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SCIENCE AND EDUCATION  
FOR SMART GROWTH



## FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

under the thematic strands

"Effectiveness of the operations: Result orientation and level of achievement of the specific objectives under Investment Priority 9i and 9ii under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme"

"Efficiency of the operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (output indicators) and adequacy of the simplified cost reporting methodologies applied"

"Impact evaluation"

**The Contractor**

  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

<b>GRANT</b>	Non-repaible financial aid
<b>CLLD</b>	Community-led local development
<b>TFEU</b>	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>ESIF</b>	European Structural and Investment Funds
<b>EAPE</b>	Executive Agency “Programme Education”
<b>CPI</b>	Consumer Price Index
<b>IP</b>	Investment Priority
<b>UMIS</b>	Information system for the management and monitoring of EU funds
<b>DB MES</b>	Direct Beneficiary Ministry of Education and Science
<b>CCU</b>	Central Coordination Unit
<b>MC</b>	Monitoring Committee
<b>LAG</b>	Local Action Groups
<b>MCSO</b>	Methodology and criteria for selecting an operation
<b>MES</b>	Ministry of Education and Science
<b>NSRIRB</b>	National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)
<b>NIP of NSRIRB</b>	National Implementation Plan of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)
<b>OP</b>	The Operational Programme
<b>OP SESG</b>	Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020
<b>OP HRD</b>	Operational Programme “Human Resources Development”
<b>IP of SEICSEM</b>	Implementation Plan of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)
<b>CMD</b>	Council of Ministers Decree
<b>PA</b>	Priority axis
<b>RME</b>	Regional management of education
<b>DCM</b>	Decision of the Council of Ministers
<b>WB</b>	The World Bank
<b>SEICSEM</b>	Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)
<b>MA</b>	Managing Authority



**MA of PE**

**DLEE**

**SEN**

Managing Authority of Programme Evaluation 2021-2027

Distance learning in an electronic environment

Special educational needs

## GLOSSARY OF THE TERMS USED

<b>Beneficiary</b>	As referred in Article 2(10) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013: a public or private body responsible for initiating or initiating and implementing operations; and in the context of State aid schemes, pursuant to Article 107(1) TFEU, an organisation receiving the aid.
<b>Output indicators</b>	Output indicators relate to operations supported. An output is considered what is directly produced/supplied through the implementation of an ESF operation, measured in physical or monetary units. Outputs are measured at the level of supported people, supported entities (entities are defined as organisations – a group of people formally organised to pursue a collective objective that can both implement and be supported through projects, and should only be taken into account if they benefit directly from ESF support that leads up to costs), provided goods or services delivered. They are set at the level of investment priorities or specific objective.
<b>Result Indicators</b>	Result indicators capture the expected effects on participants or entities brought about by an operation. Result indicators should correspond to the specific objectives set out for each investment priority selected. They go beyond output indicators in so far as they capture a change in the situation, in most cases related to supported entities or participants. They must be set as closely as possible to the activities carried out under the relevant investment priority in order to minimise external factors that could affect the reported value of result indicators.
<b>De minimis aid</b>	Aid which does not distort or threaten competition or has a negligible effect on competition due to its minimum amount, as defined in the current EU regulation, on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to De minimis aid.
<b>Managing Authority</b>	National, regional or local public authority designated to manage an operational programme pursuant to Decision No 823/21.10.2015 of the Council of Ministers.
<b>Financial Indicators</b>	The financial indicators relate to the total amount of eligible expenditure entered into the accounting system of the certifying authority and certified by it, in accordance with point (c) of Article 126 of Regulation No 1303/2013. They may be used to monitor progress in terms of the payment of the funds available for any operation, measure or programme in relation to its eligible cost. They are compulsory in the Performance Framework.
<b>Achieved product</b>	For the purposes of this report, an output indicator should be understood

<b>Input Resource</b>	For the purposes of this report, expenditure spent/verified should be understood
<b>Costs for organisation and management</b>	Indirect costs related to the remuneration of project management personnel – project manager, technical assistant, accountant and other expert or technical staff, as well as the administrative costs related to project management identified as eligible in the documents referred to in Article 26(1) LMEFSM. (Ordinance No 189 of 28 Jul 2016, Additional provisions, p.9)
<b>Indirect costs</b>	Expenditure related to the implementation of activities foreseen in the project which do not directly contribute to the achievement of its objectives and results but are necessary for its overall administration, management, evaluation and sound financial implementation. (Ordinance No 189 of 28 Jul 2016, Additional provisions, p. 3)
<b>Direct costs</b>	Costs related to the implementation of the activities of the project concerned which are directly aimed towards the achievement of its objectives and results. (Ordinance No 189 of 28 Jul 2016, Additional Provisions, p.7)
<b>Cost of remuneration</b>	Salary costs under an employment or service relationship, the salary costs specified in an order of the appointing authority, respectively in an employment contract under Article 110 of the Labour Code, for the assignment of additional obligations in connection with activities related to the implementation and/or management of a project, or under a contract of service, including the costs of social and health insurance, payable by the employer, the appointing authority or the contracting authority. (Ordinance No 189 of 28 July 2016, Additional Provisions, p.8)
Percentile	Percentiles are a statistical measure of the position dividing the orderly distribution of the data into one hundred equal parts. This position measure provides information about the percentage of observations of a variable, arranged from the lowest to the highest, which are below its value. Thus, the 20th percentile (P20) would be the value of the variable located at the boundary of the first 20 units of observation.
Research sample	Sample of schools and/or kindergartens where activities have been implemented under projects funded under the procedures covered by this evaluation
Control sample	Schools similar in profile where no activities have been implemented under projects funded under the procedures covered by this evaluation
<b>Counterfactual impact evaluation</b>	Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (also called counterfactual evaluation) is a type of evaluation through which, in order to assess the impact, the results are compared between the educational institutions involved in the interventions (schools and kindergartens, respectively teachers, pedagogical specialists and parents) and a control group of similar schools that have not participated in the interventions. The comparison between the two

	<p>groups shall identify the effects of the evaluated procedures in relation to all the objectives and results indicated by the interventions. Counterfactual analysis is “a comparison between what actually happened and what would have happened in the absence of intervention”.</p>
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## I. INTRODUCTION

The present evaluation report was prepared in implementation of Contract No D03-24/08.09.2022 with subject matter: Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups such as Roma under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020, concluded between the Executive Agency “Programme Education” – Contracting Authority and Global Advisers JSC – Contractor.

The main objective of the evaluation is “Evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of grant procedures aimed at active inclusion and social economic integration of marginalised groups, including Roma, under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020.”

The present evaluation has been prepared in accordance with the Technical Specification of the Contracting Authority for the preparation of the evaluation and covers answers to evaluation questions from the thematic strands:

### **1. Effectiveness of operations: Result orientation and level of achievement of the specific objectives under Investment Priority 9i and 9ii under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme:**

- to what extent the indicators included in the procedures referred to in point 3.4 of the Technical Specification are adequate to the objectives of the relevant procedure, investment priority and priority axis;
- the extent to which the planned values of the indicators for each procedure have been met, and the extent to which their implementation contributes to achieving the values of the indicators at the level of investment priority, priority axis and the Programme as a whole;
- the level of achievement of the objectives when comparing the actual and expected results of the activities carried out under the operations under Priority Axis 3 directed directly or indirectly to marginalised groups such as Roma.

### **2. Efficiency of the operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (implementation indicators) and adequacy of the applied simplified cost reporting methodologies’**

### **3. Impact evaluation**

Within the scope of the stated thematic strands “Effectiveness”, “Efficiency”, and “Impact”, the approach to answering the evaluation questions has been carried out through conducting an evaluation on the outlined by the Contracting Authority evaluation questions according to thematic strands, as follows:

#### **Effectiveness of operations: Result orientation and level of achievement of the specific objectives under Investment Priority 9i and 9ii under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme:**

1.1/ What is the progress (including the achievement of the end goals) in implementing the Priority Axis 3 indicators directed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups such as Roma, including milestones and end goals in their performance framework?

