of the OPGG trainings in the period from the end of 2019 to 31.12.2021 is unequivocally stated by those who underwent them. The majority (97%) - both those who improved their situation and those for whom no change occurred - are more or less satisfied with their participation in the training(s).

The project BG05SFOP001-3.002-0001 "Quality Professional Training for Increasing the Effectiveness of Justice" is a follow-up to the previous seven projects implemented under OPAC and strengthens the experience and practice to outline new directions of development. Face-to-face, regional and distance training has been provided to 14 653 magistrates, judicial and prosecutorial assistants, judicial officers, bailiffs, registry judges, jurors and other persons under the Judiciary Power Act. The new focuses are related to the development of thematic areas to ensure a sustainable increase in the quality of training, as well as to the deployment of regional trainings, in partnership with 55 courts (appellate, district, administrative, regional, Sofia City Court, Sofia District Court and Specialised Criminal Court), which thematically respond to specific needs of the administration of justice on the ground. They are included in the catalogue of good practices of the member countries of the European Judicial Training Network. The development of a thematic handbook on European law successfully complements the training process on national legislation and combines knowledge to reach European standards of quality justice.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.002-0002 "Innovative products and services in NIJ training" introduces innovative approaches in judicial training, including the development of inter-institutional collaborations and "knowledge partnerships" to support judicial training. The activities create the conditions for the development of a high-tech training process that goes beyond conventional forms of training in terms of strategic outcomes and vision. The activities include an innovative model of specialised in-person training in the field of administrative justice, in partnership with the Supreme Administrative Court; foreign language training in English and French; training and study visits to European training schools and institutions; the creation of self-learning resources and the introduction of new forms of training in an electronic environment; the development of an information management system for the training process and the creation of conditions for its conduct in a paperless environment. 4 145 representatives of the target group have been trained. The new accents are also related to the creation of conditions for the electronification of the training process and its management through the construction of self-learning resources, new forms of training in the virtual environment, the creation and implementation of an information system for the management of the training process and for its conduct in a paperless environment. Training and study visits to European training schools and institutions should be added to the innovative activities and services as an international component of the project proposal, reflecting best European practices and contributing to enhancing the capacity of the National Institute of Justice to create new products and services by developing and establishing institutional links with European schools and institutions. A Learning Management Information System (LMIS) has been developed and implemented.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.006-0001 "Justice in the 21st Century - Developing Professional Competence and Integrity of Magistrates and Judicial Officials" supports the development of standards for

judicial training, the improved process of evaluation of judicial training, the strengthening of the community of judicial trainers are tools for the implementation of horizontal policies in the activities of the Institute to ensure the sustainability of the results of the training activities. 9,002 representatives of the target group have been trained in face-to-face, distance and hybrid trainings, including trainers at the NIJ. The activities implemented under the project reflect the vision for judicial training formulated in the Institute's Strategic Plan 2020-2022, as well as the achievements of the NIJ and other institutions responsible for the implementation of the Updated Judicial Reform Strategy and its Implementation Roadmap.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.006-0002 "NIJ - Modern Judicial Training Institution" provides quality professional training in the judiciary and organizational development and strengthening of the National Institute of Justice. Investing in human resource development at NIJ and continuing education for the Institute's staff in line with identified needs is a key element in establishing the Institute as a modern judicial training institution. The research communities of temporary faculty formed by the project and the resources developed will contribute to the development of an independent capacity for research and analysis of the administration of justice within the judiciary, which will become established as a sustainable NIJ practice for developing professional knowledge and skills. Opportunities are provided to improve the foreign language training of magistrates and judicial staff in English and French, and to exchange experiences and good European practices with European and international institutions, organisations and schools that contribute to the proper application of EU law based on mutual trust and cooperation and to the development of a pan-European legal culture.

As a good practice, it can be noted that before the project proposals were submitted, NIJ prepared a functional analysis funded from its budget and on this basis the identified needs were shaped as project ideas.

To date, in terms of future development and ensuring the sustainability of the investments made, no specific funding has been earmarked for the NIJ in the operational programmes, and the objectives set out in the NAP are too clustered in the Justice sector, with no clear demarcation of the exact interventions for which the requested funds will be used in terms of ongoing reforms. Judicial training should receive European funds, not because the budget cannot allocate enough, but because the budget cannot fund foreign experts and foreign participants, etc. Investment should continue in creating the conditions for improving the professional development of magistrates and judicial staff, with a view to enhancing their qualifications and expertise through training, which is an essential element of continuing the reform to modernise the judiciary. It is equally important that the systems already in place, which are proving themselves among the target group, continue to be funded so that they can be improved.

The indicators achieved under the procedure "*Increasing the competence of magistrates and judicial officers through effective training at the National Institute of Justice*" are as follows:

Table 15 Indicators achieved under the procedure[99]

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[99] as of 30.11.2023.

№	Indicator	Target value	Agreed value	Verified value in UMIS	% implementation
O3-1 Programme specific indicator	Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported	3	3	3	100%
O3-2 Programme specific indicator	Projects for the implementation of joint actions	2	2	2	100%
O3-8 Programme specific indicator	Trained magistrates, court officials, officials of the investigating authorities under the CPC	16 152	16 152	18 798	116.38%
R3-1 Programme specific indicator	Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary	1	1	1	100%.
R3-3 Programme specific indicator	Magistrates, court staff and employees of the investigating authorities under CPC who successfully completed training with a certificate	16 102	16 102	18 747	116.43%
O3-16 Individual per procedure	Developed and improved technological and information systems related to judicial "e-learning"	1	1	1	100%

The performance data for the indicators and the values achieved and verified[100], point to a very high degree of effectiveness, which is also consistent with the results achieved and the contribution of the interventions we have discussed in the procedure statement.

In terms of the efficiency achieved, measured by the indicators achieved for the procedure "*Sustainable improvement of the quality of the National Institute of Justice's activities and enhancing the*

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[100] as of 30.11.2023 according to the data of the OPGG MA and the EMIS

competence of magistrates and judicial officers through effective training" discussed in the presentation, are the following:

Table 16 Indicators achieved under the procedure[101]

№	Indicator	Target value	Agreed value	Verified value in UMIS	% implementation
O3-1 Programme specific indicator	Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported	16	16	16	100%
O3-8 Programme specific indicator	Trained magistrates, court officials, officials of the investigating authorities under the CPC	10 505	10 505	10 541	100%
R3-1 Programme specific indicator	Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary	8	8	8	100%.
R3-3 Programme specific indicator	Magistrates, court staff and employees of the investigating authorities under CPC who successfully completed training with a certificate	10 175	10 175	10 167	99.92%

The performance data for the indicators and the values achieved and verified[102], point to a very high degree of effectiveness, which is also consistent with the results achieved and the contribution of the interventions we have discussed in the procedure statement.

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[101] as of 30.11.2023.
[102] as of 30.11.2023 according to the data of the OPGG MA and the EMIS

6.4. Evaluation question 1.2.   Which of the investments in the field of administrative and judicial services can be identified as the most effective in terms of their users (end users)?

> The OPGG is a key tool to support the realisation of the vision for e-government and e-justice in the Republic of Bulgaria. The most effective for the end users are the investments fully focused on better and efficient service to citizens and businesses, which have contributed to the following results :
>
> ✓ Introduced efficient business models in the work of the administration - from routine activities to services for citizens and businesses;
> ✓ a digital administration - an administration structured in line with modern management technologies and advances in information and communication technologies;
> ✓ achieved interoperability at national level - from fragmented and closed, to integrated and technologically independent solutions;
> ✓ a mechanism for coordinated planning and implementation of all e-government development initiatives;
> ✓ ensuring the provision of administrative services through the single e-Government portal at any time, from any place and via different devices;
> ✓ e-government sectoral systems in place: e-procurement, e-customs, e-archiving, e-security;
> ✓ Information technologies introduced in the judiciary system - through the established portals and systems/registries, transparency and accountability in the activities are enhanced and the service to citizens and businesses is improved;
> ✓ the introduced information technologies have a significant contribution as a tool for a comprehensive reform of the judicial system, the ultimate goal of which is to achieve an efficient judicial system and maximum facilitation for citizens and businesses.
>
> Investments in e-government and e-justice will contribute in the medium and long term to the establishment of open and flexible relations between the administration and citizens and businesses. This will lead to a continuous improvement of administrative services and an increase in their public value, respectively for end users.

Administrative services are often slow, time-consuming and expensive. The main objective of any administrative reform is to make them faster, more convenient and cheaper. Comparing actual and expected results and achieving these objectives means that OPGG interventions are effective. The data for Bulgaria from the annual eGovernment Benchmark[103] show great progress in orienting administrative services to the

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[103] https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/egovernment-benchmark-2023

needs of their users. They are also the basis for concluding that the interventions under priority axes 1 and 2 have achieved their objective of being user-oriented and user-focused.

The proven effects of e-government are the reduction of the administrative burden for citizens and businesses, the simplification and streamlining of work processes in the administration in the provision of administrative services, the provision of service-based automated exchange of data and information that "follow" the user, the implementation of a fully electronic exchange of documents, which reduces document turnover and eliminates the risk of loss / destruction of documents, etc.[104]

The vision of the Republic of Bulgaria in the field of e-government until 2025 encompasses the transformation of the model of providing user-oriented electronic administrative services by changing the technological and administrative processes behind them, with the result of reducing the administrative burden for citizens and businesses.[105]

The implementation of the Strategy explicitly provides for the application of the principle of putting the user at the center of administrative services[106] , namely to take into account the needs, expectations and interests of the user when designing e-services.

In this sense, the annual European Commission's benchmarking of e-government tracks the dynamics of the "user centricity" indicator at the EU and individual Member State level. Bulgaria's performance on this indicator for the period 2014-2023 /which roughly coincides with the implementation of interventions under priority axes 1 and 2/ is very good. For example, in 2014 the average value of this indicator for the EU28 was 73 and for Bulgaria 61.[107] According to the data for 2023, the gap is narrowing substantially. The average for the same indicator for the EU27 is 88.3 and for Bulgaria 83[108] . These figures show that there has been great progress in orienting administrative services towards the needs of their users. They are also a reason to conclude that the interventions under priority axes 1 and 2 have achieved their objective of being user-oriented and user-focused. In this sense, they have proven to be effective in achieving this objective, understood as a comparison of the actual and expected results of the interventions.

The main objective of the digitalization in the judiciary sector, as part of the judicial reform, is to provide high quality, cost-effective and easily accessible electronic services to the end users - citizens and businesses, to improve the management of the courts, to achieve higher efficiency of functioning, to optimize case management activities and communication processes both between the courts and between them and other bodies of the judiciary and the executive. The systems implemented through the investments made for the introduction of e-justice will improve the processes of interaction within the judiciary and in relations with citizens and business, facilitate access to information, and contribute to reducing the

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[104] Updated e-government development strategy for the RB 2019-2025
[105] Updated e-Government Development Strategy forthe Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2025
[106] the "User-centricity promises for design and delivery of digital public services"
[107] E-Government Benchmark Report 2015: Country FactSheet Bulgaria
[108] E-Government Benchmark Report 2023: Country FactSheet Bulgaria

opportunities for undue influence, which in turn will lead in the long term to a more efficient and transparent allocation of resources.

The effectiveness of interventions in the area of administrative and judicial services has been demonstrated empirically and through the evaluation of specific OPGG projects in the analysis of question 1.5 of this document . In terms of the investments made, we can say that, in terms of end-users, the most effective investments are those made in information systems and resources that mediate the introduction of e-government and e-justice and the provision of e-services, as they mediate the possibilities of using the services. The end-users of administrative and judicial services are businesses and citizens. End-users are also other administrative structures that cooperate with the main providers of administrative services. Part of the administrative and judicial reform is the digitisation of services and their electronic delivery. This is also part of the development and implementation of e-government and e-justice in Bulgaria.

We can get an idea of the effectiveness of the interventions in the field of administrative services by analysing the data from the survey of citizens and businesses described in the methodology of the report. The survey revealed active use of e-services by citizens[109] - 72.7%. However, this result reflects more general attitudes towards access to digital information. The reason for the high percentage probably lies in the broader interpretation of e-services, in which citizens also include receiving information from an institution's website, submitting an e-mail alert, checking health insurance status, etc. Here we should also bear in mind that the high percentage of positive answers is also due to the fact that respondents are not asked about the frequency of use of a service, but whether they have ever used one provided by the administration or the judiciary. Citizens using e-services say that they are currently using more compared to five years ago. This applies to 76.3% of respondents. These are the direct results of the investments made by OPGG towards e-government and e-justice in the 2014-2020 programming period, resulting in upgraded systems that make possible the infrastructural provision and introduction of new e-services accessible to citizens. This is also an indicator that the investments made are effective, which is reflected in the use by end-users. In confirmation of the evidence of increased usability of e-services, we will also look at the dynamics of requesting them through the Single Model. Statistics on the provision of e-administrative services through the Single Model show that for 2023, the following:

✓ 229000 e-services requested (number of services for citizens and businesses);
✓ 5100000 messages exchanged through the Secure Electronic Delivery System (number of services for citizens and businesses);
✓ 180000 obligations requested in the Electronic Payment System (number of services for citizens and businesses);
✓ Provided 330000000 internal e-administrative services (number of internal processes, checks by service, internal services).

The contribution of the investments made under the project BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001 "Upgrading of horizontal and central systems of e-government in relation to the implementation of the Unified Model

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[109] The sample is representative of the adult population of the country. The characteristics of the sample of those who participated in the survey are presented in section Methodology.

for requesting, payment and provision of electronic administrative services" is undeniable - the effects here are relevant to all registers and services and are yet to be multiplied. In terms of which means of identification they use when using e-administrative services and those provided by the judiciary, respondents were most likely to say that they have a PIC (issued by the NRA) and QES. Despite the increased use in recent years of NRA personal identification codes, as well as of various types of qualified signatures (including cloud-based signatures, which are gaining popularity due to the use of smartphones as a secure authentication platform), over the years that e-government processes have been developed, it has been discussed that the introduction of a single method of identification continues to be the best way to provide secure access to e-government tools, and analyses are in the direction that the most convenient such met This approach would ensure wider use of e-services, as all citizens would have a way to access them, rather than having to actively acquire one. The most important question in the context of this evaluation is about the respondents' opinion on the most useful / most efficient / most effective e-service. Here, the largest concentration is shown by the answers concerning the checking/payment of debts to the central and local administrations /checking health insurance status - 44.3%, payment of local taxes and fees - 50.3%, checking a debt under a pay slip or a penalty notice - 41.9%, issuing a criminal record certificate - 25.3%, issuing a certificate of presence/absence of debts - 39.8% and so on. As can be clearly seen from the data, citizens rate the administrative services of the NRA and the Local Taxes and Fees Departments of the municipalities as the most efficient, followed by the ESGRAON - Unified System for Civil Registration and Administrative Service of the Population services, the Ministry of Interior - identity documents and some others with a much smaller relative share (issuance of a certificate of commissioning - 5.9%). Of the services provided by the judiciary, the most effective/useful was identified as the electronic criminal record certificate service provided by Central automated information system "Judicial Status", which enables citizens to apply for and obtain a criminal record certificate from any district court in the Republic of Bulgaria, without limitation of their place of birth or residence. It should be noted here that the survey questions refer to all e-administrative services, not only those directly related to OPGG interventions. Significant proportions of people using e-services have used the possibilities provided by institutions to obtain an official document or service electronically, to communicate electronically with the administration, and to apply for a service remotely.

If we are to link the most used services to the specific OPGG investments and their contribution, these are the investments made in upgraded portals and systems that have improved the quality and speed of processes, namely:

- ✓ "Upgrading horizontal and central e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Single Model for requesting, paying for and providing electronic administrative services";
- ✓ Upgrading the NRA core systems to provide data and services to internal and external systems;
- ✓ Development of electronic administrative services and implementation of additional functionalities in automated information systems in the Ministry of Interior;
- ✓ The established Central automated information system "Judicial Status".

The effectiveness of administrative services can also be assessed through the prism of respondents' views on the advantages of e-government and e-justice. Here, the benefits for citizens are unconditional

and the results of the survey clearly show the effectiveness of administrative services. Here are the most important advantages of e-government[110] :

- ✓ saving time in queues and counters - 90.1%;
- ✓ eliminating the need for a lot of paper documents - 67.2%;
- ✓ easy and fast receipt of services electronically - 64.1%;
- ✓ saving money for consumers and service providers - 40.4%;
- ✓ equalisation of access to administration - 20.3%;
- ✓ increasing the efficiency of the administration - 16.1%.

Respondents grouped the advantages of e-justice in a similar way, identifying[111] as the most important:

- ✓ saving time in queues and counters - 82.6%;
- ✓ eliminating the need for a lot of paper documents - 61.2%;
- ✓ easy and fast receipt of services electronically - 58.3%;
- ✓ reduction of the conditions for corruption - 34.9%;
- ✓ saves both consumers and institutions money - 34.6%;
- ✓ reduction of the work of the judicial administration - 30.2%;
- ✓ facilitating access to information for citizens and businesses - 23.7%.

The benefits to users are unconditional and are a result of the systems and processes put in place and operationalised in the justice sector, in particular the investments made to introduce e-justice. We can see that the main objectives that the programme has set itself in terms of continuing the reform of the justice system through investment in the digitalisation of the sector are also recognised as key benefits by end users. One of the major challenges for e-government and e-justice is the need to continuously improve the quality of services provided. They should be designed to fully meet the needs and requirements of citizens and businesses, and to be as flexible and adaptable as possible to periodic changes in these requirements.

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[110] when answering the question "In your opinion, what are the most important advantages of e-government?", respondents gave more than one answer.

[111] when answering the question "In your opinion, what are the most important advantages of e-justice?", respondents gave more than one answer.

Figure 11. Assessment of the quality of services provided

How do you rate the quality of the electronic administrative services you use in terms of:

	Bad	Medium	Good	Very good	Great
Speed of services delivery	4%	11.5%	42.4%	32.4%	13.3%
Ease of access to services	4%	10.4%	45.7%	33.8%	8.6%
The complexity of filling in the forms	2.5%	16.5%	51.1%	21.9%	7.9%
Protection of users' personal data	5.0%	15.1%	54.7%	17.6%	7.6%
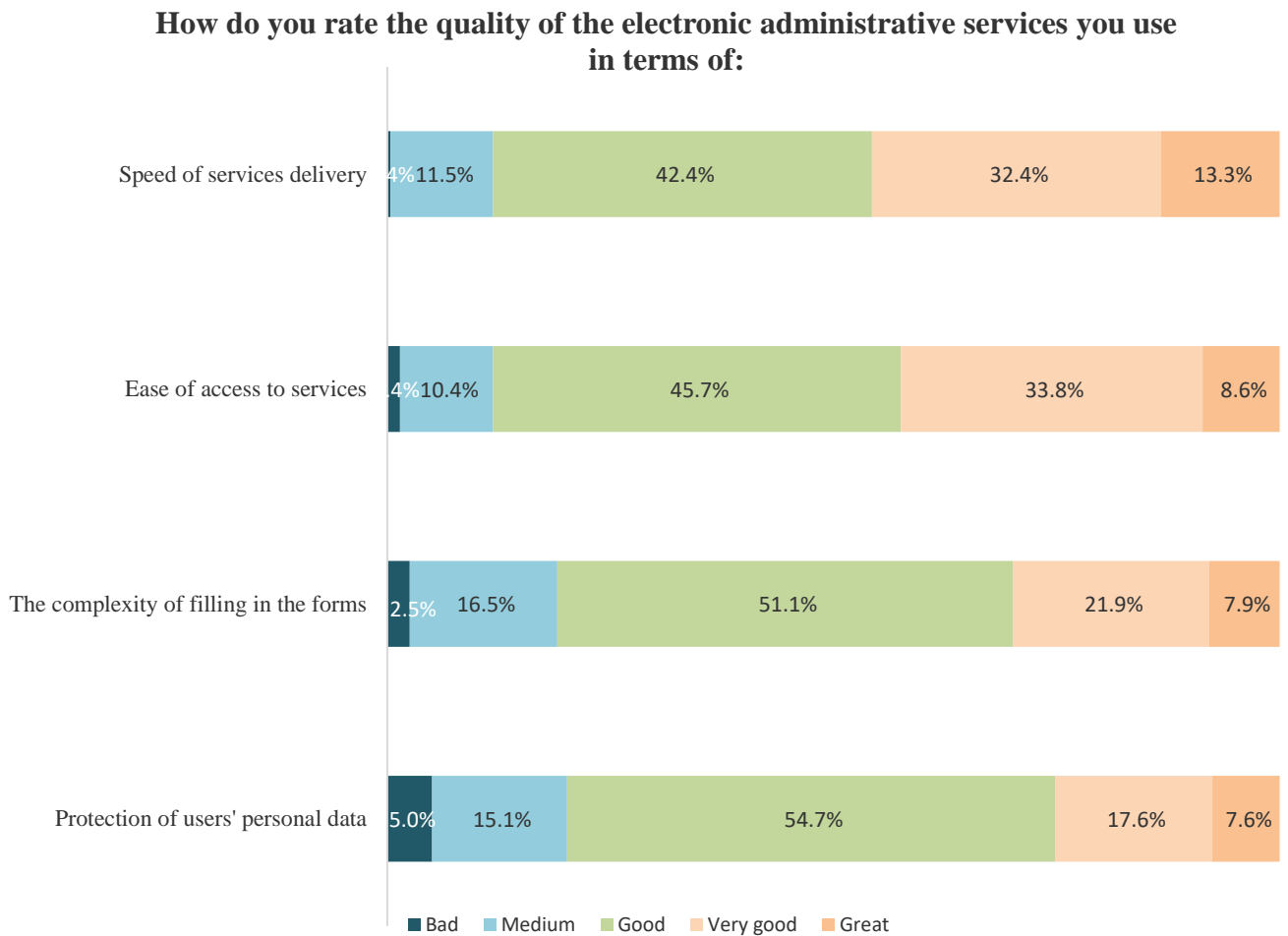
Source. Survey among the general public

Among the indicators measuring "quality", the speed of service delivery and ease of access to services were rated most positively.

The analysis of the survey data also highlights the problems, the solution of which would increase the efficiency of e-services and give impetus to the further development of e-government and e-justice. In this part, the tendencies for more widespread use of computers by citizens, ensuring an accessible and stable connection to the Internet, but also the lack of consistency between different institutions, the need to use different passwords and codes to access administrative services, insufficient dissemination of e-services, etc. are also relevant.

Among the most significant obstacles to the implementation of e-government, citizens point to the lack of continuity due to the frequent change of governments (75.5%), limited application of best practices from other countries (70.7%), lack of will and willingness of the state and politicians (62.6%), lack of skills of citizens to work with computers when interacting with the administration (61.9%) and lack of appropriate laws (61.2%).

In terms of the most significant risks for the implementation of e-Justice, citizens point to hacker attacks (54.7%), systems failure (54.4%), making mistakes in the electronic exchange of data between (39.6%), misuse of personal data (54.2%).

For the purposes of this evaluation, a similar survey was conducted among business representatives as end users of services. The questionnaire used is similar to that used in the citizens' survey. This allows a comparative analysis of the opinion of the two groups of end-users on the effectiveness of the e-services provided thanks to OPGG's investments. As in other surveys, the already established fact that the demand for e-administrative services from businesses is significantly higher than from citizens is confirmed here. According to the data from the present survey, 95.5% of respondents use e-services[112]. The change in frequency of use has been increasing over the last five years - 84.8% of business representatives state that they are now using more e-services. We should of course not forget in the analysis that for legal entities, for example, it is mandatory to file a tax declaration electronically with QES (Article 7, paragraph 2 of the Income Tax Act) after 2017.

Respondents answered the question "What type of e-service do you find most useful/effective for your business?" as follows:

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[112] "e-services" - including those provided by the administration and the judiciary

Figure 12. Evaluation of the usefulness/effectiveness of e-services

What type of e-service do you find most useful/effective for your business

Service	%
Submission of annual tax declaration	78.6%
Issue of a certificate of presence/absence of debts	65.9%
Reference of local tax and fee liabilities with the possibility to…	65.1%
Reference to payments made, transferred to NRA accounts and…	61.9%
Electronic declaration of certain circumstances	61.1%
Announcement of acts in the Commercial Register (GFO,…	57.1%
Provision of a statement of the current status of all employment…	54.8%
Issuance of certificate of current status	50.8%
Registration, re-registration, changes in the circumstances of…	39.7%
Issuance of a Certificate of Paid Taxes and Social Security…	35.7%
Issuance of criminal record certificate	34.9%
Registration/deregistration of persons under the Value Added…	34.9%
Issue of Certificate of Taxes Paid on Profit from Business…	25.4%
Request for rectification of errors and omissions made by…	23.0%
Submit electronic bids for public procurement	20.6%
Issue of certificate of resident	20.6%
Recording of circumstances concerning procuration, branch,…	18.3%
Issuance of certificate of reserved company/name	15.9%
Issuance of a certificate of commissioning of a construction site	10.3%

Source. Survey among business representatives

It should be noted that businesses actively use e-administrative services and positively evaluate their efficiency. The range of services provided electronically has been continuously expanding in recent years and this significantly facilitates the work of business structures, saves time and money. In other words, the efficiency of this type of service is increasing. This is also evidenced by the survey data. The majority of the respondents share the opinion that the electronic services provided by the state institutions and the judiciary facilitate the business activity - 82.5%. A slightly lower share of the answers refers to the electronic services provided by local authorities - 59.7%. Here it is important to emphasize that the sample of the survey among businesses is dominated by micro and small enterprises with a relative share of approximately 85%. The administrative burden is a particularly significant problem for those businesses that do not have the staff and resources to meet all administrative requirements. It is no coincidence that an alphabetical truth for all administrative reform initiatives and measures is "Think Small First". This is even truer for the introduction of e-government and e-justice. If we are to link the most used services to the

specific OPGG investments and their contribution, these are the investments made in upgraded portals and systems that have improved the quality and speed of processes, namely:

- ✓ "Upgrading horizontal and central e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Single Model for requesting, paying for and providing electronic administrative services";
- ✓ Upgrading the NRA core systems to provide data and services to internal and external systems;
- ✓ Upgrade of TR for integration with the EU TR data exchange platform, embedding of the Non-profit legal entities register, integration with Property Register, single entry point and transfer of Central Register of Pledges;
- ✓ Development of electronic administrative services and implementation of additional functionalities in automated information systems in the Ministry of Interior;
- ✓ The established Central automated information system "Judicial Status";

Next of interest is the assessment of businesses on the most important advantages of e-government. As with citizens, the absolute favorite is saving time in queues and counters - 81.8%. This is followed by o dropping the need for a lot of paper documents - 70.5%, easy and fast receipt of services electronically - 72.0%. These are all arguments in support of the thesis that the introduction of e-government is achieving its objectives and is effective. In summary, 64.4% of business representatives believe that it saves time and money for businesses.

The assessment of the business community regarding e-justice, brings out similar assessments with some nuances, as we see that the advantages in e-government are more tangible. With the greatest weight is the time saved from queues and counters (60.6%), ease and speed of obtaining services electronically (54.5%), the elimination of the need for many paper documents (45.5%), reducing the preconditions for corruption (34.8%). Hence, the strong conclusion is that OPGG funded interventions are effective because they achieve the objectives set for their programming and implementation.

The answers received are not entirely positive. Businesses remain critical of some remaining shortcomings of e-government. First and foremost is the difficulty related to the lack of a universal identifier for all e-services - 43.9%. Another drawback is the need to remember many passwords and access codes - 22.7% and the requirement to use an electronic signature for some services - 25.0%. Business representatives believe that there is a lack of coordination between institutions - 41.7% and this hinders their activities. They would like the e-administrative services to become even more widespread by increasing the number of such services offered - 38.6% as well as to have more information and awareness campaigns on the opportunities offered through the introduced e-administrative services. Among the shortcomings of e-government, the lack of political will for its actual implementation was also highlighted - 28.8%. Several elements are concentrated here: frequent changes of governments in recent years, frequent regulatory and institutional changes, staffing problems, resistance among some administrations to reform and coordinate their work with other administrative structures, etc. Among the shortcomings of e-Justice are highlighted the lack of will and desire on the part of the state and politicians (80.4%), the lack of long-term campaigns to promote the services (62.4%), the lack of continuity due to frequent changes of

governments and changing approaches to the introduction of e-government (70.6%), the small number of e-services offered (38.6%).

We can summarize that the benefits for the end users of e-services are unconditional - the results of the analysis unambiguously show the effectiveness of e-services, respectively of the investments made in the program for building systems and optimizing processes.

6.5. Evaluation question 1.3. Do the implemented measures contribute to more equal access to administrative services and to improved coordination of their provision at national, regional and local level?

> The implemented measures contribute to more equal access to administrative services at national, regional and local level, providing easy and fast access to services to all citizens and businesses, regardless of their location and status. The process of coordinating the provision of electronic services has been ensured by creating conditions for the compatibility of systems, standardisation of services, and creating a technological environment for the provision of real-time data. All key processes and registries have been secured and those with the highest usability have been prioritised in the implementation process.
>
> Measures have been implemented, under PA 3, with regard to the establishment of electronic communications between the courts and pleading parties and the introduction of e-justice tools. They lead to improved coordination between the structures in the justice sector, through the operationalization of processes, created conditions for standardization of services and built technological environment for their provision. The implemented investments contribute to time and cost savings for citizens and businesses and facilitate access to services provided by the justice system.

The investments made under PA 1 have supported more equitable access to administrative services. According to the Report on the status and renewal of information resources in the administration, The Single Portal for Access to Electronic Administrative Services (SPAEAS, egov.bg) has been implemented as a single point of access to electronic administrative services. As of December 31, 2022, information on 1 712 electronic services is published on the portal, of which 1 132 electronic administrative services are implemented through centralized and unified request. More than 1 600 electronic forms of services and supporting documents have been developed for their request. For the year 2022, the new electronic administrative services for centralised requesting published on The Single Portal are 272. Information on 580 EASs provided in a decentralised manner through developed portals of administrations - Ministry of Interior, Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre, Customs Agency, National Social Insurance Fund, NCID, etc. - has also been published.

At the end of 2022, the services of 501 administrations are provided centrally, of which 49 are central, 302 municipal and district, 27 regional and 123 specialised territorial administrations.

In addition to the increase in the number of registered users of the Single Portal, by the end of 2023, 502 administrations, of which 49 are central administrations, 302 municipal and district administrations, 27 regional administrations and 124 specialised territorial administrations, will provide services centrally.

The conditions are provided for all regional, municipal and district administrations to provide their services centrally through the Single Model for requesting, paying for and providing electronic administrative services. Through the Single Model, 21 services are provided centrally by district administrations and 182 services by municipalities and their districts.

As of February 2024 Real-time information: https://analytics.egov.bg

- Joined the Single Administration Model - 502;

- Number of administrations connected to the Electronic Payment System - 670;

- Number of services developed under the Single Model - 1231;

- Number of e-services requested through the Unified Model by citizens and businesses for 2022 - 68385 pcs, for 2023 - 74717 pcs. for comparison to 2019 were 2500 pcs.

Part of the portal's functionality is the maintenance of a workspace for citizens, business and administration, for citizens this is "My Space", through which specific information can be selected and accessed with a single click and the most frequently requested services can be accessed. A centralised profile is also maintained for eGovernment purposes, in which person-specific information such as notification addresses, mobile numbers, etc. is stored and updated; the type of information can be dynamically expanded. The information available in the profiles is accessible via web services for external systems.

Provision of electronic administrative services

The effective implementation of the digital transformation of the administration, aimed at fulfilling the principle of "the user at the center of administrative services", requires optimisation of resources and re-engineering of work processes in the construction and development of information systems and applications for electronic services.

The development of horizontal and centralised eGovernment systems and the introduction of the Unified Model for requesting, paying and providing electronic administrative services gives the opportunity to offer more electronic services, through a single entry point, from level 3 (requesting and receiving services electronically) and level 4 (requesting and receiving services electronically, including online payment). This saves administrations' resources and ensures better coordination and control of the interoperability requirements for administrations' information systems.

The total number of services listed on the AR as of 12/31/2022 is 2,505, of which 1,657 services are provided at Level 3 or Level 4. The end of reporting period report shows that the trend of increasing number of level 3 and 4 services continues. At present, the total number of services is 2118.

The implementation of the projects "Transformation of the administrative service model" and "Upgrading of the horizontal and central e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the

Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of administrative services"[113] , implemented by the Ministry of e-Government[114] have contributed significantly to improving the coordination of service provision at national, regional and local level.

The Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020 envisages a thorough transformation of the provision of administrative services, and the Roadmap to it envisages the introduction of complex administrative services as an innovative form for the benefit of citizens and businesses. The expected results of the implementation of the complex administrative services model are that the administration will offer electronic services and that at a later stage services will be grouped on the principle of "episodes of life" and "business events".

The main contribution to the achievement of these results is made by the following projects: BG05SFOP001-1.001-0002 "Transformation of the Model of Administrative Services" (TMAS), which was developed to support the achievement of specific objective 1 of the OPGG priority axis 1, namely "Administrative services and e-government" and to contribute to the achievement of two of the defined result indicators of the programme – "administrations supported for the introduction of complex administrative services" and "number of standardised municipal services". TMAS is designed to address the deficit of complete and structured information on administrative services, regimes, information sets and registers. It is designed to answer many open questions at the time of implementation - how many and which services exist, how they are provided, what documents are required, what fees are charged and on what legal basis. TMAS is complemented by another key project for improving administrative services supported by OPGG - BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001 "Upgrading of horizontal and central e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of administrative services", implemented by the State Agency for Electronic Government (SAeG), subsequently transformed into the Ministry of eGovernment. It develops the e-government systems developed during the 2007-2013 period and creates a long-term solution for the provision of internal administrative services by upgrading and integrating existing information systems in a way that allows for automated retrieval of evidence and circumstances from registers.

Another important prerequisite for the successful implementation and deployment of e-administrative services is the training of staff (users and administrators) in the administration and use of the systems, which secures the process by enabling the acquisition of technical skills related to their implementation. Training of internal and external institutional users ensures internal processes and enables a smooth implementation of the service delivery process.

However, there have been delays or non-implementation of certain activities within the implementation of individual projects. This is largely due to the lack of a sustainable and coherent e-government development policy in the respective responsible institution, lack of good inter-institutional coordination at different levels, lack of capacity in administrations, regulatory constraints, etc. The main barriers to e-government implementation are analysed in evaluation question 1.9.

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[114] Preceded by the State Agency "Electronic Government"

PA 3 investments have been implemented in terms of electronic communications between courts and litigants and e-Justice tools, leading to improved coordination between structures in the justice sector through the operationalization of processes, created conditions for standardization of services and built technological environment for their provision.

A Single Information System of the Courts (SISC) has been developed and implemented in all 151 courts, with the exception of the administrative courts and the SAC (where EDIS is functioning), laying the foundations for electronic case management, unification of work processes in the judicial system and introduction of uniform rules in case management, which should lead to time savings, faster administration of justice, transparency, publicity and access to justice.

The Single e-Justice Portal (SEJP) has been upgraded by migrating the websites of 180 courts in order to unify and centralize the information from the websites of the courts in the Republic of Bulgaria through uniform templates updated in accordance with the changes in the legal framework. The SEJP provides active access to cases by making procedural actions electronic and creates the possibility for citizens to file a complaint or claim electronically.

A Central automated information system "Judicial Status" has been built, which makes a significant change in the optimization of processes related to the judicial status of citizens. Through the development of the information system, for the first time a central database of criminal records has been established, bringing together 113 databases of district courts and the database of the Central Criminal Records Bureau at the Ministry of Justice, as well as a database of convicted Bulgarian citizens abroad. A fully centralised criminal record register has been established in Bulgaria - processes have been streamlined, the administrative burden has been reduced, and the accessibility of the service has been increased by extending its reach to every citizen regardless of their criminal record. The system enables citizens to apply for and obtain a criminal record certificate from any regional court in Bulgaria, without any limitation of their place of birth or residence.

A single e-Justice portal for the executive branch of the justice sector has been further developed and centralized. A single entry point for citizens to access the services provided by the executive structures in the justice sector has been established. For e-administrative services, it is possible to request, pay for and receive them in real time if no action by an official is required for their provision.

A centralized information system on judicial enforcement, regulated by the Judiciary Act, has been established. Seven e-services have been developed for citizens and businesses. The information system provides centralized electronic access to data on the initiation, movement and closure of enforcement cases in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the system marks the beginning of the process of building an efficient, secure and coherent electronic environment for the enforcement process.

The measures implemented to improve structural, procedural and organizational aspects of the judiciary are accompanied by investments in the implementation of e-justice, through which:

- ✓ Handling of electronic cases and documents by the judiciary;
- ✓ Access to national registers electronically in real time;
- ✓ Improving the interaction and integration of the information systems of the legislative, judicial and executive authorities in the Republic of Bulgaria;
- ✓ Linking our national legislation and registers with similar European registers and structures;

- ✓ Provision of services electronically;
- ✓ Raising the general legal awareness of citizens;
- ✓ Achieving technological and semantic compatibility;
- ✓ The foundations have been laid for developing justice as close as possible and for the benefit of citizens and businesses.

