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ОПЕРАТИВНА ПРОГРАМА
ДОБРО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ

REPORT I

**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*

Project

GFK-2016

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3. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Audit Authority
ACoM	Administration of the Council of Ministers
AR	Annual Report (of OPGG)
AEUF	Audit of EU funds
CA	Certifying authority
CCP	Code of Criminal Procedure
CCU	Central Coordination Unit
DIP	District Information Point
DPEUFI (AFKOS)	Directorate for the Protection of the European Union's Financial Interests (AFKOS)
EA CAEAF	Executive Agency "Certification Audit of the European Agricultural Funds"
EA AFEU	Executive Agency Audit of the Funds from the European Union
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EFSM	European Funds for Shared Management
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EVALSED	European Commission guidelines for the assessment of socio-economic development
HPC	Hybrid private cloud
ISJC	Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council
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
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
MoEG	Ministry of eGovernment
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoF	Ministry of Finance



NA	National Assembly
NAMRB	National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
NGO	NGO
NSI	National Statistical Institute
OP	Operational Programme
OPGG	Operational Programme "Good Governance"
PA	Priority axis
PA	Partnership Agreement
PPA	Public Procurement Agency
PPA	Public Procurement Act
SA EG	State Agency "Electronic Government"
SJC	Supreme Judicial Council
SFIA	State Financial Inspection Agency
SEP	Socio-economic partners
TS	Technical specification
UMIS	Unified Management Information System



4. 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 public procurement contract, the Contracting Authority has defined the purpose of the contract, namely to carry out an independent analysis based on which to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments carried out under the OPGG in the period from 19 February 2015¹ to 31 July 2022, and the potential effects of the measures that are in the process of implementation, by:

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.

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

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.

The measures planned in the OPGG are grouped in five² 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 ESF;

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 1304/2013³. PO4 and PO5 are priority axes for technical assistance.

The specific objectives of each priority axis are:

PA1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing administrative and regulatory burdens for citizens and businesses and introducing the principles of "life episodes" and "business events"; Increasing the number of services available to citizens and businesses electronically.
PA2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of administrations implementing organisational development and results-based management mechanisms; Improving the specialised knowledge and skills of administrative staff and developing career development mechanisms; Increase citizen participation in policy making and monitoring.
PA3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Increase transparency and speed up the administration of justice through reform of the structure, procedures and organisation of the judiciary; Improving the accessibility and transparency of the judiciary by introducing e-justice;

² In OP Good Governance 2014-2020 - with the fourth amendment of 05.10.2022 a new priority axis 6 has been added, which is not subject to this analysis and assessment.

³ 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



	3. Expanding the scope and improving the quality of judicial training.
PA4	<ol style="list-style-type: none">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 ESIF in Bulgaria and improving the capacity of beneficiaries.
PA5	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Effective and efficient management of the OPGG;2. Increasing the capacity and awareness of OP beneficiaries.

This Report 1 has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Employer as set out in the Technical Specification, following the minimum content requirements. The report focuses on research tasks 2 and 3 as formulated in the Technical Specification.



5. RESEARCH TASKS AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

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 all the work according to the description of the scope of the Evaluation in section 3.1 and tasks 2 and 3 of the ToR.

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

Task 2: Analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments made under PA2 and PA3 to *increase civic participation and strengthen civic control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary*, including the formulation of concrete recommendations, measures and indicators to increase the involvement of civil society organizations (NGOs and socio-economic partners) in the process of preparation, implementation and evaluation of the Partnership Agreement 2021-2027 programmes.

The evaluation questions in the scope of Task 2 are:

- 2.1. What is the effectiveness of investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the administration and the judiciary?
- 2.2. What is the effectiveness of investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary, seen as a ratio between inputs and outputs?
- 2.3. Are the targets realistic? What is the difference between the expected and the actual results?
- 2.4. What is the contribution of the support from the OPGG to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary?
- 2.5. Have there been any changes since the investments under PA2 and PA3 in:
 - 2.5.1 Citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary?
 - 2.5.2 Citizen participation in the processes of formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation in the administration and in the judiciary, as well as in the promotion of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes?
 - 2.5.3 How does the administration address the suggestions of civil society organisations in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation?



2.5.4 The way in which the responsible institutions and bodies are implementing the reforms in the judiciary and the use of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes?

2.5.5 Which/what part of the changes are due to the support under the OPGG?

2.6. What is the impact on stakeholders/target groups?

2.7. What are the identified unintended effects (positive and negative) of the interventions?

For Task 2, the Contractor will also answer the following additional questions:

2.8. Do the results achieved guarantee sustainability in terms of increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary?

2.9. Have the recommendations and conclusions made by civil society representatives in the reports and analyses funded under the OPGG been taken into account by the administration and the judiciary?

Accordingly, research task 3 is formulated as follows:

Task 3: Analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of *the investments under PA4 and PA5*, including the formulation of specific recommendations, measures and indicators to improve the management and control system of the funds in Bulgaria for the programming period 2021-2027:

3.1. What is the effectiveness of the investments made? Have the planned results been achieved and to what extent have the investments contributed to achieving them?

3.2. What is the efficiency of the investment, considered as a ratio between inputs and outputs?

3.3. Are the targets realistic? What is the difference between the planned and the actual results?

3.4. What is the change before and after the PA investments? How much of the change is due to support from the OPGG?

3.5. What is the impact of the implementation of each of the two priorities of the programme? What mechanisms have contributed to achieving impact? What are the factors for lack of impact?

3.6. What is the impact on stakeholders and target groups?

3.7. What is the impact on the implementation of the horizontal principles?

For Task 3, the Contractor will also answer the following additional question:



3.8. Have the technical assistance funds contributed to strengthening the capacity of the specific beneficiaries concerned?

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.



6. 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 analysed and the number of projects implemented. This implies well-chosen methods and tools for information gathering and analysis, which cover the scope of the evaluation and at the same time involve the staff in these structures to a sufficiently low degree due to their heavy workload.

Relevant to the choice of evaluation methodology are the recommendations based on best practice⁴ 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 analysed;
- 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.

A description of the assessment methods follows.

Methods of information and data collection

The following data collection methods were used for the assessment:

⁴http://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



- 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 evaluations already carried out concerning the OPGG;
- Qualitative methods - focus groups, 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 the process, monitoring and evaluation was collected, analysed and indexed. European and national strategic and normative documents relevant to the investments made under the OPGG, European and national strategic and normative documents regulating the management of EU funds, EC guidelines and other documents for carrying out 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 examined. 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 groups* were 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 groups, a cross-check of the information that had been collected through other methods of analysis was also carried out at a later stage. The focus groups were 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 Tasks 2 and 3, interviews were conducted with representatives of the MA of the OPGG, key stakeholders, beneficiaries.

The quantitative methods that were used included a standardized survey. Within the scope of Tasks 2 and 3, a quantitative survey was conducted with beneficiaries of the specific procedures covered by Task 2 (PA 2 and 3) and a quantitative survey with beneficiaries of procedures covered by Task 3 (PA 4 and 5). A comprehensive survey was carried out - 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.

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

The following table provides a summary of the studies carried out in relation to the implementation of Tasks 2 and 3 included in this report.



Table 1 Summary data from the applied methodology in the framework of the evaluation of tasks 2 and 3

Quantitative and qualitative research conducted	
	Number
In-depth interviews - PA 2 and PA 3*	16
In-depth interviews - PA 4 and PA 5**	13
Conducted focus group***	1
Survey conducted in the framework of Task 2	
	Number
Total number of beneficiaries of PA 2 and PA 3 participating in the survey	238
Beneficiaries who have implemented projects under BG05SFOP001-2.009 and BG05SFOP001-2.025 and participated in the survey (PA 2)	207
Beneficiaries who have implemented projects under BG05SFOP001-3.003 and participated in the survey (PA 3)	31
Survey conducted in the framework of Task 3	
	Number
Beneficiaries PA 4 (total number of respondents)	24

**In-depth interviews were conducted with NGOs that have implemented projects under PA2 and PA3 (incl. their partners under PA2 from local and central government); interviews with stakeholders, incl. representatives of NGOs that have not implemented projects under OPGG; stakeholders working in different areas of the judiciary (incl. In-depth interview with representatives of the MA.*

***In-depth interviews with representatives of the NAMRB - 1 pc; in-depth interviews with representatives of the DIP - 10 pc; in-depth interviews with representatives of the Audit Authority for the ESIF - 1 pc; in-depth interview with representatives of the MA.*

****Focus group with CCU representatives.*

Methods for analysis of the collected data

The methods that were used for the analytical activities were 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;
- 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 analysing information to answer each evaluation question, and the potential respondents.



7. ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH TASK 2

Task 2: Analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the investments made under PA2 and PA3 *to increase civil participation and strengthen civil control over the activity of the administration and the judicial system*, including formulation of specific recommendations, measures and indicators to increase the engagement of civil society organizations (non-governmental organizations and socio-economic partners) in the process of preparation, implementation and evaluation of the programmes of the Partnership Agreement 2021-2027.

This task is aimed at assessing the achievements of the procedures under the two priority axes, which are aimed at increasing citizen participation and control over the activities of the administration (PA 2) and control over the reform of the judiciary (PA 3) by evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the investments and their contribution to increasing citizen participation.

The answers of the evaluation questions are listed below.

The analysis under research task 2 covers the investments made under priority axes 2 and 3 to increase citizen participation and strengthen the civil control over the activity of the administration and the judicial system.

The scope of the analysis includes the investments under **Specific Objective 3: Increase of citizen participation in policy-making and control of Priority Axis 2 “Effective and professional governance in partnership with the civil society and the business”**, as well as **Specific Objective 1. Increase of transparency and acceleration of judicial proceedings through structural, procedural and organisational reforms in the judiciary of Priority Axis 3 “Transparent and efficient judiciary”**.

Investments are implemented through the following procedures:

- BG05SFOP001-2.009 “Enhancing civil participation in processes of policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring”
- BG05SFOP001-2.025 “Increasing civic participation in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation”
- BG05SFOP001-3.003 “Citizen control over the judiciary reform”

Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 “Enhancing civil participation in processes of policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring” has a total budget of BGN 10 000 000 with a maximum amount of BGN 90 000 for a single project. Eligible applicants under the procedure are non-profit legal entities, designated to carry out activities for public benefit, nationally representative organizations of the employers and of the employees, recognized by the Council of Ministers, as well as NGO/ SEP networks/ coalitions/ platforms.

The procedure was launched in July 2018. Within the application period, 211 project proposals were submitted, 121 administrative contracts were concluded and 115 were implemented (5 terminated and 1 expired without implementation).



The objectives of the procedure, as set out in the Guidelines for Applicants are:

1. Partnership management with citizens and businesses;
2. Open and accountable governance;
3. Making recommendations to improve service delivery processes, better regulatory environment, fighting corruption, preventing conflict of interest and abuse of office, observance of ethical standards by civil servants.

The expected results of the support provided under this procedure are:

- ✓ Improving the interaction between the administration and the citizens and the business
- ✓ Increasing NGO and SEP activism in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation, including by making recommendations for improving service processes, better regulatory environment, fighting corruption, preventing conflict of interest and misuse of official status, observance of ethical norms by civil servants;
- ✓ improving the socio-economic environment as a result of more open and accountable governance.

The second procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 “Increasing civic participation in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation” was launched in October 2021 with a total budget of BGN 11 145 970 and a maximum grant amount for an individual project - BGN 60 000.

Eligible applicants, specified in the Guidelines for Applicants, are: non-profit legal entities established on the basis of the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act, designated to carry out activities for public benefit (NGO) and nationally representative organizations of the employers and of the employees, recognized by the Council of Ministers through the procedure of Art. 36, Par. 1 of the Labor Code and the Ordinance for determining the procedure for establishing the existence of the criteria for representativeness of the organizations of the workers and employees and of the employers, as well as their divisions according to Art. 36, Par. 8 of the Labor Code (SEP) as well as networks/ coalitions/ platforms of NGOs/SEPs with members meeting the above conditions⁵. Within the application period at the end of 2022, 238 project proposals have been submitted, 186 of which have been awarded grant contracts and 3 have been terminated.

The Guidelines for Applicants define the two objectives of this procedure:

1. Governance in partnership with citizens and business;
2. Open and responsible governance.

The expected results of the second procedure have been refined and are as follows:

⁵ NC under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009



- ✓ increasing interaction between the administration and citizens and businesses;
- ✓ Increasing NGO and SEP activity in implementing and monitoring policies and legislation;
- ✓ making recommendations to improve administrative services, to improve the regulatory environment, to improve the business environment, to fight corruption, to prevent conflicts of interest and abuse of office, and to ensure that public officials comply with ethical standards.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3.003 “Citizen control over the judiciary reform” has a total budget of BGN 5 000 000 with a maximum amount of BGN 100 000 per project. Three submission periods were defined: 28.04.2017 (for projects to be implemented in 2017 - 2019); 30.09.2018 (for projects to be implemented in 2019 - 2020); 30.09.2020 (for projects to be implemented in 2021 - 2022).

Eligible applicants under the procedure are non-profit legal entities designated to carry out activities for public benefit, registered in the Central Register of Non-Profit Legal Entities under Article 45 of the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act, in force until 31.12.2017 or registered in the Register under Article 17 of the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act, in force since 01.01.2018, which have at least one completed financial year as of the date of application and professional organizations registered under the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act or registered under/created by a special law, of persons working in the judiciary (judges, prosecutors, investigators, registry judges, jurors, court officials, expert witnesses, etc.), lawyers, notaries and other legal professionals, mediators and arbitrators, and other persons working in the justice sector who have at least one completed financial year at the date of application. During the three application periods, 148 project proposals were submitted, 56 administrative contracts were concluded, 53 were implemented and 3 were terminated.

The procedure is in support of SO 1 of PA3. The specific objectives set out in the Guidelines for Applicants are:

1. Implementation of civil control over the reform of the judicial system through the active involvement of NGOs and professional organizations in the development, monitoring and evaluation of strategies for reform;
2. Making proposals for improvements in the judiciary.
3. Promoting and developing alternative methods for resolving legal disputes.

The expected results of the support under the procedure are expressed in increased civil control over the reform of the judiciary and an increase in the number of NGOs actively involved in this process, recommendations for improving the judiciary and transfer of good practices, promotion and creation of the necessary conditions for the introduction in practice of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes. The overall result from the support is aimed at increasing the efficiency of the work of the institutions of the judiciary and increasing public confidence in the judiciary.



7.1. Effectiveness of investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the administration and the judiciary

Evaluation question 2.1. 2.1. What is the effectiveness of investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judicial system?

Based on the review of the data on the achievement of the indicators and the feedback of the respondents, it can be concluded that a high degree of effectiveness has been attained in achieving the specific objectives of PA2 and PA3 to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration and the reform of the judiciary, with the projects leading to the expected results. ***The indicators have been achieved to a high degree (with the exception of indicator CO20, which has not been achieved only under PA2), while there is still room for the projects under implementation under PA2 to reach the targets.*** This is also confirmed by the quantitative survey among beneficiaries, who express their views on the results and effects achieved to a high degree.

Effectiveness is considered as the degree of achievement of the objectives set at programme level (achievement of the set outcome and result indicators). A variety of methods are used. In order to assess effectiveness, physical performance is measured - analysis of results achieved as measured by indicators. The analysis of indicators is the main quantitative method by which the documentary information collected on the assessment of physical progress under the OPGG has been analysed. In order to further validate the results obtained from this method, the opinions collected through the qualitative methods (in-depth interviews and focus groups) were also taken into account.

The effectiveness criterion is at the heart of performance evaluation and reflects the essential question facing policy makers: to what extent has an intervention contributed to achieving the desired change. In terms of the logic model, the focus is on the expected causal dynamics between outcomes and direct and indirect effects. In applying this method, primary and secondary information gathered in documentary analysis and other research methods is analysed to provide the answers and evaluate effectiveness.

The specific research task is aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the investments under Specific Objective 3: Increase of citizen participation in policy-making and control of Priority Axis 2 “Effective and professional governance in partnership with the civil society and the business”, as well as Specific Objective 1. Increase of transparency and acceleration of judicial proceedings through structural, procedural and organisational reforms in the judiciary of Priority Axis 3 “Transparent and efficient judiciary”

For the purpose of the performance evaluation, an analysis of the indicators was carried out on the basis of documentary data from technical reports, data from the beneficiaries' files in the UMIS, minutes of the meetings of the Monitoring Committee, data from the annual reports on the implementation of the programme and reports from the UMIS 2020 and the Guidelines for Applicants of the evaluated procedures.



The analysis of effectiveness is carried out by priority axis, for each of which the procedures financed under the OPGG are analysed, as described in the introduction to evaluation task 2.

Priority axis 2

Based on the review of the data on the achievement of the indicators and the feedback from the respondents, it can be concluded that a high degree of effectiveness has been attained in the achievement of Specific Objective 2.3. under PA2 to increase citizen participation in the process of policy formulation and monitoring. *The indicators have been achieved to a high degree (with the exception of indicator CO20) and there is still room to reach the target values for the projects under implementation under PA2. The Managing Authority has made continuous efforts through systematic monitoring and risk assessment to maximise the achievement of this indicator.*

In the justification of Specific Objective 3 of PA 2 in the programme document⁶ it is described that the OPGG will promote a working partnership between the state, civil society organizations and businesses. The rationale for the results that Bulgaria seeks to achieve through the support of the programme states that full-fledged citizen participation is identified as an important element of the functioning of an effective institutional environment in Bulgaria for making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies. Again in this rationale, weaknesses are highlighted in relation to the civil sector based on the Civil Society Assessment Report⁷ among which it is mentioned, “the non-governmental sector in Bulgaria, does not exercise sufficient influence in policy development and implementation, and there is a lack of effective mechanisms to influence this process. It is also noted that the dialogue between civil society and the state is of a volatile nature.”

The programme points out that citizen monitoring of the activities and policies implemented by the administration should have a strong anti-corruption effect and encourage ethical and responsible employee behaviour. It is also expected that initiatives and projects will be funded with practical solutions in the fight against corruption, prevention of conflict of interest and abuse of office. The need to improve the administrative capacity for the management of complaints, prevention of cases and administrative arbitration is underlined.

In the initial version of the programme⁸ it is described that “more specifically the activities of NGOs and social and economic partners for civil monitoring and control over the actions of the administration, assessment by users of administrative services, development of analyses and proposals for amending laws, structures and policies at national and local levels, etc. will be implemented through a global grant of EUR 10 million. The organisation playing the role of an Intermediate Body for this global grant will be a nongovernmental organisation selected

⁶ https://www.eufunds.bg/sites/default/files/uploads/opgg/docs/2022-10/1.%20Programme_2014BG05SFOP001_5_0_bg%20%281%29.pdf

⁷ Civil Society Index 2008-2010: civil society in Bulgaria: civic engagement without participation, http://www.osf.bg/downloads/File/Civil_Society_in_Bulgaria_BG.pdf

⁸ item 7.2.2 of the Operational Programme "Good Governance"



through competition based on its capabilities and track record in managing NGO projects with donor funding. The Intermediate Body provides evidence of its solvency and competences in the relevant field as well as for its capacity for administrative and financial management and enters into a written agreement defining its rights and obligations under the global grant with the Managing Authority”.

At the fifth meeting of the Monitoring Committee (December 2016), a permanent sub-committee “Increasing Citizen Participation in Policy Formulation and Monitoring” (the Sub-Committee) was established within the MC in relation to NGO interventions under Specific Objective 3 of PA 2 of the OPGG. The main function of the Sub-Committee is to assist the MA of the OPGG and the MC of OPGG by examining, discussing and agreeing on the package of documents necessary for the implementation of procedures for NGOs and socio-economic partners under Specific Objective 3 of PA2 of OPGG. The Sub-Committee voted a mandate to the MA to initiate a modification of the programme, including the removal of the need for an Intermediate Body for the implementation of the NGO interventions. The modification was approved in March 2017. At its second meeting, held on 21.04.2017, the Sub-Committee agreed on the Technical Specification for the selection of a contractor to draft the Guidelines for Applicants and the Conditions for contacts’ implementation for the first OPGG procedure for NGOs and SEPs “Enhancing civil participation in processes of policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring”, to conduct an information campaign and to evaluate the submitted project proposals.

Two meetings of the Sub-Committee were held in 2018. One was to discuss the level of readiness for the opening of the procedure and the other was to present the Guidelines and methodology for the evaluation of projects. The Guidelines for Applicants and the evaluation methodology were developed by an external contractor selected through a public tender procedure launched in October 2017, which was delayed due to a complaint. This led to a delay in the overall programming cycle of the procedure, therefore the first procedure was launched in July 2018.

The objectives and results of Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 are measured by the following indicators:

№	Indicator	Name of the indicator	Target value set in the criteria for the selection of operations (CSO)
1	CO - 20	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations	150
2	R2-4	Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks in the policy-making, implementation and monitoring process	300
3		Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration	100
4		Number of information campaigns conducted	50



The Guidelines for Applicants for this procedure include mandatory indicators a, which are part of the system of indicators of the OPGG as described in the programme. Beneficiaries have the possibility to select a combination of indicators but it is obligatory to include value for indicator CO-20 and one of the following:

- Indicator No 3 *“Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration”*
- or indicator No 4 *“Number of information campaigns conducted”*

Beneficiaries are allowed to select the other two indicators if they are applicable to their project proposal.

As noted in the text above, the procedure is open for applications in July 2018. Within the application period, 211 project proposals were submitted, 121 administrative contracts were concluded and 115 were implemented (5 terminated and 1 expired without implementation). The project activities target different policy areas (education, health, ecology, culture, etc.), depending on the profile and activities of the beneficiary organisations and their partners, in line with the objectives of the procedure. Some of the projects are focused at municipality or district level. Almost 40% of the projects have been implemented in partnership, the partners being mainly public administration structures (municipalities, regional administrations, central administrations, specialised territorial administrations). The quantitative results of the implementation of the activities are: more than 185 information campaigns conducted, more than 382 analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies and evaluations developed for the administration developed, more than 1000 recommendations made by NGOs on policy formulation, implementation and monitoring.

The next procedure was originally planned in the Indicative Annual Work Programme (IAWP) 2020 but it was not launched as some of the projects under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 were still under implementation and it was not possible to summarise all the savings that could be made to increase the budget of the new procedure, it was not possible to make a comprehensive analysis of the effects of the procedure and thus outline the necessary changes to the evaluation methodology, the parameters of a new procedure, including the use of simplified costs.

After a thorough analysis of the application process, the implementation and reporting of the projects, as well as of the impact of procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009, the MA of the OPGG proposes to include the second procedure in the IAWP 2021. For these purposes, the Sub-Committee “Increasing Citizen Participation in Policy Formulation and Monitoring” within MC of OPGG has been involved in the discussion and coordination of the package of documents necessary for the implementation of the procedure, and the documents were sent for coordination in April 2021. During two consecutive meetings of the Sub-Committee (April 2021), the results of a survey for feedback from the administration in relation to the recommendations formulated for the NGO projects under Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 were presented and discussed, and the draft Criteria for selection of operations, the Guidelines for Applicants, the Methodology for the evaluation of project proposals, the Methodology for



the determination of simplified staff costs, the Conditions of implementation and their annexes were also discussed and agreed.

The budget of the procedure has been determined taking into account both the financial resources described in Specific Objective 3 of the OPGG and the savings of BGN 1 145 970 under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009. The procedure is expected to contribute at least 180 units under indicators CO-20 “Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations” and R2-4 “Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks in the policy-making, implementation and monitoring process”.

The procedure for selection of project proposals “Enhancing citizen participation in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation” was launched in June 2021 and was terminated due to a submitted complaint in Administrative Court Sofia - City against the eligibility of applicants and partners. The inconsistencies were corrected and the procedure was relaunched in October 2021. Eligible applicants under the procedure are non-profit legal entities, designated to carry out activities for public benefit and socio-economic partners. 238 project proposals have been submitted, of which 186 have been approved for funding, respectively contracted, and 3 have been terminated in the process of implementation.

The defined indicators under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 are as follows:

№	Indicator	Name of the indicator	Notes
1	CO - 20	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations	Mandatory indicator
2	R2-4	Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy formulation, implementation and monitoring process	Mandatory indicator if the project foresees the implementation of <i>activities for</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Citizen monitoring of policies and/or legislation through research, analysis and impact/effect evaluation and making proposals for reformulation of policies and improvement of legislation, including improving the environment for citizen participation in governance; AND/OR</i> <i>monitoring lawsuits against the administration.</i>
3		Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration	Mandatory indicator if the project foresees the implementation of <i>activities for</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Citizen monitoring of policies and/or legislation through research, analysis and</i>



			<p><i>impact/effect evaluation and making proposals for reformulation of policies and improvement of legislation, including improving the environment for citizen participation in governance; AND/OR</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>monitoring lawsuits against the administration.</i>
4		Number of information campaigns conducted	<p>Mandatory indicator if the project foresees the implementation of <i>activities for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Information activities to increase citizen participation in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation; AND/OR</i> <i>Advocacy and campaigning activities for causes of public importance.</i>

At the time of drafting the present Report, the projects approved under this procedure have not yet been completed.

The indicator system under Specific Objective 3 of PA 2 includes 4 indicators: 1 common indicator (C020)⁹, 1 programme indicator (R2-4) and 2 procedure-specific indicators. The target values of the indicators are at programme level (there are no target values at procedure level). To the extent that there are indicator targets indicated in the following tables, these are contracted targets.

Indicator R2-4 is a result indicator for which a target value has been set. The target value of the indicator has undergone a change, with the third amendment of the programme in 2020, correcting a technical error in the programming of the OPGG when the target values included the baseline values¹⁰.

Table 2 Target values for indicator R2-4

Indicator	Name	Unit of measurement	Base value	Target value before the change	Target value after the change
R 2-4	Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy formulation, implementation and monitoring process	Number	30	400	370

⁹ 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

¹⁰ <https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/opgg/node/4861>



The other indicator is C020 “Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations”. The target value for this indicator has not been changed with the programme amendments.

Table 3 Target value for indicator C020

ID	Name	Unit of measurement	Baseline (2014)	Target value
C020	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations	Number		350

In the first evaluation report “Evaluation of the implementation of Operational Programme “Good Governance” in the period 2015-2017 and studies supporting the planning and data collection for the remaining evaluations after 2017, included in the Evaluation Plan”¹¹ a review of the indicators is made - whether they are appropriate for the planned specific objectives and logic of interventions under the different priority axes of the OPGG, whether it is necessary to reformulate or include new ones, whether it is necessary to redefine the target values of some of the indicators, in what direction and for what reasons. The Evaluation report concludes that the result and output indicators set can be related to the specific objectives set for the priority axes.

Specifically, to measure the achievement of SO 3 under PA 2, one result indicator (R2-4) is set, the contribution to which is reported through one output indicator (common indicator CO20). Additionally, two more specific indicators have been formulated at procedure level.

With regard to indicator R2-4 “Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks in the policy-making, implementation and monitoring process” it is stated that “The indicator does not allow for measuring the desired change, namely “increasing citizen participation in the process of policy formulation and monitoring of policy implementation”. It itself measures the 'product' of an operation/project. A quantitative increase in the number of recommendations does not necessarily lead to a qualitative increase in citizen participation in policy making.” A recommendation is also made to “modify indicator R2-4 from one measuring outcome to one measuring implementation. It is suggested that a new outcome indicator be included in place of the current R2-4.”

The definition of the new result indicator is recommended to reflect the “Number of supported by the programme models/mechanisms for policy control by the civil society”. The Report suggests that an appropriate target value for the new indicator is 25 “models/ mechanism” supported.

For output indicator CO20 “Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations”, it is concluded that the indicator can be used to identify the participation of the NGO sector in the programme as a beneficiary/partner, but not

¹¹ https://www.eufunds.bg/sites/default/files/2018-11/Report_I_final.pdf



to measure the achievement of specific results. I.e. it presumably contributes indirectly to the relevant programme results. It is recommended CO20 indicator to incorporate all results indicators that measure (or is expected to measure) the involvement of social partners / non-governmental organizations.

OPGG has not undergone any subsequent changes with regard to this indicator.

Degree of achievement of the set indicators

When considering the extent to which the set output and result indicators have been achieved, the following qualifications should be made:

A specific objective is a result that contributes to the relevant investment priority in a particular national or regional context through actions or measures taken within the specific programme priority. In this sense, a specific objective is an expression of what each investment priority aims to achieve. The change sought by a specific objective is expressed by one (or at most two) result indicators.

Result indicators are (quantitative or qualitative) expressions of the objective. These indicators should be: closely linked to the interventions supporting the policy. Performance (output) indicators should be derived from the intervention logic of the programme, expressing its activities. Products (outputs) are the direct achievements/performances of the programme that are expected to contribute to results.

In this sense, the indicators are used as a measure of the performance of the activities set out in the project and therefore of the achievement of the objectives and provide us with information on the achievement of the effectiveness of the investment.

The Guidelines for Applicants for the two procedures in support of civil society (SO 3 of PA2) do not set target values for the indicators. In this respect, the target values set under the programme and the contracted values for the projects funded under the two procedures are used for the analysis. The achieved values of the indicators as of 15.06.2023 are analysed, including the trends for the achievement of the set targets.

Table 4 Indicators under PA 2

№	Indicator	Target value 2023*	Contracted value	Verified value in UMIS as of 15.06.2023.	% implementation
CO20*	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations	350	299	122 ¹²	40.8% (85% will be achieved in the implementation of the contracted NGO/SEP projects under Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025)

¹² Under indicator CO20, outside this procedure, 3 more projects have been verified under PA 2, in which NAMRB is a beneficiary or partner.



№	Indicator	Target value 2023*	Contracted value	Verified value in UMIS as of 15.06.2023.	% implementation
R2-4**	Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy formulation, implementation and monitoring process	370	2042	1647 ¹³	(80.6% implementation of contracted values), over 100% of the programme target
O1-10, O2-10	Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration	-	952	552	58.0% implementation of contracted values
O2-8, O2-9	Number of information campaigns conducted	-	539	250	46.4% implementation of contracted values

Source: MA of OPGG

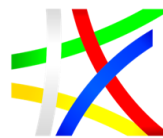
Clarifications:

* Four projects under procedures BG05SFOP001-2.001 "Strategic projects implementing the Strategy for development of public administration 2014-2020, Environment Protection Policy, Climate Change Policy and Natura 2000", PIC and NATURA 2000", BG05SFOP001-2.004 "Enhancing expert capacity of civil servants" and BG05SFOP001-2.015-0001 "Trainings for civil servants organized by the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria", where NAMRB is a beneficiary or partner. also contribute to indicator CO20 "Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations"

** Three projects (two of the MoEW and one of the MRDPW) under procedures BG05SFOP001-2.001 "Strategic projects implementing the Strategy for development of public administration 2014-2020, Environment Protection Policy, Climate Change Policy and Natura 2000", BG05SFOP001-2.016 "Development of a National Environmental Strategy and the development of the Unified Information System on Natura 2000" and BG05SFOP001-2.023 "Support for the development of territorial just transition plans for eight districts" also contribute to achievement of indicator R2-4 "Recommendations made by NGOs and networks of NGOs to the process of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring" under PA 2

The last two indicators "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration" and "Number of information campaigns carried out", which are not included in the Programme, are defined in the Guidelines for Applicants as procedure specific indicators.

¹³ Under indicator R2-4, outside this procedure, a further 26 recommendations were verified for a total of three MoEW and MRDPWB projects.



The aggregated data on the indicators implemented as a result of the two procedures under Specific Objective 3 of PA 2 indicate a very high level of implementation of indicator R2-4 - the contracted target values exceed the target value of the programme (5.7 times). The projects financed under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 are still in the process of implementation at the date of the evaluation, but 80.6% of the total contracted values of this indicator have been achieved.

The situation is similar with the indicators that determine the number of supported analyses (O1-10, O2-10) and the number of information campaigns (O2-8, O2-9). For these indicators, the targets are on an contracted basis and at the time of the evaluation, the former had achieved 58% and the latter 46.4%. There is reason to believe that the targets will be achieved, if not fully, then to a very high degree (exceeding 85%).

Only for indicator CO20 the target value is lower than the programme target has been agreed and the trend there is to achieve a maximum of 85% of the programme target¹⁴ (if at least 180 projects are implemented under the second procedure). The analysis of the information related to the indicator shows that even with the most positive forecasts, the implementation rate could reach just above 85%. According to Article 5, para 5 of Implementing Regulation (EU) No 215/2014¹⁵, the overall objectives of a priority are considered to be met if all indicators included in the implementation framework have reached at least 85% of the value of the overall objective by the end of 2023, which would be relevant for PA 2 if 85% of the above indicator is reached.

In the “Analysis of the risk of loss of funds and non-achievement of indicators” prepared by the MA of the OPGG at the beginning of 2020 the risks related to non-achievement of indicator CO 20 are outlined. At the time of the analysis, the contracted value was 119 or 34% of the target value. A contribution to the indicator is expected under the NGO/ SEP procedure launched in October 2021 under SO 3 BG05SFOP001-2.025 “Increasing civic participation in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation”, where 238 project proposals have been submitted. In order to achieve at least 85% of the target value, at which point the indicator will be considered met, more than 180 projects need to be contracted. It has been estimated that at the rate of implementation this indicator is expected to be 86% achieved by the end of 2023.

Possible reasons for not fully achieving this indicator is that the not enough quality projects were submitted - in the first procedure all projects that met the quality requirements were funded. In the two procedures, a total of 8 contracts were terminated and one ended without

¹⁴ Based on data from the Annual Implementation Report 2022.

¹⁵ COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) No 215/2014 of 7 March 2014 laying down provisions for the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common 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 Fund



implementation. The low quality of project proposals under PA2 was also identified as a problem in the 2019 Annual Report.

Increasing the administrative capacity of potential beneficiaries under these procedures does not fall under the specific objectives of PA 2. Rather, the projects aim to strengthen the channels of communication between the administration on the one hand and NGOs and socio-economic partners on the other. Eligible activities include training of NGO staff and socio-economic partners, participation of NGOs in networks, including NGO networks at European level, but these activities are supportive and their eligible costs are very limited - up to 10% of the total eligible project costs.

Another problem is the delay in launching procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 and subsequently procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025. The approach initially adopted in the programme, that part of the activities under Specific Objective 3 of PA 2 would be implemented through a global grant by an Intermediate Body (NGO), was changed by an amendment to the programme, which took time. There has also been some delay in the subsequent selection of the contractor for the procurement contract “Consultancy support to the MA of the OPGG for the preparation and implementation of a grant procedure through the selection of project proposals for NGOs and SEPs” under Specific Objective 3 “Increasing citizen participation in the process of policy formulation and monitoring” of Priority Axis 2 “Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business”. The public procurement was announced on 06.10.2017 with a deadline for submission of tenders on 08.11.2017. The Decision for award of a contract (No. FS-3/ 15.01.2018) was appealed against in the CPC and the SAC, which significantly delayed the launch of the first procedure, and created a real risk for the achievement of the intermediate target of indicator CO20 of the Performance Framework for 2018.

After the completion of the first procedure (BG05SFOP001-2.009), the MA of the OPGG carried out a detailed analysis, including through a questionnaire distributed to the beneficiaries.

In the process of implementing their projects, civil society structures formulate and make proposals and recommendations to the administration, and it is important not only to address them to the competent administration, but also the decision that the recipient administration will take in response to the proposals and recommendations. The purpose of the MA survey is to collect and examine information on the feedback received from the administration in response to the recommendations formulated by the beneficiaries on the projects. The administrative bodies to which the recommendations were addressed were mainly municipal and central administrations. They are also addressed to regional administrations, RHI, NHIF, municipal councils, committees in the National Assembly, etc. The predominance of municipalities is explained by the fact that some projects address multiple municipalities (e.g. municipalities in one or more districts). 70% of the administrative bodies addressed are not project partners. In 28% of the projects, recommendations were addressed to the partner(s), and in 2% the recommendations were addressed to both - the partner(s) and administrative bodies not formally involved in the project.



The study summarises some important findings that confirm the expectations of a high level of achievement, also expressed through the level of implementation of the indicators. The results of the survey show that a significant proportion of administrative authorities gave feedback (77%). For 75% of the projects, the beneficiaries considered that the recommendations they had made had been substantially discussed by the relevant administrative authorities and that all or part of them had been accepted as applicable. This gives hope that some administrations may 'listen' to the suggestions and take them into account in the policy-making process.

The main findings of the study are as follows:

In projects with partners - public administration structures (mainly municipal administrations), a greater impact is observed. This is due to the formal “partner” status of the institution concerned and the resulting commitment to be actively involved in the activities and to take on board the suggestions and recommendations that are agreed between the beneficiary and the institution in the course of project implementation.

Small municipalities are more likely to achieve changes, however seemingly small. This can be explained by the more compact structure, the opportunity for closer contact between the local government and the population, the immediate interaction between the different groups in the community, as well as the majoritarian nature of the mayoral elections and the importance of the mayor's performance and reputation among his or her fellow citizens in terms of expected support in the next election.

The projects, even in their totality, are unlikely to have an impact at the policy level as their focus is very diverse and not concentrated in one area. Introducing change in a policy is a process that is based on certain accumulations and usually takes time.

The documents and recommendations developed by the projects and addressed to a competent authority can make a useful contribution, adding to the body of analytical information and stakeholder views needed in the policy-making process.

Despite all the conventions, it is undoubtedly useful to encourage the activity and support the ideas of civil society organisations as a corrective to the administration. This will lead to a strengthening of their partnership and to their recognition as full participants in the processes of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring.

Based on the “lessons learnt” from the experience gained in the first procedure and the results of the above study, the MA is rethinking the design of the next procedure (BG05SFOP001-2.025) in the direction of reducing the administrative burden of the application, simplifying the evaluation process, reducing the number of criteria and their refinement, optimizing the eligible activities (more general definition of eligible activities, enabling the applicants to arrange their project around the idea they have), simplifying reporting (introduction of simplified labour cost for staff in the form of a fixed hourly rate).

Both procedures have achieved to a high degree the expected results of: increased interaction between the administration and citizens and business; increased activity of NGOs and SEPs in the



implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation; making recommendations for improving administrative services, for a better regulatory environment, for improving the business environment, for fighting corruption, for preventing conflict of interest and abuse of office, for compliance with ethical standards by public officials, such as the following Both procedures¹⁶ activate NGOs, providing them with the opportunity to implement their ideas. Through their projects, beneficiaries and their partners focus generally on how the public administration functions, which is an incentive for it to improve its performance, including by interacting with civil society structures as an equal actor in policy-making and monitoring processes.

The study conducted by the MA in three stages¹⁷ summarizes some important findings that confirm the expectations of a high degree of achievement of results, also expressed by the degree of implementation of the indicators. In the process of implementing their projects, civil society structures formulate and make suggestions and recommendations to the administration. The results of the survey show that a significant proportion of administrative bodies gave feedback (77%). For 75% of the projects, beneficiaries considered that the recommendations they had made had been discussed substantively by the relevant administrative bodies and all or part of them had been accepted as applicable. This gives hope that some administrations may 'listen' to the suggestions and take them into account in the policy-making process.

Priority axis 3

Based on the review of the data on the achievement of the indicators and the feedback of the respondents, it can be concluded that a high degree of effectiveness has been achieved in achieving Specific Objective 3.1 under PA 3 to increase transparency and acceleration of administration of justice through reform of the structure, procedures and organization of the judiciary by exercising citizen control through more active involvement of NGOs and professional organizations in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies. *The target values of the procedure indicators have been fully achieved.*

In the rationale for Specific Objective 1 . Increase of transparency and acceleration of judicial proceedings through structural, procedural and organisational reforms in the judiciary of PA 3, the programme document states that "the priority will support the open participation of all NGOs and professional organisations active in the field in the development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies and proposals for improvements in the judiciary...".

In the Criteria for the selection of operations, the procedure is also justified as complementary to the procedures "Strategic projects in the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuing of the reform of the judiciary and the strategy for the introduction of e-government and e-justice in the justice sector 2014-2020" and "Increasing the competence of magistrates

¹⁶ Based on data from an in-depth interview

¹⁷ Consolidated summary of the results of the survey 1, 2 and 3 for feedback from the administration in response to the recommendations formulated on the NGO projects under Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009, (July-August 2020, February-March 2021, June-July 2021)



and judicial officers through effective training at the National Institute of Justice”, from the IAWP 2015. The procedure also complements and builds on measures included in the approved roadmaps to the Updated Strategy to Continue the Judicial Reform, and the Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020. By financing this procedure, OPGG aims to more actively involve non-governmental and professional organizations in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies, making proposals for improvements in the judicial system, promoting and developing alternative methods for solving legal disputes; increasing confidence in the judiciary through public participation and transparency.

The target groups are: Ministry of Justice; Judiciary authorities, non-profit legal entities designated to carry out activities for public benefit, registered in the Central Register of Non-Profit Legal Entities under Article 45 of the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act, in force until 31.12.2017 or registered in the Register under Article 17 of the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act, in force since 01.01.2018, professional organizations registered under the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act or registered under/created by a special law, of persons working in the judiciary (judges, prosecutors, investigators, registry judges, jurors, court officials, expert witnesses, etc.), lawyers, notaries and other legal professionals, mediators and arbitrators, and other persons working in the justice sector; Socio-economic partners (nationally representative organisations of employers and employees); Citizens; Business; Public.

The activities that can be implemented are:

- Carrying out/developing analyses, studies, research, methodologies, models and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary to support the process of system modernization and monitoring of judicial reform;
- Exploring and transferring best practices and innovative solutions;
- Data collection and development of databases to support the process of system modernisation and monitoring of judicial reform.
- Conduct information campaigns to promote the legal aid system among citizens; alternative methods of legal dispute resolution/mediation and arbitration techniques/arbitration and arbitration procedures; mediation and conciliation process;
- Development of mechanisms and tools for feedback and evaluation by judges, prosecutors and investigators on issues of judicial administration;
- Developing mechanisms and tools for feedback and evaluation by citizens and businesses on their relations with the judiciary;
- Holding conferences, public discussions, round tables, etc. with stakeholders;
- Conducting seminars and trainings for expert witnesses, jurors, lawyers, mediators, arbitrators;
- Monitoring and making recommendations on cases of corruption offences, organised crime and cases involving persons holding senior state positions (including magistrates);



- Formulate proposals for the introduction and promotion of restorative justice approaches;
- Organisation and implementation of training of the beneficiary's staff, participation of the beneficiary in networks, including NGO networks at European level.

The Guidelines for Applicants under Procedure **BG05SFOP001-3.003** "Citizen control over the judiciary reform" specify that within the framework of PA 3 financial resources are provided for active involvement of non-governmental and professional organizations in the process of development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies, preparation of proposals for improvements in the judicial system and promotion and development of alternative methods for legal dispute resolution. The support of all NGOs and professional organisations active in the field in the development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies and proposals for improvements in the judicial system is outlined. Support is focused on NGO projects to carry out independent analysis of case failures covering weaknesses in both investigation and prosecution including witness protection, economic and financial analysis, collection of evidence by police and cooperation between the judiciary and the executive. Priority is given to projects that transfer good practices and innovative solutions based on analysis to address deficiencies in structure, management, personnel, training, cooperation and professional practices.....

The indicators relevant to the procedure are:

№	Indicator	Name of the indicator	Notes:
1	CO - 20	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations	Mandatory indicator
2	R3-1	Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary	
3	O3-1	Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported	Each project proposal must include at least one of the two indicators
4	O3-4	Projects for the promotion and development of alternative dispute resolution methods	

Beneficiaries should use at least one of the two indicators "Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported" and "Projects for the promotion and development of alternative dispute resolution methods".

In Evaluation Report "Evaluation of the implementation of Operational Programme "Good Governance" in the period 2015-2017 and studies supporting the planning and data collection for the remaining evaluations after 2017, included in the Evaluation Plan", a review of the indicators is made - whether they are appropriate for the planned specific objectives and logic of interventions under the different priority axes of the OPGG, whether it is necessary to reformulate or include new ones, whether it is necessary to redefine the target values of some of the indicators, in what direction and for what reasons. The findings on the indicators under the procedure are that they have a clear and direct logical link: *"To measure the achievement of*



SO-3.1¹⁸ one result indicator (R3-1) is foreseen, the contribution to which is reported through 5 output indicators (CO20, O3-1, O3-2, O3-3 and O3-4). The logical link and contribution of the product indicators to the result indicator is clear and direct".

In this procedure, similarly to the procedures for civil society under Specific Objective 3 of PA 2, there is a target value for only one of the indicators (CO20) at programme level, but there are no target values set in the Guidelines for Applicants for this specific procedure indicators. In this sense, the analysis considers as target values the values of the indicators at the stage of conclusion of grant contracts under the procedure.

The following table presents data on the target values of the indicators as well as the verified values (as of 15.06.2023) and the degree of implementation:

Table 5 Physical implementation of the indicators under procedure BG05SFOP001-3.003 "Citizen control over the judiciary reform "

№	Indicator	Contracted target value	Verified value in UMIS as of 15.06.2023.	% implementation
CO20	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organizations	53	53	100.00%
O3-1	Analyzes, research, studies, methodologies and assessments related to the operation of the judiciary supported	157	158	100,6%
O3-4	Projects for the promotion and development of alternative dispute resolution methods	26	26	100.00%
R3-1	Introduced new and improvement of existing tools for modernization of the judiciary	8	8	100.00%

Within the framework of the projects implemented by NGOs and professional organizations, 158 analyses, studies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary were reported and verified. 26 of the completed projects are aimed at promoting the development and improvement of the capacity for the application of alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes, with a target value of 5 by 2023.

For three of the four indicators, 100% of the target values set on the basis of the projects contracted under the procedure were achieved. These are CO20, O3-4 and R3-1, and indicator O3-1 has achieved more than 100% performance.

Considered against the programme targets for these indicators¹⁹, three (CO20, O3-1 and O3-4) of the four indicators exceeded the targets and one (R3-1) achieved 27% performance.

The implementation of this procedure has achieved high efficiency as measured by the indicators achieved.

¹⁸ Specific objective 1 of MP3

¹⁹ SO20 - 50; O3-1 - 50; O3-4 - 5; R3-1 - 30.



Finally, the performance measured by tracking the indicators is also compared with data from the quantitative survey of beneficiaries under the two priority axes (PA2 and PA 3)²⁰. As part of the survey, questions related to the achievement of results are included - whether the beneficiaries face difficulties in achieving the results, whether they make recommendations to the administrations during implementation, what is the contribution of the investments made.

According to the beneficiaries who participated in the study, the OPGG and the investments made to increase civic participation and strengthen civic control over the activities of the administration have made a significant contribution to²¹:

- ✓ *Improving the environment for civic participation (79%);*
- ✓ *Development of policy for interaction with civil society (77.4%);*
- ✓ *Creating opportunities for citizens to monitor policies implemented at national and local level (75.8%);*
- ✓ *Improving the relationship between the administration and civil society through partnership-building measures in governance (75.8%);*
- ✓ *Making suggestions for improvements in the administration and the judiciary (69.4%);*
- ✓ *Improving and contributing to administrative service reform (58.1%);*

According to the beneficiaries who participated in the study, the OP3 and the investments made to increase civic participation and strengthen civic control over the judiciary have made a significant contribution to²²:

- ✓ *Making suggestions for improvements in the work of the judiciary (100%);*
- ✓ *Development of policy for interaction with civil society (92.9%);*
- ✓ *Enabling citizen control over the reform of the judiciary through more active involvement of NGOs and professional organisations in the process of development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies (85.7%);*
- ✓ *Improving the environment for civic participation (78.6%);*
- ✓ *Promotion and development of alternative methods of legal dispute resolution (42.9%).*

²⁰ The sum of the percentages exceeds 100% because respondents have the option to indicate more than one answer.

²¹ The percentages show the sum of those who responded "have contributed to a large extent" and "have contributed significantly" to the question "To what extent do you think that the OPSP and the investments made to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration have contributed to..."

²² The percentages show the sum of those who responded "have contributed to a large extent" and "have contributed significantly" to the question "To what extent do you think that the OPCJ and the investments made to increase civic participation and strengthen civic oversight of the judiciary have contributed to..."



7.2. Efficiency of investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the administration and the judiciary

Evaluation question 2.2: What is the efficiency of investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the administration and the judiciary, considered as a ratio between inputs and outputs?

The assessment of the efficiency of the investments under PA2 and PA3 to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the administration and the reform of the judiciary is positive. The resources invested to achieve the results can be described as efficiently invested and the planned results have been exceeded.

The evaluation of efficiency was prepared by examining the relationship between the two main indicators through which inputs and outputs were planned and reported, namely:

- Costs planned and paid for individual procedures;
- The planned and reported values of the indicators by which the achievement of the objectives of the procedures is measured.

For the purpose of assessing efficiency, an analysis of indicators was carried out in two stages: at the programming stage of the operation and at the implementation stage.

There is a widely accepted definition of *efficiency* in theory and practice. However, there is often inconsistency and even contradiction in the literature concerning the definition of *efficiency*. Therefore, for the purpose of this evaluation, we shall define the concept of *efficiency* as follows:

Efficiency indicates the ratio of the result achieved to the cost invested. The lower the inputs, the more efficient are the actions and activities for which they are made.

Due to the specificities of the efficiency study, this analysis is based only on information from completed OPGG projects.

The implementation of the budgets, targets and achieved values of the performance and result indicators contracted of the funded projects were analysed on the basis of the documentary data from the beneficiaries' technical and financial reports, data from the beneficiaries' files in the UMIS 2020, data from the annual reports on programme implementation and UMIS reports, as well as information from the Guidelines for Applicants for the evaluated procedures.

The MA of the Operational Programme has not defined in advance target values for the result and performance indicators in the Guidelines for Applicants for the evaluated procedures. Contract modifications and budget modifications were analysed on the basis of the information in the UMIS and the programme implementation reports. The analysis is based on indicators related to the financial and technical performance of the projects and achieved values of the indicators discussed below.

The model for the management of interventions to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the administration and the judiciary has been designed to provide grants through selection of project proposals. The interventions to increase civic participation and



strengthen citizen control over the administration and the interventions to increase civic participation and strengthen citizen control over the judiciary are discussed separately in the text below.

The efficiency analysis is carried out by Priority Axis, analysing for each Priority Axis the procedures financed under the OPGG, as described in the introduction to evaluation task 2.

Priority axis 2

The main conclusion of the analysis is that the investments under the evaluated procedures for strengthening the citizen's control over the administration's activity are efficient: the results under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 have been achieved in a cost-efficient way, and the same is valid for procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 based on the projections for achieving the target values of the indicators at the stage of submission of the project proposal and the cost estimates.

As noted in the text above, two competitive selection procedures have been launched under PA2, which are relevant to increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the activities of the administration.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 “Enhancing civil participation in processes of policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring”

In the framework of this procedure, 121 administrative contracts have been concluded and 115 have been implemented.

Programming stage

The Guidelines for Applicants and the Conditions for the implementation of the awarded projects under the procedure have been prepared by an external contractor selected under the Public Procurement Act. The documents have been approved by the MA of the OPGG, coordinated by the Sub-Committee of the MC of the OPGG and approved by the MC. According to the Guidelines for Applicants, the maximum grant amount for an individual project is BGN 90 000. The eligible costs for the implementation of the projects are direct and indirect, and the GfA states that the indirect costs should amount to 8% of the eligible direct costs of the project. With regard to direct costs, a financial justification shall be attached to the proposal, which shall indicate how the cost of the expenditure has been derived, and shall indicate/attest to the sources of information on the basis of which the planned cost values or individual cost elements have been determined, in order to demonstrate the consistency of the planned costs with actual market prices. The sources of information are listed in the Instructions for completing the financial statement. In the direct costs part, there is a financial limitation on the amount of capacity building costs with a maximum of 10% of the total eligible project costs.

In view of the specific nature of the procedure and its objectives, the following two groups of activities can be distinguished:



Main activities contributing to the achievement of results (analyses and studies prepared, recommendations made to the administration, events and activities held and training provided to the staff of the applicants and partners) which are linked to direct costs:

- Improve participation in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring through the development of analyses, studies, evaluations, trainings, etc. by NGOs or NGO networks/coalitions/platforms as well as socio-economic partners;
- Citizen monitoring and control over the actions of the administration; Development of mechanisms and proposals to improve the environment for citizen participation in governance;
- Organisation of broad information campaigns and other activities to raise public awareness and citizen participation in the processes of policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring; Monitoring of cases against the administration;
- Advocacy and campaigning for causes of public importance;
- Joint actions between administrations and NGOs for the implementation of public policies; Participation of NGOs in networks.

Activities that are supportive to project implementation - these are organisation and management related to indirect costs: remuneration, travel, information and publicity and audit.

The MA has also defined outcome and performance indicators to measure the achievement of the objectives. When programming the operation, the MA has set as criteria in the methodology for the evaluation of project proposals two criteria that assess the efficiency of the investments:

- Efficiency of the implemented analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration, as a ratio between the target values of indicators No. 3 “Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration” and No. 2 “Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks in the policy-making, implementation and monitoring process (R2-4)” (Group II Compliance and justification, item 7);
- Efficiency of planned analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration: calculated as the ratio of grant for direct costs to the number of analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations carried out for the administration. Specifically, efficiency is calculated as follows: 'The planned cost of an analysis, study, research, methodology, audit and/or evaluation for the administration is calculated by dividing the budgeted total direct cost by the target value of the indicator “Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration”.

Stage of implementation of administrative contracts

For the purpose of this evaluation, the criteria formulated by the MA for assessing the efficiency of investments in increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the activities of the administration, considered as a ratio between the inputs and the outputs, have been used.



Table 6 Contracted and disbursed funds under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009

Procedure	Agreed	Paid	Direct project implementation costs	% implementation
Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009	BGN 9 609 207,21	BGN 8 742 800,38	8 095 185,54lv.	90.98%

Source: UMIS 2020

Note: Direct costs have been calculated as follows: the value of disbursements divided by 1.08, according to the eligible percentage)

Table 7 Monetary value of indicator "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration" under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009

Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009	Achieved target value of the Indicator	Financial resource input (direct costs) to achieve the indicator unit
Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration	435	18 609,62

Source: Own calculations

In compliance with the established evaluation methodology, the ratio of grant for direct costs to the number of analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations carried out for the administration is used in the search for the efficiency of the planned analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration, with the maximum number of points awarded to project proposals where the planned cost of an analysis, study, research, methodology, audit and/or evaluation for the administration is less than or equal to **BGN 41 400**.

According to the table above, the ratio between the total direct costs and the achieved target value of the indicator "**Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration**" is **18 609,62 BGN**, which is **55% more economical than originally planned or 22 390,38 BGN lower in absolute value**. The conclusion is illustrated by the following table.

Table 8 Correlation between direct costs and achieved target value of indicator "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration" under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009

Efficiency of planned analyses, studies, research, methodologies,	MA reference value for analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the	Average value per reported indicator for analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and	More favourably
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audits and evaluations for the administration	administration for a maximum number of points	evaluations for the administration	
Value	41 400,00 BGN	18 609,62 BGN	54.61% or BGN 22 390,38

Source : Own calculations

The data from the above calculations give grounds to conclude that the investments to increase civic participation under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 and to strengthen civic control over the activities of the administration, considered as a ratio between the resources invested and the results achieved, are efficient, as the results have been achieved in a very cost-effective way - twice as cost-effective as the target set by the MA of OPGG.

Additionally, the correlation between the two specific indicators for the procedure, which are also included in the evaluation criteria, namely, the efficiency of the analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration, measured as a ratio between the target values of the indicators "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration" and "Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the process of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring", is examined. In the evaluation criteria, activities containing analyses are considered effective if the ratio between the target values of the two indicators - "Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy formulation, implementation and monitoring process" and "Analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations supported for the administration" is equal to or higher than 2.

In the calculations made, based on the achieved and reported values of the two indicators of the implemented projects under the procedure, the ratio is 3.38, which significantly exceeds the target set in the evaluation criteria. This confirms the high efficiency of investments achieved under the procedure.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 - Increasing civic participation in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation

Programming stage

Compared to the previous grant procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009, there are changes in the Guidelines for applications as compared to the conditions set in the Guidelines for applications under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 - the maximum amount of the grant for an individual project is 60 000 BGN.

Under this procedure, the following simplified forms for grants apply:

- flat rate under Article 67(1)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 55, para. 1, point 4 of the Management of Resources from the European Structural and Investment Funds Act for indirect costs;
- standard unit cost table (flat hourly rate) under Article 67(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 55, para. 1, point 2 of the Management of Resources from the European Structural and Investment Funds Act for direct labour costs of staff.



The eligible costs for the implementation of the projects are again direct and indirect, with indirect costs amounting to 8% of the direct eligible costs.

Again, a budget structure and framework has been set at the proposal stage to ensure that there are no inefficiencies in the funds used, with a simplified costing applied to the largest direct cost item (staff labour costs). In addition, a flat rate is used for indirect costs. The budget framework provides a basis which contributes to ensuring that there are no big differences and inefficiencies in the resources used.

According to the **Methodology for determining the simplified labour cost for staff under Procedure No BG05SFOP001-2.025 “Increasing civic participation in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation”** attached to the Guidelines for Applicants, the determination of the amount of the simplified labour cost for staff is based on publicly available statistical data of the National Statistical Institute (NSI) on the employer's labour costs per hour worked by economic activity, available at https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/query.jsf?x_2=1133²⁴ using the code “Professional activities and research”, the subcategory of which “Activities of head offices; management consultancy activities” is most relevant to the type of activities expected to be carried out under the projects.

The reasons for applying a standard unit cost table (fixed hourly rate) under Article 67(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 55, para. 1, point 2 of the Management of Resources from the European Structural and Investment Funds Act are as follows: The data from the projects under Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 showed that nearly 64% of the contracts concluded provided for staff costs. The MA of the OPGG has defined the rules for the calculation of hourly rates under this procedure in the Guidelines for completing the financial justification of the project budget. Applicants were given the option to use as a basis either already concluded employment contracts with employees in order to plan staff costs in line with the usual practice of the applicant/partner, or to use data from the official NSI statistics on average monthly salaries of employees at national level for the last quarter for which data have been published before submission of the project proposal. For 71% of the projects where staff costs were foreseen, the applicants used the official statistics as the basis for their calculation. This is explained by the fact that few of the eligible NGO/SEP applicants had employees on employment contracts (staff) prior to project implementation.

An additional motive is the fact that errors and inaccuracies are systematically made in the calculation of the hourly staff rate at the application and implementation stages of projects. Beneficiaries, partners and the MA of the OPGG thus invest effort and time in calculating, checking, correcting, disproportionate to the amount of the costs themselves.

²³ INFOSTAT: Demographic and social statistics, Labour market, Annual statistics on employment and labour costs, Employer labour costs per hour worked by economic activity (A21)(2008-2019)

²⁴ INFOSTAT: Demographic and social statistics, Labour market, Annual statistics on employment and labour costs, Employer labour costs per hour worked by economic activity (A21)(2008-2019)



Given the above facts of practice, the MA considered it appropriate to introduce a fixed hourly rate for the beneficiary/partner's staff. This facilitates the application and reporting of staff costs and minimises errors related to incorrect calculation.

Project proposals shall be accompanied by a financial justification, indicating the sources of information on the basis of which the corresponding figures for each direct cost have been derived, with the exception of the costs of remuneration of the staff of the Applicant and/or Partner(s) and the costs of mission expenses of the staff of the Applicant/Partner(s).

In the methodology for the evaluation of project proposals under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025, the MA of the OPGG has not set criteria that assess the monetary value of an analysis or the ratio between recommendations/analyses.

Stage of implementation of administrative contracts

It should be noted that as of 02.06.2023 the reported and verified physical and financial progress in the implementation of the administrative contracts under the procedure is relatively low.

Table 9 Financial progress under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 as of 02.06.2023

Agreed	Paid as of 02.06.2023.	Percentage of implementation
10 261 778,64 BGN	BGN 1 561 773,04	15,22%

Source: UMIS 2020

Table 10 Physical progress under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 as of 15.06.2023

Indicators	Target values of the indicators reported and accepted by the MA as of 15.06.2023.	Contracted values of indicators according to submitted proposals (excluding terminated contracts)	% reported compared to contracted
Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs	11	183	6,01%
Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration	153	546	28,02%
Number of information campaigns conducted	30	307	9,77%
Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy formulation, implementation and monitoring process	248	1080	22,96%

Source: UMIS 2020

Considering the rate of progress (below 30%) in reporting on implementation at the present no reasonable and correct conclusions can be drawn as to the efficiency of inputs compared to outputs.



In order to have a comparability with the previous procedure, we shall compare the two procedures by conditionally taking the contracted grants and the planned results of the contracts in implementation (not including the three terminated contracts under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025).

For comparability of the analysis between the two procedures, in this procedure we also use the criteria for assessing the efficiency of investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the administration, measured by the ratio between inputs and outputs, similar to those used to assess the efficiency of the previous procedure. Because the procedure is still under implementation and progress is below 30%, we use the values of the contracted funds and the target values of the indicators.

Table 11 Contracted funds and direct implementation costs under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025

Procedure	Contracted funds	Direct project implementation costs
Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025	10 261 778,64	9 501 646,89

Source : Own calculations

Note: Direct costs are calculated as follows: value of contracted amounts less 8%)

Table 12 Input of financial resources per unit of result (ratio between contracted direct costs and target value) under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025

Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025	Contracted target value of indicators	Financial resources invested to achieve unit result (ratio between agreed direct costs and target value)
Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration	546	17 402,28

The contracted indicators for the terminated contracts Nos 58, 161, 205 are excluded from the table.

Source: Own calculations

Table 13 Comparative data on the ratio between direct costs and the planned target value of the indicator "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration" under the two procedures

Efficiency of planned analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration	Reported value of 1 number of analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration	Planned value of 1 number of analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration
	Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009	Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025
Value	18 609,62 BGN	BGN 17 402,28

Source: Own calculations

The value of one analysis under Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 is BGN 17 402,28 and the ratio between the target values of indicators "Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO



networks to the process of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring" and "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration" is 1,99 times. However, it should be taken into account that under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 the maximum budget for a project is limited to 60 000 BGN, while for procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 the maximum budget is 90 000 BGN.

The data from the above calculations shows that the budgeting approach of the project proposals does not show much difference in the unit cost of analysis, study, research, methodology, audit and evaluation for the administration, even though in the second procedure the efficiency criterion assessing the monetary value of the analysis is not part of the methodology for evaluation the efficiency of project proposals.