1.2/ What are the external factors and the extent to which they have influenced the achievement/non-achievement of the underlying indicators?

1.3/ Is the selection of target groups adequate in the grant award procedures under assessment and are they in line with the set indicators?

1.4/ To what extent are the data collected for the calculation of indicators reliable and qualitative? What should be the parameters of the collected data?

1.5/ Is it necessary to introduce additional data collection from other sources such as administrative registers, sociological surveys, etc.? Have any obstacles to the use of information from administrative registers been identified for the purposes of the implementation of projects under the OP SESG, directed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups, including Roma, and what are the possible solutions for overcoming them?

1.6/ To what extent do the operations under the OP SESG which are the subject of this evaluation achieve the planned results in the short, medium and long term?

1.7/ What helps or hinders the achievement of the objectives and results of the operations under the OP SESG subject to this evaluation?

1.8/ What factors determine the better performance of certain operations than others funded under the Programme?

1.9/ To what extent have the operations implemented under the Operational Programme SESG, that are subject of this evaluation, contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020) and of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)?

1.10/Is there a causal link between the intervention /the activities carried out under the operations under Priority Axis 3/and the results achieved?

**Efficiency of the operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (implementation indicators) and adequacy of the applied simplified cost reporting methodologies'**

1.1/What is the cost efficiency of these procedures, measured as a ratio between inputs and outputs?

1.1.1/Are adequately set the flat rates for financing activities for organisation and management of projects financed by the OP SESG, the standard scales of the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects financed by the OP SESG, the standard scales of unit costs?

1.1.2/Findings, conclusions and recommendations on the use of simplified cost options under the OP SESG

1.1.3/Comparative analysis of the cost efficiency of similar products under the covered procedures.

1.1.4/What are the costs of participating in the operation of a person from the targeted group?

**Impact evaluation**

**• Increasing the number of educational institutions providing a supportive environment for inclusive education**

1/Do the PA 3 measures of the Programme have an impact on reducing disparities in learning outcomes in different settlements?

2/What is the impact of PA 3 of the Programme at regional level (at level of region NUTS 2, district NUTS 3 and municipality) on reducing the share of early school leavers?

3/What is the territorial distribution of the children, students and parents involved in the operations marginalized groups, including Roma, and is it adequate to the demographic structure of the population – at the level of municipality, district and NUTS 2 region?

4/Is the coordination at the level of procedures and projects appropriate to the municipal plans for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities?

5/What is the territorial distribution of educational institutions that have provided a supportive environment at the level of municipality, district and NUTS 2 region? (additional evaluation question formulated by the Contractor)

- **Increasing the number of successfully integrated children and students from marginalized communities, including Roma, through the education system**

1/Are activities in support of interaction in a multicultural educational environment and interscholastic activities effective with a view to integrating students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the education system?

2/Are attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity changing towards marginalized groups (including Roma) in the supported educational institutions in comparison to those who were not involved in PA 3 operations?

3/Do the attitudes of the parents of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma, towards education changing in comparison to those who were not part of the operations?

4/Do the sentiments and attitudes towards future realisation on the labour market of students from marginalized groups covered by the PA 3 operations changed? (additional evaluation question formulated by the Contractor)

- **Improving the qualification of teachers and pedagogical specialists in the education system for working in a multicultural environment**

1/Is the training of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators, adequate according to the needs identified in the Programme?

2/To what extent do pedagogical professionals and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators, included in activities for improving their capacity for teaching in a multicultural environment, apply what they have learned in practice?

3/What is the impact of the activities to improve the teaching capacity in a multicultural environment of pedagogical professionals and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators, in improving the educational environment for children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma?

4/What unplanned effects on teachers and pedagogical professionals from the implementation of the measures can be indicated? (additional evaluation question formulated by the Contractor)

- **Reducing the share of early school leavers, sustainably retaining students in the education system, and including children from marginalized groups in the education system**

1/What is the proportion of the supported by the operations children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma, who continue to higher education and what is their ratio to children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma, who have not been subject to measures under the operations under the OP SESG?

2/What is the contribution of Priority Axis 3 of the Programme to reducing the share of early school leavers?

3/Are attitudes towards informed decisions being developed by students from marginalized groups, including Roma for continuing education?

4/What methods of educational integration and inclusive education have been used? How have they been used in the direction to:

- reducing the share of early school leavers (ESL);
- overcoming discrimination;
- improving the educational outcomes of children and students from marginalized communities, including Roma.

5/What are the unplanned effects on operation-supported children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma, related to reducing the share of early school leavers? (additional evaluation question formulated by the Contractor)

- **Improving the educational outcomes of children and students with special educational needs, from marginalized groups, including Roma and their achievements in mastering key competences**

1/What is the link between the tools developed within the scope of the projects under evaluation and the educational outcomes of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma?

2/As a result, did the implementation of the projects improve:

- the language skills of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma;
- literacy levels of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma;
- the educational outcomes of children and students with special educational needs and to what extent, including children and students that are not subject of support by the PA 3 measures;
- the achievements of students included in activities under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme in NEE and SME compared to students not included in the Programme;
- the attitude towards the educational process of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma (additional assessment question formulated by the Contractor);
- the attitude towards professional realisation of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma (additional assessment question formulated by the Contractor).

- **Complementarity with national education policies and programmes**

1/What is the impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalized groups such as Roma under the Programme's PA3 on education policies and regulations?

2/Is there any changes in the main strategic documents and regulatory framework related to the implementation of the PA3 measures of the Programme? (additional evaluation question formulated by the Contractor)

- **Improving access to education for marginalized groups, including Roma through a CLLD approach under OP SESG:**

1/Overcoming of socio-economic barriers to access to education for children and students from marginalized groups (identified barriers on the territory of the LAG for pre-school education, school education, vocational education)

2/Contribution of CLLD projects to the educational integration of marginalized groups such as Roma – to reduce the share of early school leavers and/or dropouts of children and students from marginalized groups, to increase the coverage of children and students from marginalized groups in education (inclusion, return or retention in education, contribution to reducing segregation (if applicable), continuation of higher education, etc.).

3/Comparison of the CLLD approach with the other approaches (the systematic approach with a direct beneficiary MES, direct grant provision through an integrated project proposal, project selection procedure) to ensure access to education for children and students from marginalized groups (e.g. in relation to the specificity of the territory and the problems at local level for educational integration and coverage of the target groups – better addressing the problems, greater commitment/initiative of the local community and stakeholders, better working with parents, the role of the partnership compared to the lack of it in systemic projects; complementarity and demarcation between approaches – centralised/systemic and local/territorial under CLLD).



4/What is the evaluation of the capacity, level of dialogue and coordination of CLLD participants according to key partners? (additional evaluation question formulated by the Contractor)

• **Evaluation of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on projects aimed at active inclusion and socio-economic integration of marginalized groups including Roma**

1/How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of the activities of the projects under evaluation?

2/What measures have been taken to address the difficulties and problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

3/How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the participation of target groups in the implementation of the projects?

4/Lessons learned and good practices from coping with the COVID-19 pandemic – Recommendations for the 2021-2027 programming period

5/ What are the main impacts (positive and negative) of COVID-19 on the implementation of the activities of the projects under evaluation ? (additional assessment question formulated by the Contractor).

## II. SUMMARY

### i. Effectiveness of operations: Result orientation and level of achievement of the specific objectives under Investment Priority 9i and 9ii under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme

The present summary outlines the results of the evaluation under the thematic strand "Effectiveness of operations: Results orientation and level of achievement of the specific objectives under Investment Priority 9i and 9ii under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme" under Contract No D03-24 from 08.09.2022 for the implementation of public procurement with the subject "Conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups such as Roma under Priority Axis 3 "Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion" of Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020. The contracting authority is the Executive Agency "Programme Education" and the Contractor is "Global Advisers" JSC.