6.6. Evaluation question 1.4. Do the investments lead to improved access to administrative services and equal access to justice for disadvantaged people (disabled, marginalised, unemployed, living in sparsely populated, mountainous and border areas, illiterate or with primary education)?

> The OPGG investments made are a contribution to government policy for the full and equal use of rights, including access to services and justice, by persons from vulnerable groups. The measures implemented under the programme create conditions for equal access to administrative services and justice. However, we must take into account, the different characteristics of the target group and the fact that for some categories access may be restricted by a number of circumstances beyond the control of the OPGG and the administrations providing services. Different types of inequalities in society are the subject of state-wide policy in different sectors, and the measures implemented are only part of the efforts to overcome these inequalities and overcome the social exclusion of these groups.

The main objective of digitisation is to provide high quality, cost-effective and easily accessible electronic services. This, in turn, has an impact on increasing the accessibility, publicity, traceability and transparency of institutions. Investments in e-government and e-justice, in particular the development of systems through which e-services are delivered, are those on which end-users most often base their assessment of accessibility. For the purpose of this evaluation, a survey was carried out to investigate the views of end-users of administrative and judicial services, and the sample completed includes the target group of people from vulnerable groups [115] , and we will only present their views in the analysis of this evaluation question. More than half of the respondents from the target group stated that they use electronic[116] services provided by the institutions, which in itself is a positive assessment of the investments made as well as their usefulness for the end user.

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[115] The sample included *people from vulnerable groups* - people with disabilities, (presence of TELC), marginalized, unemployed, illiterate or with primary education, with the highest percentage of respondents among the group so formed being people with disabilities with presence of TELC

[116] the assessment is in relation to administrative and judicial services

Figure 13. Use of electronic services

Do you use electronic services ?
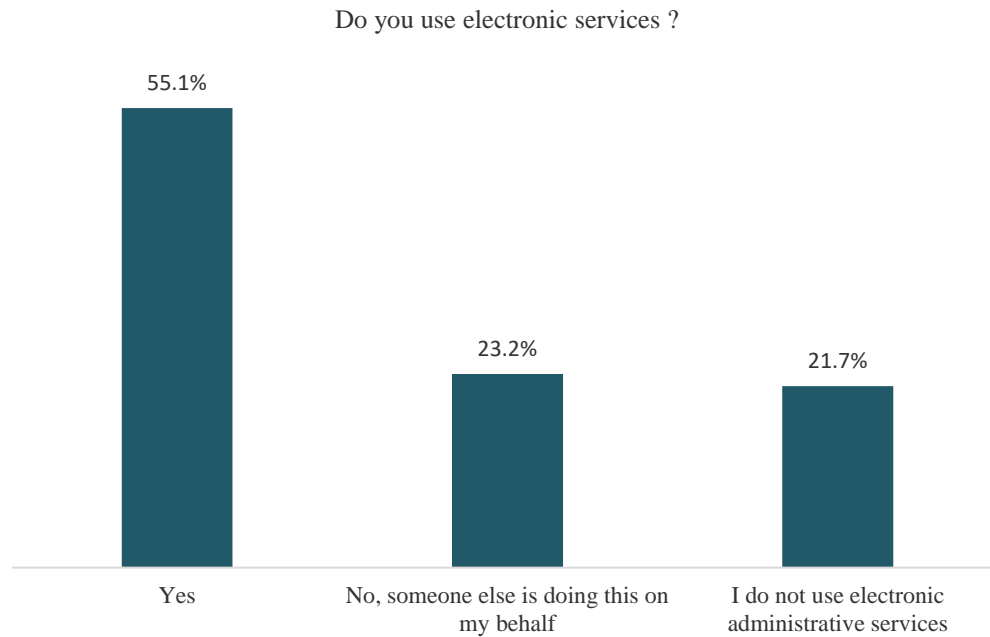
Source: research among target group - disadvantaged people

The majority of disadvantaged people who use e-services[117], say they use more e-services now than they did five years ago.

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[117] answers for electronic services in general (administrative and those provided by the judiciary)

Figure 14. Use of electronic services

Do you use more e-services now compared to 5 years ago?
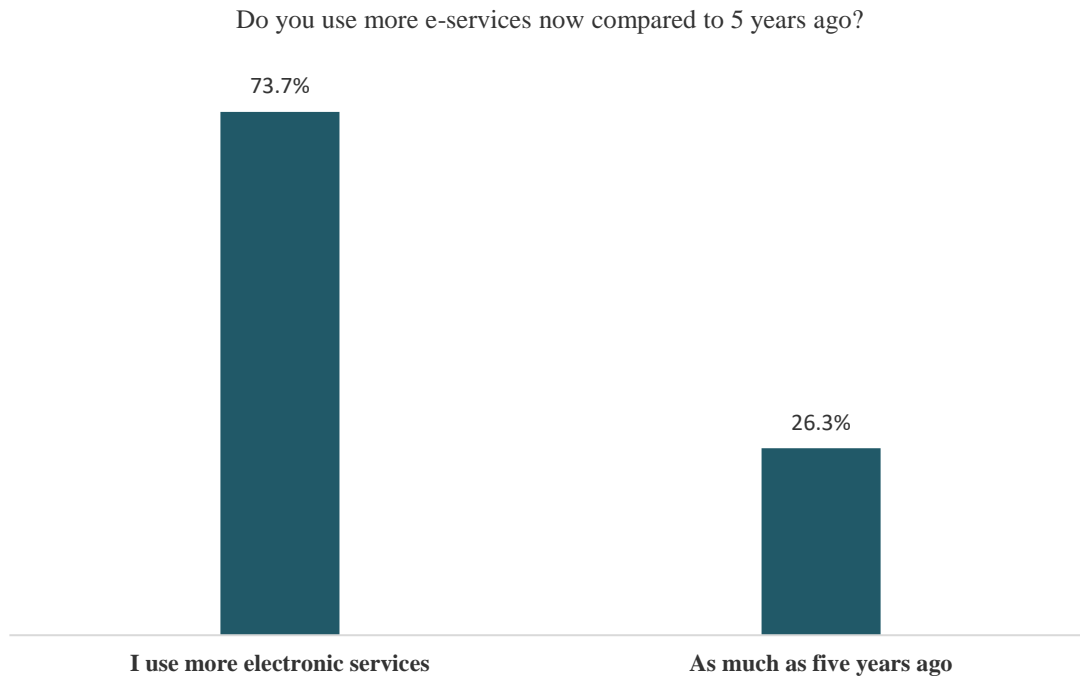
Source: research among target group - disadvantaged people

These are the direct effects of the investments made under OPGG in the direction of e-government and e-justice in the 2014-2020 programming period, which make possible the infrastructural provision and introduction of new e-services accessible to citizens.

A concrete example of improving access to administrative services by speeding up and simplifying electronic services provided through the single model is the service of exemption from vignette fees for the use of national roads for persons with disabilities. We are looking at this particular service because it is intended for people with disabilities who have expert decision of the Territorial medical expert commission. The use of the e-service ranks it in the top 10 most frequently visited services in the single portal for access to electronic administrative services. The service is provided by the Agency for Social Assistance. The provision of the service electronically affects both the required volume of documents and the decision-making time of the administration in specific cases. Before the change of the regime in 2019, applying for a free vignette required the submission of copies of the following documents:

☐copy from an expert decision of the Territorial medical expert commissions /National Expert Medical Commission;

☐copy from an ID card or passport;

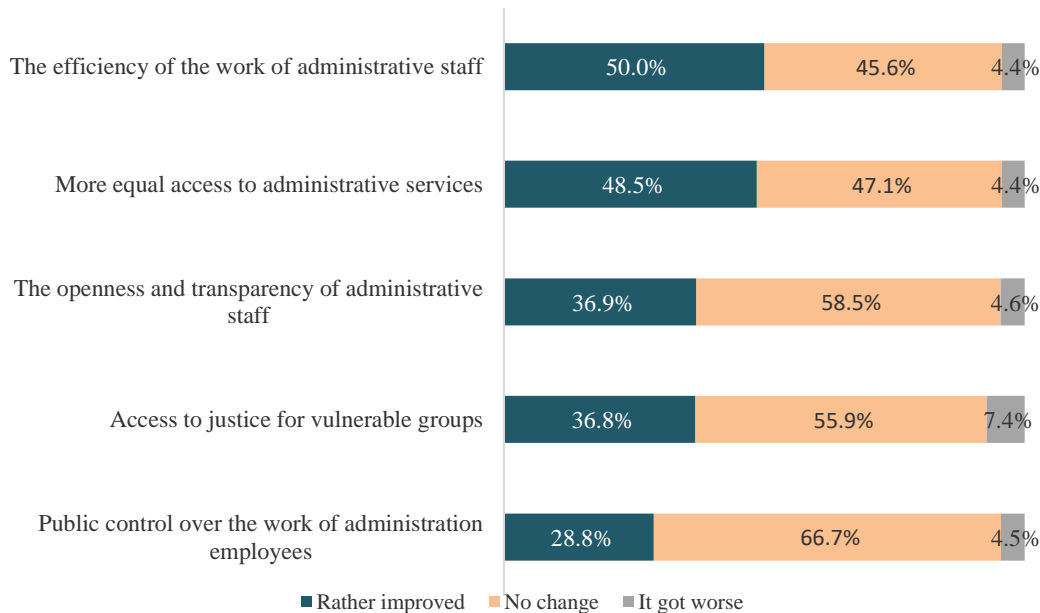☐copy from the registration certificate of the car;

□copy from an insurance policy for civil liability insurance with a one-year term;

After the change of the regulation, the Agency for Social Assistance is provided with all documents, except for the ID card/passport (in case of "paper" application for the service) by official means, thanks to the access to the relevant registers through RegiX; this greatly facilitates the application process of citizens, and eliminates the risk of errors and resubmission due to lack of necessary documents. In a similar way, electricizes all the services: the more complex the checks and the more documents a request requires, the more time and labour is saved in registry checks and electronic exchanges, and consequently the better the access to services, especially for the target group for whom physical access to the administration is sometimes difficult and limited due to various types of obstructions.

The changes in the environment brought about by the OPGG investments in the provision of more e-services by the administration and the judiciary were assessed by the respondents through the prism of several different factors:

Figure 15. Assessing the effects of increased e-services provision

In your opinion, how has the increase in the number of electronic administrative services provided, over the last 5 years, affected:

	Rather improved	No change	It got worse
The efficiency of the work of administrative staff	50.0%	45.6%	4.4%
More equal access to administrative services	48.5%	47.1%	4.4%
The openness and transparency of administrative staff	36.9%	58.5%	4.6%
Access to justice for vulnerable groups	36.8%	55.9%	7.4%
Public control over the work of administration employees	28.8%	66.7%	4.5%

■ Rather improved ■ No change ■ It got worse

Source: research among target group – people from vulnerable groups

The biggest change in the environment, in the direction of improvement, the representatives of the target group who participated in the survey see in terms of the efficiency of employees in the administration

and in ensuring more equal access to administrative services. The assessment of the respondents shows that the investments made under the OPGG in the provision of e-services have led to improved access to administrative services, while in terms of access to justice, the majority of respondents found that rather no change has taken place. However, when examining the specific target group of vulnerable groups, we should not forget that they have different characteristics and peculiarities depending on the criteria that place them in this group - people with disabilities, marginalized, unemployed, living in sparsely populated, mountainous and border areas, illiterate or with a primary stage of education. For different categories, access to services may be restricted by a number of circumstances:

- lack of or poor internet coverage in the region (in mountain and border areas);
- the "digital divide" - the inability to purchase a digital device through which to access services and/or the inability to pay a fee to access the internet (e.g. for long-term unemployed and elderly populations living in mountainous and border areas);
- Access to services available but inability to understand how the service works (for illiterate or primary school-aged; marginalised groups);
- in terms of access to justice - the possibility of access to services is available, but there is a lack of understanding of the relevant legal norms, which results in the need for appropriate legal representation (the cost of the service may not be within the means of unemployed, illiterate, marginalized communities).

OPGG investments made are a contribution to government policy for the full and equal use of rights by persons from vulnerable groups. The implemented investments create conditions for equal access to services, taking into account the characteristics described above, which hinder the target group in different aspects, but are beyond the control of the OPGG and the administrations providing services. Different types of inequalities in society are the subject of a national policy in different sectors, and the measures implemented are only part of the efforts to overcome these inequalities and overcome the social exclusion of these groups.

6.7. Evaluation question 1.5. What is the efficiency of investments under PA 1 and PA 3, considered as a ratio between inputs and outputs ? Which measures can be defined as efficient and which as inefficient? What are the factors influencing the efficiency of investments? Is it possible to achieve results at a lower cost by taking a different approach?

Methodology

To analyse the efficiency of the investments under PA 1 and PA 3, different parameters of the services provided and the time they save for citizens and/or businesses are considered. Depending on the specifics of the investments made, the savings can be:

- Labour savings calculated on the basis of time to prepare and submit documents (this includes time to complete documents, time to travel within the locality or to another locality, etc.). The time for

filing a document (excluding e-services) is estimated at 30 minutes and the time for preparing certain documents is estimated based on their specificity, time-consuming nature and the expertise needed to prepare them (this includes both applications and documents that citizens and businesses file and documents issued by the administration or actions representing internal processes).

- Transport savings (for submitting and receiving documents)
- Paper savings (for activities that require large volumes of documents (e.g. submission of tenders under the Public Procurement Act))

The following basic (and identical for all procedures) assumptions are made in the general evaluation model:

- Labour costs for administrative activities are based on NSI data for hourly wages in the Professional activities sector, which are closest to accounting, administrative and other professional management activities. By 2022, it is set at a national average of 18 leva per hour for the Professional Activities sector (including employers' costs). On the basis of an analysis of changes in labour wages in previous periods, it has been assumed that this value will increase by around 7% each year, which is why this adjustment has been included in the calculations for the period 2024-2033. Labour costs for magistrates have been assumed based on pay information at different levels in the sector, with calculations based on basic pay and accruals for length of service. As the number of early career magistrates is smaller than experienced magistrates, the average hourly rate is 'weighted', between the two illustrative pay levels towards the more experienced magistrates, whose numbers are greater, rather than presented as the arithmetic mean between the two hourly rates (29 and 49). Hence the hourly rate of 43 leva.

- Transport costs are estimated at BGN 5, and include an average hypothetical cost that assumes that half of the trips are made by public transport and the other half by car. Within this assumption, it is taken into account that citizens or employees on the business side have to go and return - i.e. this involves a minimum of two directions. For some of the services, an assumption has been made that this cost would be double if the e-service were not there, as in the period without it, individuals go once to apply/request a document or service (involves a round trip) and then to obtain the document/certificate themselves (again a round trip), which is effectively the end goal of their efforts. Based on an analysis of inflation by type of cost (NSI inflation calculator), an analysis has been carried out and an assumption has been made of an expected increase in transport prices of around 15% per annum between 2024 and 2033.

- The paper cost savings are estimated at an average market price of 10 BGN incl. VAT for a 500-sheet package. Depending on the specifics of the activity, approximate volumes of paper used have been calculated. The assumption for future periods is based on an expectation of a paper price increase of around 5% per year.

The model also makes the assumption that the number of services provided in the years after 2024 will be equal to or higher than 2023, with an expectation of slight growth in some activities and services.

For all projects and services, the period of service deployment was taken as **the starting point**, with two savings values calculated - savings in the period to date (October 2023) and future savings in the period

2024 - 2033. The future savings for each project have been estimated based on the number of services provided to date, the annual variation observed, assuming a projection for the period 2024-2033, based on which the expected future savings have been calculated.

Based on the calculated savings, a return on investment is calculated - money saved per unit of resource invested / money saved per lev invested.[118] In this part, the savings per unit of input to date (October 2023) and the expected future savings in the period 2024-2033 are calculated.

Some of the projects do not have direct monetary effects, as they are investments for overall transformation or reform and have an indirect contribution, but not a direct contribution, to the electronification of a process or service. No return on investment has been calculated for them.

An assessment of the efficiency of investments in terms of the ratio of inputs to outputs by procedure is presented below:

PA 1 Administrative services and e-government

Procedure **BG05SFOP001-1.001 "Data structuring and analytical activities in the implementation of the strategic documents for the development of public administration, development of e-government and introduction of e-government in the justice sector"** includes 2 horizontal projects on the basis of which further investments in e-services, registers or systems will be made. Therefore, the efficiency of investments for these projects is not calculated in terms of direct savings through services, but the effects of their implementation on the environment are presented. Prior to the implementation of the investment under the procedure, the efforts to build e-government in Bulgaria were highly fragmented, with a focus on individual departments, which in turn assumed a dependency of their information systems on hardware, and their level of integration was limited, in most cases partial in nature and short-lived in effect. The new cloud technologies, impose the need for operational integration at the level of the environment, which is based on a unified ICT infrastructure, according to the Strategy. Huge amounts of public money have been spent on equipping individual departments, but there is a lack of a complete picture of the real state of play and opportunities for moving towards e-government. Efforts to collect information on a voluntary survey basis are proving incomplete and confusing, which, given the plans up to 2020, could lead to valuable ideas being compromised. It is these identified deficits that underpin the implementation of the implemented investments aimed at a necessary, complete and comprehensive analysis and inventory of available ICT resources in order to optimize costs and integrate them into a unified eGovernment ecosystem. With the implementation of the investment in terms of the executive branch, an inventory and analysis (audit) of the ICT resources of the central, regional and municipal administrations is carried out to structure information and data to support the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020 (the Strategy), optimize costs and build the e-government environment. Thanks to the OPGG investments, the foundations have been laid for:

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[118] Savings are divided by inputs/investments.

✓ Providing evidence for future strategic interventions by mapping the administration's ICT resources for e-government;

✓ the prerequisites are created for imposing a model for monitoring and optimising the costs of building and maintaining an integrated environment for the development and operation of the e-government system;

✓ The implemented activities support the process of building the e-government environment by analysing the opportunities for moving to a cloud-based organisation of the ICT resources of the administration on the basis of the established state hybrid private cloud and unified electronic communications network.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.001-0002 "Transformation of the administrative service model", is a horizontal project, which **has no direct monetary effects**, but is the basis for a comprehensive transformation of the administrative service model.

Within the framework of the project, by changing the legal framework, some administrative services are deleted from the Administrative Register and new services are entered, amendments to laws and regulations are launched and measures are taken to provide administrative services as internal administrative services.

Changes to the Administrative Procedure Code from 2018 enable the electronic submission of requests, signals, proposals, complaints, protests, applications, claims and their annexes. In the transitional and final provisions of the Administrative Procedure Code, with the envisaged amendments to the *Law on Administration, a* definition of "administrative service" and "public service" is given.

The procedure for entry in the Administrative Register of specimen forms related to the provision of an administrative service/issuance of an individual administrative act; of information on the Administrative Service Centre such as address, e-mail address, contact telephone numbers, working hours and of fees or prices of the service, including when provided electronically, the basis for their determination and the methods of payment.

Under **project BG05SFOP001-1.001-0001** "Inventory of information and communication infrastructure for e-government needs" an inventory and analysis of ICT resources in 576 central, regional and municipal administrations was carried out to structure information and data, optimize costs and build the e-government environment, Register of information resources of the administration for e-government needs was developed. The register serves as a tool for the implementation of the e-government policy in the country and, in addition to being a database with constantly updated financial and technical information on the information assets available in the administrations, it is also used for planning the renewal and development of information and communication resources. The Information Resources Register provides greater transparency regarding ICT assets, their status and budget, as well as better traceability of projects in the administration.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.002 "Priority projects in the implementation of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Strategy for the development of e-government in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2016-2020" includes 19 projects, 7 of which have been terminated.

Within the framework of the procedure, project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0002 "Upgrading of the Customs Agency's core systems for data and service provision" **was financed** and analysed together with project **BG05SFOP001-1.007-0001 "**Upgrading of the Customs Agency's core systems for data and service provision - BIMIS (Phase 2)" (**Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.007)** and **BG05SFOP001-1.025-0001** "Upgrade of the Customs Agency's core systems for data and service provision - BIMIS (Phase 3)" (**Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.025**)[119] investments are for BGN 61 million[120] and are aimed at upgrading the Customs Agency's core systems for data and service provision to external systems and users. **The calculations show that the implemented systems have saved the business a total of BGN 92 million in the period 2019-2023.** This means that the investment made so far has a return of BGN 1.5 for every BGN invested, with a tendency for the total return by 2033 to be around BGN 6.75 for every BGN invested.

Projects Customs Agency	
Total investment budget	61 277 690,59 BGN.
Estimated savings for the period 2019-2023	92 080 000,00 BGN
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	321 242 214,22 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*1,50 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*5,24 BGN*
For the period of using the system +10 years ahead, every invested lev will save	*6,75 BGN*

Under projects BG05SFOP001-1.002-0003 "Upgrading of the Commercial Register for integration with the platform for data exchange between the Commercial Registers in the EU, embedding of the register of non-profit legal entities, integration with the property register, single entry point and transfer of the central register of special pledges" **and BG05SFOP001-1.002-0004** "Upgrading of the property register for integration with the cadastral register and provision of additional e-services" with the beneficiary being the Registry Agency, investments for a total of almost BGN 3 million have been made.

The calculations are made on the basis of the Statistics of newly registered and re-registered traders and non-profit legal entities and the Statistics of applications for the provision of AU from the Trade register and register of non-profit legal entities, taking into account the number of registered and re-registered traders and non-profit legal entities for the period 01.01. 2017 - 30.11.2023 and the number of applications submitted for the provision of administrative services from the Trade Register and the register of non-profit

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[119] The projects are considered together because of their relatedness

[120] The value indicated includes verified expenditure and expenditure to be verified

legal entities for the period 01.01. 2017 - 30.11.2023[121] . The data on the services provided by the Property Register are extracted from the statistical information section of the Property Register[122] .

As a result of the investments made in the two projects, almost BGN 55 million have been saved by the end of 2023, and by 2033 another BGN 213 million are expected to be saved, or a total of BGN 268 million. The return on each lev invested so far is BGN 18.32. As the trend of the use of the e-services under analysis shows a peak in 2019 and then a decline to levels close to the average for the period 2017-2023, for the period 2023-2033 the number of e-services used is forecast to remain at the levels of the average number of services used. Under these projections, additional savings of 213 million leva or 71.89 leva for every leva invested are expected by 2033. Thus, the total return on each leva invested by 2033 will be 90.21 leva for each leva invested by OPGG.

Projects Registry Agency	
Total amount of investment	BGN 2 960 511,46
Total savings by 2023	54 236 320,00 BGN
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	212 832 784,60 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*18,32 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*71,89 BGN*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*90,21 BGN*

Source: own calculations based on public data from the website of the Registry Agency:

https://portal.registryagency.bg/statistic-cr

https://www.registryagency.bg/bg/registri/targovski-registar/statistika/

Under project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0005 "Creation of cadastral data in digital form and development of electronic administrative services of the Agency of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre" investments for BGN 6.4 million were made. The effects of the project are related to: increasing the volume of electronic cadastral services, fast and quality administrative services for citizens with cadastral data, requesting and receiving the services they need at a convenient location with minimum time and resource consumption. The creation of a cadastral map for a significant part of the territory of the country is a prerequisite for the creation of a multifunctional cadastre - specialized maps, maintenance of information on communication facilities, technical and social infrastructure, etc.

The total amount saved so far for the provided electronic services and the inquiries made through the system is 228 million leva. With an expected growth of services and of 6% per year and of returns of 10% by 2033, it is expected to save another BGN 1.2 billion. **Each invested BGN saves BGN 35 (measured**

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[121] https://www.registryagency.bg/bg/registri/targovski-registar/statistika/
[122] https://portal.registryagency.bg/statistic-pr

as labour costs) and in the next 10 years an additional BGN 188 will be saved from each invested BGN or in total for the period 2016 to 2033 over BGN 223 will be saved from each invested BGN.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0005	
Total amount of investment	6 437 103,77 BGN
Total savings by 2023	227 237 747,40 BGN
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	1 213 344 736,58 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*35,30 BGN.*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*188,49 BGN*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*223,79 BGN*

Source: own calculations based on data provided by the Agency of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre.

Under the project **BG05SFOP001-1.002-0008** of the National Statistical Institute "Alignment of NSI information assets with Eurostat requirements and migration to Hybrid Private Cloud", the NSI information assets have been aligned with the requirements of BDS ISO/IEC 27001:2013 "Information Security Management Systems", necessary for the implementation of the European and National Statistical Programmes. A new NSI infrastructure has been built, and information and cyber security has been improved to ensure confidentiality and integrity, the protection of personal data and the integrated use of data collected by different government institutions. The nature of the project does not allow to calculate monetary effects , since the investment made (worth BGN 1.5 million) is a key prerequisite for optimising the work of the NSI and ensuring information security, but the effects in terms of time saved or money saved cannot be assessed. This investment is a key prerequisite for the NSI to operate in line with Eurostat requirements, i.e. it helps the beneficiary to secure its work and functions.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0010 "Development of public registers for budget and project control of e-government and a portal for access to resources for the development of software systems for e-government" is a support project that serves as a tool for ex-ante, ongoing and ex-post control of relevance in the field of e-government and ICT. It includes an investment of BGN 0.6 million for the establishment of a public register of e-government projects and activities and a portal for access to resources for the development of e-government software systems, in line with the principles of the e-Government Development Strategy and the new regulatory requirements regarding primary registers. Due to this specificity, the benefits of this project cannot be monetised and its efficiency has not been calculated according to the methodology developed here. The implementation of the Budget Control Register, the Project Register and the e-Government Software Development Resource Access Portal has led to a significant optimisation of e-Government and ICT costs for individual administrations, to a much more optimal use of available hardware and software. This saves public resources on the acquisition of

unnecessary hardware and software and significantly speeds up the processes of actually implementing e-government.

Under project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0011, investments of BGN 2.3 million have been made to upgrade the core systems of National Revenue Agency to provide data and services to internal and external systems. From the calculations made, it is evident that by the end of 2023, the implementation of the project has saved a total of BGN 180 million in time costs for citizens and businesses, saved paper and costs and time for authorization, service and banking to bank offices. By 2033 the project is expected to save an additional £2.4 billion. The investment thus made achieves a return of BGN 77 by 2023 for every BGN invested in the project with an additional savings of another BGN 1017 expected to be generated for every BGN invested in the period 2024-2033. Thus, from the implementation of the project until 2033, it is expected that each invested BGN will contribute to savings of almost BGN 1094.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0011	
Total amount of investment	BGN 2 346 054,54
Total savings by 2023	179 657 126,45 BGN
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	BGN 2 386 915 396,94
Every lev invested so far has saved	*76,58 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*1 017,42 BGN*
For the period of using CAIS + 10 years ahead, every invested lev will save	*1 094,00 BGN*

Source: the National Revenue Agency based on data from the Analytical Report "Analysis of the expected effects on the business environment of implemented projects financed under the OPGG (2014-2020)" prepared by the Institute for Market Economics Foundation, November 2022 (p.25, Chart 12: Number of payments made to the National Revenue Agency via virtual POS, p.25, section Growth of electronic documents served, p.26 and extrapolation of the rate of change for 2022 and 2023 with an assumption of a delay).

The project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0014 "National Spatial Data Portal (INSPIRE) of the State Agency "Electronic Government" (now the Ministry of Electronic Government), under which BGN 0.7 million have been invested, has made a significant contribution to the improvement of the spatial information infrastructure and the processes related to the exchange of spatial data in accordance with the Spatial Data Act and the requirements of Directive 2007/2/EC INSPIRE.

The portal shall enable the public authorities, which by virtue of a legal act collect, create, maintain and disseminate spatial data bases in relation to the powers they exercise and provide public services, to have mutual access to the spatial information datasets they maintain and to the statutory services for working with them. The Portal shall be the link to the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE) geoportal. Due to these specific functions of the Portal and its specific users, monetary effects cannot be derived and therefore no efficiency calculations have been made for this project.

The benefits/effects of the project are: created conditions for changing the technological activities of the public administration in the part of providing spatial data services to the benefit of citizens and businesses and to support decision-makers; accelerated process of harmonisation of spatial data and services of the public structures administering spatial data as providers and users of spatial data services; created clarity for users of spatial information about the goals and objectives of the development of

Project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0016 "Upgrading of the registers maintained by the Executive Agency "Motor Vehicle Administration" for the periodic roadworthiness inspections of vehicles and the training and tests for the acquisition of driving licence. Building a new model of control activity based on risk assessment" is worth BGN 983 thousand. The upgrading of the registers and databases included in the project achieved the transformation of the administration into a digital administration, reducing the administrative burden for citizens and businesses, increasing efficiency and reducing the opportunities for corrupt behaviour in the conduct of the Agency's control activities and exercising adequate internal control over control activities.

The total savings until 2023 for the provided electronic services and the reports made through the system are BGN 2.6 million. Almost 71 million BGN are expected to be saved by 2033. **Each invested BGN saves BGN 2.6 so far and in the next 10 years another BGN 72 will be saved from each invested BGN or in total for the period 2016 to 2033 almost BGN 75 will be saved for each invested BGN.**

Project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0016	
Total amount of investment	983 354,88 BGN
Total savings by 2023	2 594 158,00 BGN
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	70 941 172,80 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*2,64 BGN.*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*72,14 BGN.*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*74,78 BGN.*

Source: Executive Agency "Automobile Administration"

Under the project **BG05SFOP001-1.002-0018** "Development and implementation of an electronic information system "National Register of Arrests" of the Ministry of Justice, the investment made amounts to BGN 0.3 million. The information system for a single entry point for attachments has been implemented in operation since 20.07.2023 and therefore the period of its operation (from its implementation to the preparation of this report) is too short to obtain reliable statistical information on the basis of which to make calculations of its efficiency, such as monetization, so the important effects in terms of the environment are presented. The implemented project is a response to an existing deficit in terms of the possibility of informing interested parties prior to the purchase of movable assets (road vehicles, agricultural machinery, road construction equipment, etc.) about the attachments imposed on them by entitled authorities, as well

as in terms of the possibilities of information and transparency in the subsequent public sale of already attached assets. Thanks to the investments made, the register of attachments enables interested parties to be informed before the purchase of movable assets (road vehicles, agricultural machinery, road construction equipment, etc.) of attachments imposed on them by the right-holders. Ensure information and transparency when conducting subsequent public sales of already seized assets. The system is a single entry point for attachments and includes an electronic public sale module. It allows the registration of attachments on any type of property (except for claims governed by Regulation 655/2014 and immovable property, which is subject to attachment rather than garnishment). The register allows access for the authorities entitled and all interested parties. This ensures that they will be informed of the encumbrances and restrictions on the movables subject to regulation. This will increase the security of transfer transactions and facilitate the enforcement of the said movables.

Under the project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0019 "Creation of a technological environment for real-time data provision from the Centralised Register of Motor Vehicles to the AIS of the Executive Agency "Automobile Administration", National Revenue Agency, municipal administrations and Road Infrastructure Agency; refactoring of the AIS COS; implementation of the AIS COD and development of new electronic administrative services" with the beneficiary Ministry of the Interior, investments for BGN 2.5 million were made. The implementation of the project created conditions for the automation of data exchange between the Centralised Register of Motor Vehicles and the registers of other administrations. A new Automated Information System "Licensing and Control of Private Security Activity" was developed and implemented, the system "Control of Commonly Dangerous Means" administered by the Ministry of Interior and 19 pcs. of electronic administrative services were upgraded to level 3 and 4. The centralisation of data and the linking of registers ensures the use of data already available in a system, which corresponds to the objectives of providing quality, efficient and easily accessible electronic services to citizens and businesses.

So far, each invested BGN saves BGN 40, and by the end of 2033, the expected return on each invested BGN (measured in terms of savings) will be BGN 208. Total savings so far are 102 million leva and by the end of 2033 it is expected to save another 527 million leva. Thus, by 2033 each invested BGN will lead to savings of almost BGN 250, the total savings for citizens and businesses will be almost BGN 630 million.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0019	
Total amount of investment	2 533 962,20 BGN
Total savings by 2023	102 154 599,00 BGN
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	527 102 626,25 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*40,31 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*208,02 BGN.*

For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*248,33 BGN*

Source: own calculations based on data provided by the Ministry of Interior

Under the project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0022 "Establishment of geographic information-based electronic platform "Single Information Point" of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, investments for BGN 1 million have been made. The Single Information Point integrates data for the entire technical infrastructure of the country - communications, water and sewerage, gas, road, rail and electricity networks, heat transmission, street lighting, etc. The platform provides information and coordination of the deployment activities of electronic communications networks between different network operators. This is a prerequisite for reducing the costs of construction and use of infrastructure and the efficiency of the activities of network operators through cost sharing, reconciliation of administrative procedures related to construction and operation, saving of resources, including human, financial and time.

The savings are significantly smaller than other projects as the number of services provided per year is less than 100. At this scale, the return on investment is significantly lower. So far, each leva invested brings less than 1 penny return and it is expected that with a 10% growth in services provided each year by 2033, the return will reach 5 pennies for each leva invested.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.002-0022	
Total amount of investment	BGN 1 009 370
Total savings by 2023	3 339 BGN.
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	49 102 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	0,003 BGN
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	0,049 BGN
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	0,052 BGN

Source: own calculations based on data provided by the MLS

Under procedure BG05SFOP001-1.003 "Improving the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of the public procurement system" 2 projects have been financed with the beneficiary Public Procurement

Agency - **project BG05SFOP001-1.003-0001** "Support for the implementation of an effective public procurement policy and development of the administrative capacity of the Public Procurement Agency" and **project BG05SFOP001-1.003-0002** "Development, implementation and maintenance of a single national electronic web-based platform: the Centralized Automated Information System "Electron In total, investments amounting to BGN 6.4 million have been made under the procedure with the main result being the implementation of Centralized Automated Information System "Electronic Public Procurement"**.** Since the implementation of the system (2020), approximately just under 73 000 public procurement contracts have been announced. The average number of orders submitted per procedure announced under the Public Procurement Act varies. The figures are presented in the table below**.**

	Number of orders	**Average number of bids submitted**
2020	14 068	2,75
2021	19 345	4,05
2022	19 561	4,67
2023	20 000	5

Source: https://app.eop.bg/today/reporting/statistics

On the basis of these numbers so far and assuming that applicants for public procurement take 60 minutes to submit a tender, 30 minutes to fill it in, 4 hours to print and complete it or a total of 5.5 hours and spend BGN 5.00 on transport and BGN 6.00 on paper, it has been calculated that the Centralised Automated Information System has contributed to saving BGN 34 million so far. In the period 2024-2033, the savings from the system are expected to reach BGN 166 million.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.003	
Total amount of investment	BGN 6 438 291,78
Cost savings in the period 2020-2023	33 922 253,20 BGN
Estimated cost savings in the period 2024-2033	165 956 343,54 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*5,27 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*25,78 BGN*
For the period of using CAIS + 10 years ahead, every invested lev will save	*31,05 BGN*

In this way, **every invested BGN has so far saved BGN 5 for the business, and in the period until 2033 the total amount of saved funds from each invested BGN is expected to be about BGN 31 in saved costs for the business or a total of about BGN 200 million**.[123] for the period 2020-2033.

In the study period, the proportion of appeals falls from 9.2% in 2020 to 6.6% in 2022 and to 6.4% in 2023 (to date). This is roughly between 1,300 and 1,550 appeals per year (depending on the number of procurements announced) or 1,300 appeals saved over the period 2020-2023, while maintaining the 2020 appeal rate. This decrease contributes to a total of approximately BGN 5.8 million saved to business from appeals (at an average cost to business per appeal of BGN 4,500.00, which includes lawyer costs, state fees, etc.), and we can assume that approximately the same is also the value of court time saved by the cases that are found (appeals not filed).

Under procedure BG05SFOP001-1.004 "Upgrading of horizontal and central systems of e-government" is financed **project BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001** "Upgrading of horizontal and central systems of e-government in connection with the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of electronic administrative services" with beneficiary Ministry of e-government. The investments made amount to BGN 8.7 million.

After the upgrade of the e-government systems - RegiX, eForms system and the implementation of the services, their number starts to increase significantly, with the total number of services provided (cumulative) as of the beginning of December 2023 as follows:

Services to date (as at 1 December 2023)	Issue
Requested electronic services	229 000
Messages exchanged via Secure Electronic Delivery System	5 100 000
Claimed liabilities in Electronic Payment System	180 000
Internal e-administrative services provided	330 000 000

Source : https://unifiedmodel.egov.bg/

Expectations for the period 2024-2033 are calculated based on the 2023 indicator values with an assumption for change (growth or decline) depending on reported trends.[124] With the available baseline data, the following annual numbers can be expected in the period 2024-2033:

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[123] The savings here are less, mainly due to the small number of units (orders) the system serves. It should be noted that the total number of businesses registered in the system is around 12 223, so the return cannot be higher, as the number of orders and the number of persons, respectively the average number of bids submitted, cannot generate a large volume of actions that would lead to greater savings (as is the case, for example, in the procedure for upgrading horizontal and central e-government systems).
[124] https://bit.ly/3FG8JBE

Estimated annual number of services for the period 2024-2033 (calculated based on 2023 data)	Issue
Requested electronic services	70 000
Messages exchanged via Secure Electronic Delivery System	1 500 000
Claimed liabilities in Electronic Payment System	75 000
Internal e-administrative services provided	85 000 000

So far (December 2023), they have saved a total of almost BGN 2.9 billion, of which BGN 2.84 billion saved in costs for citizens, businesses and the administration for the time they would have spent to obtain the relevant services on the spot or to perform internal e-administrative services on paper if the investment had not been made and BGN 23 million saved in transport costs for citizens and businesses. The magnitude of the savings in this project is large because of the large number of services and operations that are handled through the systems implemented.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001	
Total amount of investment	BGN 8 673 579,78
Total costs saved to date	BGN 2 861 019 000,00.
Estimated cost savings over the next 10 years	11 939 243 649,41 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*329,85 BGN.*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*1 376,51 BGN*
For the lifetime of the single model so far + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*1 706,36 BGN*

Keeping the annual workload of e-services at 2022-2023 levels, the additional savings for the next 10 years (until 2033) would be 11.7 billion leva equivalent to the time for citizens and businesses to receive these services or time saved by optimizing internal processes in the administration[125] and 192 million leva saved on transport costs (assuming an annual growth of labour costs of about 7% and a growth of transport costs of about 15%).