With regard to the efficiency of the analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration, measured as the ratio between the target values of the indicators "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration" and "Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the process of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring" of the two procedures, we have examined the data described in the table.

Table 14 Comparative table of the efficiency of the analyses performed

Effectiveness of the analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations carried out for the administration	Ratio of the reported value of indicator No. 2 "Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the process of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring (R2-4)" to the reported value of indicator No. 3 "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration"	Ratio of the planned value of indicator No. 2 "Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the process of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring (R2-4)" to the planned value of indicator No. 3 "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration".
	BG05SFOP001-2.009	BG05SFOP001-2.025
Value	3,38	1,99

Source: Own calculations

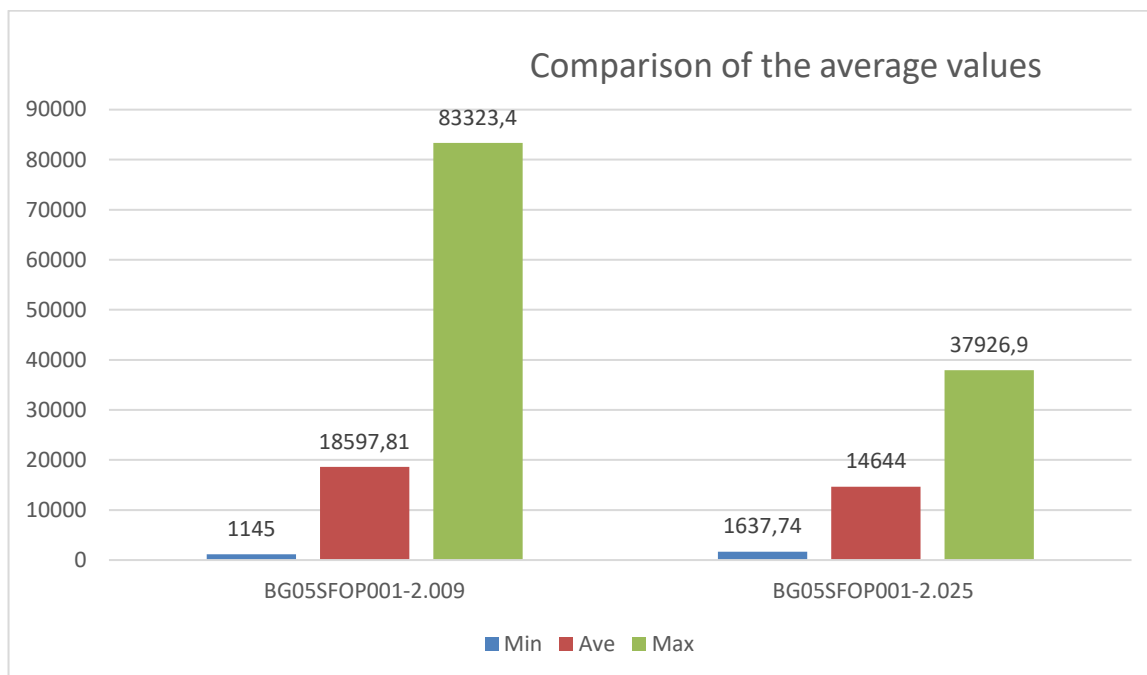
The efficiency of the analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations carried out for the administration is positive, as for Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 it is calculated on the basis of the actual progress reported for the two indicators, and for Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 - on the basis of their contracted target values.

A comparison has also been made between the unit costs (Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for administration) of the two procedures, comparing the average, minimum and maximum unit costs. For this purpose, the data on verified costs and progress towards the indicator for all completed projects under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 and the reported and verified intermediate values of costs and progress towards the



indicator for projects under implementation under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 were taken into account.

Figure 1 Comparison of the average values per unit outcome and the minimum and maximum values per unit outcome for the two procedures (direct costs per unit outcome)



While the average and minimum values of the direct costs per unit outcome of the two procedures are similar, the maximum values are quite different. It is difficult to draw a reasonable conclusion on this criterion as the results are not qualitatively linked and there may be a large difference in terms of difficulty, scope and length of analysis. However, it is likely that the limitation of the maximum eligible budget per project to 60 000 BGN in the second procedure is a prerequisite for beneficiaries to plan smaller analyses in terms of scope (and number) in order to be able to meet the budget requirement.

Overall, the assessment of the efficiency of the investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the administration is positive. The resources invested to achieve the results can be described as very efficiently invested and the price paid is lower than planned. The MA has endeavoured, already with the definition of the criteria for the selection of operations and subsequently with the Guidelines for Applicants, to define clear cost parameters and financial justification of costing as a prerequisite to setting a realistic budget for the results foreseen in the projects.

Priority axis 3

The main conclusion of the analysis is that the investments under the evaluated procedure under PA3 have been used in an efficient way. The MA has created conditions with clear GfA and guidelines, and the budget structure itself sets a framework for implementation that implies



efficiency of the funds used. The specific results achieved and reported - the analyses, studies, research, methodology and evaluation related to the activities of the judiciary - have contributed to increasing citizen control over the reform of the judiciary, and citizen participation, whether adopted by the judicial authorities or not.

One competitive selection procedure has been launched under PO 3, which is related to increasing civic participation and strengthening civic control over the activities of the judiciary with three application deadlines - **BG05SFOP001-3.003 - Citizen control over the judiciary reform**

The contracts concluded under the three application periods are as follows:

Table 15 Contracts concluded under procedure BG05SFOP001-3.003

Deadline	Implementation of projects	Contracts concluded	Contracted funds, BGN	Contracted funds with savings, BGN	Actual disbursements, BGN
28.04.2017	2017-2019	11	972 421,01	864 842,69	864 842,69
30.09.2018	2019-2020	20 (2 contracts terminated)	1 797 024,15	1 662 680,29	1 662 680,29
30.09.2020 г.	2021-2022	22 (1 contract terminated)	1 995 906,84	1 900 827,90	1 900 827,90

Source : UMIS 2020

Programming stage

According to the Guidelines for Applicants the minimum amount of the grant for an individual project is BGN 30 000 and the maximum is BGN 100 000.

For the efficiency analysis, the structure of the project budgets was examined. A flat-rate financing scheme is applied under this procedure in accordance with Article 14(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 and Article 68b of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 6, para 1 of CoM Decree 189/2016. According to the provision therein a flat rate of up to 40 % of the eligible direct personnel costs may be used for projects financed by the ESF to cover the remaining eligible costs of a project, without requiring calculations to determine the applicable rate.

Eligible costs under the procedure are:

- Direct personnel costs - these are costs of remuneration for project implementation activities arising from employment/service relationships, relationships under special law (internal staff) and/or service contracts (external staff) concluded between the beneficiary/partner and persons carrying out such activities.
- A flat rate of up to 40% of eligible direct personnel costs, which includes other eligible costs:
 - direct costs directly related to the implementation of eligible project activities and



- indirect costs.

“*Indirect costs*” are costs that are related to the project, which cannot be directly linked to a single project activity and do not contribute directly to the achievement of the project objectives and results, but are necessary for its overall administration, management, evaluation and sound financial implementation (typical administrative costs such as: organisation and management costs, office supplies, telephone, electricity, etc.; information and communication costs).

The application of a flat rate of up to 40 % of eligible direct personnel costs eases the administrative burden, thereby also reducing the risk of errors both in the application and subsequently in the implementation and reporting of projects. Only direct personnel costs are justified at the time of application in accordance with the requirements set out in the GfA. The use of a flat rate also contributes to clearer planning of expenditure by beneficiaries and linking it to specific activities, objectives and results (logical framework). This, in turn, is a prerequisite for achieving a better balance between activities and associated costs and efficient spending.

In order to further facilitate the beneficiaries, the MA has published in the application package a supporting document entitled “Common mistakes in the preparation and submission of project proposals under procedure BG05SFOP001-3.003 - Citizen control over the judiciary reform”.

Stage of implementation of administrative contracts

The implementation of all administrative contracts under the procedure has been completed. The following achieved results have been reported and verified by the MA of the Operational Programme, according to the values of the planned indicators:

Table 16 Verified indicators under procedure BG05SFOP001-3.003

№	Indicator	Contracted target value of projects implemented	Verified value in UMIS as of 15.06.2023.	% execution (verified against contracted value)
O3-1	Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the work of the judiciary	157	158	100,6%
O3-4	Projects for the promotion and development of alternative methods of legal dispute resolution	26	26	100.00%
R3-1	Introduced new and improved existing instruments for the modernization of the judiciary	8	8	100.00%
CO2 0	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs	53	53	100.00%

Table 17 Contracted and disbursed funds under procedure BG05SFOP001-3.003

Negotiated funds	Negotiated with savings	Disbursed funds
BGN 4 765 352,00	BGN 4 428 350,88	BGN 4 428 350,88

Source: UMIS 2020



In the table below we have presented a summary of the funds contracted and disbursed for each of the submission period, as well as the indicators reported and verified.

Table 18 Summary of funds contracted and disbursed

Procedure	Contracted funds, BGN	Negotiated with savings, BGN	Amounts actually paid, BGN	Staff costs BGN	Flat-rate costs (40%, incl. indirect costs*€)
First application deadline	972 421,01	864 842,69	864 842,69	617 744,78	247097,91
Second application deadline	1 797 024,15	1 662 680,29	1 662 680,29	1 187 628,78	475051,51
Third application deadline	1 995 906,84	1 900 827,90	1 900 827,90	1 357 734,21	543093,69

Table 19 Summary of reported and verified indicators

INDICATORS REPORTED AND VERIFIED				
Indicators	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs	Introduced new and improved existing instruments for the modernization of the judiciary	Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the work of the judiciary	Projects for the promotion and development of alternative methods of legal dispute resolution
First application deadline	11	1	38	4
Second application deadline	20	5	62	10
Third application deadline	22	2	58	12
GENERAL PROCEDURE	53	8	158	26

**Direct costs are costs for expert labour (staff), calculated as follows: the value of costs paid divided by 1.4 (40% flat rate)*

The main results of the projects are the analyses, studies, researches, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary. Similar to the calculation of the efficiency of the PA2, the experts' team made a calculation of the direct cost per unit of the indicator, namely the cost per unit of the product "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary". The unit cost is calculated as the ratio of project disbursements to the verified indicator value. During the three application periods, 158 analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary were prepared. The breakdown by the three application periods and implementation period is presented in Table 22.

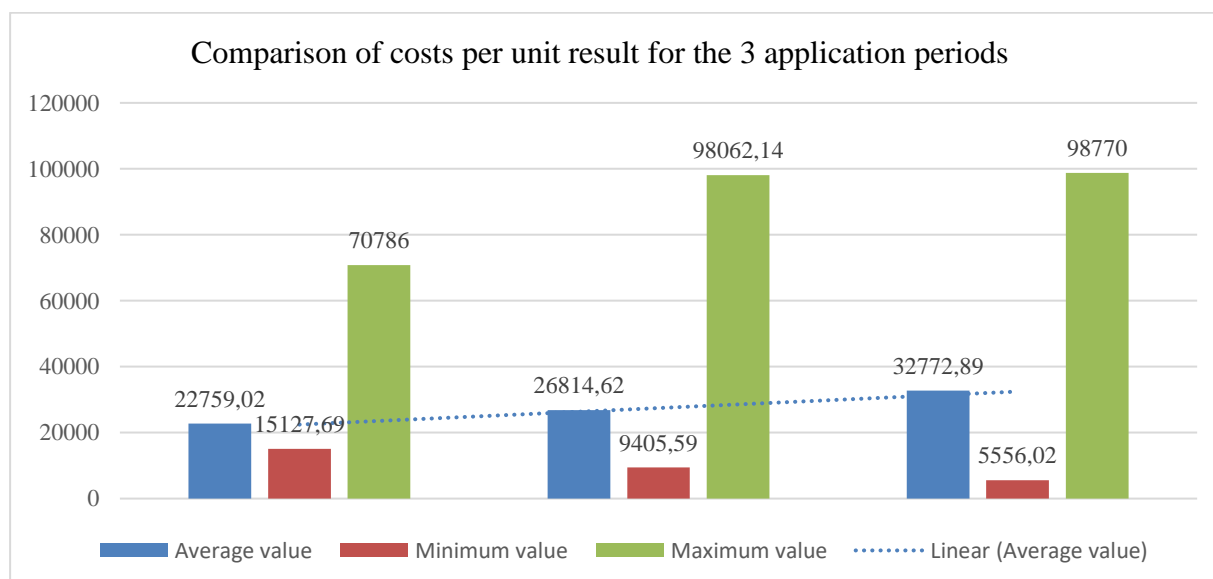


In order to examine the relationship between the contract budgets and the indicators achieved, the verified costs and values of the indicator “Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary” were examined.

It has been calculated that for the first application period, the average value of a project is 78 622,06 BGN, for the second application period - 83 134,01 BGN and for the third application period - 86 401,27 BGN, i.e. the average value of a project increases over time (and the value of achieving indicator CO2).

Within the first application period for the indicator "Supported analyses, studies, researches, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary" (O3-1) a value of 38 was achieved with. The average cost for achieving a unit of indicator is 22 759,02 BGN, the minimum value for this application period is 15 127,69 BGN and the maximum - 70 786 BGN, which is 4,7 times difference. Within the second application period, the value of the referred indicator is 62, and the average value for achieving a unit of the indicator is 26 814,62 BGN (18% difference compared to the first application period). The minimum value for achieving a unit of the indicator within this deadline is BGN 9 405,59 and the maximum - BGN 98 062,14 - a difference of more than 10 times. Within the third application period, the average value for the achievement of a unit indicator is 32 772,89 BGN. The cost of achieving of one indicator under the third deadline is 44% higher than the average cost under the first application deadline and 22% higher than the average cost under the second application deadline, i.e. there is a relatively even increase in the average cost of achieving the indicator over the three deadlines. For the third deadline, the minimum value for the achievement of the indicator unit is 5 556,02 BGN and the maximum - 98 770 BGN, i.e. almost 18 times higher than the minimum. When comparing the minimum values of the costs to achieve one indicator, it is evident that they decrease from the first to the third almost three times, while the maximum value increases from the first to the second and then stays.

Figure 2 Comparison of costs per unit result between the three application periods





As is evident from the above values for achievement of unit per indicator, no clear pattern can be found that links the value to the indicator achieved. Some analyses are multi-component and complex, while others are smaller in scope and less complex in methodology. In the absence of a qualitative indicator to which quantitative outcome indicators are linked, the only trend that can be traced is that the cost of achieving a unit of an indicator that increases over the funding period.

The comparison is conditional, as the preparation of an analysis depends on the necessary experts with relevant experience and the complexity of the analysis itself. As can be seen from the table above, there has been an increase in the cost of an analysis for the period 2017-2020. The increase can be justified by the increase in gross salaries over this period (also linked to increased inflation) and it is the cost of direct staff costs that determine the cost of the analyses produced. It is also possible that the complexity of the analyses increased as beneficiaries built on previous results, but as there is no binding qualitative indicator, this could not be tracked.

Table 20. Average annual gross salary

Average annual gross salaries of employees under employment and service relationships by economic activity				
(BGN)				
	2017	2018	2019	2020
	Private sector	Private sector	Private sector	Private sector
Professional activities and research	18 591 lv.	20 978 lv.	22 864 lv.	24 817 lv.
Administrative and support activities	10 492 lv.	11 778 lv.	12 934 BGN	14 093 BGN

Source: NSI

Next, indicator SO20 "Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs" was examined. This indicator is set at the programme level and only procedure BG05SFOP001-3.003 contributes to the achievement of the target value set for PA3 - 50.

Table 21. CO20 indicator

CO20 indicator	Target value	Verified value	Financial resources invested to achieve the indicator unit, BGN	Savings against planned financial resources
Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGO	50	53	83 553,79	16.45%

The cost for achieving indicator CO20 "Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs" as indicated in the table above is on average BGN 83 553,79. The cost per unit of result is calculated as the ratio of inputs to the indicator value achieved. When programming the procedure, a total grant amount of BGN 5 000 000 was set for 50 projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs or BGN 100 000 per project. In this respect, it can be concluded that the target result was achieved in a more cost-effective way



than planned. Forty-six NGOs and professional organisations active in the field have been involved in the development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies and proposals for improvements in the judiciary, seven of which have implemented two projects each. 53 projects have been funded, focusing on the following themes and areas: transparency, accountability and increasing trust in the judiciary; mediation and arbitration - development of alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes, development of Standards for training mediators; civil control and support for judicial reform, juvenile justice; promoting the development of restorative justice practices in criminal proceedings; improving procedures and rules for the administration of the courts; underpinning the

The data above suggests the conclusion that the funds have been used in an efficient and cost-effective manner. As indicated in the report above, the budget structure itself sets a framework for implementation that implies efficiency in the use of resources. The specific results achieved and reported - the analyses, studies, research, methodology and evaluation related to the administration's activities - have contributed to increased citizen control over judicial reform and citizen participation, whether or not they have been adopted by the judicial authorities.

In the framework of the research activity, the evaluation team carried out a study, and in order to complement the conclusions regarding the efficiency of the invested funds, opportunities for comparison with other funding instruments aimed at civil society and NGOs were sought, such as the EEA Financial Mechanism, the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme, the financial instruments of the America for Bulgaria Foundation. Unfortunately, however, the specifics of the investments do not allow for a direct comparison with the interventions funded under the OPGG, so a direct comparison of the efficiency between these programmes and the OPGG cannot be drawn.

In reviewing the available sources, comparisons were made with the Active Citizens Fund programme, established as part of the Culture, Civil Society and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms priority sector, one of the five priority sectors contracted between donors and the European Union.

The Active Citizens Fund Bulgaria is with total amount of EUR 15 500 000, provided entirely by the donor countries - Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The programme will run until 2024 and will contribute to the common objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants to reduce economic and social disparities and to strengthen bilateral relations between the beneficiary and donor countries. The objective of the Active Citizens Fund is **“Civil society and active citizenship strengthened and vulnerable groups empowered”**. The Fund supports long-term sustainability and capacity of the civil society sector, strengthening its role in promoting democratic participation, active citizenship and human rights.

Mechanisms to support NGOs include:

Two calls for strategic projects with project duration of up to 36 months

- Ongoing scheme for small initiatives with project duration of up to one year;



- Bilateral fund envisaging: 1) support measures for developing and carrying out partnership projects and initiatives with organizations of the donor countries; and 2) thematic workshops for establishing contacts and exchanging experience with organizations of the donor countries.
- Regional thematic forums;
- Measures building the capacity of civil society organizations to develop project proposals and carry out projects in the priority areas of the Fund;
- Minimum 10% of the funds will be used for Roma inclusion and empowerment, including by providing scholarships to Roma students enrolled in medical studies within the Roma Scholarship Programme;
- Mentorship support for the next generation of Roma health professionals
- Project Generation Facility – providing free consultations on developing project proposals (outside the Active Citizens Fund) contributing to the integration of vulnerable groups;
- Initiative for building the next generation of civic leaders.

The only unifying criterion between the Active Citizens Fund and the funding provided under CSO OP2 and OP3 is the similarity of the potential beneficiaries, but not the objectives of the programmes. For this reason, no comparison could be made in terms of efficiency.

In the programme document itself it is described that the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme and the Norwegian Mechanism will mainly finance structural and legislative changes in the field of child justice and capacity building at national level for the implementation of the Convention on the Application of Human Rights, including overcoming delays in the administration of justice. Again, there are no benchmarks of similarity to benchmark efficacy.

7.3. Realistic objectives

Evaluation question 2.3: Are the objectives realistic? What is the gap between expected and actual results?

The procedures for the provision of BFPs, aimed at achieving SO 3 of OP 2 of the OPGG, set ambitious targets in terms of the active participation of CSOs in the process of formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies, their interaction with the public administration and the overall improvement of the social environment. The objectives are realistic in terms of intervention logic at the level of programme, priority axis and funding procedures, and the planned interventions are justified and justified in the context of the level of development of social capital in Bulgaria at the time of programming.

The effects achieved in terms of improving the capacity for civil sector participation and fostering partnerships in decision-making are largely in line with the intended expected results.

The implementation of the BFP procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003 *Citizens' scrutiny of the reform of the judiciary* partially achieved the objectives and expected results. The contribution



of the OPGG to the promotion of the legal aid system and alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes through the investments implemented under PO 3 is undeniable. At the same time, beyond the quantitative achievement of the set indicators and the realistic planning of inputs for support, the evaluation of the funded procedure does not provide grounds to consider that a significant effect has been achieved in enhancing the role of civil society in the development, monitoring and evaluation of judicial reform strategies. The results achieved have rather a compensatory effect in terms of the overall development of the sector and civil participation in decision-making processes. This is also largely due to the specific political context in which the activities have been implemented, the capacity of the civil sector and the willingness of the judiciary institutions to partner with the NGO sector, as well as the complexity of the reforms in the judiciary and the difficult to reach consensus on the direction and parameters of change in the judiciary.

The technique of analysing the realism of the set objectives includes the following steps:

- Identification of the concepts and elements of the specific objectives at the level of the priority axis of the OPGG, relevant to the specific aspect of the evaluation - increasing civic participation and strengthening civic control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary, including the cause-effect relationships: needs - potentials for impact - planned support activities - planned indicators that substantiate the logic of intervention under the specific objective;
- Examination of the coherence of the logical framework of each of the specific BFP procedures with the intervention logic of the relevant specific objective of the priority axis;
- Analysis of progress towards the indicators and assessment of the realism of the targets.

The technique is applied differentially for each of the priority axes (MP 2 and MP 3), with the realism of the targets set being assessed against the progress and results achieved by the end of the programming period in terms of 3 quantifiable aspects:

- Degree of achievement of the set indicators;
- Timeframe of achievement of milestones and final target;
- Inputs.

The compliance of the achieved results with the set objectives is the subject of a qualitative analysis based on expert assessments and a study of global indicators for civil society development in Bulgaria.

Priority axis 2

“Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business”

The grant funding procedures, aimed at achieving SO 3, within the framework of PA 2 of the OPGG, show a relatively high degree of realism of the planned objectives and expected results on three of the examined parameters: achievement of the set indicators, timeframe of the milestones and final target values of the indicators and inputs. The positive assessment of the



implementation can be clearly validated within the Programme, but in terms of the overall development and state of civil society, the results achieved have a rather compensatory effect.

Citizen participation is undoubtedly an essential element of the intervention logic of PA 2 of the OPGG 2014-2020, in the formulation of the specific objective under discussion - Specific Objective 3: Increase of citizen participation in policy making and control.

The full participation of civil society in the processes of preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies is assessed as "*an important element of the functioning of an effective institutional environment in Bulgaria*". Along with the development and implementation of various mechanisms for the participation of NGOs and the business sector in the process of planning and implementation of public policies, emphasis is also placed on civil monitoring and its strong anti-corruption effect, prevention of conflict of interest, improvement of administrative services.

The expected results under Specific Objective 3 of PA 2, related to improving citizen and business participation, include:

- a working partnership between the state, civil society organisations and business;
- anti-corruption effect, ethical and responsible behaviour by employees as a result of citizen monitoring;
- Improved administrative capacity for complaints management, case prevention and administrative arbitration (SO 3).

The logic of intervention under PA 2 in terms of improving civil society and business participation at the development stage of the OPGG is shown below:



Table 22 Logic of intervention under PA2 in terms of improving civil society and business participation

Specific objective	Needs analysis	Identified potential for impact	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
SO 3: Increase of citizen participation in policy making and control	Insufficient influence of the NGO sector in the development and implementation of public policies; Lack of effective impact mechanisms; Inconsistent dialogue between the state and the civil society	Improving citizens' monitoring of the actions of the administration and the policies Concrete solutions to fight corruption, conflict of interest and abuse of official position Improving the capacity of the administration for complaints management, case prevention and administrative arbitration	Call for proposals for NGO and SEP dedicated to periodic and continuous citizen monitoring Integrated initiatives for citizens' monitoring and control over the actions of the administration; Developing analyses and proposals for improving the business environment, changing regulations, structures and policies at national and local level. Developing standards for involving NGOs in the strategic planning process in a transparent and effective manner Support for broad information campaigns at NUTS 2 level; Joint actions between administrations and NGOs to implement public policies; Establishment of an information exchange system between stakeholders in the field of sustainable tourism in Natura 2000 sites; Development and adoption of new tools and methodologies, dissemination of best practices, solutions to fight corruption, prevent conflict of interest and abuse of official position.	Outcome: recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the process of policy development, implementation and monitoring. Performanse indicator: number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs





For the purpose of this part of the analysis, the grant funding procedures, through which the support for the stimulation of citizen participation in the process of development and control of the implementation of policies under PA 2 is implemented, are discussed separately.

The structure of the target-setting under grant procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 *Enhancing Citizen Participation in the Processes of Development, Implementation and Monitoring of Policies and Legislation* is shown below:

Table 23. Target-setting under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009

Objectives of the procedure	Expected results	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Management in partnership with citizens and businesses; ➤ Open and responsible governance; ➤ Recommendations for improving service delivery processes, a better regulatory environment, combating corruption, preventing conflict of interest and abuse of official position, compliance with ethical standards by public officials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increasing interaction between the administration and citizens and businesses; ➤ Increasing NGO and SP activity in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation, including by making recommendations for improved service delivery processes, better regulatory environment, anti-corruption, prevention of conflict of interest and abuse of official position, compliance with ethical standards by public officials; ➤ Improving the socio-economic environment as a result of more open and accountable governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs; ➤ Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy development, implementation and monitoring process; ➤ Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration; ➤ Number of information campaigns conducted

The objectives of the specific procedure are relevant to the above-mentioned areas with potential for impact at Programme level, insofar as the development of capacity for building partnership, open and accountable governance and opportunities for making recommendations from the civil sector are relevant to improving citizen monitoring, countering corruption and improving the capacity of the administration to manage complaints from citizens and businesses. However, the general and declarative formulations do not allow for a deeper analysis of the realism and relevance of the objectives of the procedure. Additional deficits that hinder the analysis are:

- The lack of a clear focus of some of the objectives of the grant procedure, which rather refer to a higher hierarchical level of programming and are equally valid for each of the specific objectives of the Priority Axis;
- The programme level outcome indicator "*recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks...*" is interpreted in the form of a specific objective of the procedure, which



does not allow a clear formulation of a targeted change in terms of the institutional environment and the degree of citizen participation in the policy development and implementation process.

To a large extent, the same conclusions can be drawn in terms of expected outcomes. From the broadly worded "*improving the socio-economic environment*" to the broad scope of targeted changes in NGO activism in making "*recommendations for improved service delivery processes, a better regulatory environment, combating corruption, preventing conflict of interest and abuse of office, compliance with ethical standards by public officials*", the intended and expected outcomes do not presuppose the measurement of concrete change in relation to certain aspects of civic participation and interaction

The framework of objectives, expected results and indicators of the second implemented procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 *Enhancing citizen participation in the processes of development, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation* shows the same characteristics:

Table 24. Target-setting under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025

Objectives of the procedure	Expected results	Indicators
Management in partnership with citizens and businesses; Open and accountable governance.	Increasing interaction between the administration and citizens and businesses; Increasing NGO and SEP activity in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation; Making recommendations to improve administrative services, for better regulatory environment, to improve the business environment, to fight corruption, to prevent conflicts of interest and abuse of official position, and to ensure that public officials comply with ethical standards.	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs; Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy development, implementation and monitoring process; Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration; Number of information campaigns conducted.

Although the rationale of the objectives is linked to the already conducted Procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 "*Increasing Citizen Participation in the Processes of Policy Formulation, Implementation and Monitoring of Policies and Legislation*", with a reported implementation of 115 projects for the period December 2018 - February 2021, the objectives of the new call for proposals remain essentially unchanged.

However, it should be noted the increased focus of the intervention areas (eligible activities) supported under the procedure compared to the first call for proposals:

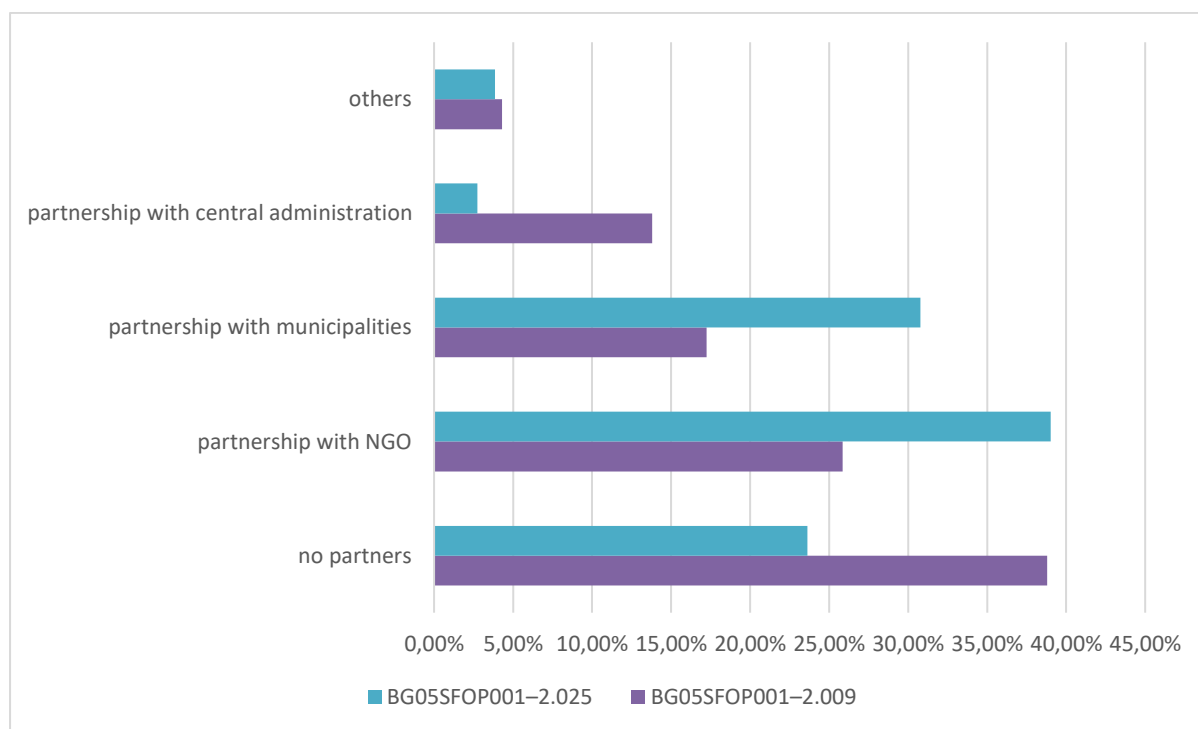
- The eligible activities for funding are prioritized as a tool for citizen monitoring and are linked to the mandatory formulation and submission of recommendations to the competent authorities and/or administrations within the framework of the submitted projects;



- The focus is on joint actions between public administrations/government bodies/municipalities and NGOs/SEPs.

As a result, only slightly more than 20% of the projects approved for funding under the second procedure are not implemented in partnership, compared to nearly 40% of projects without partnerships under the grant procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009. 56 or 30% of the funded project proposals submitted under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 are in partnership with local authorities, with almost double the number of project proposals submitted under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009. The active participation of municipalities as partners in the projects supported under the second procedure is at the expense of the participation of the central and regional administrations of the executive power. Partnerships with other NGOs as well as projects with more than one partner also show a trend of increases.

Figure 3 Projects implemented in partnership, financed under procedures BG05SFOP001-2.009 and BG05SFOP001-2.025



The diversity of topics addressed by the funded projects does not allow to explicitly identify priority areas of intervention, respectively areas where the greatest activity of the civil sector is registered. However, a significant share of projects are focused on local policies and development, environment, social policies and legislation, business environment, employment and social entrepreneurship. Logically, and as a result of the project partnerships established, the projects under procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 are significantly more focused on strengthening mechanisms for interaction at local policy level development, decision-making and effective dialogue.



Degree of achievement of the set indicators

As stated above, the analysis of the information related to the indicator "Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs" shows that even with the most positive forecasts, the implementation rate, with a target of 350 projects for 2023, could reach just over 85%. Under the first published procedure under SO 3 of PA 2, a total of 121 projects have been contracted, 5 of which have been terminated and 1 is without implementation. By the end of 2022, 186 projects have been approved for funding under the second call for proposals and 3 have been terminated. For the most part, at the time of this evaluation, the approved projects have not yet been completed (as of June 2023, under the two announced procedures, the verified value of this indicator is 122).

The indicator "Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy development, implementation and monitoring process" has a target value of 370 by 2023.²⁵ The value of the indicator verified at the time of the analysis for the two procedures under consideration for PA2 (1647 recommendations made)²⁶ shows a significant over-achievement of the target values for the operational programme.

The assessment of the implementation of the other two indicators relevant to the procedures under consideration "Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration" and "Number of information campaigns carried out" is based on a comparison between contracted and verified values, with a total of 250 information campaigns verified against 539 contracted and 552 analyses, studies and evaluations verified against 952 contracted. The progress on both indicators is 46.4% (number of information campaigns conducted) and 58% (number of analyses, studies, evaluations supported) respectively. Although at the very end of the programming period, the likelihood of achieving the target values for both indicators is high, given the stage of implementation of the projects under the second grant procedure and the reporting of progress to the MA.

Timeframe for achievement of milestones and final target

With regard to the milestones and targets of the identified indicators, several key observations can be summarised.

The process of contracting and implementing projects largely follows the programme's planned implementation framework. A milestone target of the programme for 2018 is set only for the indicator "Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs".

Table 25. Indicators

Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2018)	Final Target (2023)	Type of indicator
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²⁵ Handbook of Indicators under the Operational Programme "Good Governance", approved at the Thirteenth Procedure of the SC of the Operational Programme, 16.10.2020.

²⁶ Information of the MA of the TACA



R2-4	Recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy formulation, implementation and monitoring process	number	-	370	Output indicator
CO20	Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs	number	50	350	Performance indicator

The achievement of the milestone target for the number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners formally takes into account the timeframe set, as 55 project proposals have been contracted as of 2018. A significant number of projects under the first call for proposal have been approved and started in 2019.

The activity of the NGO sector in preparing and submitting project proposals for funding is an indication of significant interest and motivation. On the other hand, the number of approved project proposals (a total of 307 project proposals under the two grant procedures) indicates a certain overestimation in setting the target values for this indicator.

In addition, the implementation of a large part of the funded projects is concentrated in the second part and the very end of the programming period, which poses a risk to the achievement of the planned objectives in the timeframe of the programme. The deadlines for contracting and implementation of the projects financed under the first procedure, the conduct of a feedback survey by the administration related to the recommendations made by NGOs and the need to revise and agree on the selection criteria for operations, application guidelines, evaluation methodology and other related documents, justify the postponement of the second application procedure with the amendment of the 2021 OPDG IGRP²⁷ to the second quarter of the same year. Announced in October 2021, procedure BG05SFOP001-2.025 ends with the approval of 186 project proposals, the implementation of which starts in the second half of 2022.

Input resources

The distribution of planned - contracted resources under the two procedures under analysis is discussed below:

Table 26. Allocation of planned and contracted resources

Procedure		Planned funds, BGN	Contracted funds, BGN	Disbursements, BGN	% of implementation
BG05SFOP001-2.009	Enhancing Citizen Participation in the Processes of Development, Implementation and Monitoring Policies and Legislation	10 000 000,00	9 609 207,21	8 742 800,38	90,98%
BG05SFOP001-2.025	Enhancing Citizen Participation in the Processes of	11 145 970,00	10 261 778,64	1 561 773,04	15,22%

²⁷ Indicative Annual Work Programme of the OPSP for 2021 (First Amendment/April 2021), Fifteenth procedure for non-consensual decision of the CN - 14.04.2021-28.04.2021.



Development, Implementation and Monitoring Policies and Legislation

In both grant procedures, the budget estimates are relatively close to the actual contractes figures. While taking into account the fact that the number of approved project proposals does not reach the indicative ones and the project proposals under the second procedure are still in the process of implementation and verification, a reasonable conclusion can be drawn on the relative degree of realism of the planned input resources.

Relevance of the results to the objectives (qualitative analysis)

For the period 2014-2020 the Operational Programme defines two main deficit areas of NGO and business sector participation in the development, implementation and monitoring of public policies in Bulgaria:

- Lack of effective mechanisms for the impact of civil society structures at all stages of planning and implementation
- Inconsistent dialogue between the state and civil society.

The interventions foreseen under PA 2 of the Programme are justified and substantiated from the point of view that the formation of social capital that is sufficiently sustainable over time requires both capacity building of the administrations at different levels and the introduction of incentives and support to ensure the active participation of the representatives of the civil sector and the SEPs for adequate participation and implementation of practical tools for improving civil monitoring of the activities of the administration and policies. Relevant in this respect are two indicators at the level of the implemented projects:

- Number of recommendations formulated by NGOs and NGO networks to the policy development, implementation and monitoring process

1647 recommendations and 552 analyses, studies and evaluations related to the activities of the administration were verified under the projects funded under PA2 and implemented by the civil sector.

- Number of information campaigns conducted on different areas of public policies, local self-government and civic participation

250 information campaigns initiated by foundations, associations, associations of local authorities, municipalities and socio-economic partners, and supported under PA 2, have been verified by mid-2023.

Given the diverse areas in which the financial support is implemented, as well as the lack of a baseline and a specific indicator for measuring change at programme level, it is difficult to assess whether the objectives for improving citizen monitoring of administration and policy are realistically formulated and achieved, but in any case the implementation of the funded projects is a concrete incentive for increasing this type of interaction.



In-depth interviews with representatives of the MA of the OPGG conducted under the study confirm the importance of the Programme's support for improving the activity of the civil sector and the SEPs in terms of participation in decision-making processes at different levels of governance. The positive effect on the administration in terms of strengthening citizen monitoring and control is also noted.²⁸

The expert assessments of the Managing Authority of the programme are confirmed by the results of the standardised survey among grant beneficiaries under the procedures in the scope of the PA2. Over 64% of respondents indicated that as a result of the implementation of the funded projects they had established contacts that had the potential to develop sustainable partnerships. According to the survey, the greatest impact of the programme was in terms of improving the capacity of the NGO sector to actively engage in the policy development, implementation and monitoring processes (72% reported a high and very high impact of the programme in this direction). The effect of the implemented projects on the establishment of sustainable partnerships, although mentioned by 43.5% of the respondents, has the lowest support.

The findings of the qualitative and quantitative studies carried out can be indicative of the achievement of at least two of the expected results relevant to the objectives of the PA2 grant procedures under consideration:

- increasing interaction between the administration and citizens and businesses;
- Increasing NGO and SEPs activity in implementing and monitoring policies and legislation.

The results of the survey are discussed in detail in this part of the analysis, which examines Evaluation Question 5: *Have there been changes since the implementation of the investments under MP2 and MP3*, including the effect of the recommendations made by the NGO sector to the public administration to improve service delivery processes, better regulatory environment, fight against corruption, prevention of conflict of interest and abuse of official positions, compliance with ethical standards by public officials. Although fluctuating, the information regarding the recommendations accepted and implemented in practice by the public administration (18.4% of respondents indicated that the recommendations made were fully accepted and implemented, and 44.9% - that they were partially accepted by the administration) can also be the basis for registering positive trends, again related to the activation of the participation of the civil sector and interaction with the public administration. Based on the survey, however, a positive assessment of the achievement of one of the expected results related to the fight against corruption and unethical practices in the administration is unlikely, given that only 4.8% of the beneficiaries indicated that the recommendations they made were relevant to the fight against corruption. This shows that there are areas and topics that are difficult for NGOs, where they do not have enough expertise or do not think they could

²⁸ In-depth interview with representatives of the MA of OPMU



implement successful projects due to their inability to achieve convincing results and meet programme requirements.

For the purpose of this analysis, the above conclusions on the degree of achievement of the expected results under the PA2 of the OPGG are set in the context of the general assessments of the state of the civil sector in Bulgaria and the trends in the civil space in recent years. It is precisely the identified deficits and negative trends in the development of the civil sector in the country, at the time of programming, to a large extent, that justify the specific needs and planned interventions. However, it should be borne in mind that the specific contribution of the Operational Programme in the context of one or another registered trend cannot be clearly defined, given the variety of socio-economic factors to be taken into account in the evaluation.

Table 27. NGO Sustainability Index in Bulgaria²⁹

	2018 г.	2021 г.
OVERALL SUSTAINABILITY OF NGO	3.4	3.4
Organisational capacity	4.0	4.1
Financial sustainability	4.6	4.7
Advocacy	2.6	2.8
Provision of services	3.1	3.1
Infrastructure	3.0	2.8
Public prestige	3.7	3.7

The degree of achievement of the expected results of the two grant procedures, aimed at increasing civil participation in the processes of policy development, implementation and monitoring of legislation, can be considered in association with at least three of the indicators forming the overall sustainability index of the civil organizations in the country: organizational capacity, advocacy and public prestige. The information provided in the table above indicates that there has been no significant change in either the overall environment for civil society or individual aspects of civil society sector development. A marginal improvement in the 2021 score compared to 2018 is reported in terms of organisational capacity and advocacy activity of NGOs, but overall the sector remains at a level of “developing resilience”, apparently failing to sufficiently capitalise on the support it receives.

The nationally representative survey of public attitudes towards the activities of the civil organizations in Bulgaria, conducted by the Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law in 2022, is also not a reason for optimistic conclusions.³⁰ The support for the influence of NGOs in legislative initiatives and the intensity of citizen participation in public consultations and discussions in 2022 remains extremely low and at 2020 levels. The study points out that distrust

²⁹ NGO Sustainability Index in Bulgaria, Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law, Oct. 2022 г.

³⁰ Public attitudes towards the activities of CSOs - results from the national representative survey 2022, BCNL, <https://bcnl.org/analyses/obshtestveni-naglasii-kam-deynostta-na-grazhdanskite-organizatsii-rezultati-ot-natsionalno-predstavitelno-prouchvane-2022.html>



of collective action is particularly high among younger age groups, although some difference in support is reported when specific sectors of interest to broad societal groups are assessed.

The situation described is not unusual against the background of the general trend of a continuous "narrowing of civic space" across Europe³¹. In addition, the deterioration of the environment for the development of the civil sector in Bulgaria should also be seen against the background of several dominant factors of recent years: the pandemic caused by the spread of COVID-19, the military conflict in Ukraine, political crises and frequent changes of governments, entrenched public attitudes of so-called "external" influence on NGOs. The sensitivity of the civil sector to these factors is extremely high and is an additional argument for ensuring adequate support and funding.

Priority Axis 3

“Transparent and Efficient Judiciary”

The evaluation of the implementation of Priority Axis 3 "Transparent and Efficient Judiciary" proves the realism of the set objectives in terms of intervention logic, indicators and planned input resources (time and financial). However, the parameters of change examined do not provide grounds for forming a justified conclusion on the sufficient degree of achievement, respectively realism of the expected results.

The contribution of the Operational Programme to the promotion of the legal aid system among the citizens and the alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes is indisputable.

The interventions under Priority Axis 3 aimed at more active involvement of the civil sector are dominated by projects for the introduction of alternative dispute resolution methods and with limited results in terms of the role of civil society in the development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies and increase of the effectiveness of the work of the judiciary institutions.

Direct support for stimulating civic participation under PA 3 of the OPGG, through the involvement of all civil structures active in the judiciary, is foreseen under SO 1: Increase of transparency and acceleration of judicial proceedings through structural, procedural and organisational reforms in the judiciary. At the programming stage, the focus is on activities to stimulate the participation of NGOs and professional organisations in the sector in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating strategies for reforms and improvements in the judiciary. The support of such projects instrumentalises an approach of increasing transparency and trust in the judiciary.

Overall, the expected effects of the implementation of the Operational Programme are related to achieving faster, fairer and more efficient justice. In turn, **the expected results** in terms of

³¹ Europe's Civil Society Still under Pressure, FRA, Update 2022, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-protecting-civic-space_en.pdf



ЕВРОПЕЙСКИ СЪЮЗ
ЕВРОПЕЙСКИ
СОЦИАЛЕН ФОНД



ОПЕРАТИВНА ПРОГРАМА
ДОБРО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ

civic participation and business at the programme level are logically linked to the introduction of functioning systems for monitoring and evaluation of the reform strategies in the judiciary, improvement of opportunities for the application of alternative means of resolving legal disputes and reduction of the length of criminal and civil proceedings, prevention and counteraction of corruption.

The intervention logic for achieving Specific Objective 1 of PA 3 (OPGG), the civic participation component, is discussed in the table below:



Table 28 Intervention logic for achieving Specific Objective 1 of MP 3

Specific objective	Needs analysis	Identified potential for impact	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
SO 1: Increase of transparency and acceleration of judicial proceedings through structural, procedural and organisational reforms in the judiciary	<p>Excessive duration of criminal proceedings.</p> <p>Lack of monitoring and evaluation system for the judiciary</p> <p>Alternative dispute resolution methods are extremely underdeveloped</p> <p>Integrated efforts to prevent conflict of interest and corruption in the judiciary</p>	<p>Development and implementation of mechanisms and tools for feedback, monitoring and evaluation by citizens</p> <p>Improve interaction with NGOs and professional organizations for more active involvement in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies</p>	<p>Promotion of alternative dispute resolution methods.</p> <p>Support for the development of analyses, studies, methodologies and evaluations to enhance the implementation of reforms</p> <p>Support for the open participation of all NGOs and professional organisations active in the field in the development, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies and proposals for improvements in the judiciary.</p> <p>Transfer of best practices and innovative solutions to address deficiencies in structure, staff management, training, collaboration and professional practices.</p>	<p>Outcome: new and improved existing tools for judicial modernisation.</p> <p>Performance indicators:</p> <p>Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the work of the judiciary</p> <p>Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs</p> <p>Projects dedicated to promotion and development of alternative dispute resolution methods</p>





The task of the present research, related to the assessment of the level of realism of the set objectives in relation to the achieved results, is fully linked to the analysis of the grant procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003 *Citizens' control over the reform of the judiciary*.

The framework of objectives of the grant procedure follows the logic of programming:

Table 29. Target-setting under procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003

Objectives of the procedure	Expected results	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implementation of citizens' control over the reform of the judiciary through more active involvement of NGOs and professional organisations in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies ➤ Recommendations for improvements in the judicial system. ➤ Encouraging and developing alternative dispute resolution methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increased citizens' control over the reform of the judiciary and an increase in the number of NGOs actively involved in this process. ➤ Recommendations made to improve the judiciary and good practices were transferred. ➤ Promoting and creating the necessary conditions for the introduction of alternative dispute resolution methods. ➤ Increasing the efficiency of the work of the institutions of the judiciary and increasing public confidence in them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Introduced new and improved existing instruments for the modernisation of the judiciary. ➤ Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs. ➤ Supported analyses, studies, research, methodologies and evaluations related to the work of the judiciary. ➤ Projects dedicated to promotion and development of alternative dispute resolution methods.

Thus formulated the objectives of the procedure clearly correspond to the areas with potential for impact identified in the Operational Programme, but do not outline clear parameters of expected positive change, but rather the scope of eligible activities. The aspects of change can be derived from the context of the expected results, namely:

- Increased citizens' control over the reform of the judiciary and an increase in the number of NGOs actively involved in this process;
- Promoting and creating the necessary conditions for the introduction of alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes;
- Increasing the efficiency of the judiciary institutions and public confidence in them.

The justification of the procedure itself defines its complementary nature in relation to two other procedures under PA 3: 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" and BG05SFOP001-3.002 "Increasing the competence of magistrates and judicial officers through effective training at the National Institute of Justice". Thus, the specific objectives of the procedure have a synergistic effect in terms of efforts to modernise and reform the judiciary, supporting interventions directly aimed at ensuring the independence of the courts and other judicial authorities. However, in order to have a clear demarcation and no double funding, actions and measures foreseen to be supported under the Roadmap to the Updated Strategy for



the Continuation of the Reform of the Judiciary and the Roadmap to the Strategy for the Introduction of e-Government and e-Justice in the Justice Sector 2014-2020 are not eligible for funding under this procedure.

This is why, with the exception of the indicator "Number of projects implemented in whole or in part by social partners or NGOs", the other indicators under the procedure "Citizens' control over the reform of the judiciary" are also contributed by other interventions under the programme. This limits the scope for more definitive conclusions on the specific impact of the support under procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003 on at least two of the aspects of change identified above: conditions for the introduction of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes and increased public confidence in the institutions of the judiciary. Moreover, the implemented projects intervene at the micro level, within the scope of a specific judicial district or with a narrowly defined perimeter of action, while the issue of public confidence in the institutions of the judiciary concerns at a large extent the institutions of the judiciary as national institutions and could have been impacted if many positive changes are accumulated in their work.

Degree of achievement of the set indicators

The progress of the implementation of the projects financed under grant procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003 as of June 2023 shows the implementation of the target indicators according to the Manual of Indicators under the Operational Programme "Good Governance" 2014-2020.³²

The only indicator under the Programme's PA 3, for which the contribution is entirely of the procedure under consideration - "Number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or NGOs" has a target value of 50 projects by 2023. More than 50% of them have been implemented independently by the applicants, with no partnerships established.

26 of the completed projects are aimed at promoting the development and improvement of the capacity for the application of alternative dispute resolution methods, which far exceeds the target for the entire priority axis - 5 projects by 2023.

In addition, 158 analyses, studies and evaluations related to the functioning of the judiciary have been reported and verified within the framework of the projects implemented by NGOs and professional organizations.

The number of verified instruments for the modernisation of the judiciary introduced by an administrative act within the implemented projects under this procedure is 8, with a target value of 30 in total under PA3 for 2023. The latter indicates a contribution of over 25% of the projects financed under the procedure to the achievement of the indicator for the whole Priority Axis 3. It is also noted that the verification of this indicator, according to the OP methodology, requires the instruments for the modernisation of the judiciary to be approved by a normative or

³² Handbook of Indicators under the Operational Programme "Good Governance", approved at the Thirteenth Procedure of the SC of the Operational Programme "Good Governance", 16.10.2020.



administrative act, which introduces an additional aspect of evaluation of the results achieved by the implementation of the grant procedure.

Timeframe for achievement of milestones and final target

The assessment of the realism of the resource "time" shows that the implementation of the planned interventions and the planned indicators is achieved within the pre-planned timeframe.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003 has three deadlines for submission of project proposals for a period of more than three years (2017 - 2020) and a budget of BGN 5 000 000. A total of 148 project proposals were submitted within the three application deadlines, almost half (65 project proposals) submitted for funding in 2020. Out of the total of 56 contracted and 53 implemented grant agreements, the lowest number (11) was agreed in 2017, a logical consequence of the budget allocation under the procedure, where the lowest share of funds was allocated within the first application period.

The progress on the implementation of the target indicators is discussed in detail in the section dedicated to the analysis of the effectiveness of the investments to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary. Full implementation and even significant over-implementation of the agreed values for the individual indicators is reported, which is an indicator of the high degree of realism of the targets sets in relation to the time resources of the Operational programme.

Input resources

The ratio of planned - input resources in projects related to the support of citizens' participation and cooperation with civil society structures in the judiciary is also an evidence of a high degree of realism of planned expenditures and 93.4% overall absorption under the procedure, respectively realism of planned input resources.

Table 30. Planned and invested funds under Procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003

Procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003 <i>Citizens' control over the reform of the judiciary</i>	Planned funds, BGN	Contracted funds, BGN	Disbursements, BGN	% of implementation
Application deadline 2017	1 000 000,00	972 421,01	864 842,69	88,94%
Application deadline 2018	2 000 000,00	1 797 024,15	1 662 680,29	92,52%
Application deadline 2020	2 000 000,00	1 972 873,79	1 900 827,90	95,24%

Results to the objectives relevance (qualitative analysis)

The positive conclusions of the quantitative analysis of the realism of the planned objectives, as a function of the degree of achievement of the set indicators, are verified through expert assessments and opinions of key actors in the process of the implementation of the support under the OPGG, as well as information from studies at national and European level.

The results of the interviews conducted with experts from the MA of the OPGG largely outline the quality of the change achieved or the lack thereof after the implementation of the projects funded under procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003. In general, the evaluations report on the



implementation of the indicators previously set under the procedure, but are largely sceptical about the effects related to systemic and structural challenges associated with the reform of the judiciary and the capacity of the Operational Programme to influence them.

The overall assessment is that the priority interventions, at the implementation stage, are dominated by projects to introduce alternative dispute resolution methods, compared to those related to increasing citizen control over judicial reform. A conclusion is formed about a greater activity of the civil sector towards the development of different mediation practices e.g. than towards an active and constructive participation in the reform process³³.

At the same time, it is pointed out that the implemented projects related to alternative dispute resolution methods do not achieve the effect of reducing the burden on the judicial system. The reasons for this can be sought in the lack of legislative changes that would ensure the effective introduction of mediation locally and be a prerequisite for its development and its imposition as the preferred method of dispute resolution by citizens and businesses. Indicative in this respect are the data from the EU Dashboard on the caseload of the judicial system in Bulgaria for the period 2018 - 2020, which shows no change, except for a slight decrease in the number of civil, commercial and administrative cases in 2020³⁴. The latter, is largely explained by the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Attention should also be paid to the fact that within the framework of some of the projects funded under procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003, analyses are developed in which the reasons for the ineffective application of alternative dispute resolution methods (ADR) are examined, specific proposals for the introduction of good practices and proposals for legislative initiatives are formulated. Among the main shortcomings of the Bulgarian judicial system in terms of ADR pointed out are the need to introduce different degrees of a mandatory mediation procedure for initiating court proceedings, control of the quality of mediation services provided, integration of mediation and conflict resolution training in the educational curriculum.³⁵ Criticisms are also related to the lack of a sufficiently solid strategic basis and vision for the development of ADR in the Updated Strategy for the Continuation of Judicial Reform with a horizon to 2020 and the Roadmap for its implementation.³⁶

In this sense, the outputs achieved at projects level funded under the OPGG are also an assessment of the limited possibilities for achieving change by the civil sector, even with the support of public funding. Capitalizing the results of these studies in the future programming

³³ Focus group with representatives of the MA of OPSP

³⁴ EU Justice Scoreboard, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/eu-justice-scoreboard_en#scoreboards

³⁵ Analysis of best practices for alternative resolution of the most common types of cases and their integration into a common database, Report, Project BG05SFOP001 - 3.0003 - 0079 - C01, funded under OPMU, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnpbpcjpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.bgmediation.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Document-Praven-balansor-Mediatsiya-i-dobri-chuzhdestranni-praktiki.pdf>; Study and Analysis of Alternative Dispute Resolution Methods in EU Member States, Report, Project BG05SFOP001-3.003-0122, funded under OPMU 2014-2020, etc.

³⁶ Updated Strategy for the Continuation of the Judicial Reform, approved by the National Assembly on 21.01.2015, <https://www.e-justice.bg/home/index/9888d99d-1602-493e-a167-7491ede8543b>



process would extend the added value of the support and highlights an interesting aspect of the intended effects of the OP implementation.

Far more positive is the assessment of Bulgaria in terms of the state's efforts to promote alternative dispute resolution methods, where the contribution of the Operational Programme should be considered indisputable. In 2022, Bulgaria ranks 7th out of 27 Member States, with a score of 40 points out of a maximum of 68. The comparison with 2018 registers an albeit modest change - approximately 20 points out of a possible 39.³⁷ Although complex, the indicator takes into account parameters such as: publications on the level of dissemination of the ADR, information campaigns and outreach.

The experts' opinions shared during the interviews were consolidated around two main challenges for the implementation of the objectives set under the grant procedure. The main problem is the lack of motivation and interest of the judiciary itself to interact with the civil sector and professional organisations. In the process of implementation of the funded projects, this affects the quality and the final effect of the analyses and recommendations developed, which often remain unanswered and practically implemented.

The lack of an adequate legislative framework and the low interest in cooperation with civil society organisations are a major obstacle to the implementation of another expected result of the procedure - the introduction of tools and good practices for modernisation and improvement of the functioning of the judiciary. Only 7 out of 53 projects have been implemented in partnership with the judiciary. Reluctance to partnerships is noted as a clear trend and a disincentive for civil organizations.³⁸

7.4. Contribution of the OPGG support to increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the administration and the judiciary

Evaluation question 2.4: What is the contribution of the support from the OPGG to increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary ?

Contribution of the support from OPGG under PA 2

The implemented activities under PA 2 contribute to the achievement of the main objective of the interventions, namely - *Creating an environment of open and accountable governance in partnership with citizens and business and for increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the activities of the administration.* The conditions for the implementation of 307 project proposals have been ensured, and in about 40% of them the partners are structures of the public administration, and it is important to note that this is not a mandatory condition in terms of eligibility of the project proposal - that is, the programmed interventions have created a natural environment for partnership between the civil sector and

³⁷ The 2018 EU Justice Scoreboard, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2018-05/justice_scoreboard_2018_en.pdf

³⁸ Focus group with representatives of the MA of OPSP



the administration and joint implementation of the interventions, and this is a real contribution of the implemented measures under the OPGG.

More than 500 analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration have also been supported.

Over 1600 recommendations have been made regarding:

- improving service delivery processes;
- a better regulatory environment;
- modernisation of administration;
- fight against corruption.

Looking at the development of the environment through the prism of the high number of recommendations made, it can be concluded that the interventions implemented have had a direct impact on increasing the activity of NGOs and SEPs in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation. Through the implementation of the priorities, the OPGG has created an environment and an opportunity to make suggestions for improvements in the activities of the administration.

The over-performance of the indicator "recommendations made" shows that NGOs and SEPs themselves recognise the value of their participation and see the OPGG as an important tool to enable this participation to be supported. NGOs are active in generating project ideas, preparing and submitting projects and in their implementation, including by formulating recommendations to the institutions.

The large number of recommendations made also shows that funded organisations have the capacity and have carried out a certain amount of analytical work in the process of project implementation, on the basis of which they have formulated a large number of recommendations and have acted as an active partner of the institutions.

The documents and recommendations developed by the projects and addressed to a competent authority can make a useful contribution, adding to the body of analytical information and stakeholder views needed in the policy-making process. They are able to enrich the policy-making institutions by systematizing useful knowledge and information, good practices or analyses that can be of direct use for the work of the institutions and for the development and implementation of policies at national and regional level.

Contribution of the support from the OPGG under PA 3

The implemented activities under PA 3 contribute to the achievement of the main objective of the interventions, namely - *Creating an environment for civil control over the reform of the judiciary through the more active involvement of NGOs and professional organizations in the process of development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies.*

The conditions were provided for the implementation of 53 projects aimed at citizen control over the reform of the judiciary, within the framework of which 158 analyses, studies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary were prepared. The programming of the



measure did not foresee greater activity, as it was accompanied by relevant analyses as to what proportion of registered NGOs were actually active in the field of the work of the judiciary, as this area is specific and requires relevant specialised knowledge, experience and expertise. At the same time, looking specifically at the area of the work of the judiciary system, the programme has made a contribution in terms of having specifically programmed the procedure for this sector only, which allows for focused support to NGOs active in the area of citizen oversight of judicial reform, thus increasing the possibility of funding and implementing the concepts of those working in the sector.

Conditions were created for the promotion of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes and as a result of the support 26 projects with such orientation were implemented. The implementation of these projects is important from the point of view that alternative methods for resolving legal disputes, despite the existence of legislation since 2004, remain an unknown institution and there is a deficit and failure to promote the institution of "mediation".

Of course judicial reform is a long and complex process and these projects are part of the dialogue process, but it cannot be concluded that they have made a significant change in the processes of work and reform of the judiciary. Rather, the implemented projects have enabled the accumulation of analyses, knowledge, research on good practices and models to be used by citizens or institutions of the judiciary in the future. The provision of targeted funding for this type of projects is a step in the right direction in terms of establishing a policy of dialogue and information exchange between the judiciary and the civil sector .

Citizen participation in decision-making processes allows for periodic citizen monitoring of the actions, decisions and policies pursued by the state and creates opportunities for citizens' ideas to be implemented. Through NGOs and the work of SEPs, the public's position is a kind of corrective to political priorities and goals and is an instrument for public scrutiny of state policy. Civil society participates in both the policy-making process (strategic planning) and the process of control and monitoring of policy implementation. The benefits of civic participation can be outlined in the following areas:

- ✓ the legitimacy of the rationale for a policy decision (based on data and policy analysis);
- ✓ Credibility of needs and demands, which are taken into account and prioritized by institutions and policy-making units (prioritization based on needs assessment and clearly defined objectives and priorities);
- ✓ Sustainability of decisions and policies over the long term to meet identified needs and achieve lasting results (strategic planning and policy implementation in partnership with stakeholders).

The participation of NGO representatives and citizens in policy decision-making is crucial and should be well ensured by developing appropriate mechanisms and measures for inclusion. Citizen participation in policy formulation and decision-making is a prerequisite for open and effective governance, as it contributes to improving the quality of public policies and increasing



the accountability and dialogue of institutions. It also ensures the democratic legitimacy of the political system, the coherence of policies and the search for maximum possible consensus in the process of defining key priorities and measures for their implementation. This implies identifying existing communication problems, improving feedback mechanisms and improving the methods through which partnership and interaction with specific stakeholders are carried out. Showing willingness for partnership on the part of the representatives of the administrations is one of the most important factors creating preconditions for improving the mechanisms of stakeholder involvement in the process.

Citizen participation is an integral part of setting priorities for the development of sectoral policies. It is an important part of the decision-making process and the implementation and monitoring of policies designed to address important societal needs and priorities. Civil society has a key role to play in the good functioning of public administration.

Priority axis 2

In the programming of procedures BG05SFOP001-2.009 and BG05SFOP001-2.025³⁹, which fall within the scope of this evaluation under **Priority Axis 2 "Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business"**, *Specific Objective 3 "Increase citizen participation in the process of policy formulation and monitoring"*, the status and mechanisms of functioning of citizen participation in the Republic of Bulgaria, which are the subject of analysis in the *"Strategy for the Development of Public Administration 2014-2020"*, have been taken into account.", as well as the *"Strategy for Supporting the Development of Civil Society Organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2012-2015"*, which aims to create appropriate conditions for the development of civil society organizations and to stimulate partnership between them and institutions at national and local level. The *"Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020"* recognises that the mechanisms for interaction with NGOs are not sufficiently developed and do not create conditions for active civic participation. The identified problems in the sphere of public consultations and active publication of information by state institutions show that the state should develop and use in parallel different forms and instruments for involving citizens and their organisations in policy-making and decision-making. Some forms of citizen participation have been used to a high degree (e.g. public councils), others have remained out of the public eye (examples: constitutional complaint, direct legislative initiative).