The evaluation covers 23 procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020 (OP SESG) aimed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups, including Roma, 15 of which are grant procedures under the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) approach with funding under the OP SESG. The date of analysis of the data in this report is 30.09.2022.

### EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the implementation of this evaluation is focused on thematic strand Effectiveness of the operations and the evaluation questions set by the Contracting Authority. The methods used for data collection are: cabinet study; stakeholder consultations (interviews and focus groups) and a survey. Whereas the methods of analysis are: analysis of indicators; analysis of the logic of intervention; analysis of the contribution; descriptive statistics; analysis of stakeholders' views and expert assessment. The methods for data collection and analysis are selected on the basis of the evaluation questions, the available information, and the data collected further during the evaluation. The choice of their use in carrying out the evaluation is justified on the need to provide data of the fullest possible scope and quality, so as to provide the necessary basis for formulating adequate answers to the evaluation questions. The methods complement each other so that the limitations of one method are offset by the

advantages of another. These methods are in line with the European Commission's Guidelines for Socio-Economic Development Assessment EVALSED and the European Commission's Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation of the European Cohesion Policy (for ESF) of 2018.

The carrying out of the evaluation made use of available data from the programme monitoring system (financial data, indicators, data on participants in operations), statistics, data from previous analyses, strategic and normative documents, etc.

In addition, primary data were collected through interviews with representatives of the MA of the SESG, representatives of a Direct beneficiary MES (3 interviews), representatives of the MA of OP HRD (1 interview), representatives of the CCU (1 interview) and focus groups with representatives of MA and MC of OP SESG (2 focus groups), and a survey conducted in the period 15.12.2022-11.01.2023 among 105 beneficiaries (out of 276).

## **MAIN GUIDANCE POINTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The procedures subject to this evaluation show progress in their contribution to achieving the objectives of the OP SESG, in particular PA 3 of the Programme, expressed by the output and result indicators. In some cases, the contribution of the evaluated operations to the achievement of the target values of the indicators under the Programme is around 75 to 85 %.

The risk of non-achievement of the value set in the Programme is only available for output indicator 3213 "Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP" included in the evaluated procedures related to adult literacy.

With regard to the achievement of the objectives and results set out in the operations under the OP SESG subject to this evaluation, it can be concluded that in the short term the operations which have been completed (BG05M20P001-3.001, BG05M20P001-3.002 and BG05M20P001-3.004) generally achieved the target results to a high extent. Based on the progress made in the output indicators and the data on the contracted result indicators for the operations under implementation, the analysis shows that in the medium term the planned results are achieved at an expected pace and in the longer term it can be predicted that at the end of the programming period the planned results will be achieved and, in some cases, significantly exceeded, such as the result indicator P3211 "Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system"

The adequacy to the objectives and results target groups, activities, duration and budget, and that the procedures are programmed in line with the real needs for support to the target groups make a significant contribution to the objectives and results of the procedures. Interviews and focus groups highlight the key role of the motivation of the professionals involved in the implementation of activities, as well as the managers of/from the relevant institution/organisation, which is committed to the implementation of the specific project.

There are no serious obstacles negatively affecting the achievement of the objectives and results of the procedures covered by the evaluation, with some exceptions including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The use of quantifiable result indicators that measure new qualitative changes in the situation related to the participants when exiting the operation can be defined as good practice.

The use of result indicators (such as "net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens – 84 %" under BG05M20P001-3.001 and BG05M20P001-3.005 "Group net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens – 2 % increase for the period of the operation") for which are set too ambitious targets or are susceptible to influence factors beyond the effect of the operation activities is an indication of a risk to the quality of planning or monitoring of the interventions. In this case, the risk is not significant, because they are additional indicators specific to the operations.

The absence of specified target values of programme-relevant MCSO indicators and, accordingly, the setting of those in the Application Conditions or Guidelines and which are reported at the end of the projects, leads to the impossibility of an objective ongoing assessment of the contribution of the measures under an operation to the achievement of the objectives of the Programme. In addition, in so far as the indicators are part of the MCSO, they should be amended, including the setting of target values, by the MC, in accordance with Article 11(1)(1) of Council of Ministers Decree No 79 of 10 April 2014.

The analysis identified a need to change the parameters of the collected data by changing the definitions of existing indicators or adding new ones that also measure qualitative change in relation to the participants.

The following external factors had the greatest influence to the achieving of the set indicators of operations: the adequate response of the institutions, including the MA during the lockdown measures imposed as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the motivation for participation of the target groups in the project activities. The presence of support and assistance from municipal administrations and civil organisations and the availability of adequate regulations, administrative acts and instructions of the MA, applicable in the implementation of the activities, are also of high influence.

The evaluation of the external factors that influenced the failure of beneficiaries to achieve indicators, as well as their shared opinion, identified three main groups of external factors related to the failure to achieve planned indicators: those related to the absence or lack of motivation of the target groups; related to difficulties resulting from obstacles to the implementation of the envisaged activities as a result of containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak and related to financial challenges stemming from the rising inflation.

The selection of target groups for the procedures in the scope of the evaluation is adequate and they correspond to the indicators set out, with some exceptions: in one case (BG05M2OP001-3.004) target groups are defined without an age limit, unlike the output indicator. In another case, target groups are not part of the groups that are expected to be necessarily included in activities and are therefore not included in an output indicator when there is a corresponding one at an OP level (BG05M2OP001-3.001 and BG05M9OP001-2.018).

Based on the documentary analysis and survey that were carried out, it can be argued that the data collected for the calculation of the indicators are highly reliable and qualitative, but further actions are possible to improve the processes that guarantee reliability and quality.

No obstacles to the use of information from administrative registers have been identified for the purpose of the implementation of OP SESG projects with one exception (the difficulties of the MA with regard to the use of information from NEISPSE<sup>1</sup>).

Considering educational integration activities carried out by NGOs as activities of an economic nature and, accordingly, the application of the rules for granting aid under the 'De minimis' leads to a limitation of the participation of experienced NGOs in selection procedures due to the accumulation of aid under the 'De minimis'.

The full national scope and implementation of the operations by the Ministry of Education and Science as a Direct Beneficiary is a serious prerequisite for achieving better results on operations in cases where the objectives set imply a systematic approach. Funding schemes through project selection procedures shall be assessed as a prerequisite for achieving better results where a local and targeted approach or an individualised design and approach to the implementation of activities is needed and a high degree of pro-activity or innovation is expected to solve problems and achieve the objectives of the operations.

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<sup>1</sup> National Electronic Information System for Pre-School and School Education

A common factor in the analysed operations with better cost efficiency per unit of like product and achieving the planned results is the availability of simplified cost options.

The operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG have made a significant contribution to achieving the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020) and of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- When programming operations, the MA to provide in the MCSO to be set target values for indicators referring to OP indicators, as well as not to allow by Application Conditions or Guidelines to set targets defined at the level of Application Conditions or Guidelines, which are to be reported at the end of the projects.
- When planning future operations, the MA should ensure close monitoring of the intervention logic so as to ensure compliance of the target groups with the indicators set.
- To carry out the necessary coordinated actions by the units responsible in the MES system to improve the possibilities for carrying out additional validation of the microdata in NEISPSE. This recommendation should be implemented as soon as possible.
- To complement the procedure in the Management Manual of OP SESG describing the approach, steps and responsible units for data collection and processing for the purpose of monitoring and reporting under the programme with a description of the definitions of the indicators, the data sources for their tracking and a mechanism for verification and further validation for the purposes of the annual reports and data reporting to the EC. To the extent that the operations under OP SESG complete their implementation by the end of this year at the latest and given the expected introduction of functionalities in the UMIS for aggregating the data for indicators for the purpose of reporting under the programme, the MA should assess to what extent and whether it is not appropriate to take this recommendation into account in relation to the management manual of the Programme Education.
- For further operations, it would be appropriate for the MA to take into account the proposal to make greater use of indicators to monitor the qualitative change resulting from the activities carried out in relation to participants in operations and to make further efforts to better define the main indicators related to the integration of vulnerable groups. A good example of quantifiable indicators reporting qualitative change can be the following: BG05M2OP001-3.005, BG05M2OP001-2.011 and BG05M2OP001-3.020, where the established system of indicators is also used in the methodology for the assessment of project proposals, and the commitment to the different achievements is reported with different weight, according to the importance of the indicator for the achievement of the policy, to which is the contribution of the operation.
- The MA should ensure that the target values of the indicators of operations are preceded by precise analyses of the expected results of the interventions.
- The MA should carefully analyse whether the targets for certain types of specific indicators are not too ambitious or whether the reasons for non-achievement are linked to a limited degree of impact of the interventions on this type of indicators, with a view to their future use.
- When planning further operations, the MA should ensure that operations-specific result indicators are set as close as possible to the planned activities below the relevant operation in order to minimise external factors that could affect their reported value.
- The MA should, if necessary, carry out a further review with regard to the definition of the aid rules for NGOs implementing activities/projects related to educational integration. If deemed appropriate, review the experience of other Member States or consult the MF and DG Competition with a view to exploring how to overcome this obstacle. The recommendation should be taken into account in the programming of subsequent operations.

ii. **Efficiency of the operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (implementation indicators) and adequacy of the applied simplified cost reporting methodologies'**

This summary presents the results of the evaluation under the thematic strand " Efficiency of the operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (implementation indicators) and adequacy of the applied simplified cost reporting methodologies' under Contract No D 03-24 of 8.9.2022 for the implementation of public procurement with subject "Evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of grant procedures aimed at active inclusion and social economic integration of marginalised groups, including Roma, under Priority Axis 3 "Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion" of Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020." The contracting authority is the Executive Agency "Programme Education" and the Contractor — Global Advisors JSC.

The evaluation covers 23 procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020 (OP SESG) aimed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups, including Roma, 15 of which are grant procedures under the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) approach with funding under the OP SESG. The date of analysis of the data in this report is 30.09.2022.

## **EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for the implementation of this evaluation is focused on thematic strand Efficiency of the operations and the evaluation questions set by the Contracting Authority. The methods used for data collection are: Cabinet study; stakeholder consultations (interviews and focus groups) and a survey, and methods of analysis: analysis of indicators; analysis of the logic of intervention; analysis of inputs and results achieved; descriptive statistics; analysis of stakeholders' views; expert evaluation and case studies. The methods for data collection and analysis are selected on the basis of the evaluation questions, available information, and data collected further during the evaluation. The choice of their use in carrying out the evaluation is justified by the need to provide data of the fullest possible scope and quality, so as to provide the necessary basis for formulating adequate answers to the evaluation questions. The methods complement each other so that the limitations of one method are offset by the advantages of another. These methods are in line with the European Commission's Guidelines for the Assessment of Socio-Economic Development EVALSED and with the European Commission's Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation of the European Cohesion Policy (for ESF) of 2018.

To carry out the evaluation, available data from the programme monitoring system (financial data, indicators, data on participants in operations), statistics, data from previous analyses, strategic and regulatory documents, etc.

In addition, primary data were collected through interviews with representatives of the MA of the SESG (1 interview), representatives of a specific beneficiary MES (3 interviews), representatives of the MA of OP HRD (1 interview), representatives of the CCU (1 interview) and focused groups with representatives of the MA and MC of the SESG (2 focus groups), as conducted in the period 15.12.2022-11.01.2023 a survey of 105 beneficiaries (out of a total of 276).

## **MAIN GUIDANCE POINTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The procedures subject to this evaluation meet the efficiency criteria to the extent that, other things being equal, with less than previously planned and contracted financial resources the results set have

been achieved or exceeded. These results can be considered definitive in relation to the procedures that have completed their implementation – BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M20P001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1” and BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1”. The data for the other procedures should be accepted under condition and as a provisional photograph of their implementation until the date by which it is accepted to be analysed or 30.9.2022.

The analysis at the **programming stage** of the financial resources of the operations shows that, with few exceptions, there are no significant changes from the initially planned budgets. The double increase of the budget under procedure BGO5M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children” is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the initially set values of the indicators, which means that the balance is respected in the programming of the measures under the operation.

The changes in the budget under procedure BG05M20P001-2.011 “Support for success” are a consequence of the specificity of the operation, which is programmed under two priority axes – PA 2 and PA 3.

A significant increase in the initial funding was also observed under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1”. Here it should be borne in mind that this is the first of its kind integrated operation involving measures under three operational programmes (OP RD, OP HRD and OP SESG). In the opinion of the participants in the interviews with representatives of the CCU and the MA of the OP HRD, the procedure presented a serious challenge, both at the programming stage and at the stage of the implementation of the activities. This also explains to some extent the necessary changes in the predefined parameters of the procedure under OP SESG.

The results of the analysis of the procedures under evaluation at the **contracting stage** do not differ significantly from those at the programming stage. Again, most procedures do not experience significant imbalances. An exception is procedure BG05M20P001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2”, where the percentage of contracted funds compared to planned funds is only 39 %. The low percentage of contracted funds as well as target values of the indicators under the procedure entails a risk of failure to achieve the MCSO parameters of the operation.

The funds for the implementation of CLLD strategies are programmed as part of PA 3, IP 9ii. Relocating the unspent resource from them for operations within the same IP does not require a specific change in the OP SESG. In this regard, the MA’s failure to undertake the relevant steps for the implementation of the MC decision and amendment of the OP SESG to release funds for which no agreements have been concluded for the implementation of CLLD strategies and update the amount in Table 10: Dimension 4 of the Programme only carries an informational risk.

**Analysis at the implementation stage shows that logically, operations that have completed their implementation report the highest percentage of verified funds against programmed/contracted funds. These are BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M20P001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1” and BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups”. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1 (the last procedure has been added to this group for analysis purposes because, although not formally reported, due to its progress in data reporting, it could be considered as such). The remaining operations are in implementation at the time of the drafting of this report and, accordingly, conclusions on this element of the evaluation under the Efficiency strand would be premature and inaccurate.**

The approaches and methods for determining the amount of simplified cost options are established in accordance with the principles, where applicable, and the requirements of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, as well as the European Commission's Guidelines for Simplified Cost Options (EGESIF\_14-0017). The approaches and methods are compliant to the applicable national legislation as well. Based on this, it can be argued that the rates and the amount of simplified cost options are adequately defined.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- In future planning of operations, especially involving complexity and diversity of activities and measures, the MA shall ensure that the programming of procedures is preceded by a precise analysis ensuring that the envisaged financial resource is linked to the objectives, activities and indicators set;
- Although, according to information from the MA, the unspent resource for financing the implementation of CLLD strategies has been relocated, it is recommended that the MA should assess whether to submit to the MC a written procedure to amend the MCSO operation "Ensure access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas" and a draft decision amending the OP SESG in order to update the amount in Table 10 Dimension 4 of the Programm

### **iii. Impact evaluation**

The present summary presents the results of the evaluation under the thematic strand 'Impact evaluation' under Contract No D03-24 of 8 September 2022 for the implementation of a public contract with the subject of 'Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalized groups such as the Roma' under Priority Axis 3 'Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion' of Operational Programme 'Science and Education for Smart Growth' 2014-2020. The contracting authority is the Executive Agency "Programme Education" and the Contractor - "Global Advisors" JSC.

The evaluation covers 23 procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020 (OP SESG), targeting directly or indirectly marginalized groups, including Roma, 15 of which are grant award procedures (grants) under the community-led local development (CLLD) approach with funding under OP SESG. The date as of which administrative data related to OP SESG have been analyzed in this report is 30.09.2022.