So far, each invested BGN has saved about BGN 330, and it is expected that in the next 10 years the savings resulting from each invested BGN will be almost BGN 1,400. From the beginning of the investment until 2033, each invested leva is expected to save a total of 1 700 leva.

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[125] NSI data on employer labour costs per hour worked were used to value the time saved https://bit.ly/3PnqFWn

Thus, the total amount of saved funds by 2033 as a result of the investment under procedure BG05SFOP001-1.004 will be more than BGN 14.8 billion or BGN 1 700 for every BGN invested in the programme under procedure BG05SFOP001-1.004.

In the framework of **procedure BG05SFOP001-1.005 "Upgrading and development of the State Hybrid Private Cloud for the needs of e-Government",** the investments in the construction of the HCHS under project BG05SFOP001-1.005-0001 with the beneficiary Ministry of e-Government, worth BGN 54 million, cannot be monetized, as they are a preliminary basis (physical environment) for the development of e-government and e-justice. Their benefits cannot be quantified and their efficiency cannot be calculated, but we can infer as an important effect that the implementation of the project is of key importance for the development of the e-government environment in Bulgaria. It is part of the shared resources and the technological basis and environment for the deployment and operation of most of the existing and newly emerging elements of the e-government information layer.

Procedures BG05SFOP001-1.006 "Establishment, upgrade and integration of information systems and registers of the National Centre for Information and Documentation to improve the process of providing administrative and reference services" and BG05SFOP001-1.017 "Establishment, upgrade and integration of electronic registers of the National Centre for Information and Documentation in the field of higher education" are considered together, since the beneficiary of both procedures is the National Centre for Information and Documentation and the data on the number of the Given the specific nature of the activities, they should be considered in their entirety. The total amount of the investment is BGN 13,6 million. The total amount saved so far is BGN 1.2 million, which is significantly less than the amount of resources invested. It is expected that by 2033 the amount of saved funds will be BGN 8.8 million. Due to these disproportions between the amount of investments and the amount of saved resources, the current return is low (about 9 cents for every lev invested and expected to reach 73 cents for every lev invested by 2033). Despite the low monetary effect, the information systems and registers established by the National Centre for Information and Documentation contribute to improving the process of providing administrative and reference services and make an important contribution to increasing transparency in the science and higher education system. Through the investments made, integration of the information systems and registers of the National Centre for Information and Documentation is being created, upgraded and achieved, with a view to improving the process of providing administrative and reference services. This, in turn, directly supports the development of one of the sectoral systems of e-government - e-science. By upgrading the Register of Scientific Activities, it will be easier to find partners for collaborative research, better manage scientific projects and more effectively monitor the results of participation in national and international research and development programmes. Last but not least, the investment will centralise the higher education registers and integrate them into the inter-regional exchange environment, allowing automated data exchange for the purposes of integrated administrative services.

Projects NAFID	

Total amount of investment	13 646 424,87 *BGN*
Total savings by 2023	1 243 816,00 *BGN*
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	8 778 091,56 *BGN*
Every lev invested so far has saved	*0,09 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*0,64 BGN*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*0,73 BGN*

Source: Own calculations based on data provided by the National Centre for Information and Documentation

Under Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.007 "Upgrading of the Customs Agency's Core Systems for Data and Service Delivery - BIMIS (Phase 2)", project BG05SFOP001-1.007-0001 was analysed together with other projects of the Customs Agency.

Within the framework of **procedure BG05SFOP001-1.008 "Development and implementation of the Institutional Architecture of the National Social Security Institute for priority processes related to pensions and provision of electronic administrative services"** a project worth almost BGN 5 million was financed. The sectoral strategy "e-insurance" addresses the development of the Unified Social Security Information System and the gradual development and introduction of the Institutional Architecture of National Insurance Institute to cover all existing core and ancillary processes. The implemented project focuses on pensions as the main, key activity of the National Social Insurance Institute, respectively - the development of the Institutional Architecture of the National Social Insurance Institute started with the priority processes of granting and payment of pensions and supplements under the Social Insurance Code and upgrading the administrative services related to them to the level of electronization 3. The project addresses the consolidation of various information sources on pensionable service and income and other documents and data required at retirement, and the merging of the various information resources for their delivery and use into an Integrated Pension Information System. The core of the system is the Electronic Pension Insurance File, including all electronic information sources required for the pension granting and payment process, in structured form and digitized unstructured documents. The implementation of the interventions is also linked to the integration of the information systems of the National Insurance Institute with a significant number of data and information sources with different levels of electronification, the diversity of the parties involved in the process, and the need to continue efforts to provide quality easily accessible electronic services to citizens and businesses.

The total amount of saved funds on an annual basis is BGN 3.6 million. With annual personnel costs of the National Social Insurance Institute amounting to BGN 102 million, this resource contributes to the optimization (saving) of personnel costs within about 3%. If the investments described above had not been

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made, staff costs would have been 3% higher and the time to complete operations longer. Each leva invested in this project would have a return of about 0.74 leva in just one year[126] . It is expected that by 2033 the amount of saved funds will be 54.3 million leva[127] . At the end of the period, every lev invested will have resulted in a saving of almost 12 levs.

Project BG05SFOP001-1.008	
Amount of investment	4 953 643,27 *BGN*
Approximate number of pensioners per year- average	2 041 261
Savings from the work of the employees of the NSSI in an electronic environment on an annual basis (by 2023)	3 674 269,80 *BGN*
Expected savings for the period 2024-2033	54 318 932,51 *BGN*
Every lev invested so far has saved	*0,74 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*10,97 BGN*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*11,71 BGN.*

Source: National Social Security Institute, https://www.nssi.bg/publikacii/statistika/

Under the procedure BG05SFOP001-1.010 "Establishment and development of the information systems and registers of the Communications Regulation Commission to improve the regulatory and control activities and to enhance the quality of administrative services", project No BG05SFOP001-1.010-0001 with beneficiary Communications Regulation Commission was financed, the value of the investments made being BGN 0.9 million.

Within the project, systems, registers and monitoring tools of the Communications Regulation Commission have been created/upgraded that do not relate to the provision of electronic administrative services but support the activities of the regulator. The effects of the investments are:

• Establishing a mechanism to measure and monitor the quality parameters of the Internet access service provided through fixed and mobile networks (https://nettest.crc.bg/#/home). Through this mechanism, the CRC monitors compliance with the net neutrality requirements under Regulation 2015/2120. The mechanism provides more effective protection for users of electronic communications services and is used by the Communications Regulation Commission for regulatory purposes;

- Development of the existing information system "Licensing and Registers" of the Communications Regulation Commission, including the upgrade of 8 registers (and their sub-registers) by connecting them

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[126] The project ended in the second half of 2023 and there is no accumulated data to allow calculation of efficacy over a longer period.

[127] Due to the NSI projections for a decline in the population and a corresponding decline in the number of pensioners, which is also evident as a trend from the NSI statistics by year, we do not forecast growth here in the period 2024-2033.

to the inter-register exchange environment (RegiX), which contributes to easier and faster exchange of information. The upgrade has created the necessary conditions for easier and faster exchange of information and has improved the quality and speed of administrative services to natural and legal persons. The electronic administrative services of the Communications Regulation Commission have been upgraded by joining them to the Unified Request, Payment and Delivery Model of the Ministry of e-Government, a Complaints module has been developed and an electronic service "Complaints";

- a tariff comparison tool to ensure transparency of the prices and tariffs offered for electronic communications services and to enable consumers to compare and evaluate services in terms of their prices and conditions. The tariff calculator enables citizens to make an informed choice of tariff plan from the available offers in one place (https://comparetool.crc.bg/public). Transparency of tariffs is guaranteed by providers providing synthesised information on their services;

- a mechanism to curb instances of unconscious roaming registered on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria by developing a mobile application to alert consumers and collect information from the Communications Regulation Commission on the areas where unconscious roaming is registered, with a view to taking appropriate measures, in accordance with Article 16(3)(2) of Regulation 531/2012.

Although they are very important for the regulator's activities, the effects of these investments cannot be monetised and therefore no efficiency has been calculated for them.

Under the Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.011 "Development of a Unified Information System /EIS/ for the needs of Financial Supervision Commission " the project BG05SFOP001-1.011-0001 was financed for the amount of BGN 6 million. The effect of the investment is in terms of improving the regulatory and supervisory activities of the Financial Supervision Commission through the implementation of a Unified Information System, which automates the activities of all specialized and general units in the Financial Supervision Commission and provides the opportunity for review, tracking, control, validation and analysis of incoming and processed information, as well as the possibility of automated data transfer, including from and to external systems at national and international level.

In order to achieve the expected effects, the following investments have been made within the project:
-a   unified information system in the Financial Supervision Commission;
-redesign   , consolidation and improvement of the registers of the Financial Supervision Commission;
-realization of a single, reliable and modern secure channel for the applicants of electronic administrative services in the submission of applications, notifications, periodic information, and other documents;
-Upgrading the   electronic administrative services provided by the Financial Supervision Commission to levels 3 and 4;
-automation of   business processes and procedures for processing, control and analysis of data and documents;
-creating an   effective mechanism for implementing risk-based controls;
-integration of the system with the relevant key horizontal components of e-government;

-providing the possibility of integration with external registers and systems at national and European level for automated exchange of data and information.

Although 264 e-administrations have been implemented under the project, due to the short period since their launch, no monetary effects have been calculated.

In the framework of procedure BG05SFOP001-1.013 "Implementation of priority measures of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2019-2023" two projects have been agreed with the beneficiary Ministry of e-Government - project BG05SFOP001-1.013-0001 "Development and implementation of the Reference Architecture for Interoperability (RAOI) and of the Information System for centralized construction and maintenance of registers" and project BG05SFOP001-1.013-0002 "Cloud e-services for the administration". Project BG05SFOP001-1.013-0002 was closed ex officio by the MA without implementation, as the Ministry of eGovernment found the developed platform for providing cloud e-services for municipalities to be non-compliant with the Law on eGovernment. The value of the investment under project BG05SFOP001-1.013-0001 is BGN 1,6 million. The project is horizontal in nature, there are no direct monetary effects, therefore the efficiency of the activities carried out has not been calculated. An Interoperability Reference Architecture has been developed and validated as part of the eGovernment Architecture, which contains standards, description of processes, rules and procedures related to the maintenance and implementation of the Reference Architecture, including with regard to interoperability registries.

Under the procedure BG05SFOP001-1.014 "Development of the information system and the public register of Commission for Protection of Competition " the project BG05SFOP001-1.014-0001 was financed and the value of the investments made is BGN 1.5 million. Although 6 e-administrative services have been implemented under the project, due to the short period since their launch no monetary effects have been calculated. The project contributes to ensuring publicity and transparency, as well as streamlining the work of the CPC with the development of the public register.

The new information portal of the Commission for Protection of Competition https://www.cpc.bg/ contains not only information on the Commission's activities, but also a public register of all proceedings and acts. New sections have been created, one of which is the reporting of competition infringements, including anonymous reporting. With the creation of the electronic platform for anonymous whistleblowing, the Commission for the Protection of Competition aims to give anyone with evidence of competition infringements the opportunity to do so, even anonymously. The additional whistleblowing possibilities contribute to the detection of competition infringements. Information on the existence of a complaint lodged against an act of the Commission for the Protection of Competition is now also published. The filing of a complaint suspends the enforcement of the contested administrative act, which is why this information is of utmost importance for businesses and for all parties in proceedings before the Commission for the Protection of Competition. The parties to the proceedings can consult the dates of the files scheduled for an open hearing. This removes the need for business representatives to make enquiries by telephone or on the spot.

The additional information that is published on the portal facilitates business and especially the parties in the proceedings. The improved presentation of information contributes to raising public awareness of competition rules. Electronic forms and instructions for filling them in when submitting requests and complaints to the Commission electronically have been published to facilitate businesses and citizens. The possibility to attach digital evidence to the electronic forms has been created. All of this contributes to further improving administrative services, including by removing the administrative burden for parties to proceedings and signatories to submit paper documents, and responses to requests and complaints received can be requested to be received electronically.

Under procedure BG05SFOP001-1.015 "Development and implementation of e-archiving system" was financed project BG05SFOP001-1.015-0001 with beneficiary State Agency "Archives" and the value of the investment is BGN 5.4 million.

The project does not have monetary effects as it is horizontal in nature, not contributing to specific savings, but rather to improving the reliability of backups according to current standards. The e-Archiving system established ensures that the national archival collection is replenished with valuable electronic documents, preserved for the future of the nation and maintains a modern and efficient administration at the service of government, business and citizens. The implementation of the project contributes to the modernization and transformation of the processes of organization, expertise, preservation and use of electronic documents in state and municipal institutions by providing public access to the stored valuable electronic documents in digital form. The development of the e-Archiving system aims to prevent two serious risks currently faced by the administration. Firstly, to limit the risk of loss of valuable electronic documents, which would have unforeseeable consequences for both government and individuals. Second, to prevent the risk of the authenticity of valuable electronic documents being compromised. Their authenticity is guaranteed by the electronic signature that binds the documents, by the digital certificate of the system itself or by other authentication systems that guarantee not only the informational but also the evidentiary function of electronic documents. If this is not ensured, both the legitimate rights of citizens (civil, property, etc.) and the principles of governance in general may be violated. The new system preserves any historically valuable content in electronic form, including audiovisual records. A studio for digitization of audiovisual documents has been created, which the State Archives Agency did not have until the implementation of the project. Through the purchase of digitisation equipment, the recorded data will be transferred onto new media, thus ensuring the integrity of the documents and access to them.

Under procedure BG05SFOP001-1.016 "Optimization and computerization of the registers and work processes in the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency" was financed project BG05SFOP001-1.016-0001 with beneficiary Bulgarian Food Safety Agency for BGN 8.3 million.

The project contributes to optimizing the work and internal processes of the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency. The implemented investments lead to a change in the organization of the registers, the computerization of work processes and the consolidation of information sources. Thematic consolidation and electronification

of the registers and the development of specialised information systems for the management of the relevant control areas optimise the work processes at central and regional level.

At the time of writing, the services have not been implemented and therefore their effectiveness in terms of monetary impact cannot be estimated.

Under procedure BG05SFOP001-1.020 "Development and implementation of the National Insurance Institute architecture for the processes related to cash benefits, allowances and guaranteed claims", project BG05SFOP001-1.020-0001 was financed for BGN 7.3 million.

Through the implemented investments, the consolidation of information sources into a single Electronic Social Security File for each insured person, self-insured and insurer is carried out. The electronic social security file covers the data on all insurance events that may occur in a person's life related to his/her insurance status, occurrence of insurance risks, etc., as well as estimated data on periods and/or other indicators of the person's social security. The information system "Electronic social security file" has been set up to manage the logical links between the set of structured data and unstructured electronic documents on the social security rights of each insured person or person entitled to cash benefits and benefits for all insured risks regulated by the relevant laws. These data are necessary for the determination of the period, the calculation of the amount and the payment thereof, the registered occupational accidents, occupational diseases, individual administrative acts, appeals, etc.; including the construction of similar profiles of insurers. The information system "Electronic Social Insurance File" is integrated with the information systems of the National Social Insurance Institution for granting and paying cash benefits, allowances and guaranteed claims and the primary sources of documents and data (registers) of the National Social Insurance Institution for the construction of social insurance profiles, information and reference sections and the channels through which they are accessed in analytical and aggregated form.

At the time of writing, the services have not been implemented and therefore their effectiveness in terms of monetary impact cannot be estimated.

Under procedure BG05SFOP001-1.024 "Development of a national solution for the electronic exchange of social security information EESSI", a horizontal project of the National Social Security Institute for the design of a national solution for the electronic exchange of social security information EESSI was funded. It has no direct monetary effects but has a supporting role for information integration. Investments have been made to design and prepare technical specifications for a comprehensive national solution for the electronic exchange of social security information (EESSI) with EU Member States, the European Economic Area, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The effects of the investment can be derived in terms of:

- ✓ Optimising the institutional framework (competent institutions, competent authorities, liaison bodies and access points);

- ✓ Designing a national software solution for social security information exchange;
- ✓ Developing a model and designing a national EESSI focal point to take over the coordination of exchange issues and changes (request distribution, case resolution and troubleshooting of business and technical issues).

Under Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.025 "Upgrading of the Customs Agency's Core Systems for Data and Service Delivery - BIMIS (Phase 3), project BG05SFOP001-1.025-0001 was analysed together with other Customs Agency projects.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.029 "Development of electronic administrative services and implementation of additional functionalities in automated information systems in the Ministry of Interior" is funded project BG05SFOP001-1.029-0001 with beneficiary Directorate "Communication and Information Systems" - Ministry of Interior. The electronic administrative services provided by the Ministry of the Interior are part of the process of providing quality, efficient and accessible services to citizens and businesses. The implemented investments develop and complement the successfully completed on 21.06.2021 project, which put into operation the upgraded PEAM with a flexible and adaptable mechanism for visualization and presentation of information when requesting electronic administrative services and developed new electronic administrative services. In order to improve the services and expand the scope of the provided electronic administrative services, the processes of requesting, processing and providing electronic administrative services were improved, as well as the efficiency and accessibility of the services for citizens and businesses were increased; the administrative services for citizens and businesses were improved and the administrative burden was reduced, electronic services were developed and implemented in the areas of "Bulgarian Identity Documents", "Control of Commonly Hazardous Materials", "Control of Commonly Hazardous Materials" and "Electronic Administrative Services". Through the implementation of the project, support was provided for the development and implementation of additional functionalities of the Automated Information System "Licensing and Control of Private Security Activity" and the Unified Automated Register "Control of Commonly Dangerous Means" in accordance with the amendments and additions to the Law on Administrative Offences and Penalties and the implementation of integration with the Secure Electronic Service System.

PA 3 E-Justice:

Procedure BG05SFOP001-1.001 "Data structuring and analytical activities in the implementation of the strategic documents for the development of public administration, development of e-government and introduction of e-government in the justice sector":

Project BG05SFOP001-1.001-0004 "Inventory and analysis of the state of the information and communication infrastructure, information systems, services and registers in the Judiciary Sector" with beneficiary Ministry of Justice is worth BGN 938 233.30 and finances activities on inventory and

analysis of the state of the information and communication infrastructure, information systems, services and registers in the Justice Sector. The investments are aimed at examining the identified deficits in the system, and on the basis of their implementation, the first comprehensive and exhaustive review (inventory) is being carried out through an expert on-site survey of the building stock used by the structures in the sector. An audit of the IT and communication infrastructure of 385 institutions has been carried out[128] . The contribution of the project implementation is fundamental for the follow-up of the e-Justice implementation, as its main programming design by OPGG, is also to contribute to the coherence of the results of the different projects and sustainability in their implementation through multiplier effects. The review and analysis of the technical capacity in the justice sector is also a prerequisite for the implementation of the measures foreseen in the national strategy documents for the introduction of e-justice, such as various registries, systems, portals. The contribution of the implemented activities is that they provide the basis for the sustainability of the results of the projects, which are based on the analysis for building a modern e-justice system. Therefore, the investments under this procedure have no direct monetary effects and no efficiency has been calculated for them.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3.001 "Strategic projects in implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary and the Strategy for the introduction of e-government and e-justice in the justice sector 2014-2020":

Under project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0001 "Creation of a model for optimization of the court map of Bulgarian courts and prosecutor's offices and development of Single information system of courts" with the beneficiary being the Supreme Judicial Council, investments for almost BGN 5 million have been made. So far, each invested BGN saves BGN 60, and by the end of 2033 the return on each invested BGN (measured in terms of saved funds) is expected to be another BGN 1,020, i.e. for the period of the system's operation until 2033 BGN 1,080 will be saved from each invested BGN. The total savings so far are BGN 297 million, and from 2024 to the end of 2033 it is expected that another BGN 5 billion will be saved (assuming a moderation of magistrates' pay by at least three times in the period within about 20%[129]). Savings will decrease as the number of cases decreases and this trend is expected to continue, and in the period until 2023 not only new cases are processed, but also current (pending) cases or cases from the archive, therefore the calculations are based on more than 1.3 million cases initiated and managed and 4.5 million court acts rendered according to the SJC.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0001	
Amount of investment	4 953 608,68 BGN
Saved costs of court system working time (magistrates) one and a half hours less per case	279 334 987,50 BGN.

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[128] Judiciary bodies (courts, prosecution offices, investigations) and executive administrations in the Justice Sector (JS) where an inventory of the state of IT and communication infrastructure and information systems has been carried out.

[129] Based on historical data on the frequency and amount of pay increases in the judiciary.

Savings in external (jury and summons) time - jury time in 20% of cases, summons time saved at 5 leva per case (assuming easier and quicker access to information needed by summons)	9 111 830,00 BGN
Saved paper costs	1 165 235,00 BGN
Saved working time costs from electronic summoning (the calculations are made assuming a cost of BGN 40, based on a minimum of 2.2 hours of working time required to summon one person - transport, address discovery and intake, and allowing for more than one visit in at least 50% of cases due to undetected subjects) - the calculation is made at a rate of BGN 18 per hour	60 000,00 BGN
Saved time costs from accessing cases (lawyers, business, citizens)	7 568 000,00 BGN
Saved working time costs of approximately one working hour from working with electronic documents (magistrates, lawyers)	103 200,00 BGN.
Total savings based on time saved by 2023	297 343 252,50 BGN
Total savings from 2024 to 2033 (assuming at least a threefold pay increase of around 20%)	5 054 835 292,50 BGN
Borj cases per year (SJC statistics)	300 000
Every lev invested so far has saved	*60,03 BGN.*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*1 020,44 BGN*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*1 080,46 BGN*

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0003 "Introduction of e-Justice in the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria through electronic document management, provision of open data and electronic services for comprehensive administrative services to citizens and institutions" with the beneficiary Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria for BGN 2 341 553,68 is aimed at electronizing the internal processes in the Prosecutor's Office and providing the possibility for a phased transition to electronic document management by upgrading the case management information system UIS-2 and the Unified and The upgraded systems contribute to the provision of more and better electronic services to citizens, companies and state institutions, but no statistical information is available on the number of services actually provided after the introduction of the system. Due to the fact that some of the activities are internal to the system, monetary effects have not been assessed as there are no statistics on the internal operations performed after the upgrade of the clerical system.

According to the data from the portal for electronic services of the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria[130] the most used services through UIS-3 are:

✓ Issuance of certificate of pending criminal proceedings;

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[130] https://e-services.prb.bg/epob-ui/#/home

✓ Submitting an application and obtaining information under the Access to Information for Citizens Act;

✓ Submission of a request for compulsory accommodation and treatment;

✓ Issuance of a certificate of time served.

The effect of the investments made is a reliable environment for paperless document management and work with electronic content, working e-services and provision of open data.

Under the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0005 "Modernization of the Penitentiary System in Bulgaria" with the beneficiary Ministry of Justice, investments for over BGN 1.5 million have been made. So far, each invested BGN saves about BGN 24, and by the end of 2033 it is expected that the return on each invested BGN (measured in terms of saved funds) will be another BGN 246, i.e. for the period from the start of the functioning of the system until 2033 about BGN 271 will be saved from each invested BGN. The total savings so far are BGN 38 million, and from 2024 to the end of 2033 it is expected that another BGN 379 million will be saved.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0005	
Amount of investment	1 538 910,98 BGN
Savings in labour costs based on working time saved as a result of switching to CCTV (€125 per day per employee)	37 914 375 BGN.
Estimated savings for the period 2024-2033	379 143 750 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*24,64 BGN.*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*246,37 BGN*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*271,01 BGN*

Source: own calculations based on the Ministry of Justice's Programme Budget Implementation Accounts

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0007 "Enhancing guarantees for a fair process in enforcement proceedings through the establishment of an information system", worth BGN 321 793, with the beneficiary Ministry of Justice, includes investments through which the information system for centralized electronic access to data on the initiation, movement and closure of enforcement cases in the Republic of Bulgaria is established. The system facilitates the work of creditors, debtors, third parties, public and private bailiffs performing enforcement functions, control bodies under the Judiciary Act and the Private Bailiffs Act, etc. Due to the short period from implementation to the preparation of this report (less than one year[131]), there is insufficient statistical information on which to assess its effectiveness.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0008 "Further development and centralization of portals in the executive authorities of the Justice Sector for access of citizens and businesses to information, e-services and e-justice" with the beneficiary Ministry of Justice, implements a single portal of the executive

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[131] Electronic references through the Court Enforcement Information System are provided on the basis of Regulation No. H-1 of 17.01.2022, which comes into force on 01.11.2022.

authorities in the Justice Sector, through which a single entry point is implemented for citizens to access the services provided by the structures of the executive authorities in the justice sector, providing the possibility for electronic administrative services to request, pay for and access the services provided by the executive authorities in the Justice Sector. The effects of the implemented investment are in the following directions:

- ✓ implementation of a single entry point to information and services provided by the executive in the justice sector - increases the accessibility of services;

- ✓ easing the administrative burden on citizens and businesses by reducing the time it takes them to request services, which is also a factor in increasing their accessibility.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0009 "Redesign of the AIS in the Ministry of Justice and the second-level authorising officers in order to switch to the use and exchange of only electronic documents and electronic content in the sector by the executive authorities. Training of staff in the use of AIS and electronic documents" with beneficiary Ministry of Justice. The selected AIS has been upgraded in order to switch to electronic document management and to enable citizens, businesses and external entities to request and provide electronic administrative services. The upgraded automated document management information system is used for the electronic exchange of data by MoJ and VRB staff, between the different departments, as well as by citizens and businesses to request electronic administrative services. Four e-administrative services have been implemented for citizens and businesses: provision of access to public information; issuance of certificates of social security income; issuance of certificates of social security length of service; clarification of differences between an issued certificate of social security income and data on the insured person from the information system of the National Social Security Institute. The effect of the investments made under the OPGG is to increase administrative productivity and transparency as a result of the use of the AIS and to ease the administrative burden on citizens and businesses through the electronic services provided.

Under the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0010 "Implementation of the Centralized Automated Information System "Judicial Status"" with the beneficiary Ministry of Justice, through the development of the Centralized Automated Information System "Judicial Status" a central database has been built with regard to criminal records, uniting 113 databases of district courts and the database of the Central Bureau of Criminal Records at the Ministry of Justice, as well as a database of convicted Bulgarian citizens abroad, and a fully centralized database has been built. The total amount of the investment is BGN 1.3 million. Since the implementation of the system until December 2023, BGN 4.1 million have been saved, with additional savings of almost BGN 57 million expected in the period 2024-2033. Each BGN invested leads to savings of BGN 2.58 by 2023, and in the next 10 years until 2033 each BGN of investment will contribute to additional savings of another BGN 43. Thus, for the whole period until 2033, the savings from each lev invested in the system will total about 45 levs.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0010	
Amount of investment	BGN 1 317 495,10

Savings from system implementation and operation by 2023	BGN 3 401 240,00
Savings on transport of 5 leva and time for submission and receipt total 1 hour (18 leva)	BGN 739 400,00
Savings for the period 2024 to 2033	56 616 030,67 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*2,58 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*42,97 BGN*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*45,55 BGN*

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0013 contributes to expand and optimize the functionalities of the Single e-Justice Portal . As a result of the investment, e-services for citizens and lawyers are realised by linking the system to the Single e-Justice Portal.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0013	
Amount of investment	503 226,59 *BGN*
Savings in time to access cases	11 352 000,00 *BGN*
Saved transport costs	880 000,00 *BGN*.
Saved paper	35 200,00 *BGN*
Saved time by electronic summoning	60 000,00 *BGN*
Saved time from procedural actions through active access to cases	103 200,00 *BGN*
Total savings by 2023	12 430 400,00 *BGN*
Total savings from 2024 to 2033	136 338 378,82 *BGN*
Every lev invested so far has saved	*24,70 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*270,93 BGN*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*295,63 BGN*

Source: number of cases per year (SJC statistics): https://vss.justice.bg/root/f/upload/41/total-tables_Ip-2023.pdf

So far, as a result of the investment, about BGN 12.4 million have been saved, and it is expected that by 2033 an additional BGN 136 million will be saved. Each BGN invested so far has contributed to savings of around BGN 24.70, and in the period from 2024 to 2033 each BGN invested will save around BGN 270 more. Thus, the total cost savings by 2033 would be BGN 295 for every BGN invested in expanding and optimising the functionalities of the Single e-Justice Portal.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0014 "Promotion of the use of mediation as an alternative method for dispute resolution", with an investment of BGN 294 thousand**, was** implemented in response to identified deficits related to mediation and in particular the fact that until the implementation of the project

in the Ministry of Justice is maintained a Unified Register of mediators, which also maintains information on training organizations, but there is no information on the specific competencies of mediators, information on their activities, resolved by means of the Through the investments made, a centralized electronic mediation portal has been developed and implemented - the implemented project is an extremely important step towards promoting mediation as an effective way to resolve disputes and providing the opportunity for online mediation procedures without the need for physical presence of the parties. Three e-administrative services have been developed (registration and de-registration of a mediator and approval of mediator training organisations and issuance of orders to the approved trainers) and three e-services (request for termination of the activity of a mediator training organisation; change of the registered circumstances of a mediator; change of the circumstances under which an order for approval of a mediator training organisation has been issued). The effects of the investments made relate to:

- ✓ Improvement of existing procedures (instruments), leading to modernisation of the judiciary;
- ✓ Encouraging the use of alternative forms of dispute resolution through e-justice - the system in place has had an impact in terms of accessibility to end users;
- ✓ creates an opportunity to reduce the workload in the judiciary.

The monetary effects of the investment are yet to manifest themselves, as according to the planned changes in the Mediation Act, which are to come into force after 01.07.2024, mediation becomes mandatory in some cases, and the court is given the power to oblige participation in such a meeting in other proceedings.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0016 "Providing software and methodological support and building administrative capacity of the Inspectorate of the Supreme Judicial Council for the prevention of corruption and the judiciary", with an investment of BGN 168 thousand, lays the foundations for an integrated policy for the prevention of conflict of interest and corruption within the judiciary. The most tangible effect can be identified as the creation of an electronic public register of SJC referrals - as this is a real tool for the prevention of conflict of interest, or the fight against corruption in the judiciary.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0017 "Improvement of the model of forensic expertise", with an investment of 109 thousand BGN**,** is implemented in connection with the implementation of the strategic objective for a modern and effective criminal policy. Within the framework of the implemented interventions, an automated information system "Unified Register of Experts" has been built, which builds on the existing register[132] and allows to avoid fragmentation in the selection of specialists. This allows the pre-trial and trial authorities to quickly and easily find experts with the appropriate specialty. Although the nature of the project does not allow for monetary effects to be calculated, it has its effects in terms of:

- ✓ Partial modernisation of the organisation of expertise;
- ✓ Enhancing access to specialised knowledge and analysis of the court and pre-trial bodies, with guarantees of efficiency and competence, prevention of corruption and reasonable cost.

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[132] specialised software for monitoring and control of experts, developed under OPAC

Under project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0019 "Establishment of videoconferencing facilities and their use in the pre-trial and trial phases, including cross-border cooperation in the administration of justice" with the Ministry of Justice as the beneficiary, investments of almost BGN 2.5 million have been made. So far, each invested BGN saves about 12 cents, but by the end of 2033, the return on each invested BGN (measured in terms of savings) is expected to be another BGN 10.46, i.e. for the period of the system's operation until 2033, about BGN 10.58 will be saved from each invested BGN. The total amount saved so far is BGN 300 thousand and from 2024 to the end of 2033 another BGN 26 million is expected to be saved. The smaller amount of saved funds is a result of the still small number of videoconferences implemented.

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0019	
Amount of investment	BGN 2 511 555,30
Time saved with an average of 8 people involved in a trial (magistrates, litigants, lawyers)	74 648,00 BGN
Savings for travel within the country within 80 leva per day for 2023.	17 360,00 BGN
Savings for travel abroad of 500 leva per person for 2023.	208 000,00 BGN
Savings for 2023	300 008,00 BGN
Saved 2024-2033	26 261 895,88 BGN
Every lev invested so far has saved	*0,12 BGN*
In the next 10 years every invested lev will save more	*10,46 лв.*
For the period of using the system + 10 years ahead every invested lev will save	*10,58 лв.*

Project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0020 "Strategic reforms in the National Legal Aid Bureau" for BGN 192 thousand. , which resulted in the improvement of the systems for monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the legal aid offered and facilitating access to primary legal aid in line with the Roadmap to the Updated Strategy for Continuing the Reform in the Judiciary. Developed and implemented a Unified Electronic System for Legal Aid , to automate and electronically present all steps of legal aid management, synchronizing and coordinating the work of the different bodies in the system into one with better control by the National Legal Aid Bureau of the work of lawyers and bar councils. The effect of the investment is to improve the process for managing and reporting on the legal aid budget, as well as to improve the quality of legal aid and the reporting process through the introduction of the electronic system.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3.007-0002 "Improving and updating policies and rules related to the appraisal and remuneration of judicial officers and introducing guarantees for public participation in the selection of jurors by municipal councils":

This procedure has no direct monetary effects. It contributes to the preparation of the necessary analyses and amendments to the legal framework and to the introduction of uniform, clear and objective

rules for the career development of judicial officers, the formation of their remuneration and fringe benefits, as well as the evaluation of their performance through appraisal.

Within the framework of the project BG05SFOP001-3.007-0001 "Ensuring Real Public Participation in the Administration of Justice through the Institute of Jury Trials" with the beneficiary being the Supreme Judicial Council, a Unified Jury Trial Register has been developed and implemented. The investment amounts to BGN 129 379.75. The register is accessible to the public from the website of the Single e-Justice Portal. With the implementation of the Unified Jury Register, thanks to the investments made under the OPGG, it is possible to track the profile of each juror, the intensity of participation in the trial, compliance with the requirements for random selection of main and reserve jurors, as well as with all the requirements provided for in the Judiciary Act and the regulations concerning jurors. The register contributes to improving the random selection of jurors and eliminating existing poor practices prior to the implementation of the register, but has no monetary contribution.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3.008 "Development and implementation in the judicial system of software for accelerated creation and reproduction of acts and other documents through dictation and automatic voice-to-text conversion and accompanying processing systems":

As training on the use of the system under project BG05SFOP001-3.008-0001 is still ongoing, there is no basis on which to evaluate its effectiveness based on its use in a real environment. As noted in section 6.3.3, the biggest advantage of introducing voice-to-text software in the work of the courts will be the time saved by magistrates (judges, prosecutors and investigators) and court clerks, which will have a direct effect on the speed and quality of justice. The effect in terms of time savings for judges and court clerks is expected to be over 60%[133] per document. The benefits of introducing specialised software would not only be for the parties to a case, but for the judicial system as a whole, for all those who work in it, in terms of time and financial savings. And in addition to the time savings, there would be better accountability, and security in the justice system, which in the long run would lead to increased confidence in the judiciary by citizens and businesses by increasing the efficient administration of justice. Once the software has been implemented in the judiciary, it will be made available to over 640 government institutions that have already stated that they want to work with it. These include the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Interior. These institutions will have the opportunity to train themselves in the software on expressions and terms specific to them. All this will make the implemented intervention sustainable not only for the judiciary but also for the whole administration.

The factors that influence the efficiency of investments are, on the one hand, the amount of money invested and, on the other hand, the number of users of a service and the annual number of services. Efficiency is higher for repeat services and services with larger target user groups. Conversely, if we have a large volume of investment but a small number of users, then efficiency is lower. The resource intensity of investments is also a factor that is determined by the volume of funds needed to make an investment. Another factor is the implementation period. Investments that have had a longer lifetime before 2023 may

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[133] according to the calculation made when submitting the project proposal

have a higher efficiency due to the cumulative number of services provided, while those that have only been in operation for a year or less are less likely to generate services, respectively savings, which may affect their efficiency to date but does not affect their efficiency over the 2024-2033 period. Among the third group of factors are those that optimise a significant amount of working time and can consequently reduce costs for stakeholders - such as projects that reduce travel for litigants (videoconferencing) or replace human control with video control (electronic surveillance).