The projects under the two procedures address different policy areas (education, health, ecology, culture, etc.) according to the field of activity and specialization of the beneficiary organization, respectively partner, with the aim of improving citizen participation in the processes of formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation. Some of the projects explore the formulation and implementation of a specific policy at municipal or district level. In about 40% of the projects implemented in partnership, the partners are public

³⁹ The procedure is complementary to procedure BG05SFOP001-2.009 "Enhancing Citizen Participation in the Processes of Formulation, Implementation and Monitoring of Policies and Legislation". The maximum implementation period for each project is 18 months from the date of conclusion of the administrative grant agreement, but no later than 31.12.2023.



administration structures (municipalities, regional administrations, central administrations, specialised territorial administrations). In the implementation of the projects, more than 200 awareness-raising campaigns have been carried out; more than 500 analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies and evaluations have been developed for the administration, and more than 1,600 recommendations have been made by NGOs on policy formulation, implementation and monitoring.

For the purpose of this evaluation, a questionnaire survey was carried out to explore the views of beneficiaries⁴⁰. With regard to the change in the environment for civil participation and an assessment of the extent to which this change can be attributed to the OPGG projects implemented, the beneficiaries who have implemented projects under PA 2⁴¹, are of the opinion that, thanks to the interventions implemented within the OPGG projects, policies for interaction with civil society will improve in the future, due to the following results achieved:

- ✓ the suggestions made by NGOs can be used as a basis for policy development for interaction with civil society (64.5%);
- ✓ projects show that effective governance exists when it is in partnership with the community and business (59.7%);
- ✓ the necessary reforms in the administrative services sector can only be fully implemented in partnership with the public (33.9%).

According to the beneficiaries who participated in the survey, the OPGG and the investments made to increase civic participation and strengthen civic control over the activities of the administration have made a significant contribution to⁴²:

- ✓ *Improving the environment for civic participation (79%);*
- ✓ *Development of policy for interaction with civil society (77.4%);*
- ✓ *Creating opportunities for citizens to monitor policies implemented at national and local level (75.8%);*
- ✓ *Improving the relationship between the administration and civil society through partnership-building measures in governance (75.8%);*
- ✓ *Making suggestions for improvements in the administration (69.4%);*
- ✓ *Improving and contributing to administrative service reform (58.1%);*

The results show that the objectives set in terms of improving the environment for NGO participation have been achieved. In general the effects of the OPGG on promoting civic

⁴⁰ Within the scope of Task 2 evaluation - BG05SFOP001-2.009, BG05SFOP001-2.025 and BG05SFOP001-3.003 - total number of responding beneficiaries 238

⁴¹ Implemented projects under BG05SFOP001-2.009, BG05SFOP001-2.025 - total number of responding beneficiaries 207

⁴² The percentages show the sum of those who responded "have contributed to a large extent" and "have contributed significantly" to the question "To what extent do you think that the OPSP and the investments made to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration have contributed to..."



participation were assessed positively by representatives of organisations that have implemented projects. In their view, a good basis has been laid for the development of a sustainable policy of interaction between the administration and civil society. The viewpoint of NGOs as key actors in this process is extremely important. The "*Strategy for the Development of the State Administration 2014-2020*" recognises that the mechanisms for interaction with civil society organisations are not sufficiently well developed and do not create conditions for active civil participation. The intervention of the OPGG addresses precisely these deficits by creating conditions to support and promote civic participation processes. The assessment of the civil society sector in terms of whether there has been a change in the environment in which they operate thanks to the investments made under the OPGG is the starting prism for monitoring the results of project implementation. The validation of this conclusion in the presentation will be done later on also through the prism of administrations, when considering how many of the recommendations made have been useful and therefore have been implemented by the administration they are addressed to.

Priority Axis 3

Priority Axis 3 "Transparent and Effective Judiciary", and in particular the procedure related to Specific Objective 1 "Increase transparency and speed up the administration of justice through reform of the structure, procedures and organisation of the judiciary", aims to actively involve non-governmental and professional organisations in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating strategies for the reform of the judiciary, making proposals for improvements and promoting and developing alternative methods for resolving legal disputes. The procedure supports the open participation of all NGOs and professional organisations active in the field in the development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies and proposals for improvements in the judicial system.

The project activities cover various aspects of the activities of the judicial system and their focus can be grouped as follows:

- ✓ citizen control and monitoring of the judiciary;
- ✓ forensic expertise and the resolution of legal disputes and the conciliation process through the active involvement of forensic experts;
- ✓ building an environment for the introduction of a uniform standard (benchmark) for publicity and transparency in the work of the courts in the Republic of Bulgaria;
- ✓ optimising the work of the investigative bodies in the investigation of crimes in areas of high public and professional importance;
- ✓ alternative methods for resolving legal disputes;
- ✓ mechanism for citizen participation, accountability, monitoring and control;
- ✓ evaluation and analysis of judicial reform;
- ✓ creating a sustainable tool for monitoring integrity in the judiciary;
- ✓ developing a toolkit for data-driven citizen monitoring and control of judicial reform;



- ✓ analysis of the work of district courts, including the development of practical guidelines and model documents for vulnerable groups of citizens to ensure effective access to justice;
- ✓ carrying out analyses and studies related to the activities of the judiciary in order to assess the efficiency of its work and to create a model and methodology for reducing the time for solving cases, to support the process of modernization of the system and increase public confidence in it;
- ✓ efficiency and civil control in administrative justice;
- ✓ creating a toolkit for monitoring and evaluating the development of the judiciary;
- ✓ analysis of the content and format of the reports on the activities of the institutions of the judiciary and their practices for communication with the public and development of modular templates and reporting forms on the activities of the institutions of the judiciary and appropriate channels for communication with citizens, media, non-profit organizations and other stakeholders;
- ✓ promoting alternative dispute resolution methods through the establishment and development of mediation centres;
- ✓ children's justice reform - aggregating data and information in the area of children's justice to enable citizen monitoring of the effectiveness of children's justice systems;
- ✓ improving the procedures and rules for the work of the administration in the courts by developing a common framework with unified uniform rules for work in the main aspects of the judicial administration.
- ✓ cCitizen participation in the processes of modernization of justice.

The content of the projects is tailored to the field of activity and specialisation of the beneficiary organisation and their partner. Compared to PA 2, a significantly smaller number of projects have been implemented here (53), but even in the programming itself the MA has taken into account the specificity of the environment and the fact that significantly fewer NGOs have expertise and carry out activities on topics related to the work of the judiciary and has programmed the measure relatively conservatively. It has also been taken into account that changes in terms of reforms in the judiciary system have been significantly slower, as evidenced in numerous studies of the environment conducted in recent years. Compared to PA2, a much smaller proportion of projects here have been implemented in partnership - over 50% of projects have been implemented independently by applicants, with only 7 out of 53 funded project proposals implemented in partnership with judicial structures. It should be noted that it is still difficult for the representatives of the judiciary to fully accept and recognise the partnership with the NGO sector. On the one hand, there is still a lack of capacity among those working in the judiciary to benefit from the analyses, opinions and recommendations of the NGO sector. On the other hand, often the representatives of the judiciary need more time to understand and accept the ideas of the NGO sector, which often come from a different social context (best practice research) or are too cutting-edge or their implementation requires more resources or a scale of change for which the system is not ready. -



In terms of the change in the environment for civic participation and an assessment of the extent to which this change can be attributed to the OPGG projects implemented, the beneficiaries who have implemented projects under PA 3⁴³, are of the opinion that, thanks to the interventions implemented within the OPGG projects, policies for interaction with civil society will improve in the future due to the following results achieved:

- ✓ the suggestions made by NGOs can be used as a basis for policy development for interaction with civil society (71.4%);
- ✓ the necessary reform of the judiciary can only be fully implemented in partnership with the public (57.1%).

According to the beneficiaries who participated in the study, the PA 3 and the investments made to increase civic participation and strengthen civic control over the judiciary have made a significant contribution to⁴⁴:

- ✓ *Making suggestions for improvements in the work of the judiciary (100%);*
- ✓ *Development of policy for interaction with civil society(92.9%);*
- ✓ *Enabling citizen control over the reform of the judiciary through more active involvement of NGOs and professional organisations in the process of development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies (85.7%);*
- ✓ *Improving the environment for civic participation (78.6%);*
- ✓ *Promotion and development of alternative methods of legal dispute resolution (42.9%).*

The effects of the OPGG on the promotion of civic participation have been positively assessed by representatives of organisations that have implemented projects. We can see that the most significant contribution of the beneficiaries of PA 3 is the fact that the programme enables them to make proposals regarding the activities of the judiciary in the context of the necessary reform. The effect of creating this environment for governance with citizens in the future should contribute to the efficiency of the work of the judiciary institutions and to increasing public confidence in them.

7.5.Changes after investments under PA 2 and PA 3

Evaluation question 2.5: Have there been any changes since the investments under PA2 and PA3 in:

2.5.1. Citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary?

⁴³ Implemented projects under BG05SFOP001-3.003 - total number of responding beneficiaries 31

⁴⁴ The percentages show the sum of those who responded "have contributed to a large extent" and "have contributed significantly" to the question "To what extent do you think that the OPCJ and the investments made to increase civic participation and strengthen civic oversight of the judiciary have contributed to..."



2.5.2. *Citizen participation in the processes of formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation in the administration and in the judiciary, as well as in the promotion of alternative methods of legal dispute resolution?*

2.5.3. *How does the administration address the suggestions of civil society organisations in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation?*

2.5.4. *How are the responsible institutions and bodies implementing the reforms in the judiciary and the use of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes?*

2.5.5. *Which/what part of the changes are due to the support from the OPGG?*

The changes that have occurred as a result of the investments made are discussed in the following evaluation sub-questions:

Sub-question 2.5.1. Have there been any changes in the civilian control of the administration and the judiciary system since the investments under PA2 and PA3?

The results of the evaluation show that the change in the environment in terms of citizen control is more significant in terms of the implemented interventions under PA2 compared to the effects of the implementation of PA3. The higher number of projects implemented, the recommendations made and the acceptance of a large number of them by the administrations concerned are evidence that, in terms of the thematic areas of the projects implemented, the beneficiary organisations had a real opportunity to exercise citizen control.

The results of PA 3 show an activation of the NGO sector on issues related to judicial reform. The funded projects increase the activity and support the ideas of NGOs as a corrective to the judiciary. The foundations laid by these activities should be continued in the future to change the conservative environment in the judiciary system and to enable real citizen control and real judicial reform. Although no significant changes have yet been accumulated in the field of the judiciary, the implemented projects contribute to the exchange of knowledge and good practices, to increased dialogue between the NGO sector and the judiciary and to the search for models and working mechanisms that would contribute to the expected reforms in the judiciary.

The project activities under PA 2 "*Effective and Professional Governance in Partnership with Civil Society and Business*" cover various aspects of the administration's activities and their focus can be grouped as follows:

- ✓ evaluating and monitoring the implementation of strategies and sectoral policies;
- ✓ improved service delivery processes, better regulatory environment;
- ✓ fight against corruption, prevention of conflict of interest and abuse of office.

The changes that have occurred as a result of the project interventions contribute to improving the environment for civic participation. On the basis of the procedures thus programmed, the civil sector is activated and many beneficiaries and their partners focus on the activities of the public administration, thus creating the conditions for citizen control and monitoring. The implemented interventions lay the foundation for building a model in which, on the one hand,



NGO s are active participants in the processes of control over the activities of the administration and, on the other hand, the administration partners with them and addresses the proposals of the civil sector, which in turn is a prerequisite for building a sustainable partnership and dialogue in governance.

The project activities under PA 3 "Transparent and efficient judiciary" cover various aspects of the activities of the judiciary and their focus can be grouped as follows:

- ✓ citizen control and monitoring of the judiciary;
- ✓ forensic expertise and the resolution of legal disputes and the conciliation process through the active involvement of forensic experts;
- ✓ building an environment for the introduction of a uniform standard (benchmark) for publicity and transparency in the work of the courts in the Republic of Bulgaria;
- ✓ optimising the work of the investigative bodies in the investigation of crimes in areas of high public and professional importance;
- ✓ alternative methods for resolving legal disputes;
- ✓ Mechanism for citizen participation, accountability, monitoring and control;
- ✓ evaluation and analysis of judicial reform;
- ✓ Creating a sustainable tool for monitoring integrity in the judiciary.
- ✓ Developing a toolkit for data-driven citizen monitoring and control of judicial reform;
- ✓ Analysis of the work of district courts, including the development of practical guidelines and model documents for vulnerable groups of citizens to ensure effective access to justice;
- ✓ Carrying out analyses and studies related to the activities of the judiciary to assess the efficiency of its work and creating a model and methodology for reducing the time for solving cases to support the process of modernization of the system and increase public confidence in it;
- ✓ efficiency and civil control in administrative justice;
- ✓ creating a toolkit for monitoring and evaluating the development of the judiciary;
- ✓ analysis of the content and format of the reports on the activities of the institutions of the judiciary and their practices for communication with the public and development of modular templates and reporting forms on the activities of the institutions of the judiciary and appropriate channels for communication with citizens, media, non-profit organizations and other stakeholders;
- ✓ promoting alternative dispute resolution methods through the establishment and development of mediation centres;
- ✓ children's justice reform - aggregating data and information in the area of children's justice to enable citizen monitoring of the effectiveness of children's justice systems;
- ✓ Improving the procedures and rules for the work of the administration in the courts by developing a common framework with unified uniform rules for work in the main aspects of the judicial administration;
- ✓ citizen participation in the processes of modernization of justice.



In terms of the implementation of projects under PA3, we cannot yet speak of a substantial change as a result of citizen control over the activities of the judiciary, but of the beginning of a dialogue.

Sub-question 2.5.2. Have there been any changes since the investments under PA2 and PA3 in citizen participation in the processes of formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and legislation in the administration and in the judiciary system , and in the promotion of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes?

The OPGG, through the two procedures implemented under PA 2, has created an environment and an opportunity to make suggestions for improvements in the activities of the administration. NGOs and SEPs recognise the value of their participation and see OPGG as an important tool to enable this participation to be supported. NGOs are active in generating project ideas, preparing and submitting projects and in their implementation, including by formulating recommendations to the institutions. The environment has been activated, partnerships have been established, which would help for sustainable interaction between the administration and the civil sector in the future.

The implementation of the procedure "Citizens' control over the reform of the judiciary" under PO 3 contributed to the increase in the number of NGOs actively involved in the process of making recommendations for improving the judiciary and transferring good practices, promoting and creating the necessary conditions for the popularization of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes. The projects implemented in the field of alternative dispute resolution have made an important contribution to their promotion, as although the Institute has been in existence since 2004, the level of public awareness of it is extremely low, a deficit which is being addressed through the implementation of these projects. As a result of the support under PA 3, the effect of creating an environment for co-management with citizens will continue to be felt, which in the future would also help to improve the efficiency of the judiciary institutions and increase public confidence in them.

Change in a policy or environment is a process that is based on certain accumulations and usually takes time. The efficient and impartial functioning of the institutions and the judiciary system is fundamental and essential for the stable social, economic and political development of our country. The documents and recommendations developed under the projects regarding the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation in the administration and the judiciary, as well as the promotion of alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes, make a useful and substantial contribution, adding to the body of analytical information and stakeholder views needed in the policy-making process.

From a sectoral policy perspective, the role of the OPGG projects is to strengthen the capacity of civil society to prepare, implement, monitor and evaluate public policies .



The projects implemented under PA2 have a specific sectoral focus and include both work and recommendations for local authorities, as well as partnership, monitoring and recommendations for central administration institutions.

The changes that have taken place since the implementation of the PA2 investments, affecting *citizen participation in the processes of formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation in the administration*, have been addressed first through the assessment of the PA2 beneficiaries who participated in the survey and who have highlighted the following effects as the most important in their opinion⁴⁵ :

- ✓ *Improving the environment for citizen participation - (79%);*
- ✓ *Create opportunities for citizens to monitor policies implemented at national and local level - (75.8%);*
- ✓ *Improving the relationship between the administration and civil society through partnership-building measures in governance - (75.8%).*

The change after the investments under PA 2 can be seen in the light of the realisation of the objectives set by the priorities of the OPGG, namely:

- The programmed interventions have created a natural environment for partnership between the civil sector and the administration and joint implementation and delivery of the interventions (about 40% of the implemented projects have a partner from the public administration) - this creates a prerequisite for sustainable future partnerships;
- Through the implemented projects, more than 500 analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies, audits and evaluations for the administration have been supported and can make a useful contribution, adding to the set of sources of analytical information and stakeholder opinions needed in the policy-making process;
- The project activities focus on different policy areas (education, health, ecology, culture, etc.). Here the changes will cover a wider range of policies at municipal, regional and central level, as the thematic focus of the projects is not as focused as in PA3, this approach allows NGOs, depending on their expertise and identified weaknesses, to select and focus on a specific problem or theme or to target sectoral policies of wider relevance to a given territory or in a specific policy area and we can synthesize by considering the impact in the following areas:
 - regional development policies - citizen participation;
 - local policies - citizen participation;
 - sectoral policies (youth and sport, environment, health, tourism, education, etc.)
 - policies aimed at improving the effectiveness of administrative reform.

⁴⁵ Percentages show the sum of those who answered "have contributed a great deal" and "have contributed significantly" to the question "To what extent *do you think that the OPGG and the investments made to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration have contributed to...* ", only the answers of beneficiaries who have implemented a project under PA2 are presented and respondents could give more than one answer.



In assessing in which area and to what extent the OPGG and the investments made to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the judiciary, according to the beneficiaries of PA 3 with the most significant contributions are the following⁴⁶ :

- ✓ *Given the opportunity to make suggestions for improvements in the operation of the judiciary (100%);*
- ✓ *Enabling citizen control over judicial reform through more active involvement of NGOs and professional organisations in the development, monitoring and evaluation of reform strategies (85.7%).*
- ✓ *Promotion and development of alternative methods of legal dispute resolution (42.9%)*

The main change, in terms of PA3, should be seen through the impact on stakeholders, in particular the civil sector, as although the implemented projects are only 53 and with the caveat that this is a highly specialized area, the OPGG has enabled participation and has activated the environment, which is a significant step especially in relation to an environment as conservative and difficult to change as that of the judiciary. Another significant change can be seen through the prism of focused funding for relevant interventions and their allocation as a separate priority. Thanks to the programme, projects have been funded in the following main areas and themes:

- Transparency, accountability and increased confidence in the judiciary;
- Mediation and Arbitration - development of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes, development of Standards for training mediators;
- Citizen oversight and support for judicial reform, citizen monitoring and oversight of judicial map reform;
- Judicial efficiency, effective judicial reform in administrative justice;
- Quality management with the introduction of a citizen participation mechanism;
- Independence of the judiciary;
- Strengthening the integrity of the judiciary;
- The rule of law and economic growth;
- Civil control, monitoring and evaluation of the application and implementation of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Updated Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary and the implementation of the Strategy for the continuation of the reform in the judiciary 2014-2020;
- A toolkit for data-driven citizen monitoring and control of judicial reform;

⁴⁶ The percentages show the sum of those who responded "have contributed to a large extent" and "have contributed significantly" to the question "To what extent do you think that the OPSP and the investments made to increase civic participation and strengthen civic control over the activities of the judiciary have contributed to...", where only the responses of the beneficiaries who have implemented a project under FP3 are presented and the respondents could give more than one answer.



- Analysis of the interpretative activity of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Republic of Bulgaria;
- Reforms in the juvenile justice system;
- Fostering the development of restorative justice practices in criminal proceedings;
- Improving the procedures and rules of the courts' administration;
- Using new technologies for concrete solutions in the justice system;
- Analysis of various aspects of criminal justice;
- Support for the advocacy.

From the in-depth interviews conducted with stakeholders, it can be summarized that the process of creating an environment for increasing citizen participation in the processes of formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation in the administration and in the judiciary, has contributed to improving the dialogue and exchange of information between the civil sector and the institutions (administrations and judicial authorities). The promotion of this dialogue contributes to the exchange of different views and perspectives, the formulation of recommendations for the process of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. The stakeholders interviewed recommend that in the future, interventions in this type of procedures should be aimed at improving the dialogue between the civil sector and the institutions - *"Civil society is heterogeneous, the administration is heterogeneous - we need to build a model where we hear each other so that we can build a sustainable partnership in governance"* (interview, NGO sector representative).

Sub-question 2.5.3. Have there been any changes since the implementation of the investments under PA2 and PA3 in the way the administration addresses the suggestions of civil society organisations in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation?

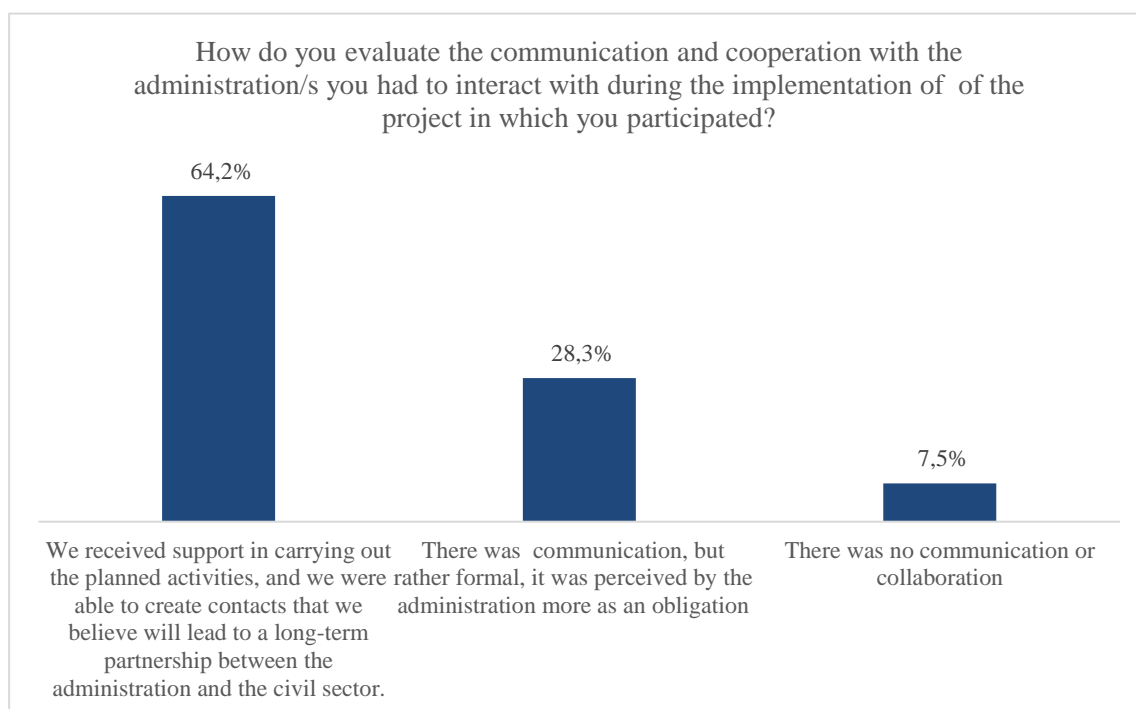
A key indicator for assessing how the administration addresses the proposals made is their implementation or non-implementation. As can be seen from the high percentage of recommendations taken into account and implemented in the PA2 projects, we can say that we have had an impact on the administration by the civil sector. If we look at the change that has occurred as a result of the interventions in terms of how they are addressed, it is rather positive - the administration accepts and implements a large number of the suggestions made. Addressing and adopting a large number of the recommendations made also highlights the capacity built in NGOs in terms of policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring. The structural preconditions are in place for the implementation of citizen control and citizen participation and it can be concluded that the implemented interventions have laid the basis for building a model in which the administration takes into account the proposals of the civil sector, which in turn is a prerequisite for building a sustainable partnership in governance. The fact that, on the basis of the procedures thus programmed, a considerable



group of beneficiaries and their partners focus on the work of the public administration in a variety of policy areas is in itself beneficial for the administration - its work becomes more transparent, there is partnership, ideas are exchanged and monitoring and control is carried out.

As discussed above in the presentation, in the implementation of the procedures in the scope of PA2, the indicator that measures the recommendations made by NGOs and NGO networks to the process of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, counts more than 1,600 made by the organizations involved in the implementation of the projects.

Figure 4. Evaluation of communication and cooperation in PA 2



Source: Survey of NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of PA2 projects⁴⁷, funded by OPGG.

The beneficiaries' assessment of their communication and cooperation with the administration(s) with which they interacted during the project implementation shows that the organizations were supported in the implementation of the activities, they were able to establish contacts that they believe can be developed as a sustainable partnership between the administration and the civil sector (64.2%).

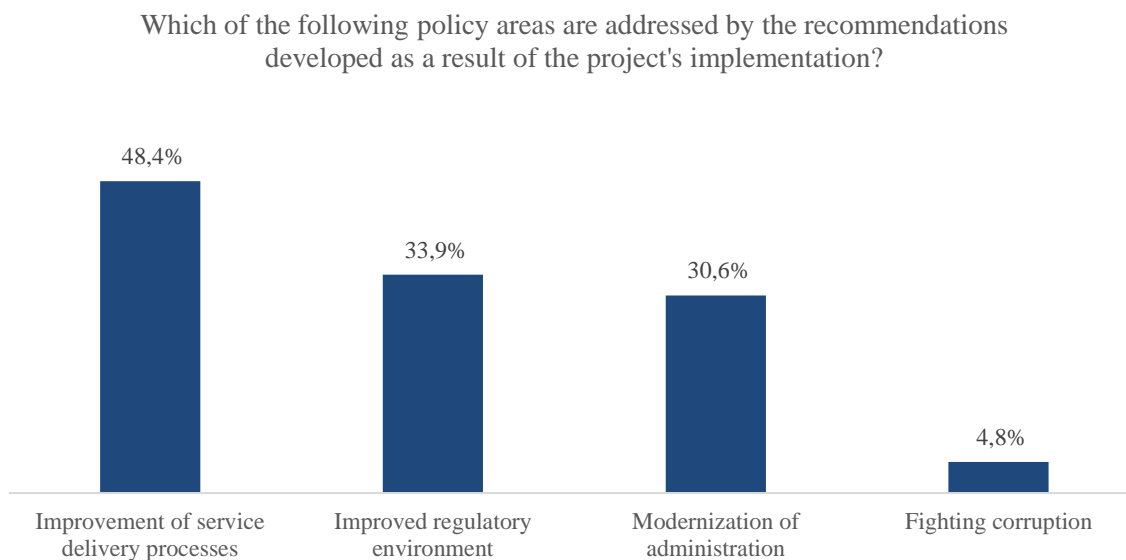
The distribution of the data also shows that for 28.3% the interaction was rather formal and 7.5% said that for them there was no communication at all - effective partnership and interaction was achieved by about two-thirds of the organizations and projects. In looking at the data, it should be remembered that the focus of the projects covered by this evaluation is very diverse and not concentrated in one area, and the following profile of areas where

⁴⁷ only the responses of the beneficiaries who have implemented a project under MP 2 are presented



recommendations have been made and their addressees - administrations⁴⁸, can be made as follows:

Figure 5 Areas of PA 2 recommendations

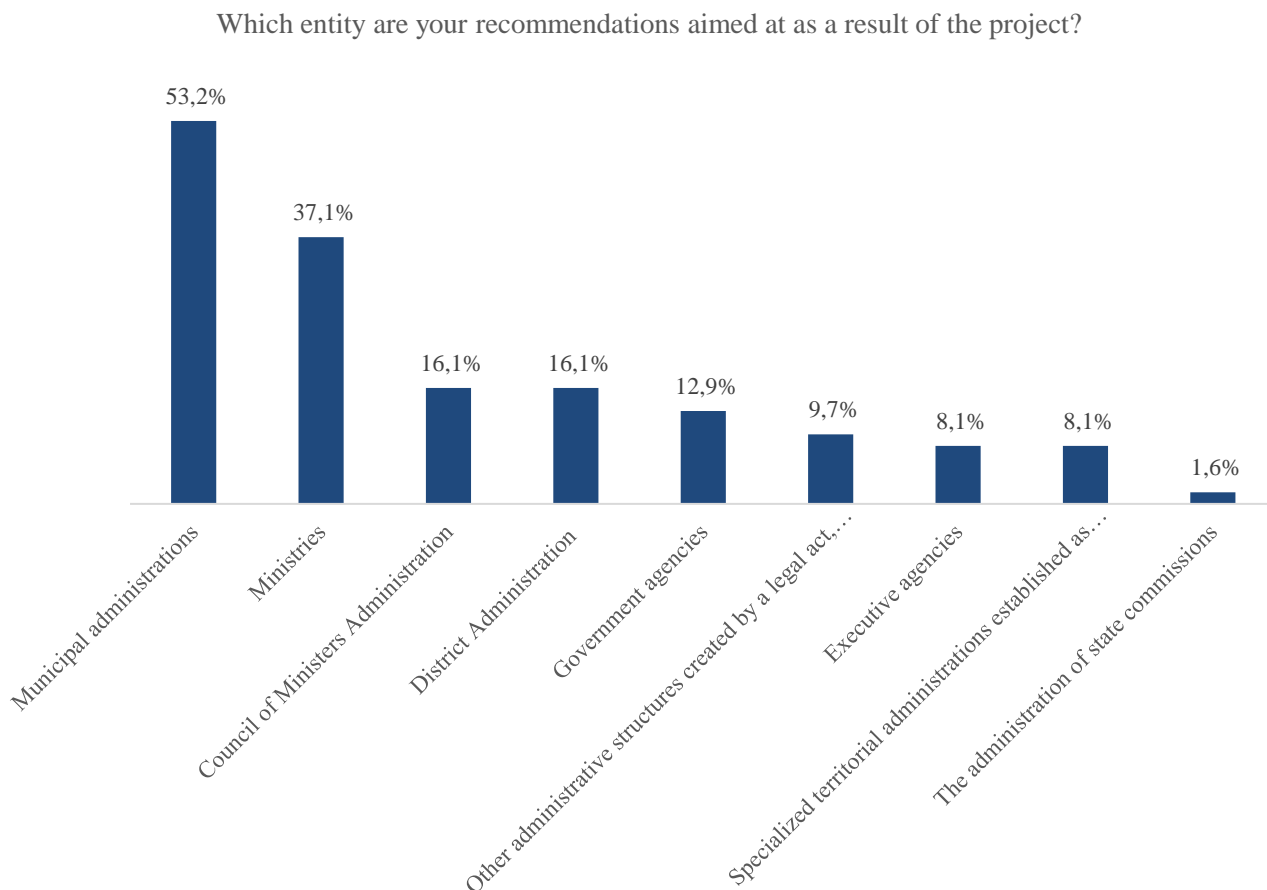


Source: survey of NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of projects under PA2, funded by the OPGG

⁴⁸ based on the respondents who have implemented projects under MP 2



Figure 6 Addressed administrations PA 2



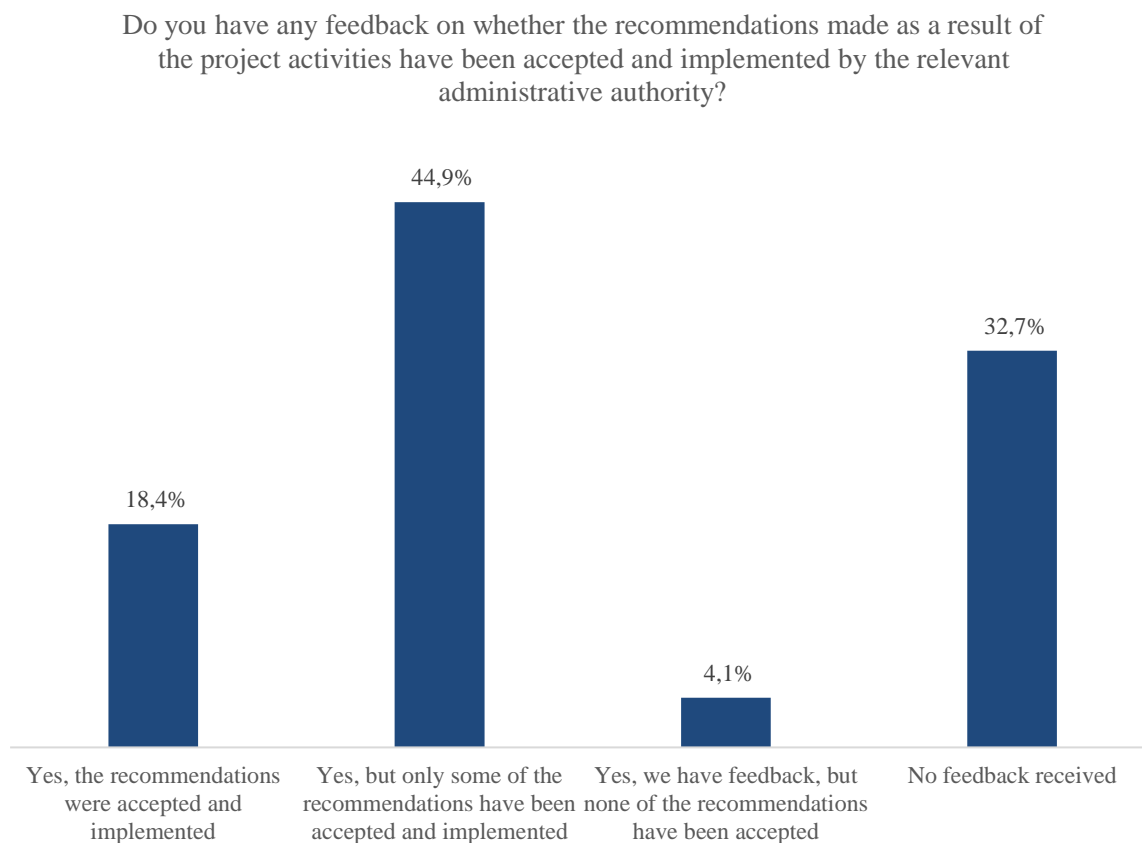
Source: survey of NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of projects under PA2, funded by the OPGG

The results show that in more than half of the implemented projects under PA2, the recommendations were addressed to the municipal administration and the most frequent area where recommendations were provided was the improvement of service delivery processes. It is at the municipality level that changes, however seemingly small, are more likely to be achieved. This can be explained by the more compact structure, the multiple functions of municipal administrations that directly affect people, the opportunity for closer contact between local government and the population, and the immediate interaction between different groups in the community. The assessment of how the administration addresses the suggestions of civil society organisations in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation, can be made on the basis of the feedback that civil society organisations give on the suggestions and recommendations they make. About two thirds of the organisations are characterised by good communication and feedback. The remaining 33% indicate that they



have not received information on the extent to which their recommendations have been accepted and implemented.

Figure 7. Implementation of the recommendations



Source: survey of NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of projects under PA2, funded by the OPGG.

Here we observe an important positive aspect - in 67.4% of the cases the organisations received feedback from the respective administration to which they addressed a recommendation. Although the specific impact and change cannot be reported, still the administration that implemented or not a recommendation, has given feedback about it to the beneficiary organisations. The other impact on the way in which the administrations addressed the proposals is demonstrated by the high number of recommendations taken into account and implemented, in 63.3% of cases (18.4% all recommendations were accepted and implemented and in 44.9% only some recommendations were accepted and implemented).



Sub-question 2.5.4. Have there been any changes since the investments under PA2 and PA3 in the way the responsible institutions and bodies implement the reforms in the judiciary and the use of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes ?

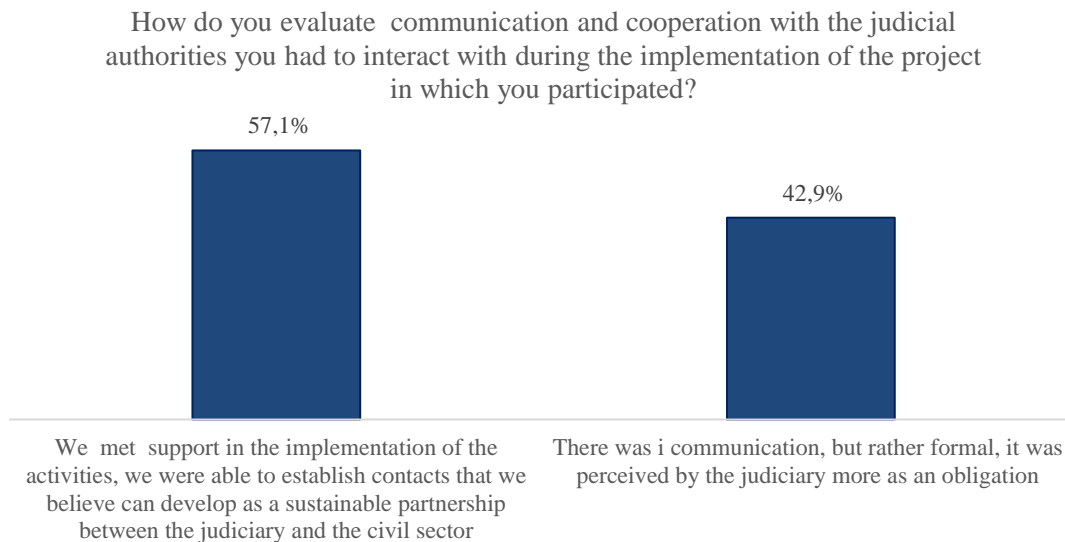
Nearly half of the beneficiaries of PA3 describe their interaction with the judiciary as "rather formal", which shows that the environment is still rather conservative in terms of partnering with the civil sector. On the positive side, however, a higher percentage of beneficiaries received some feedback on their proposals, which in turn can be seen as a positive impact of the implementation of the procedure on the judiciary. We cannot speak of significant changes in the way the responsible institutions and bodies implement the reforms in the judiciary and the use of alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes, rather we can speak of an impact on the responsible institutions and bodies, through steps taken to open up this conservative environment to the representatives of the civil sector and build a partnership with the sector as an equal and important participant in the reform process.

In order to examine the way in which the responsible institutions and bodies implement reforms in the justice system, it should be taken in mind that reform in a given system or environment is a process that is based on certain accumulations and takes time to unfold. The analyses, studies and evaluations related to the functioning of the judiciary developed under the projects, as well as the projects implemented to promote alternative methods of legal dispute resolution, have made a useful and substantial contribution, adding to the body of research, analysis, recommendations and analytical information available to the judiciary. In their project activities, NGOs often explore and reflect on stakeholder views needed in the policy-making and reform process. From this point of view, the interventions implemented have contributed to and are a step forward in the process of creating the conditions for citizen oversight of judicial reform through the more active involvement of NGOs and professional organisations in the process of developing, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies.

Regarding the assessment given by the beneficiaries of PA 3 on their communication and cooperation with the judiciary with whom they interacted during the implementation of the project, the data show that the organizations have met support in the implementation of the planned activities, they have managed to establish contacts (57.1%), as compared to the beneficiaries of PA 2 when answering the same question this percentage is 64.2%.



Figure 8. Evaluation of communication and cooperation in PA 3



Source: Survey of NGO beneficiaries of PA3 projects⁴⁹, funded by OPGG.

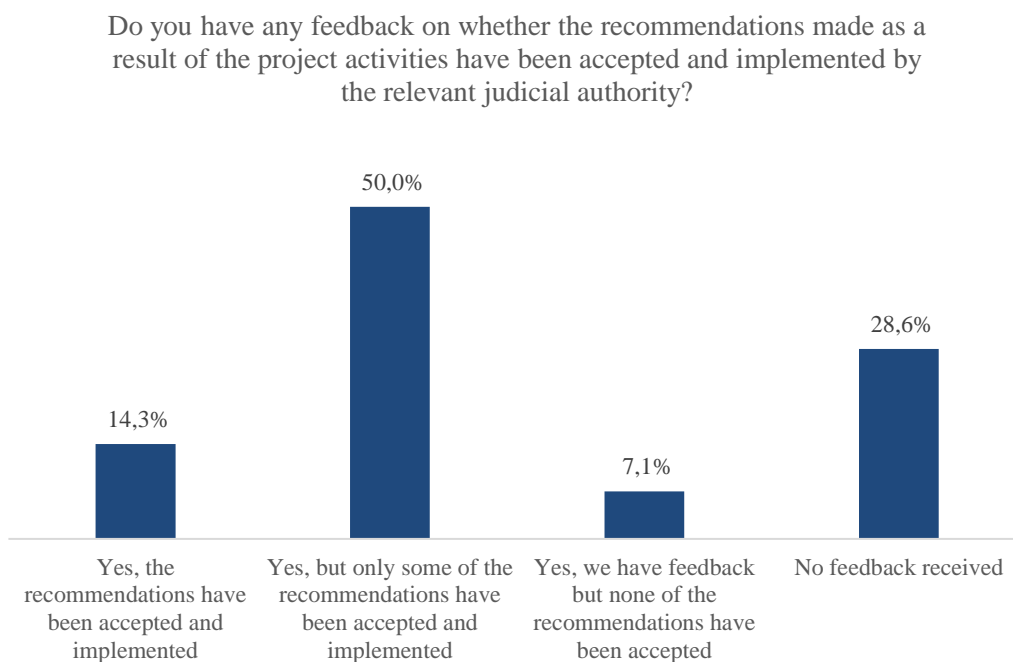
The distribution of the data also shows that for 42.9% the interaction was rather formal, as compared to 28.3% for the beneficiaries of PA2. I.e. effective partnership and interaction was achieved by slightly more than half of the organisations and projects. It can be concluded that the beneficiaries under PA2 have been able to achieve more effective partnership and interaction with the administration than the beneficiaries of PA3 with the judiciary. It should be noted that it is still difficult for the representatives of the judiciary to fully accept and recognise the partnership with the NGO sector.

The assessment of how the judicial authority perceives the proposals of the civil society organisations can be made on the basis of the feedback that the civil society organisations give on the proposals they make on the basis of the project activities carried out.

⁴⁹ only the responses of the beneficiaries who have implemented a project under PA 3 are presented



Figure 9. Implementation of the recommendations – PA 3



Source: Survey of NGO beneficiaries of projects under PA3⁵⁰, funded by OPGG

The data shows an important positive aspect - in 71.4% of the cases, the organisations received feedback from the relevant body to which they had made proposals. Although the specific impact and change cannot be reported, the judiciary bodies that have accepted or not a proposal, have still given feedback to the beneficiaries.

However, it should be noted again that there were 53 project proposals under PA 3, with 158 analyses, studies, researches, methodologies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary and 8 instruments for the modernization of the judiciary (mainly related to administrative acts). For this reason, we cannot speak of any significant changes in the way the responsible institutions and bodies implement reforms in the judiciary and the use of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes.

In this case, we can rather speak about the impact of the institutions and bodies responsible for the implementation of the reforms in the judiciary, in terms of steps taken for an effective partnership with the sector as an equal and important participant in the governance process.

⁵⁰ only the responses of the beneficiaries who have implemented a project under MP 3 are presented



Sub-question 2.5.5. Which/what part of the changes are due to the support from the OPGG?

On the basis of the two procedures⁵¹ under PA2, the civil sector has been activated and many beneficiaries and their partners are focusing on the activities of the public administration as well as on the control and monitoring processes. The implemented interventions lay the basis for building a model in which on the one hand civil society organisations are active participants in the processes of formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies implemented by the administration, and on the other hand the administration partners and addresses the proposals of the civil sector, which is a prerequisite for building a sustainable partnership in governance . The contribution of the OPGG is that through the implementation of the priorities it has created an environment and an opportunity to make suggestions for improvements in the activities of the administration. NGOs and SEPs recognise the value of their participation and see the OPGG as an important tool to enable this participation to be supported. Thanks to the support of the OPGG, funded organisations have further developed their capacity through the range of analytical and other activities implemented under the projects . Improving the capacity of NGOs that have implemented PA 2 projects in terms of policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring is a crucial contribution of the OPGG, as it guarantees the establishment of an effective partnership with the administration and the making of recommendations that the administrations will recognise and address. The capacity built places the sector as an equal participant in the governance process.

Judicial reform is a long and complex process and the projects implemented under PA 3⁵² are part of the established dialogue process, but no general conclusion can be drawn that they have made a significant difference in the judicial reform processes. Rather, enabling active civic participation through the provision of targeted funding for this type of project is a step in the right direction in terms of establishing a policy of dialogue and information exchange between the judiciary and the civil sector. As a result of the support under PA 3, the effect of creating an environment for citizen scrutiny of the reform of the judiciary will continue to be felt, which in the future would also help to improve the efficiency of the work of the judiciary institutions and increase public confidence in them.

Based on the data reviewed so far, the following changes in can be summarised as a result of the support of the OPGG, relevant to PA 2 and PA 3, which will be discussed in turn as follows:

⁵¹ BG05SFOP001-2.009, BG05SFOP001-2.025

⁵² BG05SFOP001-3.003



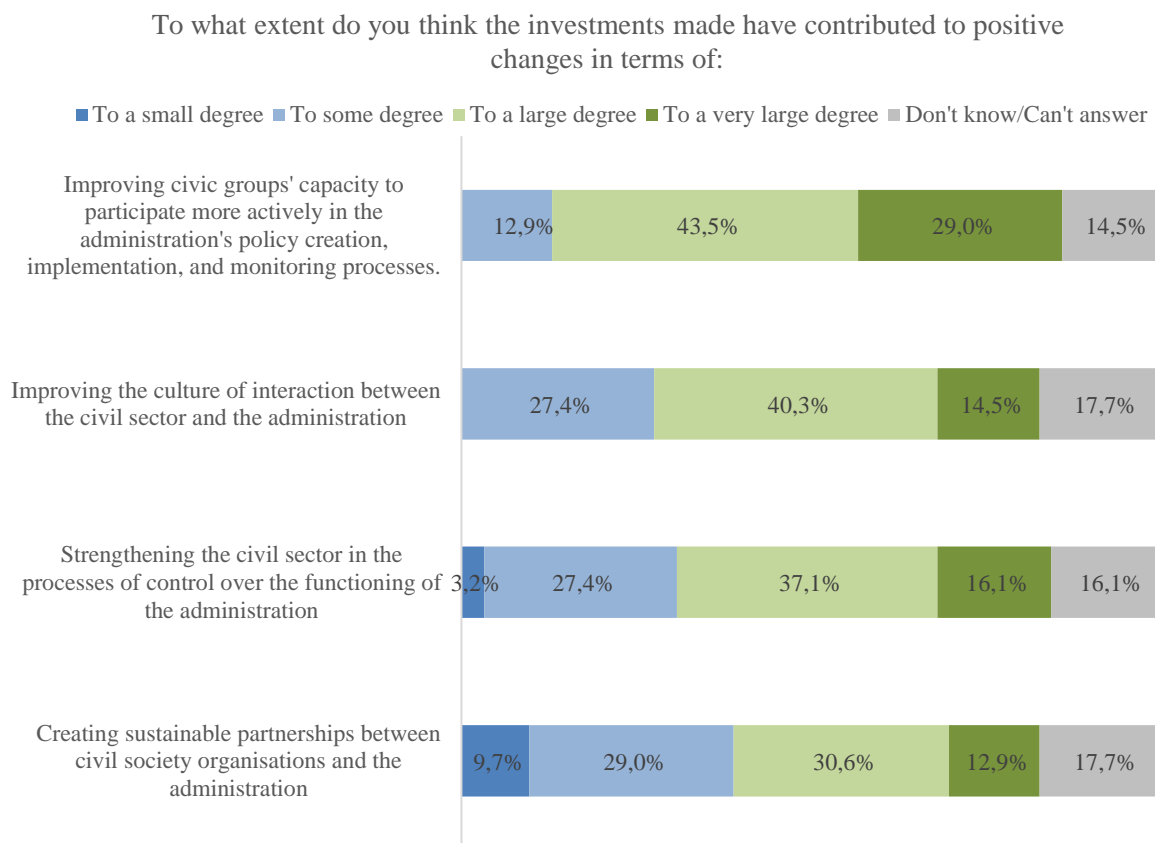
The changes achieved from the implementation of the projects under PA2 "Effective and Professional Governance in Partnership with Civil Society and Business", can be grouped as follows:

- ✓ *Improving the environment for civic participation* - the programmed interventions have created a natural environment for partnership between the civil sector and the administration and joint implementation and delivery of the interventions and this is a real contribution of the implemented measures under the OPGG;
- ✓ *Creating opportunities for citizens to monitor policies at national and local level* - over 1600 recommendations have been made to improve the process of formulating, implementing and monitoring public policies, including improving the conduct of consultative processes;
- ✓ *Capacity development of NGOs* - thanks to the support of the OPGG, the funded organisations have further developed their capacity through the range of analytical and other activities implemented under the projects. Funded organisations have experience and capacity and in the process of project implementation have formulated a large number of recommendations and acted as an active partner to the institutions, as evidenced by the high percentage of proposals addressed by the administrations. During the implementation of the projects, the participating NGOs have further developed their capacity and expertise through the activities carried out (studies, analyses, meetings, seminars) and their interaction with the institutions and partners, as well as through communication with stakeholders.



If the change is measured through the eyes of the representatives of civil society⁵³ who have implemented projects under PA 2, they highlight the following positive changes that have occurred as a result of the implemented investments under the OPGG:

Figure 10. Contribution of investments to positive changes under PA 2



Source: survey of NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of projects under PA2, funded by OPGG.

The data show that beneficiaries see the greatest contribution of the OPGG in improving the capacity of NGOs to actively engage in the processes of formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and legislation in the administration and in activating the sector to exercise control over the activities of the administration and in improving the culture of interaction with the administration. Improving the capacity of NGOs that have implemented projects, to formulate, implement and monitor policies and legislation is a crucial contribution of the OPGG as it guarantees the establishment of an effective partnership with the administration and the making of recommendations that the administrations will recognise and address. The establishment of sustainable partnerships is a process that will be followed up in the future, but at the time of the evaluation 43.5%⁵⁴ of the respondents thought that the investments made would contribute to the establishment of such partnerships, with only 9.7% taking the position that the impact of the investments made under the OPGG in this area would be rather small.

⁵³ Beneficiaries who participated in the survey and implemented projects under PA2

⁵⁴ Percentages show the sum of those who responded "to a very large degree" and "to a large degree"



The changes achieved by the implementation of the projects within the framework of PA3 "Transparent and Effective Judiciary" can be grouped as follows:

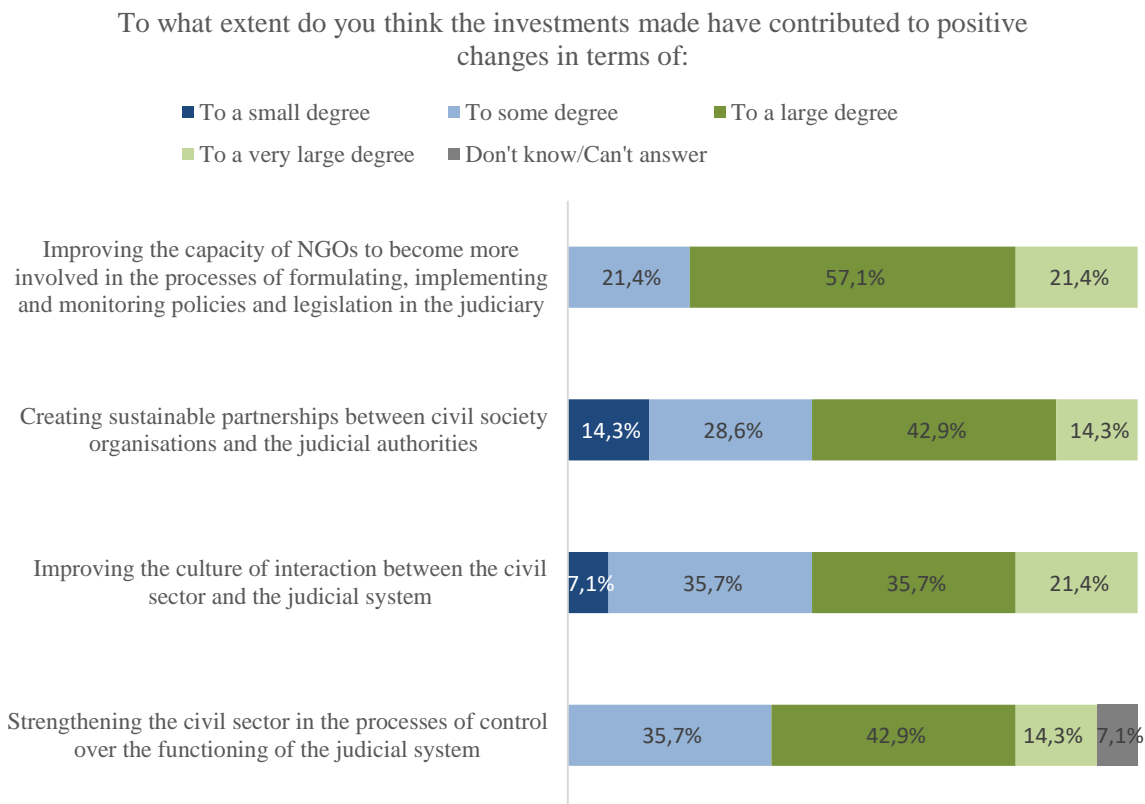
- ✓ *Increase in the number of NGOs actively involved in the process of civil control over the reform of the judiciary* - looking specifically at the field of work of the judiciary, the programme has contributed in that it has specifically programmed the procedure only for this sector, which allows for focused support to NGOs that develop activities in the field of civil control over the judiciary, thus increasing the possibility of funding and implementation of the concepts of those working in the sector;
- ✓ *Promotion and creation of the necessary conditions for the promotion of alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes in practice* - conditions were created for the promotion of alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes in practice as a result of the support 26 projects with such orientation were implemented. The implementation of the projects is important from the point of view that alternative methods of dispute resolution, despite the existence of legislation since 2004, remain an unknown institution and there is a deficit and failure to promote the institution of "mediation";
- ✓ *Established the possibility to develop analyses, studies, surveys, methodologies, models, and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary, through which the process of modernization of the system and monitoring of judicial reform is supported* - 158 analyses, studies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary have been reported within the framework of the implemented projects.

If the change is measured through the eyes of the representatives of civil society⁵⁵ who have implemented projects under PA3, they highlight the following positive changes that have occurred as a result of the implemented investments under the OPGG:

⁵⁵ Beneficiaries participating in the survey implemented projects under FP3



Figure 11. Contribution of investments to positive changes under PA 3



Source: survey of NGO beneficiaries of projects under PA3, funded by OPGG.

The data show that the beneficiaries see the greatest contribution of the OPGG in improving the capacity of NGOs for active involvement in the processes of formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation in the judiciary; in improving the culture of interaction between the civil sector and the judiciary; in activating the sector to exercise control over the activities of the judiciary. The establishment of sustainable partnerships is a process to be followed in the future, but at the time of the evaluation 14.3% of beneficiaries took the position that the impact of the investments made under the OPGG in this area would be rather small, which is most likely due to the fact that there is a very low percentage of partnership with judicial structures in the implementation of the projects under PA 3 and the environment is still conservative in terms of accepting and reflecting the expertise of the civil sector.



7.6. Impact on stakeholders/target groups

Evaluation question 2.6: What is the impact on stakeholders/target groups?

In summary, there are several broader impacts that change the overall societal environment:

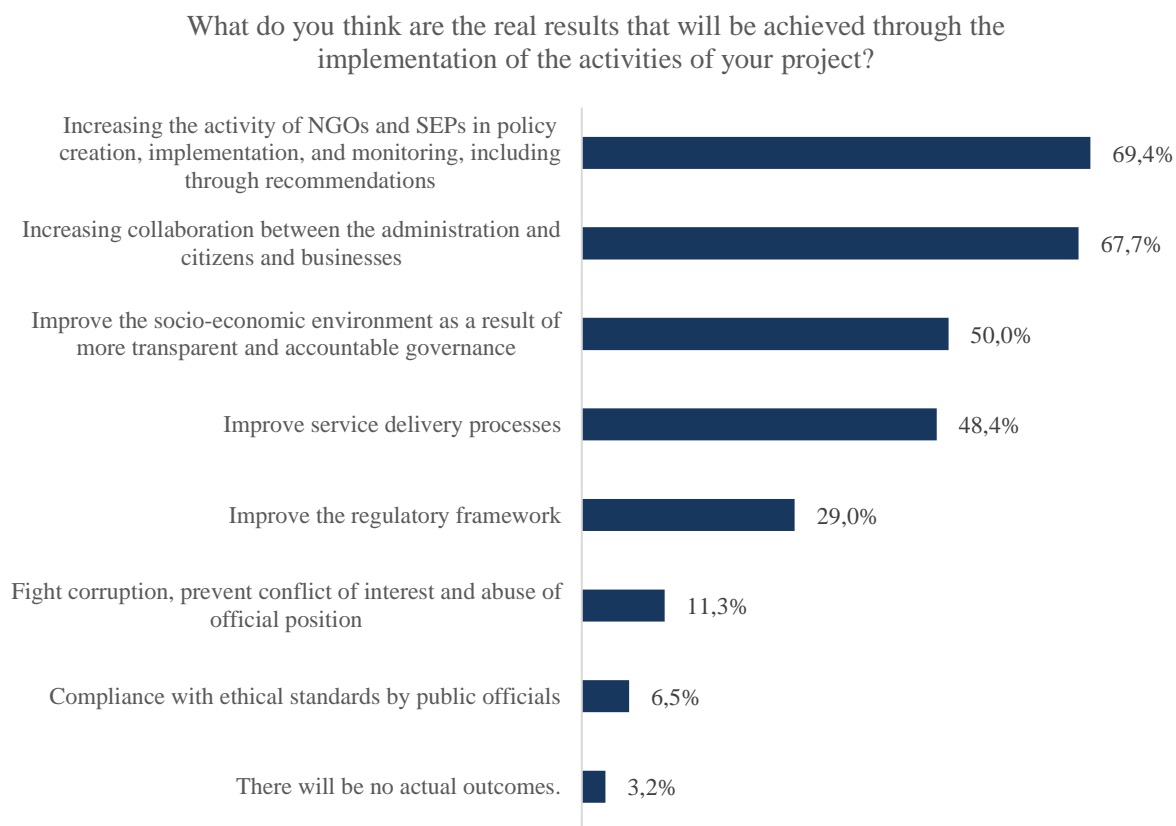
- The OPGG has succeeded in creating a mechanism that allows different points of view to be heard - it has activated the environment for civic participation, civil society organizations recognize the program and the meaning of their participation;
- Both the administration and civil society organisations should recognise that successful policy is made when it is based on research and evidence. Successful projects are those in which civil society organisations have done their job well and have shown through analysis, through research, what the problem is and what the outcome will be, including financial justification, social analysis, etc. This culture must become something that is the norm;
- The implementation of the OPGG shows that the necessary reforms in the administrative services sector and the judiciary can only be fully implemented in partnership with society. The judiciary system remains considerably more conservative in its interaction with civil society organisations and, although the number of implemented projects under PA 3 is small, the activity of the organisations that have become involved will have a positive impact on the environment for participation;
- The impact on institutions - on the one hand, with regard to the judiciary, interventions in the future should have the effect of increasing the efficiency of the work of the judiciary institutions and increasing public confidence in them, on the other hand, with regard to the administration - the activation of the sector provokes more transparency and accountability, while at the same time the administrations benefit from constructive dialogue and partnership with the civil sector.

The impact on stakeholders and target groups is examined through the lens of the assessment of the actual results achieved by the projects in the scope of the evaluation and their impact on stakeholders .

Citizen participation in decision-making processes allows for periodic citizen monitoring of the actions, decisions and policies pursued by the state; it creates an opportunity for citizens' ideas to be implemented. In this way, the position of the public can be a kind of corrective to political priorities and goals and be an instrument for public scrutiny of state policy. This is also why the beneficiaries of PA 2 who participated in the questionnaire defined that the results achieved within the projects implemented by them will be mostly for the benefit of the society (85.5%).