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION**

The methodology for the implementation of this evaluation is focused on the evaluation criterion 'Impact' and the evaluation questions under the specified criteria set by the Contracting Authority. The data collection methods used are: cabinet study; stakeholder consultations (interviews and focus groups); survey and telephone interviews, whereas the analysis methods are: expert evaluation; statistical processing of the data received; case studies; descriptive statistics; correlation analysis; assessment based on theory and counterfactual impact evaluation using the Difference in differences method. The methods of data collection and analysis have been selected on the basis of evaluation questions, available information and additional data collected during the course of conducting the evaluation. The choice to use them in carrying out the evaluation is conditioned by the need to provide data of the fullest possible scope and the highest quality, so as to provide the necessary basis for formulating adequate answers to the evaluation questions. The methods complement each other so that the limitations of one method are offset by the advantages of another.

To conduct the evaluation, data from the following sources have been used: NSI (Labour Force Monitoring and Population Census 2021), Open Data Portal - eGOV.bg, available data from the monitoring system of the Programme, data from previous analyses, etc.

Primary data are collected through: a survey (carried out in the period April-May 2023) among: 634 teachers in schools, participating in projects under the evaluated procedures, 794 - pedagogical specialists under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017, 472 - pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and pre-school education, participated in the evaluated procedures, 944 - parents of children from schools

and kindergartens that have participated in projects, 253 parents of children of school-age in schools not participating in the procedures (control group) and 158 teachers in schools not participating in the procedures (control group), interviews with representatives of the MA of OP SESG, with representatives from the Direct beneficiary MES (3 interviews), as well as carried out focus groups with representatives of the MA and the MC of OP SESG (2 focus groups) and conducted in the period 15.12.2022 – 11.01.2023 survey among 105 beneficiaries (out of 276 invited).

## **MAIN GUIDANCE POINTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The assessed procedures under PA3 have a significant impact on the achievement of the objectives of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012 - 2020), the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities (2015 - 2020), the Strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers (2013 - 2020), the National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy (2014 - 2020) and a number of other key strategic documents in the Education sector through the implementation of a substantial part of the measures set out in them. The accumulated experience and good practices of the evaluated procedures under PA3: BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and BG05M2OP001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1” have an indirect impact on the normative framework in the field of education.

Based on the analysis carried out, it can be argued that the implemented projects under the evaluated procedures moderately, along with other measures, such as the mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age, contribute to a decrease in the share of early school leaving of students. As long as there is no data on the time series of the surveyed indicator at the level of districts and municipalities, it is not possible to categorically trace the impact of the evaluated procedures at the level of the municipality, district and region.

Despite the general negative trends in the results of NEE and SME of students, the interventions under the evaluated procedures resulted in over 6 % impact on the results of NEE and SME, and their impact was greater in schools with higher presence of students from vulnerable groups. This has led to the maintenance of the positions of the participating schools (their participation in projects under the evaluated procedures contributes to maintaining their positions and not to decline) and, in the event of a decrease in the control group, the effects of the intervention are positive. If not for the activities funded under the evaluated procedures, the schools involved in the procedures would have reduced their performance by between 6 and 8 percentiles. It follows that improving the educational attainment of students from vulnerable groups remains a major challenge.

The distances in learning outcomes on the axis of the village-small town-capital city are still large. The evaluated procedures, along with the other instruments applied at national and local level have failed to overcome these differences, with differences between settlements still persisting and, in some cases, deepening.

The activities carried out under the evaluated projects, according to teachers and beneficiaries, led to a rather moderate and, according to parents, to a significant improvement in the language skills and literacy levels of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma. The activities assessed in the pre-school education system, according to kindergarten teachers, led to moderate improvements in the educational outcomes of children with special educational needs. According to the opinion of the pedagogical specialists, as a result of the projects implemented, the attitude towards the educational process and the attitude towards professional realization of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved moderately and, according to the parents’ opinion, to a significant extent.

The developed toolkit under BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” contributes to the teachers’ findings, albeit to a small extent, higher educational outcomes of the students involved in activities compared to those included in activities under the other evaluated projects.

Based on the comparison of the results according to procedures, it can be assumed that the tools developed under project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school



education” have a moderate contribution to the teachers’ findings related to the relatively high educational outcomes of children from vulnerable groups included in activities.

The activities implemented to increase the teaching capacity of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff in a multicultural environment, including educational mediators under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” have had a positive impact on improving the educational environment for children and students from vulnerable groups, and the pedagogical specialists involved in the activities for increasing the capacity for teaching in a multicultural environment claim that they apply to a high degree the lessons learned in the trainings in their practice.

The implemented projects under the CLLD approach with funding under OP SESG make a significant contribution to the educational integration of vulnerable groups, prevent early school leaving and improve the quality of educational services, thus being able to adequately address the identified socio-economic barriers on the territory of the LAG for pre-school education, school education and vocational education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the implementation of the activities of the assessed procedures carried out at its time. In some cases, the format of the planned activities could not be implemented and had to be changed, and in others, where a change in the form of implementation was not possible, the activities were postponed in time and implemented with some delay. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused some significant difficulties in the educational process, such as slowing down the pace of learning and accumulation of gaps and backlog of learning material by students.

For the successful implementation of the projects, despite the difficulties encountered during COVID-19, in addition to the skills of the management teams and the motivation of all actors involved in the activities, the actions taken by the MA are also crucial.

The directing of the activities under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” from the end of the academic year 2019-2020 and in the school year 2020-2021 to include additional training of students who have not participated in distance learning in electronic environments, as well as the transfer of funds from investment priority 9ii of PA 3 to BG05M2OP001-2.011 for the school year 2021-2022 for activities to support students from marginalized communities, including to overcome accumulated learning difficulties and gaps due to the COVID-19 crisis, can be assessed as a timely approach to reducing the risk of early school leaving.

The established support network for children and parents under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”, including psychologists, mediators and additional pedagogical specialists in one with the kindergarten teams, has played a significant role in reducing the impact on children and families of the restrictions imposed in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the actions, engagement and motivation of the pedagogical specialists, educational mediators have played a key role in keeping children and students at risk of early school leaving during the COVID-19 pandemic in the educational process.

The necessary reorganization and transition to a distance learning in an electronic environment (DLEE) during the COVID-19 pandemic has, on the one hand, deepened the educational gaps among the most vulnerable groups, and on the other hand has become a catalyst for faster development of the digital competences of the participants involved in the process, has helped to develop some soft skills in some of the students, has stimulated the improvement of the teamwork of pedagogical specialists and the introduction of more diverse learning methods.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Continued investment and activities in bridging the gap in learning outcomes in different localities are needed, with a multifactorial approach affecting all components and actors in the education process. Responsible institutions: MES, MA of Programme Education<sup>2</sup>.

It is necessary to continue the investments and activities for the prevention early school leaving with a focus on vulnerable groups, including Roma. It is necessary to implement on a regular basis the Council of Ministers Decree No 100/08.06.2018, amended and supplemented CMD No 259/14.10.2019 on the establishment and operation of a Mechanism for the joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age. To conduct regular analyses of the implementation of the Mechanism and its results. Responsible institutions: MES, MA of Programme Education.

Activities supporting synergies in a multicultural educational environment and interscholastic activities with a view to integrating vulnerable groups, including Roma, are evaluated as effective and should be continued. Responsible institutions: MES, MA of Programme Education.

A significant interest among pedagogical specialists for further trainings in the future with a clear focus has been identified. The evaluation of the usefulness of the trainings should be taken into account and, if possible, such trainings for working in a multicultural environment should be organised on a regular basis, so as to extend the range of pedagogical specialists trained as well as the spectrum of topics involved. Responsible institutions: MES, MA of Programme Education.

The experience gained from the methods applied and the activities implemented to reduce the share of early school leavers by overcoming discrimination, improving educational outcomes and educational integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, should be used in programming new operations aimed at the integration and reintegration of vulnerable groups, including Roma. Responsible institutions: MA of Programme Education.