In conclusion, the greatest return is from investments that cover a large number of users and, consequently, generate a large number of actions on which savings are reported. Such are investments in systems such as the National Revenue Agency and common e-services systems. Although highly positive in terms of utility and effects, the returns on systems that are used by a small number of stakeholders (such as the Customs Agency and the Public Procurement Agency) are lower per unit of investment.

The analysis of the implementation of the projects shows that their results cannot be achieved at a lower cost. The arguments in support of this thesis are that all procurement rules have been respected in the implementation of the projects and, therefore, value for money can be considered to have been achieved. There is no reason to believe that the same or better results could be achieved at a lower cost. Insofar as the analysis compares the savings based on the implemented electronic systems and registers, we can consider that they have achieved a good return, as for each of the systems/registers analysed the return/savings are several times higher than the financial resources invested in the implementation of the projects.

6.8. Evaluation question 1.6. What is the change in the specific area before and after the interventions under the respective OPGG PO? How much of the change is attributable to OPGG support?

6.8.1. Change in PA 1 and PA 2

For the purposes of this assessment, "change" should be understood as a transition or action from one state to another, a change to something qualitatively new and different. There has been a major and radical change in the area of eGovernment implementation thanks to OPGG investments. Changes in the area of increasing the capacity of the administration /specialised training and improving the quality of human resource management/ are mixed, ranging from positive to a large extent to limited in terms of human resource management. In most of the projects, conditions have been created for sustainability and multiplication of results. OPGG interventions implemented have led to the development of e-government and improved administrative services. The changes are complex, large-scale and comprehensive given the number of beneficiaries of the interventions, and e-government development processes are being launched. They are mostly due to the OPGG interventions.

For the purposes of this assessment, "change" should be understood as a transition or action from one state to another, a change to something qualitatively new and different. In order to assess change in the specific area before and after the OPGG interventions, the description of the administrative system and administrative services contained in the latest version of the OPGG[134] is used as a starting point. On this basis, an analysis of the changes achieved in line with the objectives of the OPGG by priority axis was then carried out.

The vision of the Operational Programme "Good Governance" is based on the understanding that strong, efficient and transparent state and judicial institutions have a direct horizontal relation to the achievement of all the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy, especially since these objectives are interrelated. It is no coincidence that Strategic Priority 4 of the Partnership Agreement (PA): Good governance and access to quality administrative services is horizontal, i.e. it is relevant to the achievement of the objectives of all the other priorities. Bulgaria's main weaknesses highlighted in the SWOT analysis of the JP, which the OPGG addresses, are "Relatively unattractive administrative environment and judiciary, including share of grey economy and corruption", and "Incomplete reforms in sectors, judiciary, public administration".

These weaknesses are cross-cutting in nature and affect the implementation of all public activities. The main objective of the OPGG is to reduce these weaknesses, thus making a significant contribution to the achievement of the strategic objectives of Europe 2020 and Bulgaria in particular.

The "modernisation of public administration" component of the OPGG addresses one of the main challenges facing Bulgaria, namely the still too low efficiency of administrations in providing quality, fast and accessible administrative services to all groups in society. OPGG supports the solution of this challenge through measures grouped in three interrelated directions: 1) ensuring the possibility for citizens to request and receive the services they need at a convenient place for them, at a minimum cost in time and money 2) the final introduction of e-government in the administration, including sectoral systems - e-procurement, e-customs, etc.; 3) improving the quality of service and the competence of employees in the administration.

In order to overcome the described weaknesses and to achieve a high quality of service to citizens and businesses, the main focus of the OPGG measures is on: registry reform; regulatory reform; optimization of structures based on functional analyses by policy; grouping of services by "life episodes"/"business events" and implementation of the Integrated Administrative Service (IAS); unification and standardization of municipal services, as well as other measures based on the user of administrative services.

Another important element in achieving a modern and efficient administration is good human resource management. OPGG responds to these issues with measures that cover the entire human resource management cycle - from the selection of quality employees, through adequate career development and guidance, to the continuous improvement of their qualifications. Both training and the provision of an effective learning environment are envisaged, linking the knowledge and skills acquired to the nature of

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[134]

the work and the needs of the administration itself. The strategic view of reforming human resources management units and better policy-making in this area is not overlooked.

OPGG aims to help solve some of the main identified organisational, technical and structural problems that pose barriers to the introduction of e-government in Bulgaria. The insufficient use of specialized software systems, the lack of a single, common for the entire administration information system for organizing and managing the processes of service provision, the simplification of the work processes of administrative services, which even provided electronically retain their bureaucratic nature, leads to high cost of e-services and therefore high costs for the population and businesses.

The OPGG is a key instrument to support the realization of the vision of e-government in the Republic of Bulgaria - by 2020 to be. 2. Digital administration - administration structured in accordance with modern management technologies and achievements of information and communication technologies; 3. Achieved interoperability at national level - from fragmented and closed, to integrated and technologically independent solutions; 4. Established a mechanism for coordinated planning and implementation of all e-government development initiatives; 5. Ensured delivery of administrative services through the single e-government portal at any time, from any place and through different devices. eGovernment will contribute to establishing open and flexible relations between the administration and citizens and businesses.

The analysis of the programming environment of the OPGG is examined to track the change resulting from programme implementation. The programme is aimed at improving the performance of the administration, which has a direct impact on the life of every Bulgarian citizen, influencing the country's business environment and its global competitiveness. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report[135] emphasizes institutions and the institutional environment as the 1st of the 12 pillars of an economy's competitiveness.

The report points out that excessive bureaucracy, over-regulation, corrupt practices, irregularities in public procurement, lack of sufficient transparency and credibility, and failure to provide adequate services to the business sector impose significant economic costs on business and slow down the process of economic development. Dependence on the judiciary and public financial management are also cited as key factors affecting the economy. The assessment of the first pillar ranks our country only 112th among 144 countries. The top four most problematic factors for doing business in Bulgaria according to the Report are: corruption; bureaucracy; access to finance; and policy instability. It is important to note that the country is ranked 102nd on the administrative burden indicator, which shows the need for regulatory reform to reduce the administrative burden. Administrative services still lack the necessary efficiency and quality due to the limited progress of administrative reform. Neither "episodes of life"/"business events" type services are provided through different channels, and too few e-services have been developed to transaction level. The development of e-government is slow and the capacity to deliver e-services is still inadequate. In this respect, the development of the Single Window and e-administration services will also benefit enterprises.

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[135] Global Competitiveness Report 2012 - 2013, World Economic Forum

The World Bank's 2014 Doing Business report[136] ranked our country 38th out of 189 economies surveyed in terms of ease of doing business.

It is noted that structural aspects of the economic and competitive environment continue to discourage investors. Improving the business environment is closely linked to job creation and economic growth. Among the identified difficulties related to the environment is the ineffective supervision by control and regulatory authorities. Their work depends both on the good implementation of EU-wide policies and on the competitiveness of the internal market and the protection of consumers of services. It is no coincidence that the facilitation of regulatory procedures and the creation of a stable, predictable and simplified environment for investment, as well as the simplification of procedures and the reduction of bureaucracy, are highlighted as priority themes in the Commission's Opinion[137] .

These issues are addressed in the OPGG through the measures foreseen to stimulate regulatory reform with a view to achieving better regulation, reducing administrative burdens and supporting the strengthening of the capacity and improving the performance of control and regulatory authorities, as well as the introduction of e-procurement in implementation of the new package of Directives in the field of public procurement. These measures are expected to lead to a significant improvement in the business environment, which will have a direct impact on economic development, thus bringing the country's economic performance closer to the EU average.

Data from the SIBILA model were used to track change following the programme interventions in addition to the effects and outcomes examined in the previous evaluation questions.

The implementation of the OPGG has an impact on the country's macroeconomic indicators as measured by the SIBILA macroeconomic model, version 2.0. As the programme is small, the impact assessment is at programme level and not at individual axes as is the case for other OPs.

Figure 16. Effects of OPGG implementation on macroeconomic indicators

IMPLEMENTATION EFFECTS OF OP "GOOD GOVERNANCE" **Macroeconomic indicator**	**Effect by 2022**
GDP	0.1%
Exports of goods and services	0.2%
Imports of goods and services	0.2%
Current account (% of GDP)	-0.07 p.p.
Private consumption	0.1%
Private investment	0.2%
Employment (15-64)	0.1%
Unemployment rate (15-64)	-0.06 p.p.
Average wage	0.1%

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[136] https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/media/Annual-Reports/English/DB14-Full-Report.pdf
[137] The Commission services' opinion on the development of a Partnership Agreement and programmes in Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020

HICP inflation	0.1%
Budget balance (% of GDP)	0.03 p.p.

Source: MoF, SIBILA 2.0, Total cumulative effect from 2014 to end-2022.

The OPGG is mainly aimed at improving the performance of state institutions as well as the dialogue with civil society. As a result, the implementation of the programme has had a positive impact on the investment climate in the country, and thus on overall economic activity. According to the assessment with the SIBILA model, version 2.0, this impact translates into an increase in private investment and economic growth, respectively, with an increase of 0.2% and 0.1% in both macroeconomic indicators by mid-2022. The improved business environment also contributes to the creation of new enterprises and the expansion of existing ones, and hence contributes to higher economic growth. The impact of the OPGG interventions will increase significantly in the long term, with improved business conditions contributing to attracting new investment and creating new jobs.

The 2022 Report for Bulgaria[138] accompanying the Council Recommendation on Bulgaria's National Reform Programme for 2022 and containing the Council's Opinion on Bulgaria's Convergence Programme for 2022 reviews Bulgaria's progress. It takes into account the positive developments and the rapid recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, but also recognises areas where reforms and efforts are still needed. Regarding the Digital Transition, the Digital Economy and Society Input Index (DESI) tracks the progress of EU Member States in the digital field. The areas of human capital, digital connectivity, the integration of digital technologies by enterprises and the provision of digital public services represent the four main aspects of the Digital Decade. Bulgaria reports a very weak performance on the DESI dimension "digital public services". The score is well below the EU average for digital public services for citizens (59 vs. 75), but close to the EU average for enterprises (76 vs. 82). Despite some improvements, the business environment is still not fully investment-friendly. Business dynamism is also affected by labour shortages - with 27% of companies facing market pressures well above the EU average - as well as administrative burdens and regulatory obstacles. Investment in the country remains weak at 19.2% of GDP.

Bulgaria's public administration performance is significantly below the EU average. Ongoing reforms to digitise, deliver better services and design better policies, including with support from EU funds, have so far produced mixed results. E-government indices are well below the EU average. The COVID-19 crisis has led to some progress in the delivery of digital public services. However, cross-border mobility remains particularly weak; consumer targeting also remains below the EU27 average.

It should be noted that the report is as of the end of 2022[139], and does not take into account changes from investments made in the period, the results of which will be reflected in the future (see Evaluation Question 1.5). The NRRP also includes support for key reforms and investments such as the digitisation of registration data and e-certification based on information in registers, e-filing of legal documents, remote court hearings, digitisation of key court processes in the administrative justice system, digitisation of the

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[138] https://www.minfin.bg/bg/867

[139] The survey results for this report are higher as they reflect more general attitudes towards access to digital information. The reason for the high percentage is probably the broader interpretation of e-services, in which citizens also include receiving information from an institution's website, submitting an e-mail alert, checking health insurance status, etc.

Bulgarian Post Office and the introduction of building information modelling in the construction sector. Investments in digital systems are expected to improve strategic planning, reform implementation, emergency management and healthcare.

The implementation of the Updated Roadmap for the Implementation of the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria, that was endorsed with Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 298 of 02.04.2021 continues. Inseparable part of the strategy are Annex No. 1 and Annex No. 2 - Concept for Registry Reform. By the same decision, the Concept for Registry Reform was updated, stating that the Updated Roadmap for the period 2019 - 2023 remains in force until the adoption of a new Roadmap.

The update of the Strategy has taken into account the **newly adopted strategic documents at national and European level in the field of e-government**, including the National Development Programme "Bulgaria 2030", the national strategic document "Digital Transformation of Bulgaria for the period 2020 – 2030", the European Data Strategy, the EU Strategy "Building Europe's Digital Future", the Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Digital Governance based on Values, signed during the German Presidency. The latest update of the Strategy focuses on the enormous potential of data for the digital transformation of the Bulgarian public sector and the creation of innovative public services, including at cross-border level. Special attention is also paid to network and information security as a foundation for building a secure and sustainable digital society and economy.

In the area of public procurement, the analysis in the Partnership Agreement 2014-2020[140] outlines various problems and challenges: unsustainable legislation (the Public Procurement Act was adopted in 2004 and at the time of the analysis five significant changes had been made, Directive 2004/17/EC, Directive 2004/18/EC, Directive 2007/66/EC, and Directive 2009/81/EC had been introduced). One of the reasons for the frequent changes can be identified as the overly detailed legislative framework, which does not allow flexibility in the application of the provisions. Another problem is insufficient administrative capacity (insufficient staffing levels at contracting authorities at all levels), lack of sustainability (staff turnover) due to frequent staff changes, low pay, lack of sufficient highly qualified experts. Inadequate application of public procurement legislation, the proliferation of heterogeneous incorrect practice in the application of the law and insufficient scope of ex-ante control and insufficient effectiveness of ex-post control are also identified as shortcomings.

Since 2004 Bulgaria has had a Public Procurement Register, which in 2009 became part of a comprehensive Public Procurement Portal maintained by the Public Procurement Agency. E-procurement, which is the first phase of the overall e-procurement process, has been introduced. Progress has also been made on the next stage of e-procurement through the Public Procurement Portal, with the possibility of a fully electronic form of communication between tenderers and contracting authorities up to the stage of preparation and submission of the tender.

OPGG has invested in a project to fully digitise the procurement process with the implementation of the CAIS EPP, enabling the electronic management of procurement from the planning stage through to

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[140] https://commission.europa.eu/publications/partnership-agreement-bulgaria-2014-20_bg

the award and management of contracts. This creates a qualitatively new environment for public procurement, which has a positive impact on the overall business climate in the country. It allows for better monitoring of public expenditure and better accountability and streamlining of processes, while at the same time preventing manipulation of documents by either contracting authorities or participants. The main advantages and benefits of e-procurement through the EOPC are: higher efficiency in the use of public funds; provision of publicity, transparency and better monitoring of the public procurement market in the country; tracking of procurement processes; single point of access to all available information related to a specific procedure; reduction of administrative burden; support for the use of tools and techniques such as dynamic purchasing system, e-tendering and e-procurement; and the use of e-procurement tools and techniques.

By using CAIS EPP, the application process, contractor selection and appeals can be expedited, saving an estimated minimum of 18,936 man-days per year according to the Institute for Market Economics [141]. The security of procedures is significantly increased by limiting opportunities for manipulation of the process and by introducing common standards in the award process that create a level playing field for participants.

Three e-administrative services have also been implemented:

- Entry of data in the Public Procurement Register;
- Entry on a list of external experts that contracting authorities may use in the preparation and conduct of procurement procedures;
- Enabling participation in e-procurement.

The following benefits have been reported as a result of the implemented projects:

- Cost savings for 2020 - 2021 at the stage of submission of bids - a total of BGN 47 million; at the stage of contracting, implementation and reporting - a total of BGN 12 million; due to accessibility and the possibility of participation in the process of non-experts BGN 4.8 million for the period 2020 - November 2022;
- There has been a steady increase in the average number of bids per contract and in the share of small and medium-sized enterprises in the submission of bids;
- Reduction of public procurement appeals and increased confidence in the public procurement process. Limiting opportunities for error and abuse.

Despite the significant improvements in the process, procurement remains a challenge. Bulgaria continues to rank last in the Internal Market Scoreboard due to unsatisfactory results in terms of transparency, competition and efficiency of public procurement.

With regards to human resources management and the capacity of the administration, the analysis of the Partnership Agreement identifies the need, along with measures to optimise the activities of the administration and increase its transparency, to take measures to implement good practices in human resources management. In 2012, new models of evaluation and remuneration of civil servants were adopted. A new Job Classification in the Administration has also been adopted as a basis for fair remuneration and other HRM policies. A system for planning staffing needs in the administration has been developed but not

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[141] https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/11689

implemented. Competitions for the recruitment of administrative staff are not sufficiently effective, consuming considerable time and resources. There is a clear tendency for the overall age of staff to increase, with less than 10% of young staff. There is no analysis of the projected turnover in the coming years in view of the large number of staff due to retire. In recent years, turnover in the administration has ranged between 8-9%[142], and it is necessary to identify both the reasons for this and the areas most affected in order to ensure continuity of service.

The leading public institution for staff training and qualification development in administration is the Institute of Public Administration. Its contribution was insufficient, as the Institute's capacity to develop adequate and relevant training programmes and courses were not high enough. Therefore, with OPGG funding, efforts have continued to modernise and strengthen the main training institution of the Bulgarian administration, in addition to other similar structures: the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Institute of Psychology - Ministry of Interior, the Academy of the Ministry of Interior, the NAMRB.

OPGG's PA 2 supported investments to improve human resource skills in the administration, contributed to the development of various analyses, tools and platforms, conducted functional analyses, trained over 60,000 civil servants in the public administration. However, there is a constant need for improvement and investment.

Supporting the change achieved in the area of administration, also surveyed in the previous evaluation questions, are data from a quantitative survey of OPGG beneficiaries. According to the data from the opinion poll among the beneficiaries of the OPGG under Priority Axis 1, the implemented interventions in this area have led to a reduction of the administrative burden for citizens and businesses. 100% of the respondents responded positively. The situation is similar with the impact of the interventions under this priority in terms of increasing the services available to citizens and businesses through electronic means. This is a major and radical change in the implementation of e-government thanks to the OPGG investments. All beneficiaries agree with the statement that the interventions implemented under the OPGG projects in the field of administrative services and e-government have contributed to a more efficient service to users /internal and external/ by the administration.

Again, according to the above-mentioned survey, the OPGG (Priority Axis 2) investments have led to a significant shift towards improving the specialized knowledge and skills of the administration staff, as well as to increasing the capacity of the training organizations (IPA, NSORB, the Institute of Psychology at the Ministry of Interior, the Diplomatic Institute) - 80% positive responses. The increase in the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms is highlighted - 70% positive responses. Significantly less approval was given to the statement that "the implemented interventions in this priority contributed to the improvement of human resource management processes in the state administration and the creation of career development mechanisms" - 30%. The change in this area is not very visible and effective and it can be concluded with certainty that this is an area where reform and modernisation efforts should continue.

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[142] According to the State of the Administration Reports

The issue of change also has the following two aspects, namely: achieving sustainability and opportunities to multiply results. Here, the responses of the beneficiaries of interventions under priority axes 1 and 2 are overwhelmingly oriented towards positive assessments. 45.5% of respondents believe that they have achieved or will achieve sustainability to a very large extent and will multiply results, and 39.4% to a large extent.

Also, according to the beneficiaries, the implemented OPGG interventions have led to the development of e-government and improved administrative services. These are two very significant changes in their respective areas that directly correspond to the objectives of the programme. The optimization of administrative services ranks first in importance, with 76.5% positive responses, followed by increasing the number of e-services provided, 70.6%, and reducing regulatory burdens, 58.8%.

The most significant changes under PA 1 and PA 2 can be presented as follows:
- building ICT infrastructure;
- introduction of integrated administrative services ;
- standardised municipal services introduced in all municipal administrations;
- Developing the organisational and analytical capacity of control, revenue and regulatory authorities;
- introducing and upgrading electronic information systems and registers;
- introducing electronic services for their transactional delivery;
- Development of sectoral e-government systems /e-customs, e-archiving, e-procurement/;
- Establishment and implementation of a functioning Centralized Automated Information System (CAIS EPP);
- introduction of quality management systems in the administration - CAF system;
- implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms in the administration;
- Development of new/updated training modules for the administration, increased capacity of centralised training institutions (e.g. IPA);
- trained administrative staff with increased knowledge and skills.

6.8.2.Change under PA 3

The deployment and use of information and communication technologies strengthens the justice system and makes it more accessible, efficient, resilient and equipped to deal with current and future challenges. The introduction of e-Justice, through the OPGG investments implemented, contributes to improving accountability, increasing efficiency within the system and facilitating access to justice by citizens and businesses. The main objective of the implemented digitisation measures in the sector is to implement and deliver high quality, cost-effective and easily accessible e-services. The change in the environment is in the streamlined processes, the reduction of the administrative burden on citizens and businesses,

the increase in the accessibility of services, the increase in the number of electronic services provided. The interventions also have a positive impact on the speed and efficiency of the services provided. Key investments directly aimed at the introduction of e-justice, which lead to a change in the environment, are: the development and implementation of the Single information system of courts (SISC), through which the electronic document flow was established, The development of the Central automated information system "Judicial Status", through which for the first time a central database has been established with regard to criminal records, uniting 113 databases of the district courts and the database of the Central Criminal Records Bureau at the Ministry of Justice, as well as a database of convicted Bulgarian citizens abroad, creating a fully centralized criminal record in Bulgaria. An electronic criminal record certificate service has also been implemented. Other portals and information systems have also been built and upgraded. Electronic Public Register of Recusals, Unified Jury Register; Specialized Information System for Monitoring and Analysis (SISMA); Unified Information System 3 (UIS 3) for electronic document circulation in the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria; Unified Information System for Counteracting Crime, etc.

Another change in the environment has been achieved through the investments made in the reform of the structure, procedures and organisation of the judiciary, which should have the future effect of increasing transparency and speeding up the administration of justice. The investments made contribute to the development of a modern and effective criminal justice policy through the necessary institutional and regulatory reforms. They aim at optimising internal processes through reform of the structures, procedures and organisation of the judiciary.

Investments related to the creation of conditions for improving the professional development of magistrates and judicial officers and a sustainable increase in the quality of training are an essential element of the reform related to the modernisation of the judiciary. The implemented interventions build on the achievements of the OPAC programme and create the conditions for the development of a high-tech training process that goes beyond conventional forms of training in terms of strategic results and vision. Thanks to OPGG investments, for the first time a unified e-learning environment is being created for organisers, learners and trainers at all stages of the preparation, delivery and reporting of training activities. The fact that the target group has developed a culture of digital working and resource use is seen as a significant contribution of OPGG support.

The change achieved from implementing the different types of interventions are as follows:

Investments in systems, registries and e-services directly aimed at introducing e-justice, *and the* analysis will focus on *key outcomes* of OPGG investments leading on change in the environment:

A major investment made for the introduction of e-justice is the development and implementation of the Single Information System of the Courts (SISC), used by 151 courts in the Republic of Bulgaria, through which the electronic document flow, including the management of electronic cases, was established. The aim is, on the one hand, to unify the work processes in the judicial system, but also to introduce uniform rules in case management, which should lead to time savings, faster administration of justice, transparency, publicity and access to justice. SISC covers all case management processes in district, circuit, appellate, military courts, the Court of Military Appeals and the SCC (Supreme Court of Cassation). The system significantly streamlines workflow and increases efficiency for magistrates and court staff. SISC provides the ability to work remotely from anywhere in the world through a secure channel accessible through QES. As of March 2023, a total of more than 1 million electronic court cases have been filed in SISC; more than 3.27 million electronic court judgments have been rendered. SISC is actively used by more than 10 000 users, including nearly 2 000 judges, more than 4 600 court staff, 3 100 juries and more than 600 summons officers. The work of summons officers is also supported by the mobile application for the service of documents part of SISC.

With the implementation of investment for the construction of a Central automated information system "Judicial Status", a significant change has been implemented related to the optimization of processes related to the judicial status of citizens. For the first time, citizens can apply for a criminal record certificate from any district court in the Republic of Bulgaria, without being limited by their place of birth or residence, which reduces the administrative burden for them. One e-administrative service for citizens has been implemented - Issuance of electronic criminal record certificate. The scope of the electronic criminal record certificate has been extended - any Bulgarian citizen can apply for it, regardless of his/her criminal record. The certificate can be applied for and issued by and for any Bulgarian citizen regardless of the existence of criminal records/administrative penalty under Article 78a of the Criminal Code, amnestied and rehabilitated. The change in the environment is in streamlined processes, reduction of the administrative burden, increasing the accessibility of the service, extending the scope of the service to every citizen regardless of birth or residence.

Until the implementation of the OPGG interventions, the Ministry of Justice and the sub-budgetary authorities have separate websites through which information is provided to citizens and businesses. Each has been developed at different times with different visions and means. There is also a lack of integration of the different websites with other e-government and e-justice portals, such as the Single e-Justice Portal of the Judiciary, the European e-Justice Portal of the European Commission, the Single e-Administrative Services Portal, etc. Thanks to the OPGG investments, the Single e-Justice Portal of the Executive in the Justice sector has been further developed and centralised. Two e-administrative services have been developed: "Issuance of a duplicate certificate of legal capacity" and "Submission of a citizen's complaint". The major change in the environment is the creation of a single entry point for citizens to access the services provided by the executive structures in the Justice Sector, with the possibility to request, pay for and receive the e-administrative services in real time if no action by an official is required for their provision. The investments made lead to a reduction of the administrative burden on citizens and businesses by reducing the time needed to request services, which is also a factor in increasing their accessibility.

Until the OPGG investments are implemented, the Ministry of Justice maintains a Unified Register of Mediators, which also contains information on training organizations, but there is no information on the specific competencies of mediators, information on their activities, disputes resolved through mediation, information on the costs that the parties would pay to resolve their dispute through mediation. As a result of the OPGG investments, a Centralised e-Mediation Portal has been developed and implemented. The project is a crucial step towards promoting mediation as an effective way of dispute resolution and enabling online mediation procedures without the need for the parties to be physically present. The mediation procedure can be initiated entirely online, by submitting an application by the interested party in the dispute and selecting a mediator registered in the Unified Register of Mediators in Bulgaria. Three e-administrative services for mediators and three e-services for organisations have been developed. Five pilot mediation centers have been established - one in each appellate region (in the cities of Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo, Vratsa, Dobrich and Sliven). This part of the project activities was implemented by SJC (Supreme Judicial Council), which also provided the technical equipment of the centers. The change in the environment resulting from the investments is in the following directions:

✓ The creation of a centralised electronic portal promotes the possibility of resolving legal disputes by the parties themselves; it will increase the credibility of mediation as an effective way to resolve legal disputes; it provides the possibility of online mediation to resolve disputes without the physical presence of the parties, cross-border and other disputes - this makes mediation accessible to everyone, no matter where they are;

Going forward, the investments made will lead to a change in the workload of the courts through out-of-court settlements, terminated court cases as a result of mediation, cases concluded after an approved mediation settlement. The effects of the investment in terms of caseload are yet to be seen, as according to planned changes in the Mediation Act, which should come into force after 01.07.2024, mediation becomes mandatory in some cases and the court is given the power to oblige participation in such a meeting in other proceedings.

Videoconferencing allows for real-time remote questioning of witnesses, expert witnesses and officials, with venues for questioning in courts and custodial settings. Pending the implementation of the OPGG interventions, our country is one of the few member states that does not meet the recommendations for cross-border cooperation through the use of videoconferencing facilities. As a result of the OPGG investments, 56 courts across the country are actively using the videoconferencing systems established by the Ministry of Justice. The points are located in 20 judicial chambers, in which several courts using the system are located, and another six in penitentiary facilities. In order to use videoconferencing as efficiently as possible, the necessary legal changes have been adopted and additional funding for development has been envisaged in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria. As a long-term contribution from the investment, the project is expected to result in significant financial savings, as just bringing one protected witness from abroad for a court hearing or the travel costs of expert witnesses travelling across the country is estimated at several thousand euros.

In order to implement the Law on Execution of Punishments and Detention and to implement electronic monitoring of offenders with certain types of punishments, it is necessary to provide the relevant equipment. The OPGG finances interventions implemented by the Ministry of Justice concerning the modernisation of the penitentiary system in Bulgaria. As a result of the investments, an assessment of the implementation of the Concept for the Development of the OPGG was carried out in May 2014. A draft Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System in Bulgaria for the period up to 2025 has been developed, and the Strategy has been approved and entered into force by an Order of the Minister of Justice of 2019. Thanks to the contribution of OPGG support, an electronic offender monitoring system has been implemented. 200 stationary devices and 200 personal identification devices (PIDs) for radio frequency monitoring and 50 satellite monitoring devices for a minimum of 250 offenders have been purchased. The purchase of these devices will enable a minimum of 500 offenders to be monitored within 1 calendar year. The change in environment from the OPGG investment is fundamental as the first steps have been taken to establish the foundations of a modern penitentiary system. The investments made have laid the foundations for ensuring a modern penal policy, effectively countering crime and humanizing the penal enforcement system. Last but not least, the implemented interventions have overcome the negative findings of the European Court of Human Rights pilot decision "Neshkov et al. vs. Bulgaria" and negative findings of the European Commission reports in the framework of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism.

As a result of OPGG's investments, was upgraded the Single Unified e-Justice Portal, migrating the websites of 180 courts in order to unify and centralize the information from the websites of the courts in the Republic of Bulgaria, through uniform templates updated in accordance with the changes in the legal framework. The investments made provide the necessary centralised information for the effective use of the new electronic service developed for the submission of an application for the issuance of an enforcement order under Article 410 of the Civil Procedure Code. In connection with the streamlining of the Single e-Justice Portal from September 2022, SISC has extended the scope of documents that are published for citizens and lawyers in SEJP. The number[143] of cases accessed through SEJP exceeds 176,000 and the number of cases requested electronically from the end of March 2023 to the end of May is over 15,800, which marks an increase of over 700% on a monthly basis, compared to the period from November 2015 to 26.03.2023. Following the optimisation of the system, electronic summons read through user profiles are over 1,500, a fourfold increase on the previous 8 years. The data shows that after the optimization of the portal, the passive access of citizens and businesses to electronic cases has increased. From the in-depth interviews conducted with stakeholders who are active users of the portal, we can summarise that their assessment of the upgrade of the system is positive, mainly identifying the change due to the investments made in making their work significantly easier, with positive effect also in terms of speed and efficiency of the activities carried out and services provided , as well as in terms of time and cost savings. What they identify as weaknesses is mainly in relation to the following aspects:

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[143] according to official statistics of "Information Service" - https://www.is-bg.net/bg/news/321

✓ not all courts have uploaded all the cases yet, especially older cases, which are accordingly not accessible in this case;

✓ frequent interface changes (e.g. changing from a password to an electronic signature) slow down full use;

✓ the non-existent possibility at the beginning of the use to submit documents / i.e. the system was passive at the beginning.

As positive aspects, respondents highlighted that where the courts have uploaded the information, things are indeed happening much faster and efficiently compared to the previous state of the portal (it is a matter of having uploaded everything to SISC to have access through the portal). In these cases you can immediately check the record, immediately see what documents have been filed in the case. If you have filed a document electronically, you can track when it was filed, so from that point of view the respondents' assessment is that things are really working. Regarding the interface and the opinions expressed that the portal is not accessible via phone due to the fact that an electronic signature is used for access, in October 2023 the possibility to access the electronic court cases via the eCase mobile application was created. A new functionality of SEJP has been developed to actively access cases by making proceedings electronic, which has enabled lawyers and litigants to successfully access over 2,400 electronic documents, the step taken is significant in terms of ensuring that the system does not remain as a dashboard, and in doing so also meets the main intent in its design to create the ability for citizens to be able to file a complaint or claim electronically. The implemented interventions have contributed to a change in the environment towards the modernization of the judicial system because they are aimed at further developing and centralizing portals in the executive/judiciary bodies of the Justice Sector for citizens and businesses to access information, e-services and e-justice. Contribute to improving the accessibility of the justice system through the introduction of e-justice - the centralization of information provides an opportunity to facilitate the way of access by citizens and businesses, as well as stakeholders - lawyers and litigators.

Until the OPGG investments are implemented, there is no integration between the automated information systems used in the Ministry of Justice and the SBH (Secondary Budget Holders) to ensure intra- and inter-ministerial exchange of electronic documents only. Clerical systems are used whose main purpose is to identify paper documents, to describe them with metadata and to allow a description of their movement. In contradiction with the E-government Law and the Electronic Document and Electronic Signature Act, there is no electronic exchange of documents between the Ministry of Justice, Secondary Budget Holders and other administrations. The executive authorities in the sector use a number of systems that have been set up in connection with the implementation of the regulatory obligations of specific laws, such as: 'Bulgarian Citizenship', 'Mediators', 'International Adoption', etc., and no integration has been established between them and the clerical systems in order to fully move towards electronic data exchange. The OPGG investments implemented, allow to review the existing automated document management systems in the Ministry of Justice and Secondary Budget Holders and to select the system to be redesigned. Upgrading of the selected automated information system has been carried out in order to move towards electronic document management and to provide citizens, businesses and external entities with the possibility to request and provide electronic administrative services. The upgraded automated document

management information system is used for electronic data exchange by Ministry of Justice and Secondary Budget Holders staff, between different departments, as well as by citizens and businesses to request electronic administrative services, and four electronic services for citizens have been implemented. The change that has taken place relates to the increase in administrative productivity and transparency resulting from the use of the AIS and the e-services portal for businesses and citizens.

Until the OPGG investments are implemented, the bailiffs use different information systems (IS), from different developers, which are used to maintain the statutory registers - cases filed, incoming and outgoing registers of incoming and outgoing documents and the log of actions performed (the Rules of Administration in the Courts and Regulation No. 4 of 6 February 2006 on the official archives of private bailiffs). In addition to the lack of a unified information systems of the judicial execution in the Republic of Bulgaria, identical documents are registered under different names and described with different contents by different bailiffs, which creates confusion and ambiguity for users. The existence of separate information systems at the bailiffs does not facilitate the parties to the cases as they do not have remote access for consultation. Through investments made under the OPGG, a Centralised Judicial Enforcement Information System has been developed as regulated by the Judiciary Act. The information system provides centralised electronic access to data on the initiation, movement and closure of enforcement cases in the Republic of Bulgaria. 7 electronic administrative services for citizens have been created. The establishment of the information system is an important stage in the process of building electronic judicial enforcement. Enforcement affects the interests of a wide range of persons and institutions: creditors, debtors, third parties, public and private bailiffs performing enforcement functions, control bodies under the Judiciary Act and the Private Bailiffs Act, etc. In view of the large number of potential users, the implementation of the judicial enforcement information system has made a significant contribution to changing the environment by providing centralised electronic access to data on the initiation, movement and closure of enforcement cases, which in turn has led to an efficient, secure and coherent electronic environment for the enforcement process.

Through the redesign of the Unified Information System 2 (UIS 2) to UIS 3, the possibility for a phased transition to electronic document flow in the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria is provided by upgrading the clerical information system (UIS), including training of magistrates and employees for paperless workflow. The interventions contribute to the provision of more and better electronic services to citizens, companies and state institutions. A number of information security and interoperability measures have been implemented to ensure the expansion of electronic statistical reporting in the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria and the provision of open data on the work of the prosecution. Measures have been implemented to further develop the Unified Information System for Combating Crime and provide public access to information on the core system related to the Open Data initiative as well as in the provision of Complex administrative services. As a result of the implemented interventions, 13 services and internal queries (4 internal administrative e-services for the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, provided through the Unified Information System for Combating Crime (UISCC)) are provided. The change in the environment due to the OPGG investments is

that a reliable environment for paperless document management and handling of electronic content is provided, more electronic services are provided as well as open data.

As a result of the OPGG investments, a software product has been developed and implemented - an electronic public register of register of judicial referrals. The introduction of the register of referrals gives publicity to cases in which the court referrals itself or refuses to hear a case. The contribution of the investment to changing the environment is that for the first time a real instrument is being created for the prevention of conflict of interest and the fight against corruption in the judiciary.

A Unified Jury Register has been developed and implemented. The register is accessible to the public on the website of the Single e-Justice Portal. Judicial staff profiles have been set up in each court to access the register and to enter information and documents. The change in the environment resulting from the investments made under the OPGG is in enabling and implementation of mechanisms and rules to ensure real public participation in the administration of justice through the institution of the jury, while ensuring safeguards against conflicts of interest. With the implementation of the Unified Jury Register, thanks to the investments made under the OPGG, it is possible to monitor the profile of each juror, the intensity of participation in the judicial process, compliance with the requirements for random selection of main and reserve jurors, as well as with all the requirements laid down in the Judiciary Act and the subordinate legislation concerning jurors.