Figure 12. Achieved results, PA 2 beneficiaries

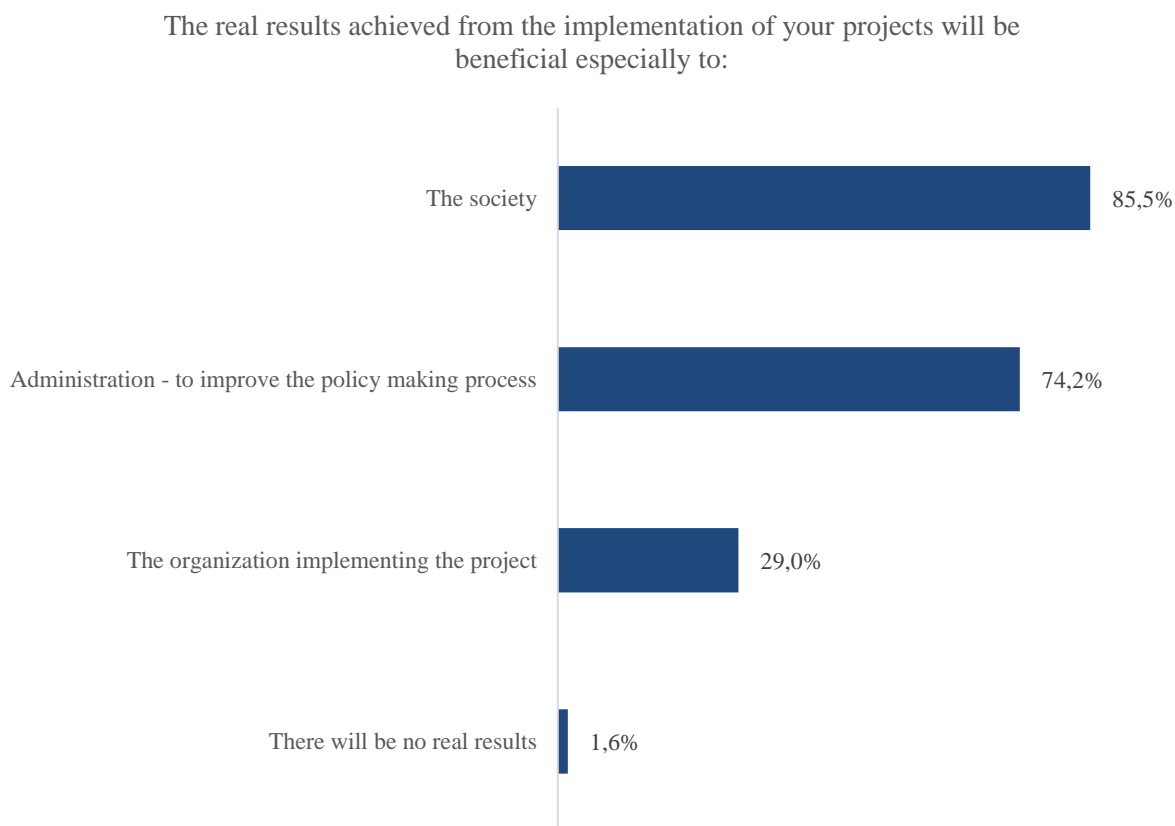


Source: Survey of NGOs and SEPs beneficiaries under PA 2⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ respondents could give more than one answer



Figure 13 Benefits of real results achieved under PA 2



Source: survey among NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of PA 2⁵⁷

Based on the data and analyses presented so far, we can group the following impacts of the implemented interventions under PA 2:

- ✓ *Impact on the work of the administration* - the activation of the civil sector will lead institutions to strive for maximum transparency and accountability, while benefiting from constructive dialogue and partnership with the civil sector ;
- ✓ *Impact on the NGO sector* - based on the procedures programmed in this way, the civil sector is activated and many beneficiaries and their partners focus on what the public administration is doing, as well as on control and monitoring processes. NGOs recognize the program and the meaning of their participation - change in the environment is seen through the impact on stakeholders - the realization that one can participate and through participation make a change or at least give a proposal to be considered and recognized for implementation by the relevant body targeted. The impetus is given for the sector to be active, to implement the ideas it has or even just to think about them . The investments made under the OPGG are an important tool for

⁵⁷ respondents could give more than one answer



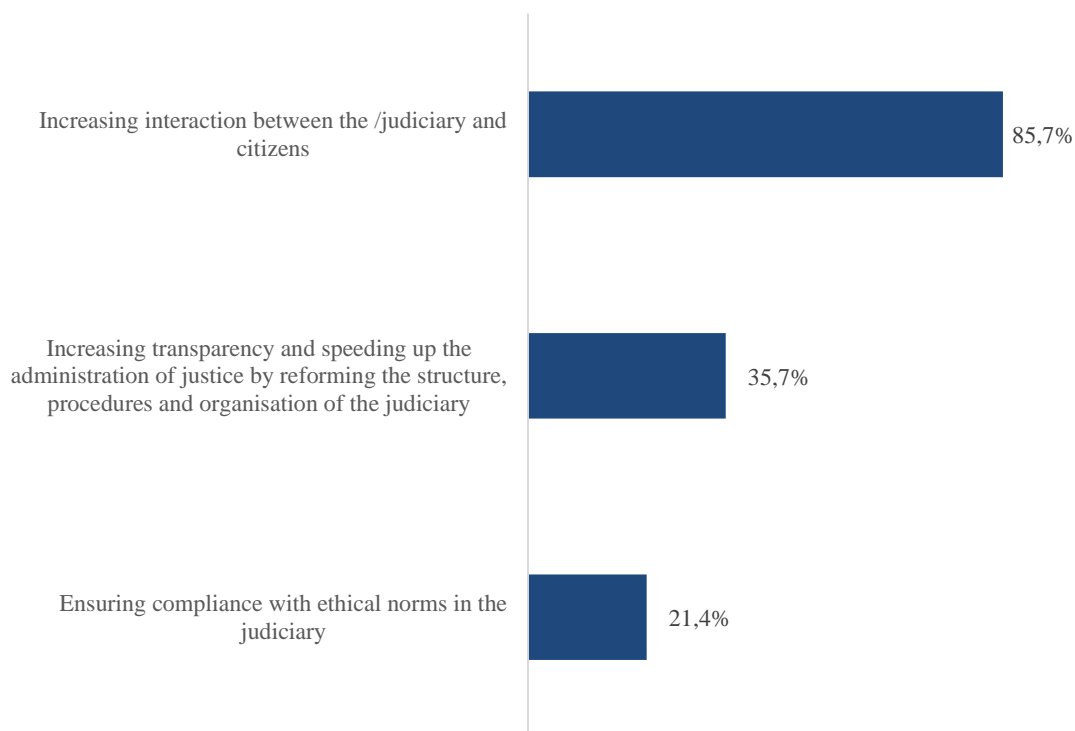
supporting the NGO sector and maintaining its capacity for civic participation, seeking change and formulating constructive proposals to the administration;

- ✓ *Impact on society* - The recommendations made and addressed by the administrations will also have an impact on society, especially in terms of improving service delivery processes.

The assessment of the actual results achieved by the projects implemented under PA 3 and their impact on stakeholders will be examined through the beneficiaries' views.

Figure 14. Results achieved, beneficiaries of PA 3

What do you think are the real results that will be achieved through the implementation of the activities of your project?

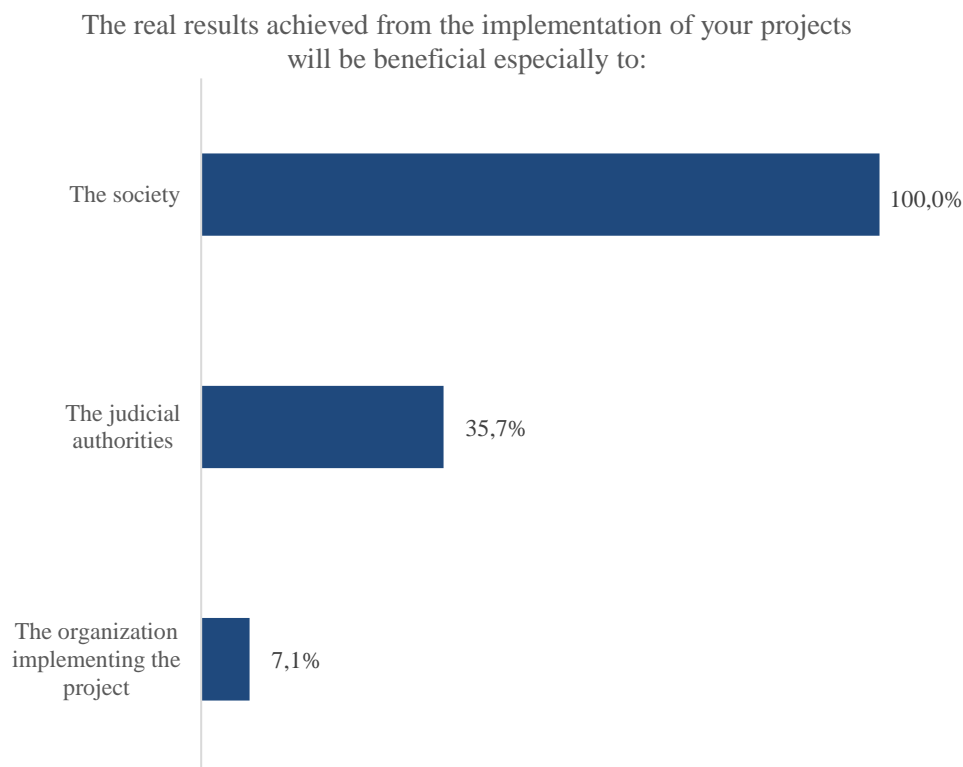


Source: survey among NGOs, beneficiaries of PA3⁵⁸

⁵⁸ respondents could give more than one answer



Figure 15 Benefits of real results achieved under PA3



Source: survey among NGOs, beneficiaries of PA3⁵⁹

On the basis of the data and analyses presented so far in this presentation, we can group the following impacts of the implemented interventions under PA 3:

- ✓ *Impact on the judiciary* - the impact of the projects, despite all the contingencies, undoubtedly, by their implementation, create an environment which, if continued to develop in the future, should contribute to the effectiveness of the work of the institutions of the judiciary and increase public confidence in them ;
- ✓ *Impact on the NGO sector* - activation of the sector, and the foundations laid by these activities should be continued to open up this conservative environment and enable real citizen participation and control;
- ✓ *Impact on society* - creating an environment that contributes to increasing transparency and efficiency in the judiciary would undoubtedly lead to increased public confidence in the judiciary system.

⁵⁹ respondents could give more than one answer



7.7. Identified unplanned effects

Evaluation question 2.7: What are the identified unplanned effects (positive and negative) of the interventions?

Given the specificities of the interventions, the evaluation did not identify any unplanned effects, as the nature of the activities funded is unlikely to exceed the objectives set or go beyond the expected results and impact. However, it should be noted that the projects implemented under the two priority axes are the basis for building a model of interaction in which, on the one hand, civil society organisations are active participants in the processes of planning, implementing and controlling public policies and monitoring the activities of the administration and the judiciary, and, on the other hand, the administration partners with and addresses the proposals of the civil society sector, which in turn is a prerequisite for building a sustainable partnership in governance.

As a partial unplanned effect, it can be noted that the capacity built in NGOs is transferred to the administration and through individuals from the sector who join the institutions (in separate structures of the executive or the legislature), which is a very important consequence of the overall change in the environment and empowerment of the third sector, increasing its role in public life and the participation of civil society organizations in the process of public policy-making. This is an additional prerequisite for sustainability.

The evaluation identified the following factors that have had an impact on the implementation of activities and investments:

- Among the negative factors are the resistance of some of the administrations and institutions of the judiciary to the opinions and recommendations of the NGO sector. On the one hand, this is due to a lack of dialogue and capacity to work in partnership with the civil sector, and on the other - a lack of capacity to implement reforms and changes;
- With a great deal of certainty we can assume that the administrations and institutions of the judiciary do not have sufficient knowledge of the recommendations made, the analyses made by the projects and this also appears to be an obstacle to their effectiveness;
- Last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the implementation period of some of the projects, may have reduced their effectiveness by hindering dialogue and dissemination of information and project results.

7.8. Additional questions

As part of the evaluation, two additional questions were formulated:



Evaluation question 2.8. Do the results achieved ensure sustainability in terms of increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the administration and the judiciary?

Evaluation question 2.9. Have the recommendations and conclusions made by civil society representatives in the reports and analyses funded under the OPGG been taken into account by the administration and the judiciary?

Additional evaluation question 2.8. Do the results achieved ensure sustainability in terms of increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the administration and the judiciary?

Sustainability in terms of increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the activities of the administration can be expected in the following areas:

- Capacity has been built both in the NGO sector and in the institutions to work in partnership, which could be used in the future. Capacity has been built in the NGO sector at local level to partner and work with local authorities and participate in policy formulation, reformulation and implementation processes at local level. Without the support of the OPGG, local NGOs would not be able to maintain and strengthen this capacity, which would significantly reduce their activity and participation. The partnerships built and projects implemented lead to sustained activity and capacity in the NGO sector and SEPs to formulate, implement and monitor policies and legislation;
- A culture of partnership and dialogue with the civil sector has been established, creating the conditions for discussing progress and seeking new approaches, testing models and improving sector policies;
- A model has been created in which NGOs are not just a corrective to the administration in the process of policy development, implementation and evaluation, but also contribute to quality strategic planning;
- Working mechanisms are established through which the administration takes into account the proposals of the NGO sector;
- Dialogue has been improved and perspectives (civil, expert, on working mechanisms, etc.) have been enriched in the policy-making process.

In order to maintain this capacity and ensure sustainability, NGOs and SEPs need to be supported in their future efforts to participate in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation.

Although the receptivity and openness of the judiciary system to the NGO sector and the proposals made is still weak, the creation of conditions for joint work and dialogue would change the attitudes of those working in the judiciary to benefit from the partnership with NGOs and to take into account their civil and expert perspective. That is, for the moment,



sustainability in relation to PA 3 can be sought mainly in capacity building and maintenance in the context of an enabling environment and to a lesser extent in the actual changes that the NGO sector has been able to bring about.

As a future effect of the implemented interventions under PA 2 and PA 3, can be expected that their contribution to creating conditions for a sustainable civil control over the work of the administration and the reform of the judiciary will continue in the future, namely through the activation of NGOs and professional organizations in the process of development, monitoring and evaluation of policies and reform strategies. Moreover, the activation of the sector will lead institutions to strive for maximum transparency and accountability, while benefiting from constructive dialogue and partnership with the civil sector.

The main results achieved per priority axis can be grouped as follows:

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

The programmed interventions have created a natural environment for partnership between the civil sector and the administration and joint implementation and implementation of interventions and this is a real contribution of the implemented measures under the OPGG - nearly 40% of the projects have been implemented in partnership with public administration structures (municipalities, regional administrations, central administrations, specialized territorial administrations). More than 1600 recommendations were made regarding:

- ✓ sectoral policies, addressing both the set objectives and recommendations for the implementation of strategic documents and the specific measures set out in their scope;
- ✓ improving service delivery processes;
- ✓ modernisation of the administration;
- ✓ a better regulatory environment;
- ✓ fight against corruption.

The interventions implemented have had a direct impact on increasing the activism of NGOs and SEPs in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation. Through the implementation of the supported projects, the OPGG has created an environment and an opportunity to make suggestions for improvements in the activities of the administration. The environment has been activated, partnerships have been established, which would help for sustainable cooperation between the administration and the civil sector in the future.

In this sense, sustainability in terms of increasing citizen participation and strengthening citizen control over the activities of the administration can be expected in the following areas:

- Built capacity both in the NGO sector and in the institutions to work in partnership, which could be used in the future; without this capacity the NGO sector would not have the potential for citizen participation and citizen control over the activities of the



administration. Building and sustaining the capacity of the NGO sector at the local level to partner and work with local authorities and participate in local policy formulation, reformulation and implementation processes. Without this support, local NGOs would not be able to maintain and strengthen this capacity, which would significantly reduce their activity and participation;

- Maintaining NGO sector and SEPs activism and capacity for policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring;
- Creating a culture of partnership and dialogue with the civil sector, creating the conditions for discussing progress and seeking new approaches, testing models and improving sector policies;
- NGOs are not only a corrective to the administration in the process of policy development, implementation and evaluation, but also contribute to quality strategic planning;
- Working mechanisms are established through which the administration takes into account the proposals of the NGO sector;
- Enhanced dialogue and enrichment of perspectives (civil, expert, in working mechanisms, etc.) in the policy-making process.

In order to maintain this capacity and ensure sustainability, NGOs and SEPs need to be supported in their future efforts to participate in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation.

Priority Axis 3 " Transparent and efficient judiciary"

Judicial reform is a long and complex process and the implementation of these projects are part of the dialogue process, but it is not yet possible to draw a general conclusion that they have made a significant change in the judicial reform processes. Rather, supporting citizen participation (enabling the development and implementation of projects) through targeted funding for activities that address judicial reform is a step in the right direction to establish a policy of dialogue and exchange between the judiciary and the civil sector. As a result of the support under PA 3, the effect of creating an environment for reforms to be carried out together with citizens will continue to be felt, which in the future would also help to improve the efficiency of the judiciary institutions and increase public confidence in them. The supported projects maintain the expertise of the civil sector to work on issues related to the judiciary. The specificities and complexity of the subject matter require expertise and knowledge of the processes. The accumulation of this expertise and the building of such capacity is a lengthy and complex process and can only be sustained with real citizen participation. In order to maintain this capacity, the NGO sector needs to be able to work periodically on these topics and issues, and to develop its expertise.

Although the receptivity and openness of the judiciary to the NGO sector and the recommendations made is still weak, creating conditions for joint work and dialogue would



change the attitudes of those working in the judiciary to benefit from partnership with NGOs and to take into account their civil and expert perspective. That is, for the moment, sustainability in relation to PA 3 can be sought mainly in building and sustaining capacity to develop, monitor and evaluate reform strategies and to a lesser extent in the actual changes that the NGO sector has been able to bring about. This capacity has been developed through the specific project activities, the analyses carried out, the good practices and foreign experiences systematised, the recommendations made, the interaction with the institutions of the judiciary and the dialogue on key reform issues and areas.

Additional evaluation question 2.9. Have the recommendations and conclusions made by civil society representatives in the reports and analyses funded under the OPGG been taken into account by the administration and the judiciary?

On the basis of the data collected and the analyses made, we can conclude that the role of PA 2 in building effective partnerships and interaction with the administration is more significant, as the number of recommendations made and accepted in relation to the number of projects is higher, while this ratio is lower for projects targeting the judiciary. The judiciary system remains closed and conservative with regard to the use of the expertise accumulated by NGOs. Public consultation processes are enshrined in legislation and administrations have a track record of complying with these obligations, although they still lack the skills to communicate and manage dialogue with citizens and NGOs effectively. Due to the fact that administrations are considerably more open to partnerships and effective dialogue, interventions under PA 2 will lead, on the one hand, to improved internal work processes and service delivery processes in administrations and, on the other hand, lay the basis for a sustainable partnership between the civil sector and the administration on the basis of already successfully completed common activities and established dialogue.

The slow reform processes and the conservativeness of the judiciary system and the institutions of the judiciary, determine the fact that the implemented interventions cannot have an impact on the implementation of significant changes in the way the responsible institutions and bodies implement reforms in the judiciary. However, the implemented projects are an important step towards establishing this much needed dialogue and towards giving the civil sector, which has the necessary expertise, a real opportunity not only to point out weaknesses in the system from the outside, but also to make proposals for their elimination as an equal participant in the process. Researching good practices and discussing them in the local professional environment also contributes to changing the thinking and attitudes of professionals in the judiciary and to finding workable solutions to change the weaknesses in its work. However, more concerted efforts are needed through the implementation of various instruments to provide an environment for citizen scrutiny of judicial reform, as well as to build understanding within the institutions of the judiciary that they should work to strengthen their partnership with NGOs, to develop capacity to benefit from this partnership while at the same time recognising NGO structures as a full participant



in the processes of developing, monitoring and evaluating reform strategies. Last but not least, it is important that this process is better coordinated by the Ministry of Justice because often the consensus between NGOs and representatives of the judiciary, if reached, needs to be translated into a legislative initiative.

If we look at the types of recommendations made and the way the relevant institutions address the proposals of NGOs and the judiciary, we can make the following summaries by priority axis:

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

In more than half of the implemented project proposals the recommendations were addressed to the municipal administration and the most frequent area where recommendations were provided was the improvement of service delivery processes. Effective partnership and interaction with the administration was achieved by about two thirds of the organisations. In 63.3% of cases, recommendations were accepted and implemented (*18.4% all recommendations were accepted and implemented and in 44.9% only some recommendations were accepted and implemented*). If we look for the change that occurred as a result of the interventions in the way the recommendations were addressed, we can rather say that it is positive - the administration accepts and implements a significant number of the proposals made. The recommendations implemented by the administrations will also have an impact on society as a whole, especially in terms of improving service delivery processes and improving the quality of policies. The highly politically contested public environment and the frequent change of governments in this period is a precondition for more difficult communication between civil society and the institutions. Such periods are generally unfavourable in terms of the search for policy sustainability, as the dialogue between NGOs and administration is disrupted by frequent personnel changes and lack of continuity and disruption of institutional memory.

Priority Axis 3 " Transparent and efficient judiciary"

Just over half of the organisations and projects aiming at a transparent and efficient judiciary have achieved effective partnership and interaction. Here we can compare that the beneficiaries of PA 2 have managed to achieve more effective partnership and interaction with the administration than the beneficiaries of PA 3 with the judiciary. It should be noted that it is still difficult for the representatives of the judiciary to fully accept and recognise the partnership with the NGO sector. There is also another peculiarity that for a proposal to be implemented as a change, in not a few cases it requires legislative amendments, which is also difficult to achieve given the need for interaction with the legislative and executive branches. However, it should be reiterated that there are only 53 project proposals under PA 3, and 158 analyses, studies and evaluations related to the activities of the judiciary have been prepared. On the basis of the nature of these proposals, we cannot speak of significant changes in the way the



responsible institutions and bodies implement reforms in the judiciary and promote the use of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes. The slow reform processes and the conservativeness of the judiciary and the institutions of the judiciary determine the fact that the implemented interventions cannot have a serious impact on the implementation of substantial changes in the way the responsible institutions and bodies implement the reforms in the judiciary. The system needs a complete change in the attitudes of those working in it and a better understanding of the importance and benefits of partnership and interaction with the civil sector - despite significant changes in this aspect in recent years, cultural patterns persist among magistrates that are not conducive to the effectiveness of the judiciary and its functioning according to European standards, including in terms of interaction with civil society. For the most part, the system tends to resist one or other reforms due to a simple reluctance to expose itself to change, with potentially unpredictable consequences. Restoring public confidence in the judiciary, on the one hand, and the motivation of judges, prosecutors and investigators as the real holders of a public mandate, requires the direct participation of citizens in the justice system and their representatives in key management decisions to achieve transparency. The projects implemented with the support of the OPGG are an effective means to achieve this objective. On the basis of the assessment made, we can rather speak about the impact made in terms of the institutions and bodies responsible for the implementation of the reforms in the judiciary and the steps taken for an effective partnership with the NGO sector as an equal and important actor in the process of implementation of the Judicial Reform Strategy. In the context of the Strategy, the implemented projects can be related to strategic objective 6 - "Increase confidence in the judiciary through public participation and transparency". In one part, the projects contribute to building models for active dialogue between the judiciary and different communities. On the other hand, they have an impact through mechanisms to promote alternative methods of solving cases, as a means of increasing the trust and responsibility of citizens and building a legal culture, through the activities carried out to promote the use of alternative methods of solving legal disputes. These project activities may not yet have the direct effect of reducing the workload of the judiciary, but they do have the effect of informing communities about their use and functioning. Although the effect is rather minimal and not many recommendations have been addressed, the projects implemented with the support of the OPGG have helped to build a mechanism and models for dialogue between the judiciary and civil society.



8. ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH TASK 3

Task 3: Analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of *investments under PA4 and PA5*, including the formulation of specific recommendations, measures and indicators to improve the management and control system of the funds in Bulgaria for the programming period 2021-2027.

The focus of the evaluation under this research task is on investments under Priority Axes 4 and 5.

Priority Axis 4 “Technical assistance for the management of the ESF” aims to achieve three specific objectives:

- Specific objective 1: Support the horizontal structures responsible for the management and implementation of the ESIF;
- Specific objective 2: Ensure the effective functioning of UMIS 2020;
- Specific objective 3: Improve public awareness of the opportunities and results of the ESIF in Bulgaria and improve the capacity of beneficiaries.

Specific beneficiaries under PA4 are horizontal structures and units such as the Central Coordination Unit, the National Fund Directorate in the MoF - Certifying Authority, the Executive Agency for the Audit of European Union Funds - Audit Authority, the National Statistical Institute⁶⁰, the Public Procurement Agency, the State Aid Unit at the MoF, the National Structure for the Management of the Implementation of the National Priority Framework for Action on NATURA 2000 (NPFA), the Directorate AFCOS in the MoI; Executive Agency “Certification Audit of European Agricultural Funds”, State Agency “Electronic Government”⁶¹ - for activities related to the management of the ESF.

The objectives of this priority address the needs related to strengthening the capacity of the SCF/ESIF management units, enhancing the qualification and motivation of the staff of these units, building a quality mechanism for monitoring the system of indicators, assessing the implementation and impact of the national strategy papers, supporting the evaluation and monitoring systems and processes. Other needs are related to the upgrading of the UMIS, reducing the administrative burden for applicants and beneficiaries, ensuring continuous support for UMIS 2020, and new applications. Another group of needs are related to the permanent maintenance, updating, optimisation of the single information portal (www.eufunds.bg), updating of manuals, explanations, guidelines, lists of most common errors, etc., functioning of the district information points, as well as the promotion of the European Cohesion Policy and its objectives in Bulgaria.

⁶⁰ Although NSI is an eligible beneficiary under this FP4, they have not implemented a project

⁶¹ МЕУ след Постановление № 89 на МС от 19.05.2022 г. за създаване на Изпълнителна агенция "Инфраструктура на електронното управление" и за приемане на Устройствен правилник на изпълнителна агенция "Инфраструктура на електронното управление" и Устройствен правилник на Министерството на електронното управление, Обн. SG 38 of 2022.



The model for managing interventions under Priority Axes 4 and 5 uses a direct grant approach to specific beneficiaries. Seven procedures have been launched under PO 4, three of which are still under implementation.

The following procedures have been funded under Priority Axis 4:

Table 31. Financed procedures under PA4

Procedure	Number of contracts	Total value in BGN
BG05SFOP001-4.001 – “Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 District information points”	27 completed contracts with 27 beneficiaries (DIP)	8 697 210,79 funds verified and paid
BG05SFOP001-4.002 Technical assistance to the horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF (financial plan per budget line)	11 completed contracts with 6 beneficiaries - 2 pcs. of the CCU; 2 pcs. of the Certifying Authority; 2 pcs. of the EA AFEC; 1 pcs. of the PPA; 1 pcs. State Aid and Real Sector Directorate of the Ministry of Finance; 2 pcs. to AFCOS and 1 pcs. to SAFEAF.	33 396 172,23 funds verified and paid
BG05SFOP001-4.003 - Support for capacity development of municipalities in the development and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF	1 contract in execution with the NAMRB	9 428 656,24 negotiated funds
BG05SFOP001-4.004 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 district information points in the period 2019 - 2021"	27 contracts with 27 beneficiaries (DIP)	9 046 943,40 funds verified and paid
BG05SFOP001-4.005 Technical assistance to the horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF in the period 2019 - 2021 (Financial plan for budget line)	15 completed contracts with 8 beneficiaries - 2 pcs. of the CCU; 2 pcs. of the Certifying Authority; 2 pcs. of the EA AFEC; 2 pcs. of the MoEG, 1 pcs. of the PPA; 1 pc. Directorate of State Aid and Real Sector of the MoF; 2 pcs. of AFCOS, 2 pcs. and EA SAFEAF and 1 pcs. of MoEW.	45 229 885,31 funds verified and paid
BG05SFOP001-4.006 - Horizontal support for the effective management of the ESIF funds (financial plan per budget line)	8 contracts with 8 beneficiaries: 1 to the CCU; 1 to the Certifying Authority; 1 to the AFEC; 1 to the MoEG, 1 to the PPA, 1	27 960 198,23 negotiated funds



	to the SAFEAF, 1 to the AFCOS and 1 to the MoEW.	
BG05SFOP001-4.007 - Ensuring the functioning of the national network of district information centres 2022-2023	27 contracts with 27 beneficiaries (DIP)	7 387 950,44* contracted funds

**Updated information as of 11.10.2023.*

Source.

Procedures BG05SFOP001-4.001, BG05SFOP001-4.004, BG05SFOP001-4.007 are aimed at supporting the national network of 27 district information points. The main parameters of the three procedures are presented here.

The aim of the first two procedures (considered chronologically) is to ensure the effective functioning of the 27th district information points, building on what has been achieved and increasing citizens' awareness, accessibility to information and promotion of the opportunities provided by the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period.

Specifically, the objectives cover:

- promoting the role of the EU and raising awareness of funding opportunities under the programmes;
- ensuring maximum transparency in the implementation and management of programmes;
- building and maintaining high public confidence in the implementation and management processes of the Partnership Agreement and the programmes.

In the third procedure - **BG05SFOP001-4.007, which is under implementation at the time of evaluation, the defined objective is complemented in line with the** implementation of the objectives of the National Communication Strategy 2014-2020 and the Partnership Agreement. This procedure aims to build on the visibility among the public of the European Cohesion Policy, the funding opportunities as well as the results achieved in projects co-financed by EU funds, and the DIPs will work to increase transparency in the implementation of the programmes, building broad public confidence and supporting the implementation of the integrated territorial approach in Bulgaria.

The services to be provided by the DIP are:

- Dissemination of general information on EU policies, the Partnership Agreement, the management and implementation of the ESIF;
- Provision of specific information to potential beneficiaries on the possibilities to apply for programmes co-financed by the ESIF;
- Organisation of events to promote the programmes co-financed by the ESIF (public information events, press conferences, seminars, etc.), tailored to the specific needs of the district, potential beneficiaries and the opportunities for applying for open procedures;
- Collection and dissemination of information and promotion of good practice in relation to the ESIF;



- Dissemination of information and promotional materials on the objectives, modalities and opportunities for funding from the ESIF in Bulgaria;
- Cooperation with the managing authorities/intermediate bodies of the OP and work with national, regional media and other EU information networks in relation to the performance of their functions.

To measure the results achieved in the implementation of the three procedures, the following indicators are foreseen (Procedure 1)

	Indicators
O4-3	Number of public information events
O4-2	Information materials issued by type (brochures, leaflets, etc.)
O4-4	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance
	Number of consultations provided by telephone, e-mail or on-site at the district information points*

*Indicator only for Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.001

All contracts under the first two procedures had been completed at the time of the evaluation.

The next group of procedures are **aimed at horizontal structures**: BG05SFOP001-4.002 Technical assistance for horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF; BG05SFOP001-4.005 Technical assistance for horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESF in the period 2019 - 2021, BG05SFOP001-4.006 - Horizontal support for the effective management of the ESF funds and have the following objectives:

- To support the horizontal structures and units responsible for managing the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)
- To ensure the effective functioning of the UMIS information system (under Art. 1 of Decree No 322 of the Council of Ministers of 2008⁶², and subsequently under Art. 21 para. 1 of the Law on Management of the European Structural and Investment Funds (LMESIF);
- To maintain and develop the Single Information Portal (www.eufunds.bg) (under Art. 1 of Decree No. 107 of the Council of Ministers of 2014⁶³, and subsequently under Art. 19, para. 1 of the LMESIF;

⁶² Decree No 322 of the Council of Ministers of 19 December 2008 laying down the conditions, procedure and mechanism for the functioning of the Information System for the management and monitoring of the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the European Assistance to the Most Deprived Fund and the Cohesion Fund of the European Union in the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁶³ Decree No 107 of the Council of Ministers of 2014 laying down the procedure for the award of grants under programmes co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund of the European Union and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for the period 2014-2020.



The procedures are implemented through two separate budget lines for each beneficiary - a financial plan to finance salaries and a financial plan to finance other activities.

Eligible beneficiaries are **EA AFEC, PPL, COM (CCU), CoM**, Directorate "Protection of the financial interests of the European Union" (AFKOS) of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) - Directorate AFKOS, MoF, MoEW, MoF, Executive Agency "Certification audit of the European Agricultural Funds".

These procedures support the horizontal structures and units for the management of the ESF funds to effectively perform their functions⁶⁴, to increase their administrative capacity, to implement the communication activities described in the National Communication Strategy 2014-2020 and to ensure the functioning and maintenance of the EMIS and the Single Information Portal for general information on the implementation and management of the ESF www.eufunds.bg.

The indicators for the three procedures are:

Indicators	Name
O4-1	Trained employees
O4-2	Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)
O4-3	Number of public information events
O4-4	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance
O4-5	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year
R4-2	Satisfaction of participants with the training
R4-3	UMIS user satisfaction
R4-4	Proportion of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy

Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.006 is under implementation at the time of evaluation.

The latest procedure under PO4 BG05SFOP001-4.003 - Support for capacity development of municipalities in the development and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESF, aims to improve the quality and successful implementation of municipal projects co-financed by the ESF, incl. (1) Developing the capacity of municipal administrations in the preparation and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF; (2) Providing an environment for communication and exchange of good practices in the implementation of projects co-financed by the ESF; and (3) Improving the quality of public procurement documents in the implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF. The specific beneficiary is the NAMRB.

⁶⁴Programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification, audit and evaluation of the ESF funds;



The indicators expected to be achieved through the implementation of the procedure are

	Indicators
O4-2	Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)
O4-3	Number of public information events
	Upgraded information system

At the time of the evaluation, the procedure was in progress.

Priority Axis 5 "Technical Assistance" is aimed at strengthening and enhancing the institutional capacity of the Managing Authority as well as the capacity of the beneficiaries to apply for and implement quality projects under the OPGG.

Priority Axis 5 is aimed at achieving two specific objectives: Specific Objective 1: Effective and efficient management of the OPGG and Specific Objective 2: Increasing the capacity and awareness of OP beneficiaries.

The eligible beneficiary is the Managing Authority of the OPGG.

Priority Axis 5 Technical Assistance of the OPGG provides funding in several main areas:

- Material, human and technical capacity to manage and implement the programme
- Activities to continuously improve the capacity of the structures involved in programme management (MA and MC) and to ensure conditions for adequate progress assessment, risk management and programming
- Ensuring conditions for effective management and implementation of the OPGG by developing and improving all necessary procedures, manuals, handbooks and documents, supporting the closure of OPAC and OPTA 2014-2020 and preparing for the next programming period.
- Improving the capacity and awareness of the beneficiaries of the Operational Programme, by implementing effective communication strategies to promote the EU contribution, motivate and increase the interest of the different target groups of the programme to prepare and submit quality project proposals.

Table 32 Budget lines financed under procedure BG05SFOP001-5.001 under PO 5

Procedure	Beneficiary	Total value of concluded contracts, BGN	Status
BG05SFOP001-5.001-0001 Technical assistance to the MA of the OPGG for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication	MA of the OPGG	8 015 222,24 Funds vouched and disbursed	Completed
BG05SFOP001-5.001-0002 Assessments and Analyses under the Operational Programme	AMC (D-DU)	945 838,80	In execution



BG05SFOP001-5.001-0003 Technical assistance to the MA for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication under the OPGG	MA of the TACA	13 698 000,00	In execution
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Source.

Following are the answers to the evaluation questions for Research Task 3

8.1. Investment efficiency

Evaluation question 3.1. What is the effectiveness of the investments made? Have the planned results been achieved and to what extent have the investments contributed to achieving them?

The two priorities (PA 4 and PA 5) have achieved high investment efficiency, achieving the planned results as measured by the performance and result indicators set out in the programme. During the programme implementation period, a number of reductions have been made in the budget of the two priority axes, the target values of the indicators have been changed, resources have been reallocated in order to respond flexibly to challenges related to the external environment, and the MA has been able to perform its functions and ensure the work of the programme and its beneficiaries with a reduced budget.

As noted in the introduction to Research Task 2, *effectiveness* is viewed as the extent to which the objectives set at the programme level (as measured by the achievement of the set outcome and performance indicators) have been achieved. To assess effectiveness, physical performance is measured - an analysis of the results achieved as measured by the extent to which the indicators have been achieved. While a number of research methods have been used to track the achievement of objectives and outcomes, indicator analysis is the primary quantitative method by which performance is assessed.

For the purpose of the performance evaluation, an analysis of the documentary data from the beneficiaries' technical reports, data from the beneficiaries' files in UMIS, minutes of the MC meetings, data from the annual programme implementation reports, UMIS 2020 reports, the Operational Selection Criteria, the minutes of the Monitoring Committee meetings and their annexes, the Application Guidelines for the examined procedures was carried out. The results of the quantitative and qualitative studies were also analysed.

The analysis of effectiveness is carried out by Priority Axis, analysing for each Priority Axis the procedures financed under the OPGG, as described in the introduction to evaluation task 3.

Priority axis 4

Based on the review of the data on the achievement of the indicators and the feedback of the respondents, it can be concluded that a very high degree of effectiveness has been achieved in achieving the specific objectives of the PA4, as the technical assistance provided to the horizontal structures has ensured the performance of the system for monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF. The quantification of effectiveness is measured by the achievement of indicator values which exceed the target values, with some



indicators being exceeded many times, although not all projects have been completed at the time of evaluation. This leads to the conclusion that the projects have been implemented effectively, achieving many more results than planned.

According to the above data, also presented on the basis of the 2022 AR and verified data from the UMIS, the achieved values of the indicators exceed the target values, and for some indicators the exceedance is multiple. This leads to the conclusion that the projects have been effectively implemented, achieving much more results than planned. The large over-performance of the target values for the first four performance indicators also points to conservative target planning in the preparation stages of the operational programme. For two of the indicators (O4-1 Trained staff and O4-3 Number of public information events), the high implementation rates may also be a consequence of the constraints during Covid-19 when many of the training and event activities were in an online environment, allowing for more trainees to be involved and more events to be held. The rationale for the priority axis in the programme document⁶⁵ lists the three specific objectives of the priority axis and describes the expected results.

Specific objective 1. Support the horizontal structures responsible for the management and implementation of the ESIF. The expected results justify the need to analyse the pay model in place to remove distortions from its application to staff working on the ESIF, as well as recommendations from the Interim Evaluation of the OPTA on the need to conduct comparative evaluations between OPs, meta-evaluations and evaluations of the implementation of horizontal policies or indicator systems. Gaps in the monitoring and evaluation capacity of the programmes have been identified, suggesting delays in reprogramming actions. The need to increase capacity and improve coordination is justified. The analytical part of the specific objective identifies weaknesses in the area of public procurement and state aid, which is of critical importance as a significant part of the ESIF funds are spent under the Public Procurement Act. The role of the different horizontal structures is justified. An ongoing support mechanism is also proposed through training and qualification of staff; development of methodologies and rules for standardisation of processes; improvement of coordination and methodological guidance provided to MAs on the applicable State aid regime.

Specific objective 2: Ensure the effective functioning of UMIS 2020. The description justifies the need and status of a single management and monitoring information system (UMIS) and the direct benefits. As the UMIS will continue to be used, the system is planned to be further developed and opportunities for improvement have been identified (Mid-term evaluation of the OPTA). In order to ensure coordination in the management of the ESIF in the Republic of Bulgaria, it is foreseen to build and maintain an interface between UMIS 2020 and ISAC, similar to the 2007-2013 programming period. The needs for additional trainings, addition of new functionalities, the need for continuous maintenance are justified.

⁶⁵ https://www.eufunds.bg/sites/default/files/uploads/opgg/docs/2022-10/1.%20Programme_2014BG05SFOP001_5_0_bg%20%281%29.pdf



The three procedures described above for the horizontal structures (BG05SFOP001-4.002, BG05SFOP001-4.005, BG05SFOP001-4.006) as described in Table 34 have been programmed and implemented in pursuance of the two specific objectives.

Under these contracts, beneficiaries carry out preparation, management, monitoring, evaluation, visibility and communication, control and audit activities. In addition, activities related to the reduction of administrative burden, simplification of legislation and regulations, development and maintenance of electronic data exchange systems are implemented. The contracts also provide for the remuneration of staff and increase their capacity through training.

The main achievements and results in the implementation of contracts under this group of procedures relate to:

Coordination of the overall system: changes in regulations, coordination, preparation of proposals to ensure the overall work for the ESIF. For example, at the meeting of the Second Monitoring Committee of the Partnership Agreement (7.02.2017), the information summarised and provided shows that the MA and horizontal structures are focused on completing the reporting for the 2007-2013 programmes and are working at an accelerated pace to establish new mechanisms and regulatory documents for legal management and control for the 2014-2020 period. The Managing and Certifying Authorities of the programmes have been accredited, enabling the process of reimbursement from the European Commission to start.

There have also been effects of the absorption of the funds, both at the macro and micro level, as demonstrated by the simulations with the macroeconomic model CIBILA 2.0, which show a markedly positive overall effect on the value added in the economy by the investments made, expressed in a cumulative increase of 11.5% in GDP by the end of 2016.

2016 is the first year of implementation of the law on the management of EU funds as a key measure to improve processes, create a predictable environment, optimize the system for managing EU funds and increase its effectiveness and efficiency.

The introduction of the LMESIF overcomes the prevailing fragmentation (and sometimes contradictions) of different legal acts by introducing unified and simplified procedures based on clearly defined deadlines, forms and other rules with the effect of reducing the administrative burden and effective judicial protection for beneficiaries. An essential effect of the introduction of the LMESIF is the creation of a legal framework that guarantees a level playing field between beneficiaries and MA in their relations and the possibility of settling relations through administrative and legal channels⁶⁶.

In 2016, the main sub-legislative acts to the LMESIF were adopted, which regulate the national rules regarding Monitoring Committees, provision of grants, eligibility of expenditure, selection of contractor by beneficiaries, UMIS.

UMIS

⁶⁶ Full Preliminary Impact Assessment of the Bulgarian Government's Policy to Change the Regulatory Framework Governing the Management of EU Structural and Investment Funds, Centre for Legislative Impact Assessment, 2015.



Continuous upgrading of UMIS, accompanied by simplification of reporting rules and reduction of administrative burden - this includes various activities related to the use of ISMS, the transition to electronic submission of project proposals and reporting in ISMS, the possibility not to submit documents that are already submitted and valid or can be verified ex officio. The system has developed the possibility to use budget lines which are reported by beneficiaries as successful in terms of reducing **administrative burden**. Activities are financed as part of the contracts implemented by the CCU.

The activities supported are the upgrade and maintenance of UMIS: development, optimization and maintenance of UMIS 2020, development of a system for information protection, automated backup and recovery of data in UMIS 2020, implementation of a system for monitoring the correct functioning and use of the software in UMIS 2020, development of an e-learning environment for working with UMIS 2020, conducting training for users of UMIS; development and updating of video-training for working with UMIS 2020, development of a system for entering requests.

The results achieved thanks to the investments in the UMIS, accompanied by a reduction of the administrative burden are remarkable, as according to the Annual Report (AR) for 2022, more than 112,000 project proposals have been submitted through the platform, more than 110,000 reporting packages have been examined, more than 195,000 users have been registered, more than 1,800 grant procedures have been announced.

The indicator that measures the results related to the UMIS system is R 4-3 UMIS User Satisfaction, with a target of 85% and 89.61% satisfaction achieved.

Informing target groups about EU Cohesion Policy

This includes activities related to maintaining and developing the Single Information Portal www.eufunds.bg and providing information on the implementation of individual projects and programmes. The activities are funded as part of the contracts implemented by the CCU. The Single Information Portal on the European Structural and Investment Funds was created to raise awareness of citizens and businesses on funding opportunities and the implementation of measures under the different operational programmes. For the period 2014-2020 there were 11 586 282 unique page views; 3 454 912 page views; 1 704 131 users. The National Communication Strategy of the Operational Programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period has been developed and is being implemented, which sets out the strategic communication framework for the 2014-2020 programming period as part of the inter-institutional interaction process.

These activities are measured by outcome indicator R 4-4. Proportion of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy. With a target of 66%, a value of 73.3% has been reached.



Activities, investment contributions and impacts are discussed in detail in evaluation questions 3.4 and 3.5.

Coordination activities: changes in regulations, coordination, drafting of proposals, response to external environment factors (pandemic caused by COVID-19 and Russian aggression in Ukraine)

Actions taken to secure funds to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

On 13 March 2020, the European Commission proposes a €37 billion Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative and puts forward a number of proposals to amend the legislation to allow Member States to benefit from greater financial support and targeted assistance.

In a communication on the Initiative between the EC and Bulgaria, the available resources are specified - unallocated funds from the national envelopes (around 515 million euros or just over 1 billion leva) are directed to finance measures in response to the crisis. The potential resources, programmes and measures to be mobilised for an immediate response to the deepening crisis have been identified by the managing authorities of the operational programmes. On the basis of the information analysed on the internal allocation of resources per programme and the additional budget needed to finance specific measures, the Council of Ministers adopted Decision No 256 of 14 April 2020 agreeing to reallocate the contribution from the ESF by transferring funds between the 2014-2020 operational programmes to support measures to minimise the negative consequences of the epidemic spread of COVID-19.

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 additional flexibility to Member States to reallocate resources to deliver tailor-made measures to counter the public health crisis. Such a possibility was not allowed under the previous regulations governing the European Structural and Investment Funds.

In this regard, the uncommitted funds and the savings from ongoing operations within the Cohesion Fund and the Operational Programmes "Transport and Transport Infrastructure" and "Environment" respectively are identified. By Decision of the Council of Ministers No 319 of 11 May 2020 supplementing the previous Decision No 256 of 14 April 2020, the corresponding transfers of funds from the CF to the ERDF and from and to the operational programmes, respectively, were determined.

Under the OPHRD, OPIC and OP "Regions in Growth" (OPGR) programmes, funds have been directed to measures in response to the crisis and internal, unallocated resources from non-negotiated funds and savings from current operations. ERDF - BGN 40.4 million for the provision of hospital and laboratory equipment; personal protective equipment and clothing for hospitals, regional inspectorates, transfusion haematology centres and emergency care centres. Pursuant to the Decision No 256 of 14 April 2020, the Managing Authority (MA) of the OPGG prepared a draft amendment to the programme, which resulted in the release of resources



amounting to BGN 105 000 000 to be transferred to the OPHRD. For this purpose, the OPGG budget was reduced by BGN 105 000 000, including an ESF contribution of BGN 89 250 000 and a national co-financing of BGN 15 750 000.

With these resources, the total amount of investments in response to the crisis under the European Structural and Investment Funds and national operational programmes exceeds BGN 1 billion. These are resources from the 2014-2020 programming period that have been saved or under non-launched grant procedures.

In the European Council's endorsed Recovery Plan for Europe - Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and Next Generation EU, there is an instrument to provide additional funds for the ongoing implementation of Cohesion Policy to support the recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for an environmentally, digitally and sustainably resilient recovery - the so-called REACT-EU. Total REACT-EU funding for Bulgaria amounts to € 576 million. The funding for Bulgaria under REACT-EU for 2021 is established in a letter of the European Commission of 10.11.2020 on the allocations for our country for the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 and is set at 436 355 501 EUR at current prices or 853 437 179 BGN. The REACT-EU funding for Bulgaria for 2022 was established by a decision of the European Commission of 23.11.2021. It is set at EUR 139 651 309 or BGN 273 134 220.

Actions taken to address the consequences of the refugee crisis caused by Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2022.

Member States are invited to channel resources to address the refugee crisis through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), including through the additional funds made available by REACT-EU. To this end, a Regulation amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 223/2014 with regard to Cohesion Actions for Refugees in Europe (CARE) enters into force. In addition, the co-legislators approved a proposal to increase upfront funding under REACT-EU for Member States hosting refugees from Ukraine, as well as the implementation of a unit cost for operations to address migration challenges.

EU Structural Funds are one of the main sources of funding to provide the necessary response to the needs of people fleeing the war. Support is deployed in terms of programming, contracting and first disbursements in the period May-September 2022, covering measures under the national programmes for humanitarian assistance to displaced persons from Ukraine. All programming, including the national methodology for the implementation of the simplified cost option to support the basic needs of refugees from Ukraine has been consulted and implemented in close cooperation with the Commission services. In the early reception phase of integration, funds are targeted at providing accommodation, shelter and food supplies to refugees as the most urgent needs for their first weeks in the country. The mobilised EU Cohesion Policy funds cover eligible expenditure already incurred by the state budget only for the period from the beginning of the crisis until 31 May 2022.



Decision No 328 of the Council of Ministers of 2022 approving funds for the provision of cohesion actions for refugees in Europe redirected funds from REACT-EU 2022 to specific measures to address the challenges of the refugee crisis. This mainly covers food and accommodation costs for refugees in the reception phase. The funds are disbursed, mainly through the Ministry of Tourism, and the same are financed in advance from the state budget and then reimbursed by the relevant operational programmes on the basis of approved beneficiary projects.

Subsequent amendments and additions to RR No 328 of 2022 (RR No 347/2022; No 364/2022; No 471/2022; No 647/2022) have refined the specific parameters and scope of support, allowing MAs of operational programmes that finance measures to address the refugee crisis to use the unit cost established by EU Regulation in implementing the planned activities. In addition, a national unit cost methodology has been established, agreed with the European Commission and more adequately responding to needs compared to the possibilities provided by the EU Regulation.

In political terms, Bulgaria participated in the development and signed a joint declaration with Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia (later joined by Croatia and Cyprus) on the needs and challenges regarding the unprecedented humanitarian migration to the European Union and the Cohesion Policy response to the consequences of the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

In response to the declaration, in June the European Commission presented its proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 as regards additional flexibility to deal with the consequences of military aggression by the Russian Federation (FAST CARE). The draft Regulation aims to help Member States to cope with the challenges created by the extremely large number of people arriving in the EU. The proposal foresees legislative measures for additional flexibility to allow for faster and more comprehensive support from the Funds to ease the burden on national budgets and facilitate implementation. The Regulation enters into force in October 2022.

Other actions to overcome the crisis caused by Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2022.

In the context of the EU's urgent intervention to tackle high energy prices resulting from the war in Ukraine, exceptional temporary measures have been allowed for the flexible use of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and Cohesion Fund resources to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are particularly affected by increased energy prices, as well as to support vulnerable households to cover energy costs incurred and paid as of 1 February 2022.

The ERDF is used to provide working capital support to SMEs, which are particularly affected by increased energy prices. The ESF provides support to vulnerable households, as defined in national rules, to help them meet their energy consumption costs.

In this respect, Regulation (EU) 2023/435 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 February 2023 amending Regulation (EU) 2021/241 as regards the REPowerEU chapters in recovery and sustainability plans and amending Regulations (EU) 1303/2013, (EU) 2021/1060 and (EU) 2021/1755 and Directive 2003/87/EC has been adopted.



On the basis of the provisions of the Regulation and following an analysis of the possibilities for mobilising funds from the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds, respectively from the 2014-2020 Operational Programmes, a Decision of the Council of Ministers № 453 of 27 June 2023 has been adopted approving funds for reimbursement of costs through the application of the exceptional measures for the use of funds to support small and medium-sized enterprises that are particularly affected by energy price increases and vulnerable households (SAFE).

The above-mentioned DCoM approves funds from the budgets of the operational programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period to be used for the reimbursement of eligible costs incurred by the Electricity System Security Fund in the framework of national programmes for the compensation of non-domestic end-users of electricity - to support small and medium-sized enterprises that are particularly affected by increases in energy prices, and/or national programmes for the compensation of natural gas and district heating companies using

It should be acknowledged that the situation in the electricity and natural gas markets continues to be very dynamic, with continued compensation payments to non-domestic customers by the Electricity System Security Fund. At the same time, we are in the final months of the implementation of the 2014-2020 operational programmes, a period characterised by a particular dynamism in the closure and payment of projects and operations. In this respect, the Decision of the Council of Ministers allows the relevant operational programmes, if necessary, to propose to the EC for approval expenditure that is different from the mentioned DCoM № 453.

In conclusion, these are just some of the more significant results achieved from the implementation of the coordination activities by the CCU. The contribution and impact of the implementation of these procedures are discussed in detail under the relevant evaluation questions.

In order to measure progress and results, the following table presents the values of the performance and result indicators achieved from the financing of these contracts:

Table Indicators achieved by CCUs in the implementation of their contracts under PA4

	Indicator	Target value	Reported value	Verified value	Balance against contract
O4-1	Trained employees	886	517	517	369
O4-2	Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)	3,00	1,00	1,00	2,00
O4-3	Number of public information events	25	1	1	24
O4-4	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens	5	4	4	1
O4-5	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	171,00	279,04	279,04	0
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year	5,00	3,28	2,25	0
R 4-2	Satisfaction of participants with the training	87,60	93,25	93,25	0
R 4-3	UMIS user satisfaction	85,00	89,61	89,61	0



Indicator		Target value	Reported value	Verified value	Balance against contract
R 4-4	Proportion of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy,	66	72,3	72,3	

EA AFEU

The EA AFEU has successfully completed 4 grants contracts (BG05SFOP001-4.002-0001, BG05SFOP001-4.002-0006, BG05SFOP001-4.005-0006, BG05SFOP001-4.005-0007) and is currently implementing one (BG05SFOP001-4.006-0003).

The funding is used to recruit and maintain adequate administrative capacity to carry out the planned audit engagements.

All statutory recruitment opportunities have been used, including in replacement of long-term absentees. The average number of auditors whose salaries are financed through the budget line is 58, or 91% of the Agency's specialised staff, with 82% of the workload related to the implementation of audit engagements on programmes co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The funds were used to ensure that the remuneration of the Audit Authority's staff is adequate to market conditions in order to ensure their independence and objectivity.

As a result of the implementation of the financial plans, the turnover of qualified staff has been significantly reduced. With a planned value of 5% for the "Staff turnover per year" indicator, an average of 3.2% was recorded for the reporting period. The appropriate incentives provided under the budget line have motivated the staff of the Audit Authority to maintain their service, despite the significant volume of audit engagements and the difficulties associated with year-round travel to carry out on-site inspections.

Improving the audit management process and the quality of audit engagements: three new versions of the Audit Manual for European Union funds have been approved. The updated texts reflect changes in the regulatory framework and the European Commission's guidelines for the implementation of audit work.

The Audit Authority's checklists for systems audits and audits of operations are published on the Agency's website to ensure that they are accessible to all stakeholders: Managing Authorities, Certifying Authority and beneficiaries.

The Audit Authority's methodology and quality control procedures are subject to annual review and evaluation by the European Commission.



Evidence of the high quality achieved are the results of the last two audits of the Audit Authority's activities carried out by the European Court of Auditors.⁶⁷ The audits have not resulted in any recommendations for improvement.

The Agency annually prepares and disseminates an Analysis of Procurement Irregularities Identified in Audit. This initiative has been highly appreciated by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy as an example of good practice in preventing irregularities.⁶⁸

As a result of the effective application of the Audit Authority's methodology, all tasks related to the closure of the eight operational and cross-border cooperation programmes of the 2007-2013 programming period and the annual closure for the second, third and fourth accounting years for the nine operational and cross-border cooperation programmes for the 2014-2020 period were completed in strict compliance with the set deadlines.

The closure declarations for the programming period 2007-2013 and the annual control reports for the three accounting years of the following programming period, prepared by the Audit Authority, have been accepted by the European Commission.

During the period of implementation of the financial plans described above, 61 system audits were carried out (at least one per year at the Managing Authority and the Certifying Authority for each programme). Recommendations were made to improve the management and control systems of these bodies for the weaknesses identified. All recommendations have been accepted by the audited organisations and, for findings of high and medium materiality, timely corrective actions have been taken. The high quality of the work carried out by the Audit Authority, the constructive recommendations and the professional communication with the audited organisations have ensured the proper functioning of the management and control systems of all operational and cross-border cooperation programmes. The results of the controls on 555 projects (audits of operations carried out by the CA during this period) have also confirmed the proper functioning of the management and control systems, given that no programme was found to have errors with a financial impact exceeding the predefined materiality threshold of 2%.

The quality and timeliness of the audit work on the numerous samples in relation to the closure of the 2007-2013 period, as well as for the current 2014-2020 programming period, was also contributed to by the audit software used by EA AFEU to document the planning work, perform the checks and store the collected evidence in electronic form. During the reporting period, technical support was provided for the new version of the specialised audit software, Ideagen Pentana.

⁶⁷ Implementation Report for BL BG05SFOP001-4.002-0001-SO1/26.02.2016, <https://aeuf.minfin.bg/bg/276>

⁶⁸ Implementation Report for BL BG05SFOP001-4.002-0001-SO1/26.02.2016, <https://aeuf.minfin.bg/bg/276>



In order to improve knowledge and skills, each staff member of the specialised administration has participated in at least one external training each year, directly related to the management and audit of EU funds, with a total of 44 trainings funded under the budget line.

The eight internal training sessions organised during the period have played a significant role in maintaining adequate knowledge and skills of the audit staff. The regular holding of such meetings, with the participation of all staff from the specialised administration, provides an opportunity to exchange experience between the different audit teams, to jointly examine and discuss good audit practices and to hold discussions to improve audit work.

During the period of implementation of the financial plan, 519 participations of staff of the specialised administration in training, seminars, etc. were recorded. The surveys carried out show that the participating staff rated the training courses as high quality (97% satisfaction rate).

The entire audit and management staff holds the Certified Internal Auditor in the Public Sector certificate, with additional international audit certificates held by: three auditors - Certified Fraud Examiner, seventeen auditors - Certified Government Auditing Professional, four auditors - Certified Internal Auditor, two auditors - Certified Information System Auditor. Three of the international auditor certifications were obtained during the implementation of the financial plans.

Experts with specific knowledge and skills are also hired in cases where specialised expertise is required: to cover the additional audit capacity required, 8 external persons with the required qualifications and experience have been engaged for the period of implementation of the budget line to carry out specific audits and/or to provide experts

Table 33 Results achieved by the Audit Authority

	Indicator	Target value	Reported value	Verified value	Balance against contract
O4-5	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	160	294.67	294.67	0
O4-1	Trained employees	1104	900	900	0
O4-5	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens	4	4	3	1
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year	5	3,35	0	Hp
R4-4	Satisfaction of participants with the training	85	97,05	97,05	Hp



For the period 2017-2022. The Audit Authority issues 12 annual control reports each year, according to which the error rate is below the materiality threshold of 2% of the declared expenditure for the relevant programmes. All reports have been accepted without comments by the EC.

For the period 2017-2022, the Audit Authority has carried out a total of 77 systems audits, with ratings on key requirements of the programmes' systems throughout the period set at level 2 of the four-level scale ("Functioning. Some improvement needed"). In 2022, the scores on Key Indicators 6 (UMIS), 10,11,12 and 13 of the CA rise to 1.

For the period 2017-2022, the CA audits the operations for all accounting years, and an analysis of the data shows that while in 2017, in 39% of the audited procedures, the CA formed findings with financial impact, in 2019 this percentage drops to 24%.

Table 34 Audits of operations:

2022	<p>The implementation of the audit work for the eighth financial year has been delayed as a result of the delay in the organisation and start of the audits of the operations of the main operational programmes (for the second period) in the period July-August 2022, as well as the need to carry out additional audit checks and new quality control on the audit work for the same period.</p> <p>In the framework of the checks carried out in the audits of the operations for the eighth accounting year for the main operational programmes and the three cross-border cooperation programmes for which the EA AFEU is the Audit Authority, the Agency checked 558 contracts under contractor selection procedures (75 of them were found to have errors with financial impact, all of which were corrected in the annual accounts.</p>
2021	<p>In the framework of the audit work carried out in 2021, the EA AFEU has examined 476 contractor selection procedures. In addition, the SAECA has audited 18 procurement procedures related to the COVID measures under the IMDIP. Of these, 70 were found to have errors with financial impact, all of which were corrected in the annual accounts.</p>
2020	<p>In the framework of the audit work carried out in 2020, the EA AFEU has verified 265 contractor selection procedures. Of these, 48 were found to have errors with financial impact, all of which were corrected in the annual accounts. Residual error below 2% of the materiality threshold.</p>
2019	<p>The Audit Authority carried out audits of operations under the 8 main operational programmes and the three cross-border cooperation programmes. 314 contractor selection procedures were audited, 61 of them were found to have errors with financial impact which were not identified by the MA and the Certifying Authority. All have been corrected in the annual accounts.</p>



2018	The Audit Authority carried out audits of operations under the 8 main operational programmes and the three cross-border cooperation programmes. 69 contractor selection procedures were audited, 45 of them were found to have errors with financial impact which were not identified by the MA and the Certifying Authority.
2017	The Audit Authority carried out audits of the operations under the 7 main operational programmes and the three cross-border cooperation programmes for which expenditure was certified to the EC during the accounting year from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. 70 contractor selection procedures were audited, 9 of them were found to have errors with financial impact which were not identified by the MA and the Certifying Authority.



Table 35 Proportion of procedures checked that have identified errors with financial impact by year:

Indicators	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	chart
Number of audited projects in operations audits	86	159	218	138	177	191	
Costs in Operations Audit Population (EURO)	595 056 375,70	673 807 945,59	1 242 071 990,02	1 050 072 547,15	1 139 236 723,66	1 031 784 351,03	
Number of entrusted OPs in the samples	70	69	314	265	476	558	
Number of POs for which the AA has identified violations with financial impact	9	45	61	48	70	75	
Number of corrected OP errors in the annual accounting reports	9	45	61	48	70	75	
Percentage of procedures with financial impact findings	12,86%	65,22%	19,43%	18,11%	14,71%	13,44%	

Note: The data presented in the table summarise the information on the audit activity for the following programmes: the OPEP, the OPRD, the OPIC, the OPTTI, the HRD OP, the OPGG, the OPSEIG and the 3 CBC programmes (Bulgaria-Serbia, Bulgaria-Turkey and Bulgaria-North Macedonia). These OPs also include the procedures under DCoM 160 and PRAG



On the basis of the data presented in the table, it can be concluded that as the programming period progresses and the volumes of funding for projects under the various programmes increase, the work of the EA AFEU increases - the number of projects checked in the audits of operations increases, and the number of public procurement contracts checked increases accordingly, as well as the number of public procurement contracts for which the CA has identified irregularities with financial impact. However, after an initial increase in 2018, the relative share decreases from 65.22% to 13.44% in 2022. This fact highlights the increased capacity of the entire system of horizontal structures.

Other horizontal structures that have contracts are:

Certifying Authority - National Fund Directorate in the Ministry of Finance. They finance the following activities: activities to reduce the administrative burden, training and increasing administrative capacity, as well as financing staff salaries.

The indicators foreseen to track progress under these procedures are summarised in the following table:

Table 36 Indicator values achieved in the implementation of the NFD contracts

	Indicator	Base value	Target value	Reported value	Verified value	Balance against contract
O4-5	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	0	118	55,5	55,5	62,5
O4-4	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens	0	3	3	3	0
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year	0	5	1,8	1,8	0
O4-1	Trained employees	0	162	127	127	35
R4-4	Satisfaction of participants with the training	00	80	90,8	90,8	0

The NFD receives support to carry out its functions through:

- Financing of staff remuneration
- Ensuring the implementation of the activities of the State Aid Directorate
- enhancing and improving the professional knowledge and skills of employees;
- Provide support to reduce administrative say.

During the period covered by this evaluation, NFD carried out an average of 52 Certification Reports (SR) and Declarations of Eligibility of Expenses (DEE) inspections per year. As programmes progress, the amount of expenditure verified increases, reaching BGN 1.25 billion in 2022.



Table 37 SR and DEE checks carried out by the NF Directorate

indicators	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	by October 2023	Chart
Number of checked CR and DEE	50	54	53	55	50	52	37	
Amount of verified expenses under CR and DEE for all programs in euros	546 063 945	1 025 930 995	1 129 416 675	1 029 572 007	1 218 258 823	1 247 417 415	670 650 953	
Number of certification reports returned by the NF to the MA for correction	10	12	10	15	6	8	2	
Returned certification reports from the NF to the MA for correction as a share of the verified CR and DEE	20,0%	22,2%	18,9%	27,3%	12,0%	15,4%	5,4%	
Number of rejected/unconfirmed declarations of eligible expenses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of inspections carried out under Art. 27, item 2 of REGULATION No. H-3 on compliance with procedures and control	69	72	69	74	70	64	10	

As experience has been gained over the course of the programme period, the number of reports returned has declined, while the number of CRs and DEEs verified has remained constant. After 2021, the number of returned reports as a proportion of the total number of verified CR and DEEs falls below 15%. This shows that the capacity to manage the ESIF is improving, with an increase in the volume of funds disbursed. At the same time, throughout the period, the NFD has carried out a steady number of checks on the CRs and the DEEs and checks on compliance with procedures and control activities.