The tools developed under BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 "Support for success" and BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" should continue to be implemented, developed and upgraded in the system of school and, respectively, pre-school education. Responsible institutions: MES, MA of Programme Education..

It is necessary to continue, develop and upgrade investments and activities to improve the language skills and literacy of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, to improve the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, as well as children and students with special educational needs. Responsible institutions: MES, MA of Programme Education.

The CLLD approach shows a good impact on the educational integration of vulnerable groups, preventing early school leaving and improving the quality of education services and should therefore continue to invest in it. Responsible institutions: MES, MA of Programme Education.

In the next programming period 2021 - 2027, account should be taken on the need to work harder towards improving the e-resource and electronic skills of both teachers and students, increasing motivation for learning among students from vulnerable groups, and increasing parental ownership of the educational process. Responsible institutions: MA of Programme Education.

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<sup>2</sup> Managing Authority of Programme "Education" 2021 – 2027

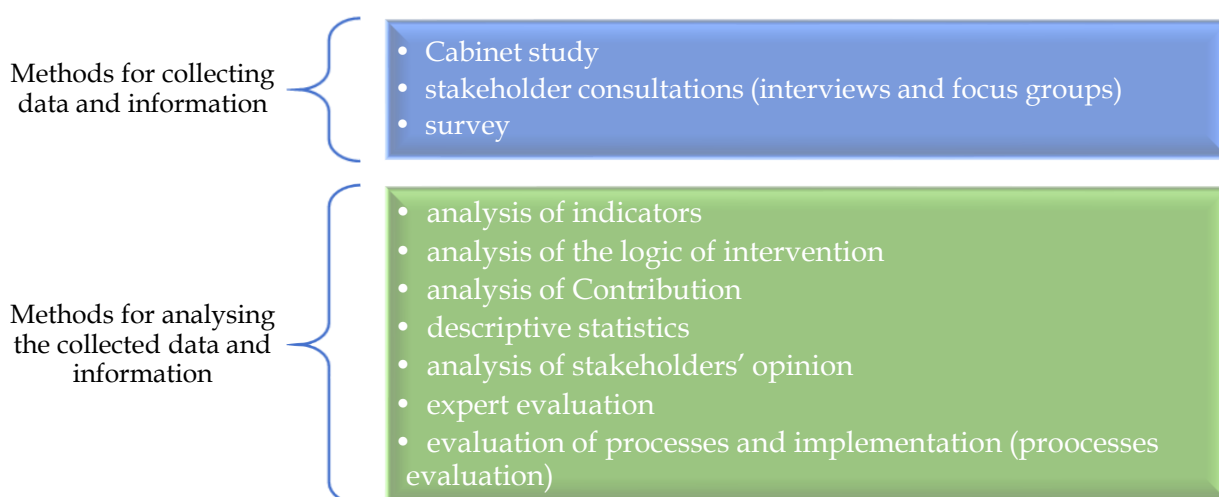
### III. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

#### Effectiveness of operations: Result orientation and level of achievement of the specific objectives under Investment Priority 9i and 9ii under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme

##### 3.1. Evaluation methods used, evaluation questions, data sources and information

The methodology for the implementation of this evaluation is focused on thematic strand Effectiveness of the operations and the evaluation questions set by the Contracting Authority. The figure below presents the methods for data collection and analysis used to assess the procedures under PA 3 of the OP SESG in order to answer the evaluation questions covered by the thematic strand. The methods for data collection and analysis are selected on the basis of evaluation questions, available information, and data collected further during the evaluation. The choice of their use in carrying out the assessment is justified on the need to provide data of the fullest possible scope and quality, so as to provide the necessary basis for formulating adequate answers to the evaluation questions. The methods complement each other so that the limitations of one method are offset by the advantages of another.

Figure1 Used methods for data collection and analysis



The carrying out of the evaluation made use of available data from the programme monitoring system (financial data, indicators, data on participants in operations), statistics, data from previous analyses, strategic and normative documents, etc.

In addition, primary data were collected through interviews with representatives of the MA of the OP SESG, representatives from the Direct Beneficiary MES, and focus groups with representatives of the MA and MC of the OP SESG (see statistics of the methodology for carrying out the evaluation).

##### 3.2. Statistics of the methodology for carrying out the evaluation

Table 1 presents the statistical information related to the methodology applied for the evaluation carried out.

Table1 Statistical data from the applied methodology

Survey of Beneficiaries	The period	Number/ %
Period of conduct	15.12.2022-11.01.2023	-
Total number of invited respondents	-	276

Total number of respondents	-	105
% of respondents	-	38 %
<b>Interviews conducted</b>	<b>Date of holding</b>	<b>Number</b>
Interview with representatives of DB MES (project BG05M2OP001-2.011-0001-C04 "Support for success")	12.01.2023	1
Interview with representatives of DB MES (project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004-C03 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education")	13.01.2023	1
Interview with representatives of DB MES (project BG05M2OP001-3.004-0001-C04 "New chance for success")	13.01.2023	1
Interview with representatives of the MA of OP SESG on the CLLD approach	26.01.2023	1
Interview with representatives of the CCU	13.03.2023	1
Interview with representatives of the MA of OP HRD (concerning procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" – Component 1)	14.03.2023	1
<b>Organised Focus Groups</b>	<b>Date of holding</b>	<b>Number</b>
FG with representatives of the MA	19.12.2022	1
FG held with representatives of the MC	30.01.2023	1

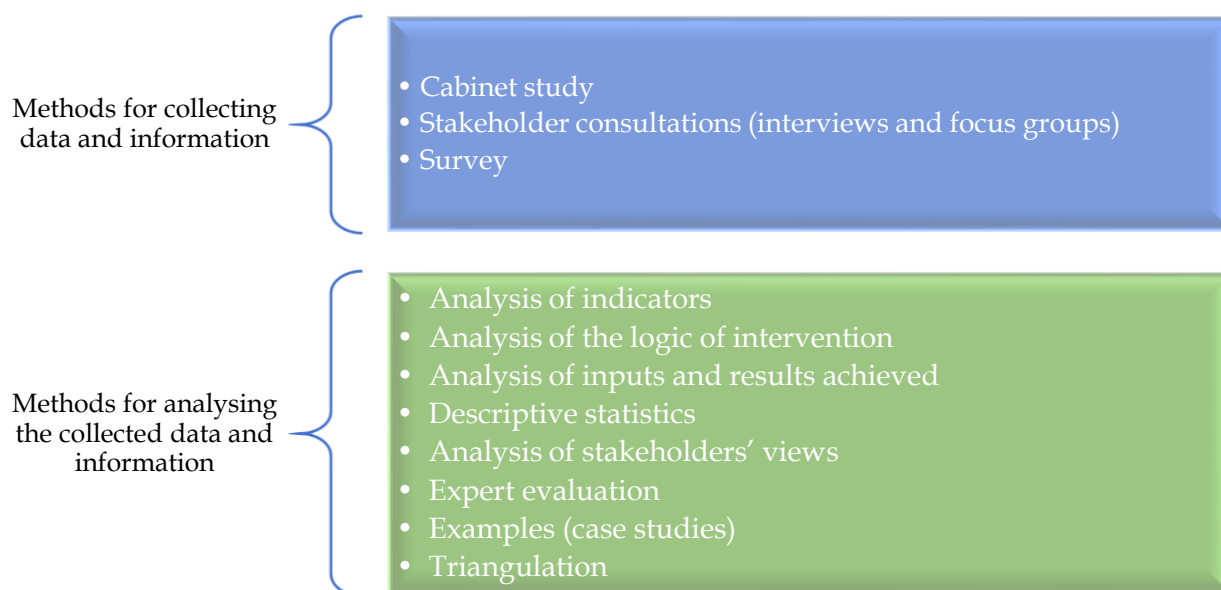
The specific methodologies for the carried out: survey of beneficiaries; interviews and focus groups, as well as their data and information are presented in *Annexes 1 to 17* to this report.