A Specialized Information System for Monitoring and Analysis (SISMA) has been developed - it allows automated collection and processing of statistical data from the judiciary, including SISC, the systems of the prosecution and investigation, the National Statistical Institute and other bodies. This system enables the competent authorities to take informed decisions on the reorganisation of the judicial map of Bulgaria and to analyse the current state of the judicial structures. SISMA enables access to essential elements of judicial statistics without breaching existing rules for accessing, completing and correcting data, and thus ensures greater transparency in judicial management. With a view to the overall functioning of the system, the necessary integration and exchange of data with external information systems approved by the Supreme Judicial Council and relevant to the criteria examined for the development of the quality of justice is ensured. When information is received from the UIS/SISC, it is processed in real time. The OPGG investments made have contributed to improving the environment in terms of effective management of individual judicial structures - when overlaying this information against organisational statistics at the level of the judicial structure, and efficient management of the judicial map is ensured by overlaying administrative and expert management information against the socio-demographic structure of the population, economic activity, technological infrastructure, administrative and other public services offered by the public and private

Investing in increasing transparency and speeding up the administration of justice through reform of the structure, procedures and organisation of the judiciary - ***key outcomes*** of OPGG investments leading on change in the environment:

The implemented investments contribute to the development of a modern and effective criminal policy through the necessary institutional and regulatory reforms. They are aimed at optimising internal

processes by reforming the structures, procedures and organisation of the judiciary. Thanks to OPGG's support, numerous new approaches to the administration of justice itself have been developed through the implementation of over 100 analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary and the introduction of 52 new and improvements to existing instruments for the modernisation of the judiciary, as of the evaluation date. Together, they provide a rich toolbox for addressing the challenges of Bulgarian judicial reform and achieving modernisation. The following can be systematised as key results:

An audit of the judiciary's IT and communications infrastructure has been carried out, as a full picture of the resource provision and state of the sector's ICT is not available at the time of implementation of the interventions. The implemented investments are fundamental for the follow-up of the e-Justice implementation, as they also contribute to the coherence of the results of the individual projects and sustainability in their implementation through multiplier effects.

The OPGG investments contribute to a change in the environment for improving the quality and efficiency of the judiciary as a whole, through developed and approved models, standards, methodologies and mechanisms that will lead to a reduction of the workload and improvement of working conditions in the courts and prosecutor's offices in the Republic of Bulgaria in the long term - a model for the optimization of the judicial map of district courts and prosecutor's offices and a roadmap for the reorganization of the judicial structures at district and appellate level.

The change in the environment concerning the improvement of the attestation procedures and disciplinary practice in the judiciary is that a mechanism has been established to link the policy on remuneration and other benefits of magistrates with the prevention of corruption. Thanks to the investments made, a model has been developed for the formation of the basic salary and all other payments and benefits which minimises individual discretion on the part of the administrative authority and provides for an adequate mechanism for automatic updating.

Investments have been made that lay the foundations for the creation of a modern penitentiary system - as a result of the investments, an assessment of the implementation of the Concept for the Development of the General Directorate "Execution of Penalties" was carried out in May 2014. A draft of the Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System in Bulgaria for the period up to 2025 has been developed, and the Strategy has been approved and entered into force by the Order of the Minister of Justice of 2019. The investments made have laid the foundations for ensuring a modern penal policy, effective counteraction to crime and humanization of the penal enforcement system.

A "Regulation on the Information System of Judicial Enforcement" was adopted to create a legal possibility to use the established unified information system of judicial enforcement in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Interventions aimed at reducing the workload of the courts have been implemented, including through the facilitating of procedural rules, increased use of alternative forms of dispute resolution and the introduction of e-justice. Necessary legal changes have been made to Regulation No 2 of 15 March 2007

on the conditions and procedure for the approval of organisations that train mediators; on the requirements for training mediators; on the procedure for the registration, de-registration and deletion of mediators from the unified register of mediators and on the procedural and ethical rules for mediator conduct.

Interventions have been implemented that implement changes in an integrated policy to prevent conflict of interest and corruption within the judiciary. Internal rules for the verification of integrity and conflict of interest of judges, prosecutors and investigators, for the verification of acts of judges, prosecutors and investigators that undermine the prestige of the judiciary and for the verification of violations of the independence of judges, prosecutors and investigators have been drafted and adopted; internal rules for the verification of the financial declarations of judges, prosecutors and investigators - adopted by the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council on the basis of Art. 54, para. 1, item 10, in conjunction with item 8 of the Law on the Judiciary, becoming mandatory for the inspection teams of the Inspectorate when carrying out the inspection of the property declarations of judges, prosecutors and investigators. The drafted and adopted internal rules contribute to the achievement of the objectives of increased effectiveness of the prevention of conflict of interest and guarantees for effective investigation of magistrates.

Interventions have been implemented to improve the systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of legal aid and to facilitate access to primary legal aid. The change in the environment through the investments made under the OPGG is in the unification of the legal aid system through the guidelines developed, introducing common minimum and European standards for the provision of legal aid.

Investments have been made to measure citizens' satisfaction with the judiciary and its independence: a permanent mechanism has been developed to assess the impact of the implementation of the Civil Procedure Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, Code of Administrative Procedure, which is a prerequisite for ensuring guarantees for effective and fair justice; a mechanism has been established for permanent independent monitoring of the factors questioning the independence of the judiciary and debate on them. The investments made in terms of putting in place measures to enhance judicial independence have contributed to changing the environment for increased accountability and transparency of the SJC, which in the long term should also lead to increased confidence in the judiciary.

On the basis of the investments made under the OPGG, the Rules for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the jurisprudence of the administrative courts were prepared and approved by order of the Chairman of the Supreme Administrative Court, to ensure effective judicial review and the right of access to justice. They allow for the timely initiation of procedures to request the adoption of an interpretative decision when contradictory or incorrect practice is found. The change in the environment is in terms of the possibility created for ongoing external monitoring of the effectiveness of the unification of practice by the supreme courts, as well as in terms of optimisation of the work of the administrative authorities in applying the law.

Until the period of implementation of the interventions, the budget of the judiciary shall be prepared on a historical basis and not through programme budgeting according to clear objectives and a plan that must be financially secured. The contribution of the investments made under the OPGG, once the process of adoption of the legal framework is completed, will be in the introduction of a new model of performance-

based budgeting in each structure of the judiciary institutions, increased transparency of the judiciary budget and improved efficiency of budget management.

Investments have been made to improve and update policies and rules relating to the appraisal and remuneration of judicial officers and to introduce safeguards for public participation in the selection of juries by municipal councils. Through the OPGG investments made, a change is being implemented in terms of enabling the improvement of the status of judicial officers by developing and introducing uniform common criteria for their appraisal, taking into account the specificities of the type of judicial authority/employer concerned, developing and introducing modern methods for the management and evaluation of performance and linking performance evaluation to elements of remuneration.

On the basis of numerous analyses, assessments and discussions, a new Concept for the Criminal Policy of the Republic of Bulgaria has been developed, defining the main challenges for the criminal policy with a five-year implementation period 2020-2025, approved by a decision of the Council of Ministers. The change in the environment is the alignment of the criminal policy with the European trends and taking into account the recommendations of the EC reports under the Cooperation and Evaluation Mechanism from 2008 until now for the adoption of a new Criminal Code.

The Internal Rules for the Organization and Procedure of the Training Activities at the National Institute of Justice were amended and supplemented. The new rules of the Regional Programme reflect the recommendations and suggestions of the partner courts, aimed at ensuring greater flexibility and operability of the participating judicial authorities. A new Chapter Nine "Regional Training Programme" is created, which repeals the current Internal Rules on the Organisation and Procedure for the Implementation of the Regional Training Programme for Courts and Prosecutor's Offices. This completes the process of consolidating the training activities of the NIJ into a single act, which was launched in 2017 with the aim of codifying and unifying the norms governing the Institute's training activities.

Investing in the provision of quality vocational training - *key outcomes* of OPGG investments leading on environmental change:

Investments related to the creation of conditions for improving the professional development of magistrates and judicial officers and a sustainable increase in the quality of training are an essential element of the reform related to the modernisation of the judiciary. The projects in these procedures are implemented by the NIJ, which is the institution entrusted by the Judiciary Act with the training of judicial personnel. In this context, NIJ is supported through OPGG funding to expand its activities towards building analytical and organisational capacity to provide the necessary scope and quality of training for the judiciary.

The change in the learning environment has been implemented through the implementation of a Learning Management Information System (LMIIS) and the creation of conditions for its development and delivery in a paperless environment. Thanks to the OPGG investments, a unified e-learning environment is created for the first time for organizers, learners and trainers in all stages of preparation, delivery and reporting of training activities. Through the investments made, the community of judicial trainers is being developed and strengthened through the formation and upgrading of teaching skills of judges, prosecutors,

investigators and/or judicial officers, other representatives of the project's target group, potential and established NIJ temporary trainers. The investments made under the OPGG have had a significant impact, as thanks to the information system set up, international experts have been able to be involved, whose hosting would have been more complex and costly to organise if it had been done conventionally. Many new trainers who are just entering the field are also involved in the training. Judicial training standards have been developed to develop the key skills and competencies needed to exercise the powers of all levels of authorities within the judiciary. The Judicial Training Standards are a tool for strategic planning of NIJ's training activities, on the basis of which the Institute's sustainable curricula and programmes will be developed. Thanks to the OPGG investment, over 13,757 magistrates, judicial and investigative officers under the Code of Criminal Procedure and other officials have been successfully trained in various areas, with 29,339 training participants. The change in the environment is measured through the prism that quality professional training of magistrates, judicial officers and others in the system with a view to enhancing their qualifications will also lead to improved efficiency of justice.

6.9. Evaluation question 1.7. What has been the change in terms of business environment, administrative and regulatory burden since the OPGG investment ? How much of the change is due to the support from OPGG?

The investments made under the OPGG are mainly aimed at:

✓ modernising public administration and developing e-government and e-services for the public sector;

✓ modernising and reforming the judiciary and achieving fair and quality justice through investment in e-justice and e-service delivery.

As a result, the implementation of the programme is expected to have a positive impact on the investment climate in the country and hence on the overall economic activity[144] . This impact will be reflected in an increase in private investment and, consequently, in economic growth, with an increase of 0.2% and 0.1% respectively by mid-2022 on both macroeconomic indicators. The implemented change will be in the direction of an improved business environment, which is expected to contribute both to the creation of new enterprises and to the expansion of existing ones, and hence to higher economic growth. The impact resulting from the OPGG interventions will grow significantly in the long term, with improved business conditions contributing to attracting new investment and creating new jobs. The investments made to introduce e-government and e-justice have significantly reduced administrative costs for businesses through the ability to do things online, many services have been made fee-free and others have been minimised. Costs to the state are also reduced in the

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[144] EU FUNDS IN BULGARIA Assessment of the macroeconomic effects of the implementation of the programmes co-financed by EU funds, Ministry of Finance, September 2022, https://www.minfin.bg/bg/1168

long term following investment in a well-functioning e-government and e-justice system and its maintenance. The link between replacing a paper-based process with an electronic one and increasing transparency and reducing opportunities for abuse comes mainly through the elimination of face-to-face communication with administration representatives and the absence of cash payments, which makes the process transparent and minimises opportunities for corrupt practices. These factors will inevitably lead to a change in the business environment in the long term, making it more attractive for investment.

OPGG investments are changing the business environment by providing opportunities - users of e-administrative services in the "business" category (*95.9%*) strongly estimate that they are now using more e-services than five years ago. The increased use of e-services is an indicator that it is a convenience for businesses and is becoming the preferred way to fulfil obligations arising from legal provisions or to obtain certain services. Among the indicators measuring the "quality" of service provided, speed and ease of access to services were rated most positively, which is also a positive change in the business environment. However, businesses are critical of the information that institutions provide on available e-services and how to use them, considering it clearly insufficient. Efforts should be invested in the wider promotion of the available e-services, including through information campaigns on the possibilities of e-government and e-justice tools and how businesses can use them - only in this way will a sustainable change in the business environment be achieved.

Regarding the regulatory and administrative burden, the surveyed business representatives are adamant that the e-services provided by the administration and the judiciary facilitate the activities of the businesses they manage (*82.5%*). The main advantages of the investments made for the introduction of e-government and e-justice, which respectively are reflected as changes in the environment for business development, are:

- saving money and time;

- easy and fast electronic receipt of services;

- eliminating the need for paper documents;

- easier access to information;

- reducing the conditions for corruption.

The successful implementation of e-government and e-justice has many advantages and greatly facilitates the service delivery process. Undoubtedly, the most noticeable effect of this is the saving of time, effort and money in carrying out various procedures. In turn, the facilitated procedure, as well as the clear and uniform rules for its implementation, creates a more favorable environment for business development and attracts new investors. Improving the work of institutions invariably leads to a business environment that is more attractive to investors, which would lead to the creation of new businesses and the expansion

of already established enterprises. The interventions implemented under the OPGG are a key instrument for improving processes and modernising the model for the delivery of administrative services and for reducing the administrative burden on businesses and citizens. The data from the regular reports[145] on the state of administration in Bulgaria clearly show an increase in the use of e-services by both companies and citizens, which was practically confirmed by the results of the survey implemented within the framework of this evaluation. The information systems implemented through the OPGG investments, on the basis of which e-government and e-justice are implemented, contribute to changing and improving the business environment due to several main factors:

- ✓ Operationalisation of administrative processes has been achieved - time is saved on the part of the administration due to the automation of processes;
- ✓ Reduce regulatory and administrative burden - by speeding up and simplifying e-services - the more complex the checks and the more documents a request requires, the more time and work the checks save in the registries and e-exchanges built thanks to OPGG investments;
- ✓ the time for requesting a service, preparing and submitting the documents, payment and receiving a response before and after the introduction of its electronic version - here the effect for the business is a significant saving of time, which is inevitably a positive change in the business environment;
- ✓ opportunities for new services are created - the linking of individual databases and registers and the automatic exchange of information between them provides opportunities for the creation of new services, which in turn facilitates and supports the business with the ability to provide a comprehensive service based on the investments made under the database linkage programme;
- ✓ the introduction of electronic systems through which e-services are provided creates a sense of transparency and accountability of the institutions that provide them, leading to a business environment that is more attractive for investment.

Distinguishing the impact, especially in the medium and long term, of an individual project within the overall eGovernment and eJustice ecosystem is almost impossible, as they are all part of a system of interconnected entities. However, if we focus on the change in terms of the business environment, administrative and regulatory burden after the OPGG investments, we can distinguish the following investments of the program, whose results can be considered as key to the implementation of these changes and whose effects have already been considered both earlier in the presentation and in other analyses commissioned in the course of their implementation, namely:

- ✓ Upgrading horizontal and central e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Single Model for requesting, paying for and providing electronic administrative services";
- ✓ Upgrade of Commercial Register (CR) for integration with the EU CR data exchange platform, embedding of the Non-profit legal entities register, integration with Property Register, single entry point and transfer of Central Register of Pledges;
- ✓ Improvement of the National Customs Agency's fundamental information systems for providing data and services - BICISn(Phases 1, 2 and 3);
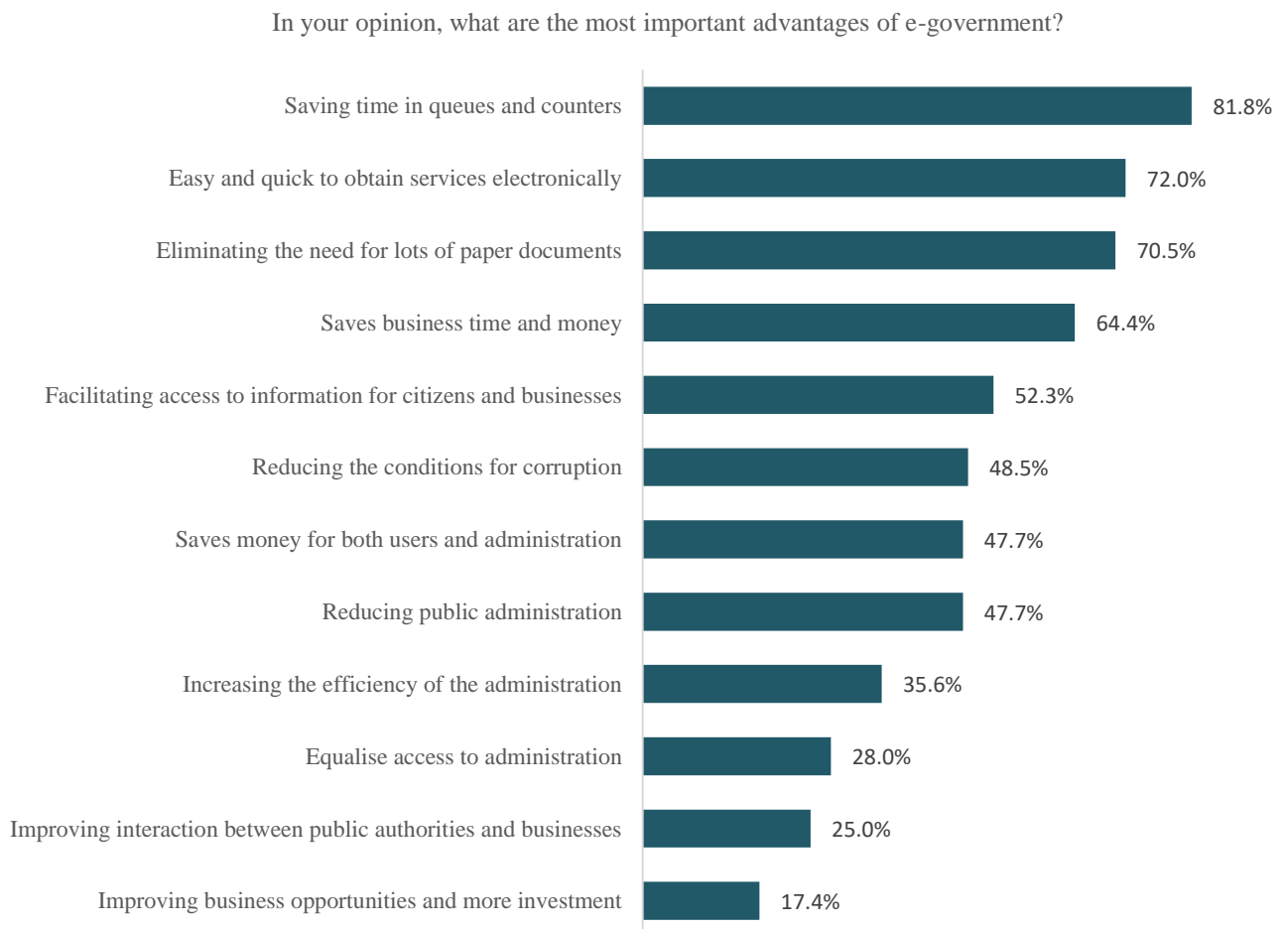
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[145] Reports on the state of the administration, Administration of the

✓ Development, implementation and maintenance of a single national electronic web-based platform: the Centralised Automated Information System "Electronic Public Procurement";

✓ Upgrading the NRA core systems to provide data and services to internal and external systems;

✓ The established Central automated information system "Judicial Status";

✓ The upgraded Single e-Justice Portal - in terms of the possibilities for active access to cases and the connection to SISC;

✓ The developed Centralised Information System of Judicial Enforcement.

The change in the business environment can be assessed through the prism of the advantages of the introduction of *e-government and e-justice,* which the business representatives who participated in the survey highlighted.
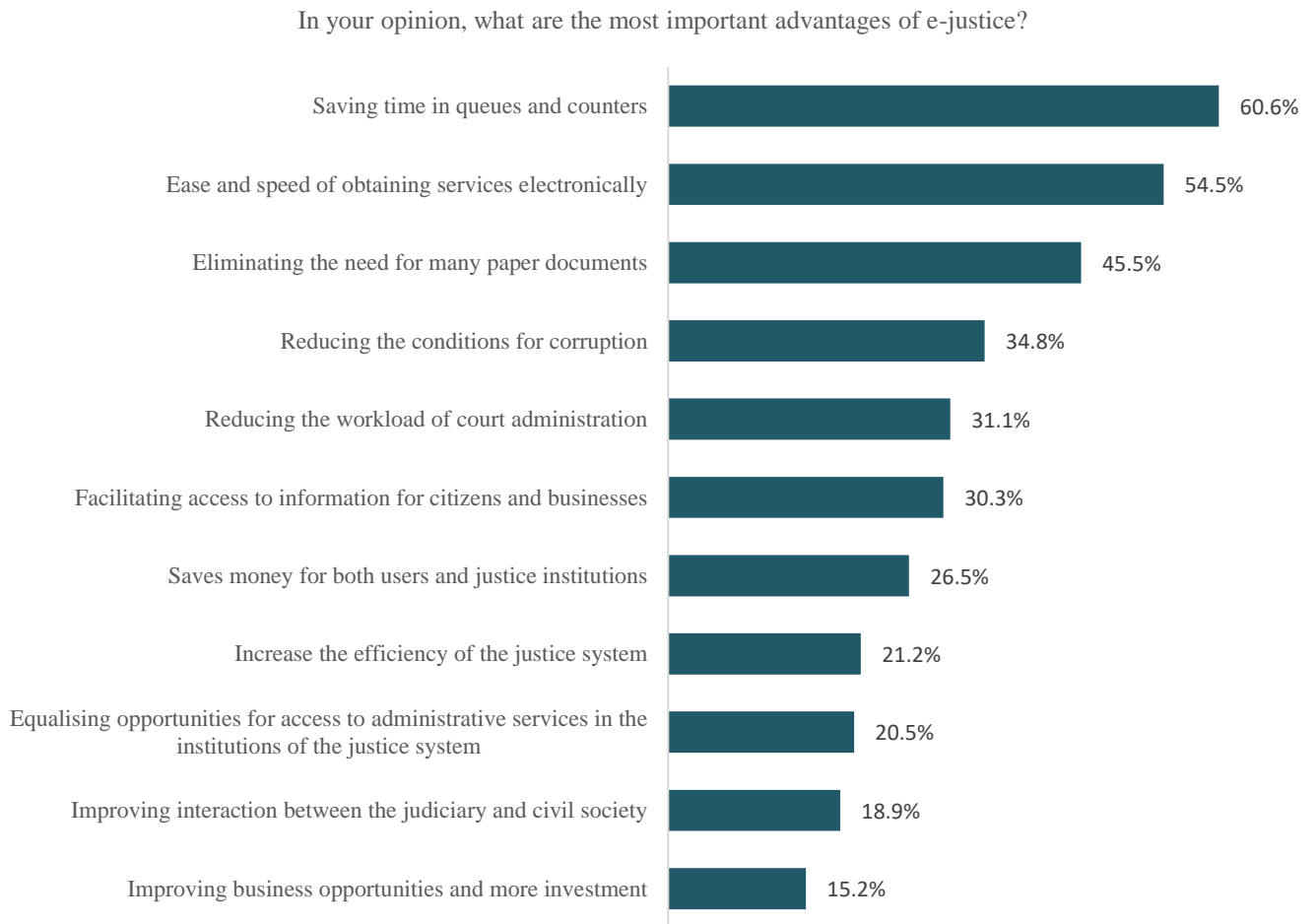
Figure 17. Benefits of introducing e-government

In your opinion, what are the most important advantages of e-government?

Saving time in queues and counters	81.8%
Easy and quick to obtain services electronically	72.0%
Eliminating the need for lots of paper documents	70.5%
Saves business time and money	64.4%
Facilitating access to information for citizens and businesses	52.3%
Reducing the conditions for corruption	48.5%
Saves money for both users and administration	47.7%
Reducing public administration	47.7%
Increasing the efficiency of the administration	35.6%
Equalise access to administration	28.0%
Improving interaction between public authorities and businesses	25.0%
Improving business opportunities and more investment	17.4%

Source. Survey among business representatives

Figure 18. Benefits of introducing e-justice

In your opinion, what are the most important advantages of e-justice?

Saving time in queues and counters	60.6%
Ease and speed of obtaining services electronically	54.5%
Eliminating the need for many paper documents	45.5%
Reducing the conditions for corruption	34.8%
Reducing the workload of court administration	31.1%
Facilitating access to information for citizens and businesses	30.3%
Saves money for both users and justice institutions	26.5%
Increase the efficiency of the justice system	21.2%
Equalising opportunities for access to administrative services in the institutions of the justice system	20.5%
Improving interaction between the judiciary and civil society	18.9%
Improving business opportunities and more investment	15.2%

Source. Survey among business representatives

It is evident that the scores are similar with some nuances, with **changes in various parameters constituting the business environment being more noticeable in the e-governance assessment.** The results provide a basis to summarize the main advantages , which are respectively reflected as changes in the business development environment, of the investments made in e-government and e-justice:
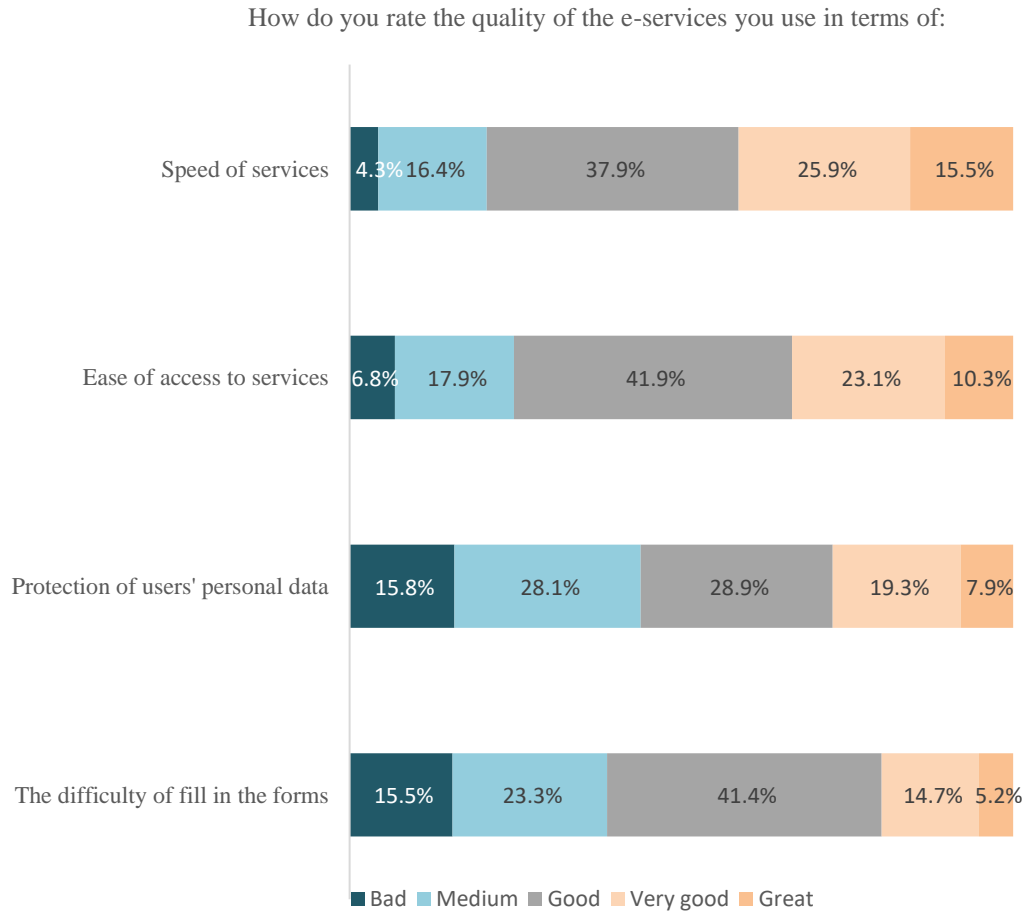
- saving money and time;
- easy and fast electronic receipt of services;
- eliminating the need for paper documents;
- easier access to information;
- reducing the conditions for corruption.

The business representatives who participated in the survey carried out within the framework of this evaluation, also express a strong opinion that the electronic services provided by the institutions facilitate the activities of the businesses they manage (82.5%). Undoubtedly, the investments made under the

OPGG have contributed to these results, and their impact has been precisely on reducing the administrative burden and facilitating the activities of businesses. One of the biggest challenges for e-government and e-justice, is the need to continuously improve the quality of the provided services. They should be designed in such a way that they fully meet the needs and requirements of business, as well as being as flexible and adaptable as possible to periodic changes in these requirements.

Figure 19. Assessment of the quality of services provided[146]

How do you rate the quality of the e-services you use in terms of:

	Bad	Medium	Good	Very good	Great
Speed of services	4.3%	16.4%	37.9%	25.9%	15.5%
Ease of access to services	6.8%	17.9%	41.9%	23.1%	10.3%
Protection of users' personal data	15.8%	28.1%	28.9%	19.3%	7.9%
The difficulty of fill in the forms	15.5%	23.3%	41.4%	14.7%	5.2%

Source. Survey among business representatives

Among the indicators measuring "quality", the most positive were the speed of services and the ease of access to services, which is also a positive change in the business environment. Looking at the assessment of the quality of services provided through different indicators, it should be mentioned that amendments were made to the Administrative Services Ordinance as a consequence of an OPGG project implemented by the Administration of the Council of Ministers (BG05SFOP001-2.007-0001). Among the many significant amendments is the requirement to publish an annual report assessing user satisfaction for the

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[146] the evaluation is in relation to administrative and judicial services

previous year. According to the Ordinance, the methods of feedback to be applied and the organisation of the survey, measurement and management of user satisfaction are laid down in the internal rules on the organisation of administrative services of the administration concerned. By 1 April each year, administrations shall produce an annual report on the assessment of user satisfaction for the previous calendar year, which shall be published on the website of the administration concerned. The results of user feedback shall also be used to measure and manage user satisfaction with the administrative service provided. The information obtained and analysed from the feedback and the results of the user satisfaction measurement shall be discussed and consulted with citizens' and business NGOs and civil society representatives and shall be made public at least once a year. As a result of the feedback and satisfaction measurement information received, analysed and consulted, action shall be taken to improve administrative services. The amendments made are aimed precisely at creating the conditions for improving administrative services and their continuous improvement, and hence the quality of services.

In order to increase the use of e-services, respectively the efficiency in the direction of business users, it is necessary that they are sufficiently well informed about the available services and how to use them.

Figure 20. Evaluation of the information provided

In your opinion, do the institutions provide sufficient information on:
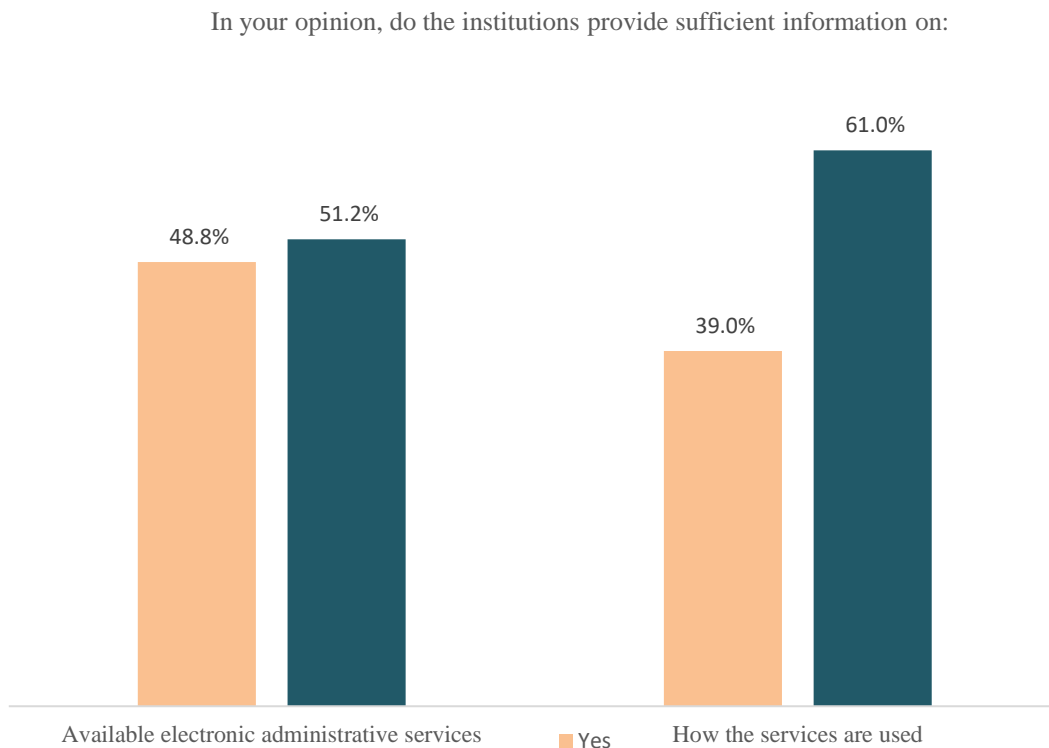
Source. Survey among business representatives

Businesses are much more critical than citizens about the information provided by institutions. Efforts should be invested in the wider promotion of available e-services, including through information campaigns on the possibilities of e-government tools and how businesses can use them. In order to encourage users to

make use of e-government services, it is advisable to make them aware of their advantages and how to use them, which can only be done through proactive awareness campaigns. This is the only way to achieve an effective change in the business environment.

6.10. Evaluation question 1.8.   What are the identified unintended effects (positive and negative) of the investments?

Overall, the investments have achieved the planned and expected results and there are no outstanding unplanned effects. Positive intended effects emerged in the increased transparency and accountability in the work of the administration through the introduction of digital "non-presence services". The main advantages of e-administration in Bulgaria include improved efficiency, as citizens have easy access to public services, reducing waiting times and increasing productivity. Another advantage is improved accessibility, as citizens can access public services from anywhere and at any time if they have an internet connection.

The "digital divide", which refers to users who have access to technology and those who do not, is cited as a known disadvantage (unintended effect). This can be a significant challenge in rural areas or for people who cannot afford the necessary technology. Cybersecurity threats related to e-government services such as hacking, phishing and identity theft are also emerging.

Indirect unintended positive effects that we can identify are the creation of a culture for digital work in an electronic environment and the increase of digital competence of those covered by the interventions in priority axes. This indirect effect also leads to an easier adoption of the novelties and standards of working in an electronic environment, which is of particular importance for the system in the justice sector, which until now has been 'analogue' in nature. In the long term, this will also have an indirect positive impact on the development of e-Justice, as the professional community will handle the different systems more efficiently.

The OPGG is programmed to support administrative reform and e-government and e-justice and thus improve efficiency and effectiveness in the work of the administration and the judiciary. However, the interventions implemented are of such a nature that they do not imply the emergence of unintended effects (positive or negative). The programme has a very clear intervention logic, which boils down to clearly traceable physical performance indicators (e-services implemented, building of information infrastructure, improvement of information systems, optimisation and re-engineering of work processes for the provision of administrative services in central and territorial administrations, building of e-justice systems and e-services in the justice sector). Due to the physical nature of the investments, they could hardly lead to unintended effects, something that is observed in programmes that invest in human capital.

However, several unintended effects can still be identified, which are expected to be more pronounced in the coming years.

Positive unplanned effects:

Fostering innovation - in the long term, reforms could stimulate innovative thinking and foster a culture of innovation in the search for a more efficient way of working and applying new methodologies and technologies.

Building a culture for digital work in an electronic environment and increasing the digital competence of those covered by the interventions in priority axes 1 and 2 of the OPGG, as well as in the justice sector - this indirect effect also leads to easier adoption of innovations and standards of work in an electronic environment, which is of particular importance for the system in the justice sector, which until now has been "analogue" in nature. In the long term, this will also have an indirect positive impact on the development of e-Justice, as the professional community will handle the different systems more efficiently.

Negative unplanned effects:

The "Study and Analysis of e-Government and Digital Administrative Services in the Republic of Bulgaria"[147] points to the "digital divide" as a disadvantage of digital services, referring to users who have access to technology and those who do not. This can be a significant challenge in rural areas or for people who cannot afford the necessary technology. Cybersecurity threats related to digital administrative services such as hacking, phishing and identity theft are also emerging.

6.11. Evaluation question 1.9. What are the barriers to the development of e- governance and e-justice ?

The main identified barriers to the development of both systems can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ Challenges and difficulties in preparation and procurement - both in terms of e-governance and e-justice, beneficiaries experience difficulties in development of technical specifications, i.e. in some cases there are delays in the preparation of tender documents and in the opening of tenders; delays in other cases are caused by appeals/cancellations of tenders;
- ✓ Lack of capacity and sufficient staff with ICT expertise - this challenge is valid for both systems. This creates difficulties in drafting the technical specifications for public procurement, often using external contractors to develop the technical specifications. There are also insufficient specialists to take care of the implementation, maintenance and improvement of the established infrastructure;
- ✓ Numerous regulatory changes leading to changes and delays in project implementation;
- ✓ Structural changes in administrations and an unsustainable political environment.

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[147] "Study and Analysis of e-Government and Digital Administrative Services in the Republic of Bulgaria", UNWE, Collective Katya Kirilova, Alexander Naydenov, Plamen Milev, Iva Raicheva, Yavor Tabov and reviewers Prof. Dr. Krasimir Shishmanov, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Venelin Boshnakov

With regard to e-justice, there are also difficulties with insufficient coordination between the institutions whose participation is necessary for the implementation of the measures (inter-ministerial coordination and coordination, including between the judiciary and the executive) - delays are identified in projects due to the fact that already at the level of project idea, the necessary changes in the regulatory framework are not agreed or implemented, due to poor coordination, for example between the SJC and the Ministry of Justice, and in many cases this is not done at the stage of project implementation. The planning processes regarding required legislative changes should also be improved in order not to delay the e-Justice development process.

It is important for the development of e-government and e-justice to create an environment of political continuity in terms of approaches to the development of e-government and e-justice.

Barriers to e-government development:

The barriers to the development of e-government are discussed in the context of the difficulties in implementing the OPGG and funding priority axis 1 investments aimed at e-government. Serious challenges appear in several areas:

- Capacity of beneficiaries in preparation and procurement;
- Lack of sufficient staff with ICT expertise in the public administration;
- E-ID;
- Changes in the regulatory framework;
- Structural changes in the administration;
- Unstable political environment.