Table 38 Indicators achieved by State Aid Directorate (SAD), Ministry of Finance

	Indicator	Base value	Target value	Reported value	Verified value	Balance against contract
O4-1	Trained employees	0,00	647,00	652,00	652,00	0
4-4	Satisfaction of participants with the training	0,00	85,00	98,34	98,34	0

The Public Procurement Agency received support for:

- Ensuring the implementation of the activities of the PPA by financing the salaries of the staff
- Increase and improve the professional knowledge and skills of employees;

Table 39 PPA indicators achieved

	Indicator	Base value	Target value	Reported value	Verified value	Balance against contract
O4-5	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	0	195	346,17	346,17	0
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year	10	5	3,47	3,47	
O4-1	Trained employees	0	153	0	0	153
4-4	Satisfaction of participants with the training					

Within the framework of the contracts concluded, the Directorate for the Protection of the European Union's Financial Interests (AFKOS) of the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) - AFKOS Directorate received support for:

- Ensuring the implementation of the activities of AFKOS, by financing staff salaries
- Increase and improve the professional knowledge and skills of employees;

Table 40 AFKOS indicators achieved

	Indicator	Target value	Reported value	Verified value	Balance against contract
O4-5	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	80	178,67	178,67	
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year	5	2,66	2,66	
O4-3	Number of public information events	1	1	1	0



O4-2	Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)	4	4	4	0
O4-1	Trained employees	236	256	256	0
4-4	Satisfaction of participants with the training	87,5	144,2	96,3	0

The EA SAFEAF receives funding that is intended to provide:

- The implementation of certification audit activities for ESIF funds ;
- Enhancing the professional knowledge and skills of the staff of EA SAFEAF;
- Ensuring resource support for the implementation of ESIF activities .

Table 41 Achieved indicators by EA SAFEAF

Indicator		Base value	Target value	Reported value	Verified value	Balance against contract
O4-5	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	0	28	30,59	30,59	
O4-5	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens	0	1	1	1	
	Trained O4-1 staff	0,00	1186	1076	1076	110
	Satisfaction of participants with the training 4-4	0,00	85,00	97,26	97,26	
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year		7,29	4,21	4,21	

The main activities financed under the budget line are: organising, conducting and participating in training of the staff on issues related to the management of the ESIF funds; ensuring the participation of the staff in coordination mechanisms, working groups, workshops, exchange of experience initiatives, etc. related to the management of the ESIF funds; carrying out audits and on-the-spot checks in the paying agency and beneficiaries; technical support of the audit activity, provision of software, hardware, specialised and office equipment.

The implementation of the activities set out in the Financial Plan contributes to maintaining the high level of competence and motivation of the staff of the EA SAFEAF, as well as to its resource endowment to meet the high demands placed on it in its role as Certifying Authority of the European Agricultural Funds and Audit Authority of the "Maritime and Fisheries Programme 2014-2020".

The main activities that are financed are audits and on-the-spot checks at the Paying Agency and beneficiaries, provision of resources for the implementation of the ESIF activities, organization, conduct and participation of staff in training on issues related to the management



of the ESIF funds, ensuring the participation of staff in coordination mechanisms, working groups, workshops, experience sharing initiatives, etc. related to the management of the ESF funds.

The last procedure under PO4 **BG05SFOP001-4.003 - Support for capacity development of municipalities in the development and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF** aims to improve the quality and successful implementation of municipal projects co-financed by the ESIF, incl. (1) Developing the capacity of municipal administrations in the preparation and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESF; (2) Providing an environment for communication and exchange of good practices in the implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF; and (3) Improving the quality of public procurement documents in the implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF. The specific beneficiary is the NAMRB.

As the Audit Authority for the Maritime and Fisheries Programme and the Certifying Authority for the European Agricultural Funds, the EA SAFEAF has successfully fulfilled its obligations under the applicable European regulations and national rules.

Good communication with the audited structures and with the concerned directorates in the Ministry of Agriculture, the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency, the Executive Agency for Vine and Wine, the Executive Agency for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

The EA SAFEAF, as Certifying Authority for the European Agricultural Funds, has issued and submitted to the European Commission the Annual Report on the certification of the financial statement in relation to the EAGF/EAFRD expenditure of the Paying Agency BG 01 for the financial year 2020. As a result of effective communication between the State Fund for Agriculture - Paying Agency and the Certifying Authority, the residual error rate for EAGF and EAFRD has been reduced below the materiality threshold of 2% of declared expenditure and the Certifying Authority has issued an annual unqualified opinion. The European Commission Decision on the clearance of the accounts for FY 2020 of the Paying Agency BG 01 - State Fund for Agriculture is pending.

Fact checks have also been carried out in relation to the certification audit for financial year 2021. The checks covered the accreditation components of the Paying Agency, an assessment of the management and control system for irregularities and the Paying Agency's obligations, checks on the veracity, completeness and accuracy of the EAGF and EAFRD accounts, including detailed checks on 92 cases of claims from the Paying Agency and on 92 payments; carrying out checks on the effectiveness of the controls put in place by the RA by carrying out factual checks on 66 payment claims; carrying out administrative and/or on-the-spot checks relating to 212 claims for The preliminary findings have been communicated to the management of the Paying Agency and the Competent Authority.

The on-the-spot checks on direct payments under the two agricultural funds that will be taken into account for the 2022 financial year audit have been carried out, namely 79 checks under



the EAGF and 60 checks under the EAFRD. The timing of these audit activities is subject to time constraints, i.e. they are carried out within the current marketing year, i.e. when it is possible to validate the relevant agronomic measures and related eligible costs.

EA SAFEAF, as the Audit Authority for the Maritime and Fisheries Programme, issues and submits to the EC the Annual Control Report and Annual Opinion (Annual Audit Opinion) for the 6th accounting year 01.07.2019 - 30.06.2020 under the MFP. As a result of effective communication between the Managing Authority, the Intermediate Body, the Certifying Authority and the Audit Authority, the residual error rate for the programme is 0.54% and the Audit Authority issues an unqualified annual opinion. The Annual Control Report has been submitted to the EC via SFC2014 by the regulatory deadline of 15.02.2021. The report has been accepted and approved April 2020 by the EC DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

During the reporting period, system audits were carried out on the Managing Authority, the Intermediate Body and the Certifying Authority. The audit work also includes audits of operations and audits of accounts under this programme. All audits were completed in a timely manner and in accordance with the Agency's audit strategy and audit plan.

The indicators expected to be achieved through the implementation of the procedure are:

	Indicators
O4-2	Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)
O4-3	Number of public information events
	Upgraded information system

At the time of the evaluation, the procedure was in progress. A number of implementation delays have been realised. This project has been included in the Risk Analysis of loss of funds and non-fulfilment of indicators, where a resource of *around BGN 4.5 million* has been identified *under the project "PROGRESS - Support for the development of municipalities, cities and regions for European cohesion"* with the beneficiary National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria. At the time of preparation of the analytical document, no contracts have been concluded with external contractors under the activity "Provision of specific support to municipalities in the preparation and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESF" in the part of providing advice and expert support to municipalities for the preparation of strategic documents for the programming period 2021-2027. A public procurement contract has been launched in 4 lots for "Provision of consultancy services at the request of municipalities for the preparation and adoption of strategic, planning and programming documents at local level for access to EU funds in the programming period 2021-2027" with an estimated value of BGN 4 500 000 including VAT and deadline for submission of tenders until 27.01.2022.

In summary, the results achieved in the implementation of the contracts concluded under the procedures implementing the first two specific objectives of PA4 demonstrate a high degree of implementation. Although some of the contracts are still under implementation, the achieved values of the output and result indicators represent high performance.



The following table also presents the progress on the physical implementation of the indicators.

Table 42 Achieved values of the indicators under PA4

№	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023	Verified value in ISMS as of 15.06.2023.	% implementation
O4-1	Trained employees	Number	5024	4 172	83%
O4-2	Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)	Number	7	5	71%
O4-3	Number of public information events	Number	28	3	11%
O4-4	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	Number	1018	1535,23	151%
O4-5	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens	Number	15	12	80%
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year	%	2,78%	2,13%	Over 100%
R4-2	Satisfaction of participants with the training	%	85%	119,07%	Over 100
R4-3	UMIS user satisfaction	%	83%	89,61%	Over 100
R4-4	Proportion of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy	%	66%	72,30%	Over 100

As can be seen from the table above, the outcome indicators have been met and exceeded - the turnover rate of horizontal management and control system staff is very low - almost half of the target of 5% overall, and the satisfaction of training participants is at an all-time high. UMIS user satisfaction measured in percentage terms also exceeds the target. The situation is similar for the population awareness indicator.

Specific Objective 3: Improving public awareness of the opportunities and results of the ESIF in Bulgaria, as well as improving the capacity of beneficiaries justifies the permanent maintenance of the single information portal for general information on the implementation of the EUSF in Bulgaria (www.eufunds.bg). The specific objective also provides support to the functioning network of information centres for the promotion of the EU Cohesion Policy in Bulgaria.

The aim of procedures BG05SFOP001-4.001 "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 district information points in the period 2015 - 2018", BG05SFOP001-4.004 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 district information points in the period 2019 - 2021" and BG05SFOP001-4.007 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 District information points in the period 2022 - 2023" (under implementation) is to ensure the effective functioning of 27 District information points, building on the achievements and increasing citizens' awareness, accessibility to information and promotion of the opportunities provided by the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period.

The services to be provided by the DIP are:



- Dissemination of general information on EU policies, the Partnership Agreement, the management and implementation of the ESIF;
- Provision of specific information to potential beneficiaries on the possibilities to apply for programmes co-financed by the ESIF;
- Organisation of events to promote the programmes co-financed by the ESIF (public information events, press conferences, seminars, etc.), tailored to the specific needs of the district, potential beneficiaries and the opportunities for applying for open procedures;
- Collection and dissemination of information and promotion of good practice in relation to the ESIF;
- Dissemination of information and promotional materials on the objectives, modalities and opportunities for funding from the ESIF in Bulgaria;
- Cooperation with the managing authorities/intermediate bodies of the OP and work with national, regional media and other EU information networks in relation to the performance of their functions.

To measure the results achieved in the implementation of the procedure, the following indicators are foreseen:

	Indicators
O4-3	Number of public information events
O4-2	Information materials issued by type (brochures, leaflets, etc.)
O4-4	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance
	Number of consultations provided by telephone, e-mail or on-site at the district information points

These three procedures support the implementation of projects with the beneficiaries being the municipalities on whose territory the administrative centres (the 27 districts on the territory of the Republic) are located. The 27 DIPs work actively with the managing authorities, supporting them in the implementation of information campaigns on the territory of the districts. The network actively cooperates with local administrations, labour offices and regional education inspectorates, universities and secondary schools to raise citizens' awareness of the opportunities available through the European Structural and Investment Funds. According to AR data, in 2017 alone, there were 14607 visitors to the 27 DIPs, 17084 questions received, 5619 publications in the media, 790 events organised with 29809 participants.

In order to meet the objectives of the National Communication Strategy (NCS) and the Partnership Agreement: to promote the role of the EU and to inform about the funding opportunities under the programmes, to ensure maximum transparency in the process of implementation and management of the programmes, to build and maintain high public confidence in the processes of implementation and management of the Partnership Agreement and the programmes, through 27 projects under the procedure "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of district information points", the following activities are carried out.



In 2018, the number of visitors to the 27 DIPs was 15 564, the number of questions received was 18 663, the number of publications in the media was 6 107, 502 events were organised with 31 119 participants.

In 2022, the following specific results were reported: ensuring the effective functioning of the network of 27 DIPs to increase citizens' awareness, accessibility to information and promotion of the opportunities provided by the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period, which were attended by 15,520 visitors to the offices; 17,035 questions were asked and answered; 8,685 publications in the media were made; 528 face-to-face information events were held with 11,404 participants and 33 online information events with 1,874 participants.

The data on the performance of the indicators by procedure are presented in the following table:

Table 43 Data on the implementation of the indicators for procedures under PA4

Indicators	Target value 2023	Verified value	% implementation (verified against agreed)
O4-3 Number of public information events	4688	4819	103%
O4-2 Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)	704	739	105%
O4-4 Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	264	337,28	128%

According to the data presented, the indicators are significantly over-agreed and hence the achieved indicator values exceed the set target values many times over. Another indicator, which is not related to the procedures under consideration, but partly reflects the effect of the work of the JRC is R4-4. The share of the population aged 15+ who are informed about the EU cohesion policy, the data in the UMIS shows 72.3% awareness, with a target of 70% by 2023. Of course, awareness is not solely due to the work of the CSIs, but also to other interventions, but certainly through their multifaceted work the CSIs have a role in citizens' awareness.

Based on the 2022 AR data, the following table shows the performance of the DIPs:

Table 44 DIPs results achieved, 2022

Results reported in Annual Reports	Unit of measurement	of 2022
Visitors to the DIPs	Nr	15 520
Publications in the media	Nr	8 685
Attended information events	Nr	528
Participants in the events	Nr	11 404



Online information events	Nr	33
Questions received	Nr	17 035

The annual reports on the implementation of the programme report on the results achieved, confirming that the projects have met their objectives and that the 27 DIPs continue to be an important source of information for citizens/public and successfully promote the funding opportunities provided by the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period.

Investments in the procedures financing the operation of the network of information centres have been effective, as evidenced by the extent to which performance indicators have been achieved, in a number of cases exceeding the results set. The following evaluation questions also track the contribution and impact of the DIPs work. Another group of procedures funded under PA4 are those related to support to horizontal structures linked to the ESIF. BG05SFOP001-4.005 Technical assistance to horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF in the period 2019-2021 (Financial Plan for budget line) and BG05SFOP001-4.006 - Horizontal support for the effective management of ESIF funds.

In order to compare with the views of the beneficiaries⁶⁹ included in the quantitative and qualitative research, the responses related to the results are presented as an illustration:

Table 45. Effects achieved thanks to Technical Assistance

	I agree	I disagree	I can not judge
The participation in training of staff from the institutions responsible for managing the EU funds contributed to enhancing their capacity.	92,3%		7,7%
They helped to improve coordination between the institutions responsible for managing the EU funds	69,2%	23,1%	7,7%
Helped to raise awareness among the general public on how to spend the EU funds	100,0%		
Helped reduce procurement errors	53,8%	38,5%	7,7%
They contributed significantly to the upgrading of the UMIS with new functionalities, which reduced the administrative burden for the Applicants and Beneficiaries and optimized the work of the bodies and institutions responsible for the management of the ESIF funds.	92,3%		7,7%
The project, implemented by NAMRB, helped to overcome challenges faced by municipalities in the implementation of municipal projects co-financed by the ESIF	46,2%	7,7%	46,2%

⁶⁹ The methodology for the quantitative survey is described in section Methodology of the report



Beneficiaries highlighted the link between the results achieved and the support of the programme, with the highest percentage rating the effects in terms of training, improved coordination, awareness and upgrading and functioning of the UMIS.

Priority axis 5

Based on the analysis of the data in terms of the results achieved, as measured by the indicator values, it can be concluded that a high degree of efficiency has been achieved in achieving the objectives of the MP5, as demonstrated by the overall work of the MA, the OPGG and the progress achieved in the contracting of the programme funds and the achievement of its objectives.

Priority Axis 5 "Technical Assistance" is aimed at strengthening and enhancing the institutional capacity of the Managing Authority as well as the capacity of the beneficiaries to apply for and implement quality projects under the OPGG.

The concept of management and implementation, which is supported by Priority Axis 5 and the wide range of beneficiaries of the operational programme, implies a fundamental commitment and a mandatory contribution of the priority axis to increasing citizen participation and inclusion of the different target groups in the decision-making process. The main instruments used in this direction are the Operational Programme Monitoring Committee, information campaigns with beneficiaries, public consultations, thematic events. Alongside the public events and campaigns, of equal importance are the series of evaluations, studies and analyses that are financed with PA5 funds and which include a mandatory element of stakeholder and target group participation in the form of focus groups, interviews and other forms of public consultation. These elements of the technical management of the programme have the potential to focus the participation of social partners and civil society structures in thematic areas relevant to the successful implementation of the policies supported by the operational programme.

The specific targeting of investments and the formulation of objectives, activities and results also implies efficiency in implementation.

Under the priority axis, 3 contracts have been financed, two of which are still in the process of implementation (mentioned in the introduction to the evaluation task).

BG05SFOP001-5.001-0001 "Technical assistance to the MA of the OPGG for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication"

The objective of the budget line is to ensure effective management, implementation, monitoring and control of the OPGG by strengthening and enhancing the institutional capacity of the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme "Good Governance" and increasing the capacity and awareness of the beneficiaries of the programme.

Two activities are included - Preparation, implementation, monitoring and control of the OPGG and Information and communication.



BG05SFOP001-5.001-0002 "Assessments and Analyses under the Operational Programme

The budget line through the financial plan aims at carrying out evaluations and analyses in accordance with the prepared and approved Evaluation Plan for the 2014-2020 programming period. The evaluations/analyses should contribute to the effective and efficient implementation and management of the programme, as well as to the assessment of the impact of the interventions on the target groups of the OPGG. These are also eligible activities under the budget line.

BG05SFOP001-5.001-0003 "Technical assistance to the MA for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication under the OPGG" continues the previous procedure.

Two financial plans are under implementation under procedure BG05SFOP001-5.001 "Technical Assistance to the OPGG" - "Technical assistance to the OPGG for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication" and "Evaluations and analyses under the OPGG". By the end of 2020, 3 budget lines have been approved under PA5, of which 1 has expired. The remaining two budget lines expire in 2021. No new project proposals were approved for funding in 2020.

The financial plans implemented by the MA of the OPGG cover all the activities of the Managing Authority by providing funds for staff remuneration and training, ensuring the work of the Monitoring Committee, carrying out information and communication activities, holding information days for beneficiaries, carrying out programme evaluations.

As part of its work, the MA undertakes continuous analyses of programming, contracting and implementation. The 2020 AR described the lack of commitment and project readiness on the part of the responsible institutions to implement the measures in the roadmaps aimed at the development of public administration and judicial reform as a major problem at the programming and contracting stage of the OPGG funds, especially under priority axes 2 and 3. This leads to delays in the preparation and opening of procedures for the provision of BFP. In order to overcome these problems, the OPGG MA is working actively and continuously with the specific beneficiaries through dedicated letters and meetings in order to clarify the needs and approach of the beneficiaries and to structure the specific procedures in line with the objectives and priorities of the OPGG.

Another important problem identified is the low quality of the submitted project proposals, which leads to delays in the evaluation and approval processes. The MA organises regular information days on open procedures to overcome this problem. As well as holding information days after the announcement of each procedure, the MA provides detailed information on the preparation of project proposals and reducing the administrative burden of the project proposal application process by carrying out desk checks where possible.

Another problem identified by the MA, applicable to almost all projects under the OPGG, which appears at the implementation stage, is compliance with the procurement timetable, as



well as appeals against contracting authorities' decisions. This takes away from the planned implementation time of the projects and leads to a significant time lag.

In order to proactively address the identified problems, the MA implements the following measures:

- Carry out ongoing monitoring of the implementation of project activities.
- Assists beneficiaries with advice on cases, including technical issues related to project reporting.
- Holds regular meetings to discuss specific project issues and how to resolve them, including acting as a mediator to coordinate the implementation of projects involving different institutions.
- Ongoing monitoring of the status of contested procurement cases in the CPC and SAC for key projects; requesting timely submission of payment requests from beneficiaries to ensure timely verification and certification and mitigate the risk of automatic release of programme funds.
- On an ongoing basis, provide guidance/information on the most common errors in implementation, procurement; changes in regulations, etc. to prevent errors and irregularities.
- Maintains and updates the information on the OPGG website;
- Proactively coordinates to clarify cross-cutting issues related to the implementation of measures from the roadmaps to the strategic documents on e-government; works in close cooperation with the administrations/administrative units that have functions in the policy areas for the implementation of measures financed and implemented under the programme (the State Agency for e-Government, the Directorate for Modernisation of Administration in the A CoM, the Supreme Administrative Council, etc.); applies as an alternative means of communication with the b
- Implement measures to streamline internal work processes to increase MA efficiency, such as reducing paper-based workflow and introducing electronic signatures and electronic document exchange

Taking into account the progress in the implementation of the programme towards the end of 2021, the critical delay in the implementation of key projects, the structural changes caused by the dynamic political environment in the country, the MA prepares a "Risk analysis of the loss of funds and the implementation of indicators", a Plan and a Risk Register with specific measures, responsible parties and deadlines for all key projects whose implementation is at high risk. The implementation of the measures is monitored and reported by the MA on a monthly basis, within its capacity, to manage the identified risks in order to effectively manage the identified risks that could lead to non-implementation of key measures by administrations foreseen in strategic documents in the field of e-government, administrative and judicial reform. The MA puts maximum efforts, within its competences, to manage the external risks present in order to minimize them and achieve the target values of the programme indicators. The MA engaged all programme stakeholders and partners to address the risks encountered,



taking the dialogue for each policy area to the highest level in order to catalyse the prioritisation process at country level.

In connection with the lack of capacity in the implementation of projects in some of the administrations and the delays in public procurement, the MA conducts training of beneficiaries, as well as consultations at each stage of the project - preparation of tender documentation, implementation of activities and reporting.

For those projects where a significant delay has been generated and the timeframe for implementation by the end of 2023 will not be sufficient, the MA shall take action to release the funds for subsequent contracting. Beneficiaries have been requested to submit unilateral declarations of intent to terminate contracts.

The amendments to the programme and the reallocation of available resources to measures to address the crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression in Ukraine have also contributed to reducing the risk of losing programme funds.

In connection with the COVID crisis and in implementation of RMS No. 256/2020 amending the OPGG in 2020, the OPGG budget has been reduced by BGN 105 million and the funds have been transferred to the OPHRD. The 2020 IAWP has been amended 4 times and 9 additional procedures have been included.

The programme has been revised/amended 4 times.

First amendment to the programme

Following an analysis of the European and national legislation regarding the options for selecting an organisation to manage and implement the global grant, the Managing Authority (MA) of the TACA sent to the European Commission (EC) an official letter No 02.50-83/15.03.2016, in which it presented two options for the implementation of the planned interventions:

Selection of an intermediate body for the global grant, in accordance with the procurement rules in force (Public Procurement Act (PPA));

Conduct of a selection procedure for project proposals under Priority Axis 2, within the framework of which a grant will be provided to NGOs for regranting, in accordance with Article 137 of Regulation 966/2012

Second amendment to the programme

4 main changes are made:

Reduction of the budget of OPGG PO4 by EUR 1 764 706.

The voluntary contribution of the Republic of Bulgaria to the *Structural Reforms Support Programme* should be transferred in accordance with Article 25 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 from OP 4 of the CSF, resulting in a reduction of the budget of OP 4 and of the CSF as a whole by EUR 1 764 706 (EUR 1 500 000 European funding and EUR 264 706 national co-financing).



The reduction in funds under OP 4 of the OPGG is reflected under intervention code 122 "Evaluation and studies"⁷⁰. The analysis of the contracts concluded and the project proposals evaluated so far under PA4 (39 in total) shows that only 2.3% of the funds have been contracted for this type of expenditure (only two contracts). This, in turn, means that the costs of carrying out analyses, evaluations, studies, etc. can be reduced without having a negative effect on the programme.

Transfer of funds from the performance reserve to the main allocation of PA1

It is proposed to reduce the size of the reserve under Priority Axis 1 "Administrative Services and e-Government" (Axis 1) and accordingly increase the size of the main allocation of funds under the same axis, where the percentage of the reserve of the total support from the European Union is the highest - currently 6.41%. With the proposed change, the performance reserve for PA 1 becomes 6.33% of the total funding, compared to 6.33% for PA 2 and 5.9% for PA 3.

Modification of the financial indicators of the programme

The financial indicators initially set in the programme for the amount of certified expenditure under Priority Axes 1, 2 and 3 respectively by 2018 (2018 milestone target) have been calculated under the guidelines existing at the programming stage of the programme. The proportional amount of European funding for each axis (including the performance reserve) foreseen for 2015 has been taken into account, with one-sixth of what was foreseen for 2014 added (based on the figures in Table 17 of the programme).

On 30.06.2017, the Managing Authority (MA) of the OPGG received by e-mail instructions from the EC in relation to the identified discrepancies in the programme concerning the financial indicators in the implementation framework, namely:

1. the indicators should include the total amount of eligible costs - European and national co-financing;
2. the value of the final target must be 100% of the funds for the priority axis (European and national co-financing);
3. the sum of the milestone values should correspond at least to the n+3 target (recalculated to include national co-financing).

The amendment of the programme reflects the comments received from the EC and the recalculations made in relation to the n+3 rule are also in line with the Commission's Explanatory Note on the methodology and process of automatic decommitment.

Change in indicator O5-7 "Number of employees whose salaries are co-financed by TA" (target value 62 changed to 59 for employees in the MA of the OPT)

At present, according to the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers and its Administration, the Directorate for Good Governance has 59 employees. According to the management and control system, the functions of the departments are clearly defined, the

⁷⁰ Pursuant to Annex I of Regulation (EU) No 215/2014 laying down provisions for the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 as regards methodologies for climate change support, the definition of milestones and common objectives in the implementation framework and the nomenclature of intervention categories for the European Structural and Investment Funds



necessary distribution and division of responsibilities is ensured and the number of experts is sufficient for the successful performance of their functions in relation to the management of the OPSG. The analysis of the workforce of the OPGG shows that the number of staff has not been changed since its establishment and that there is no need for such a change. In this respect, indicator O5-7 'Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance' of Table 13 'Performance indicators (under priority axis 5)' of the OPGG is amended from 62 to 59.

Third amendment to the programme

The amendment of the OPDS is in implementation of the DCoM No 256/2020, which will result in the release of a resource of 105 000 000 BGN from the OPGG, which can be transferred to the HRD OP to support measures to minimize the negative consequences of the epidemic spread of COVID-19. The significant reduction of funds also affects part of the target values of the indicators which should be achieved by 2023 and necessitates dropping and reducing the target values of indicators under PA 1 and PA 2.

With this amendment of the programme it is proposed to update the *texts on Priority Axis 4 (PA 4)* - it is proposed to revise the wording used so far when indicating the specific beneficiaries under PA 4, specifying that they are indicative and adding the currently identified beneficiaries ESIF and the Executive Agency "Certification Audit of the European Agricultural Funds". In this respect, it is also proposed to update the indicative actions supported under this axis.

Fourth amendment to the programme

The military aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the ongoing armed conflict pose a threat to security in Europe.

EU Member States have been significantly affected by the ongoing crisis over Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, which has led to a number of unexpected challenges for the European Union just as the Union and its Member States

States were busy rebuilding economies and societies after the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of this military aggression, the Union and MS are facing a huge influx of people fleeing Russian aggression. Since 24.02.2022, the EC has presented a number of proposals under the Cohesion Action Mechanism for

Refugees in Europe (CARE) to ensure that all available funding under the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy and the European Assistance Fund for the most deprived persons is mobilised rapidly to address the immediate challenges faced by MS. With the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2022/562 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6.04.2022, MS can finance a wide range of investments foreseen in their cohesion policy programmes and addressing migration challenges under the ERDF and ESF. Support provided under cohesion policy should have a complementary role. The RMS 328/2022 approved funds to address migration challenges.

A specific priority axis is created within the programme. The targets for indicators O1-5, O1-6, R1-5, O5-1, O5-3 and O5-7 are reduced.



In particular, the fourth amendment of the programme creates a new priority axis 6 "Cohesion Actions for Refugees in Europe" (CARE) for a value of 42.6 million BGN, reallocating available financial resources from priority axes 1, 2 and 3.

Table 46 Changes in some indicators (concerning PA5)

		Old value	New value
O5-3	Evaluations carried out on the OPGGs, priorities, procedures, etc.	10	4
O5-7	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	59	43

Additional funds - BGN 1.2 million - are transferred from PA5 to PA4.

The reduction of the target values of indicators O5-1 and O5-7 under OP 5, due to the epidemic crisis related to the spread of Covid-19, making it difficult to implement activities related to training and the reduction of the staff of the Directorate "Good Governance" and indicator O5-3 in connection with the approved by the Monitoring Committee of the Operational Programme on 02.08.2021 "Evaluation Plan of OP "Good Governance" for the programming period 2014-2020", according to which it is foreseen to carry out 4 evaluations under the program.

Assessments conducted

An evaluation of the programme was carried out in 2018 with the subject "Evaluation of the implementation of the OPGG in the period 2015-2017 and studies supporting the planning process for data collection for all evaluations after 2017 included in the OPGG Evaluation Plan". The contract was concluded on 07.02.2018. The evaluation was completed in June 2018.

The findings of the evaluation are presented in two reports.

A summary of the main findings of the first report "Evaluation of the implementation of the CSP 2015-2017":

The strategic objectives set out in the OPGG remain relevant to the socio-economic situation.

The IAWPs follow the intervention logic described in the programme text, are developed in consultation with the beneficiaries and thus reflect their main needs, problems and challenges.

In the period 2015-2017, the regulatory environment in which the programme is implemented is dynamic. There have been numerous changes in the national legislation relevant to the OPGG. New acts have been adopted which did not exist in 2015.

The needs and strategic objectives related to administrative reform and e-government have not changed. Only the approaches to addressing the needs through updating the roadmaps to the strategic documents have changed. With regard to judicial reform and e-Justice, there are changes in key normative documents (Law on Judiciary, Criminal Procedure Code). These reflect the need to update the roadmaps and strategies for e-Justice and judicial reform. The Roadmap to the Strategy for the Development of the Public Administration was updated in early April 2018.

The set outcome and output indicators can be related to the specific objectives of the priority axes. A link between output and result indicators is ensured. In some cases this link is not direct.



The target values of the result indicators are set as the sum of the baseline values and the expected contribution of the programme. This approach is not in line with the EC guidelines for the 2014-2020 programming period and therefore the EC needs to be informed and the targets recalculated ex officio.

There are large differences in the levels of implementation of individual indicators at the level of the operational programme. For some indicators under PA2, PA3, PA4 and PA5 there is a significant over-execution of the planned values. A need for reformulation/removal/replacement of some indicators and of target values for others has been identified.

The approved projects under PA1 are in line with the objectives and priorities of the OPGG. Key projects in the area of administrative reform and e-government have been launched.

The MA accepts the recommendations made for strengthening the capacity of beneficiaries as well as those for information and communication activities, with the exception of the recommendation to make a separate programme website. A new single information portal for all operational programmes is currently in use and it is not appropriate to plan the creation of a stand-alone OPGG website.

In terms of reducing the administrative burden, the process of reporting on project organisation and management activities has been simplified by introducing a single rate for reporting on these costs for all procedures launched after September 2017.

In line with the recommendation on the collection and processing of information for reporting on the long-term outcome indicator SO-30 "Participants whose labour market situation is better within six months after leaving the operation", a contractor has been contracted.

The MA accepts the recommendations for changes to the Programme Evaluation Plan (10th meeting of the OPGG) It was also sent in January 2019 to the EC via the SFC2014 system (document reference Ares (2019)26808.

The MA accepts the recommendation for optimisation of the questionnaire used to collect the data on participants (microdata) under Annex 1 of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013, as in the current Guidelines for e-Reporting the size of the questionnaire has been reduced and reduced to the applicable options for the participants in projects under the OPT. The recommendation to drop the requirement for participant microdata to be collected and reported on financial plans under Priority Axis 4 and 5, and for Priority Axis 2 and 3 to collect participant data only on projects implemented under Specific Objective 2 of Priority Axis 2 and Specific Objective 3 of Priority Axis 3, respectively, was accepted.

"Interim evaluation of the progress in the implementation of priority axes 1, 2 and 3 of the Operational Programme "Good Governance" (OPG)" was carried out in the period 16.12.2019 - 16.04.2020.

The evaluation covers the overall implementation of PA 1, PA 2 and PA 3 from the approval of the programme on 19.02.2015 to 31.12.2019.

The most important findings and recommendations are:

- For all three priority axes there is a risk of non-utilisation of the financial resources foreseen.
- The remaining resource can be used to fund priority projects from



- Relevant strategic documents and roadmaps on the axes that could potentially contribute to the indicators that are underperforming. Alternatively, if there is a risk of not being able to absorb the planned financial resources, it is recommended to take measures for the possible reallocation of funds between the priority axes of the programme or to other operational programmes.
- The performance and outcome indicators set enable the achievement of the objectives to be measured, although a direct link between performance and outcome indicators is not always observed.
- The metadata does not provide information on the basis of which the baseline and target values of the outcome indicators were defined.
- It is recommended when programming the next operational programme in the metadata of the indicators, describe the considerations and conditions under which the baseline and target values of the indicators are defined. The provision of such information would be useful in tracking changes in the original conditions under which the target value was set and the extent to which these changes affect its achievement.
- There is a discrepancy between the approach taken in setting the target values of the result indicators in the OPGG and the EC Guidelines for the 2014-2020 programming period. In the OPGG, the target values include the baseline, while the EC Guidelines recommend not to include the baseline in the target value.

Monitoring and Training Committee

As part of its functions, the MA works with the Monitoring Committee, holding both in-person and out-of-person meetings. During the evaluation period, 17 regular meetings of the MC and 21 non-presidential decision-making procedures were held.

There are the following specific results/progress reported in 2020:

- MA staff and members of the MC trained
- Organized information days for potential candidates and trainings on beneficiaries of the programme
- Interim evaluation of progress in the implementation of priority axes 1, 2 and 3 of the Operational Programme "Good Governance".

Reducing the administrative burden for beneficiaries

The MA is taking a number of measures to reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries - for example - electronic signing of documents, conducting online information days and trainings, providing live streaming.

The system of indicators under PA5 includes 7 performance indicators⁷¹ to measure the achievement of the set specific objectives. The following indicator targets are set in the OPGG:

⁷¹ According to the EC instructions, the priority axis "Technical Assistance" with a value of less than EUR 15 million does not require the definition of result indicators.



Table 47 Indicator system for PA5, target values

№	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023
O5-1	MA staff and members of the MC trained	Issue	1300*
O5-2	MC meetings held	Issue	20
O5-3	Evaluations carried out on the OPGGs, priorities, procedures, etc.	Issue	4**
O5-4	Analyses, studies, reports, etc. supporting the implementation of the OPGG and the preparation for the next programming period	Issue	5
O5-5	Information materials produced by type (printed, electronic and audiovisual)	Issue	15
O5-6	Number of public information events	Issue	150
O5-7	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	Issue	43***

*The target has been changed with the fourth amendment of the programme, from 2400 to 1300. **The target value was changed with the last amendment of the programme.

***The target value was changed twice, once by the second amendment and then by the fourth amendment (62-59-43).

As a result of the implementation of the funded budget lines, the following values of results measured through the indicators have been achieved:

Table 48 Achieved values of the indicators under PA 5

№	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023	Achieved value (verified) as of 15.06.2023	% implementation
O5-1	MA staff and members of the IP trained	Number	1 300	1 198.00	92,15%
O5-2	CN meetings held	Number	20	21	105%
O5-3	Evaluations carried out on the TACs priorities procedures etc.	Number	4	3	75%
O5-4	Analyses, studies, reports, etc. supporting the implementation of the TAC and the preparation for the next programming period	Number	5	9	180%



№	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023	Achieved value (verified) as of 15.06.2023	% implementation
O5-5	Information materials produced by type (printed, electronic and audiovisual)	Number	15	51	300%
O5-6	Number of public information events	Number	150	155	103,33%
O5-7	Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical	Number	43	36,5	85%

Source.

According to the data in the table on the achieved values of the indicators at the time of evaluation and taking into account that two projects are still under implementation, the MA has managed to achieve a high degree of efficiency in meeting the objectives. For some indicators the achieved values exceed the target values (over-achievement for O5-4 and O5-5) for others there is a possibility to achieve the targets by the end of implementation. Overall, it appears that targets are set conservatively based on past experience. In implementing the activities, the MA achieved a high success rate due to changed environmental factors, the possibility to hold events online, resulting in greater flexibility, time and resource savings. The use of different channels for communication and dissemination of information - social media channels, interactive presentation of content also leads to a change in communication mechanisms, saving time and resources and reaching a larger audience. It should also be noted that the reduced number of MA staff with an initial target of 62 this indicator has been reduced to 43 staff and the number has not been filled - the MA is fully performing its duties and with reduced staff.

The results achieved in the implementation of the objectives of this priority axis, measured through the output indicators, prove the effectiveness of the investments under PA5. Although with a supportive role, the MA has been able to adapt and work flexibly to the many changes in the external environment that have affected the implementation of the programme and to achieve and exceed the planned results.

8.2 Efficiency of investment

Evaluation question 3.2. What is the efficiency of the investment, considered as a ratio between inputs and outputs?

The target values of the outcome indicators under PA4 and the indicators under PA5 have been achieved before the physical and financial implementation of all procedures has been completed. The contracts for the procedures have been executed and the results have been achieved within the planned resources, including savings. To the extent that there are non-achievements, the reasons are discussed in the analytical part. It can be reasonably concluded



from the analysis of the procedures in terms of planning and execution that a very good level of efficiency of inputs in relation to outputs has been achieved. The MA ensures efficiency through good planning by setting maximum amounts of grants at the programming stage, percentage limits on certain types of expenditure, clear requirements for financial justification of expenditure. Efficiency is also enhanced by the fact that all beneficiaries are contracting authorities under the Public Procurement Act (PPA), the application of which is aimed precisely at ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in spending of funds available from EU funds and programmes. On the other hand, the results set under the procedures have been achieved and overachieved.

There is a widely accepted definition of *efficiency* in theory and practice. However, there is often inconsistency and even contradiction in the literature concerning the definition of *efficiency*. Therefore, for the purpose of this evaluation, we shall define the concept of *efficiency* as follows:

Efficiency indicates the ratio of the result achieved to the cost invested. The lower the inputs, the more efficient are the actions and activities for which they are made.

Due to the specific features of the two priority axes subject to evaluation in this assignment, namely technical assistance for the provision of the functions of the overall management, monitoring and control system of the ESF, the analyses will be focused on examining the cost-effectiveness of the inputs for achieving the specific objectives of the priority axes, as measured by result indicators.

The efficiency analysis is based solely on information on completed OPGG projects.

The evaluation of efficiency was prepared by examining the relationship between the two main indicators through which inputs and outputs were planned and reported, namely:

- Costs planned and paid for individual procedures;
- The planned and reported values of the indicators used to measure the achievement of the objectives and results of the procedures.

For the purpose of assessing efficiency, an analysis of the results measured by the indicators was carried out at two stages: at the programming stage of the operation and at the implementation stage. The analysis of the indicators is based on the documentary data from the technical and financial reports of the beneficiaries, data from the beneficiaries' files in the UMIS, data from the annual reports on the implementation of the programme and reports from the UMIS 2020, the Guidelines for Applicants for the evaluated procedures.

The data on the implementation of budgets, targets and achieved values of performance and result indicators (for PA 4) that have been contracted for the funded projects have been analysed. The MA of OPGG has not defined in advance target values for the result and performance indicators in the Guidelines for Applicants for the evaluated procedures. Contract changes and budget modifications have been analysed on the basis of the information in UMIS, the programme implementation reports, documents from Monitoring Committee meetings, annual reports on the implementation of the OPGG. The analysis is based on indicators related



to the financial and technical implementation of the projects and the achieved values of the indicators discussed in the statement below.

The analysis of efficiency is carried out by priority axis and by group of procedures as described in the introduction to evaluation task 3. The presentation follows the approach of describing the procedures according to their numbering in UMIS.

Priority Axis 4. Technical assistance for the management of the ESF

The implementation of the TA procedures under PA4 has achieved a good level of efficiency and economy of inputs in relation to outputs. The target values of the result indicators were achieved before the physical and financial implementation of three of the procedures under PA 4 was completed, while savings were made in all procedures. From the analysis of the procedures in terms of planning and implementation, it can be reasonably concluded that at the programming stage the MA had already set maximum amounts of the grants, percentage limits on certain types of expenditure to ensure efficient spending. In addition, the fact that all beneficiaries are contracting authorities under the Public Procurement Act, the application of which is aimed precisely at ensuring efficiency and economy in the spending of the funds provided by the EU funds and programmes has a positive impact on efficiency. The introduction of a flat rate for two of the procedures for the DIP network also contributes to the efficient use of funds and to obtaining maximum results.

The management model for Priority Axis 4 interventions uses a direct grant provision to specific beneficiaries. Seven procedures have been launched under PA 4, three of which are still under implementation. The contribution of the procedures to the specific objectives of the Priority Axis will be discussed in the text below.

Specific objectives 1 and 2.

Three procedures related to the provision of technical assistance to the horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the EUF have been launched under the PA 4 - **BG05SFOP001-4.002; BG05SFOP001-4.006 and BG05SFOP001-4.006**, the last procedure is under implementation.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.002 “Technical assistance for the horizontal structures in charge of programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in Bulgaria”.

The procedure is for the direct grant provision to the following eligible applicants: the Central Coordination Unit under Article 10 of the Decree No 70 of the Council of Ministers of 2010 on coordination in the management of the European Union funds (including the structures for coordination of the information and publicity policy) - CCU; the Certifying Authority (National Fund Directorate of the Ministry of Finance) - CA; the Audit Authority (Executive Agency "Audit of the European Union funds") - AA; the National Statistical Institute - NSI; The Public Procurement Agency - PPA; The State Aid Unit – Directorate "State aid and real sector" of the



Ministry of Finance (MoF) -SARS Directorate; The national structure for coordination and control of implementation of National Prioritised Action Framework (NPAF) for NATURA 2000 -Structure under NPAF; Protection of the European Union financial interests Directorate (AFCOS) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) - Directorate of AFCOS

Programming STAGE

The selection criteria for operations define the eligible costs under the procedure: for remuneration; for the purchase, development and/or maintenance of software; for the purchase of furniture and equipment; for materials and consumables; for insurance of equipment purchased under the financial plans under the OPGG, for warranty and non-warranty maintenance of equipment and furniture; for services; for organising, conducting and participating in training for staff; for organising, conducting and/or participating in events; for organising and conducting

The following limitations are set in the costing:

- Expenditure on the organisation and management of the budget lines for other activities (other than remuneration) should be up to 5% of the total eligible expenditure under the budget line concerned, but not more than BGN 150 000;
- The costs for the organisation and management of the budget lines for remuneration should be up to 5% of the total eligible costs of the respective budget line, but not more than BGN 50 000;
- Expenditure on publicity and visualisation is eligible only for financial plans for activities other than the financing of salaries and should be up to 1% of the total eligible expenditure under the relevant financial plan, but not more than BGN 30 000.

In order to determine the realism of the costs planned for the project/ budget plan, applicants should provide a financial justification when submitting their project proposal.

At the programming stage, the following maximum project values are set for individual applicants:

Table 49 Maximum project values of individual applicants under procedure BG05SFOP001-4.002

CANDIDATE	MAXIMUM VALUE OF THE GRANT FOR REMUNERATION	MAXIMUM VALUE OF GRANT FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES
CCU	BGN 5 500 000	BGN 12 155 000
CO	BGN 3 500 000	BGN 3 000 000.
OO	BGN 9 200 000	BGN 3 000 000.
NSI	BGN 65 000	BGN 250 000
PPA	BGN 2 550 000	BGN 860 000



STATE AID UNIT OF THE MoF	BGN 200 000	BGN 2 000 000
STRUCTURE UNDER NPAF	BGN 715 000	BGN 55 000
AFCOS DIRECTORATE	BGN 1 050 000	BGN 900 000

Source: Guidelines for Applicants BG05SFOP001-4.002

Guidelines for Applicants and Annex 1. Guidelines for the preparation of a financial plan describe the requirements for the preparation of a financial justification of the planned expenditure. Applicants should demonstrate that these costs correspond to the real market prices for the assets, services or activities concerned. Additionally, in order to facilitate applicants, Annex 6. E-Application Conditions, guidance on budget preparation is included. Thus, the MA creates the conditions for achieving efficiency and economy in budgeting as early as the programming stage, in order to fully ensure the efficiency of the expenditure in order to achieve the targeted results. Such requirements are to prepare and implement a financial justification of the planned expenditure, with the applicant demonstrating that this expenditure corresponds to real market prices for the assets, services or activities concerned (the requirements are set out in the Guidelines for completing the Financial Justification). In this way, the MA, through the GfA and the accompanying guidelines, creates the conditions for achieving efficiency.

Funds spent and results achieved:

Table 50 Financial implementation under procedure BG05SFOP001-4.002

Planned	Contracted TOTAL, BGN	Paid TOTAL, BGN	Implementation %
46 300 000,00	41 725 631,93	33 396 172,23	80,04%

Source: UMIS 2020

A more detailed breakdown of contracts signed and funds spent by beneficiary is provided in the following table:

Table 51 Contracts concluded and funds spent by beneficiary

CANDIDATE	MAXIMUM VALUE OF THE GRANT FOR REMUNERATION	CONTRACTED VALUE	DISBURSED FUNDS	% OF BUDGET EXECUTION
CCU	BGN 5 500 000	6 290 790,18	6 230 274,36	99%
CO	BGN 3 500 000	3 625 713,00	3 451 600,28	95%
AA	BGN 9 200 000	9 841 617,00	9 060 636,72	92%
NSI	BGN 65 000	Not contracted	Not contracted	Not contracted
PPA	BGN 2 550 000	1 368 574,00	1 327 740,07	97%



STATE AID UNIT OF THE MOF	BGN 200 000	Not contracted	Not contracted	Not contracted
STRUCTURE UNDER NPAF	BGN 715 000	Not contracted	Not contracted	Not contracted
AFCOS DIRECTORATE	BGN 1 050 000	1 200 000,00	1 172 582,09	98%

The average budget execution rate for these budget lines is 95%, as the expenditure on these contracts is mainly salary costs and can be planned relatively accurately. This corresponds with the high share of the performance indicator, O 4-5. Number of employees, whose remunerations are co-funded by technical assistance O4-5. The result indicator related to these contracts - R4-1. Annual turnover of the beneficiaries' staff also exceeds the target - 5% expected and between 0,5 and 4% achieved.

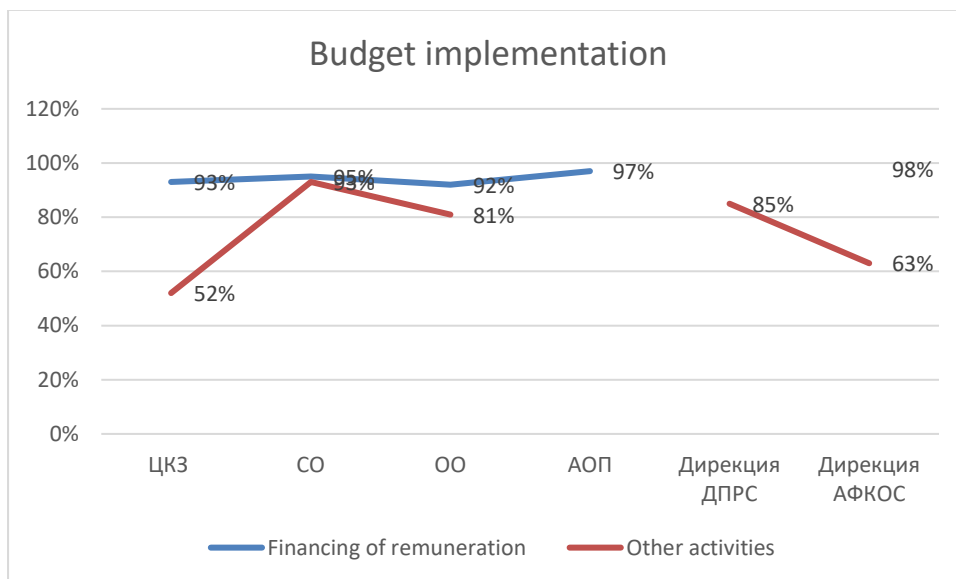
Table 52 Percentage of budget implementation by budget line

CANDIDATE	MAXIMUM VALUE OF BFP FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES	AGREED VALUE	DISBURSED FUNDS	% OF BUDGET EXECUTION
CCU	BGN 12 155 000	12 140 723,29	6 364 222,62	52%
CO	BGN 3 000 000.	1 976 403,39	1 631 458,72	93%
AA	BGN 3 000 000.	1,701 115,00	1 381 467,64	81%
NSI	BGN 250 000	Not contracted	Not contracted	Not contracted
PPA	BGN 860 000	Not contracted	Not contracted	Not contracted
STATE AID UNIT OF THE MOF	BGN 2 000 000.	1 486 939,61	1 265 629,76	85%
STRUCTURE UNDER NPAF	BGN 55 000	Not contracted	Not contracted	Not contracted
AFCOS DIRECTORATE	900 000 BGN	752 583,12	470 365,32	63%

The average budget implementation rate for these budget lines is 74.8%, mainly due to savings accumulated in procurement.



Figure 16 Budget implementation by type of expenditure



The following table shows the performance of the indicators under this procedure:

Table 53 Indicators achieved under procedure BG05SFOP001-4.002

Indicators	Name of the indicator	Contracted value	Achieved value	Percentage of implementation
Result indicators ⁷²	Employees trained	2830	2551	90,1%
	Information materials published by type (handbooks, guidelines, books, booklets, information flyers etc.)	7	5	71,4
	Number of public information events	28	3	10,7%
	Number of employees, whose remunerations are co-funded by technical assistance	242	1020,46	421,75
	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens	5	5,00	100,00%
Output indicators	Annual turnover of the beneficiaries' staff *	4,6%	2.57%	179%
	Satisfaction of participants with trainings delivered *	84,67%	93,6%	110,55%
	Satisfaction of UMIS users *	87%	89,94%	103,4%
	Share of the population of 15+, aware of the EU Cohesion policy	66,00		

Source: UMIS 2020

*average value

According to the table with the contracted and verified values of the performance and result indicators, most of the indicators have been over-achieved.

Of the result indicators, a large over-performance was observed in terms of the verified value of the indicator "Number of employees, whose remunerations are co-funded by technical

⁷² The unit of measurement for all the performance indicators is the **number**.



assistance " (421.68%). A high implementation rate (90.14%) is reported for the indicator " Employees trained", although in one of the contracts this indicator was only 51% achieved. The indicator with the lowest implementation is the Number of public information events, as this activity is included in the CCU contract. The reason for the non-performance of both indicators is the high staff commitment during the European Presidency.

A low percentage of implementation was reported for the indicator "Number of public information events", the non-implementation being largely due to the target set for the project "Increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Central Coordination Unit" - 25, for which only one information event was reported. In the Final Technical Report of the beneficiary, the reason for not reporting on the indicator is given as a cost saving. The same reason is given for not reaching the target value of the indicator "Information materials published by type", which was not reached for the same project. The high workload of CCU staff also contributed to the inability to implement the information events. Additionally, the need to procure the activity through public procurement may have created difficulties. The savings realised under the budget line "Increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Central Coordination Unit" amount to 47.62% of the contracted value (BGN 12 150 000.00).

Regarding the output indicators - three of them have been over-fulfilled, only the indicator "Share of the population of 15+, aware of the EU Cohesion policy" has not been fulfilled. It should be noted that this is not due to an actual non-achievement of the set value, but to the fact that no nationally representative opinion poll was commissioned during the budget line period to measure the value of the indicator⁷³. The same activity is included in the Beneficiary's CCU budget line for the period 2019-2021.

The planned results have been largely achieved as originally intended. Savings realised were 19.88%. At the same time, the funds under the procedure have ensured the work of the horizontal structures and units responsible for the management of the ESF funds, ensured the effective functioning of the UMIS, as well as the maintenance and development of the Single Information Portal (www.eufunds.bg) for the period of implementation of the financial plans. Despite the non-fulfilment of some of the result indicators, the savings made and the over-fulfilment of the outcome indicators have been exceeded, confirming the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the investments made under this procedure.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.005 - Technical assistance to the horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESF in the period 2019-2021".

The procedure is for the direct grant provision, and the eligible applicants are the horizontal structures and units responsible for the management of the ESF funds: The Central Coordination Unit in the Administration of the Council of Ministers - CCM; the Certifying

⁷³ According to the Final Technical Report for budget line BG05SFOP001-4.002-0003-C06



Authority (National Fund Directorate of the Ministry of Finance) - CA; the Audit Authority (Executive Agency "Audit of the European Union funds") - AA; the National Statistical Institute - NSI; The Public Procurement Agency - PPA; The State Aid Unit – Directorate "State aid and real sector" of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) -SARS Directorate; The national structure for coordination and control of implementation of National Prioritised Action Framework (NPAF) for NATURA 2000 -Structure under NPAF; Protection of the European Union financial interests Directorate (AFCOS) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) - Directorate of AFCOS; The Executive Agency Certification audit of European agriculture funds - CAEF EA; The State e-Government Agency - SEGA.

Programming STAGE

Direct costs for staff remuneration; for mission expenses; for the provision of the work of a diplomatic official for the Cohesion Policy and EU Structural Instruments Coordination at the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Bulgaria to the EU; for holding and/or participation in an event(s), including training costs; for the purchase and/or maintenance of furniture/equipment; for the insurance of equipment purchased under the OPGG FP; for the purchase, maintenance and operation of motor vehicles (vehicles); for the purchase/development of **Indirect costs** are also eligible under the procedure: organisation and management costs and information and communication costs. These are set as a flat rate (*percentage of eligible direct costs, depending on the total value of the FP*), calculated in accordance with the Methodology for setting the flat rate for the financing of organisation and management activities and information and communication of projects/financial plans under the OPGG, developed in accordance with the National Methodology for setting the flat rate for the financing of organisation and management activities of projects co-financed by the ESF and approved by the Head of the OPGG MA.

At the programming stage, the following maximum project values are set for individual applicants:

Table 54 Maximum value of the financial contribution for remuneration and other activities procedure BG05SFOP001-4.005

Candidate	Maximum value of the grant for remuneration	Maximum value of grant for other activities
CCU	BGN 8 690 110.	BGN 12 152 200
CO	BGN 3 717 540	BGN 2 999 250
AA	BGN 10 463 740	BGN 2 583 000
NSI	BGN 65 000 lv.	BGN 250 000
PPA	BGN 2 147 270	BGN 350 000



STATE AID UNIT OF THE MOF	BGN 200 000	BGN 1 600 000
STRUCTURE UNDER NPAF	BGN 580 420	BGN 55 000
AFCOS DIRECTORATE	BGN 1 447 130	BGN 898 000
CAEF EA	BGN 1 240 000	BGN 1 166 300
SEGA	BGN 5 049 500	BGN 469 800

Source: Guidelines for Applicants BG05SFOP001-4.005

Stage of implementation of administrative contracts

Priority Axis 4 is aimed at ensuring the maintenance of the relevant structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESF and increasing and enhancing the capacity of their staff, and the objectives of the procedure have been fully achieved.

Funds spent and results achieved:

Table 55 Financial implementation under procedure BG05SFOP001-4.005

Planned value, BGN	Agreed TOTAL, BGN	Paid TOTAL, BGN	Implementation %
56 124 260,00	48 697 078,45	45 229 885,31	93%

Source: UMIS2020

The following table shows the breakdown of funds under the remuneration contracts.

Table 56 Allocation of funds for remuneration under contracts.

Candidate	Maximum value of the grant for remuneration	Contracted value	Verified value	% of implementation
CCU	BGN 8 690 110.	8 690 110,00	8 482 905,22	98%
CO	BGN 3 717 540.	3 807 540,00	3 803 620,19	100%
AA	BGN 10 463 740	10 213 740,00	9 864 625,19	97%
NSI	BGN 65 000	N.A.		
PPA	BGN 2 147 270	2 147 262,00	2 146 963,74	100%
STATE AID UNIT OF THE MOF	BGN 200 000	N.A.		



STRUCTURE UNDER NPAF	BGN 580 420	N.A.		
AFCOS DIRECTORATE	BGN 1 447 130	1 447 130,00	1 430 554,74	99%
CAEF EA	BGN 1 240 000	1 068 570,64	1 018 133,36	95%
SEGA	BGN 5 049 500	4 640 000,00	4 640 000,00	100%

The average budget execution rate for these contracts is 98.4% and there are savings. This is also due to the fact these activities are procured under the PPA. This leads to lower prices and therefore savings in implementation.

The following table presents the contracted and disbursed funds by beneficiary for the contracts for other activities, as well as the budget absorption rate:

Table 57 Funds contracted and disbursed by beneficiary for “other activities”

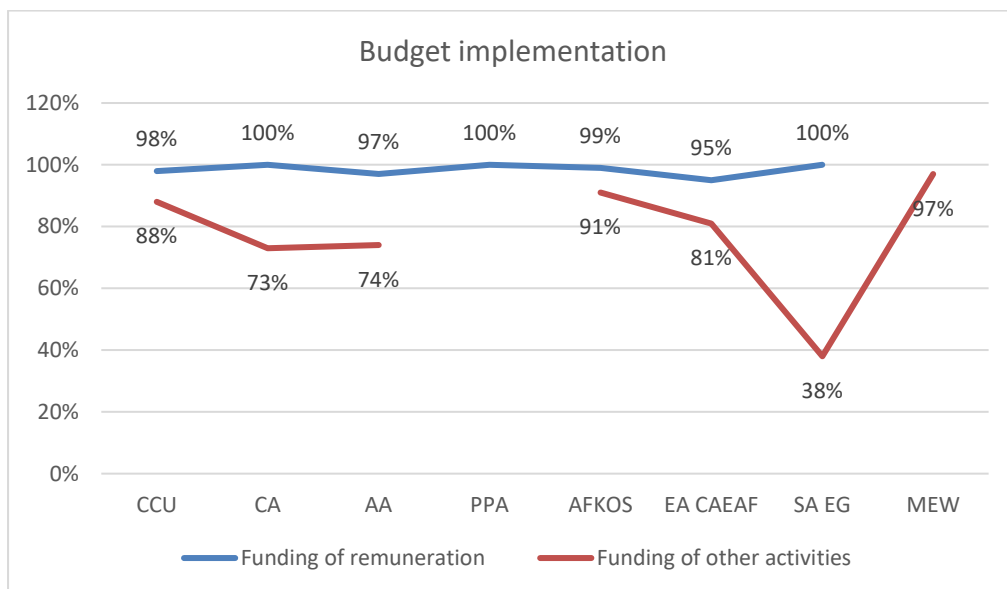
Candidate	Maximum value of grant for other activities in BGN	Contracted value in BGN	Verified value in BGN	% of implementation
CCU	12 152 200	10 079 011,03	8 874 470,43	88%
CO	2 999 250	2 251 722,21	1 636 740,92	73%
AA	2 583 000	1 008 791,27	744 098,68	74%
NSI	250 000	N.A.		
PPA	350 000	N.A.	N.A.	
STATE AID UNIT OF THE MOF	1 600 000	N.A.		
STRUCTURE UNDER NPAF	55 000	N.A.		
AFCOS DIRECTORATE	898 000	667 202,39	606 140,48	91%
CAEF EA	1 166 300	1 089 069,11	886 760,73	81%
SEGA	469 800	166 212,00	63 892,80	38%
MOEW		440 416,53	426 896,31	97%

The average budget execution rate for these contracts is 77.4% and there are savings. This is also due to the fact that outside the funds for remuneration, activities are awarded under the PPA. This leads to lower prices and therefore savings in implementation.



The following graph shows the implementation of the budget for the two budget lines - remuneration and other expenditure.

Figure 17 Budget implementation for the two budget lines financing remuneration and other types of expenditure



The following table presents the values of indicators achieved in the implementation of the contracts under this procedure. The planned results have been achieved as originally planned, which justifies the conclusion that the relationship between resources invested and results achieved has been efficient.

Table 58 Indicators achieved under procedure BG05SFOP001-4.005

Indicators	Name of the indicator	Contracted value	Achieved value	% implementation
Result indicators ⁷⁴	Employees trained	1831	1 621	88.53%
	Information materials published by type (handbooks, guidelines, books, booklets, information flyers etc.)	Not contracted	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Number of public information events	Not contracted	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Number of employees, whose remunerations are co-funded by technical assistance	407	410.43	100.84%

⁷⁴ The unit of measurement for all the performance indicators is the **number**.



	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens	6	6	100.00%
Output indicators	Annual turnover of the beneficiaries' staff *	5,33%	2,96%	55,53%
	Satisfaction of participants with trainings delivered *	85%	94.71%	111.42%
	Satisfaction of UMIS users *	87%	89.94 %	103.38%
	Share of the population of 15+, aware of the EU Cohesion policy	66%	72,30%	109.55%

Source: UMIS 2020

According to the table with the contracted and verified result indicators, the majority of the indicators have been over-fulfilled, only with regard to the indicator " Employees trained" the verified value is 88.53% of the contracted one.

The planned results have been largely achieved as originally intended. Savings realised were 6.95% of what was contracted. At the same time, the funds under the procedure have ensured the operation of the horizontal structures and units responsible for the management of the ESF funds, ensured the effective functioning of the UMIS, as well as the maintenance and development of the Single Information Portal (www.eufunds.bg) for the period of implementation of the financial plans. The above provides a basis for concluding on the efficiency of the relationship between resources invested and results achieved and the economy of implementation achieved.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.006 - Horizontal support for the efficient management of ESIF is under implementation and will not be subject to analysis. The conclusions regarding procedure BG05SFOP001-4.005 also apply to this procedure.

The last launched procedure under PA 4 is procedure **BG05SFOP001-4.003-0001 Support for increasing the capacity of municipalities for development and implementation of projects co-financed by ESIF**. The procedure is under implementation.

The objectives of the procedure are:

- Increasing the quality and successful implementation of municipal projects co-financed by the ESIF, including:
- Capacity development of municipal administrations in the preparation and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF;
- Providing an environment for communication and exchange of good practices in the implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF;
- Improving the quality of public procurement documents in the implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF.

Direct and indirect costs are eligible under the procedure.



At present, no conclusions can be drawn as to the efficiency of the inputs in relation to the outputs, as the procedure has not been completed.

Under PA 4, in implementation of specific objective 4.3, funding is provided for the functioning of the national network of district information points, which have as their main task to provide information and promote the opportunities for funding under the ESIF. Three of the procedures under PA 4 are aimed at ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 District information points: BG05SFOP001-4.001 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 District information points"; BG05SFOP001-4.004 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 District information points in the period 2019-2021" and BG05SFOP001-4.007 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of District information points 2022-2023".

Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.001 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 district information points"

Programming stage

The aim of the procedure is to ensure the effective functioning of the 27 district information points. The planned funds under the procedure amount to BGN 10 000 000, and the selection criteria for operations also set target values for the indicators to be achieved with the implementation of the projects. The grant is provided at 100% aid intensity. The Guidelines for Applicants set out the minimum and maximum amount of the grant requested for the individual RICs, according to the district in which the DIP operates.

Eligible for funding under the procedure are costs for: remuneration; rent of premises and overheads, materials and consumables, purchase of vehicles, repair and maintenance of vehicles, running repairs; furniture and/or equipment; insurance of equipment and vehicles; development and/or distribution of information materials; organisation and conduct of public information events and work with the media; travel; project organisation and management; project publicity and visualisation and other project-related costs.