**Efficiency of the operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (implementation indicators) and adequacy of the applied simplified cost reporting methodologies'**

**3.3. Evaluation methods used, evaluation questions, data sources and information**

The methodology for the implementation of this evaluation is focused on the thematic strand "Efficiency" and the evaluation questions set by the Contracting Authority. The figure below presents the methods for data collection and analysis used to assess the procedures under PA 3 of the OP SESG in order to answer the Efficiency evaluation questions covered by the thematic strand. The methods for data collection and analysis are selected on the basis of evaluation questions, available information, and data collected further during the evaluation. The choice of their use in carrying out the assessment is justified by the need to provide data of the fullest possible scope and quality, so as to provide the necessary basis for formulating adequate answers to the evaluation questions. The methods complement each other so that the limitations of one method are offset by the advantages of another.

*Figure 2 Used methods for data collection and analysis*



Available data from the programme monitoring system (financial data, indicators, data on participants in operations), statistics, data from previous analyses, strategic and normative documents, etc.

In addition, primary data were collected through interviews with representatives of the MA of the SESG, representatives of a direct beneficiary MES, representatives of the MA of OP HRD and CCU and focus groups with representatives of the MA and MC of the OP SESG (see statistics of the methodology for carrying out the evaluation).

### 3.4. Statistics of the methodology for carrying out the evaluation

The table below presents the statistical information related to the methodology applied for the evaluation carried out.

Table 2 Statistical data from the methodology applied

Survey of Beneficiaries	Period	Number/ %
Period of conduct	15.12.2022-11.01.2023	-
Total number of invited respondents	-	276
Total number of respondents	-	105
% of respondents	-	38 %
Interviews conducted	Date of holding	Number
Interview with representatives of KB MES (project BG05M2OP001-2.011-0001-C04 "Support for success")	12.01.2023	1
Interview with representatives of KB MES (project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004-C03 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education")	13.01.2023	1
Interview with representatives of KB MES (project BG05M2OP001-3.004-0001-C04 "New chance for success")	13.01.2023	1
Interview with representatives of the MA of OP NSIS on the CLLD approach	26.01.2023	1
Interview with representatives of the CDC	13.03.2023	1
Interview with representatives of MLSP	14.03.2023	1
Organised Focus Groups	Date of holding	Number

FG with representatives of the MA	19.12.2022	1
FG held with representatives of the MC	30.01.2023	1

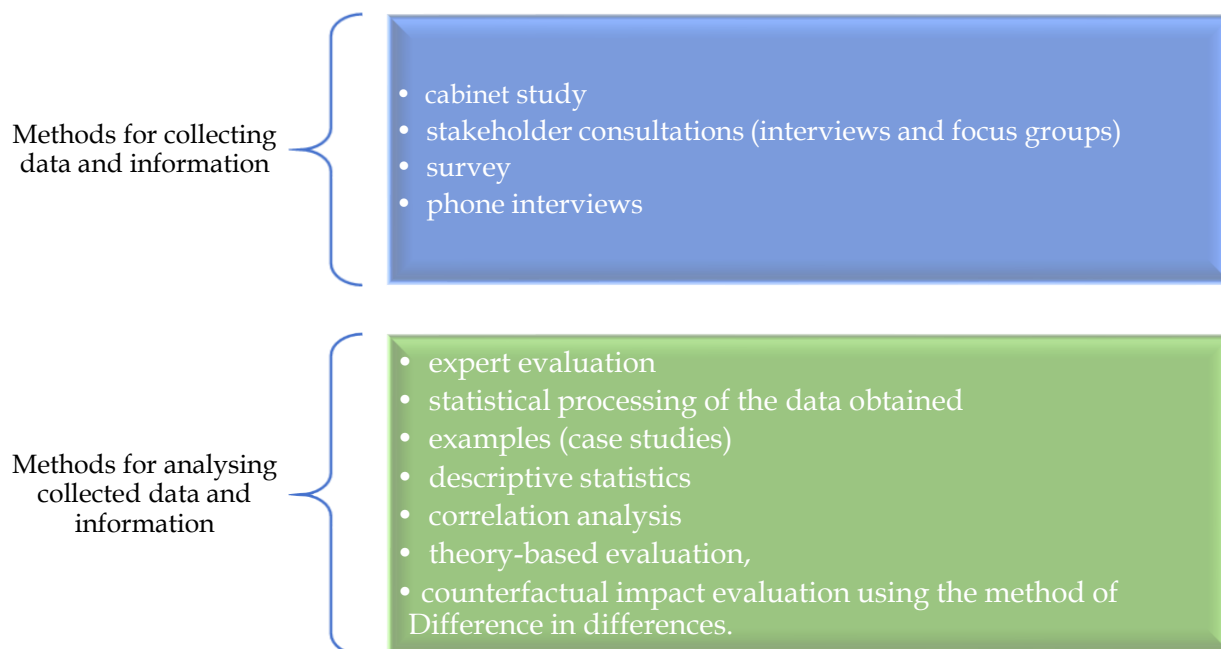
The specific methodologies for the carried out: survey of beneficiaries; interviews and focus groups, as well as their data and information are presented in *Annexes 1-16* to this report.

## Impact evaluation

### 3.5. Evaluation methods used to conduct the, evaluation questions, information and data sources

The methodology for the implementation of the present evaluation has been designed to answer the evaluation questions raised by the Contracting Authority in the strand of Impact evaluation. The figure below presents the methods of data collection and analysis used to evaluate the procedures under PA 3 of the OP SESG in order to answer the evaluation questions covered by the thematic strand. The methods of data collection and analysis have been selected on the basis of the evaluation questions, available information and data collected further during the course of conducting the evaluation. The choice to use them in carrying out the evaluation is conditioned by the need to provide data of the fullest possible scope and the highest quality, so as to provide the necessary basis for formulating adequate answers to the evaluation questions. The methods complement each other so that the limitations of one method are offset by the advantages of another.

*Figure 3 Used data collection and analysis methods*



For the purpose of the evaluation, a series of studies were carried out to gather information to answer the evaluation questions. Depending on the specificities and activities of each of the procedures performed, different samples of educational institutions (schools and kindergartens) are distinguished and the key stakeholders – pedagogical specialists, teachers and parents are covered. The opinions of parents and teachers serve as a source of information about the changes that have occurred in students’ attitudes and educational achievements.

**Objectives and subject matter of the studies:** The aim of the studies was to register the opinions and attitudes of participants in the project activities under the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020. The results of the studies have been used to evaluate the impact of procedures, highlighting the short- and long-term effects of interventions. The collection of information from participants in procedures aimed at inclusive education and socio-economic integration of marginalized groups, including Roma, had the following objectives: to complement the information missing in the available documents through which an adequate answer to key impact evaluation questions can be given, and to compare the documentary information with the views and views of the participants on the impact of the activities.

**Target groups:** Participants in the procedures – teachers, pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff and parents of children, covered by the activities under the following assessed procedures: BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”; BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”; BG05M20P001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”; BG05M20P001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”; BG05M20P001-2.011 “Support for success”; BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration” of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education” – Component 1 and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”.

**Registration methodology:** Given the type of micro-data bases provided by the Contracting Authority under each of the procedures and information about the end users in them, the methodologies we selected for registration of the primary information were two:

- telephone interview (to conduct research among parents);
- online survey (to conduct research among directors, teachers, non-pedagogical staff).

The design of the questionnaires is consistent with the selected methods of data registration: optimal number of questions, for the most part closed and semi-open type. The interview and the online survey are anonymous and do not require the completion of personal data of the respondent (names and telephone number, email address, etc.), but for the purpose of the evaluation the collected data included age, gender, education (where applicable), status on the labour market, residence and other demographic characteristics, consistent with the objectives of the specific procedure.