Preparation and procurement

Preparation and procurement is a major challenge and barrier to OPGG investment implementation, affecting all projects. The capacity of beneficiaries to implement projects is a constraint. The MA has identified difficulties and problems related to delays in project implementation due to delays in procurement; appeals against contracting authority acts; incorrect implementation of procurement contracts. In almost all MA annual reports this problem is highlighted as a bottleneck and cause of implementation delays. The MA developed a "Risk analysis of the loss of funds and non-achievement of indicators"[148], as the document had been constantly updated, and a Plan to mitigate the risk of loss of funds and non-achievement of indicators was also developed is prepared and the identified measures implemented. One of the risks analysed relates to contractors not being awarded contracts due to delays in procurement preparation, untimely advertising or appeals. The MA addressed these risks, yet a number of projects were modified or cancelled as a result.

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[148] Fifteenth regular meeting of the OPGG CN, 12.05.2022

Critical lack of staff with ICT expertise

The problem of public procurement specifically in the area of e-governance is directly related to the critical lack of staff with expertise in information technology in the public administration. This creates difficulties in drafting technical specifications for public procurement, and often times the administration uses external contractors to develop the technical specifications.

In a report on ICT[149] under Project No. BG05SFOP001-2.001-0009 "Introducing the principle of shared services in the organisation and operation of central administration", funded by OPGG, several important conclusions are drawn in relation to the staff with ICT expertise in central administrations. The report indicates that ensuring adequate ICT staffing and capacity remains a challenge for the Bulgarian administration. A survey conducted for the report in July 2017 provides a clear picture of ICT staffing and capacity in the public administration, including at the level of line ministries, agencies and regional and local administrations. The findings are that internal ICT departments are predominantly small, with an average staff of less than 5. Organisations that have recruited a higher number of staff are SAeG, NSI, MoD, ASA, NRA, CA, MoI and SFA. The level of awareness of the e-Government Act and the extended functions of the SAEU is low, with the main touch points being the Government Communications Network and CERT Bulgaria[150]. Most IT departments are hampered by reduced staff, inability to recruit suitable people with the required skills, uncompetitive salaries, unstructured budget management and underestimated operational costs. Small ICT teams are mainly responsible for infrastructure management, information security, network management, customer service, computer maintenance and in some cases application support. Application maintenance is in most cases outsourced to private companies. Technical support functions are undertaken by the largest number of employees. Overall, the most common tasks of IT staff across all organisations are end-user/helpdesk support (31%), computer maintenance (22%), information security (11%), application software support (11%) and ICT management (10%). Data/voice networks, data center development and software applications are the least frequently performed functions, each accounting for 5 per cent of ICT staff activity. The conclusion drawn is that ICT departments within the various ministries operate in a closed environment and hardly collaborate with other IT counterparts that provide similar services. This leads to inefficient processes and duplication of functions. Most ICT staff are not aware of ICT budgets and the processes for allocating and managing funds. There is no standard or tool for tracking IT expenditure and no uniform terminology for procurement of ICT related items and services. For these reasons, administrations have difficulties in preparing technical specifications and use external contractors, but this leads to other risks. Examples in this respect are two projects[151] of the MoRDPW for which the procurement of the systems has not been announced because the preparation of

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[149]

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjb9Muhqr6EAxX8SvEDHcNmCUsQFnoECBEQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.strategy.bg%2FFileHandler.ashx%3FfileId%3D22331&usg=AOvVaw2dw22dwaTb5bMaI2d8D3ss&opi=89978449

[150] https://govcert.bg/web/guest

[151] BG05SFOP001-1.018 Establishment of a unified public register for spatial planning, investment design and construction permitting and BG05SFOP001-1.019 Establishment of a property management system, including a unified register of state and municipal property

technical specifications has to be completed, which has been awarded with considerable delay. The projects were subsequently cancelled.

Lack of a national e-identification scheme

The national scheme for electronic identification, provided for in the Law on Electronic Identification, is not yet established, which to a certain extent limits the access of citizens and businesses to EAI, including cross-border ones.

The current legislation in the Republic of Bulgaria provides that the persons referred to in Art. 1 and 2 of the EMU Act are obliged to provide citizens and organisations with the possibility to identify themselves when requesting EMU in accordance with the Electronic Identification Act (EIA) or by means of electronic identification, determined by a decision of the Council of Ministers, issued and maintained by administrative bodies. And in 2022, no change has been made to the Administrative Register with a view to entering the electronic identification means and their level of security in a field specifically created for this purpose.

According to IISDA, 590 administrations have declared that they provide access to the EAP with more than one means of electronic identification. According to the information, 63% of the administrations require QES, 20% - PIK and 17% - username and password or other means.

Under the OPGG, a contract has been concluded with the Ministry of Interior for the implementation of project No. BG05SFOP001-1.002-0006 "Development of the pilot system for electronic identification and implementation in productive mode", which addresses the measure of the same name 78[152] . The project was launched in 2016 with a deadline for implementation in 2021. The measure was removed from the scope of the OPGG in the same year and was foreseen to be financed by the state budget. The issue of e-identification remains unresolved to date. The provision of a universal free means of e-identification is crucial for the development of e-government. This implies taking urgent and decisive measures at political level to implement the measure as quickly and qualitatively as possible.

Changes in the regulatory framework

Difficulties, project delays and in some cases inability to implement projects are related to specific changes in the regulatory framework as well as to the failure to make or to make necessary amendments in a timely manner.

Amendments to the Law on e-Government[153] (§ 45. of the Transitional and Final Orders) determine that the activities on system integration[154] are carried out by "Information Services" JSC. The company is designated to act as a public contracting authority. The Decision of the CoM No. 727/5.12.2019 designates the administrative bodies which, in the performance of their functions related to system integration

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[152] Measure 78 of the Updated SEA Implementation Roadmap
[153] Addendum. - SG 102/2019 in force from 29.11.2019
[154] which include the provision of services for the establishment, maintenance, development and monitoring of the performance of information and communication systems used by administrative authorities, as well as activities that ensure the performance of these services

activities, should entrust the performance of those activities to "Information Services" JSC. This leads to changes in the overall scheme of implementation of the OPGG contracts executed by the institutions included in the decision of the Council of Ministers in their parts concerning the construction of information and communication systems. Some of these bodies are beneficiaries or potential applicants under the OPGG. The change introduced though was not in line with the State aid rules, which had resulted in the impossibility of financing measures under the OPGG (e.g. the project of the Ministry of Health, which has been terminated; the Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre, the National Revenue Agency, the Registry Agency, which were no longer eligible for funding under the programme).

In order to resolve the issue raised regarding the compliance of the legal change with the State Aid (SA) rules at national level, it was decided to outsource the system integration services to "Information Services" JSC as a Service of General Economic Interest (SGEI). For this purpose, it was necessary to prepare a notification from the Ministry of Transport and Communications to the European Commission, and only after its positive opinion could the aid be granted. This notification was delayed, although the MA had repeatedly drawn the attention of the responsible institutions to the adverse consequences that its delay entails for the programme. As this issue remained unresolved, the MA of the OPGG was in a practical impossibility to ensure the legality of certain procedures. This caused delays in the opening of new procedures and the implementation of already approved key projects/activities that have been assigned to the "Information Services" JSC for a total cost of about 17.5 million (MoH, AGCC, RA).

In order to eliminate the risk of loss of funds under the programme, the MA took actions and at the beginning of 2021 it started to renegotiate the financial resources for the projects of RA and AGCC by releasing funds earmarked for the implementation of activities related to system integration. On March 31, 2021, the administrative contract concluded for the project "Completion of the National Health Information System (NHIS) - Stage 1 and Stage 2" related to the development of the NHIS was terminated, the activities of which have now been fully outsourced to "Information Services" JSC.

Both the regulatory changes made during the implementation process and the lack of regulatory changes required for the implementation of certain projects hinder the implementation of the programme. Such a project is No BG05SFOP001-1.002-0009 "Implementation of the Civil Registration and Address Register CAIS" of the SAeG. An example of regulatory changes that have had a negative effect on already approved projects are the amendments to the Electoral Code made on 23.12.2022, namely the repeal of § 145 of the TFO regulating remote e-voting, which have led to the elimination of the need for financing the project No. BG05SFOP001-1.002-0015 "Development and implementation of a pilot system for remote e-voting" of the MEU for e-voting, in view of which the project was terminated.

Structural changes in the administration

Another challenge that caused difficulties is related to the closure of the SAeG and the establishment of the MeG. Although the effect of the establishment of the MeG was positive, given that a new administrative structure was being created, as well as the necessary regulatory changes in a number of laws and regulations related to e-government, this entailed a risk of delays in the implementation of the measures and actions planned in the e-Government Strategy and its roadmap, as well as for the implementation of

the projects funded under the OPGG. According to the OPGG Annual Implementation Report for 2022, the closure of the SAeG/establishment of the MeG and the preceding and accompanying processes have led to a fatal delay in the procurement and a revision of the approach for the implementation of certain activities (4 MieG projects were partially or fully at risk, a possible appeal of the contracting authority's acts could have lead to the impossibility of implementation within the eligible timeframe until 31.12.2023).

Dynamic and unstable political environment

Another difficulty is the dynamic political environment in the last few years (multiple extraordinary parliamentary elections, alternation of caretaker and regular governments, all with short mandates, and long periods of a non-functioning National Assembly), which hampers key reforms, and in some places there is a lack of continuity in terms of projects under implementation (e.g. under project No. BG05SFOP001-2.022-0001 of the Ministry of the Interior, the resource management system developed and delivered in early 2021 has not been implemented in a production environment, which has led to project closure in 2022 without actual implementation).

Other barriers

Other factors that created difficulties are related to the lack of readiness of beneficiaries, delays, related to the formal expression of commitment to implement the measures included in the roadmaps for the implementation of the national strategies, but in reality a lack of readiness to present project ideas or to implement the projects.

Other difficulties highlighted in the Mid-term Evaluation Report of the eGovernment Strategy[155] were:

- ✓ Inappropriate approach to investment planning - both the creation of a unified information environment and the introduction of e-services by individual administrations are financed in parallel, which leads to a lack of tangible impact of investments;

- ✓ Lack of a strategic approach and prioritisation of services by 2016 and adoption of the 2016-2020 Roadmap to eGovernment;

- ✓ The failure of most administrations to recognise e-government as a priority beyond the introduction of electronic filing systems;

- ✓ Lack of statutory requirements for established systems, services and registers;

- ✓ Lack of interoperability;

- ✓ Insufficient coordination between the institutions whose participation is necessary for the implementation of the measures (inter-ministerial coherence and coordination);

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[155] "Carrying out an independent analysis and interim evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Roadmap for its implementation".

✓ Insufficient maturity of projects at their launch (unclear scope, change in implementation concept, lack of precise definition of needs).

Barriers to e-justice development

Barriers within project implementation are generally applicable, e.g. with regard to procurement. Beneficiaries experience difficulties in preparing the technical specifications, i.e. there are delays somewhere in both the preparation of the tender documents and in the call for tenders itself. Delays in other cases are caused by procurement appeals. There is a critical shortage of staff with IT expertise to look after the implementation, maintenance and improvement of the infrastructure built. The public administration cannot compete with the highly developed private IT sector as an employer. In many cases, the difficulties in the preparation of TC stem from this very problem. It is very common to use external contractors for the development of TC, which is the only way out for administrations that do not have their own capacity, but it has its risks and drawbacks

In terms of e-justice development, work should be done to improve coordination between the Ministry of Justice and the SJC, which should work in an eco-system to achieve the set objectives . Inter-agency coordination and alignment is important as delays in projects are identified due to the fact that even at the project idea level, necessary changes in the regulatory framework are not agreed due to poor coordination between SJC and the Ministry of Justice. The pre-planning process for legislative initiatives and changes that accompany systems improvements should also be improved. Again, the system should not be allowed to enter the inertia to which it is prone, as this will delay the changes that have already occurred and prevent the full potential of *e-justice from* being realized. Other potential barriers include:

✓ dynamics in the country's law-making processes - an unstable and unpredictable legal environment;
✓ conjunctural and/or politically motivated limitation of resources for the implementation of e-justice policy (financial and human);
✓ lagging behind the dynamics of global ICT development - slowing down adaptation to technological change.

The surveys conducted among citizens and businesses highlight the following main barriers to the development of *e-government and e-justice***:**

✓ Lack of long-term campaigns to promote services (*77.2%*);
✓ Lack of continuity due to frequent change of governments and change of approaches to e-governance and e-justice (*75.5%*);
✓ Lack of will and desire on the part of the state and politicians (*62.6%*);
✓ Lack of timely changes in legislation (*61.2%*);
✓ Lack of skills of citizens and businesses to use computers when interacting with administrations and judicial authorities (*61.9%*);
✓ Lack of skills of the employees in the administration and the judiciary to use computers for administrative services (*34.9%*).

6.12. Evaluation question 1.10. To what extent have the systems established for e-services, management and monitoring in the administration and judiciary contributed to the speed of service, greater transparency and accessibility of their work? Have they contributed to increased user satisfaction?

Looking at the criterion of "satisfaction", it should be mentioned again that amendments were made to the Administrative Services Ordinance (ASO) as a result of an OPGG project implemented by the AMC (BG05SFOP001-2.007-0001). Among the many significant amendments is the regulation of the requirement to publish an annual report on the evaluation of user satisfaction for the previous year. According to the EAA, the methods of feedback to be applied and the organisation of the survey, measurement and management of user satisfaction are laid down in the internal rules on the organisation of administrative services of the administration concerned. By 1 April each year, administrations shall produce an annual report on the assessment of user satisfaction for the previous calendar year, which shall be published on the website of the administration concerned. The results of user feedback shall also be used to measure and manage user satisfaction with the administrative service provided. The information obtained and analysed from the feedback and the results of the user satisfaction measurement shall be discussed and consulted with citizens' and business NGOs and civil society representatives and shall be made public at least once a year. As a result of the feedback and satisfaction measurement information received, analysed and consulted, action shall be taken to improve administrative services. The amendments made are aimed precisely at creating the conditions for improving administrative services and their continuous improvement, and hence the quality of services. On the basis of the data from the quantitative surveys conducted, we can conclude that the main advantages that end-users see in terms of using electronic services provided by the administration and the judiciary are:

- saving money and time;
- easy and fast electronic receipt of services;
- eliminating the need for paper documents;
- easier access to information;
- reducing the conditions for corruption;

The main advantages that the end users have highlighted are in fact also the goals that e-government and e-justice set themselves. From this point of view, we can say that the investments implemented under the OPGG have contributed to faster services, greater transparency and accessibility.

One of the major challenges of e-services, management and monitoring in the administration and judiciary is the need to continuously improve the quality of services provided. They should be designed in such a way that they fully meet the needs and requirements of citizens and businesses, as well as being as flexible and adaptable as possible to periodic changes in these requirements. Improving quality will consequently lead to higher satisfaction among end users. Among the indicators measuring 'quality', the speed of service delivery and ease of access to services were rated most positively by citizens and business

representatives who took part in the survey.[156] . Only in the assessment made in the survey by the target group of disadvantaged people there is evidence that they rather see no change in terms of access to justice, but see more positive change in administrative services.

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[156] the conclusions apply to both electronic services provided by the administration and electronic services provided by the judiciary

7. Presentation of case studies

PA Case Study 1: Upgrading horizontal and central e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Single Model for requesting, paying for and providing e-administrative services[157]

The subject of the study is Project BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001-C04 "Upgrading of horizontal and central systems of e-government in relation to the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of electronic administrative services" with the beneficiary Ministry of e-Government. The project started in 2017 and ends on 31.12.2023.

Matrix for collecting general information on the project:

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[157] The project is under PA1 and PA2.

General information				
Priority axis/Specific objective	Initial Indicators Set	Indicators achieved at the end of implementation	Have the set indicators been met	Has qualitative change/ reform been achieved?
Priority axis 1 "Administrative services and e-government" (PA 1) Priority Axis 2 "Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business" (PA 2) Objective 1. Reducing the administrative burden for citizens and businesses and moving towards comprehensive administrative services via electronic means. Goal 2: Provide high quality and affordable EHRs.	O1-3: Administrations supported for the introduction of integrated administrative services; O1-7: Number of supported registries; O1-8: Supported electronic services for their delivery in transactional mode; O2-6: Trained administration staff; R2-2: Administrative staff who have successfully completed training with a certificate	502 administrations joined the Single Model Over 60 registries available through RegiX 28 primary administrators joined RegiX Over 300 000 000 internal e-services [158] 1224 services developed through the Single Model 225 administrative staff trained 225 employees received a certificate	The following systems have been upgraded: Single Portal for Access to e-Administrative Services (SPAAS) changed to the e-Government Portal by the Law on e-Government - SG No. 80 of 19 September 2023; Electronic Authentication System (eAut); Electronic Forms Management System (eForms); Reference and Certification Information Exchange (RegiX); E-payment system; Electronic Delivery System (eDelivery).	During the project implementation period, a number of regulatory changes were made - laws, regulations, by-laws, etc. At the beginning of the project 150 services were developed at the end of the project 1224. There is an overachievement of the indicator. More than 90% of administrations have joined the single model. Negotiations are underway to establish a link between the single e-Justice portal and the e-Service System. Users of the e-Governance Portal have increased by over 300% from the original figure.

Specific issues - the analysis is based on a detailed review of the technical and financial reports as well as in-depth interviews with beneficiary representatives. It is analysed by the blocks of questions depending on which project category they fall under according to the activities planned and implemented:

Through the implementation of the project:

➤ **Reform:** a detailed analysis of what type of reform the implemented activities have led to
  ↳ What type of reforms have been implemented - organisational development; optimisation of internal organisational processes; exploration of the changes that have taken place and the effects on the performance of the administration concerned

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[158] https://unifiedmodel.egov.bg/wps/portal/unified-model/unified-model/statistics/statistics/!ut/p/z1/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfIjo8ziPQItHA39LYy83UONzQ0c_fx9zE18AowN_Mz1w1EV-Lt4mxg4Gof5-zkauxt6uJjrRxGj3wAHcDQgTj8eBVH4jfciZAEwBIyKfJ190_WjChJLMnQz89Ly9SOKS4AhVFySmVwMdEEUXjMczdAVYAkQs4syA0NjajySQv2TFcEAGdqflo!/#anchor1

Reforms carried out within the project:

Modification of standards, rules and procedures related to the implementation of the Single Model

- ✓ Models developed in accordance with the requirements of Article 8(5) and (6) of the LeS;
- ✓ Developed procedure for entry in the Administrative Register and the interoperability registers of the developed and updated electronic templates and their information objects;
- ✓ Developed three electronic templates for requesting electronic administrative services provided by all administrations No. 2, 2133 and 2134 of the Administrative Register developed according to the model;
- ✓ Developed a manual and a package of information materials on the implementation of the model under Article 8(6) of the LeG.

In the process of project implementation, deficits in the regulatory framework have been identified, which hindered the smooth implementation of the Unified Model and in this regard a number of amendments have been made to the Law on e-Government, promulgated in SG No. 80 of 19 September 2023. At the same time, amendments to the Regulation on the general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services, amendments to the Law on electronic identification with a view to the first private e-identification scheme are being prepared in the Ministry of e-Government.

Internal administrative reform

During the project implementation period, the State Agency for e-Governance was transformed into the Ministry of e-Governance in view of the policies to be implemented at the national level. This established the lead function of specialized administration in the MeG, in particular the experts of the Directorate of e-Government Systems and Components as the lead unit for the implementation of the single model.

Reform of e-service provision

On the basis of Art. 1 of the *"Internal Rules of the Ministry of e-Government for the Control of Compliance with the Requirements of the Law on e-Government, the Law on Cyber Security, the Law on Access to Public Information and the Law on Access to Spatial Data", checks are carried out on administrations for the implementation of some of the requirements of the Law on e-Government, namely. 1; Art. 3; Art. 4, Art. 5, para. 2, Art. 8, para. 2 and para. 3; Art. 10; Art. 11; Art. 12; Art. 13; Art. 15, Art. 30; Art. 31; Art. 32; Art. 33; Art. 34; Art. 35; Art. 36, para. 1; Art. 40, para. 1 of the E-Government Act, as well as Art. 19, para. 3, para. 5 and para. 8; Art. 20, para. 4; Art. 24, para. 1 of the Ordinance on general requirements for information systems, registers and electronic administrative services. Part of the above-mentioned articles concern the provision of e-services through the Single Model. The administrations introduced a number of regulatory and administrative changes in the period 2018 - 2023 in order to achieve the standards for e-services provision approved by the MEU.*

One of the most significant changes in this area is the improved service to citizens and businesses resulting from the project.

As of 2017, the **Single Portal for Access to Electronic Administrative Services (SPAEAS)** www.egov.bg is a single point of access to the EAA. By 31.07.2017, a small number of administrations

were integrated into the portal. These include the General Directorate of Civil Aviation Administration, the Maritime Administration Executive Agency, the Automobile Administration Executive Agency, the Registry Agency, the National Social Security Institute, the Ministry of Justice, the National Centre for Information and Documentation, the Commission for Personal Data Protection, Sofia Municipality, Varna Municipality and Dobrich Municipality. The total number of registered electronic administrative services on the portal is about 400.

A significant weakness of the SPAEAS is the perception of the portal only as an entry point that redirects the user to the website of the relevant administration providing the electronic administrative service. In practice, most of the administrations that provide real administrative services electronically have their own e-services portals. This creates fragmentation. There is a lack of a centralised approach subject to a common vision, architecture and rules.

Towards the end of 2022, the Single Portal for Access to Electronic Administrative Services (eGovernment Portal)[159] has been upgraded with new functionalities to allow users to interact with horizontal eGovernment systems. As of 31.12.2022, information on 1,712 e-services is published on the portal, of which 1,132 e-Government services have been implemented through centralised and unified application. More than 1 600 electronic forms of services and supporting documents have been developed for their request.

For the year 2022, the number of new EASs for centralised application published on the e-Government Portal is 272. Information on 580 EASs provided in a decentralized way through developed portals of the administrations - Ministry of Interior, Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre, Customs Agency, National Social Insurance Institution, National Center for Information and Documentation, etc. is also published.

By the end of 2022[160] services are provided centrally to 501 administrations, of which 49 are central, 302 municipal and district, 27 regional and 123 specialised territorial administrations.

The conditions are provided for all regional, municipal and district administrations to provide their services centrally through the Single Model for requesting, paying for and providing EAS. Through the Single Model, 21 services are provided centrally by district administrations and 182 services by municipalities and their districts.

Part of the functionality of the portal is the maintenance of a workspace for citizens, business and administration, for citizens this is "My Space", through which specific information can be selected and accessed with a single click and the most frequently requested services can be accessed by a specific person. A centralized profile is also maintained for e-governance purposes, where person-specific information such as notification addresses, mobile numbers, etc. is stored and updated; the type of information can be

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[159] Pursuant to the Law, Art. SG 80 of 19 September 2023 - e-Government Portal, not Single Portal for Access to the EMA
[160] Status report and annual plan for the development and renewal of information resources in the administration and information resources of the unified electronic communications network of the public administration and for national security needs , MEU

dynamically expanded. The information available in the profiles is accessible via web services for external systems.

Interest from citizens and businesses is steadily growing, as evidenced by the public information on the www.egov.bg website.

80 federated portals have been implemented for administrations (NRA, MeG, Executive Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture (EAFA), regional administrations, municipalities, etc.). A free service for federated portals of administrations is implemented through the portal platform of the Single Portal for Access to Electronic Administrative Services. The portal platform is a cloud-based solution for building websites according to a pre-prepared template within a single infrastructure. The templates allow for a relative customisation of the look and feel of the site, but retain the structure to facilitate the end user and create a unified online visual identity for government institutions. The platform is maintained by the teams of the Ministry of eGovernment and the content of the federated portal is maintained by the teams of the respective administration for which it was created.

🔸 Created conditions for sustainable results

Within the framework of the implementation of the activity "Training of civil servants for the use of horizontal e-government systems" the project provides for the training of 225 civil servants for the use of horizontal e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Single Model. A certificate will be issued for successful completion of the training. The trainings were conducted in person or online. The trainers were experts from the MEU. According to the beneficiary's latest report, the indicator has been exceeded with 243 civil servants trained in the use of horizontal e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Single Model, 121 of the trainees were male and 122 of the trainees were female.

🔸 Have the trainings conducted within the projects had tangible results?

The technical skills of the central and local administration staff who have participated in the training have improved their knowledge of working with horizontal e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Single Model. Participants have expressed a desire for additional and further training.

✓ Created conditions for sustainable results

According to the Training Needs Analysis of the Public Administration of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2022 - 2024, the following answers were received from a total of 50 respondents in response to the question on the development of which general competences there is the greatest need for training for the employees in the administration:

- Digital competence - 30;
- Teamwork - 23;
- Results orientation - 16, etc.

In response to the question on priority areas and training topics/courses, respondents formulated their proposals in the following areas: digital competence, technology and innovation. Digital competence training is the most common suggestion from the employees surveyed. IPA offers most of the suggested courses, but the rapid development of this area implies annual updating, introducing new topics and building on old ones. Specific topics mentioned include: working with operating systems, introduction to

automated correspondence capabilities in Outlook or another email client, introduction to browser capabilities, database implementation capabilities, beginning programming skills, etc. In the field of digital technologies, there are also some suggestions for topics such as Blockchain in public administration, Crypto currencies, Technology and ecology, etc. In terms of innovation, there are topics such as Creative Thinking and Innovation, Innovation and its Use in Public Administration, as well as Startups and Design Thinking. Work of the administration in electronic environment. The topic of e-government was the second most popular topic, as was the topic of interaction between administrations in an electronic environment. Specific proposals for training in this area are: electronic communication between the different territorial structures, work with digital systems - provision of e-services in the public administration, strategies and tactics for prevention and combating the consequences of hacker attacks, specialized training for lawyers to work in a digital environment and others. The necessary skills that are noted are: encryption of confidential information, screen sharing, types of online protections, etc.

In this regard, IPA is working with MeGU to update the training programmes to meet the needs of the administration for training on "Working with digital systems - providing e-services in public administration"[161] .

Introduction of *e-government* **and** *e-justice***:** a detailed analysis of the activities implemented

In this part, in addition to the reports of the MEU on the implementation of the specific activities of the project, the Status Reports and Annual Plan for the Development and Renewal of Information Resources in the Administration and Information Resources of the Unified Electronic Communications Network of the State Administration and for the Needs of National Security for 2017 and 2022, as well as information from the "Statistics" module of the portal - www.egov.bg - are considered.

✓ Improved service to citizens and businesses as a result of the implementation of specific activities
By the end of 2022, the Single Portal for Access to Electronic Administrative Services has been implemented as a single point of access to the EAS. As of 31.12.2022, information on 1 712 e-services has been published on the portal, of which 1 132 EASs have been implemented through centralised and unified request. More than 1 600 electronic forms of services and supporting documents have been developed for their request.

By comparison, as of 2017, the **Single Portal for Access to Electronic Administrative Services (SPAEAS)** www.egov.bg is perceived only as an entry point that redirects the user to the website of the respective administration providing the electronic administrative service. In practice, most of the administrations providing real administrative services electronically as of 2017 have their own e-services portals. This creates fragmentation. There is a lack of a centralised approach subject to a common vision, architecture and rules. The total number of registered e-administrative services on the portal as of 2017 is about 400and by 2023, 1224 services can be requested centrally. The number of users of the **Single Portal - ** citizens and businesses - is constantly growing, as is evident from the public information on the website www.egov.bg.

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[161] https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/catalogue

To facilitate the users, the portal functionality has been built to maintain a workspace for citizens, business and administration, for citizens this is "My Space", through which specific information can be selected and accessed with one click and the most frequently requested services can be accessed by the specific person. A centralized profile is also maintained for e-governance purposes, where person-specific information such as notification addresses, mobile numbers, etc. is stored and updated; the type of information can be dynamically expanded. The information available in the profiles is accessible via web services for external systems.

In addition to the increase in the number of registered users of the Single Portal, by the end of 2023, 502 administrations, of which 49 are central administrations, 302 municipal and district administrations, 27 regional administrations and 124 specialised territorial administrations, will provide services centrally. The conditions are in place for all regional, municipal and district administrations to provide their services centrally through the Single Application, Payment and Delivery Model. 21 services are provided centrally by regional administrations and 182 services by municipalities and their districts through the Single Model.

By October 2023. Real-time information: https://analytics.egov.bg

- Joined the Single Administration Model - 502;

- Number of administrations connected to the Electronic Payments System - 602;

- Number of services developed under the Unified Model - 1224;

- Number of e-services requested through the Unified Model by citizens and businesses for 2022 - 68385 pcs, for 2023 - 74717 pcs. for comparison to 2019 were 2500 pcs.

As of 2017**, Module for electronic authentication (e-Authentication) -** provides means for determining the electronic identity of applicants for electronic administrative services through its integration with electronic identification tools - qualified electronic signature, PIC, etc. By 2023, the module has been upgraded to the e-Authentication system (in version eAtt 2.0) implements the process related to the one-time identification and authentication (identity verification) of users to systems that require it. With one-time system integration, it is possible to authenticate a user with any means of identification provided by eAtt 2.0-integrated identification providers, and conversely, with identification provider integration, users can be authenticated to all eAtt 2.0-integrated systems through the means provided by that provider. The total number of successful authentications is 7,848,071, with 2,572,723 successful authentications in 2022 alone, of which 2,410,078 are with QES and 162,645 are with mobile QES. For 2023, successful authentications have increased to 3,671,637, of which 3,439,564 are with QES and 232,073 are those with mobile QES. Through the system, the Single sign on (SSO) or single sign on authentication method has been implemented, allowing users to securely authenticate to multiple applications and websites using only one set of credentials provided by eAUT 2.0.

The e-payment module - https://pay.egov.bg/ is a horizontal module of the e-government platform. The module implements a unified environment for electronic payments by registering electronic payments for requested e-administrative services from citizens and businesses. A time authentication service is

implemented for the proper functioning of the e-payment system. It allows to securely and irrevocably establish the exact time of initiation of the payment request and proves that certain data existed exactly at the time of their provision.

As of 2017, there are 11 administrations providing electronic administrative services and included in the Electronic Payments Environment. Among them are the Ministry of Justice, the Registry Agency, the Customs Agency, the Bulgarian Institute of Metrology, the Maritime Administration Executive Agency, the Automobile Administration Executive Agency, the National Social Insurance Institute, the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NCID), the Municipality of Burgas, the Municipality of Gabrovo and the Municipality of Radomir. Some of them do not provide the service of payment of due fees through a virtual POS terminal. The banks providing payment services are DSK Bank, First Investment Bank and UniCredit Bulbank.

The total number of debts registered through the Electronic Payment Environment is 7874, of which 4774 were paid by card. The highest number of payments registered was to the Ministry of Justice, followed by NCID.

By 2022, the module has been upgraded to an electronic payment system (e-Payment). The system enables obligors to pay their obligations by credit or debit card, through ePay or at a bank branch counter with a payment order, and with a provided access code. Services to all regional and municipal administrations and their districts can be paid through the system. With the upgraded new functionalities of the system, one more payment channel is provided - Central Virtual POS Terminal, through which obliged persons can pay. Requesting of fees due by the administrations is done through the access provided by MEU to each administration to the Electronic Payment Environment. Each administration is provided the ability to request payment to an individual or entity with the functionality to view all current liability statuses in real time.

At the end of 2022, there are 524 administrations providing EASs and 6 banks. In 2022, 112 administrations have joined the electronic payment system. During the reporting period, 44 325 payment requests were registered.

In 2022, 112 AIS customers joined. Transactions carried out are 44 325, the same figures for 2021 are respectively183 AIS customers and 25 101 of successful transactions. In 2023, a new 145 AIS customers were added and the number of successful transactions increased to 118,818.

The electronic service module (e-service) - https://edelivery.egov.bg/ **-** the e-service system aims to implement the automated use of the systems of administrative authorities as well as third party systems (e.g. banks). As of 2017, the e-service system is an integrated service of the National Social Insurance Institute (NSI) and the possibility to serve electronic documents is provided. The means of registration in the e-service system are through the QES and the PIC of the NSII.

Secure Electronic Serving System (SESS, e-Serving)

The Secure Electronic Delivery (eDelivery) system has been upgraded in the period and 2019-2023 and is implemented as a system for managing the sending and/or receiving and storing of electronic documents to/from public authorities, natural and legal persons with unambiguous authentication of the moment of sending, receipt and delivery, as well as for ensuring the authorship and integrity of the same.

Active accounts in the system as of October 2023 are 267 442, of which over 80% are individuals. For 2022, 3 953 organisations are registered in the system, of which 2 655 are legal entities and 1 132 are persons under Art. 1 and 2 of the LES. The number of messages sent through the system is 1 412 687, an increase of almost 60% compared to 2021.

As of November 2023, traffic tickets and penalty notices issued under the Road Traffic Act are served through the SESS.
In addition to the Unified Model, the project has implemented the following:

Electronic forms management system (e-Forms)

The e-Forms Management System (e-Forms) provides the ability to select a service and automate the subsequent processes of interaction between requestor and provider in providing the requested service. The system allows already authenticated users to access a list of EMAs and fill in the corresponding e-form and submit to the administrative body implementing the service.

Functionality integrated to the Secure Electronic Serving System is the functionality to verify the validity of a personal digital certificate (e-Validation)

E-validation is a means of verifying and confirming the validity of a qualified electronic signature, a time stamp, an electronically signed document in real time, and the ability to print an electronic document, converting the contents of a paper document into electronic form. Added 710 Root certificates from the trust list administered by the European Commission on validation of electronic signature.

Through the prototype e-forms system, 1,132 EASs (1,224 as of 2023) are made available for centralized filing, which have been filed 140,995 times between 2019 and 2022.

In 2022, the prototype shall be upgraded to a full-fledged e-forms management system to provide the ability to request services through web-based forms, as well as integration of request-related activities such as payment of outstanding fees, service of process, etc.

    ➕ Improved access to services for citizens and businesses as a result of the implementation of specific activities

As a result of the successful implementation of the project activities, the Single Portal - egov.bg is fully operational and the facilitated access to electronic administrative services is highly appreciated by citizens, businesses and administrations, as evidenced by the growing number of users of the system. On the other hand, the SSEB as a module of the system has proven its effectiveness and those willing to join the module are not only administrative structures, but also judicial authorities, which is enshrined in the envisaged amendments to the APC. The secure electronic delivery system will be used for the exchange of messages in the administrative process, which testifies not only to the success of the implementation of the project

BG05SFOP001-1.004 Upgrading of horizontal and central systems of e-government, but also to the validation of the results as good practices that find application in other areas.

Cross-border electronic identification

A significant problem related to requesting e-services from abroad is identified, related not only to the lack of a national e-identification scheme, but also to the strong limitation of the possible means of identification to qualified electronic signature, NRA PIC and NSII PIC. These limitations are by no means related to technological problems, but are mainly the result of a lack of political will to solve the problem. An example in the opposite direction is a country like Croatia with more than 20 means of identification and 15 member states connected to their national eIDAS node (https://nias.gov.hr/en/Authentication/Step2).

🞢 Conditions created for more transparent and efficient service

According to the Administrative Register maintained by IISPA, 2479 services are provided at central, district, municipal and specialised administration levels in the country. 1836 of them are available in the portal and 1224 services are developed under the Unified Model. Payments and processing can be tracked in real time. Upgrading and automation of processes is planned to continue until 2025 with the aim of achieving 100% e-service provision by 2025. According to the Digital Decade programme, by 2030 all EU countries should have achieved 100% provision of key e-services for citizens and businesses. Bulgaria has the ambition to reach the EU level targets.

🞢 Created conditions for sustainable results

Over the last two years, there has been an increase in the expectations and requirements of citizens and businesses for sustainable and reliable e-government and secure data and information exchange in an electronic environment, In this regard, the state of the public administration's IT, as well as ensuring the optimal functioning of key systems and IT infrastructure to withstand critical workloads, is more important than ever. The results achieved under the OPGG will be built upon with the construction of data spaces and the penetration of new technologies and artificial intelligence with e-government with the support of the "Research, Innovation and Digitisation for Smart Transformation" 2021-2027 programme.

On the other hand, the best indicator for successful implementation of the project "Upgrading of horizontal and central systems of e-government in relation to the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of electronic administrative services" and its results is the high evaluation by the users and the actions taken by the judiciary for the integration of the SSES and the e-justice system.

Over the last two years, there has been an increase in the expectations and requirements of citizens and businesses for sustainable and reliable e-government and secure data and information exchange in an electronic environment, In this regard, the state of the public administration's IT, as well as ensuring the optimal functioning of key systems and IT infrastructure to withstand critical workloads, is more important than ever. The results achieved under the OPGG will be built upon with the construction of data spaces and the penetration of new technologies and artificial intelligence with e-government with the support of the "Research, Innovation and Digitisation for Smart Transformation" 2021-2027 programme.

On the other hand, the best indicator for the successful implementation of the project "Upgrading of the horizontal and central systems of e-government in relation to the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of electronic administrative services" and its results is the high evaluation by users and the actions taken by the judiciary for the integration of the two systems.