The procedure provides for maximum ceilings for certain types of expenditure as follows:

Table 59 Types of expenditure under the procedure

Type of expense	Maximum amount / percentage limit
salary costs	The GfA indicates maximum values per month for one employee according to the regional city in which the respective DIP functions
costs for the current renovation of the DIP	Indicated maximum values in the GfA according to the regional city in which the respective DIP functions
expenditure on the purchase of furniture and/or equipment	Indicated maximum values in the GfA according to the regional city in which the respective DIP functions
project organisation and management costs	up to 10% of the value of the project grant



project publicity and visualisation costs

up to 1% of the value of the project grant

The expenditure under ERDF rules (Percentage of support under ERDF rules according to Article 98 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013) is set at 10%.

In accordance with the procedural manual, staff positions have also been defined, with distinctions made according to the size of the district towns.

There are also maximum values for the projects, again depending on which city the DIP is in.

In order to determine the realism of the costs planned for the project, applicants shall submit a financial justification with their project proposal.

At the programming stage, guidance is provided on how the budget should be prepared to ensure that the funds spent are fully efficient and cost-effective in achieving the targeted results. Such requirements are to prepare and implement a financial justification of the planned expenditure, with the applicant demonstrating that this expenditure is in line with the actual market prices for the relevant assets, services or activities. (Guidelines for budget preparation, part of the e-Application Guidelines - Annex 9 to the GfA, and Guidelines for the preparation of a financial justification, Annex 1 to the GfA). In this way, the MA provides detailed recommendations and guidance on how to prepare the budget in accordance with the applicable regulations, the costs to be justified, indicating the elements forming their value.

In preparing the financial justification of the planned project costs, applicants are expected to demonstrate compliance with the actual market prices for the relevant assets, services or activities by providing sufficient and reliable information to demonstrate such compliance. The possibilities are that the determination of the amount of the relevant expenditure may be based on a reference to prices of contracts already concluded or actual payments made for other projects during the previous 3 years by the administration of the beneficiary concerned for assets with comparable technical parameters, and services or activities of a similar nature. It is also possible to submit three indicative offers based on the set parameters or minimum technical characteristics to be compared and analysed and on this basis to set an estimated price in the project proposal. The last possible way is to submit a reference from the public procurement register, an expert analysis or an official opinion provided by public institutions, professional organisations or associations of persons performing services or activities analogous or similar to those covered by the project, containing information on the value of analogous or similar supplies, services.

The planning of the staff of the DIP should be in accordance with the procedural manual, with a recommended number of staff according to the city in which the DIP is located. The following table presents the result and output indicators set out in the selection criteria for operations



Table 60 Planned indicators

Indicators	Planned value
Number of public information events	1 590
Information materials issued by type (brochures, leaflets, etc.)	10
Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	88
Number of consultations provided by telephone, e-mail or on-site at the district information points	20 000

Implementation stage

Under this procedure, 27 contracts have been implemented, with an implementation rate of 89% of the contracted budget for the whole procedure, varying between 64 and 99% for the different contracts.

The indicators met are as follows:

Table 61 Implementation procedure BG05SFOP001-4.001

Means of the procedure	Agreed, BGN		Paid, BGN		% implementation
10 000 000	9 842 553,90		8 697 210,79		88.36%
Indicators	Planned value ⁷⁵	Contracted value	Verified value	% implementation (verified against contracts)	
Number of public information events	1 590	2055	2 326	113.19%	
Information materials issued by type (brochures, leaflets, etc.)	10	221	288	130.32%	
Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	88	88	176.17	200.19%	
Number of consultations provided by telephone, e-mail or on-site at the district information points	20 000	41 120	48 752	118.56%	

Source: UMIS 2020

Evident from the information in the table the results achieved, as measured by the indicators, exceed the contracted values by a significant number. On the other hand, in the process of

⁷⁵ According to the selection criteria for operations



implementation, savings of 11.64% have been realized compared to what was contracted. Thus, beneficiaries have both saved resources and achieved higher results, in a cost-effective manner. The projects have been implemented in an efficient manner, with more results achieved at a lower cost than planned.

The result indicators give expression to other results as described in the Annual Implementation Reports of the OPGG for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The 27 DIPs operate on a one-stop shop principle and work actively with the managing authorities, supporting them in the implementation of information campaigns on the territory of the districts. The network actively cooperates with local administrations, labour offices and regional education inspectorates, universities and secondary schools to raise citizens' awareness of the opportunities available through the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The immediate results reported in the AR of OPGG are as follows:

Table 62. Reported results DIP

Results reported in Annual Reports	Unit of measurement	2016	2017	2018
Visitors to the DIP	Number	11 327	14 607	15 564
Publications in the media	Number	4 370	5 619	6 107
Organised events	Number	721	790	502
Participants in the events	Number	21 123	29 809	31 119
Questions received	Number	13 144	17 084	18 663

The results achieved with less financial resources than initially planned provide grounds to conclude that the inputs, which have ensured the effective functioning of the 27 district information points through the funded activities, have been used in an efficient and economical way. The financial resources invested, which have ensured the effective functioning of the 27 DIPs, have increased the awareness of the citizens/public, provided information and promoted the funding opportunities available from the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.004 – “Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 district information points in the period 2019-2021”.

Programming stage

The objective of the procedure is to increase the awareness of the citizens/public, the accessibility to information and to promote the funding opportunities provided by the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period by ensuring the effective functioning of the 27 DIPs. The planned funds under the procedure amount to BGN 11 000 000. The grant is provided at 100%



aid intensity. In the Guidelines for Applicants the minimum and maximum amount of the requested grant for the individual DIPs are defined, according to the regional city in which the DIP functions.

Under this procedure, flat-rate financing shall be applied in accordance with Art. 68b par. 1 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 6, para 1 of CoM Decree No 189/2016.

The maximum grant amount is set as follows:

	Maximum
RIC - Sofia	BGN 600 000
RIC - Burgas, Varna, Pleven, Plovdiv, Ruse, Stara Zagora	BGN 500 000
RIC - Blagoevgrad, Veliko Tarnovo, Vidin, Vratsa, Gabrovo, Dobrich, Kardzhali, Kyustendil, Lovech, Montana, Pazardzhik, Pernik, Razgrad, Silistra, Sliven, Smolyan, Targovishte, Haskovo, Shumen, Yambol	BGN 370 000

Eligible costs are:

Direct personnel costs - these are the costs of salaries actually incurred and paid for project implementation activities, resulting from employment relationships concluded between the beneficiary and the employees in the relevant RIC.

For all other eligible costs, a flat rate of 40% of the eligible direct personnel costs shall be used in accordance with Art. 68b par. 1 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 6, para 1 of CoM Decree No 189/2016.

The following costs are included in the category of 'other eligible costs': for travel expenses; for rent of the DIP premises and overheads; for provision of materials and consumables; for branding of the DIP; for ongoing repairs of the DIP; for purchase of furniture and/or equipment; for maintenance and repair of equipment and furniture purchased/used under the project; for maintenance, repair and operation of vehicles; for the purchase of motor vehicles (vehicles) for the DIP s in Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo and Pernik; for the insurance of equipment and vehicles; for the development and/or distribution of information materials (printed, audio-visual and electronic); for organising and conducting public information events and working with the media; indirect costs.

Under this procedure no limits were set for the maximum amount of remuneration of the employees unlike Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.001 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 district information points". To the extent that there are limits on the funds available for remuneration, this follows from the restrictions on the maximum amount of the grant and the mandatory percentage of all other eligible costs⁷⁶. The activity to support the

⁷⁶ "Compensation expenses" include the costs of gross salaries and wages accrued and paid under the employment relationship and of benefits paid by the insurer for the days of temporary incapacity for work under the Social Insurance Code to employees in the JRC, as well as the costs of compulsory social and health insurance contributions on behalf of the insurer for these employees (according to Art. 27(1) of P.M. 189/28.07.2016), and a flat rate of **40% of the eligible direct personnel costs** is used for all other eligible costs



work of the DIPs should be planned in accordance with the requirements of the Procedural Manual (Annex 7) and the Branding and Visioning Concept of the Network of 27 DIP s for the Promotion of the ESIF in Bulgaria (Annex 8)⁷⁷ .

The salary costs range from BGN 1 145.34 to BGN 2 454.86, with the highest salaries for the Sofia Municipality project, as in the previous procedure.

Implementation of administrative contracts

The implementation of the contracts under the procedure has achieved the following results:

Table 63 Implementation under procedure BG05SFOP001-4.004

Funds of the procedure	Contracted, BGN	Paid, BGN	% implementation
11 000 000	9 191 638,79	9 046 943,40	98,43%

Indicators	Contracted value	Verified value	% implementation (verified against contracted)
Number of public information events	1 681	1 925	114,52%
Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	88	107.99	122,72%
Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)	349	286	81,95%

Source: UMIS 2020

The budget execution in this procedure is very high at 98.43% compared to 89% in the previous procedure. Nine contracts achieved 100% budget execution, 8 contracts achieved 99% execution. The application of a flat rate and the accumulated experience of the beneficiaries make such a high absorption possible, resulting in minimal savings of 1.57%. The use of a flat rate of 40% of eligible direct personnel costs has contributed to better financial planning of the funds required at the application stage and also to a reduction in administrative burden and reporting errors. At the same time, the arithmetic average of remuneration per staff member is comparable to that of the previous procedure. It amounts to BGN 57,526.56 for 36 months or BGN 1 597.96 per month.

⁷⁷ The Procedural Manual for the work of the Network of 27 Information Centres for the promotion of the ESF in Bulgaria and the Branding and Vision Concept 2014-2020 are published in the OPIE section of the Single Information Portal: www.eufunds.bg, in the section "Manuals, guides, rules".



The results achieved for the indicator “Number of employees, whose remunerations are co-funded by technical assistance” exceed the contracted values by a significant margin - 122.72%. This, in turn, is a prerequisite for the higher results achieved also in terms of indicator - Number of public information events. The implementation of the indicator " Information materials published by type" was 81.95%. The increased number of public information events held is also related to the work in the situation of COVID-19, as part of the events are held online. As outlined in the following table, total public information events for 2020 are 575 and in 2021 are 730, but 113 of these are online. This results in a reduced number of outreach materials.

The 2019, 2020 and 2021 Annual Implementation Reports of the OPGG report the following immediate results:

Table 64. Reported results DIP

Results reported in Annual Reports	Unit of measurement	2020	2021
Visitors to the DIP	Number	12573	14 653
Publications in the media	Number	8055	8 757
Attended information events	Number	595	617
Participants in the events	Number	17929	10 642
Online information events	Number	0	113
Questions received	Number	15514	24287

The immediate results achieved show that the 27 DIP s continue to be an important source of free information for the general public in relation to the promotion of funding opportunities provided by the ESIF.

The functioning of the DIP in 2019, 2020 and 2021, secured with funds under the procedure, has effectively contributed to promoting the role of the EU and informing about the funding opportunities under the programmes; to ensuring maximum transparency in the process of implementation and management of the programmes, as well as to building and maintaining high public confidence in the processes of implementation and management of the Partnership Agreement and the programmes. It can also be concluded from this procedure that the financial resources invested have been used efficiently and have ensured the effective functioning of the 27 DIP s.

Procedure BG05SFOP001-4.007 - Ensuring the functioning of the national network of district information points 2022-2023 is under implementation and will therefore not be analysed. This procedure is also subject to flat-rate financing in accordance with Art. 68b par. 1 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Article 6, para 1 of CoM Decree No 189/2016. The conclusions regarding the programming of procedure BG05SFOP001-4.004 also apply to this procedure.



Overall conclusion on the efficiency of the investments under PA 4

The progress under PA4 as of 15.06.2023, in terms of contracting and financial execution is as follows:

Table 65 Financial implementation of PA 4

Planned value	Contracted) TOTAL	Contracted funds (incl. savings)	% savings after implementation	Paid TOTAL	% implementation
169 633 260,00	154 483 799,86	141 297 098,48	8.37%	122 820 078, 08	79.65%

Sourc: UMIS 2020.



Target values of the indicators under PA 4 have been achieved as of 15.06.2023 and the percentage of savings refers to the 80 completed contracts.

Table 66 Indicators under PA 4

№	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023	Contracted value	Verified value in UMIS as of 15.06.2023.	% implementation verified /target 2023	% implementation verified/ contracted
O4-1	Employees trained	Number	2600	5024	4172	160,46%	83,04%
O4-2	Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.) leaflets, etc.)	Number	60	721	754	1256,67%	104,58%
O4-3	Number of public information events	Number	90	4746	4872	5413,33%	102,65%
O4-4	Number of employees, whose remunerations are co-funded by technical assistance	Number	250		497*	199,00%	
O4-5	Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens	Number	7	15	12	171,43,29%	80,00%
R4-1	Annual turnover of the beneficiaries' staff	%	5%	5,03%	1,73%	99,4%	290,75%
R4-2	Satisfaction of participants with trainings delivered	%	85%	85,20%	94,89%	111,6%	111,4%
R4-3	Satisfaction of UMIS users	%	83%	85%	89,61%	107,96%	105,42%
R4-4	Share of the population of 15+, aware of the EU Cohesion policy	%	70%	66%	72,30%	103,29%	109,55%

Source: UMIS 2020

*Data from AR 2022



The target values of the indicators for 2023 have been achieved before the physical and financial implementation of three of the procedures under PA 4 has been completed. Against the financial resources invested under PA4, the effective management and implementation of the ESIF during the programming period has been ensured through the measures implemented in the following main areas:

- Capacity for the effective and efficient functioning of the ESIF management system - including the activities and capacity of the CCU, NF, AA, as well as the structures and staff directly related to particular aspects of the functioning of the ESIF system (AFCOS, the State Aid Unit of the MoF, NSI, PPA, NOMB - in terms of capacity at local level, etc.);
- Information, publicity and transparency of the implementation of the ESIF and high awareness of beneficiaries and all stakeholders (through support to the Information and Publicity Policy Coordination Structures and the District information points, information and communication campaigns to ensure information and publicity);
- Technological support for the functioning of the system, through the development of UMIS 2020 and the Single Information Portal www.eufunds.bg.

Priority Axis 5. Technical assistance

In the implementation of the budget lines, the target values of the indicators (excluding indicator O5-3 Evaluations of OPGG, priorities, procedures, etc.) were achieved before the physical and financial implementation of two of budget lines under of PA 5 (out of three). Based on the physical and financial implementation data analysed and the results achieved, it can be concluded that a very good level of performance has been achieved in meeting the objectives of PA 5.

The priority axis is aimed at strengthening and enhancing the institutional capacity of the Managing Authority, ensuring the work of the Monitoring Committee, as well as the capacity of the beneficiaries to apply for and implement quality projects under the OPGG.

Within this priority axis, three budget lines BG05SFOP001-5.001-0001 " Technical assistance for MA of OPGG for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication", BG05SFOP001-5.001-0003 "Technical assistance to the MA for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication under the OPGG" and BG05SFOP001-5.001-0002 " Assessments and analysis under OPGG" are financed. Procedures BG05SFOP001-5.001-0002 and BG05SFOP001-5.001-0003 are still under implementation.

BG05SFOP001-5.001-0001 " Technical assistance for MA of OPGG for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication"

The objective of the budget line is to ensure effective management, implementation, monitoring and control of the OPGG by strengthening and enhancing the institutional capacity



of the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme "Good Governance" and increasing the capacity and awareness of the beneficiaries of the programme.

Table 67 Budget line BG05SFOP001-5.001-0001

Planned value	Contracted (excluding savings), BGN	Contracted funds incl. savings), BGN	% savings after implementation	Paid TOTAL, BGN	Implementation %
12 052 500,00	9 064 300,00	8 015 222,24	11.57%	8 015 222,24	88.43%

Source: UMIS 2020

According to UMIS 2020, this budget line includes two activities:

Table 68 Activities under budget line BG05SFOP001-5.001-0001

№	Name of the activity	Contracted value, BGN	Reported value, BGN
1	Activity 1. Preparation, implementation, monitoring and control of the OPGG	8 522 300,00	8 111 394,96
2	Activity 2. Information and communication	542 000,00	176 929,81

Source.

It is evident from the table that significant savings have been obtained in Activity 2 due to the fact that it is mainly implemented through public procurement procedures. Activity 1 foresees to finance remuneration of the OPGG Managing Authority staff, training of MA staff and members of the MC of OPGG, provision of MC of OPGG meetings, etc., therefore the reported value is significantly closer to the contracted one.

The following achievements are reported:

Table 69 Indicators achieved under budget line BG05SFOP001-5.001-0001

Indicator	Unit of measurement	Contracted value	Verified value	% implementation
MA staff and MC members trained	Number	800	855	106,88%
MC meetings held	Number	9	13	144,44%
Information materials by type elaborated (printed, electronic and audiovisual)	Number	15	28	186,67%
Number of public information events	Number	66	94	142,42%



Indicator	Unit of measurement	Contracted value	Verified value	% implementation
Number of employees, whose remunerations are co-funded by technical assistance	Number	43*	36,50*	300,27%

Source: UMIS2020

**Based on information included in AR 2022.*

According to the table of contracted and verified indicators, all indicators have been exceeded. The planned results have been fully achieved as originally planned. Savings obtained amount to 11.57% of the contracted target. At the same time, the funds under the procedure have provided the conditions for the effective management and implementation of the OPGG, for the financing of the activities carried out in support of it, including the costs for the payment of monthly salaries to the staff of the Good Governance Directorate, for carrying out on-the-spot checks, for providing external expertise for the implementation of the OP, for supporting the evaluation of project proposals and other activities directly related to the functions carried out under the programme. The financial resource has ensured the information and publicity activities of the programme, the activities of informing potential beneficiaries about the financial opportunities provided by the European Social Fund through the OPGG, as well as informing beneficiaries with their responsibilities in the implementation of the OPGG. The above provides a basis for concluding that the ratio between resources invested and results achieved is efficient.

BG05SFOP001-5.001-0002 “Assessments and analysis under OPGG

The budget line through the financial plan aims at carrying out evaluations and analyses in accordance with the prepared and approved Evaluation Plan for the 2014-2020 programming period. The evaluations/analyses should contribute to the effective and efficient implementation and management of the programme, as well as to the assessment of the impact of the interventions on the target groups of the OPGG. At the time of the evaluation, the BL is under implementation and no conclusions can be drawn on efficiency.

BG05SFOP001-5.001-0003 “Technical assistance to the MA for preparation, implementation, monitoring, control, information and communication under the OPGG”

The aim of the budget line is to ensure effective management, implementation, monitoring and control of the OPGG by strengthening and enhancing the institutional capacity of the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme "Good Governance" and increasing the capacity and awareness of the beneficiaries of the programme.

According to UMIS 2020, this budget line includes two activities:



Table 70 Activities under budget line BG05SFOP001-5.001-0003

№	Name of the activity	Contracted value, BGN	Reported value, BGN
1	Activity 1. Preparation, implementation, monitoring and control of the OPGG	12 878 000,00	10 015 343,30
2	Activity 2 Information and communication	820 000,00	116 682,83

The contract is in the process of being implemented and the activities and payments have not been finalised and therefore no valid conclusions can be drawn regarding efficiency.

Overall conclusion on the efficiency of the PA5 investments

As of 15.06.2023, according to UMIS 2020, the following results have been achieved under PA 5:

Table 71 Indicators under PA 5

№	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023	Contracted value	Verified value in UMIS as of 15.06.2023.	% performance against target 2023	% performance against contracted
O5-1	MA staff and MC members trained	Number	1300	1150	1198	92,15%	104,17%
O5-2	MC meetings held	Number	20	15	21	105%	140%
O5-3	Evaluations of OPGG, priorities, procedures, etc.	Number	4	4	3	75%	75%
O5-4	Analyses, studies, reports and other items facilitating the implementation of OPGG and the preparation for the next programming period	Number	5	8	9	180%	112,50%
O5-5	Information materials by type elaborated (printed, electronic and audiovisual)	Number	15	22	45	300%	204,55%
O5-6	Number of public information events	Number	150	122	155	103,33%	127,05%



№	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023	Contracted value	Verified value in UMIS as of 15.06.2023.	% performance against target 2023	% performance against contracted
O5-7	Number of employees, whose remunerations are co-funded by technical assistance	Number	43		36,5*		

Source: UMIS 2020

*Based on information included in AR 2022.

The progress of PA5 as of 15.06.2023 in terms of contracting and financial execution is as follows:

Table 72 Financial implementation of MP 5

Contracted TOTAL	Contracted funds (after savings)	Savings percentage	Paid TOTAL	% implementation
23 636 455,61	22 601 805,99* BGN	4,38%	19 050 577,79 BGN	80,60%

Source: UMIS2020

* The value is for 3 projects, as follows: 5.1-1 - completed at BGN 8 015 222.24, or 88.57% of funds disbursed (11.43% savings); 5.12 - 945 838.80 - in progress; 5.13 - 13 640 744.95 - in progress.

In conclusion, a comparison is made with the achieved values of some key indicators of the Operational Programme "Technical Assistance"⁷⁸, comparable to the result indicators of PA4 of the OPGG, in order to track the development of the capacity of the beneficiaries, as well as the improved coordination and work of the horizontal structures, the effectiveness and efficiency of the use of the UMIS as well as in the work of the network of RICs.

Comparison by reduced staff turnover indicator

1. Reduced staff turnover of beneficiaries per year (horizontal structures), OPTA	Result achieved ⁷⁹	10,15%
	Objective	Less than 10%
	Base value	14,60%

⁷⁸ Analysis of the implementation of the Operational Programme "Administrative Capacity" and the Operational Programme "Technical Assistance" in relation to the preparation of the final reports under both programmes, 2016.

⁷⁹ Expressed cumulatively - total value at 31.12.2015.



Compared to the progress under the OPTP, the progress under the OPGG shows that at the time of drafting of the present report, with a target value of the indicator of 5%, an average performance of 2.5% has been achieved, which is a very large reduction compared to the previous programming period when with a target value of 10%, 10.15% was achieved.

Similarly, for the indicator related to user satisfaction with UMIS, with a target of 75%, a result of 72.74% was achieved (under OPTA)

5. UMIS User Satisfaction Index	Result achieved	72,74%
	Objective	75%
	Base value	30%

The data on the achieved value of this indicator at the time of the evaluation show that with a target value of 87% for the UMIS user satisfaction indicator, a satisfaction rate of 89.90% was achieved under the OPGG programme. For the needs of comparison the achieved value of 72.4% satisfaction of UMIS users for investments was reported under the OPTA.

In the framework of OPTA the most important results are related to the establishment and functioning of the UMIS, promotion of the European cohesion policy, ensuring the functioning of the DIP and the implementation of public information campaigns. Expert opinions on the capacity of the CCC and other institutions in the central administration involved in the implementation of SCF programmes vary. The reasons for this lie in the different expectations of the stakeholders. On one hand, there has been a change in strategic planning, but at the same time, in terms of process management and the possibility to regulate more clearly the relationship between beneficiaries and Managing Authorities, it has not yet been sufficiently achieved. Despite the experience gained, in many cases the uncertainty for beneficiaries and the unpredictability of programme management persists. This could also mean a recurrence of some of the problems and implementation delays they have generated.

The existing institutional framework should be optimised and upgraded by continuing the good practices introduced during the 2007-2013 programming period and the need to include new measures, prioritised in the area of public procurement and state aid, in order to reach the necessary high level of competence of the administration in due time. Measures to strengthen administrative capacity with a focus on greater flexibility and adaptability, while maintaining the established balance and with a view to functioning effectively in relation to the coordination, management and control of the ESF in the 2014-2020 programming period, will be crucial.

The functioning of an efficient coordination mechanism in the area of EU funds management (ESIF) is a key issue. The actions and efforts undertaken during the programming period to streamline and reform the structures responsible for the different aspects of coordination



(programming, monitoring, information provision, coordination of information and publicity activities) are positively assessed.

8.3. Realistic objectives

Evaluation question 3. Are the objectives realistic? What is the difference between the planned and the actual results?

The assessment of the implementation of Priority Axes 4 and 5 under the OPGG shows a high degree of realism of the planned objectives and the achieved results in two of the examined indicators⁸⁰: the degree of achievement of the set indicators and the inputs. The results achieved, as measured by the performance and result indicators, exceed those planned.

The technique of analysing the realism of the set objectives includes the following steps:

- Identification of the concepts and elements of the specific objectives at the level of the priority axis of the OPGG relevant to the specific aspect of the evaluation, including the cause-effect relationships needs - impact potentials - planned support activities - planned indicators that justify the intervention logic of the specific objective concerned;
- Examination of the coherence of the logical framework of each of the specific BFP procedures with the intervention logic of the relevant specific objective of the priority axis;
- Analysis of progress towards the indicators and assessment of the realism of the targets.

The technology is applied differentially for each of the priority axes (PA 4, PA 5), with the realism of the set objectives assessed against the progress and results achieved by the end of the programming period in terms of 3 quantifiable aspects:

- Degree of achievement of the set indicators;
- Timeframe of achievement of milestones and final target;
- Inputs.

The relevance of the achieved results to the set objectives is the subject of a qualitative analysis based on expert assessments and a study of the development of the ESIF system.

Priority Axis 4. Technical assistance for the management of the ESIF

The assessment of the implementation of Priority Axis 4 under the OPGG shows a high degree of realism of the planned objectives and expected results in two of the indicators examined: the degree of achievement of the set indicators and the resources invested. Only milestones have been set under PA4 due to the specificity of the activities and functions performed by the beneficiaries. The defined milestones meet the criteria for realistic targets.

⁸⁰ There are no milestones in the set procedures, so the timeframe of the targets is not in the scope of the analysis.



ЕВРОПЕЙСКИ СЪЮЗ
ЕВРОПЕЙСКИ
СОЦИАЛЕН ФОНД



ОПЕРАТИВНА ПРОГРАМА
ДОБРО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ

The achieved values of the result indicators underline the good planning and assurance of the functioning of the ESIF management, monitoring, control and audit systems.

The procedures are implemented through direct provision of grants and the eligible candidates are the horizontal structures and units responsible for the management of the ESF funds. Information and publicity activities for the programmes financed by the ESF, including the provision of information on the programmes and on specific application guidelines through the network of the JRC and the single information portal, raising public awareness of the funding opportunities provided by the ESF and coordinating the information activities on the programmes.

The intervention logic of OPGG PA4 is shown below:



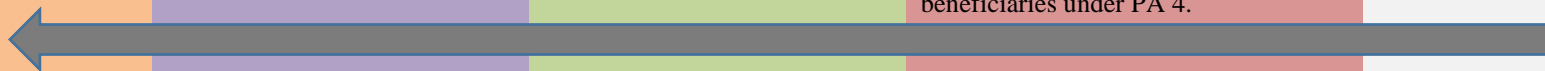
Table 73 The intervention logic of PA 4

Specific objective	Needs analysis	Identified potential for impact	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
Support to horizontal structures responsible for the management and implementation of the ESIF	<p>"Distortion" of the pay model for staff in the management units of the SCF, EAFRD and ERDF;</p> <p>Gaps in capacity to monitor and evaluate programmes and delays in reprogramming actions;</p> <p>Challenges to the implementation of the common preconditions;</p> <p>Identified weaknesses in the application of the State aid regime and the conduct of public procurement;</p> <p>The need to build capacity for evaluation of the NSRF and OPs, to protect EU financial interests and monitor the implementation of horizontal policies.</p>	<p>Analysing and changing the pay model for staff in the structural management units;</p> <p>Analysis and development of evaluation systems and indicator systems;</p> <p>Support the preparation of plans for the implementation of horizontal preconditions;</p> <p>Support for capacity building of horizontal structures responsible for the implementation of legislation and policies in the field of public procurement, state aid and protection of EU financial interests, control and management of the EU's Structural Funds.</p>	<p>Analyses and ongoing assessments of national strategic and normative documents;</p> <p>Organisation of coordination events between operational programmes;</p> <p>Provide and disseminate adequate guidance on the management of EU funds;</p> <p>Audits and on-the-spot checks, coordination of information and publicity activities;</p> <p>Activities to reduce administrative burdens;</p> <p>Expert capacity building activities - training, participation in workshops, trips, conferences, coordination mechanisms, etc.</p> <p>Financing of salary costs;</p> <p>Provision of material and technical conditions for the needs of the specific beneficiaries under PA 4.</p>	<p>For result: Satisfaction of participants with the training; Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year.</p> <p>For performance: Information materials issued by type; Number of public information events; Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance; Projects contributing to reducing administrative burdens; Trained employees.</p>





Specific objective	Needs analysis	Identified potential for impact	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
<p>Improving public awareness of the opportunities and results of the ESIF in Bulgaria, and improving the capacity of beneficiaries</p>	<p>Providing up-to-date and publicly available information on the implementation of the EU SCF in Bulgaria;</p> <p>Maintaining and expanding networks and partnerships to promote Cohesion Policy and its objectives in Bulgaria;</p> <p>Developing and maintaining effective communication channels to meet the publicity and information commitments of the OP.</p>	<p>Expanding the possibilities and effective application of different information channels and networks - a single information portal for the implementation of the EU SCF in Bulgaria, a network of 28 DIPs, the National Network of Information and Communication Officers;</p> <p>Support for the implementation of the National Communication Strategy 2014 - 2020.</p>	<p>Maintaining the documentary fund of the operational programmes;</p> <p>Maintaining and developing the single information portal www.eufunds.bg;</p> <p>Maintaining and developing the network of information centres;</p> <p>Organizing events, trainings, conferences, etc.</p> <p>Targeted media outreach;</p> <p>Developing the capacity of the NAMRB to support small municipalities in the country.</p> <p>Provision of material and technical conditions for the needs of the specific beneficiaries under PA 4.</p>	<p>For result: Percentage of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU Cohesion Policy</p> <p>For performance: Information materials issued by type;</p> <p>Number of public information events;</p> <p>Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance;</p>





The structure of the objectives under grant procedure BG05SFOP001-4.001 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 district information points", BG05SFOP001-4.004 - "Ensuring the functioning of the national network of 27 district information points in the period 2019-2021" and BG05SFOP001-4.007 - Ensuring the functioning of the national network of district information points 2022-2023 is presented below:

Table 74 Targeting by procedures

Objectives of the procedure	Expected results	Indicators
The goal of the procedure is to ensure the effective functioning of the 27^{re} district information points, building on what has been achieved and increasing citizens' awareness, accessibility to information and promotion of the opportunities provided by the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period.	In line with the objectives of the National Communication Strategy 2014-2020 and the Partnership Agreement, this procedure builds public awareness of the European cohesion policy, funding opportunities, and the results achieved in projects co-financed by EU funds, as the DIPs will work to increase transparency in the implementation of the programmes, building broad public trust and supporting the implementation of the integrated territorial approach in Bulgaria.	Number of public information events Information materials issued by type (brochures, leaflets, etc.) Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance Number of consultations provided by telephone, e-mail or on-site at the district information points

The activities are related to the achievement of the objectives of the procedures - functioning of the district information points, as well as the promotion of the European Cohesion Policy and its objectives in Bulgaria. This is realised by holding information events, publishing information materials, providing information events, answering questions.

The objectives of these procedures are related to: promoting the role of the EU and informing about funding opportunities under the programmes; ensuring maximum transparency in the implementation and management of the programmes; building and maintaining high public confidence in the implementation and management processes of the Partnership Agreement and the programmes.

The main objective and the expected results are to increase the awareness of the citizens/public, the accessibility to information and to promote the funding opportunities provided by the EU in the 2014-2020 programming period by ensuring the effective functioning of the 27 DIPs.

Degree of achievement of the set indicators

As indicated in the analyses of the previous two questions, although one of the procedures is under implementation, the indicators for the procedure have been exceeded. Two main reasons are identified as described above, related on the one hand to the planning of the indicators based



on previous experience, and on the other hand to the changed external environmental factors- the change of the communication and information dissemination model, including through multiple online events, as well as the accumulated experience of the DIP network on the one hand, and on the other hand their activity and the stakeholders' expectations regarding the information needed. This may be due to unrealistic conservative planning of indicators and setting of their target values.

Timeframe for achievement of milestones and final target

No milestones have been set under PA4, only targets. The implementation framework for the operational programmes co-financed by the ESIF set out in Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013135 implies the setting of milestones for 2018 and targets for 2023 set for each priority, with the exception of priorities dedicated to technical assistance and programmes dedicated to financial instruments. The milestones are set both in terms of performance and result indicators (where appropriate) and financial indicators.

The project contracting and implementation process largely follows the planned programme implementation framework, with a significant part of the PA4 resource contracted by 2018. This is largely driven by the specificities of the activities, the needs and the nature of the work of the ESIF system and creates flexibility for the beneficiaries of PA4. Setting only milestones is a good approach for this type of beneficiaries, especially if accompanied by regular analyses of absorption rates and assessment of the risk of loss of funds.

Input resources

The allocation of planned - contracted resources across the three procedures under analysis is addressed in the analysis of the previous question on efficiency.

Table 75 Input resources

Funds under procedure	Agreed, BGN	Contracted with reflected savings, BGN	Paid, BGN	% implementation
BG05SFOP001-4.001				
10 000 000	9 842 553,90	8 697 210,79	8 697 210,79	88.36%

Funds under procedure	Agreed, BGN	Contracted with reflected savings, BGN	Paid, BGN	% implementation
BG05SFOP001-4.004				
11 000 000	9 191 638, 79	9 046 943,40	9 046 943,40	98.43%



For both grant procedures, the estimated budget figures are relatively close to those actually agreed. As noted in the previous question, "The functioning of the JRC in 2019, 2020 and 2021, secured with funds under the procedure, has effectively contributed to promoting the role of the EU and informing about funding opportunities under the programmes; to ensuring maximum transparency in the process of implementation and management of the programmes, and to building and maintaining high public confidence in the processes of implementation and management of the Partnership Agreement and the programmes."

Relevance of the results to the objectives (qualitative analysis)

In Priority Axis 4, Specific Objective 3 justifies the improvement of the public awareness of the opportunities and results of the ESIF in Bulgaria, as well as the improvement of the capacity of the beneficiaries justifies the permanent maintenance of the single information portal for general information on the implementation of the EU SCF in Bulgaria (www.eufunds.bg). The specific objective also provides support to the functioning network of information centres for the promotion of the EU Cohesion Policy in Bulgaria. Under this specific objective, support for the network is foreseen to continue.

The results are related to the effective implementation of the functions of the horizontal structures and units for the management of the ESIF funds, increased administrative capacity, the implementation of communication activities, ensured functioning and maintenance of the UMIS and the Single Information Portal for general information on the implementation and management of the ESIF www.eufunds.bg, which we have discussed in detail in the following questions in the statement of Task 3, where specific data are presented and analysis is made.

The activities are related to achieving the objectives of the procedures and related to the functioning of the district information points, as well as the promotion of the European Cohesion Policy and its objectives in Bulgaria - holding information events, publishing information materials, providing information events, answering questions.

The implementation of the activities and the achievement of the results is measured by the relevant indicators, as specified in the tables and narrative of the previous two evaluation questions. The annual reports on the implementation of the programme present the results of the functioning of the DIPs in terms of visitors, number of questions asked, number of information events.

The interventions foreseen under PA 4, Specific Objective 3 of the Programme are realistic and justified in terms of supporting Bulgaria's information and publicity obligations. They finance information activities to disseminate clear and understandable information on the ESIF to reach beneficiaries and stakeholders and thus contribute to the transparency of EU funds investments.

The targeting approach under the procedures for the provision of BG05SFOP001-4.002 Technical assistance to the horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF, **BG05SFOP001-4.005** Technical assistance to horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF in the period 2019 - 2021, **BG05SFOP001-**



4.006 - Horizontal support for the effective management of ESIF funds is illustrated in the following table:

Table 76. Targeting by procedures

Objectives of the procedure	Expected results	Indicators
<p>Support horizontal structures and units responsible for managing European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) resources</p> <p>Ensure the effective functioning of the information system referred to in Article 1, para. 1 of Decree No 322 of the Council of Ministers of 2008⁸¹ (ISIS)</p> <p>To maintain and develop the Single Information Portal (www.eufunds.bg) under Art. 1 of Decree No 107 of the Council of Ministers of 2014⁸²</p>	<p>A significant part of the measures under the procedure are aimed at building on the results achieved during the 2007-2013 programming period.</p> <p>Supported horizontal structures and units responsible for the management of the ESIF funds</p> <p>Ensured effective functioning of UMIS</p> <p>Single information portal maintained</p>	<p>Trained employees</p> <p>Information materials issued by type (manuals, handbooks, booklets, brochures and information leaflets, etc.)</p> <p>Number of public information events</p> <p>Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance</p> <p>Projects contributing to the reduction of administrative burdens</p> <p>Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year</p> <p>Satisfaction of participants with the training</p> <p>UMIS user satisfaction</p> <p>Proportion of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy</p>

The justification of the objectives is linked to the specific objectives justified in the operational programme (SO1. Support to the horizontal structures responsible for the management and implementation of the ESF and SO2. Ensure effective functioning of the UMIS 2020 of PA4).

⁸¹ Decree No 322 of the Council of Ministers of 19 December 2008 laying down the conditions, procedure and mechanism for the functioning of the Information System for the management and monitoring of the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the European Assistance to the Most Deprived Fund and the Cohesion Fund of the European Union in the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁸² Decree No 107 of the Council of Ministers of 2014 laying down the procedure for the award of grants under programmes co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund of the European Union and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for the period 2014-2020.



The projects are implemented through a financial plan per budget line and support a number of activities in the horizontal structures that achieve the following results:

- Consultancy services are provided, including ongoing evaluations of strategic documents and the preparation of analyses relevant to the management and implementation of the ESIF. Information was provided on the implementation of the preconditions and the implementation of national strategic and regulatory documents was analysed (SO 1).
- Events have been organised to improve coordination between operational programmes. (SO1)
- In order to provide adequate guidance for the management of EU funds, manuals, guides and procedures are updated and disseminated annually to specific beneficiaries under PA4. Managing authorities and beneficiaries will be provided with.
- In order to ensure control over the spending of the EU funds, audits and on-the-spot checks were carried out by the SA, the AA, the EA SAFEA and the AFKOS Directorate in the Ministry of Interior in the Managing Authorities, the Intermediate Bodies and the beneficiaries, including the cross-border cooperation programmes.
- Actions have been implemented to reduce excessive administrative burdens, including at the control stage, through changes in the regulatory framework (SO1).
- The staff of specific beneficiaries under PA4 are trained and participate in courses, workshops, study tours, conferences and seminars on issues related to the management of the ESIF. By updating existing knowledge and acquiring new knowledge, the expert capacity of the structures involved in the management and coordination of the ESIF has been upgraded (SO1).
- A financial resource is provided for remuneration and other related costs at the expense of the appointing authority/employer for staff of specific beneficiaries under PA 4 for the implementation of ESF management activities (SO 1).
- Investments have been made in human capital and administrative capacity by ensuring the participation of staff of specific beneficiaries under PA4 in coordination mechanisms related to the management of the ESF, including participation in working groups and experience sharing initiatives. The exchange of experience contributes to the dissemination of good practices from other Member States (SOs 1, 2 and 3).
- The available software, hardware and specialised and office equipment have been provided and upgraded to meet the needs of specific beneficiaries under PA4, contributing to their functioning as an environmentally friendly administration and reducing the administrative workload.
- A help desk for UMIS 2020 users is in place (SO 2).
- Hardware and software, IT and telecommunication devices that are necessary for the upgrade and maintenance of UMIS 2020 are provided. Activities to upgrade and maintain ISMS 2020 with applications, which are discussed in detail in the following sections.



- The upgrading of the information system for the programming period 2021-2027 is ensured. The activity will ensure the transition for the implementation of the next programming period.
- Training has been provided to users of the UMIS 2020 and the information system for the 2021-2027 programming period, which is discussed in detail below under Contribution and Impact (SO 2).
- The maintenance of the documentary fund of the operational programmes 2007-2013 and the information system used in this period is ensured (SO 3).
- The maintenance and development of the Single Information Portal www.eufunds.bg is ensured, which will give access to general and specialized information on the management of the ESIF in Bulgaria.

The procedures are focused on specific activities for each beneficiary, with separate budget lines for the financing of expenditure (a budget line for remuneration and a budget line for expenditure on other activities). The projects have been implemented and the planned results have been achieved.

Degree of achievement of the set indicators

As indicated above in the analyses of the previous two evaluation questions, although one of the procedures is still in the process of implementation, the indicators have been achieved to a high degree and exceed the targets set.

Timeframe for achievement of milestones and final target

No milestones are foreseen for the achievement of the indicators under the priority axis. with regard to the milestones and targets of the identified indicators, several main observations can be summarised.

The process of contracting and implementing projects largely follows the programme's planned implementation framework. No delays or problems have been reported, except for changes in some authorities (SAEG in MoEG for example).

The timeframe is appropriately defined, covering the whole programming period and covering all the needs of the beneficiaries, following the implementation cycles of the programmes and the Partnership Agreement.

The interventions foreseen under PA4 are realistic and justified from the point of view that the functioning of the system for management, monitoring and control of EU funds is crucial and continuous efforts and support are needed to achieve the desired results. The contribution and impact of the interventions implemented are discussed in the following sections.

Input resources

The distribution of planned - contracted resources under the two procedures under analysis is discussed below:



Table 77. Allocation of planned and contracted resources

Funds under procedure BG05SFOP001-4.002	Agreed, BGN	Contracted with reflected savings, BGN	Paid, BGN	% implementation
46 300 000,00	41 725 631,93	33 396 172,23	33 396 172,23	80,04%

Funds under procedure BG05SFOP001-4.005	Agreed, BGN	Contracted with reflected savings, BGN	Paid, BGN	% implementation
56 124 260,00	48 697 078,45	45 229 885,31	45 229 885,31	92,88%

The contracted funds are not in line with the planned procedures and savings have been realised as a result of implementation. However, the assessment of efficiency reflects the higher efficiency than originally planned as well as the savings realised in the procurement of the activities. An additional argument towards realism is the fact that the planned resource is set over a long period of time, therefore reserves are built into the planning to compensate for inflation and other changes in the socio-economic context that might require additional resources. This ensures implementation, as the reverse hypothesis, of a shortfall, would call into question resourcing.

Relevance of the results to the objectives (qualitative analysis)

The interventions foreseen under PA 4 of the Programme are justified and substantiated in terms of the need for horizontal support for management, monitoring, control and audit of the ESIF instruments, continued development of administrative capacity, targeted actions to support the reduction of the administrative burden, continued active information of target groups and stakeholders on EU assistance. The indicators identified under the priority axis are relevant and measure progress in the implementation of the projects funded. The annual programme implementation reports, the annual reports of the beneficiaries, as well as a number of other implementation reports and opinions, present the results achieved, and the data from the EMIS report on the achieved values of the output indicators as well as the result indicators. Indicators reporting change are particularly indicative of successful implementation and alignment between objectives and results:



Table 78 Indicators under PA 4

№	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023	Verified value in ISMS as of 15.06.2023.	% implementation
R4-1	Staff turnover of beneficiaries per year	%	5%	2,14%	Over 100
R4-2	Satisfaction of participants with the training	%	85%	95,57%	Over 100
R4-3	UMIS user satisfaction	%	83%	89,61%	Over 100
R4-4	Proportion of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy	%	70%	72,30%	Over 100

Positive change has been achieved in all outcome indicators, with performance exceeding planned targets. This leads to the conclusion that the expected results have been achieved and the logical framework has been properly constructed. This fact underlines the good planning of the targets and the good results achieved in implementation.

Priority Axis 5. Technical assistance

The analysis of the implementation of Priority Axis 5 under OPGG shows a high degree of realism of the planned objectives and consistency of expected and achieved results in terms of effective programming, implementation, monitoring and control of the process of spending public funds, as well as improving the capacity of the MA. The overall assessments of the management and control systems of the Operational Programme, the reported low error rate with financial impact in the control and verification of funds prove that thanks to the support under PA5, a high level of effectiveness of the implementation management of the Programme as a whole is maintained.

The programme foresees and implements regular information and training initiatives to improve the capacity of the beneficiaries to plan and implement projects without significant effect on the motivation and commitment of some of the beneficiary administrations.

Priority Axis 5 Technical Assistance of the OPGG is structured around two specific objectives with a horizontal character for the whole operational programme.

Specific objective 1 *Efficient and effective management of the OPGG* brings together activities related to the material, expert and technical capacity of the programme management and implementation process, continuous capacity improvement and ensuring an institutional



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ДОБРО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ

environment for effective performance management (adequate progress assessment, risk management and programming, support for the closure of the 2014-2020 programming period and preparation of the next programming period).

The focus is on reducing the administrative burden for beneficiaries, simplifying procedures, investing in human resources and ensuring high efficiency in planning and management processes.

Specific objective 2 *Enhancing the capacity and awareness of the beneficiaries of the OP* is aimed at implementing effective communication strategies to promote the EU contribution, motivate and increase the interest of the different target groups of the programme to prepare and submit quality project proposals.

The management and implementation concept supported by Priority Axis 5 and the wide range of beneficiaries of the Operational Programme imply a major commitment and mandatory contribution of the Priority Axis to the provision of information and publicity on the Programme, both in terms of the contribution of the Community and the Operational Programme, and in terms of awareness raising and improving the capacity of potential beneficiaries to implement quality projects. The main instruments used in this respect are the Operational Programme Monitoring Committee, information campaigns with beneficiaries, public consultations, thematic events.

Alongside the public events and campaigns, the series of evaluations, studies and analyses funded by FP5 are of equal importance. These elements of the technical management of the programme have the potential to focus the participation of the social partners and civil society structures in thematic areas relevant to the successful implementation of the policies supported by the OP. The evaluations and analyses that are financed with the support of the Priority Axis ensure the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the different stages of implementation and monitoring of the progress of the Operational Programme, providing feedback and a participatory decision-making process.

The intervention logic of OPGG PA5 is shown below:



Table 79 Intervention logic for MP 5

Specific objective	Needs analysis	Identified potential for impact	Planned intervention activities	Applicable indicator
Efficient and effective management of the OPGG	<p>The need for capacity building of the OPGG MA staff for successful programme management and implementation;</p> <p>Material, human and technical capacity to perform the management and implementation tasks of the OPGG;</p> <p>Ensuring the functioning of the MC;</p> <p>Support the development and improvement of necessary procedures and documents related to planning and management processes</p>	<p>Capacity building for efficient and effective absorption of ESF support;</p> <p>Support the development and validation of management and implementation procedures (programming, project selection, control, monitoring and evaluation) with a focus on administrative burden reduction and simplification;</p> <p>Activities, services and supplies aimed at ensuring high efficiency in planning and management processes;</p> <p>Ensuring information, publicity and level of awareness on the implementation of the OPGG</p>	<p>Material and technical support of the activity of the MA;</p> <p>Support for the provision of specific expertise, collection, analysis and summarization of information, consultations, analyses, evaluations, etc.</p> <p>Support for evaluation of implementation and programming;</p> <p>Financial control and audit support;</p> <p>Training and participation in workshops, meetings, working visits, etc.</p> <p>Periodic analyses and studies. Publications and event organisation;</p> <p>Financing of salary costs for the staff of the MA of the OPGG.</p>	<p>Final outputs: Information materials produced</p> <p>Number of public information events</p> <p>Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance;</p> <p>MA staff and members of the MC trained;</p> <p>MC meetings held</p> <p>Evaluations carried out on the TOPGG, priorities, procedures, etc.</p> <p>Analyses, studies, reports, etc., supporting the implementation of the OPGG and the preparation for the next programming period</p>



The framework of objectives of the three budget lines funded under FP5 follows the intervention logic described above:

Table 80 Target setting of the three budget lines

Procedure	Objectives	Indicators
BG05SFOP001.-5.001 "Technical assistance for Operational Programme "Good Governance""	Ensuring the activities of the MA related to programming, implementation, monitoring, control and evaluation of the OPGG	MA staff and members of the MC trained MC meetings held
	Increasing the administrative capacity of the MA for effective and efficient programme management;	Evaluations carried out on the OPGG, priorities, procedures, etc.
	Improving the capacity of beneficiaries to prepare and implement projects in line with the priorities, objectives and requirements of the programme;	Analyses, studies, reports, etc. supporting the implementation of the OPGG and the preparation of the next programming period
	Provision of information and wide publicity on the objectives and opportunities of the programme and the positive role of the European Community in the process of building an efficient and competent administration and judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria.	Production of information materials by type (printed, electronic, audiovisual) Number of public information events Number of staff whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance

Degree of achievement of the set indicators

As of June 2023, for the three funded projects, the values of the verified indicators, with few exceptions, exceed the set targets. Given the progress in the implementation of the projects, full implementation of the Priority Axis indicators is expected.

As far as the assessment of the realistic planning of the performance indicators is concerned, the following should be noted:

- Slight underestimation of the opportunities for achieving the indicators related to training of MA staff and members of the MC and financial provision of human resources at the implementation stage of the Operational Programme and the Priority Axis;



- The lack of set intermediate targets does not outline a sufficiently detailed implementation timeframe.

The implementation of the set indicators is discussed in detail in the part of the report dedicated to the assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of PA5. The quantitative assessment of progress is indicative of the high degree of realism in planning the target values of the indicators.

Input resources

The disbursements as of June 2023 under PA5 are more than 84% of those agreed under the three funded projects and show a relatively good level of realism of planned resources.

Results to objectives relevance (qualitative analysis)

For the purpose of this part of the analysis, the results of the audits carried out by the Executive Agency for the Audit of EU Funds on the OPGG systems are examined.⁸³

The overall assessment of the management and control systems under the OPGG are constant for the period 2018 - 2023, and according to the classification of key requirements of management and control systems are assessed in category 2 "Works. Some improvement needed."

Table 81 Overall assessment of the management and control systems under the OPGG⁸⁴

KRs for management and control systems under Regulation (EU) 480/2014		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1	Adequate separation of functions and adequate systems for reporting and monitoring in cases where the responsible authority entrusts execution of tasks to another body.	2	2	1	1	2
2	Appropriate selection of operations	2	2	2	2	2
3	Adequate information to beneficiaries on applicable conditions for the selected operations	2	2	2	2	2
4	Adequate management verifications	2	2	2	2	2
5	Effective system in place to ensure that all documents regarding expenditure and audits are held to ensure an adequate audit trail.	2	2	2	2	1
6	Reliable system for collecting, recording and storing data			2	2	1
7	Effective implementation of proportionate anti-fraud measures	2	1	2	2	1

⁸³ Annual control reports under Article 127(5)(b) of Regulation 1303/2013

⁸⁴ There again

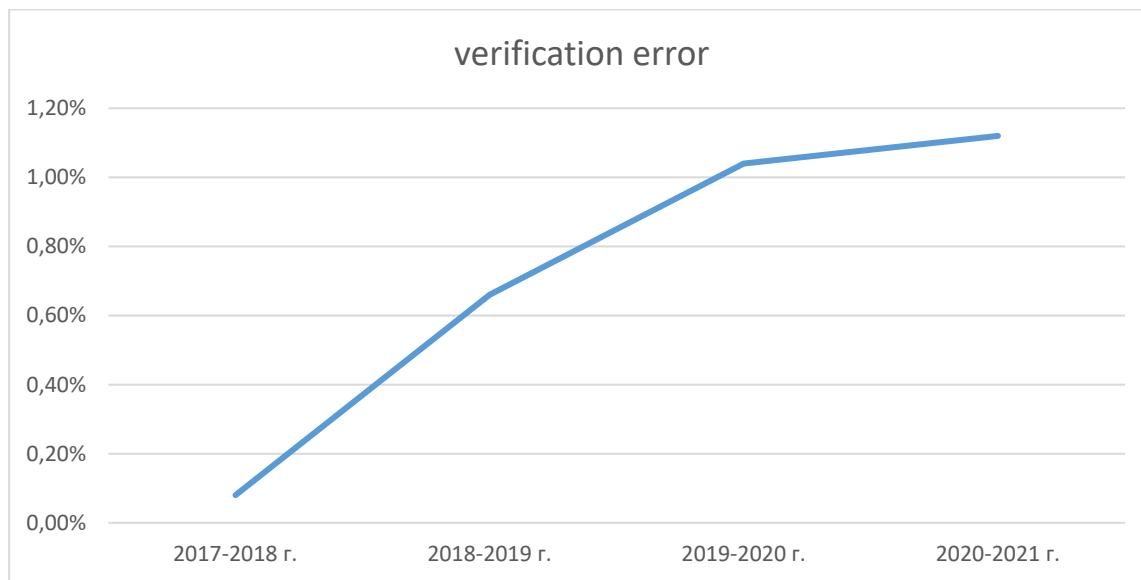


KRs for management and control systems under Regulation (EU) 480/2014		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
8	Appropriate procedures for drawing up the management declaration and annual summary of final audit reports and of controls carried out	1	1	1	1	1

The main recommendations formulated by the Audit Authority at the initial stage of the implementation of the Programme are related to shortcomings in the procedures for selection of operations, monitoring and verification, promotion of the Programme and implementation of the EC Guidelines for fraud risk assessment and effective anti-corruption measures. As the implementation of the Programme has progressed, the audits carried out did not identify deficiencies of management systems with a high level of materiality, except for cases related to the verification of procurement expenditure.

To a large extent, thanks to the support under PA 5 Technical Assistance, the MA of the Operational Programme maintains a high level of efficiency in terms of managing the implementation of the different processes of control and verification of the absorption of ESF support. The annual reports of the OPGG operations report the random nature of errors with financial impact in the MA's verification of expenditure on operations below the materiality threshold of 2%.

Figure 18 Errors with financial impact in the verification of expenditure on operations by the MA⁸⁵

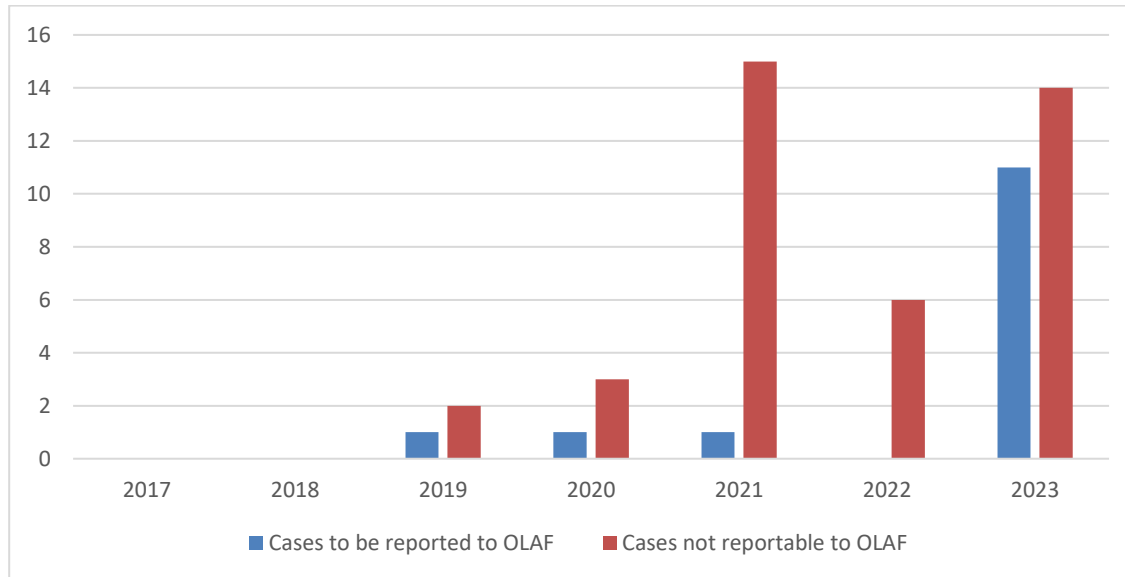


⁸⁵ Annual control reports under Article 127(5)(b) of Regulation 1303/2013



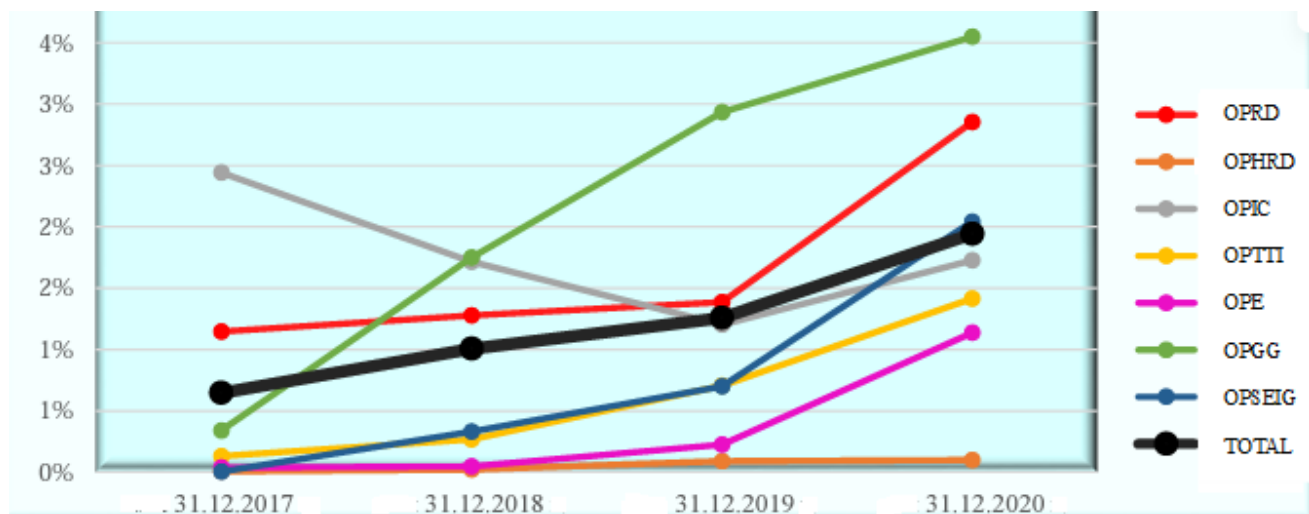
Indicative of the optimization and effective implementation of the control and verification systems by the MA of the OPGG is the number of registered cases of irregularities in the programme implementation period by year.

Figure 19 Number of cases of irregularities recorded by the MA



The percentage of error found in verification compared to the total contracted funds by year shows similar increasing trends.

Figure 20 Proportion of irregularly spent funds identified by MA in verification and contracted funds.⁸⁶



⁸⁶ Audit Report No. 0300201720 on the audit of the "Administration of irregularities" performance for the period 01.01.2017 to 31.01.2020, Court of Auditors, <https://www.bulnao.government.bg/bg/oditna-dejnost/dokladi/?category=1&type=&year=&search=>.



The change demonstrated is a function of the intensity of spending, respectively of the verification of the programme funds, but also evidence of effective implementation of management and control systems. The MA of the OPGG establishes an appropriate control environment and ensures sufficient administrative capacity to manage risk and take corrective action.

In order to achieve the objectives related to improving the capacity of the beneficiaries to implement projects in accordance with the priorities and requirements of the programme, the MA of the OPGG organises and conducts regular activities, including:

- Holding information days to present the opportunities and conditions for application for each call for proposals;
- Conducting trainings for management and financial reporting of OPGG projects - trainings are conceived both as a capacity building tool, but also as a means to get feedback, improve communication with beneficiaries and optimize the rules for application and implementation;
- Development and publication of manuals, guidelines and rules for the implementation and reporting of projects financed under the OPGG.

The number of information days and trainings held for potential beneficiaries of the programme are summarised in the annual reports on the implementation of the OPGG:

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of participants in information days	199	81	117	438	54	26	177	24
Number of participants in trainings	0	129	347	135	367	286	151	264

The variety of information, training and communication activities reported under the programme has definitely had an effect in terms of motivation and activity of potential beneficiaries to participate in the call for proposals. For the whole period of implementation of the programme, 1 116 participations in information days and 1 679 participations in trainings financed under FP5 were reported.

At the same time, against the backdrop of the progression of irregularities recorded by the MA, as well as the number of terminated projects under some of the OPGG procedures, the frequency and scope of capacity building initiatives are a weak argument in favour of improving the capacity of the target groups to prepare and implement quality project proposals. The insufficient capacity of some of the administrations to prepare and implement projects, together with a lack of motivation and commitment, is also seen as part of the challenges to the achievement of the objectives of the OPGG in the annual reports on programme



implementation. The factors underlying these trends are discussed below, in the section that looks at the impact of the implementation of PA5.

The above-mentioned conclusions, unfortunately, do not represent an exception to the general assessments of the capacity of the administration in Bulgaria. The fifth national survey "Engagement Barometer" reports a decline in the engagement index in the public administration in Bulgaria for 2023 in general, compared to 2022.⁸⁷ The average score of the administrative capacity of the public administration for 2022 is 2.8342 compared to 2.9608 for 2021.⁸⁸

Insufficient project implementation capacity of some of the beneficiaries under the OPGG is addressed in the risk management strategies and represents a challenge to the management capacity of the MA itself. A number of measures are being taken to compensate for the deficits: maintaining a risk register with specific mitigation measures, beneficiary training and communication at all stages of project implementation, release and reallocation of programme funds, over-contracting and identification of project ideas with sufficient readiness for implementation by the end of 2023.

Last but not least, the National Roadmap for Administrative Capacity Development for the period 2021-2027, which addresses the needs for building administrative capacity of stakeholders for effective implementation of programmes co-financed by EU funds and increasing the added value of the financed investments should be mentioned.⁸⁹ The survey of beneficiaries carried out for the purpose of the study highlights the areas with the greatest need for support - preparation and implementation of public procurement procedures, project reporting and delivery, ensuring sustainability.

With regard to the last formulated objective of the programme, related to providing information and wide publicity about the objectives and opportunities of the programme and the positive role of the European community in the process of building an efficient and competent administration and judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria, the MA of the OPGG develops Annual Action Plans for information and communication, linked to the objectives of the National Communication Strategy 2014 - 2020. The plans address the main communication needs by target groups, plan specific communication activities and appropriate communication channels.

The programme is the only one that does not have its own website and uses a page in the single information portal of the European Structural and Investment Funds eufunds.bg. The YouTube channel which is maintained was created in 2019, albeit with a limited popularity of 176 subscribers.

⁸⁷ Fifth National Survey of Civil Service Employee Attitudes "Engagement Barometer", IPA, 2023, <https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/novini/rezultati-ot-peto-nacionalno-prouchvane-barometr-na-angzhairanostta>.

⁸⁸ Administrative Capacity Index of the Public Administration in the Republic of Bulgaria for 2022, <https://www.namrb.org/bg/aktualno/ofitsialno-be-predstaven-indeksat-na-kapatsiteta-na-darzhavnata-administratsiya-za-2022-g>

⁸⁹ National Roadmap for Administrative Capacity Development 2021 - 2027 - presentation, CDC, Providing information and wide publicity on the objectives and opportunities of the programme and the positive role of the Community in the process of building an efficient and competent administration and judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria.



8.4. Contribution of the investments from the OPGG

Evaluation question 3.4. What is the change before and after the investment? How much of the change is due to support from the OPGG?