The draft law on amendments and supplements to the Administrative Procedure Code sets out texts for improving the legal framework to achieve faster, effective and accessible proceedings and administration of justice in administrative cases. The amendment is in line with the measure "Enactment of legislative amendments to the Code of Administrative Procedure regulating the legal framework for e-justice in administrative cases (Q4/2024)", Reform 1 "Accessible, effective and predictable justice" in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The texts provide for the use of an e-Government Portal as part of the administrative process and for communication with the parties to proceedings. Parties to civil and criminal proceedings are also expected to join the e-Dispatch System by the end of 2024.

PA Case Study 2: Implementing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in administrations

Quality management policy in the public administration is set as one of the main priorities for development of public administration. It is focused towards the implementation of quality management systems for the continuous improvement of the activities of administrations. The Law on Public Administration regulates the requirement for comprehensive quality management for the effective and efficient achievement of the strategic and annual objectives of administrations, including through quality management systems. With the Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020 and the Roadmap for its implementation, quality management in administrations has been prioritised for implementation through Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which is a European model for improving the performance of the administration.

The Institute for Public Administration began its work with the European quality model in 2014, when a specialized training on the CAF model was organized for Bulgarian civil servants by trainers at the European Institute of Public Administration. The training is conducted within the framework of an IPA project funded by the Operational Programme "Administrative Capacity".

The Bulgarian trained team formed the core of the IPA national unit on CAF and took part in the development of a new training programme of the Institute on the CAF model as well as the mechanism for its implementation in Bulgaria.

In 2015, with an amendment to the IPA's Rules of Procedure, a National CAF Resource Centre was established, which included a team of full-time IPA staff and associate members - trained CAF lecturers who supported the implementation of CAF in the administration.

The functions of the National CAF Resource Centre are to:

➢ coordinate and assist administrations in the implementation of the CAF model;
➢ organise and participate in the certification of the self-assessment of administrations carried out with the CAF model;

- conduct training and consultancy on the promotion, introduction and implementation of the CAF model;
- organise forums, conferences and discussions on the introduction and implementation of the CAF model;
- research and promote good practices in the implementation and application of the CAF model;
- supports and participates in the work of the European network of national CAF correspondents and CAF users in the public sector;
- cooperates with the European CAF Resource Centre at the European Institute of Public Administration and with national CAF Resource Centers and correspondents in different countries;
- conduct research and publish information on the introduction and implementation of the CAF model.

Under the Operational Programme "Good Governance" 2 projects for the implementation of the quality management system - CAF were financed. These two projects are the subject of this case study.

1. **Project BG05SFOP001-2.002-0001 Introduction of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in administrations**

General information				
Priority axis/Specific objective	**Set of initial indicators**	**Indicators achieved at the end of implementation**	**Have the set indicators been met**	**Has qualitative change/ reform been achieved?**
Priority Axis 2 "Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business" (PA 2) **Specific objective No. 1 "Increase the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms"**	**Number of new/updated training modules for administration supported - Number -2** **Administrative staff trained - 1068** **Administrative staff who have successfully completed the training with a certificate - 1002** **Number of supported administrations implementing**	**Number of new/updated training modules for administration supported - Number -2** **Administrative staff trained - 1105** **Administrative staff who have successfully completed the training and received a certificate - 1105** **Number of supported administrations**	**100%** **103,46%** **110,28%**	**The project has contributed to a better understanding of CAF as a philosophy and a working tool for good governance, implementing improvements in organizations and stimulating the use of achievements and good practices of other structures.** **The CAF model has been successfully implemented in 48 administrations that apply organisational development and results-based**

organisational development and results-based management mechanisms - 48 Administrations supported for the introduction of quality management systems - 48	implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms - 48 Administrations supported for the introduction of quality management systems - 48	**100%** **100%**	management mechanisms. The accumulated experience of the experts and consultants of IPA and the National CAF Resource Centre is a prerequisite for the sustainability of the project, as its results have been developed and built upon in the next OPGG project.

The project was implemented between September 2016 and December 2018.

Within the framework of the project, the Institute has implemented a set of interrelated and complementary activities on the implementation of the tool for total quality management in public administration in Bulgaria and has conducted a large-scale campaign for its promotion among Bulgarian institutions and organizations. The administrations in which CAF has been implemented have been pre-selected by the IPA and the project proposal presents information that during the selection process a total of 85 administrations applied for CAF implementation and 48 were selected. No information is available about the criteria based on which the administrations were selected. The number of applications formally received illustrates the great interest and desire of the administration in Bulgaria to improve the efficiency of their work through the implementation of quality management systems and organisational development and results-based management mechanisms.

The following five activities have been implemented under the project:

Activity 1 Conduct general CAF training and update the training programme for general CAF training in order to develop knowledge of the model and the benefits of its application in the administration

➤ During the implementation of this activity, the training program of the existing general training on the model "Quality Management and CAF Implementation" was updated, the training materials were updated. The activity was implemented by experts of the CAF Resource Centre, with a focus on the practical approach by including new case studies, exercises and examples from practice on the application of the model. 10 three-day training sessions were held in Sofia for a total of 300 staff from the 48 target administrations as well as participants from other administrations. The trainings were conducted by IPA lecturers.

The CAF General Training developed under Activity 1, with an updated training programme, becomes part of the IPA Catalogue. Once the project is completed, the funds needed to finance the training are allocated from the state budget to the administrative structures according to the approved plan. This ensures financial sustainability of the overall CAF training.

Activity 2 Capacity Development of the CAF Resource Centre at IPA

As a result of this activity, an interactive CAF Implementation Guide (https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/caf/caf-e-tool/caf-e-tool) has been developed to support the overall implementation process in the target administrations and to create conditions for sustainability and multiplication of the results after the end of the project. It is available online for all stakeholders and has been actively used to support the implementation of the model in other administrations, which is also in line with the implementation of the horizontal policies.

The project activities are aimed at targeted capacity development of the CAF Resource Centre at the Institute of Public Administration as a leading institution for:

- Supporting the process of improving the quality and efficiency of management in the Bulgarian public administration through the application of the CAF model;
- Providing information and familiarising the Bulgarian administration structures with the model;
- promoting the model and contributing to the awareness of Bulgarian civil servants and their managers about the usefulness and feasibility of its implementation;
- training on the subject.

Activity 3 Implementation of the CAF model in 48 administrations

Under the activity, the CAF model had been implemented in 48 administrations in phases (three waves). In the initial phase, a dedicated team of consultants was prepared for each administration to implement the roll-out, supported by the Resource Centre and the project team. A complete set of support materials for the implementation process had been developed. Implementation training had been provided to the identified self-assessment teams, the self-assessment reports and improvement action plans have been prepared.

Administrations that have implemented CAF under project BG05SFOP001-2.002-0001:

Central administrations of the executive power (ministries, agencies and others): Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Defense; Ministry of Finance; National Social Security Institute; Bulgarian Institute of Metrology; State Agency for Child Protection; Executive Agency "Railway Administration"; Executive Agency for Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises; Executive Agency for Vine and Wine; National Centre for Information and Documentation;

District administrations: District administration of Sofia; District administration of Blagoevgrad; District administration of Vidin; District administration of Lovech; District administration of Pazardzhik; District

administration of Pernik; District administration of Plovdiv; District administration of Razgrad; District administration of Ruse; District administration of Stara Zagora; District administration of Targovishte;

***Municipal administrations*:** Ardino Municipality; Bansko Municipality; Blagoevgrad Municipality; Burgas Municipality; Veliko Tarnovo Municipality; Vidin Municipality; Dobrich Municipality; Ivanovo Municipality; Miziya Municipality; Pernik Municipality; Provadia Municipality; Razgrad Municipality; Rodopi Municipality; Sevlievo Municipality; Slivnitsa Municipality; Tvarditsa Municipality; Troyan Municipality; Targovishte Municipality; Harmanli Municipality; Chelopech Municipality;

Territorial units of the central administrations of the executive power: Regional Directorate of Agriculture - Blagoevgrad; Regional Directorate of Agriculture - Varna; Regional Directorate of Education - Shumen; Regional Directorate of Education - Plovdiv; Regional Directorate of Education - Sofia-city; Regional Directorate of Education - Varna; Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate.

Activity 4 Capacity building for external evaluation of CAF implementation and for the award of the "Effective CAF User" certificate

A specialised training "Masterclass" was held at EIPA, Maastricht to build capacity for external evaluation (feedback) on the implementation of CAF in the administration. National rules have been developed for the external evaluation of CAF implementing organisations and for the award of the "Effective CAF User" certificate. The national rules for external evaluation provide clear guidance on how an organisation should be evaluated on its application of the CAF model. Three questionnaires have been developed with criteria on the three pillars on which the procedure is built (pillar 1 - self-assessment process; pillar 2 - process of identification of improvement measures and pillar 3 - level of maturity of total quality management principles in the organisation). An external evaluation (feedback) of 16 administrations was carried out within the project. The main aspects, themes and questions addressed by the external evaluation are how the CAF implementation process has been carried out in the administration concerned in its entirety; how the self-assessment has been carried out; what the communication has been during the overall CAF implementation process; how the Self-Assessment Report has been structured and what the process of its preparation has been; how the improvement measures of the administration have been prioritised; how the Improvement or Action Plan has been prepared. The most common recommendations in the CAF Feedback Reports are the following: increase stakeholder involvement in performance improvement; improve communication inside and outside the organisation; define areas of improvement to address an operational or strategic objective in the organisation; identify those responsible for implementing the measures in the Action Plan; identify sufficient time to implement the measures; and increase management commitment. Three conferences were held to share experiences and discuss results.

Activity 5 Promotion of CAF

Under this activity various activities have been implemented to promote CAF. A Communication Strategy for the promotion of the model has been developed, which contains a set of objectives, tactics to achieve them and guidelines for communication. A communication campaign to promote the model was carried

out. A video on the implementation of CAF in Bulgaria; the books CAF 2013 and CAF in Education; the European CAF Resource Centre study on the implementation of CAF from 2016; the Compendium of Good Practices were distributed. The CAF Resource Centre section on the IPA website has been improved. 4 e-newsletters on CAF have been issued, which present brief information on the process of CAF implementation in the different administrations in the country and inform on the results of the ongoing Communication Campaign.

Within the framework of this activity, a Study with an analysis and summary of the results achieved by the project, as well as a study of the perspectives for public institutions and organizations in Bulgaria for the implementation of the European quality model was developed and promoted.

A final conference was organized and held to promote the CAF model in the administration. During the Conference, "Effective CAF User" certificates were awarded to the administration(s) that met the criteria for this distinction and implemented CAF during the period 2017-2018.: Bulgarian Institute of Metrology; National Social Security Institute; Blagoevgrad Regional Administration; Lovech Regional Administration; Pazardzhik Regional Administration; Pernik Regional Administration; Plovdiv Regional Administration; Blagoevgrad Regional Directorate of Agriculture; Blagoevgrad Municipality; Burgas Municipality; Veliko Tarnovo Municipality; Plovdiv Regional Directorate of Education; Sofia Regional Directorate of Education; Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate.

Activity 6 Information and communication activities

Within the framework of this activity, the mandatory information and communication activities according to the Single Beneficiary's Guide for the implementation of the Information and Communication Rules 2014-2020 have been implemented.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The CAF model has been successfully implemented in 48 administrations that apply organisational development and results-based management mechanisms.

Key results achieved:

- ➢ Total CAF training for 300 employees
- ➢ Specialised training for 749 employees of the administrations that have implemented the model
- ➢ 40 consultants trained to implement CAF
- ➢ 16 experts have been trained to carry out external evaluation of administrations that have implemented CAF
- ➢ An Interactive Online Guide on the implementation of the CAF model has been developed and is available on the IPA website (https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/caf/caf-e-tool/caf-e-tool).
- ➢ Compendium of good practices developed

> ➢ A study has been developed on the prospects for the implementation of CAF in Bulgaria
> ➢ A large-scale Communication Campaign was conducted to promote the model among Bulgarian institutions, organizations and the general public.
> ➢ National rules and procedures for external evaluation of organizations applying CAF have been developed
> ➢ 16 administrations have received feedback, 14 of which have been certified as "Effective CAF User"

With the implementation of the project activities, the Institute of Public Administration and the National CAF Resource Centre have achieved much more than 100% implementation of the set indicators. The contribution of the project, resulting in 48 administrations applying the mechanism, can be seen as a major step towards introducing the culture of "excellence" and the principles of Total Quality Management in the public sector in Bulgaria. The effective implementation of the CAF model should lead in time to a further development of the quality management culture in the public administration in Bulgaria.

The main conclusions and lessons learned regarding the results achieved from the implementation of CAF in the project target administrations are as follows:

o The CAF enables a change of mindset at administration level and demonstrates the benefits of using self-assessment as a tool to improve its overall performance;
o CAF is a good basis for strategic planning in the organization;
o CAF emphasises the critical importance of committed management participation in the organisation's teamwork to achieve its overall goals. Successful implementation of the model is a function of the tone at the top and the motivation and will to change of the entire organization;
o Organisations need to be as critical as possible of their work in order to improve;
o All parts of the organisation and all key stakeholders must be involved in the introduction and implementation of CAF so that it does not become "just another project", a transitory and short-lived exercise for management or a small team of employees;
o CAF encourages and improves dialogue within the organisation. The model illuminates the coordination and communication deficits in the organization, which are an essential component in the process. Thanks to all the formal and informal meetings during the introduction and implementation of CAF, the internal interaction in the administration, including between management and employees, is improved, leading to a harmonised working environment;
o In carrying out their functions, administrations must take into account the perspective of stakeholders. In this regard, it is good to seek more frequent feedback from staff on their views on their performance in the administration and to periodically consult external stakeholders on their level of satisfaction with the administration.

As a result of the analysis and survey of the perspectives and attitudes of public institutions and organizations in Bulgaria until 2020 on the implementation of the European quality model CAF, carried out within the framework of the research under activity 5, a significant increase in its recognition in the

administration has been reported after the implementation of the IPA project. Administrations point out the following main benefits and advantages of implementing the model:

- o Improving the quality of services offered by the administration (83.33%);
- o Increasing people's and customers' satisfaction with the administration (76.67%);
- o Improving internal communication between administrative staff (65%);
- o Opportunity to involve all employees in the development and improvement of the organization (65%);
- o Improving the picture of the relationship between inputs and outputs of the administration (56.67%);
- o Improve knowledge of the organization's strengths (43.33%);
- o Ability to update the administration's strategic documents (43.33%);
- o Improving partnerships (36.67%).

During an inspection in January 2024 of the websites of the administrations that implemented CAF in the period 2017-2018 and received the label "Effective CAF User", it was found that after the introduction of the model, only two of the 14 administrations have prepared a second self-assessment report (Lovech Regional Administration and Burgas Municipality), and only Lovech Regional Administration has also approved an Improvement Plan. For the remaining 12 administrations, no public information is available on the actions carried out related to the implementation of CAF since its introduction. As indicated in the above statement, communication is one of the key success factors not only in the self-assessment but also in the follow-up of improvement actions. Publication of information on the administration's website (and on social networks, if applicable) is not mandatory, but is considered good practice. For the 14 administrations surveyed, such information was available at the time of the award of the "Effective CAF User' label - mostly published in the "News" sections. According to the Guide to the process of implementing the CAF model in the Bulgarian administration, each organisation decides independently whether it will make the self-assessment report available to all, but it is considered good practice to inform all staff about the results, i.e. the main conclusions of the self-assessment, the areas where the most action is needed and the improvements planned. The third phase "Improvement Plan" of the CAF process includes as the last step 10 planning the next self-evaluation. The CAF model is based on the cycle of continuous improvement - the so-called Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. It focuses on the continuous improvement process in an organisation based on the following approach: careful planning should lead to effective actions, which need to be checked/analysed whether they are being carried out correctly and possibly adapted/changed. The cycle is then re-applied - in a continuous process - to continue improving the organisation. In this respect, the use of the PDCA cycle for the management of the Action Plan foresees a new assessment with CAF, but this is not mandatory, only recommended. In the study carried out under activity 5 of project BG05SFOP001-2.002-0001, it is proposed that the next self-assessment should be carried out within two years as a suggestion to reduce the difficulties of CAF implementation under step 10. This proposal is also related to the validity period of the "Effective CAF User" certificate, which is 2 years. The lack of information on the actions taken by the majority of administrations that implemented CAF in the period 2017-2018 and received the label "Effective CAF User" leads to the assumption that

they do not continue to communicate the CAF model in the way they did at the time of implementation of the model, or that the administrations will not implement the CAF model again.

In this regard, we believe that the implementation of all or part of the proposals of the Resource Centre for ensuring the sustainability of the CAF model, published on the IPA website, containing proposals for regulatory and other (non-regulatory) changes, will contribute to greater sustainability in the implementation of the CAF model in the organizations that have implemented it. These proposals are formulated in a concrete and clear manner and include legislative changes to the Law on Administration, the Law on Local Self-Government and Local Administration, the Ordinance of CoM No. 192/2009 on the establishment of the CAF, the IPA's Rules of Procedure, the Clasificator for Administrative Positions, the Regulation for the Implementation of the Classifier for administrative positions, and the Regulation on the Salaries of Public Administration Employees, as well as other proposals including the introduction of a position or functions for quality management, through a job description or an order, the possibility of additional remuneration, the development of rules for the certification of the Effective User by the ACoM approved by the CAF, the establishment of a separate unit on quality management with administrations with over 100 staff.

2. **Project BG05SFOP001-2.014-0001 "Capacity Development for the Implementation and Application of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in Administrations"**

This project is a continuation of the project "Implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in administrations", implemented in 2016-2018 by the Institute of Public Administration. Within the framework of the research conducted under the first project, the degree of readiness of individual structures in different spheres for the implementation of the total quality management system was identified in accordance with a developed Methodology, which includes four criteria for the selection of target administrations:

1. Representativeness of administrations at all levels:
   - Municipalities
   - Regional administrations
   - Central administrations
   - Territorial administrations.

2. Territorial representation of the 28 districts in the country, each of which shall include at least 2 administrations.

3. Involve executive agencies, administrations reporting to the National Assembly and other larger administrations in the study to disseminate the model.

4. Sub-criteria such as availability of trained IPA staff, territorial representation in the regions and/or population size were also taken into account in the selection of municipalities.

To determine the level of readiness, an online survey was sent to 75 organisations and to the majority of participants in the CAF training organised by IPA under the first project. In the framework of the survey, 70 completed questionnaires were received. 44 administrations (59%) responded categorically that they

were willing to implement the European quality model. On this basis, according to the information contained in the administrative contract, a committee with representatives of the IPA and the MoJ has identified 32 target administrations in which to introduce the European CAF model under the second project. In the course of the project, the IPA has made further enquiries among municipal and other administrations about the implementation of the CAF model and 14 administrations have expressed their willingness and have been included in the training process for the implementation of the model. The implementation of the Common Assessment Framework under the second project is planned to take place in 4 waves, with wave 1 covering 11 administrations, wave 2 covering 10 administrations, wave 3 covering 11 administrations and wave 4 covering 14 administrations, each preceded by a common training.

General information				
Priority axis/Specific objective	Initial Indicators Set	Indicators achieved at the end of implementation	Have the set indicators been met	Has qualitative change/ reform been achieved?
Priority Axis 2 "Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business" (PA 2) Specific objective No. 1 "Increase the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms"	Number of new/updated training modules supported for the administration - Number -6 Administrative staff trained - number 1432 Administrative staff who have successfully completed the training and received a certificate - number 1432 Number of supported administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms - 46 Administrations supported for the introduction of quality management systems - number 46	Number of new/updated training modules supported for the administration - Number -6 Administrative staff trained - 1435 Administrative staff who have successfully completed the training and received a certificate - number 1435 Number of supported administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms - 46 Administrations supported for the introduction of quality management systems - number 46	100% 100,21% 100,21% 100% 100%	The CAF model has been successfully implemented in 46 administrations that apply organisational development and results-based management mechanisms The accumulated experience of the experts and consultants of the IPA and the National CAF Resource Centre is essential for the qualitative performance of its functions in conducting trainings and consultations for the promotion, introduction and implementation of the CAF model in the public administration. Increased awareness of the benefits of the European model as well as implementation of the National External Feedback Rules

The project was implemented between July 2019 and February 2023.

The following activities were implemented within the project:

Activity 1 Updating the training programme and conducting general CAF training

In the framework of this activity, the training program of the general training on the model "Quality Management and CAF Implementation" and the training materials were updated on the basis of the experience gained from the implementation of the model in the 48 administrations of the first project, the studied Bulgarian and international best practices and new research.

Trainings were held for 88 senior civil servants and managers to promote and better understand the CAF model. 410 civil servants (employees of the administration of the executive power, of other state institutions, bodies and persons created by a legal act, who want to get more information about the model or have expressed their wish to implement it) were also trained.

The consultants already trained under the previous project with proven knowledge and expertise are engaged for the sustainability of the project, as well as to multiply their knowledge and capacity among stakeholders.

The trainings conducted for senior government officials and managers address the recommendation ".... that in subsequent IPA projects, targeted upstream communication activities be conducted specifically at the highest levels of the country's administrative structures. It would be appropriate to organize preliminary information meetings for the heads of administrations in order to familiarize them with the idea and the essence of the model", highlighted in the IPA's 2018 study on the prospects for the implementation of CAF in Bulgaria (under activity 5 of the first project).

Activity 2 Strengthening the capacity of the CAF Resource Centre

The strengthening of the capacity of the CAF Resource Centre is the result of the implementation of a complex of activities, such as updating the package of materials for training consultants on the implementation of the model based on the practice and experience of the previous project, familiarization with the developed interactive manual, development of the consultant network by training new CAF consultants and upgrading the knowledge of the already trained, sharing good Bulgarian and international practices.

Action 3 Implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in 46 administrations

Under the activity, the CAF model has been implemented in 46 administrations in phases (four waves). In the process of implementation, the self-assessment teams were trained, the self-assessment reports and improvement plans were prepared. Two conferences were held to exchange experiences on the process of introducing the model in administrations.

Administrations that have implemented CAF under project BG05SFOP001-2.014-0001:

Central administrations of the executive power (ministries, agencies and others): the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Tourism; the State Agency "Archives"; the State Agency for Refugees; the Ministry of Regional Development, Directorate for National Construction Control; the Bulgarian Agency for Food Safety; the Agency for Social Assistance; the EA "Certification Audit of the European Agricultural Funds".

District administrations: District administration of Kyustendil; District administration of Pleven; District administration of Gabrovo; District administration of Sofia region; District administration of Veliko Tarnovo; District administration of Yambol; District administration of Sliven; District administration of Silistra.

Municipal administrations: municipality Kazanlak; municipality Rila; municipality Stara Zagora; municipality Svilengrad; municipality Stolichnaya; municipality Botevgrad; municipality Ivaylovgrad; municipality Kaspichan; municipality Kovatchevtsi; municipality Kostenets; municipality Lovech; municipality Nikolaevo; municipality Ruzhintsi; municipality Sliven; municipality Chavdar; municipality Shabla; municipality Kostinbrod.

Territorial units of the central administrations of the executive power. Regional Inspectorate of Agriculture, Burgas; RZI Yambol; RUO Dobrich and RUO Haskovo.

Activity 4 Implementation of the National External Feedback Rules and award of the label "Effective CAF User"

Within the framework of this activity, a specialized training for external evaluation (feedback) on the implementation of CAF in the administration was conducted in order to prepare experts for external evaluation of the organizations applying the model in terms of its effects on the organization.

The External Feedback procedure has been applied to 51 administrations that have implemented CAF in the two projects. The recommendations for improvement in the reports are similar to those described in the External Evaluation Reports of the first project: increase stakeholder involvement in performance improvement; improve communication inside and outside the organisation; define areas of improvement to address an operational or strategic objective in the organisation; identify those responsible for implementing the measures in the Action Plan; identify sufficient time for implementation of the measures; increase management commitment to the implementation of the measures; and improve the effectiveness of the CAF.

The development of the institutional capacity of the CAF Resource Centre with the training of an additional 11 external evaluation experts has led to a positive impact of the activity on the target groups, 47 of whom have been labelled as "Effective CAF User".

Activity 5 Promotion of CAF

In the framework of activity 5, a set of activities for the promotion of the CAF model was implemented (a conference for the promotion of the model and 3 annual meetings of CAF users were held; 4 information bulletins were issued; a book "CAF 2020" was distributed; a collection of good practices was developed and distributed; a video was produced), which is an important aspect of its implementation and a key factor for achieving real results.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS ACHIEVED

The CAF model has been successfully implemented in 46 administrations that apply organisational development and results-based management mechanisms.

Key results achieved:

- ➢ A total of 132 staff were trained in CAF, including 88 senior civil servants and managers
- ➢ Specialised training for 855 employees of the administrations that have implemented the model
- ➢ The training programme and the training package for new CAF implementation consultants have been updated
- ➢ 11 experts have been trained to carry out external evaluation of administrations that have implemented CAF;
- ➢ Report on the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the "Common Assessment Framework CAF" developed
- ➢ Compendium of good practices developed
- ➢ A large-scale Communication Campaign was conducted to promote the model among Bulgarian institutions, organizations and the general public.
- ➢ Two annual CAF user meetings held
- ➢ 47 administrations have received the "Effective CAF User" certificate

The project contributes to raising awareness on the benefits of the European model as well as the implementation of the National External Feedback Rules.
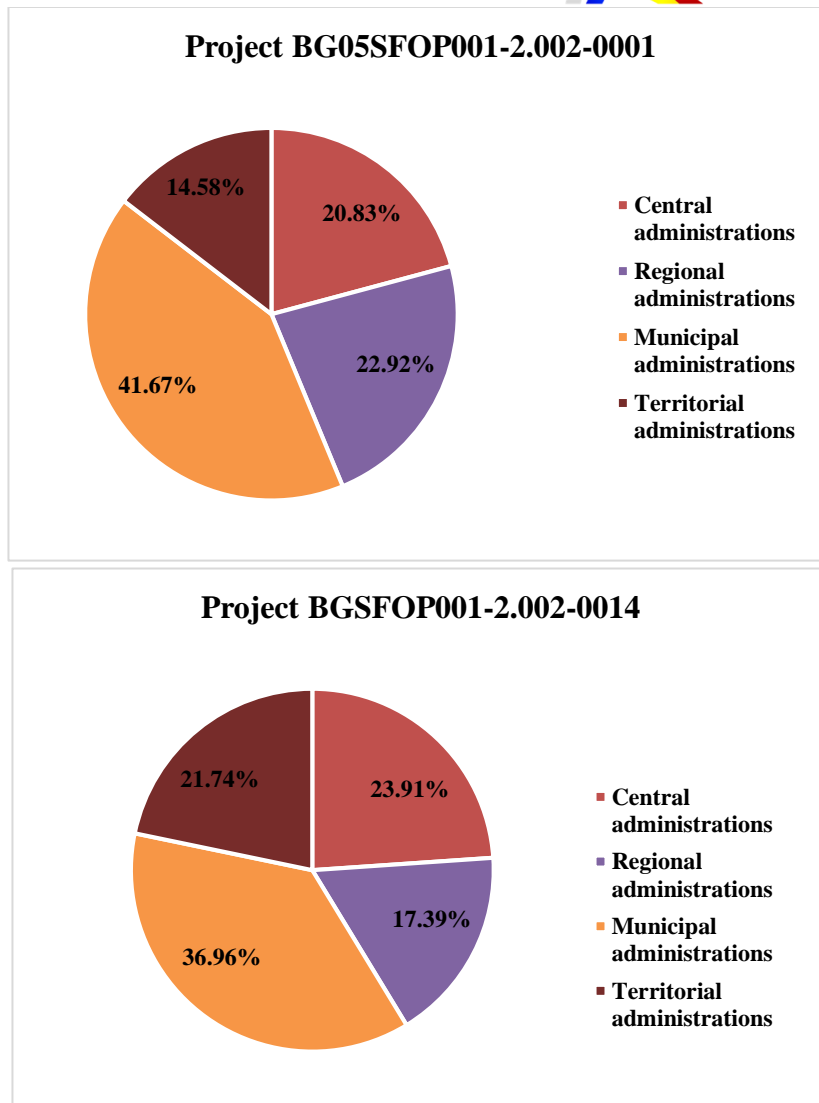
Capacity development of the CAF Resource Centre at IPA is also essential for the quality performance of its functions.

The IPA representative interviewed for this evaluation says that the success of the second project and the involvement of 46 administrations in it is entirely due to the popularity of the first project.

As a result of the implementation of the two OPGG-funded projects, the model has been successfully introduced in **94 administrations** that are implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms. The distribution of CAF-adopting administrations by type is as follows
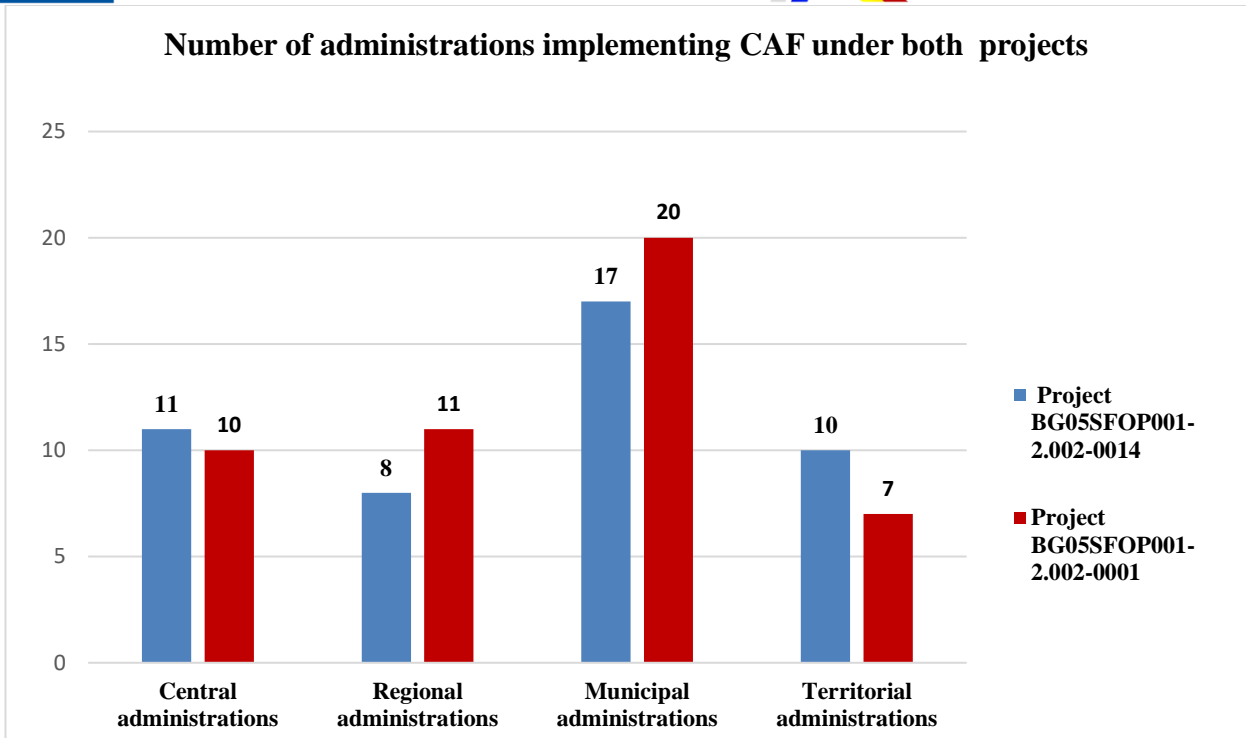
Number of administrations implementing CAF under both projects

Municipal administrations have shown the most interest in implementing CAF in both projects. During the in-depth interview, the IPA representative shared that at the regional and local level, the implementation of CAF was easier as there was better recognition and understanding of the CAF model by the organizations, while at the national level, it was necessary to convince the management of the organizations of the benefits of the model.

Project BG05SFOP001-2.002-0001

- Central administrations
- Regional administrations
- Municipal administrations
- Territorial administrations

14.58%
20.83%
22.92%
41.67%

Project BGSFOP001-2.002-0014

- Central administrations
- Regional administrations
- Municipal administrations
- Territorial administrations

21.74%
23.91%
17.39%
36.96%

The report on the results of the Study on the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the quality model "Common Assessment Framework CAF" among the administrations that have implemented it in the period 2017 - 2020[162] , prepared by IPA experts, shows in an indisputable way the effectiveness and benefits of the implementation of the CAF model in the Bulgarian administration. The use of the CAF model provides public organisations with:

➢ Ability to diagnose/self-assess the organisation based on a set of criteria that are widely accepted in the public sector across Europe;

➢ Ability to trace the cause-effect relationship between enabling factors/causes (what the organization does) and outcomes/consequences (what the organization achieves in its activities);

➢ A means of determining and measuring the progress and achievements of the organization;

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[162] https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/publicationscaf#cbp=/bg/prouchvane-na-efektivnostta-efikasnostta-i-ustoychivostta-na-modela-za-kachestvo-obshcha-ramka-za

➢ Ability to ensure consistency and continuity in the development of the organization and the necessary changes in its improvement process;

➢ A means to motivate employees by involving them in the improvement process;

➢ Opportunity to promote and share good practice both between different structures within an organisation and between different organisations;

➢ A means of improving the quality of management in the organization by implementing necessary improvement measures.

The evaluation team conducted a review of the websites of the administrations that implemented CAF in the framework of the second project and received the label "Effective CAF User", and found that for the most part the organizations maintain and publish information related to the implemented CAF model for quality management. This is most true for administrations that have implemented CAF in the 2021-2022 period. For some of the administrations that implemented CAF at the beginning of the project implementation, there is no information on CAF-related activities after implementation and obtaining the label "Effective CAF User".

It should be pointed out that the period of implementation of the model (from preparation through self-assessment and preparation of the Improvement Plan) is within 3, maximum 4 months. This is followed by the implementation period (1 to 2 years according to Bulgarian practice). Administrations are not obliged to apply the model again afterwards, but the published Guide to the process of applying the CAF model in the Bulgarian administration states that it is highly recommended to apply CAF again and again (good practice is 2-3 years after the previous implementation) in order to ensure continuity in the process of development of the organisation and its continuous improvement. The "Effective CAF User" label itself has a validity period of 2 years, which should further motivate administrations to re-apply the model and be awarded the label again.

According to the 2022 State of the Administration Report, IISDA data show that 187 (31.97%) out of 585 administrations use quality management systems. Of these: 82 are municipal and district administrations, 17 regional administrations, 42 specialised territorial administrations and 46 central administrations. As of 31.12.2022, the most frequently used quality management systems are ISO - 201 and CAF - 79[163] . As of 31.12.2022, 79 administrations reported that they use CAF, which means that some of the administrations that implemented the model under IPA projects no longer apply it.

In this regard, to ensure the sustainability of the CAF model, the IPA has identified measures as an important tool for improving the organization and functions of organizations. The proposed measures contain clear and concrete proposals for regulatory and other (non-regulatory) changes that were described in the review of the first draft - legislative changes to the Law on Administration, the Law on Local Self-Government and Local Administration, the Ordinance of CoM No. 192/2009 on the establishment of the CAF, the IPA's Rules of Procedure, the Clasificator for Administrative Positions, the Regulation for the Implementation of the Classifier for administrative positions, and the Regulation on the Salaries of Public Administration Employees and other proposals including the introduction of a position or functions for

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[163] Some of the administrations also apply CAF and are ISO 9001 certified

quality management, through a job description or order, the possibility of additional remuneration, intangible incentives. There is no information on the IPA website under CAF Section if these measures have been implemented. On checking the public consultation portal www.strategy.bg, there is also no information on initiating legislative amendments related to the CAF model. No information was provided in this respect during the interview with the IPA representative.

Beyond the sustainability proposals described above, which also require political will, the beneficiary has provided all the necessary preconditions to ensure the sustainability of the implemented projects. According to the IPA information gathered during the qualitative research, the institute continues to work by providing know-how and advice to the administration free of charge. The IPA has consultants with practical experience and knowledge of the new features of CAF 2020 and its relationship with other management tools. The Institute is able to support the implementation of the model in new administrations interested in doing so. During the in-depth interview with an IPA representative, the IPA representative said that there are new administrations that are interested in incorporating and implementing the CAF model beyond the already implemented projects.

On the IPA website there is a CAF section where all the documents necessary for the implementation of the model (manuals, rules, compendiums, information materials, analyses and studies) are published. In the IPA Catalogue for 2024, the course UM-6 Practical application of the CAF quality management model in administration is offered, as well as the E-learning module UM-15 Common Assessment Framework (CAF). In the IPA's 2023 Target Achievement Report, under Measure 4 "Support for Administrations in the Implementation of CAF", the IPA reported that 212 administration staff were trained in 2023, one forum was held with over 100 participants and a Guide to the Process of Implementing the CAF Model in Bulgarian Administrations was developed and published. In the IPA's Annual Objectives for 2024, within the framework of Objective 3 "Support for administrations in managing quality in their activities in order to increase the efficiency of the public administration", it is planned to use state budget funds to conduct trainings to develop the capacity of the administration for the introduction and continued use of quality management approaches and systems, including CAF, as well as to develop the network of quality management experts through a forum and publications on IPA's social networks.

PA Case Study 3: Creation of a Model for Optimization of the Judicial Map of Bulgarian Courts and Prosecutor's Offices and Development of a Unified Court Information System

The subject of the study is project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0001 "Creation of a model for optimization of the judicial map of Bulgarian courts and prosecutor's offices and development of a Single Information System of Courts" with beneficiary the Supreme Judicial Council. The project was implemented in the period June 2016 - July 2023. The activities implemented and key results achieved are as follows:

Activity "Development of a model for optimization of the judicial map of Bulgarian courts and prosecutor's offices":

- ✓ A detailed review and analysis of the judicial map reforms implemented in the last 10 years in EU Member States in the context of their applicability to the Bulgarian judiciary;
- ✓ A report with concrete proposals and recommendations for the use and adaptation of good European practices in Bulgaria;
- ✓ 6 analyses were prepared on the current state of the individual court structures and their efficiency and effectiveness - for the regional, district, appellate courts and prosecution offices;
- ✓ Selected 10 pilot district courts and 10 district prosecutor's offices - at least two district courts and district prosecutor's offices from each of the appellate districts and prepared 5 detailed reports on the functioning of the reorganized and/or merged structures on the possibilities for their reorganization and/or merger through the application of the developed analytical tools;
- ✓ Drafted proposals for the optimization of the court map, including proposals and justification for specific reorganized and/or merged local structures and held 10 public hearings per appellate district with participants from district, circuit and appellate courts, respectively prosecutor's offices, representatives of regional and local authorities, notary chambers, registry judges, private/state bailiffs, bar associations, representatives of civil society, etc.;
- ✓ SJC-approved model for court map optimization at the level of district courts and prosecutor's offices and SJC-approved Roadmap for reorganization of court structures at the district and appellate levels;
- ✓ Drafted a package of proposals to amend and supplement the current legislation to introduce a streamlined court map, including motivations and an impact assessment;
- ✓ Measures developed to balance the workload of magistrates through an adopted model for the optimization of the judicial map at the level of district courts and prosecution offices;
- ✓ Measures developed to optimize the costs of administrative management of judicial structures through an adopted model for optimization of the judicial map at the level of district courts and prosecutor's offices.

Activity "Development of proposals for the description, analysis and optimization and re-engineering of work processes related to the handling of cases by the courts in a unified process model":

- ✓ 3 reports were prepared, containing: a detailed description of the SISC functionality at the procedural level; an analysis of the procedures and workflows related to case management at the level of district, circuit, appellate and Supreme Court of Cassation and the links between them; specific solutions and recommendations for integration between SISC and other systems of the judiciary or state administration;
- ✓ 1 set of maps prepared on the streamlined processes related to electronic case management and electronic case access, as well as the simultaneous handling of electronic and paper cases.

Activity "Development and implementation of a Single Information System of Courts":

- ✓ Developed a Single Information System of Courts with associated functionality for inter-agency exchange of information, including by hierarchical levels in the judiciary, with existing systems of the judiciary, as well as between systems of the judiciary and the state administration;

- ✓ Tested SISC in a working environment through a pilot deployment;
- ✓ SISC implemented in all courts;
- ✓ Training for users (training of trainers type) - magistrates, judicial officers and IT experts - 397 participants;
- ✓ SISC field trainings conducted - 1797 magistrates, judicial officers and IT experts;
- ✓ Measures have been taken for the recognition of SISC as a single centralised information system for the courts under the Judiciary Act and its use by all courts.

Activity "Analysis of the regulatory framework, existing technological processes, means of collecting and summarizing statistical information":

- ✓ 5 analyses were prepared: on the normative base and the degree of semantic compatibility of the used classifiers and their harmonization with the EC requirements; on the technological processes and the preparation of time standards and means for control and optimization; on the state and the need for optimization of the means for collecting and processing statistical information and the possibilities for preparing statistical reports in real time; on the means for collecting information and the methods for measuring the workload of magistrates and employees; on the main prerequisites and limitations to implement a specialized information system, including tools for analysis and monitoring of factors related to the socio-economic development of judicial districts and the workload of courts and prosecutors' offices (SISMA), to achieve technological and semantic compatibility by expanding the scope and maximum application of domestic and international classifiers.

Activity "Establishment of a specialized information system including tools for analysis and monitoring of factors related to the socio-economic development of the judicial districts and the workload of the courts and prosecution offices":

- ✓ Prepared analysis of the information to be integrated, used and visualized in a specific way and according to various predefined parameters;
- ✓ Developed and implemented a specialized information system including tools for analysis and monitoring of factors related to the socio-economic development of the judicial districts and the workload of the courts and prosecution offices;
- ✓ Training of 30 system operators (magistrates, court officials, system administrators) on SISMA.

Hardware Supply Activity:

- ✓ Purchased hardware equipment for SISC implementation and operation;
- ✓ Hardware equipment purchased for the implementation and operation of SISMA

Priority axis/Specific objective	Initial Indicators Set	Indicators achieved at the end of implementation	Have the set indicators been met	Has qualitative change/ reform been achieved?

Priority Axis 3 "Transparent and Effective Judiciary" Specific objective No. 1 "Increase of transparency and acceleration of judicial proceedings through structural, procedural and organisational reforms in the judiciary" Specific objective No 2 "Improve the accessibility and the accountability of the judiciary through the introduction of e-justice"	R3-1 "Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary" - 3 R3-3 "Magistrates, court staff and employees of the investigating authorities under CPC who successfully completed training with a certificate" - 380 O3-8 "Trained magistrates, court officials, officials of the investigating authorities under the Criminal Procedure Code" - 3030 O3-1 "Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported" - 21 O3-7 "SISC designed" - 1	R3-1 "Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary" - 3 R3-3 "Magistrates, court staff and employees of the investigating authorities under CPC who successfully completed training with a certificate" - 397 (364 trained to work with SISC and 33 trained to work with SISMA) O3-8 "Trained magistrates, court officials, officials of the investigating authorities under the Criminal Procedure Code" - 1 797 O3-1 "Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported" - 21 O3-7 "SISC designed" - 1	R3-1 - 100% R3-3 - 104% O3-8 - 59.30% O3-1 - 100% O3-7 - 100%	The investments made have contributed to judicial reform by creating a model for the reorganisation of the court map of district courts and prosecution offices and providing a roadmap for the rationalisation more generally of courts and prosecution offices at all levels to improve quality and efficiency overall, including reallocation of resources where appropriate. The implemented investments also contribute to the fulfilment of the set objectives related to the evaluation of the efficiency of the individual structures of the judiciary and the reform of the judicial map, set out in the Updated Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary, achieving technological and semantic compatibility by expanding the scope and maximum application of domestic and international classifiers in accordance with the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020.

Through the implementation of the project:

➢ **Reform:**

Reforms related to the optimization of internal organizational processes - helping to achieve the goals of increasing the transparency and efficiency of the administration of justice. This is achieved through the implemented activities for the reform of the structure, procedures and organization of the

judiciary through the optimization of internal organizational processes, the implemented analyses and studies, as a result of which tools for the modernization of the judiciary have been introduced, namely:

- ✓ Model of optimization of the judicial map of district courts and prosecutor's offices;
- ✓ Roadmap for reorganization of judicial structures at the district and appellate levels.

With the development of a model for the optimization of the court map, the following results are built upon:

- The best practices and applied methodologies in other EU Member States, which have reformed the judicial map in recent years, have been studied, and an expert assessment has been made on the overall effect of potential measures that could be taken - independently or in the context of other reforms, as well as on the applicability of these practices in the Bulgarian judicial system, taking into account the national specificities of procedural legal relations. The analysis is complemented by on-site visits to two MS for which the research has shown the greatest similarity of legal systems and the existence of implemented effective solutions;
- Based on the identified good practices in other EU Member States and the primary analyses of the SJC, criteria for and preparation of detailed studies on the current state of the district, circuit and administrative courts, and their efficiency and effectiveness, together with the influencing socio-economic and administrative-territorial factors, have been defined, including the preparation of such detailed studies. Through the detailed analyses and on-site visits, opportunities for reorganisation and/or merging of selected specific judicial districts or groups of judicial districts are assessed;
- Recommendations for reorganization of the map of district courts and prosecutor's offices have been drawn up, with detailed reasons for each reorganization model. The results achieved are illustrated in concrete proposals for amending and supplementing the current legislation, with reasoning and impact assessment included, in order to make the proposed changes sustainable.

All reports and analyses produced will serve as a matrix and model against which future proposals for changes in the structure of the judicial districts will be made to improve overall quality and efficiency, including reallocation of resources where appropriate. Through the established model for the reorganisation of the judicial map of district courts and prosecution offices and a roadmap for the reorganisation of courts and prosecution offices at all levels, the OPGG interventions contribute to the stated objectives of reforming key elements of the judicial system to improve quality and efficiency overall, including reallocation of resources where appropriate. The implemented investments also contribute to the objectives set for the assessment of the efficiency of individual judicial structures and the reform of the judicial map, as set out in the Updated Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform of the judiciary.

Efficient administration of the judiciary is part of optimizing the processes of the judiciary by achieving technological and semantic compatibility and by expanding the scope and maximum application of domestic and international classifiers in accordance with the Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020 and the Roadmap for its implementation, the European e-Justice, as well as the commitments of the sector to EU initiatives. Analyses have been prepared and an overview has been made of the main prerequisites and constraints for the implementation of a specialized

information system including tools for analysis and monitoring of factors related to the socio-economic development of judicial districts and the workload of courts and prosecution offices (SISMA). The analyses lay the foundations for the analytical activities and workflow planning of SISMA in order to produce statistical reports and monitor the development of the judicial map in real time. As a result, SISMA has been built to enable automated collection and processing of statistical data from the judiciary, including SISC, prosecution and investigation systems, the National Statistical Institute and other bodies. This system enables the competent authorities to take informed decisions on the reorganisation of the judicial map of Bulgaria and to analyse the current state of the judicial structures. The OPGG investments implemented contribute to improving the efficient management of the individual judicial structures - when overlaying this information against organisational statistics at the level of the judicial structure, and the efficient management of the judicial map is guaranteed by overlaying administrative and expert management information against the socio-demographic structure of the population, economic activity, technological infrastructure, administrative and other public services offered by the public and private sectors, etc. SISMA enables access to essential elements of judicial statistics without breaching existing rules for accessing, completing and correcting data, and thus ensures greater transparency in judicial management. With a view to the overall functioning of the system, the necessary integration and exchange of data with external information systems approved by the Supreme Judicial Council and relevant to the criteria examined for the development of the quality of justice is ensured. When information is received from the JIS/SISC, it is processed in real time. In the case of integration with other information systems of the judicial system, the processing of information is carried out with regard to the time intervals at which the data can be received - in real time or at a specific time/interval. Access by judicial authorities is ensured and the SJC has adopted appropriate access rules for this purpose. Internal organisation has been established in the SJC administration by assigning tasks to a specific unit of the administration.

➢ **Introduction of *e-government* and *e-justice*:**

Reform related to improving the accessibility and accountability of the judiciary through the introduction of e-justice - Fundamental to achieving the set objectives of improving the accessibility and accountability of the judiciary through the introduction of e-justice is the development and implementation of the Single Information System of Courts (SISC). The aim is on the one hand to unify work processes in the judiciary, but also to introduce standardised/unified rules in case management, which should lead to time savings, faster justice delivery, transparency, publicity and access to justice.

SISC has been piloted in 17 courts during the period from 23.06.2020 to 02.07.2020 and has been tested in a working environment in 2 appellate, 5 district and 10 regional courts. Based on the difficulties identified, changes and optimizations have been made in terms of expanding the set of filters in the list screens for user convenience and nomenclature values - qualities of persons, output of different persons in the entry log and other books; additional functionalities for viewing data and tracking the movement of cases in which there is a refusal to institute; arrangement of judges in acts in the absence of redefined compositions; functionality for generating a Collateral Order by template and additional reports.

The main problems identified with SISC relate to difficulties in moving to electronic signing of court documents; obstructions in entering data into the system that were not previously available with the clerical systems; and omission of process steps. At the same time, questions and ideas for optimising the system to make it more user-friendly have arisen in the process. Suggestions that emerge are discussed at various working meetings with the contractor, and the various functionalities that have been identified as gaps or that impede daily processes are added to the system.

The final timetable for the implementation of SISC in all courts of the Republic of Bulgaria (except for the pilot courts, the administrative courts and the Supreme Administrative Court) was from 06.08.2020, simultaneously in 21 courts of the five appellate districts, and was to last until 14.09.2020. In this regard, the Plenum of the SJC directs the administrative heads of the courts that have been currently working with SISC, as well as the courts in which the system will be implemented, to create the necessary organization in the court on the basis of Article 9 of the Rules of Procedure for the use of electronic signature and electronic identification by the judiciary for the implementation of the rules of Article 8 of the same Rules, as well as ensuring the implementation of the provisions of Articles 360g and 360h of the Judicial Power Act. Instructions have been given to make the necessary arrangements for the participation of the relevant magistrates, judicial officers and IT experts in the SISC training.

The initial steps of implementing SISC in the courts, caused tensions in the judiciary. The SJC has received numerous letters from courts demanding that it either stop the implementation of SISC or that it be "fixed" as a matter of urgency. The main arguments are that it is too complicated - elementary steps require dozens of clicks, and in addition, a qualified electronic signature must be used for every procedural action. Those working with the system have determined that the identified shortcomings call into question the validity of court acts and procedural actions performed by the parties, given the risk to the authenticity and content of actions and judgments performed electronically. The lack of connectivity between SISC and SEJP jeopardizes the rights of the parties due to the uncertainty of service of notices and expiry of deadlines and as a final result destroys the credibility of electronic communication with the courts. Added to this is the decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of Cassation on 28 July 2021 to propose to the head of court to issue an order to discontinue the use of SISC in the SCC and accordingly resume the old Automated Case Management System (ACMS). The order states that SISC shall be suspended from August 11, 2021, until the obstacles to its full use are removed and a decision is taken by the Plenum of the SCC to resume its operation. The newly filed cases will be filed through the ACMS, where the cases and files filed in SISC will be transferred.

As a result of all the difficulties and doubts identified by those working with the system, the SJC Plenum decided to have SISC inspected by independent experts, outside SJC and outside "Information Services". The verification is in terms of whether SISC complies with the technical specification, whether it meets the generally accepted notions of speed, convenience, ease of access to functionalities, security, duplication and preservation of information, etc. Following the publication of a public procurement notice, a contractor was selected to perform an independent audit of the Single Information System of Courts. The information assets used to support SISC and their information security, the compliance of the system with the SJC technical specification and the generally accepted quality requirements of an information system

were checked. The final report was submitted on 11.04.2022. In a closed session of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council, representatives of the contractor presented in detail the activities performed and the results of the audit, as well as an explanation of how the three types of SISC tests were conducted to verify security, system performance and available configurations, using different methods. A message posted on the SJC website states that after the tests it was found that all attempts to compromise, manipulate and anonymously log into the system were unsuccessful. It is clarified that every login as well as every attempt to access the system is logged and recorded. The Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council resolved that the recommendations made as a result of the audit will be forwarded to "Information Services" for implementation at SISC within 30 days of receipt of notification.

In the meantime, numerous meetings have also been held between the beneficiary and the MA, addressing any issues identified, and ongoing correspondence has been maintained with the MA of OPGG. In 2022, 8 SISC recommendations issued by the MA of OPGG following the 2021 on-site inspection have been implemented and the beneficiary regularly informs the MA of the measures taken. The evaluation identified the following factors that had an impact on the implementation of activities and investments:

- ✓ Among the negative factors identified are poor coordination between the SJC, the courts, and the Ministry of Justice, which should work in an eco-system to achieve certain goals;
- ✓ Poor planning on the part of the beneficiary is also identified as a shortcoming - there are no technical specifications prepared in advance for the important procurement contracts where systems are planned to be built, which leads to delays and projects being implemented over a much longer period than previously planned ;
- ✓ The lack of prior functional analyses carried out together with stakeholders leads to planning activities that should be corrected later, as deficiencies are identified that could have been avoided by carrying out a deeper functional analysis.

At the end of September 2022. The Supreme Court of Cassation resume work with the system after joint efforts of the teams of the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Supreme Judicial Council and Information Services AD to optimize the system's functionalities in accordance with the specifics of the work of the SCC. As of 1 June 2021, and for the SCC - as of September 2022, 151[164] courts in Bulgaria are working with the system (after the closure in 2022 of the Specialised Criminal Court of Appeal and the Specialised Criminal Court, with the exception of the Administrative and Supreme Administrative Courts). SISC covers all case management processes in district, circuit, appellate, military courts, the Court of Military Appeals and the SCC, and before 28.07.2022 also the specialized courts. After their closure, the work on the pending cases initiated in these courts shall continue in SISC with the transfer of activities to the successor courts without suspending the administration of justice. Connectivity between SISC and Single e-Justice Portal (SEJP) has been established in response to the identified shortcomings regarding the rights of the parties due to the uncertainty of service of notices and expiry of deadlines and as a final result erosion of trust in electronic communication with the courts.

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[164] 113 district courts (including the Sofia District Court), 28 district courts (including the Sofia City Court), 6 courts of appeal (including the Military Court of Appeal), 3 military courts and the Supreme Court of Cassation.

SISC lays the foundations for reform in terms of unifying work processes in the judiciary and introducing standardised rules in case management, which should lead to time savings, faster justice delivery, transparency, publicity and access to justice.

A total of over 1 million electronic court cases have been filed in the Single Information System of Courts (SISC). About 69% of the cases are civil, 28% are criminal, 3% are commercial and the rest are corporate. The number of closed cases is nearly 910 thousand, which is 89% of the total number of cases filed in SISC. Nearly 790 thousand cases were closed within 3 months. High Judicial Council data shows that these indicators are higher than those recorded in all courts in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017 - 2021. The ratio of appealed and protested cases to the number of completed cases is only 7%[165].

As of the end of October 2023, SISC had 1,339,975 cases filed and under management and 4,486,200 e-judgments[166]. SISC is actively used by more than 10,000 users, including nearly 2,000 judges, more than 4,600 court clerks, 3,100 jurors, and more than 600 summons officers.[167]. The work of summons officers is also supported by the mobile application for service of documents, part of the SISC functionalities. Access to the Single Court Information System itself is only ex officio. Electronic services for citizens and lawyers are implemented by connecting the system to Single e-Justice Portal (SEJP) and upgrading it with the relevant options. In September 2022, SISC is expanding the scope of documents that are published for citizens and lawyers in SEJP. Currently the full set of documents in each case is available and all cases filed in SISC have their electronic folder in the portal. This enables all parties, citizens and lawyers to have access to their cases without the need to physically visit the respective courthouse. From in-depth interviews conducted with stakeholders who are active users of SEJP, respondents highlighted as positive aspects that where courts have uploaded the information, processes are faster and more efficient compared to the previous state of the portal. New SEJP functionality has been developed to enable active access to cases by filing proceedings electronically, which has enabled lawyers and litigants to successfully file over 2,400 electronic documents in 125 courts.[168]. The progress has been significant in terms of ensuring that the system does not remain passive (as a dashboard), thereby also meeting the main intent of its design - to enable citizens to file complaints or claims electronically.

In 2022, SISC is also integrated with the National Legal Aid Bureau's Unified Electronic Legal Aid System, also developed under the OPGG, which allows for quick and easy assignment of staff attorneys to cases. In the same year, with OPGG funding, a Unified Jury Registry was also established, which ensures transparency and traceability of the jury selection process and their involvement in trials.

Access to services for citizens and businesses as a result of the implementation of specific activities

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[165] according to data officially announced by Information Service in March 2023 - https://www.is-bg.net/bg/news/315

[166] according to the data submitted by the OPGG MA Third Monitoring Committee Meeting of the Technical Assistance Programme of 14.11.2023 - presentation "OPGG Implementation and Closure" https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/14176 and according to the technical reports to the project BG05SFOP001-3.001-0001;

[167] according to officially announced data from Information Service https://www.is-bg.net/bg/news/315

[168] according to officially announced data from Information Service https://www.is-bg.net/bg/news/321

The unification of work processes in the judiciary, but also the introduction of standardised rules in case management, leads to time savings, faster justice, transparency and publicity. The investments made in terms of electronic communications between courts and litigants and the e-Justice tools introduced contribute to saving time and costs for citizens and businesses and facilitate access to justice.

Conditions created for more transparent and efficient service

The developed system has the effect of improving the processes of interaction within the judiciary, as well as in the relations between the system and citizens and businesses, by facilitating access to information and contributing to the reduction of opportunities for undue influence, which in turn in the long term will lead to more efficient and transparent service.

Are the conditions in place for sustainable results

The sustainability of the results achieved depends on securing funding for future improvements in systems, on political will and on the policies to be pursued in the field in the future.

Conclusions and recommendations

To date, SISC has been mandated as the primary system for conducting cases and performing procedural actions, by the decisions of the SJC Plenary and by legislation through the SJA. Upgrading is an ongoing process, and naturally legislative changes of any nature will lead to the construction of new modules in SISC. With funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, two new modules covering mediation and warrant cases will be upgraded. In terms of the new programming period, neither investment in systems nor funding for specific activities is foreseen. However, the sustainability of the results achieved depends on the provision of funding to ensure the further improvement of the system and to carry out the necessary activities when deficiencies in performance are identified. The SJC should carry out a thorough financial analysis and plan the necessary resources for maintenance and future development of the system. The planning of future activities should be carried out together with the stakeholders (system users and the Ministry of Justice).

Good practices - a description of their potential and possible ways to implement them in the future.

To build and maintain this type of system, it is good practice to conduct functional analyses. These should be carried out not only in the pre-construction planning phase, but also on a regular basis to identify, in a timely manner, performance deficiencies that impact on the effectiveness and utility of the built systems. This type of analysis, preliminary and regular, should be done together with the stakeholders, which will avoid planning activities that should be corrected later. This type of planning is effective in a way to save the expenditure of resources to maintain identified deficiencies at a later stage, which could have been avoided.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. Conclusions

PA 1 investments in administrative service development and administrative reform made a significant contribution to regulatory reform, simplification, revision and consolidation of existing legislation. The implemented projects contribute to better alignment of policies and legislation, avoiding unnecessary regulations or burdensome administrative procedures.

With the support of OPGG under the project "Transformation of the Administrative Service Model", the Concept for Registry Reform[169] has been developed, which is based on the information from the inventory of registers in the administration and the analysis and assessment of their status. Within the framework of the project, normative changes have been made which have led to a reduced administrative and regulatory burden for citizens and businesses, as follows:

- Introduced ex officio collection of information (includes compliance with the one-time data collection and creation requirement, as well as the provision of administrative services as internal administrative services);
- deleted from the administrative register services as continue to be carried out as an activity;
- extended access channels and the possibility to combine these channels when requesting and receiving services.

As a result of the OPGG investments, under the project BG05SFOP001-1.004-0001 "Upgrading of horizontal and central e-government systems in relation to the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, payment and provision of administrative services", implemented by the MeG, a long-term solution for the provision of internal administrative services is being created by upgrading and integrating the existing information systems in a way that allows automated retrieval of evidence and circumstances from the registers. As a result of the project implementation, a standard, rules and procedures related to the implementation of the Unified Model for requesting, paying for and providing electronic administrative services have been developed, a prototype e-forms management system integrated with the e-service and e-payment systems has been developed and implemented, an interface for payment request and notification has been built, the eAuthentication system (eAvt) has been upgraded, the eService system has been upgraded, the ePayment system has been integrated with the CPOS terminal. Also, the system for inter-register exchange (RegiX) has been upgraded, 52 registers have been supported by building new and upgrading existing adapters, 80 administrations have been supported for the introduction of CAS. 1 085 administrative regimes were supported and simplified, 61 legal acts were subject to impact assessment, 85 administrations were supported to introduce integrated administrative services, 17 municipal services were supported for standardisation, 7 control, revenue and regulatory authorities were supported to develop organisational and analytical capacity, 751 e-services were supported for their transactional delivery, 115 registers were supported.

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[169] Concept for Registry Reform, Annex 2 to the Updated Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria (2019 - 2025)

As a result of OPGG's support, an e-tendering system is operational as an overall improvement in the procurement processes, the Centralized Automated Information System for Electronic Procurement (CAIS EPP) has been established and 3 procurement related administrative services have been developed. The system is used by multiple target groups (contracting authorities, contractors, administration and business). This leads to various effects: increased confidence from all actors, including an increase in the likelihood of bidding companies to offer innovative products and services, as there is more certainty that bids will not be rejected for bureaucratic reasons; the publication of easily accessible, understandable and timely information on all stages of the procurement process increases transparency. This in turn improves competition, increases efficiency and reduces the threat of unfairness or corruption. Minimising the risk of fraud, corruption and mismanagement of public funds leads to a "level playing field" for all bidders, thereby promoting competition. The automation of a number of steps in the system prevents the deliberate imposition of requirements, mostly purely bureaucratic, which were possible before the CAIS EPP. Opportunities for error, abuse and manipulation in the application process are greatly reduced.

The greatest return is from investments that cover a large number of users and, consequently, generate a large number of actions on which savings are reported. These are investments in systems such as those of the NRA and horizontal e-services systems. Returns on systems that are used by a small number of stakeholders (such as the Customs Agency, NCID, MoTC and PPA) are lower per unit of investment. However, it is incorrect to consider that services with a small number of users, and consequently a lower return (measured in monetary effect), are inefficient. These services are just as important for changing the environment and processes of work as services that have millions of users, respectively generate a large number of units of information exchange or services. The "cost" of investments is not only distinguished by the potential number of users, which cannot always be "monetised". There are a number of additional effects of the digitisation of services identified in the report.

The analysis of the implementation of the projects provides reasoning to believe that their results cannot be achieved at a lower cost. The arguments in support of this thesis are that all procurement rules have been respected in the implementation of the projects and, therefore, it can be assumed that optimum value for money has been achieved. There is no reason to believe that the same or better results could be achieved at a lower cost.

To the extent that the analysis compares the savings based on the implemented electronic systems and registries, we can conclude that they have achieved a good return, as for each of the analyzed systems/registries the returns/savings are many times higher than the financial resources invested in the implementation of the projects. This is complemented more broadly by increased transparency in service delivery and improved accessibility to services.

OPGG investments have made a significant contribution to improving the knowledge, skills and professional competence of a large number of civil servants - over 60,000 staff have been trained, some of whom have participated in more than one training. There has also been an upgrade in the capacity of the training organisations (IPA, NAMRB, Diplomatic Institute) to prepare and implement a variety of training modalities, digitisation of processes, and for some, logistical and analytical capacity.

As a result of OPGG's support, the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms has increased. The CAF model has been

introduced in 94 administrative structures; Shared Services Units have been piloted; a toolkit for more effective recruitment of civil servants has been developed; prerequisites have been created for a more effective approach to public consultation and the involvement of the civil sector in the process of developing, implementing and monitoring policies and legislation; the methodology for functional analysis has been updated and piloted for the review of five horizontal/sectoral policies.

Citizens (users of services) highlight as the most useful (and most effective) the administrative services of the NRA and the Local Taxes and Fees Departments of the municipalities, followed by the ESGRAON services, the Ministry of Interior - identity documents and some others with a much smaller relative share. For businesses, these are the administrative services of the NRA, followed by the RA. The services provided by NCID emerge as highly innovative. Users of e-administrative services point to the time saving in queues and counters as important advantages, followed by the elimination of the need to submit many paper documents, as well as the ease and speed of obtaining services electronically.

Unresolved problems for citizens, the solution of which would increase the efficiency of administrative services and would give impetus to the further development of e-government: more widespread use of computers by citizens, ensuring an accessible and stable connection to the Internet, lack of consistency between different institutions, the need to use different passwords and codes to access administrative services, insufficient dissemination of e-services, etc.

Business remains critical of some still existing shortcomings of e-government - the difficulty related to the lack of a universal identifier for all e-services; the lack of coordination between institutions; the need to increase the number of e-services offered; the lack of political will for the actual implementation of e-government.

In conclusion, there has been a major and radical change in the implementation of e-government thanks to the OPGG investments, with the most significant changes in priority axes 1 and 2 related to:

- Development of ICT infrastructure; introduction of integrated administrative services; standardization of municipal services; development of organizational and analytical capacity of control, revenue and regulatory bodies; introduction and upgrading of electronic information systems and registers; introduction of electronic services for their delivery in transactional mode; development of sectoral e-government systems (e-customs, e-archiving, e-procurement); creation and introduction of a functioning e-procurement system CAIS EOP.
- Introduction of quality management systems in the administration (CAF system in 94 administrations); implementation of organisational development and results-based management mechanisms in the administration; development of new/updated training modules for the administration; trained administration staff with increased knowledge and skills.

The changes are complex, wide-ranging and comprehensive given the number of beneficiaries, target groups and interventions.

The investments that have been implemented under PA 3 are aimed at expanding the application of information and communication technologies, creating and implementing electronic services for citizens and businesses, increasing transparency and speeding up the administration of justice through the implementation of the reforms envisaged in the strategic national documents, as well as expanding the

scope and improving the quality of training in the judiciary. The introduction of e-Justice, through the measures implemented under the OPGG, contributes to improving accountability, increasing efficiency within the system and facilitating access to justice by citizens and businesses. The most important achievement in this sector is the development and operationalization of SISC in 151 courts, together with the upgrade of SEJP. Work processes in the judiciary have been unified and the introduction of electronic case management has begun. Uniform case management rules have been introduced, which should lead to time savings, faster administration of justice, transparency, publicity and access to justice. The centralised automated information system "Judicial Status" is a significant change implemented. For the first time, a central database has been established for criminal records, bringing together 113 databases of district courts and the database of the Central Criminal Records Bureau at the Ministry of Justice, as well as a database of convicted Bulgarian citizens abroad, i.e. a fully centralised criminal record in Bulgaria has been established. An electronic criminal record certificate service has been implemented through which the possibility of applying for and obtaining a criminal record certificate from any regional court in the Republic of Bulgaria, without any restriction of their place of residence or place of birth, has been electronically implemented, thus reducing the administrative burden for them. Other portals and information systems such as the Single e-Justice Portal of the Executive in the Justice Sector, UIS-3 and UISCC, the Centralised Information System of Judicial Enforcement, the AIS of the MoJ and the sub-ordinate budget holders, JISMA, registers (of experts; of juries; of mediators (including a portal); of judges' recusals), the Unified Electronic System (EUS) for legal aid on a national scale, etc. have been developed and upgraded. The systems and e-services put in place will improve the processes of interaction within the judiciary and in relations with citizens and businesses, facilitate access to information and contribute to reducing the opportunities for undue influence, which in turn will lead in the long term to a more efficient and transparent allocation of resources. Investments in e-justice will contribute in the medium and long term to establishing open and flexible relations between the administration and citizens and businesses. This will lead to a continuous improvement of the services provided and an increase in their public value, respectively that of the end users.

Through the implementation of the projects, which include measures for the implementation of judicial reform, a basis is created for the judiciary to become an effective guarantor of the rule of law in the Republic of Bulgaria. The implemented interventions support activities contributing to the independence of the judiciary, balancing the workload of magistrates (including through the development and expansion of the application of alternative means of resolving legal disputes), implementing rules and procedures for the appointment, appraisal and career development of magistrates and judicial officers, introducing programme budgeting, etc. The operations also cover the implementation of a package of measures that contribute to putting criminal justice policy on a new conceptual footing. All the projects implemented under PA 3 have contributed to the implementation of a large part of the reform measures set out in the roadmaps and provide a basis for building on the processes aimed at reforming the judiciary.

Investments related to the creation of conditions for improving the professional development of magistrates and judicial officers and the sustainable improvement of the quality of training are an essential element of the reform of the judiciary. The projects in these procedures are implemented by the NIJ, which is the institution entrusted by the Judiciary Act with the training of judicial personnel. In this respect, the

NIJ is supported through OPGG funding to expand its activities towards building analytical and organisational capacity to ensure the necessary scope and quality of training for the judiciary. As a result of the activities implemented, a Learning Management Information System (LMIIS) has been developed and implemented, creating the conditions for its development and delivery in a paperless environment. Thanks to the OPGG investments, for the first time a unified electronic training environment is being created for organizers, trainees and trainers at all stages of the preparation, conduct and reporting of training activities. Building a culture of working in a digital environment is seen as a significant contribution of OPGG support. The system recorded 50,000 entries/requests over the period of use. The beneficiary identifies the development of e-learning resources that are continuously used after the completion of training through the NIJ e-learning portal as a key investment. Over 13,757 magistrates, judicial and investigative officers under the Criminal Procedure Code and other officials have successfully completed training in various areas, with 29,339 training participations. These trainings provide quality professional training to magistrates, judicial officers and others in the system to enhance their skills and improve the efficiency of justice . In addition to training on topics in different areas of law, foreign language training has also been provided, which should contribute to strengthening judicial cooperation within the European Union. Improving the foreign language skills of magistrates and judicial officers is a key instrument for the creation of an area of freedom, security and justice based on mutual recognition of judicial decisions and mutual trust in the EU.

In conclusion, it should be noted that after the implementation of the OPGG measures and the implementation of the set reforms in the judiciary, no new strategy has been prepared to continue and build on the results achieved so far. No funding is foreseen in the new programming period for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary. Long-term targeting is critical to develop and build on the information systems in place, to continue measures to develop a modern and effective criminal justice policy through the necessary institutional and regulatory reforms, and to continue investments related to creating the conditions for improving the professional development of magistrates and judicial officers. The dynamics of social and political life will pose new problems and challenges that can only be adequately addressed through long-term and clear target setting for the continued reform and development of the judiciary.

8.2.Recommendations

Investment should be made in the wider promotion of e-services, including through information campaigns on the possibilities of e-government tools and how citizens can use them.

Accessibility to e-services could be increased by introducing a single method of identification for the use of e-services provided by the administration, linked to identity documents - such an approach would ensure wider use of e-services, as all citizens would have a way to access them, rather than having to actively acquire one.

In terms of e-justice development, work should be done to improve coordination between the Ministry of Justice and the SJC, which should work in collaboration to achieve the set objectives. The pre-planning process for legislative initiatives and changes that accompany systems improvements should also be

improved. The system should not be allowed to enter a state of inertia, as this will delay the changes that have already taken place and prevent the full potential of e-justice from being realised.

Funding should be secured for the future improvement of the systems built thanks to the OPGG, if this is not secured there is a risk (especially in the justice sector) that they will not reach their full potential and will remain at the level they have reached so far, which will not lead to the modernisation of the justice system and will hinder the process of improving the accessibility and accountability of the justice system. The sustainability of the results achieved depends on this.

Investments related to the creation of conditions for the improvement of the professional development of magistrates and judicial officers should be continued, with a view to enhancing their qualifications and expertise through training, which is an essential element of the continuation of the reform of the judiciary.

There is a critical shortage of staff with IT expertise to take care of the implementation, maintenance and improvement of the infrastructure. A recruitment strategy should be put in place to enable the civil service to compete with the highly developed private IT sector as an employer.

The introduction of the principle of shared services in the organisation and operation of central administration should continue using the pilot models tested. In this way, the problem of the critical shortage of staff with IT expertise in the civil service can be addressed, while at the same time unburdening administrations with the necessary resources. In addition, shared services can reduce the complexity of some activities and save scarce and expensive resources (IT experts for example) - they can generate economies of scale for investments in technical and communication infrastructure.

Support to the capacity and systems of the NSI should be continued to ensure the collection and processing of data that are particularly useful in all public policy making.

Developing a reliable system for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of public administration reforms is an important step. Such a system will allow for the collection of data to improve the implementation of reforms and to make adjustments where important. This data is extremely important for analysing problems when strategic documents are being developed.

The completion of indicators is very often a challenge for the monitoring and evaluation of the public sector in Bulgaria. For future strategy documents or when updating existing ones, it is good to assess the reliability of indicators and to replace those that do not include sufficiently precise descriptions, measurement, responsibility as well as baseline values (where available), intermediate target and end target to facilitate monitoring and evaluation.

With regard to human resources management in the administration, reconsider the introduction of centralised selection competitions. In this way it will be possible to increase the objectivity and efficiency of selection.

There is a need to use more in-depth analyses of the training needs of administrative staff, periodically reviewing the skills and competencies required, using feedback from managers and citizens, and updating the competency model to new trends, new technologies and the needs of society. Existing training

opportunities should be expanded, a competency checking system developed and career development practices promoted to achieve a higher level of skills and capacity among civil servants.

Expanding and promoting the mobility of civil servants can be a concrete career development tool that allows for skills and capacity building. The Bulgarian Mobility Portal already includes two types of mobility: appointment to a post in an EU institution and temporary reassignment to another post in the same institution. As part of the civil service job portal, the mobility portal is regulated, where all permanent mobility positions must be advertised and, if desired, those for temporary mobility. However, the portal is not widely used. The mandatory mobility for senior civil servants is also not in place.

9. ANNEXES

Annex 1 - List of documents for documentary analysis and review

Annex 2 Evaluation matrix

Annex No. 3 Number of contracts and funds of the evaluated measures as of 20.07.2022 with breakdown by tasks and priority axes

Annex 4 Description of the model for calculating the efficiency

Annex 5 Detailed description of published, agreed and implemented procedures, compliance with the objectives of the main strategic documents and achieved