Contribution of investments under PA 4

By examining the contribution of the OPGG in terms of supporting the horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESF, changes can be identified in relation to the following objectives:

Support to horizontal structures responsible for the management and implementation of the ESIF

The OPGG fully supports the management system of the programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit structures of the ESF. The functioning of the system of horizontal structures, each with its essential functions, is fully financed by the OPGG. Virtually every change that has taken place in the environment has been entirely due to support from the OPGG, as there are no other financial sources investing in the ESF management structures. The expert capacity of the structures involved in the management and coordination of the ESF funds has been upgraded - the funds provided by the programme help not only to upgrade knowledge through training, but also to retain the experts who have already gained significant experience in the horizontal structures of managing the ESF funds. Retaining the capacity of these staff is of utmost importance in terms of ensuring the effective management of the system. A low staff turnover has been achieved and maintained and the possibility to preserve the institutional memory of the ESF management systems and to upgrade and develop the capacity - according to Monitorstat, the indicator "staff turnover of beneficiaries per year" for 2021 shows a value of 2.79%, compared to 6.40% in 2013. It can be concluded that the main influence for the improvement of the indicator is precisely the investments made through the OPGG.

In the 2014-2020 programming period, a fundamental change in the regulatory framework has been implemented with the 'Law on the management of eu funds under shared management' (LMEFUSM). This is of great importance for all stages and processes of programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESF. The law creates conditions for clear procedures and rules and the possibility for applicants and beneficiaries to appeal against MA acts.

The law guarantees:

- a more transparent, more comprehensible and more efficient system of public funds from the EU's financial system;
- increased coordination at management level and at all levels of control;
- unified and simplified procedures based on clearly defined deadlines, forms and other rules with the effect of reducing the administrative burden;



-effective judicial protection for beneficiaries.

An essential effect of the introduction of the LMEFUSM Act is the establishment of a legal framework that guarantees a state of equality between beneficiaries and the MA in their relations and the possibility of settling disputes through administrative and administrative legal ways.

This is a significant change in the environment for both the beneficiaries and the administrations managing the programmes, leading to a more transparent and efficient system for managing and implementing the ESF.

Ensuring the effective functioning of UMIS

A high level of satisfaction was achieved by the users of the UMIS (**89.61%**). The significant contribution to this are the investments made in the system under the OPGG, which lead to a simplified/paperless application and reporting process, which reduces the administrative burden on applicants, provides wider access to participation precisely due to the easing of the administrative burden, provides the opportunity for smooth processes. Transparency has been achieved, the capacity for use of the UMIS by all stakeholders has been upgraded, in-person trainings have been conducted and video trainings for all stages and modules of the system have been produced and disseminated.

Improving public awareness of the opportunities and results of the ESIF in Bulgaria and improving the capacity of beneficiaries

According to Monitorstat, the share of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy in 2021 is 72.30% , which compares to 62% at the end of 2013. These results give reason to believe that the positive change is due to the investments made by the OPGG in terms of the The Regional Information Centers (RIC), the Single Information Web Portal and the information and communication measures implemented through the programme funds in each project implemented with programme funds. Since its creation until December 2022, the DIPs has been provided answers to more than 184,210 questions, which has inevitably had an impact on improving the capacity of beneficiaries in terms of application and implementation processes for projects funded by the EU's Structural Funds.

Material and technical support for the MA activity, including the implementation of measures aimed at reducing the administrative burden for beneficiaries

The material-technical needs of the structures for the management of the ESIF are ensured, including the needs for software and software products - thanks to these products the administration has the opportunity to work in an almost paperless environment, which is a step towards the development of an environmentally friendly administration. Reduced administrative burden - by providing the possibility to work in an electronic environment, the burden for both beneficiaries and administrations is reduced. UMIS eases the work of end-users by reducing the administrative burden, time and costs, reducing the scope for error and standardising the way managing authorities work.



Rapid crisis and emergency management

In the period covered by the evaluation, the ESIF structures have shown great adaptability and competence in rapidly setting up mechanisms in response to the COVID 19 pandemic and the consequences of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, which is the result of the accumulated capacity that inevitably results from the investments made by the programme in terms of the expertise of the different units and institutions.

The change achieved from the implementation of the projects funded under PA 4 is summarised in more detail in the table below:

Table 82. Change achieved, PO4

Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
<p>Ensuring transparency and information about the application opportunities, the implementation of the programmes, promotion of the investments made and the good practices and results achieved, promotion of the EU funds</p> <p>Activities to provide coordination, methodological support to the network of the RICs, as well as organizing training for the DIP staff;</p> <p>Upgrading the operational capacity of the RIC</p>	<p>Since 2012, the Regional Information Centers network for the promotion of the EU Cohesion Policy in Bulgaria has been functioning. In the period 2007-2013, the network provided information on funding opportunities under the programmes co-financed by the EU Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund (CF). In the period 2014-2020, given the good results of the activities and in order to maintain and develop the established capacity and partnerships of the network, its scope has been extended to all programmes financed by the ESF, thus providing accessible information on the ESIF to the citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria in the territory of the network's partnerships, a change which has been achieved thanks to the OPGG. An efficient working environment and working conditions have been ensured, including remuneration of the DIP staff;</p> <p>In the 2014-2020 period, thanks to the programme's investments, conditions have been created to build on the cooperation of the network of 27 DIPs with local administrations, labour offices, regional education offices, universities and secondary schools, so that information on funding opportunities from these funds reaches all potential beneficiaries, including young people, Europe Direct centres and, in coordination with Europe Enterprise, Global Libraries, the National Agricultural Network and Network of the MA information and publicity officers. According to Monitorstat data on the relevant indicator, which reflects the level of awareness of the population, the share of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy for 2021 is 72.30% , which compares to 62% at the end of 2013. These results give reason to believe that the work of the DIP is one of the factors for increasing and improving the public awareness of the opportunities and results of the ESIF in Bulgaria, and this change in the environment is due to the interventions under the OPGG.</p> <p>In connection with their functions in terms of improving public awareness of the opportunities and results of the ESIF in Bulgaria, the DIPs partner with regional media and maintain regular columns in electronic media. Ensured active direct communication, including at regional level with all stakeholders, focusing on potential beneficiaries, by organising information days on relevant application procedures</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	<p>RICs function on the one-stop shop principle and work actively with MAs, supporting them in the implementation of information campaigns on the territory of the districts. From its establishment until December 2022, the DIPs have been working with the local and regional authorities. Since its launch in 2022, the DIPs have organised more than 10 540 public events, provided answers to more than 184 210 questions and carried out more than 76 370 publications in the media. These results give reason to believe that the work of the DIPs is one of the factors for the increased rate of absorption of funds under the operational programmes, through the provision of adequate and timely information reaching a wide range of stakeholders. The functions that we have reviewed and the results achieved have also had an impact on improving the capacity of beneficiaries in terms of application processes and implementation of projects funded by the ESIF, given the data on the number of requests addressed to the network.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated major changes and in this regard the RIC's hosting of online events and providing technical support to work with the ESIF unified management information system (UMIS) is one of the factors that contributed to the rapid adaptation during the pandemic and ensured continuity of processes.</p> <p>In amendments in 2020 The Regional Development Act (RDA) and the new Regulations for the Implementation of the RDA adopted in the same year, provide for the DIPs to also support the process of implementation of the integrated territorial approach in Bulgaria by having DIP staff participate in the expert composition of the Regional Development Councils, and in particular in their mediation units and public consultation units.</p>
<p>Technical assistance to the horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF Provision of computers, printers and other equipment for the</p>	<p>The material-technical needs of the structures for the management of the ESIF are ensured, including the needs for software and software products - thanks to these products the administration has the opportunity to work in an almost paperless environment, which is a step towards the development of an environmentally friendly administration. Working in a paperless environment also has positive effects in terms of easier archiving of documents, less space and maintenance costs and easier management of archives.</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
<p>needs of the structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF</p> <p>Supply of stationery, copy paper, toners and other consumables for the needs of the structures</p> <p>Organisation of meetings and group events</p> <p>Preparation of studies and analyses</p> <p>Translation and interpretation services</p> <p>Purchase and maintenance of specialised software for the needs of the individual units in the ESIF management structures - e.g. maintenance of the SAP system in the MF, building and maintaining databases, workflow management system, etc.</p>	<p>Administrative burden is reduced - by providing the possibility to work in an electronic environment, the burden is reduced for both beneficiaries and administrations. UMIS eases the work of end-users by reducing the administrative burden, time and costs, reducing the possibility of errors and standardising the way managing authorities work.</p> <p>The audit activity on the territory of the country is secured - the implemented change in the 2014-2020 programming period is that the audit activities carried out by the 'Audit of EU Funds' Executive Agency are carried out entirely in an electronic environment in the UMIS system, which saves resources and reduces the burden on the beneficiaries to provide records and documents that are available in the system and can be accessed by the auditors without the assistance of the beneficiaries.</p> <p>The work of the certifying authority and the work of AFCOS is ensured. The role of the body for the protection of the European Union's financial interests remains unchanged following the launch of the European Public Prosecutor's Office. The functions of both bodies are clearly demarcated by amendments to Regulation 883/2013 (the so-called OLAF Regulation). It sets out how OLAF will work alongside prosecutors in the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) to ensure that EU funding is well protected.</p> <p>Analyses and evaluations have been prepared for the needs of the specific beneficiaries under MP 4</p> <p>A low staff turnover and the possibility to preserve the institutional memory of the ESIF management systems and to upgrade and develop the capacity has been achieved and maintained - according to Monitorstat the indicator "staff turnover of beneficiaries per year" for 2021 is 2.79%, as compared to 6.40% in 2013. It can be concluded that the main influence for the improvement of the indicator is precisely the investments made through the OPT.</p>
<p>- Organisation of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee;</p>	<p>Partnership agreement and coordination of the programming process for the programming period 2021-2027</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
<p>-Technical support to the staff of the CCU for the performance of their direct duties in relation to the coordination of the ESIF;</p> <p>-Conducting analyses and studies in relation to the management of the ESIF funds;</p> <p>-</p>	<p>Ensure the regular functioning of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee - by providing the necessary material resources, but also through financial support to maintain the capacity of the CCU (Central Coordination Unit) to carry out these functions.</p> <p>Ensuring the work of working groups and councils that ensure coordination and interaction on sectoral policies in the intervention areas of the programmes, as well as on the functioning of the ESIF system and the optimisation of programme implementation processes (e.g. working group on Roma integration policies).</p> <p>Monitoring of the Partnership Agreement and coordination of the ESIF, including analytical and coordination activities</p> <p>The regulatory framework has been streamlined and the administrative burden has been limited and in some cases reduced</p> <p>These changes are the result of the work of the CCU and the ESIF structures. They have been achieved both through regular meetings and working groups and through continuous interaction and communication between the responsible institutions, collection and analysis of information from all stakeholders and regular monitoring of the implementation of programmes and policies, the fulfilment of preconditions, the results achieved from the implementation of programmes, etc.</p> <p>These efforts lead to improved capacity for reform and sector policy making, which provides a sound basis for programming EU funds consistent with national and European priorities.</p> <p>Bulgaria has the capacity and participates in the debate on the future of cohesion policy as the EU's main investment policy for growth and jobs</p> <p>It ensures the simultaneous work on the two overlapping programming periods - preparation of the new programming period (2021-2027) and completion of the old programming period (2014-2020).</p> <p>Necessary analyses have been prepared to serve for the preparation of the new programming period, including the Socio-economic Analysis required for the preparation of the Partnership Agreement, the work and preparation of the unlocking conditions are being secured, the necessary new</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	regulatory framework is being prepared in relation to the requirements of the new EU legislative package (new regulations).
<p>Develop the regulatory framework and implement activities to reduce excessive administrative burdens;</p>	<p>A fundamental change in the regulatory framework in the 2014-2020 period is the implementation of the Law on the management of eu funds under shared management. This is of great importance for the process as a whole - the creation of clear procedures, a clear possibility for applicants and beneficiaries to appeal in court against MA acts.</p> <p>The law guarantees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -a more transparent, more comprehensible and more efficient system of public funds from the ESIF as part of the country's financial system; -increased coordination at management level and at all levels of control; -Unified and simplified procedures based on clearly defined deadlines, forms and other rules with the effect of reducing the administrative burden; -effective judicial protection for beneficiaries. <p>The Law was developed by an inter-ministerial working group with the participation of representatives of the social partners, the executive and the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria. Its specific provisions have been discussed at various expert and political levels.</p> <p>The established legal framework corresponds to the nature of the regulated public relations and their regulation is ensured through administrative procedures and public norms. The rights and responsibilities of the bodies for the management and control of the ESIF funds - managing authorities (MAs), certifying authorities and audit bodies - are clearly and legally defined.</p> <p>The acts that are subject to judicial review are defined and the procedure for hearing the dispute - before the administrative courts under the Administrative Procedure Code is determined.</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	<p>The law also specifies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the modalities of the grant, the "design" of the procedures - the rules governing the evaluation process for the selection of project proposals and the direct granting of aid to a specific beneficiary - the legal form of the grant - as a rule, an administrative contract for the grant, as well as the possibilities for amending it <p>Specific rules in relation to the implementation of the community-led local development approach are foreseen</p> <p>Additional provisions also ensure the implementation of forms of financial support - reimbursable aid, prizes and financial instruments.</p> <p>The law also defines the types of projects - project proposal, system project, integrated project, budget line</p> <p>The procedure for grants is defined</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selection • direct granting to a specific beneficiary <p>The conditions for changing the eligibility conditions and the eligibility periods for each of the stages are defined. The rules for requesting additional information are defined.</p> <p>The law also regulates financial management and control, procedures for the administration of irregularities, procedures for making financial corrections, and a challenge to the decision determining the financial correction does not stop the payment.</p> <p>The procedure for appealing of administrative acts and the jurisdiction before the administrative courts under the procedure of the Code of Civil Procedure is defined.</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	<p>The main sub-legislative acts to the Law have also been adopted, which regulate the national rules regarding Monitoring Committees, provision of grants, eligibility of expenditure, selection of contractor by beneficiaries, UMIS</p> <p>A number of efforts have been made to reduce administrative burdens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reduction of necessary documents, verification of circumstances by the administration - streamlining screening and selection procedures and eliminating excessive controls - encouraging the use of simplified cost options - simplifying rules and increasing the speed of State aid decisions
<p>Organization and participation in trainings on issues related to the management of the ESIF funds for the staff of the specific beneficiaries under PA 4</p> <p>Participation of the beneficiaries' staff in working groups, workshops, initiatives for exchange of experience in relation to the management of the ESIF funds;</p> <p>Ensuring the work of diplomatic staff on Cohesion Policy in the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Bulgaria to the EU;</p>	<p>The expert capacity of the structures involved in the management and coordination of the ESIF funds has been upgraded - the funds provided by the programme help not only to upgrade knowledge through training, but also to retain the experts who have already gained significant experience in the horizontal structures of the management of the ESIF funds. Retaining the capacity of these staff is of utmost importance in terms of ensuring the effective management of the system, and an indicator that change has been achieved is the low turnover rate, which we have already touched upon.</p> <p>The participation of the staff in different thematic trainings in the following thematic areas is ensured: programming, monitoring and evaluation of the ESIF; financial management; verification; audit of the ESIF including specialised audit trainings; public procurement; state aids; risk management; irregularities, financial corrections and fraud; financial instruments; UMIS 2020; information and awareness; specialised trainings on spatial planning and cadastre, intellectual property protection; soft skills.</p> <p>The number of trainings per year exceeds the struggle of the employees, with some employees having the opportunity to participate in more than one training. This ensures that employees' expertise and skills are maintained.</p> <p>Through trainings at the Institute of Public Administration, training is provided in all the main blocks of the ESIF management cycle - strategic, institutional and legislative framework,</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	programming, project selection and contracting, financial management, irregularities, public procurement, state aid, financial instruments, monitoring and evaluation, publicity and communication.
<p>Support for capacity development of municipalities in the development and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF</p>	<p>Financial resources have been secured to improve the capacity for project implementation and preparation of procurement for the implementation of the ESIF investments.</p> <p>The contracts concluded under the PPL with the contracting municipalities are as follows⁹⁰ :</p> <p>2023 - 4994 (until September)</p> <p>2022 - 5370</p> <p>2021 - 4493</p> <p>2020 - 1300</p> <p>This data shows an increasing trend, which is an indicator of capacity strengthening as the programming period progresses. However, there is still the issue of quality of selection and compliance with market principles. According to the data of the Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives⁹¹ , in 33% of the public procurement in the construction sector with the contracting authority Municipalities of Regional Centres only one candidate participated in the procedure. Overall, in 61% of cases only one bidder reached the final (33% where only one bidder appeared and another 28% where there were other bidder(s) but they were eliminated and only one bidder reached the final. The percentage of the average value of contracts awarded as a proportion of the average estimated value of works contracts with district centre municipalities as the contracting</p>

⁹⁰ Source Public Procurement Register, <https://app.eop.bg/today/reporting/statistics/contract-number>

⁹¹ Corruption Risk in Public Procurement Index, 2023 http://www.bili-bg.org/cdir/bili-bg.org/files/BILI_-_index_ppt_11_09_2023.pdf, the analysis is based on a representative sample of 166 procedures with a total value of 259.9 million leva. The sample was drawn by random selection from a total of 1,224 procedures announced in the period 01.01.2020-30.06.2023, the subject of which are construction works and have a total estimated value of BGN 2.73 billion. The scope of the analysis includes the procurement of construction works by the municipalities whose centres are the regional cities of the country.



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	<p>authority is 96%, i.e. in practice the successful bidders submitted prices that were very close to the maximum budget set by the contracting authorities.</p> <p>The share of appealed public procurement after 2019 is below 10% with a downward trend (2022 reaches 7%).</p>
Horizontal support for the effective management of ESIF funds	
<p>Upgrading and maintaining UMIS;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development, optimisation and maintenance of UMIS 2020 • Establishment of a system for information protection, automated backup and data recovery in UMIS 2020 • Implementation of a system to monitor the proper functioning and use of the software in UMIS 2020 • Development of an e-learning environment for working with UMIS 2020 <p>Conducting trainings for UMIS users; Developing and updating video-trainings for working with UMIS 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a system for entering the requests to the Helpdesk of the UMIS 	<p>The unified management information system for application, reporting, monitoring and control of the implementation of the ESIF is upgraded and maintained</p> <p>.</p> <p>The UMIS system allows more efficient management, reporting and controls, as well as information exchange with the EU institutions. Traceability is ensured for each programme, procedure, financial aid contract. Performance can be monitored against various criteria and indicators. The system is fully web-based and only a browser is needed to work with it, it is also optimised for mobile devices. Currently, the following has been achieved through UMIS ⁹² :</p> <p>more than 112 000 project proposals submitted;</p> <p>over 110 000 reporting packages examined;</p> <p>over 195 000 registered users;</p> <p>more than 1 800 grant procedures launched</p> <p>49 500 trees have been saved thanks to UMIS users and the number is growing daily as the programmes are implemented.</p> <p>A high level of satisfaction was achieved by the users of the UMIS (89.61%). The significant contribution to this is the investments made in the system under the OPGG, which lead to a</p>

⁹² data as of the end of 2022 - Annual Report on the Implementation of the Operational Programme "GOODGOVERNMENT", 2022



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of technical support to the UMIS 	<p>simplified/paperless electronic application and reporting process, which reduces the administrative burden on applicants, provides wider access to participation precisely due to the easing of the administrative burden, provides the opportunity for smooth processes.</p> <p>Transparency has been achieved, the capacity for use of the UMIS by all stakeholders has been upgraded, in-person trainings have been conducted and video trainings for all stages and modules of the system have been produced and disseminated.</p> <p>A National Investment Management System (NIMS) has been developed - it ensures coordination of capital investments financed from the national budget with those from the ESIF. The system contributes to improving impact analyses of investments. The NIMS has created a transparent and reliable possibility for all administrative structures to provide and control the allocation of public funds. Anyone interested can apply, report or simply check easily and quickly the possibilities to secure national investments. Using the System, the administrative burden on public structures and especially on applicants is reduced. A uniform structure of the application forms is set up, projects from all over the world can be submitted, and the credibility of state structures is built. The system has been developed to address the need to computerise the process for the provision of support and investments funded entirely from the National Budget, for which the use of the UMIS 2020 system is inappropriate, given the differences in regulatory requirements (European and national legislation), as well as the different project management and implementation processes.</p> <p>The system of programme indicators has been improved.</p> <p>A help desk for UMIS users is functioning;</p> <p>Ensuring the visibility of project implementation and achievements</p> <p>With the upgrade of the UMIS modules, the degree of transparency and accessibility to information have increased significantly, which is reflected in the UMIS ratings of the last sixth system audit (report of 19.01.2022) and (report of 28.01.2022), which are categorized at level 1 "Functioning well. No improvement or minor improvement needed".</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	<p>The change in environment and the benefits of using UMIS also emerged in relation to the COVID 19 pandemic and all its resulting consequences. The system in place has ensured that all ongoing procedures can run smoothly in view of the measures taken in the country to contain the spread of the virus. The provision of an environment for conducting the procedures entirely by electronic means has enabled all parties to work remotely, and the development of modern information technology has made access and management possible from anywhere in the world, including through the use of mobile devices. Last but not least, when we talk about the pandemic, it should be noted that the UMIS platform has been a huge facilitator and has speeded up the procedure in terms of applying for COVID grants at a time when the businesses affected by the pandemic urgently needed a financial injection to continue operating.</p>
<p>-Maintaining and developing the The Single Information Web Porta www.eufunds.bg; Providing information on the implementation of individual projects and programmes.</p> <p>-Informing the target groups about the EU Cohesion Policy.</p>	<p>Transparency and access to information on the programmes financed by the ESIF are ensured through the maintenance and development of the single information portal. The Single Information Portal on the European Structural and Investment Funds is designed to raise citizens' and businesses' awareness of funding opportunities and the implementation of measures under the identified operational programmes. It is maintained and developed under a project funded by OPGG. For the period 2014-2020 there are:</p> <p>11 586 282 unique page views;</p> <p>3,454,912 hits;</p> <p>1 704 131 consumer .</p> <p>The National Communication Strategy of the Operational Programmes for the 2014-2020 program period has been prepared, which sets the framework for strategic communication for the 2014-2020 programming period as part of the inter-institutional interaction process.</p> <p>The National Network of Information and Publicity Officers has been established and coordinated as an effective coordination mechanism for cooperation and partnership between the institutions; an active exchange of information between the experts from the Central Information Office and the</p>



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	<p>information and publicity officers in the respective Managing Authorities on the progress of the implementation of the planned communication activities of the operational programmes has been ensured;</p> <p>Examples of "good practices" and successfully implemented projects of beneficiaries of grants under the ESIF are published.</p>
<p>Development and maintenance of the Information System Monitorstat.</p> <p>The system contains a statistical database of surveys of the National Statistical Institute, statistical authorities and agencies responsible for collecting information for monitoring various strategies and programmes. The system is centralised, web-based, with two main modules providing access to indicators and metadata from statistical surveys on national, European and international strategies and EU operational programmes for the period 2014-2020.</p>	<p>The NSRD and OP evaluations identified a weakness in the design of the indicator system. In the 2014-2020 period, in response to this identified weakness, the Information System Monitorstat has been built - it meets the needs of horizontal coordination in terms of the necessary framework for statistical validation and procedures for collecting and processing the microdata needed to assess the contribution of activities to the specific objectives of each OP.</p> <p>A statistical database of data has been established to ensure ongoing monitoring of the implementation of national and European strategies and management decisions on policy implementation through the development of a statistical framework, procedures and information collection system;</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of the result indicators of the operational programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period is ensured;</p> <p>The necessary framework for statistical validation and procedures for the collection and processing of microdata needed to assess the contribution of activities to the specific objectives of each OP, the lack of which was reported as a weakness in the previous programming period, is in place</p> <p>Interface with the "Monitorstat" system - through the established link between the two systems it is possible to collect information on the economic indicators of the applicants electronically, ex officio, with the consent of the respective applicants. This reduces the administrative burden on them and ensures the correctness of the information on economic indicators. Following the integration between the two systems, 121⁹³ funding procedures have been processed (116 under</p>

⁹³ Regarding the Integration with ISUN / UNIS / NSI data as of 28.09.2023.



Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	<p>UMIS and 5 under NIMS). The number of unique beneficiaries served is 17 107 and the number of project proposals served is 31 171.</p> <p>Nearly 200 statistical indicators have been published for 16 national, European and international strategy documents. In parallel with the indicators for key strategic documents, IS "Monitorstat" also maintains 229 result indicators, thus providing up-to-date information for the monitoring of EU operational programmes for the 2014-2020 period.</p> <p>The assessment of the integration benefits associated with the NSI service is as follows:</p> <p>Saved beneficiaries money on document fees:</p> <p>Total for all candidate beneficiaries - BGN 1 745 576.00 , broken down by year as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2020 - 266 392.00 BGN; - 2021 - BGN 665 112.00; - 2022 - BGN 662 536.00; - 2023 - 151 536.00 lv. <p>Time saved - on average per beneficiary applicant - 1 person-day (application submission, receipt from the NSI and scanning and entry into the UMIS portal); - total for all applicant beneficiaries - 4 750 man-days or 38 000 man-hours</p> <p>NSI resources saved - on average 2 man-hours for the execution of 1 request (request acceptance, processing, verification and transmission-accounting)</p> <p>- total man-hours for all requests - 9 500;</p>



ЕВРОПЕЙСКИ СЪЮЗ
ЕВРОПЕЙСКИ
СОЦИАЛЕН ФОНД



ОПЕРАТИВНА ПРОГРАМА
ДОБРО УПРАВЛЕНИЕ

Activity/function supported by OP DM	Change achieved
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- approximately 500 kg of paper saved;- 4750 fewer users at the NSI reception. <p>Saved A4 paper - 155 855 sheets;</p>

In the 2014-2020 programming period, the following additional functionalities of UMIS have been funded and implemented:

- Checklists are introduced in a structured form - the functionality provides the possibility to recreate all checklists in the system, thus completely electrifying the process. The need for paper is completely eliminated, communication between individual experts and all participants in the process is accelerated and improved;
- Official documents have been introduced - for a given procedure, a set of documents can be set to be loaded ex officio to the submitted project proposals in ISUN through a link to the registers in the Regix system. Currently available reports that can be loaded for both applicant and partner are:
 - Reference for current status - TR and Register of Non-Profit Organizations, Bulstat Register, Registry Agency and Central Register of Non-Profit Organizations for Public Benefit Activities at the Ministry of Justice;
 - Report on the presence-absence of obligations - Customs Agency - Register of Obligations to the Customs Administration;
 - Reference for the presence-absence of liabilities - Register of obliged persons (National Revenue Agency);
 - Reference of animals registered in livestock holdings by category - Register of animals and livestock holdings;
 - Reference to animals - Register of animals and livestock holdings;
 - BULSTAT reference for penalty orders for the period - Register of penalty orders (Executive Agency "General Labour Inspectorate");
- E-Declarations have been implemented - through this functionality it is possible to fill in the declaration templates to the application and reporting packages in a fully structured way, reducing the need to print, fill in, sign, scan and attach the relevant declarations. All the steps to complete them are fully in the system;
- Interface with the "Monitorstat" system - through the established link between the two systems it is possible to collect information on the economic indicators of the applicants electronically, ex officio, with the consent of the respective applicants. This reduces the administrative burden on them and ensures the correctness of the information on economic indicators;
- Integration with the MoEG has been achieved - the integration between UMIS and the MoEG Project Register allows for the submission of project proposals subject to MEU approval and for receiving comments on them through UMIS.
- Interface with the SAP system - Data transfer between UMIS and SAP requires the generation and import of files containing information on hundreds of payments, signed contracts and verified reports in just seconds. The processing time for data related to payments made to beneficiaries is significantly reduced.
- Automatic creation of contracts - the functionality allows, through a single action, to create contracts for all approved project proposals under a given procedure, automatically filling in the information on "Start date of contracts", "Implementation status", "Bank account", "Closing date", "Completion date" and information on indicators, if necessary. Significantly reduce the time required to enter 1



contract into the system and minimise the opportunities for technical errors in the transfer of information;

- Automatic creation of payment orders for Electronic budget payment system - the ability to automatically generate data for the preparation of payment orders for payment through Electronic budget payment system. The functionality allows the automatically generated thousands of payment requests to be loaded into Electronic budget payment system and settled in minutes.
- Automatic generation of payment requests - With this functionality it is possible, with a single action, to create and approve "n" number of payment requests for concluded contracts for grants, for a given procedure. This speeds up the process of delivering grants to beneficiaries and reduces technical errors in processing the information;
- Automatic evaluation of project proposals - on the basis of a predefined formula by the MA formula in the system is provided the possibility of automatic calculation of the results on a number of economic indicators of the beneficiaries based on information that is provided automatically through the integration between UMIS and Monitorstat. The aim is to significantly speed up and automate the process of evaluating project proposals and avoid technical errors through automatic calculations performed by the system.
- Application form settings - the functionality allows each MA to configure the structure of the application form to suit the specifics of the respective application procedure. In this way, applicants fill in a form that requires only the information that is necessary for the specific procedure under which they are applying for support;
- Submitting requests for amendment/change of the grant contracts in a structured form - the functionality allows beneficiaries to fill in their requested changes directly in the structured document of their grant contract and send it through the system. The MA confirms/accepts or rejects the requests also in the system. The process significantly reduces the processing time for the sent amendment/change requests and minimises the risks of technical errors when transferring the information from a scanned to a structured document. The use of paper is reduced;
- Integration of the projects financed under the Community-led local development approach in the UMIS;
- Upgrading of the public module of the UMIS - Complete reorganization of the public module of the UMIS and addition of additional structured information from the system on the implementation of programs and projects (public information on the evaluation of project proposals, information on the Community-led local development approach, information on the upcoming procedures for the provision of BFP, information on the reported expenditure by contractor, etc.).

The changes made in the UMIS streamline the work processes and reduce the administrative burden for the MA, beneficiaries and control bodies, shortening the time for work, facilitating all stakeholders, saving time and minimizing the use of paper. The changes made contribute to the implementation of the principles of sustainable development and equity between applicants and are fully environmentally friendly. The service documents and ex-officio checks introduced reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries and



are fully in line with the principles of e-governance by reducing the time for preparing and submitting project proposals and reducing the use of paper.

Contribution of investments under PA 5

It is observed that there is improved capacity of the administration involved in the management of the OPGG funds for the absorption of the support under the ESIF, also the quality of the processes is improved as well as the efficiency of the management and implementation of the operational programme as a whole as a result of the support under PA 5 of the OPGG. The recorded positive change is 100% contribution of the Operational Programme.

Positive effects of the implementation of PA5 are measured in terms of expert and institutional capacity, coordination and communication capacity, management at all levels, reporting and control, implementation of effective information and communication strategies, preparation of analyses and evaluations of progress and impact to ensure continuity and sustainability of programme results.

While applying sustainable and targeted approaches to interact with the programme's target groups, the evaluation does not highlight any significant change in terms of ensuring sufficient capacity of the OPGG beneficiaries to prepare and implement projects.

Individual aspects of the induced change have been identified as a result of the analysis of the implementation of the planned results and indicators as well as interviews conducted with beneficiaries and experts from the structural units of the MA of the OPGG. The most significant are:

Table 83 Change achieved, PA5

Activity/function supported by the OPGG (PA 5)	Change achieved
<p>Preparation, implementation, monitoring and control of the OPGG, incl. Provision of remuneration and incentive system for MA staff, participation in training, working visits and meetings of MA staff and members of the MC, organisation of MC meetings on the Programme, technical support for the MA work, monitoring activities, preparation of documents and procedures, management of document flow and provision of audit trail.</p>	<p>Increased expertise and qualification of the staff involved in the management and implementation of the OPGG, motivation to work and result-oriented performance through participation in trainings, conferences, workshops and visits, expert networks.</p> <p>Increased administrative capacity for management and implementation, through improving management, audit and control systems and procedures, providing additional expertise for analysis and evaluation of progress, identifying and</p>



Activity/function supported by the OPGG (PA 5)	Change achieved
	<p>introducing sustainable risk management practices, including in crisis situations.</p> <p>Improved capacity for coordination, communication and result-oriented management at all levels (strategic and operational) - development of programming, communication and advisory capacity for beneficiaries at all stages of implementation, increasing the expertise and capacity of the members of the programme's MC.</p> <p>Ensured conditions and resources for efficient running of the main processes of management, monitoring and control of the implementation of all operations supported under the programme, through optimization and digitalization of the processes for application, evaluation and reporting of project proposals, creation and maintenance of adequate systems for collection and storage of information, audit trail and information for the decision-making process, reduction of administrative burden.</p> <p>A supportive environment for quality functioning of management and control systems - expert and technical support for performance management processes</p>
<p>Support for closure of OPAC and OPTA, including verification, control and audit activities, preparation of final report and closure declaration, information and publicity activities, final meetings of the MC.</p>	<p>Improved quality of reporting processes and quality of evaluation of the implementation of the programmes implemented in the previous period - support for the preparation of evaluations and analyses of the implementation of OPAC and OPTA</p> <p>Pre-conditions for ensuring continuity and building on results for the period 2014 - 2020</p>



Activity/function supported by the OPGG (PA 5)	Change achieved
	<p>created through effective management and allocation of human resources to ensure the simultaneous running of the evaluation and programming processes of the programmes of the previous and current period, consultations and active work with stakeholders and MC.</p>
<p>Support for the provision of information and publicity, promotion of the Community contribution through the Operational Programme for the development of a modern administration, an efficient and transparent judicial system, an active civil society.</p>	<p>Improved effectiveness of communication strategies to promote the contribution of the OPGG through the development and use of a variety of communication channels, different event formats and feedback.</p> <p>Ensured conditions for implementation of information and publicity commitments under Regulation (EU) 1303/2013</p>
<p>Providing opportunities for active communication and improving knowledge about the OPGG and the quality of project preparation and implementation, including public events, training for potential beneficiaries, annual information events, round tables, conferences, etc. formats.</p>	<p>Ensured a sufficient level of transparency regarding procedures, objectives and decision-making process in the management and implementation of the Operational Programme...., through an active information and communication process with the members of the MC, beneficiaries of financial support, stakeholders.</p> <p>Mechanisms and tools put in place to improve the capacity for project planning, management and monitoring of the beneficiaries themselves under the different priority axes of the OP - development, publication and dissemination of manuals, guidelines and implementation guides, organisation of training and information sessions, consultation and communication with beneficiaries at all stages of the project preparation and implementation cycle.</p>



Activity/function supported by the OPGG (PA 5)	Change achieved
<p>Support for the preparation of evaluations and analyses to improve the management of the Programme, including performance, interim and effectiveness evaluations of the individual priority axes and the Programme as a whole.</p>	<p>Improved capacity for programming, planning and evaluation of the structural units of the MA of the OPGG through timely implementation of the evaluation plan of the Operational Programme.</p> <p>Improved accountability and capacity to deliver on commitments to report on progress under the OPGG to the EC - annual performance and progress reports, impact assessments</p>

The undisputed change resulting from the interventions under PA5 is the ensured and improved administrative capacity of the OPGG MA. The views expressed during the interviews conducted with MA representatives underline the contribution of the programme both at individual level (in terms of expertise and coordination between individual staff) and at structural level - in terms of institutional memory, convergence and procedures. Regular communication and coordination at operational level between the programme experts in charge and the teams of the individual beneficiaries is pointed out as a good practice with proven sustainability. While such practice is also applied in the management of other operational programmes, in the case of the OPGG it is a marker of a change in the management paradigm where the whole process of programming, implementation, monitoring and reporting is understood as a continuous and coherent cycle.

8.5. Impact of the implementation of PA 4 and PA5

Evaluation question 3.5 What is the impact of the implementation of each of the two priorities of the programme? What mechanisms have contributed to achieving impact? What are the factors for lack of impact?

The answer to this evaluation question is formulated on the basis of the application of the document analysis method as well as the results of the quantitative and qualitative research.

Impact of the implementation of PA 4

The impact of the implementation of the activities under PA 4 is related to the functioning of the ESIF system - including coordination and control of the management of the ESIF funds. Mechanisms have been put in place which have contributed to the impact of the programme in terms of:



reducing the administrative burden through a fundamental change in the administrative base - the adoption of the law on the management of EU funds is a key measure to improve processes, create a predictable environment, optimize the system for managing EU funds and increase its efficiency and effectiveness;

Ensuring the efficient functioning of the UMIS - a simplified / paperless application and reporting process, which ensures more efficient management, reporting and checks, as well as exchange of information with the European Union institutions; the system is entirely web-based and only a browser is needed to work with it, it is also optimized for mobile devices; the UMIS platform is a mechanism for enormous facilitation and speeds up the procedure in terms of applying for COVID 19 - grants at a time when businesses affected by the p

support to the horizontal structures responsible for the management and implementation of the ESIF - the funds provided by the programme help not only to upgrade knowledge through training, but also to retain the experts who have already gained significant experience in the horizontal structures for the management of the ESIF funds; investment in the material and technical needs of the structures for the management of the ESIF, enable the administration to work in an almost paperless environment, which is a major step towards the development of an environmentally friendly administration.

The impact of the implementation of the activities under PA 4 is related to the functioning of the ESIF system - including coordination and control of the management of the ESIF funds. The impact includes securing the core functions that play a key role in ensuring transparency of the implementation of the ESF and improving monitoring and management processes

The mechanisms that have contributed to achieving an impact in terms of reducing administrative burdens can be summarised as:

- Regarding the administrative framework - the adoption of the law on the management of EU funds is a key measure to improve processes, create a predictable environment, optimize the system for managing EU funds and increase its efficiency and effectiveness. The Act overcomes the fragmentation of the existing regulatory framework for the ESIF and introduces unified and simplified procedures based on clearly defined deadlines, forms and other rules with the effect of reducing the administrative burden and effective judicial protection for beneficiaries. In 2016, the main sub-regulations to the law on the management of EU funds were also adopted, regulating national rules regarding Monitoring Committees, provision of BFP, eligibility of expenditure, selection of contractors by beneficiaries, UMIS. The simplification of the rules and procedures for the management of the ESF and the reduction of the administrative burden create an opportunity to facilitate access to funds, financial management and the achievement of the stated results. One of the keys to achieving this is the legal framework put in place and avoiding different interpretations at different times;



- Reducing the number of required documents, carrying out internal administrative checks of the declared circumstances, mechanisms have been created which directly lead to a reduction of the administrative burden;
- During the period, based on the amended legal framework and identified problems from previous periods, the screening and selection procedures were streamlined, which is a direct mechanism influencing the reduction of the administrative burden;
- Encouraging the use of simplified cost options leads to significant relief for beneficiaries;
- This programming period sees the full integration of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) into the ESIF framework, including UMIS 2020, which is also a mechanism for reducing the administrative burden on beneficiaries;
- Regarding State aid regimes, the rules have been simplified and a mechanism has been created to speed up the process of deciding whether State aid is available or not, involving sector administrations as they have knowledge of the market or the nature of an economic activity that determines whether State aid is available or not.

The mechanisms that have contributed to achieving an impact in terms of ensuring the effective functioning of UMIS can be summarised as follows:

- The investments made in the system under the 2014-2020 programming period lead to a simplified/paperless application and reporting process, which reduces the administrative burden on applicants, provides greater access to participation precisely because of the easing of the administrative burden, provides the opportunity for smooth processes. Transparency has been achieved, the capacity to use the UMIS has been upgraded for all stakeholders, in-person trainings have been conducted and video trainings have been produced and disseminated for all stages and modules of the system. With the upgrading of the UMIS modules, the degree of transparency and accessibility to information have increased significantly, as evidenced by the high satisfaction rate achieved by UMIS users (89.61%); The UMIS system developed provides the opportunity for more efficient management, reporting and controls, as well as information exchange with the European Union institutions. Traceability of each programme, procedure, financial aid contract is guaranteed. Performance can be monitored against various criteria and indicators. The system is fully web-based and only a browser is needed to work with it, it is also optimised for mobile devices. Currently, the following has been achieved through UMIS:
 - more than 112 000 project proposals submitted;
 - over 110 000 reporting packages examined;
 - over 195 000 registered users;
 - More than 1 800 grant procedures have been launched;



- The established UMIS system enables the MA to create a rapid response mechanism to the COVID 19 pandemic crisis - it ensures that all ongoing procedures can run smoothly in view of the measures taken in the country to contain the spread of the virus. The provision of an all-electronic environment has enabled all parties to work remotely and the development of modern information technology has made access and management possible from anywhere in the world, including through the use of mobile devices. Last but not least, it should be noted that the UMIS platform has been a mechanism of great facilitation and has speeded up the procedure in terms of applying for COVID 19 - grants at a time when the businesses affected by the pandemic urgently needed a financial injection to continue operating;
- Technical support is provided for the users of the UMIS through Helpdesk, which assists all users of the system in case of problems. Detailed information on the implementation of individual projects and programmes is provided. This mechanism leads to a wider access to participation and a level playing field, as it is fully geared towards helping end users and therefore to higher user satisfaction;
- All of the above mechanisms implemented through the investments planned under the OPGG also lead to the ratings given to the UMIS⁹⁴ by the last sixth system audit⁹⁵ (report dated 19.01.2022) and (report dated 28.01.2022), which are categorized at level 1⁹⁶ "Functioning well. No improvement or minor improvement needed".

The mechanisms that have contributed to achieving impact in terms of supporting the horizontal structures responsible for managing and implementing the ESIF

- A mechanism for investment in human capital and administrative capacity - the funds provided by the programme help not only to build up knowledge through training, but also to retain experts who have already gained significant experience in the horizontal structures of managing the ESIF funds. Retaining the capacity of these staff is of utmost importance in terms of ensuring the effective management of the system, and an indicator that the mechanism has had an impact is the low turnover rate in the horizontal structures;
- Thanks to the human capital and administrative capacity investment mechanism, the administration has shown a high level of flexibility and adaptability and implemented a rapid response mechanism to the pandemic crisis COVID 19, managing to build a mechanism to quickly and easily obtain grants for businesses at a time when those affected by the pandemic urgently needed financial resources to continue operations.
- Thanks to the mechanism for investment in human capital and administrative capacity, the administration has shown a high level of flexibility and adaptability and has implemented a

⁹⁴ Key Requirement (KRA) 6 - A reliable system for collecting, recording and storing data for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, controls and audits, including links to electronic data exchange systems with beneficiaries

⁹⁵ Results of the audits of systems under the TACs to the GCO

⁹⁶ Overall assessment (categories 1, 2, 3, 4) [As defined in Table 2 - Annex IV to Regulation (EU) No 480/2014]



mechanism for a rapid response to the refugee and energy crises caused by the Russian military aggression in Ukraine, managing to redirect resources to finance measures to reduce the impact of these crises.

- The material and technical needs of the ESIF management structures, including software and hardware needs, are provided. Thanks to the smoothed investment mechanisms for the material and technical needs of the ESIF management structures, including the needs for software and hardware products, the administration is able to work in an almost paperless environment, which is a step towards the development of an environmentally friendly administration;

The table below presents the activities and functions supported and for each of them the impact is assessed, as well as the mechanisms for achieving impact and the factors for lack of impact, respectively.

Table 84 Impact of the implementation of PA 4

<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrading and maintenance of UMIS; Conducting training for EMIS users; Operation of a help desk for UMIS users; • Development and updating of video training for work with UMIS 2020 • Provision of support to the UMIS for the programming period 2007-2013 	<p>Ensured environment for electronic application and reporting of projects under the ESF.</p> <p>Maintenance of a single electronic system for application, reporting, monitoring and control of the implementation of the ESIF</p> <p>The upgrade of the UMIS 2020 modules has significantly increased the level of transparency and accessibility to information.</p> <p>Information on the functionalities of UMIS and a guide for their use by beneficiaries and MAs are provided and are accessible and user-friendly.</p> <p>Technical support is provided for the users of the UMIS through Helpdesk, which assists all users of the system in case of problems.</p> <p>Detailed information on the implementation of individual projects and programmes is provided.</p>	<p>The needs of the information system are fully covered, as :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources are provided to support the system functionality • Resources are provided according to assessed needs • All accompanying UMIS processes are secured • Trainings are provided that are generally accessible (in in-person and convenient video format) • Features have been upgraded based on experience and feedback from stakeholders



<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
	<p>Access to information on projects and programmes from the 2007-2013 programming period is ensured through the maintenance of an information system for the 2007-2013 programming period</p>	
<p>Maintenance and development of The Single Information Web Porta http://www.eufunds.bg</p>	<p>Access is provided to horizontal documents (programmes, strategies, regulatory framework) and information on the implementation of the programmes for each of the programming periods</p>	<p>Financial resource is provided Communication and publicity capacity is maintained and built upon Continuous communication and promotion of the role and place of the ESIF and the results achieved. A single point of access to information on OP and PA implementation is provided</p>
<p>Informing target groups about EU Cohesion Policy.</p>	<p>Information materials and information content have been produced, information dissemination has been ensured Transparency and accountability for programme implementation achieved Promotion of the effects of the ESIF investments and raising the awareness of the population about the implemented programmes</p>	<p>A strategic framework for the implementation of the activity has been established (National Communication Strategy of the Operational Programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period) A National Network of Information and Publicity Officers has been established and coordinated as an effective coordination mechanism for cooperation and partnership between the institutions involved in the management of the ESIF</p>
<p>Organization and participation in training on issues related to the management of the ESIF funds for the staff of the CCU, as well as their participation in working groups, workshops, initiatives for exchange of experience in</p>	<p>Conditions are provided for maintaining and upgrading the capacities of key units responsible for the management of the ESF funds through training, exchange of experience and good practices.</p>	<p>Resourcing of activities ensured Investment in human capital and administrative capacity is ensured</p>



<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
<p>relation to the management of the EUSF funds;</p>	<p>The exchange of information with EC services is ensured</p> <p>Ensured participation representatives in the negotiations on European Union policies and legislation</p> <p>Participation in decision-making processes at EU level (participation in joint meetings, working groups, councils, etc.) is ensured by providing experts at the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the EU in Brussels.</p> <p>Improved coordination between all main institutions in the system of the ESIF, ensuring timely information on upcoming changes and policy guidelines that are on the EC agenda in order to achieve timely coordination with the relevant documents in the country.</p>	<p>Resourcing of the activity and sending experts to the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the EU in Brussels to ensure the communication process between the EC services and the relevant institutions in Bulgaria.</p> <p>Capacity and institutional memory preserved and built upon by reducing turnover and keeping the composition of structures unchanged</p>
<p>Organisation of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee;</p>	<p>Coordination of policies and programmes financed through the ESIF is ensured (coordination between policy directorates, managing authorities and monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit structures)</p> <p>The principle of partnership with the central and territorial executive authorities, municipalities,</p>	<p>Resourcing of the activity is ensured by providing funds for coordination meetings, working groups, etc.</p> <p>The Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee is ensured</p> <p>Capacity and institutional memory preserved and built upon</p> <p>Turnover has been kept low, thus preserving institutional memory and ensuring continuity</p>



<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
	<p>nationally representative employers' and employees' organisations, civil society organisations and academics is ensured through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee - Programme Monitoring Committees - holding regular meetings 	
<p>Technical support to the staff of the CCU for the performance of their direct duties in relation to the coordination of the ESIF;</p>	<p>Improved the working environment for the coordination of policies and programmes financed through the EU's Structural Funds by providing equipment and the necessary material and consumables to move towards an environmentally friendly and efficient administration.</p> <p>Coordination between all main institutions in the ESIF system has been improved, as well as coordination with stakeholders through regular meetings and communication, through the involvement of civil society representatives in the process, through participation in the The Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee.</p>	<p>Resourcing of the activity is ensured by purchasing the necessary equipment</p>
<p>Carrying out analyses and studies in relation to the management of the ESIF funds;</p>	<p>Data and analysis are provided for decision-making and policy development:</p> <p>The preparation of a socio-economic analysis to track changes in the main social areas and for the</p>	<p>Resourcing of activities ensured</p>



<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
	<p>purposes of programming the new programming period, collecting data on the indicators for the implementation of the strategic documents and tracking progress in their implementation in the context of the preconditions (Monitorstat, NSI) -</p> <p>Analyses to review progress on programme implementation and the risk of loss of funds,</p> <p>Analyses related to reprogramming needs and programme modifications, coordination of programmes according to the changes in context, etc.</p> <p>Ensured data and analysis based decision making for policy making directorates and lead departments as well as managing authorities</p>	
<p>Develop the regulatory framework and implement activities to reduce excessive administrative burdens;</p>	<p>Administrative burden reduced through changes in the regulatory framework, introduction of simplified costs</p> <p>The quality of investments and the results of funded programmes have improved</p> <p>With the introduction of the the law on the management of EU funds, the following effects have been achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcoming the fragmentation of the regulatory framework characteristic of the first programming period; 	<p>Resourcing of activities ensured</p> <p>Capacity and institutional memory preserved and built upon to build on experience and lessons learned and to optimise the regulatory framework</p> <p>The ESIF system is reformed</p>



<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Optimisation of the system for managing the ESIF funds and for increasing its effectiveness and efficiency - Ensuring the necessary degree of sustainability and predictability of social relations and their regulations; - Establishing legal preconditions for the successful implementation of the programmes co-financed by the ESIF in the next programming periods. 	
<p>Maintenance of the RIC Activities to provide coordination, methodological support to the network of the RICs, as well as organizing training for the DIP staff;</p>	<p>The network is a key information channel for application opportunities and dissemination of information on project implementation in the 28 administrative districts of the country, as well as for the exchange of good practices.</p> <p>The capacity of the DIPs is being strengthened and in the new programming period (2021-2027) they will take on the role of mediators in the preparation of the integrated territorial investments and will be a key factor in the process of coordination of stakeholders at local level.</p>	<p>Resourcing of activities ensured Accumulated experience and expertise Equality achieved between administrative districts in terms of access to information Information of interest to all stakeholders is secured</p>
<p>Technical assistance to the horizontal structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and</p>	<p>Improved programming quality More effective and efficient management of the EU's Structural Funds is achieved</p>	<p>Resourcing of activities ensured Capacity and institutional memory preserved and built upon</p>



<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
<p>audit of the ESIF Provision of computers, printers and other equipment for the needs of the structures for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF</p> <p>Supply of stationery, copy paper, toners and other consumables for the needs of the structures</p> <p>Organisation of meetings and group events</p> <p>Preparation of studies and analyses</p> <p>Translation and interpretation services</p> <p>Purchase and maintenance of specialised software for the needs of the different units in the ESIF management structures</p>	<p>Administrative burden reduced</p> <p>The the law on the management of EU funds have been drafted</p> <p>The regulatory framework for the management and coordination of European funds under shared management has been updated</p> <p>The practices of the audit and certifying authority and the practices of the application of the regulations are aligned in order to avoid different treatment of beneficiaries in similar situations</p> <p>The material and technical aspects of the working environment have been improved</p>	<p>Continuity and preservation of institutional memory are ensured</p>
<p>Organisation of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee;</p> <p>Technical support to the staff of the CCU for the performance of their direct duties in relation to the coordination of the ESIF;</p>	<p>The meetings of the Committee and the work of its secretariat are ensured</p> <p>Ongoing coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the ESIF is carried out</p>	<p>Resourcing of activities ensured</p> <p>Capacity and institutional memory preserved and upgraded, which is an important part of maintaining and reforming the ESIF system and ensuring the functions of the The Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee</p>
<p>Organization and participation in trainings on issues related to the management of the ESIF funds for the staff of the specific beneficiaries under PA 4</p>	<p>Improved capacity and expertise to manage the ESIF through training</p>	<p>Resourcing of activities ensured</p> <p>Capacity and institutional memory preserved and built upon</p>



<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
<p>Participation of the beneficiaries' staff in working groups, workshops, initiatives for exchange of experience in relation to the management of the ESIF funds;</p>	<p>Improved coordination and implementation of the partnership principle through workshops, discussions, working groups and councils and through regular meetings of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee</p>	
<p>Support for capacity development of municipalities in the development and implementation of projects co-financed by the ESIF</p>	<p>Ensured capacity for project implementation and preparation of public procurement for the implementation of the ESIF investments</p>	<p>Resourcing of activities to improve capacity for project development and implementation Capacity and institutional memory preserved and built upon</p>
<p>Development and maintenance of the Information System Monitorstat.</p> <p>The system contains a statistical database of surveys of the National Statistical Institute, statistical authorities and agencies responsible for collecting information for monitoring various strategies and programmes. The system is centralised, web-based, with two main modules providing access to indicators and metadata from statistical surveys on national, European and international strategies and EU operational programmes for the period 2014-2020.</p>	<p>Improving strategic planning processes, monitoring the implementation of national and European strategies and management decision-making on policy implementation through the development of a statistical framework, procedures and an information collection system;</p> <p>Ensured ongoing monitoring of the result indicators of the operational programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period;</p> <p>System in place to track changes in macro indicators</p> <p>Achievement of the strategic objectives for e-government and sustainability of the information provided by the NSI to assess the implementation of the objectives under national, European and</p>	<p>Outsourcing to the lead institution that has the capacity and expertise to implement the activities Establishing coordination between the MA and the NSI for the development of result indicators for the operational programmes for the programming period 2014-2020</p>



<i>Supported activities/functions</i>	<i>Impact of the implementation of MP 4</i>	<i>Mechanisms contributing to impact/ factors for lack of impact</i>
	<p>international strategies and programmes;</p> <p>Improved administrative capacity of state institutions;</p> <p>Ensured e-government progress;</p> <p>Reduced paper-based paperwork, which has a positive impact on environmental protection.</p> <p>Improved processes and quality of strategic planning and policy monitoring</p>	

Impact of the implementation of PA 5

The main aspects of positive impact of the implementation of PA5 are assessed in terms of a well-functioning and predictable institutional management environment, good administrative capacity, capacity and motivation to work of the different actors in the management of EU support, transfer of capacity and knowledge for programming and management. However, a number of external factors partially hinder the achievement of positive change and present significant challenges throughout the life cycle of the Programme - an unstable political situation in the country and a dynamic regulatory environment, insufficient project preparation and implementation capacity of some beneficiaries, the significant socio-economic crises triggered by the Covid 19 pandemic and the military conflict in Ukraine. The inherited mechanisms and institutional knowledge from previous programming periods, the relatively closed life cycle of the Priority Axis interventions and the targeted efforts to develop management capacities have largely eliminated the negative impacts of external factors.

The specifics of the support under PA5 allow to outline three main aspects of impact: institutional environment, target groups and ensuring continuity, transfer of capacity and knowledge for programming and management in the next programming period. Positive impacts on these three aspects are derived from documentary evidence and conclusions already drawn on the contribution of priority interventions and the change induced. In addition, the impact assessment considers the effects achieved in their entirety, as direct and indirect, planned and unplanned. The analysis of external environmental factors, such as drivers or pressures, places the impact of specific interventions in the context of more global trends.



In terms of the **institutional environment**, the effects of the implementation of PA5 are planned and can be summarised as: building and maintaining well-functioning and predictable management and control systems, ensuring technical security and comparative stability of human resources. Beyond the support under the Priority Axis, the crucial factor for these positive impacts is, of course, the capital of knowledge and experience accumulated in the implementation of the two previous programmes OPAC and OPTA.

The overall impact of the Priority Axis on the **target groups** is the subject of a specific evaluation question. In this part of the analysis certain positive effects can be summarised, both for each of the target groups and in terms of improving interactions between them:

- Operational Programme Managing Authority staff - improving expertise and motivation for work, including capacity for personal professional development, professional self-confidence and competence;
- Candidates and beneficiaries under the different grant procedures - access to information and knowledge about the Programme, but also opportunities for improving the quality of project preparation and implementation, attracting additional resources in the form of partnerships and effective communication with the MA. The main mechanisms contributing to achieving these effects, although with variable success, have been developed and implemented in a targeted manner at the programming stage in the form of complex criteria for the evaluation of project proposals and methods for decreasing the administrative burden. Members of the OPGG Monitoring Committee, for whom support under PA5 is again linked to capacity building and conditions for participation in collective decision-making. Alongside the training provided and implemented, the priority supports different formats for the work of the Committee and the establishment of consultative structures in specific areas of support. For example, with the amendment of the Internal Rules for the work of OPGG, a Permanent Sub-Committee on "Increasing Citizen Participation in Policy Formulation and Monitoring" was established in 2017. In accordance with Article 23 of the Rules, the Sub-Committee assists the OPGG and the MA by examining, discussing and agreeing on documents related to the management and implementation of Specific Objective 3 "Increasing citizen participation in the process of shaping and monitoring policy implementation" under Priority Axis 2 "Effective and professional governance in partnership with civil society and business" of the OPGG.

The described procedure for the establishment of a sub-committee to the MC is an example of a mechanism supporting the capacity of both the MA itself and the MC in order to improve the quality of the procedures for supporting a specific target group, but also to ensure better interaction and active participation of the NGO sector in all stages of the implementation of support.

Last but not least, the contribution of all interventions under the Priority Axis to **capitalizing the experience and knowledge on the management and implementation of the OPGG** should be assessed as a basis for programming and implementation of the next programming period. The continuity and upgrading of the management and control systems from the different periods of absorption of the support from the ESIF, the accumulation of experience in the organisation of processes, the distribution of roles



and responsibilities, lessons learned, is a valuable asset with the potential to ensure the sustainability and future development of the institutional framework for management.

The above observations on the quality of the institutional and expert environment can probably explain the fact that during the interviews conducted with the representatives of the OPGG MA team, the expert opinions are united around that there are no particular difficulties related to the management and implementation of the priority of an internal institutional nature. The main reason for this is the fact that the whole life cycle of this element of the OP is controlled and managed, both at operational and strategic level, by one administration according to established procedures and standards.

However, there is a different assessment of the importance of a number of factors external to the programme, which have been a source of serious challenges almost throughout the period of implementation of the OPGG. Detailed information on this is contained in the Annual Implementation Reports.

First of all, the reports point to the dynamic political environment and the frequent change of governments in the country, which hinders the implementation of key projects of the OPGG, leads to lack of continuity in implementation, mainly in the structures of the central administration, delays in the conducting of public procurement, inability to adopt regulatory amendments necessary for the successful implementation and even the launch of certain projects.

Next, the OPGG is one of the most sensitive programmes in terms of changes in the regulatory environment. A typical example of this is the remote e-voting project of the Ministry of e-Government. Initially with SAEG as the beneficiary, the project was restructured after the closure of the agency and subsequently terminated as a result of the amendments to the Electoral Code adopted in 2022 and the abolition of e-voting.

Insufficient project implementation and management capacity of some of the programme beneficiaries is directly linked to low motivation and willingness to participate, factors that remain to a significant extent insurmountable for the OPGG. The conclusion is confirmed by the problems highlighted in the Annual Reports related to the implementation of the Programme and by the views expressed in the interviews. Together, both lead to a lack of quality project ideas, delays in the preparation and agreement of technical specifications, problems with procurement timelines and the quality of tender documentation.

The epidemic crisis triggered by the spread of the Covid 19 is a challenge with an ongoing effect on various structural elements of the management of the OPGG - the implementation of on-site inspections, the organisation of work processes and the continuous work from home of the MA team, the implementation of the programme's communication strategy and related attendance forums, training, meetings and other initiatives. In terms of management systems, the epidemiological situation is a significant pressure factor for adopting more flexible and alternative approaches, adapting implementation timeframes, systems and processes, new forms of communication and interaction between the different actors in the programme delivery cycle. In this sense, it should be noted that a large number of projects funded under the OPGG which foresee the implementation of trainings and events are also put to the test.



Last but not least, the military conflict in Ukraine and the subsequent wave of displaced persons and families on the territory of Bulgaria are the reason for a new reorganization of the Operational Programme and redirection of a significant resource of BGN 21 781 040.00 to the Programme for Humanitarian Assistance to Displaced Persons from Ukraine with Temporary Protection.

In addition to the specific implications of the impact of each of the above factors, the cumulative effect of their combined effect on the overall implementation of PA5 must also be considered. The significance of the impact justifies these factors to be identified as the cause of a number of negative trends in the overall socio-economic development of the country, respectively limiting the possibilities of the OPGG to fully realize the previously planned expected results, including those under PA5.

8.6. Impact on stakeholders and target groups

Evaluation question 3.6. What is the impact on stakeholders and target groups?

Impact on stakeholders and target groups of PA 4

The impact of PA 4 on the stakeholders and target groups can be summarised in the following few areas:

- **Transparency in the implementation of the ESIF.** The impact of the PA 4 projects is in terms of creating conditions for maximum transparency in the implementation of the ESIF - by providing information on the possibilities for applications, by providing information on the implementation of programmes and projects and by making stakeholders aware of the achievements of the implementation of the ESIF at national and regional level and the investments made. A key role in this process is played by the DIP and the CCU through the communication and publicity network, the Single Information Web Portal eufunds.bg and the UMIS.
- **Ensure partnership and participation in the programming and monitoring process of the ESIF programmes and the Partnership Agreement.** Another strand of stakeholder impact is to secure the programming process, including the involvement of all stakeholders in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement and securing the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee, respecting the principle of partnership and stakeholder participation.
- **Maintaining the capacity of the CCU and the system for programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF) -** by providing funds for salaries, the programme contributes to ensuring the functions of the CCU, the 'Audit of EU Funds' Executive Agency and NF for monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF funds. The CCU contributes to maximising the quality of programming of programmes and investments and the three units together contribute to compliance with the principles of transparency and sound financial management, effectiveness, efficiency and economy of expenditure.
- **Coordination and complementarity with national policies and programmes, as well as with other financial instruments (bilateral instruments, NPRR, etc.).** The CCU ensures the coordination of the different programmes, ensuring that there is no duplication of funding and maximising synergies between the different financial instruments.



The implementation of PA 4 of the Programme impacts on the following stakeholders:

- General public
- Candidates and beneficiaries of programmes financed by the ESIF
- Horizontal structures for the programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF (CCU, NF, the 'Audit of EU Funds' Executive Agency, AFCOS, etc.)
- Managing authorities of operational programmes
- Network of 28 RICs
- National executive institutions responsible for sectoral policies
- Local authority
- NGOs and SEPs
- Business
- IPC of the Partnership Agreement
- National Network of Information and Publicity Officers

For each of these target groups and stakeholders, the different effects and impact areas are outlined below:

Table 85 Impact on target groups and stakeholders under PA 4

Target group/stakeholder	Effects and areas of impact
<p>General public</p>	<p>Information, publicity and transparency of the implementation of the ESIF and high awareness of all stakeholders is ensured through the support of the Information and Publicity Policy Coordination Structures and the District Information Centres, the information and communication campaigns and other information and publicity actions. DIPs operate on a one-stop shop basis and work actively with MAs, supporting them in the implementation of information campaigns in the districts. From its establishment until December 2022, the DIPs have been working in the field of education and training. The DIPs have organised more than 10 540 public events, provided answers to more than 184 210 questions and carried out more than 76 370 publications in the media. The general public's awareness of EU cohesion policy has increased (share of the population aged 15+ who are informed about EU cohesion policy - 72.3%)</p> <p>These results give reason to believe that the work of the DIPs is one of the factors for the increased rate of realisation of funds under the operational programmes through the provision of adequate and timely</p>



Target group/stakeholder	Effects and areas of impact
	<p>information reaching a wide range of stakeholders. The functions that we have reviewed and the results achieved have also had an impact on improving the capacity of beneficiaries in terms of application processes and implementation of projects funded by the ESIF, given the data on the number of requests addressed to the network. In relation to the COVID 19 pandemic and all its consequences, the established public information mechanisms and the UMIS electronic system ensure the smooth running of all ongoing procedures in view of the measures taken in the country to limit the spread of the virus. The provision of a fully electronic environment has enabled all parties to work remotely and the development of modern information technology has made access and management possible from anywhere in the world, including through the use of mobile devices. Last but not least, when we talk about the pandemic, it should be noted that the UMIS platform has been a huge facilitator and has speeded up the procedure in terms of applying for COVID grants at a time when the businesses affected by the pandemic urgently needed a financial injection in order to continue operating.</p>
<p>Candidates and beneficiaries of programmes financed by the ESIF</p>	<p>Information, publicity and transparency of the implementation of the ESIF and high awareness of applicants/beneficiaries and all stakeholders on the possibilities to apply for the different operational programmes, information on the implementation of the programmes and projects is provided. Stakeholders are aware of the achievements of the implementation of the ESIF at national and regional level and the investments made.</p> <p>Establishment of a network of DIPs through which information on individual programmes and procedures can quickly reach potential beneficiaries.</p> <p>Information and communication materials and other necessary information and publicity actions are provided</p> <p>Equality between beneficiaries in the application process is ensured</p> <p>E-Application procedures have been simplified - as already mentioned the streamlined/paperless application and reporting process, which reduces the administrative burden on applicants, provides greater access to equal participation. The built capacity of</p>



Target group/stakeholder

Effects and areas of impact

the governance structures and the UMIS platform appear to be a huge facilitation and speed up the procedure in terms of applying for COVID grants at a time when the businesses affected by the pandemic urgently needed a financial injection to keep operating. The built capacity of the system was also reflected in terms of the rapid response and support actions taken to address the consequences of the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. EU Structural Funds have been one of the main sources of providing the necessary response to the needs of people fleeing the war. Support is deployed in terms of programming, contracting and first disbursements in the period May-September 2022, covering measures under the national programmes for humanitarian assistance to displaced persons from Ukraine. All programming, including the national methodology for the implementation of the simplified cost option to support the basic needs of refugees from Ukraine has been consulted and implemented in close cooperation with the Commission.

The administrative burden has been reduced - in terms of the administrative framework in the 2014-2020 programming period, many simplifications have been made, both in terms of the application procedures stemming from the law on the management of EU funds and in the Regulation concerning UMIS. The possibility of electronic application, implementation and reporting of projects through the EMIS facilitates the beneficiaries and the access to information. The investments made in UMIS under the OPGG in the 2014-2020 program period lead to a simplified/paperless application and reporting process, which reduces the administrative burden on applicants, ensures wider access to participation precisely due to the easing of the administrative burden, provides the opportunity for smooth processes. Transparency has been achieved, the capacity to use of the UMIS has been upgraded for all stakeholders, in-person trainings have been conducted and video trainings have been produced and disseminated for all stages and modules of the system. With the upgrading of UMIS modules, the level of transparency and accessibility to information have increased significantly, as evidenced by the high satisfaction rate achieved by UMIS users (89.61%);

The provision of information on application opportunities is ensured, in addition to the UMIS and through the Single Information Web Portal www.eufunds.bg, which by the end of 2022 recorded 11 586 282



Target group/stakeholder	Effects and areas of impact
	<p>unique page views and 1 704 131 users.</p> <p>Provision of information through Information System Monitorstat</p>
<p>Horizontal structures for the programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF (CCU, NF (CA), AFEU, AFCOS, State Aid Unit to the MF, NSI, PPA, NAMRB)</p>	<p>The capacity for the effective and efficient functioning of the ESIF management system has been upgraded and expanded - in particular the activities and capacity of the of the CCU, NF (CA), AFEU (AA), as well as structures and employees directly involved in certain aspects of ESIF's functioning (AFCOS, State Aid Unit to the Ministry of Finance, NSI, PPA, NAMRB - in terms of capacity at local level, etc.).</p> <p>The OPGG has contributed to maximising the quality of programming and investments, compliance with the principles of transparency and sound financial management, effectiveness, efficiency and economy of expenditure.</p> <p>The OPGG finances the functions of the CCU in coordinating the ESIF and achieving complementarity with national policies and programmes and other EU programmes and bilateral instruments. The OPGG contributes to ensuring the coordination of the different programmes. Through its functions, the CCU prevents double funding and ensures maximum synergy between the different financial instruments</p> <p>Improved the regulatory framework governing the operation of the ESIF system and reduced the administrative burden</p> <p>Capacity is maintained and sustainability is ensured by reducing turnover</p> <p>Capacity has been improved by ensuring participation in thematic trainings of individual units in the ESIF management system.</p> <p>The financial support and maintenance, including technical and material support, of the activities of the ESIF management system is ensured in order to perform the functions of</p>
<p>Managing authorities of operational programmes</p>	<p>Improved coordination of ESIF investments with other EU instruments, bilateral programmes and national co-financing (non-overlapping, demarcation and complementarity)</p> <p>Coordination of the regulatory framework for the implementation of the ESIF has been achieved</p>



Target group/stakeholder	Effects and areas of impact
	<p>The practice of control and audit of the ESIF funds is unified</p> <p>A unified system for application, reporting, monitoring and control of the implementation of the ESIF is established and maintained, which facilitates the work of the MA.</p>
<p>Network of 28 RICs</p>	<p>The work of the DIPs is ensured, creating conditions for sustainability and capacity development.</p> <p>The working model and business processes in the DIPs are ensured, which contribute to the awareness of beneficiaries and all stakeholders (support to the Information and Publicity Policy Coordination Structures and the District Information Centres, information and communication campaigns and other necessary actions to ensure information and publicity).</p> <p>Improved communication between DIPs and local stakeholders</p>
<p>National executive institutions responsible for sectoral policies</p>	<p>The institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and effective public communication in the process of preparation of the Partnership Agreement and programming of the Operational Programmes has been strengthened. The built capacity of the ESIF management structures are a huge facilitator and speed up the procedure in terms of applying for COVID grants at a time when the businesses affected by the pandemic urgently needed a financial injection to keep operating.</p> <p>Thanks to the response mechanisms put in place and through the use of the UMIS electronic platform, the following results have been achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprises supported under individual measures: • The operation "Support to micro and small enterprises to overcome the economic impact of the pandemic COVID-19" has supported more than 23,600 companies by providing liquidity and working capital⁹⁷ ; • Support for small businesses with a turnover of over 500,000

- ⁹⁷ In comparison, in the 2007-2013 programming period, a total of about 3,150 enterprises were supported (11,778 projects were implemented in the 2007-2013 period, of which 3,154 projects with business organisations as beneficiaries).



Target group/stakeholder	Effects and areas of impact
	<p>BG to overcome the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic" - support has been provided to over 4,450 businesses by providing liquidity and working capital;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The "Support to medium-sized enterprises to overcome the - economic impact of the pandemic COVID-19" financed 1 553 medium-sized enterprises; • Direct grant procedure BG16RFOP002-2.094 "Working capital support for SMEs affected by the temporary anti-epidemic measures through the implementation of the National Revenue Agency (NRA) support scheme" - over 3 200 companies affected by the temporary anti-epidemic measures have additional liquidity; • "Support for SMEs operating bus services to overcome the economic impact of COVID-19 through the implementation of a support scheme from the Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications (MTITC)" - 580 bus operators are funded; • "Support to SMEs in the tourism sector to overcome the economic impact of COVID-19 through the implementation of a Ministry of Tourism (MoT) support scheme" - 750 enterprises operating as tour operators or tourism businesses were supported.
Local authority	<p>Capacity to prepare and implement projects funded by the EU's Structural Funds has been improved.</p> <p>For the 2014-2020 period, municipalities have concluded contracts for a total of 5,070 projects for a total value of BGN 5.4 billion, with BGN 3.7 billion disbursed so far.</p>
NGOs, academia and SEPs	<p>Ensure the involvement and access of socio-economic partners, NGOs, academia and other stakeholders in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ESIF support.</p> <p>Ensured the application of the principle of partnership, leading to improved mechanisms for exchange of views, experience and knowledge between different stakeholders, strengthening opportunities for more creative problem solving, allowing effective</p>



Target group/stakeholder	Effects and areas of impact
	<p>management of multi-dimensional actions, needs assessment, dialogue (involving a wide range of stakeholders or perspectives) and multi-level interventions (national, regional and local) and ensuring the high degree of alignment of selected actions to real needs</p> <p>Access to information on indicators is provided through the Information System Monitorstat.</p>
Business	<p>A better awareness of the application possibilities and the role of the ESIF for sustainable development at national and regional level has been achieved.</p> <p>The administrative burden in the process of application and implementation of projects aimed at business is reduced</p> <p>Support to businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic is provided by allocating resources to address the economic impact and ensure safe working conditions in the face of a high risk of COVID-19 spread.</p>
The Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee	<p>The principle of partnership is ensured</p> <p>Stakeholders are involved in the process of programming and monitoring the implementation of the Partnership Agreement through participation in working groups on its preparation and through participation in meetings of the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committees.</p> <p>The programming and monitoring process is secured, including the involvement of all stakeholders in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement</p> <p>The functioning of the Monitoring Committees of the Agreement is ensured, respecting the principle of partnership and participation.</p>
National Network of Information and Publicity Officers	<p>Training, exchange of good practices and experience, development of the National Communication Strategy of the Operational Programmes for the 2014-2020 period have been ensured.</p> <p>A National Network of Information and Publicity Officers has been established as an effective coordination mechanism for cooperation and partnership between the institutions involved in the management of the ESIF and coordination of its regular work and meetings has been implemented; An active exchange of information between the experts</p>



Target group/stakeholder	Effects and areas of impact
	from the Central Information Office and the information and publicity officers in the respective Managing Authorities on the progress of the implementation of the planned communication activities of the operational programmes has taken place.

Impact on stakeholders and target groups of PA 5

The evaluation concludes that the evaluated budget lines under PA5 have contributed to a large extent to the proper functioning of the management and control system of the Operational Programme "Good Governance", have contributed to motivating and increasing the interest of the different target groups in the programme.

Priority Axis 5 Technical Assistance of the OPGG is structured around one horizontal specific objective: Effective and efficient management of the operational programme. The target groups of the priority axis are the employee of MA of OPGG, members and observers of the MC of OPGG, beneficiaries of the OPGG, the general public.

The results of the desk research, qualitative information gathered during interviews with employee of MA of OPGG, and the results of the surveys conducted were used to develop the analysis to the evaluation question⁹⁸.

The impact of the support from the OPGG on the target groups of the priority axis is measured in the long term period as opposed to effectiveness and efficiency, which measure the results of the implementation of the support at the time of its implementation.

The positive changes brought about by the implementation of the evaluated budget lines are related to improving the capacity of the structures involved in the management of the programme (MA and MC) and providing conditions for adequate progress assessment, risk management and programming, as well as improving the capacity and awareness of the potential beneficiaries of the operational programme, informing beneficiaries about their responsibilities in the implementation of the OPGG and improving their knowledge of the programme, raising public awareness of the implementation of the OPGG, as well as the positive role of the Commission.

The following benefits can be identified as the most significant for the target groups:

MA employees:

- Enhancing the expertise and qualifications of the staff involved in the management and implementation of the OPGG;

⁹⁸ Described in the Methodology section of the report



- Strengthening the administrative capacity for programme management and implementation;
- Improve capacity for coordination, communication and results-based management at all levels (strategic and operational);

In the Annual Control Reports for the Operational Programme "Good Governance" 2014-2020, covering four periods (01.07.2018 -30.06.2019; 01.07.2019 -30.06.2020; 01.07.2020 -30.06.2021; 01.07.2021 - 30.06.2022), prepared by the Executive Agency "Audit of European Union Funds", the overall assessment of the management and control system of the Operational Programme "Good Governance" for the reference periods is defined at level 2 "Functioning. Some improvement needed". The residual error rate of the programme for the reference periods is below the materiality threshold of 2% of the declared expenditure of the programme.

Impacts on the beneficiaries of the OPGG

- Increased interest of the beneficiaries of the programme, as well as increasing their capacity to implement projects;
- Ensuring transparency in terms of procedures, objectives and decision-making;
- Improving the planning, management and monitoring capacity of the beneficiaries themselves under the different priority axes of the OP.

According to the data available in UMIS 2020, the competitive selection procedures are recognisable among potential beneficiaries of the programme and there is interest in them:

Table 86 Project proposals submitted and approved under the competitive selection procedures

Procedure number	Name of procedure	Number of project proposals submitted (PP)	Number of approved PPs	Number of PPs on the reserve list	Number of rejected PPs
BG05SFOP001-3.003	Citizen control over the judiciary reform	148	56	44	47
BG05SFOP001-2.025	Increasing civic participation in the implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation	238	191	0	47
BG05SFOP001-2.009	Enhancing civil participation in processes of policy and legislation formulation, implementation and monitoring	220	122	50	39
BG05SFOP001-2.019	Specialised training for the territorial administration	71	67	0	4



BG05SFOP001-2.006	Specialised training for central administration	58	47	0	11
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Source : UMIS2020

968 project proposals have been submitted under all the OPGG procedures, of which 710 have been approved (73.35%), 94 have been included in the reserve list (9.71%) and 150 project proposals have been rejected (15.5% of all submitted). The rejected project proposals (148) were mainly submitted under the grant procedures through selection of project proposals, only 2 were under direct grant award procedure. The above gives reason to conclude that a sufficient number of well prepared project proposals are submitted under the programme, which contributes to the results achieved.

Table 87 Total number of project proposals submitted under the OPGG

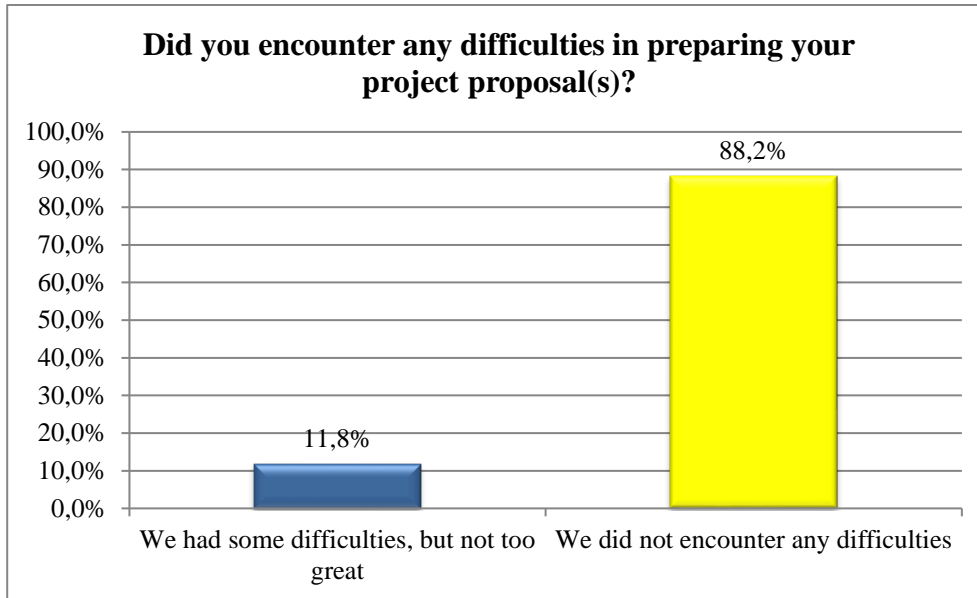
Total number of FPs submitted	Total number of approved PPs	Total number of PPs on the reserve list	Total number of rejected PPs
968	710	94	150

Source: UMIS 2020

Indicative of the quality of the Application Guidelines and the Guidelines for the implementation of the projects under the programme is the opinion of the beneficiaries who participated in the competitive selection procedures for the interventions to strengthen the civil control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary. An extremely high percentage of respondents, 88.2%, indicated that they had no difficulties in preparing their project proposals, while the remaining 11.8% indicated that they had difficulties, but not major ones. The assessment was similar for the package of documents for the preparation of project proposals, which according to the respondents was understandable and clear for the applicants under the procedures.



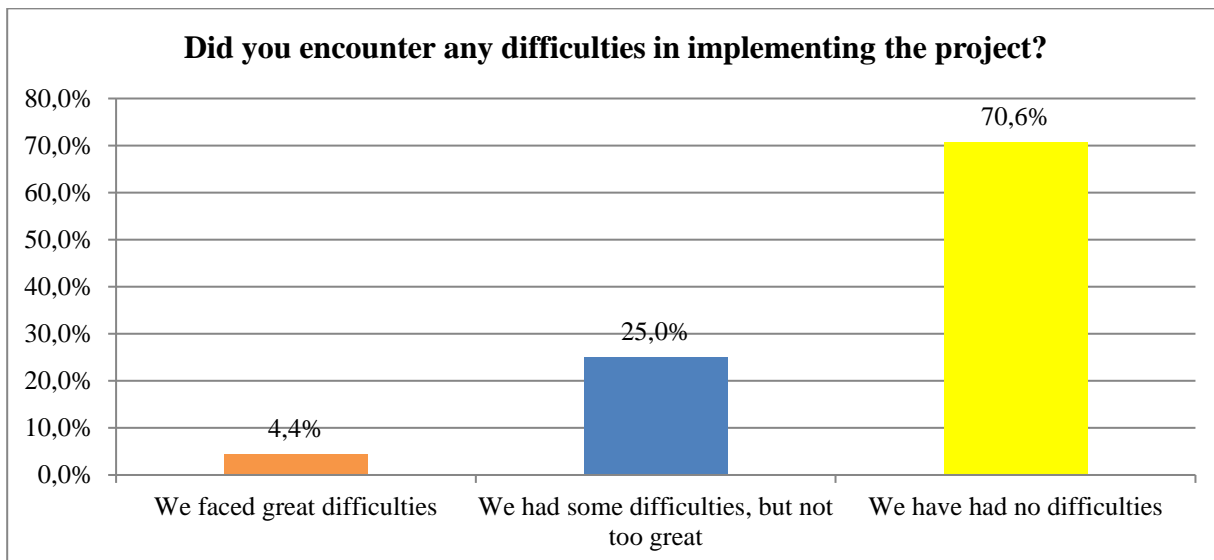
Figure 21. Difficulties in project preparation



Survey of NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of projects funded by the OPGG.

The same respondents answered that they had not experienced any significant difficulties in the implementation of the projects. 70.6% had no difficulties and 25% had minor difficulties. Only 4.4% encountered major difficulties.

Figure 22. Difficulties in project implementation



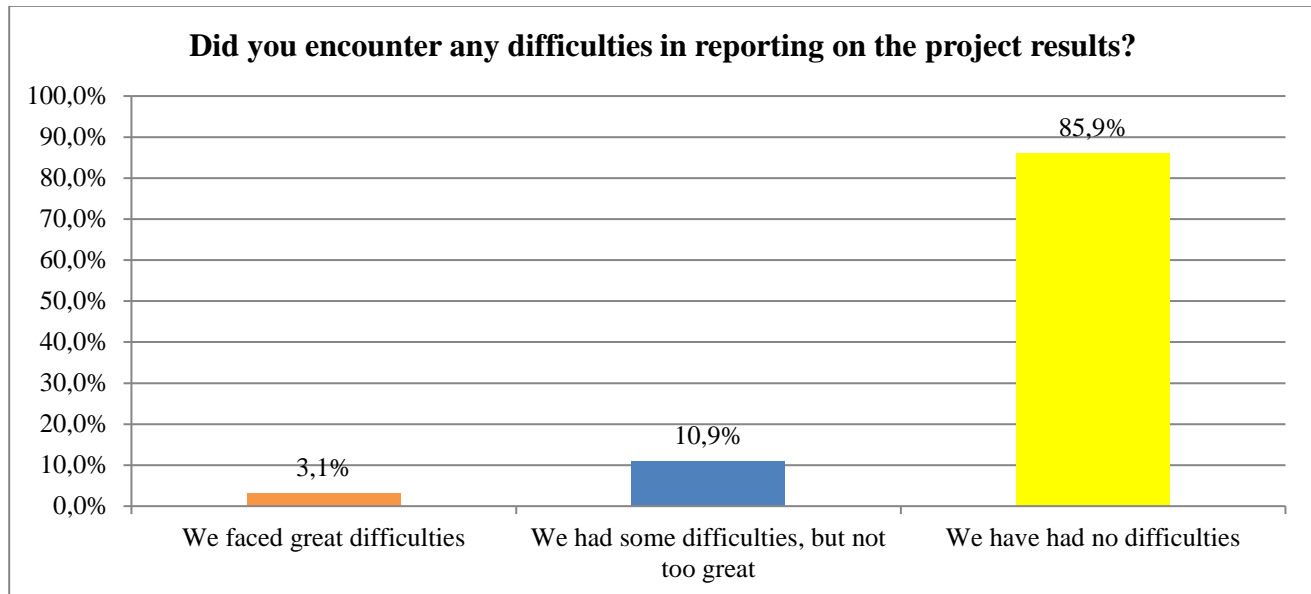
Survey of NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of projects funded by the OPGG.

With regard to accountability in the implementation of administrative contracts, 85.9% of the beneficiaries who participated in the competitive selection procedures for the interventions to strengthen the civil control



over the activities of the administration and the judiciary indicated that they had no difficulties in reporting on their projects. 10.9% of the respondents had some difficulties, but not very great, and only 3.1% had great difficulties.

Figure 23. Project reporting difficulties



Survey of NGOs and SEPs, beneficiaries of projects funded by the OPGG.

The regular communication and coordination at operational level between the responsible programme experts and the project teams of the individual beneficiaries was pointed as a good practice during the interviews with employee of MA of OPGG. As indicated in our answer to the previous evaluation question this practice is a marker of a change in the management paradigm where the whole process of programming, implementation, monitoring and reporting is understood as a continuous and coherent cycle.

8.7. Impact on the implementation of horizontal principles

Evaluation question 3.7. What is the impact on the implementation of the horizontal principles?

The programme contributes greatly to the implementation of the cross-cutting principles. These are set out and implemented both in the framework of procedure and programme management and in the implementation of individual project activities.

The activities implemented contribute to sustainable development as well as to the promotion of gender equality, non-discrimination and partnership.

The OPGG has set out the following horizontal principles which are consistent with the implementation of the European and national legislative framework:



- **Sustainable Development** - The programming and implementation process of the OPGG promotes environmental protection requirements, resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, resilience to natural disasters, and risk management prevention. In particular, these programme principles are reflected in the following project requirements: support for the development of an environmentally friendly administration (paperless operation, green public procurement, etc.), waste management, building a more competitive low carbon economy where resources are used in an efficient and sustainable way, preventing biodiversity loss, improving business conditions.
- **Promoting equality between men and women and non-discrimination** - promoting equality between men and women and taking into account the social aspects of gender; preventing discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, taking into account the needs of the different target groups at risk of such discrimination; ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities. Measures to promote equal opportunities and prevent any discrimination based on sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic characteristics, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation are included in the application guidelines and in the approved projects.
- **Partnership** - stakeholder consultation, public consultation, etc.

The principles of equal opportunities, gender equality and prevention of discrimination are subject to monitoring and evaluation both at the individual project level and at the priority axis level. Actions for:

- Incorporation of the principles into the text of the Programme
- Incorporating the principles into the project evaluation and selection process.
- Analysis of the implementation of horizontal principles, including equal opportunities, gender equality and prevention of discrimination;
- Advising beneficiaries on the forms and ways of incorporating the principle of equal opportunities, gender equality and prevention of discrimination in their proposals;

In the framework of the implementation of the programme, the horizontal principles are respected both at the level of preparation and submission of the project proposals and in the process of implementation of the project activities. The projects implemented take into account the following assurance of horizontal principles:

1. **Sustainable development** - Within the projects, only some of the beneficiaries address the principle of sustainable development among the horizontal principles they respect. Those of them that pay attention to this principle indicate that they will apply the principle of sustainable development *by* encouraging and monitoring the application of environmentally friendly practices in their work (e.g. minimising the use of paper, plastic at every possible opportunity, including when organising meetings, conducting correspondence, training, etc.). In the process of project implementation, they promote the optimal use of resources in an efficient and sustainable way, conducting green procurement, etc. Among the sustainable development principles mentioned are



the upgraded professional skills of the employees, which will be used in daily work in the long term. This will lead to positive results in the performance of their tasks in the future and the introduction of sustainable good working practices.

Among the key projects that make a significant contribution to sustainable development, especially by minimising the use of paper and plastic, are projects that support the development of the UMIS functionalities. By upgrading the functionalities of the UMIS, not only has paper been saved from all project proposals, technical and financial reports and additional documents, but the level playing field between applicants has been increased, as they face a level playing field regardless of their geographical location and distance from the managing authority. According to information published on the front page of the information system, 48 000 trees have been saved so far. 55 566 contracts of 40 743 beneficiaries are reported and managed through the platform.

2. **Promoting gender equality and non-discrimination** - projects demonstrate compliance with policies to promote gender equality and non-discrimination. The main areas in which this principle has been respected are:
 - a. In the application and recruitment processes, beneficiaries have taken the necessary steps to ensure equal access for all stakeholders. They have respected the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of sex, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The criteria for recruitment and for assessing the quality of work performed by employees were the level and type of education, qualifications and work experience.
 - b. No gender quota has been introduced
 - c. The activities carried out within the structures were accessible to all employees, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, etc. Project activities exclude any discrimination and are based on objective criteria for recruitment and selection of participants. The inclusion of employees in the projects is guided by their professional competences and job profile;
 - d. In the performance of their functional duties and choice of professional development training, men and women in the beneficiaries' structures were entitled on equal terms to choose and develop their professional and personal capacities, as well as to improve their competences and specific knowledge.
 - e. Some of the beneficiaries indicated that the buildings housing their structures provided equal opportunities for physical access for persons with disabilities. Some of them also take physical accessibility into account when selecting halls and other venues for public hearings, seminars, trainings, etc.
3. **Promotion of the partnership principle** - This principle is present both in terms of the ESIF coordination functions that the OPGG supports and within the implementation of the programme itself. Stakeholder involvement is a key principle both in the programming, implementation and monitoring of the Partnership Agreement and the Operational Programmes (supported by the



horizontal coordination of the ESIFs) and in individual projects. Depending on their objectives and content, the implemented projects ensure the organisation and strengthening of partnerships with all stakeholders, with their representatives participating in the Partnership Agreement Monitoring Committee and individual programmes. This is done: through the establishment and strengthening of cross-sectoral links, stakeholder consultations, workshops, public hearings, etc., and in the context of partnership and participation principles. The partnership principle is applied continuously in the coordination and communication processes between the different structures - both in the management of the ESIF funds and in the implementation of the sectoral policies that the ESIF supports. Coordination and communication includes interaction with other structures and stakeholders, in the processes of planning activities in line with the objectives and priorities of the Programme, in advising managing authorities in the processes of monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the implementation of the ESIF. In addition to the principle of partnership, the principles of transparency and dialogue shall be respected. These aim at ensuring stakeholders that activities are implemented in a transparent and shared information environment. Projects are implemented in a dialogical mode with stakeholders and in full transparency in order to communicate effectively and to build trust and positive attitudes towards the implementation of the objectives of the Programme and the ESIF Funds. The choice of channels and means of information is a prerequisite for equal treatment of the recipients of information and its timely dissemination.

In addition, the Programme contributes to capacity building for compliance with the horizontal principles and the partnership principles - i.e. the inclusion of these aspects in the Programme creates an attitude and standards for their compliance among the administration, representatives of the judiciary and civil society structures, while at the same time the individual beneficiaries in their work have an attitude and implement the partnership principles and seek sustainability and impact on the overall environment, on policies and reforms. The projects within the PA 2: Effective and professional governance in partnership with the civil society and the business, as a logic of action are based on the principle of partnership and build capacity both in the civil sector and in the administrations to build a culture of civil society participation in decision-making processes and policy implementation.

In project implementation, the principle of equality and partnership is ensured through equal listening to and consideration of views and proposals, support for equal involvement in activities according to functional characteristics within and between management structures, and ensuring equal access to information.

In addition to the impact on the implementation of the horizontal principles, the implementation of the OPGG has an impact on the macroeconomic indicators of the country, as measured by the macroeconomic model CIBILA version 2.0. As the programme is small, the impact assessment is at programme level and not on individual axes as is the case for other operational programmes.



Figure 24 Effects of the implementation of the OPGG on macroeconomic indicators

IMPLEMENTATION EFFECTS OF OPGG 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%
HICP inflation	0.1%
Budget balance (% of GDP)	0.03 p.p.

Source: MF, SIBILA 2.0, Cumulative total effect from 2014 to end of the year concerned

The main focus of the OPGG is on improving the performance of state institutions as well as 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 estimation of the CIBILA version 2.0 model, this impact is reflected in an increase in private investment and economic growth, with an increase of 0.2% and 0.1% respectively by mid-2022 on both macroeconomic indicators. 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, as the improved business environment will contribute to attracting new investments and creating new jobs.

8.8. Additional questions

Within Research Task 3, the following additional question was formulated:

Additional evaluation question 3.8. Have the technical assistance funds contributed to strengthening the capacity of the specific beneficiaries concerned?

Virtually all technical assistance funds contribute to strengthening the capacity of the specific beneficiaries concerned. Capacity building can be systematised along the following lines:

- Training for staff and upgrading their knowledge and skills to perform the key functions of programming, monitoring, management, control, coordination, certification and audit of the ESIF (CCU, NF (CA), AEUF (AA), AFCOS, State Aid Unit to the Ministry of Finance, NSI, PPA, NAMRB);
- Investing in capacity for regulatory development (including streamlining of all laws and regulations as well as capacity development to reduce administrative burden and streamline project preparation, implementation and reporting processes.



- Capacity building to align audit and certification body practice
- Investments in capacity by improving facilities and working conditions (purchase of equipment, software, etc. for the needs of the units concerned)
- Improving the capacity of local authorities through the NAMRB project, which invests in the skills of municipal staff for the preparation and implementation of projects financed through the ESIF and the skills for the preparation of public procurement for the implementation of ESIF investments.
- Investment in the capacity of the DIP - human resource provision and investment in the knowledge and skills of DIP staff to carry out awareness raising activities for beneficiaries and all stakeholders at local level
- Support to the information and publicity policy coordination structures for the preparation of information and communication campaigns and other necessary information and publicity actions
- Investment in capacity to maintain and develop the UMIS in line with the needs of target groups and stakeholders and advances in technology
- Investments in capacity to improve dialogue with the European Commission and its structures, as well as capacity to participate in working groups, workshops, experience-sharing initiatives in relation to the management of the ESIF funds
- Investing in capacity to participate in decision-making processes at EU level (participation in joint meetings, working groups, councils, etc.) and improving coordination with EC structures
- Upgrade and develop the capacity to commission and produce analyses of system needs, including capacity for evidence-based and data-driven decision-making
- Improving the capacity for strategic planning and monitoring of the implementation of national and European strategies and management decision-making for policy implementation through the development of a statistical framework, procedures and information collection system; Improving the capacity to ensure ongoing monitoring of the outcome indicators of the operational programmes for the 2014-2020 program period;

It should be noted that the expert evaluations of the implementation of PA 5 do not register any particular difficulties and challenges, both at the programming stage and at the implementation stage of the priority axis. The main reason for this is the fact that the whole life cycle of this element of the OP is controlled and managed, both at operational and strategic level, according to established procedures and standards. The main challenge is identified as the Covid-19 crisis and the subsequent implementation constraints and delays. However, the extent of the impact of external factors on PA 5 is assessed as minimal.

The specificity of the support under PA 5 allows to outline three main aspects of impact: institutional environment, target groups and ensuring continuity, transfer of capacity and knowledge for programming and management in the next programming period. Positive impacts on these three aspects are derived from documentary evidence and expert assessments of the relevance of the planned objectives and the results achieved, effectiveness and efficiency of implementation.

In terms of the **institutional environment**, the effects are planned insofar as PA 5 supports the establishment of well-functioning and predictable management and control systems, ensures technical



security and the comparative stability of human resources. Beyond the support under the Priority Axis, the crucial factor for these positive impacts is of course the capital of knowledge and experience accumulated in the implementation of the two previous programmes OPGG and OPTA.

The overall impact of the Priority Axis on the **target groups** is the subject of a specific evaluation question, but also in this part of the analysis certain positive effects can be summarised, both for each of the target groups and in terms of improving interactions between them:

- Operational Programme Management Board staff - improving expertise and motivation for work, including capacity for personal professional development, professional self-confidence and competence;
- Beneficiaries of the different procedures for granting - access to information and knowledge about the Programme, but also opportunities for improving the quality of project preparation and implementation, attracting additional resources in the form of partnerships and effective communication with the MA. The main mechanisms contributing to achieving these effects, although with variable success, have been developed and implemented in a targeted manner at the programming stage in the form of complex criteria for the evaluation of project proposals and methods for easing the administrative burden.
- Members of the Monitoring Committee, for whom support under PA 5 is again linked to capacity building and conditions for participation in collective decision-making.

Last but not least, the contribution of all interventions under the Priority Axis for **capitalizing the experience and knowledge on the management and implementation of the OPGG** should be assessed as a basis for programming and implementation of the next programming period. The accumulation of management and control systems, experience in the organisation of processes, distribution of roles and responsibilities, lessons learned, can be a valuable asset to ensure the sustainability and future development of the institutional framework for management.



9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1. Conclusions Task 2

9.1.1. Effectiveness and efficiency

Investments to increase civic participation and strengthen civic control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary in the implementation of SO 3 of Priority Axis 2 and SO 1 of Priority Axis 3 have achieved the planned results and are highly effective as measured by the result indicator (at the level of specific objective). Although some of the projects under PA 2 are still under implementation, the data confirms the high efficiency and the possibility to achieve the objectives. The only exception is the CO20 indicator, which will not be 100% achieved, largely due to the delay in the launch of the two procedures under PA 2 due to the changes required in the Operational Programme concerning the implementation of the activities under SO 3 of PA 2 through a global grant.

The chosen management approach without an intermediate unit, as well as the fact that the MA of the OPGG is supported in the process of programming and evaluation of project proposals by an external contractor with experience in managing procedures for the NGO sector, selected under the Public Procurement Act, contributes to the effective management of processes, providing specific and precise instructions to applicants and beneficiaries, which has led to the achievement of the planned results.

In addition to the known delays in the start of procedures, the quality of the submitted project proposals could have contributed to the lower rate of implementation of indicator CO20 in the procedures under PA2. It should be noted that although partially met, this indicator is expected to be at least 85% completed by the end of 2023. According to Article 5(5) of Implementing Regulation (EU) No 215/2014⁹⁹ the overall targets of a priority are considered to be met if all indicators included in the implementation framework have reached at least 85% of the value of the overall target by the end of 2023, which would be relevant for PA2 when 85% of the above indicator is reached.

The means to achieve the objectives and results have been invested efficiently and cost-effectively, and some of the planned results have been exceeded.

The practice adopted by the MA for the introduction of a fixed hourly rate for the beneficiary/partner's staff is a positive one under PA2. This facilitates both the applicants in the process of preparing project proposals and the beneficiaries in the process of accounting for staff costs, in addition to minimising errors related to incorrect calculation of this type of costs. Another positive practice is to provide a financial justification with project proposals, indicating the sources of information on the basis of which the corresponding figures

⁹⁹ COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) No 215/2014 of 7 March 2014 laying down provisions for the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common 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 Fund



for each direct cost have been derived, with the exception of the remuneration costs of the staff of the Applicant and/or Partner(s) and the mission costs of the staff of the Applicant/Partner(s).

A flat rate of up to 40% of eligible direct personnel costs is applied under PA3, which reduces the administrative burden as well as contributing to a better use of funds (lower error rate). At the application stage it is a requirement that eligible personnel costs are justified. Thus, a budget framework is set at the application stage which prevents inefficient planning - beneficiaries have to plan realistically and justify their planned staff costs. Additionally, the use of a flat rate reduces potential errors in awarding and accounting for other types of costs, thus also reducing the administrative burden and simplifying reporting. The use of a flat rate contributes to the efficient use of the funds included in the 40%.

Once the implementation of the second procedure under PA2 is completed, it will be possible to make a comprehensive comparative analysis of which of the three financing methods leads to the greatest efficiency and economy in the spending of funds by beneficiaries (the one used in the two procedures under PA2 or the application of a flat rate under the procedure under PA3), and also which is accompanied by a reduction in the administrative reporting burden.

9.1.2. Realistic objectives

The planned objectives and the expected results of the procedures aimed at achieving SO 3 under OPGG PA 2 show a relatively high degree of realism. The positive assessment of the implementation is confirmed, as the interventions foreseen under PA2 to promote citizen participation in the process of formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies are justified and justified in the context of the level of development of social capital in Bulgaria.

However, the state of the civil sector and the level of civic activity at the end of the implementation of the Operational Programme show rather negative trends, with the dominant influence of a number of factors of the socio-economic environment: the specific political context, the capacity of the civil sector and the readiness of the administration and the institutions of the judiciary to partner with the NGO sector. Thus, the results achieved under the Priority Axis have had a rather countervailing effect in terms of overall sector development and citizen participation in decision-making processes.

The positive contribution of the OPGG to the promotion of the legal aid system and alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes through the investments implemented under PA 3 is undeniable. The set indicators have been achieved in an effective and efficient manner and with realistic planning of support inputs. However, the evaluation of the funded procedure BG05SFOP001-3-003 does not provide a basis for considering that a significant effect has been achieved in enhancing the role of civil society in the development, monitoring and evaluation of judicial reform strategies. This is also largely due to the specific political context in which the activities have been implemented, the capacity of the civil sector and the willingness of the judiciary institutions to partner with the NGO sector, as well as the complexity of the reforms in the judiciary and the difficult to reach consensus on the direction and parameters of change in the judiciary.



9.1.3. Contribution of the support from the OPGG to increase citizen participation and strengthen citizen control over the activities of the administration and the judiciary

The implemented projects under PA 2 and the results achieved show that the set objectives in terms of improving the environment for Civil society organizations' participation have been achieved, which is a significant contribution of the support of the OPGG. The programme, through the funding of the projects, has created an environment and an opportunity to make suggestions for improvements in the activities of the administration. If the contribution of the support is seen through the prism of the high number of recommendations made within the framework of the PA2 projects, it can be concluded that the interventions implemented have had a direct impact on increasing the activity of NGOs and SEP in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation. NGOs and SEPs themselves recognise the value of their participation in policy-making processes and see the civil society as an important instrument to enable this participation to be supported. CSOs are active in generating project ideas, preparing and submitting projects and in their implementation, including through the formulation of a large number of recommendations to the institutions. The documents and recommendations developed by the projects and addressed to the competent authorities, together with a set of analytical reports, good practices and analyses of stakeholders' views, also make a useful contribution to improving policy-making processes. In order to be more actively used by all stakeholders, it is important to promote them in a sustainable way. As the requirement to publish project outputs on the beneficiaries' web pages cannot be monitored by the OPGG for a long period of time after project completion, consideration could be given to a section on the eufunds.bg portal where all reports produced under the projects could be shared in an appropriately organised space. The products produced are important for policy-making institutions and enrich knowledge and experience in the different sectors by systemizing useful knowledge and information, good practices or analyses that can be of direct use for their work in policy development and implementation at national and regional level in a significantly longer period after the projects have ended. Due to the frequent changes of political and expert staff in administrations, it is important that this knowledge is accessible for a longer period of time and is available for anyone involved in policy work to find.

Judicial reform is a long and complex process and the implementation of the projects under PA3 is part of the process of creating a model/mechanism for dialogue with civil society and contributes to increasing citizen participation and control over judicial reform. At the moment, no general conclusion can be drawn that the implemented activities have made a significant contribution to changing the processes of work and reform of the judiciary. The reasons are many and are related to factors external to the NGO sector - the general context of the reform, the ongoing social and political processes, the complexity of the matter and the specificities and complexity of the institutions of the judiciary, the political context, the lack of legislative initiative to adopt the proposals made, etc. It would be unrealistic to expect that the NGO sector can be a leading factor in this process. Rather, the implemented projects provide an opportunity to accumulate analysis, knowledge, research on good practices and models to be used by other experts or institutions of the judiciary in the future. Through the accumulated knowledge and experience and through the beginning of a dialogue on key issues of judicial reform, CSOs engage in this process and put pressure for change, highlight accumulated problems, systematise expectations. Providing targeted funding for this



type of project is a step in the right direction in terms of establishing a policy of dialogue and exchange of information between the judiciary and the civil sector, as well as in terms of monitoring the activities of the judiciary.

It should be noted that it is still difficult for the representatives of the judiciary to fully accept and acknowledge the partnership with the NGO sector. There is still a lack of capacity among the judiciary to benefit from the analysis, opinions and recommendations of the NGO sector. Often, the judiciary needs more time to understand and accept the ideas of the NGO sector, which usually come from a different social context (best practice research) or are too cutting-edge, or their implementation requires more resources or a scale of change for which the systems are not ready. Slow reform processes and the conservatism of the judiciary and the institutions of the judiciary condition the fact that the interventions implemented cannot have an impact on making significant changes in the way the responsible institutions and bodies implement reforms in the judiciary. In the period under review, the conditions for achieving legislative changes and political consensus were not favourable for much of the time, so few of the proposed changes could be implemented. Cultural patterns persist among magistrates which are not conducive to the effectiveness of the judiciary and its functioning by European standards, including in terms of interaction with civil society. For the most part, the system tends to resist one or other reforms due to a simple reluctance to expose itself to change, with potentially unpredictable consequences.

9.1.4.Changes after the interventions

The projects implemented under PA2 have been able to achieve more tangible changes due to the larger number of projects and the wide range of topics and areas of their impact. They have a positive impact on the processes of citizen control and policy monitoring and catalysing dialogue between the civil sector and the administration. The implemented schemes show that CSOs are active in generating project ideas, in preparing and submitting projects and in their implementation, including by formulating recommendations to the institutions. The environment has been activated and partnerships have been established, which would help for sustainable interaction between the administration and the civil sector in the future. We can see from the high percentage of recommendations taken on board and implemented in the PA2 projects that we have had an impact on the administration from the civil sector. If we examine the change that has occurred as a result of the interventions in terms of the way they are addressed, it is rather positive - the administration accepts and implements a large number of the proposals made. There are structural preconditions for citizen control and citizen participation and it can be concluded that the interventions implemented have laid the basis for building a model in which the administration enters into dialogue with civil society organisations and takes into account the proposals of the civil sector, which in turn is a prerequisite for building a sustainable partnership in governance. The fact that, on the basis of the procedures thus programmed, a considerable group of beneficiaries and their partners focus on the work of the public administration in a variety of policy areas is in itself beneficial for the administration. Their work becomes more transparent, there is partnership, ideas are exchanged and monitoring and control is carried out. The implemented interventions lay the foundation for building a model in which on the one hand civil society organizations



are active participants in the processes of formulating, implementing and monitoring public policies implemented by the administration, and on the other hand the administration partners with and addresses the proposals of the civil sector, which in turn is a prerequisite for building a sustainable partnership in governance.

The PA3 procedure has contributed to increasing the number of NGOs actively involved in the process of developing recommendations for improving the work of the judiciary, researching good practices, promoting and creating the necessary conditions for the introduction of alternative methods for resolving legal disputes. The implemented projects on alternative methods of legal dispute resolution are important for their promotion among both citizens and professionals. Although the Institute has been in existence since 2004, public awareness of it is extremely low, which is a deficit that these projects seek to address.

It can be expected that, although in the initial phase, the environment for interaction and dialogue between the NGO sector and the institutions of the judiciary created as a result of the support under PA3 will have its beneficial effect in the short and long term. Implementing reforms together with citizens, in an open dialogue and partnership, would also help to improve the efficiency of the judiciary institutions in the future and increase public confidence in them. Although at the moment we cannot report a significant change in citizen control over the activities of the judiciary, rather the impact has been in the direction of activating organisations that have an interest and expertise in issues related to the judiciary. At the moment, one of the visible direct effects is that OPDU supports the activity and enables the implementation of the ideas of civil society organisations in addition to and as a corrective to the judicial authorities. This support is an important instrument and the foundations laid by these activities should be continued, which would have a positive effect on increasing the transparency of the work of the judiciary and opening it up to citizens.

Nearly half of the beneficiaries under PA3 describe their interaction with the judiciary in relation to the implementation of project activities as "rather formal", with 7 out of 53 funded project proposals implemented in partnership with the judiciary, which shows that the environment is still rather conservative in terms of partnering with the civil sector. On the positive side, however, a higher percentage of beneficiaries received some feedback on their proposals/recommendations, which in turn can be seen as a positive impact of the implementation of the procedure on the judiciary. It is not possible to speak of significant changes in the way the responsible institutions and bodies implement the reforms in the judiciary and the use of alternative methods for the resolution of legal disputes, rather we can speak of an impact in terms of steps taken to open up this conservative environment to civil society actors and to build a partnership with the sector as an equal and important actor in the reform process. Restoring public confidence in the judiciary requires the direct involvement of citizens and their representatives in key management decisions and oversight in order to achieve transparency. The projects implemented under PA3 with the support of OPGG are a means to achieve this objective.

9.1.5. Impact on stakeholders and target groups

The civil society partners have succeeded in creating a mechanism that allows different points of view to be heard - it has activated the environment for civic participation, civil society organisations recognise the



programme and the meaning of their participation, seeing the CSP as an important tool that supports their efforts and capacity to participate in public policy-making processes. With the experience gained and dialogue established, both the administration and CSOs are beginning to recognise that successful public policies are made when they are research-based, data-driven and evidence-based. Through the implemented projects, CSOs complement the public sector with analysis and research, highlight and systematize problems and possible solutions to overcome them, analyze good practices. This culture should become the norm by further strengthening the dialogue and partnership between the civil sector and public institutions and making their interaction sustainable. The implementation of the CSP shows that partnership with civil society is a very important prerequisite for implementing the necessary changes in public policies, for catalyzing reforms in the administrative services sector and the judiciary. The activation of the civil sector provokes more transparency and accountability of the administration, while at the same time administrations benefit from constructive dialogue and partnership with the civil sector.

Unlike the administration, which has been building capacity for successful cooperation with civil society and policy coordination for years, the judiciary remains considerably more conservative in its interaction with civil society organisations. Although the number of projects implemented under PA3 is small, the activity of the organisations that have been involved will have a positive impact on the environment for participation in the medium term - on the one hand, due to the capacity built and partnership models established, on the other hand, through the analyses accumulated, good practices studied, proposals made, documents produced. The implemented projects aimed at enhancing the role of civil society in the development, monitoring and evaluation of judicial reform strategies are expected to contribute to increasing public confidence in the judiciary and the rule of law.

9.1.6.Unintended effects

Given the specificities of the interventions, the evaluation did not identify any unintended effects, as the nature of the activities funded is unlikely to exceed the objectives set or go beyond the expected outcomes and impacts. The projects implemented under the two priority axes are the basis for building a model of interaction in which, on the one hand, CSOs are active participants in the processes of planning, implementation and control of public policies and monitoring of the activities of the administration and the judiciary, and, on the other hand, the administration partners and addresses the proposals of the civil sector, which in turn is a prerequisite for building a sustainable partnership in governance.

As a partial unplanned effect, it can be noted that the capacity built in NGOs is transferred to the administration through individuals from the third sector who enter the institutions (in particular sectors of the executive or legislative power), which is a very important consequence of the overall change in the environment and empowerment of the third sector, developing its capacity and increasing its role in public life and the participation of civil society organizations in the process of drafting and monitoring public policies. This is a further prerequisite for achieving sustainability and partnership.



9.2.Recommendations Task 2

It would be good to continue supporting measures and projects that include monitoring activities by civil society organisations on the policies and services implemented and provided by the different administrations. Modernising public administration, increasing the capacity of civil society organisations, and effective interaction between them is an ongoing task, so support for initiatives that set themselves such objectives should continue. There is a need to provide a mechanism for tracking how the administration and its structures have responded to the proposals, how many of them have adopted them in their work, in their strategic documents and policies, how many of them approve of the proposals made but will implement them gradually and how many of them are unable or unwilling to introduce and implement the NGO recommendations. When setting indicators related to making suggestions/recommendations, it should be possible to report on the indicator not only by the beneficiaries declaring the facts, but also by the administrations themselves validating the information. In this respect, the introduction of a procedure whereby administrations give written feedback (letter, recommendation, etc.) and indicate their attitude to the recommendations made and their intention to take them into account could be a useful step to improve monitoring and better assess the effects of the projects implemented. This could contribute to the preparation of follow-up analyses in terms of changes achieved and impact.

It would be beneficial to consider including activities for off-site joint trainings/forums of CSOs and administrations to exchange experiences and interact by sharing good practices and experiences.

When programming future interventions, thematic funding could be considered, e.g. projects addressing local policies (i.e. targeting municipal and territorial sub-units of administrations) and addressing the functioning of the central administration. However, it should be borne in mind that focusing interventions more narrowly would also mean leaving some of the policies or areas of work of the administration out of the focus of support, which has its drawbacks in terms of the wide range of administrations and policies that were covered by the intervention. Their limitation means prioritising certain sectors at the expense of others and depriving some of the expertise and capacity within NGOs of the opportunity to participate, and hence limiting the opportunities for citizen scrutiny in specific areas with a small number of potential beneficiaries (e.g. the nuclear energy sector, or other sectors and policies where a small number of NGOs work).

Providing funding to promote citizen participation in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation in the future will allow to maintain an active civil sector and to make positive changes in the administration and the judiciary with the participation of citizens. Given the specificities of the NGO sector and the short timeframes of the projects, advocacy and civic participation in the legislative process is less prominent in the supported projects due to the NGO sector's inability to deploy its activities in a legislative initiative within the project. Sharing experiences and exploring good practices in advocacy processes and methods would be of additional benefit to develop the skills of civil society activists to participate in the legislative process.

There is a need to look for ways to promote alliances between NGOs in order to achieve greater effectiveness through the implementation of projects related to increasing citizen monitoring of national



and local policies on issues of public importance, such as social policies, business environment, environment, tourism. Encourage more public campaigns and public awareness campaigns because the environment and public expectations are very important for the success of advocacy campaigns and for the acceptance of proposals made by NGOs by politicians and the administration.

While interventions targeting the civil society sector are not aimed at enhancing their capacity, including to prepare and manage quality projects, it is advisable to address their capacity, albeit through small-scale activities in the context of the project being implemented or through a common event prior to the start of contract implementation. This would broaden the involvement of different organisations and the policy areas being addressed. Such actions could be implemented as ongoing information campaigns, could be accompanied by more in-depth training on project preparation and implementation, advocacy, etc.

It would be good to promote active work with the municipal administration in both large regional centres and small municipalities. The rationale is that, based on regional achievements in increasing interaction between the NGO sector and local administrations, the latter will increasingly take NGOs and SEPs seriously as legal forms of monitoring and control over their work.

It is advisable to maintain the established successful good practices of the MA in managing procedures for civil society structures, which have proven their effectiveness. Once all civil society procedures have been completed, it is advisable to carry out a comparative analysis on the funding modality and the relationship with the efficiency and effectiveness achieved, which will provide guidance on the budgeting mechanism (flat rate or standard unit cost table).

9.3. Conclusions Task 3

9.3.1. Efficiency

Based on the review of the indicator achievement data and the feedback of respondents, it can be concluded that a very high degree of effectiveness of the investments under PA4 and PA5 has been achieved in terms of results. The target values of the *performance and result indicators have been achieved, although 3 procedures are still under implementation and the result indicators achieved exceed the target values. The external environment factors have had an impact on the ESF system, but the horizontal structures and MA have reacted in a timely manner by making the necessary changes and this has not affected the effectiveness of the programme.*

9.3.2. Efficiency

The target values of the result indicators of PA4 and the indicators of PA5 (with the exception of indicator O5-3 Evaluations carried out on OPGG, priorities, procedures, etc.) have been achieved before the physical and financial implementation of all procedures and budget lines has been completed. The target values of the result indicators of PA4 and the indicators of PA5 have been achieved before the physical and financial implementation of all procedures has been completed. Contracts for procedures have been executed and results have been achieved within planned resources, including savings. To the extent that there are non-



achievements, the reasons are discussed in the analytical part. It can be reasonably concluded from the analysis of the procedures in terms of planning and execution that a very good level of efficiency of inputs in relation to outputs has been achieved. The MA ensures efficiency through good planning by setting maximum amounts of grants at the programming stage, percentage limits on certain types of expenditure, clear requirements for financial justification of expenditure. Efficiency is also enhanced by the fact that all beneficiaries are contracting authorities under the Public Procurement Act (PPA), the application of which is aimed precisely at ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in the spending of the funds made available from EU funds and programmes. At the same time, almost all the results set under the procedures have been achieved and overachieved.

The comparison with the target values and the achieved performance of selected outcome indicators under the OPTA (2007-2013) shows the progress made in the development of the horizontal structures underpinning the management, coordination, monitoring and control system of the ESIF, including highlighting the effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the OPGG.

9.3.3. Realistic objectives

The assessment of the implementation of Priority Axes 4 and 5 under the OPGG shows a high degree of realism of the planned objectives and the achieved results in terms of achievement of the set indicators and inputs. The procedures have been planned evenly over the implementation period and all planned activities have been covered: ensuring the functioning of the system for coordination, management, monitoring and control of the ESIF, functioning of the network of CSOs, functioning and upgrading of the UMIS. The results achieved, as measured by the performance and result indicators, exceed the planned ones with efficient use of resources.

9.3.4. Contribution of investments

The functioning of the system of horizontal structures, each with its essential functions, is fully funded by the OPGG. Virtually every change that has taken place in the environment has been entirely due to support from the OPGG, as there are no other financial sources investing in the ESIF management structures. The expert capacity of the structures involved in the management and coordination of the ESIF funds has been upgraded - the funds provided by the programme help not only to upgrade knowledge through training, but also to retain the experts who have already gained significant experience in the horizontal structures of managing the ESIF funds. Retaining the capacity of these staff is of utmost importance in terms of ensuring the effective management of the system. A low staff turnover has been achieved and maintained and the possibility to preserve the institutional memory of the ESIF management systems and to upgrade and develop the capacity - according to Monitorstat the indicator "staff turnover of beneficiaries per year" for 2021 is 2.79%, compared to 6.40% in 2013. It can be concluded that the main influence for the improvement of the indicator is precisely the investments made through the OPGG.

The adoption of the law on the management of the EU funds, in the 2014-2020 programming period, is a key measure to improve processes and reduce the administrative burden, create a predictable environment,



optimize the system for managing EU funds and increase its effectiveness and efficiency. The Act overcomes the fragmentation of the EUSF regulatory framework that existed at the time and introduces unified and simplified procedures based on clearly defined deadlines, forms and other rules with the effect of reducing the administrative burden and effective judicial protection of beneficiaries. In 2016, the main sub-regulations to the ESIF Act were also adopted, regulating national rules regarding Monitoring Committees, provision of grants, eligibility of expenditure, selection of contractor by beneficiaries, UMIS. Simplification of the rules and procedures for managing the ESIF and the reduction of the administrative burden create an opportunity to facilitate access to funds, ease financial management and achieve the stated results.

The structures have shown great adaptability and competence in the rapid establishment of mechanisms in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequences of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, which once again testifies to the accumulated capacity, which is inevitably a consequence of the investments made by the programme in terms of the expert staff of the structures involved in the management and coordination of the ESIF funds. It is thanks to this expertise and the investments made in the UMIS platform that the procedures for applying for COVID grants are being accelerated at a time when the businesses affected by the pandemic urgently needed funding and support to continue operating. The system's built capacity was also evident in the rapid response and support related to the actions taken to address the consequences of the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. EU Structural Funds have been one of the main sources of providing the necessary response to the needs of people fleeing the war. Support is deployed in terms of programming, contracting and first disbursements in the period May-September 2022, covering measures under the national programmes for humanitarian assistance to displaced persons from Ukraine. All programming, including the national methodology for the implementation of the simplified cost option to support the basic needs of refugees from Ukraine, has been consulted and implemented in close cooperation with the Commission services.

A high level of satisfaction was achieved by the users of the UMIS (89.61%). The significant contribution to this are the investments made in the system under the OPGG, which lead to a simplified electronic, paperless application and reporting process, which reduces the administrative burden on applicants, provides greater access to participation precisely because of the easing of the administrative burden, provides the opportunity for smooth processes. Transparency has been achieved, the capacity to use the UMIS has been upgraded for all stakeholders, in-person trainings have been conducted and video trainings have been produced and disseminated for all stages and modules of the system. Administrative burden has been reduced - by providing the possibility to work in an electronic environment, the burden for both beneficiaries and administrations has been reduced. UMIS has eased the work of end-users by reducing the administrative burden, time and costs, reducing the scope for errors and standardising the way managing authorities work. The system is fully web-based and only requires a browser to work with it, it is also optimised for mobile devices. At the moment, through UMIS there are:

- more than 112 000 project proposals submitted;
- over 110 000 reporting packages examined;



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- over 195 000 registered users;
- More than 1 800 grant procedures have been launched;
- 48 618 trees were saved thanks to the help of UMIS users.

With the upgrade of the UMIS modules, the degree of transparency and accessibility to information have increased significantly, which is reflected in the assessments of UMIS by the last sixth system audit (report of 19.01.2022) and of the SA by the sixth system audit (report of 28.01.2022), which are categorized at level 1 "Functioning well. No improvement or minor improvement needed".

Transparency and access to information on the programmes financed by the ESIF is ensured through the maintenance and development of the single information portal. The Single Information Portal on the European Structural and Investment Funds (eufunds.bg) has been created to raise awareness of citizens and businesses about funding opportunities and the implementation of measures under the individual operational programmes. It is maintained and developed under a project funded by OP "Good Governance". For the period 2014-2020 there are:

- 11 586 282 unique page views;
- 3,454,912 hits;
- 1 704 131 users.

In the 2014-2020 programming period, the Monitorstat Information System has been established - it meets the needs of horizontal coordination in terms of the necessary framework for statistical validation and procedures for collecting and processing the microdata needed to assess the contribution of activities to the specific objectives of each OP. Following the integration between the two systems, 121 funding procedures have been processed (116 under UMIS and 5 under SMNI). The number of unique beneficiaries served was 17 107 and the number of project proposals served was 31 171. Savings to beneficiaries from document fees for the period 2020-2023 amount to BGN 1 745 576.00.

Regarding the impact of the interventions under PA5, it should be noted that the expert evaluations of the implementation of PA5 do not register any particular difficulties and challenges, both at the programming stage and at the implementation stage of the priority axis. The main reason for this is the fact that the whole life cycle of this element of the operational programme is controlled and managed both at operational and strategic level by one administration according to established procedures and standards. The main challenge is identified as the Covid crisis and the associated constraints and delays in implementation. However, the risk of not achieving the set indicators under PA5 is assessed as minimal.

The positive changes brought about by the implementation of the evaluated budget lines are related to improving the capacity of the structures involved in the management of the programme (MA and MC) and providing conditions for adequate progress assessment, risk management and programming, as well as improving the capacity and awareness of the potential beneficiaries of the operational programme, familiarising beneficiaries with their responsibilities in the implementation of the OPGG and improving their knowledge of the programme, raising public awareness of the



The following benefits can be identified as the most significant for the target groups:

MA staff:

- Enhancing the expertise and qualifications of the staff involved in the management and implementation of the OPGG;
- Strengthening the administrative capacity for programme management and implementation;
- Improve capacity for coordination, communication and results-based management at all levels (strategic and operational);

The programme contributes to capacity building for compliance with the horizontal principles and the partnership principles - i.e. the inclusion of these aspects in the programme creates an attitude and standards for their compliance among the administration, representatives of the judiciary and civil society structures, while at the same time the individual beneficiaries in their work have an attitude and implement the partnership principles and seek sustainability and impact on the overall environment, on policies and reforms. The projects of NGOs/CSOs under PA2 as a logic of action are based on the principle of partnership and build capacity both in the civil sector and in the administrations, to build a culture of interaction between civil society and the administration in the decision-making processes of policy implementation.

9.4.Recommendations Task 3

It would be beneficial to build on existing approaches for sharing lessons learned between institutions responsible for the management and control of the funds, especially with concrete examples of weaknesses and errors identified and ways to avoid or address them.

During the programming period 2021-2027 it is necessary to continue the support for strengthening the administrative capacity of the applicants/beneficiaries in order to increase the efficiency of the absorption of EU funds in Bulgaria. Continued efforts are needed to strengthen municipal capacity and build the capacity of civil society. There is also a need for comprehensive support to beneficiaries in terms of public procurement - training opportunities, use of expert support, exchange of practices, etc.

The analyses show very good results in the use of the UMIS and in this sense it is good to continue with the upgrade of the UMIS functionalities, the trainings for beneficiaries and the continuous feedback and satisfaction survey.

The programme would do well to continue its support for upskilling and retention of already trained staff.

Support to the DIP should continue as its effectiveness and efficiency have been confirmed and results are visible. The network actively cooperates with local administrations and various institutions and raises citizens' awareness. It is worth considering the possibility of extending the scope of possible activities of the DIP -delegating additional functions, activities/assigning specific tasks to the DIP that require interventions at regional and/or local level by the national level structures responsible for the management and implementation of the programmes.



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The functioning of an efficient coordination mechanism in the area of EU funds management is a major issue. The actions and efforts undertaken during the programming period to streamline and reform the structures responsible for the different aspects of coordination (programming, monitoring, information provision, coordination of information and publicity activities) are positively assessed.

The existing institutional framework should be upgraded by continuing the good practices introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period and the need to include new measures, prioritised in the area of public procurement, in order to reach the necessary high level of competence of the administration in a timely manner. Measures to strengthen administrative capacity with a focus on greater flexibility and adaptability, while maintaining the established balance and with a view to functioning effectively in relation to the coordination, management and control of the EFSM in the programming period 2021-2027, will be key.



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10.ANNEXES

Annex 1 - List of documents for documentary analysis and review

Annex 2 Evaluation matrix