**Instruments:** Questionnaires for researching the opinion of end-users on the procedures under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

**Sampling methodology:** Based on micro data on target groups representatives who took part in the respective procedures provided by the Contracting Authority, a corresponding number of persons to be interviewed (volumes of sample populations) has been calculated. Sample populations are divided into two – depending on whether the interventions are aimed at school or pre-school education. For each target group, an independent sample was selected using the formula for determining the sample size on a population basis, 95 % confidence level, a guarantee factor of 0.96, a standard deviation 0.5 and a maximum permissible error  $\pm 6.921$  %. For the different samples, the sample error varies depending on the sample size. The samples shall include representatives of the target groups under the different procedures as follows:

*Table 3 Planned and executed samples*

Target group	Volume of the planned sample	Sample size	Maximum permissible error
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Parents of school-age children in schools that have participated in the projects	540	544	± 4.202 %
Parents of children in kindergartens/pre-school groups in school that have participated in the projects	400	400	± 4.899 %
Teachers in schools that participated in procedures projects: BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success"; BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" - Component 1; BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection"; Procedures implemented under the CLLD Approach "Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas".	550	634	± 3.892 %
BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment" - pedagogical specialists	350	794	± 3.478 %
Pedagogical staff in kindergartens and pre-school education participated in the procedures BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school	400	472	± 4.511 %



education and training of disadvantaged children”; ‘BG05M2OP001-3.005 Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education’;				
BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” – educational mediators*	200	3*		
Control group of parents in schools (in a sample of schools) not participating in the procedures	250	253		± 6.198 %
Control group of teachers in schools not involved in the procedures	250	158		± 7.796 %
Survey among beneficiaries under the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020	100	105		± 8.946 %

*\*Due to the fact that no specific identification is available in the provided micro data to allow the identification of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, the survey was conducted among all persons included in the micro data. The survey ended with completed only 3 surveys by educational mediators, which is insufficient for the purposes of statistical summaries and for this reason they have not been analysed.*

Control group of kindergartens and preschool groups in schools has not been constructed, as project BG05M2OP001- 3.005-004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” covers practically all kindergartens with presence of children from vulnerable groups according to certain criteria. Therefore, it is methodologically impossible to construct a control group for this target group (pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and parents of children in preschool education).

The size of the population for each of the procedures is presented in the table below:

*Table4 Volume of population of each procedure*

Procedure	Number of educational institutions covered in projects under the procedure	Number of units/persons covered
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3.001	226	24 498
3.005	1 949, of which 1 664 kindergartens	teachers 1 629 and parents (children) 38 437
2.018	88	38 793
2.011	A total of 1 784 schools, of which 1 061 schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups and 709 schools with a lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups	190 274, of which 13 509 persons who participated after 09.07.2021
3.002	136	29 294
CLLD	71	
3.017		3 287

In the cases where there is no contact information for the representatives of the target groups in the micro data for the procedures provided by the Contracting Authority, the surveys were sent to the participating kindergartens/schools with a request to be filled in by the pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff. Parents participate in the survey both as a target group covered by part of the activities and as an interested party who can give an opinion on the educational achievements and progress of children. This approach makes it possible to triangulate opinions and to better report the achievements and results of the implemented projects.

Due to the lack of microdata for teachers participating in BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 "Support for success" under this algorithm, a sample of 160 schools was made and the surveys to the pedagogical specialists were sent through the management of the schools in the sample. The lack of contact details for parents under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 "Support for success" could not be compensated, therefore participants from this target group were not interviewed.

### 1. Methodology of the sample for conducting telephone interviews with parents

Based on the size of the sample population for each individual sample, a name list of participants to be included in the specific sample was drawn up as follows: in the name list (micro database) the column shall record the serial number of the person (1, 2, 3... n, where n is the number of the last person on the list) and the row lists the name of the person concerned. A third column is created, which is a cumulative sum, which is formed as follows: opposite the name of each person is a number, which is the sum of the sequence number of the particular person and the cumulative sum of the previous person. After compiling the cumulative sum for the specific micro database, a random starting number shall be selected, which is within 1 to n, where n is the sequence number of the last person from the relevant micro database and represents the number of the first unit that came into the sample. A step was then calculated which is equal to the private size of the population and the sample size.

The next step is the determination of the sequential numbers of the persons in the sample. This was done by the following algorithm:

1. A random number shall be selected from 1 to n, where n is the sequence number of the last person in the sample, which is the starting number;
2. Calculate the step equal to the size of the particular population divided by the sample size of the procedure concerned;

3. Compare the starting number with the cumulative sum of each row. Select the cumulative sum that is closest in value and larger than the starting number and smaller than the next cumulative sum. This is how the first person to enter the sample is determined;
4. Each subsequent person entering the sample shall be determined by adding the step with the previous sum of the step and the starting number and comparing it to the cumulative sum as described in point 3;
5. This action is continued until the desired sample size is reached.

Expressed algorithmically, as described above should look like this:

- compute  $A_1 = \text{random number}$
- compute Step.
- compute  $A_2 = A_1 + \text{step}$ .
- compute  $A_3 = A_2 + \text{step}$ .
- compute  $A_n = A_{(n-1)} + \text{step}$ .

where 'n' is the number of all persons involved in the procedure.

A person falls into the sample only when in comparison, the cumulative sum of the person is less than the calculated  $A_k$  ( $A_1 < A_k < A_n$ ), where "k" is a specific sequential number of the person.

This ensures impartiality and randomness in terms of choice, as the starting number is random and the step is calculated on the basis of the total number of persons involved in the procedures, the cumulative sum and the number of effective interviews to be achieved.

In the course of the fieldwork, additional samples were emitted for each of the samples on the same principle and they were used in cases where the calculated sample sizes under the relevant procedures were not achieved because: the respondent's phone is turned off, the phone is wrong, the respondent does not respond to the calls, the respondent refuses to give an interview, the phone number is not that person's, the person has no current phone number, the person has no phone, etc. Such respondents have been replaced by appropriate characteristics (sex, age) from the additional extracts.

## **2. Selection methodology for conducting online surveys with directors, teachers and pedagogical specialists**

From the list of schools involved in the relevant procedure, teachers from all schools carrying out activities within the scope of the procedures under evaluation were contacted. Pedagogical specialists were interviewed who were directly involved in the activities with students under the relevant procedure. The schools and the teachers involved in the projects were invited to conduct the study. In practice, a comprehensive survey method was used here instead of sampling, with the exception of BG05M2OP001-2.011, where a sample approach was used in the selection of schools.

For project BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment" and in cases where a database of emails of participants in the activities is available, the available data were used to be addressed directly. The same approach was applied for BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education", where contact data of pedagogical specialists involved in project activities are included in micro data.

Those who responded to the survey (response rate) gave a reliable basis of surveys to serve the purposes of the analysis, except for the case already described with the number of surveys by educational mediators under BG05M2OP001-3.017.

## **3. Control group**

Based on the sampling methodology described above, samples were also emitted for control groups under the relevant procedures. Similar schools were used for this purpose, where no project activities were carried out within the scope of the evaluated procedures. The “propensity score matching” (PSM) method was used to select schools. Control schools were selected according to the following criteria:

1/type of school

2/type of settlement

3/share of Roma population in the municipality (according to NSI data from Census 2021)

4/type of school by grade

Within the control schools, principals, teachers and parents were interviewed. The criteria on which respondents from the control groups were interviewed are as follows:

- The respondent or the respondent’s child has not participated in procedures or participated in activities under any of these procedures;
- With regard to the share, the population of the control group interviewed is identical or with a difference of not more than 1 % in terms of characteristics: sex, age, locality, education, ethnicity and/or by characteristics typical of each of the procedures (e.g.: the respondent is the parent of a child at preschool or school age, etc.).

For the purpose of carrying out a counterfactual impact evaluation (also called counterfactual evaluation), the results were compared between the schools involved in the interventions and a control group of similar schools that did not participate in the interventions. The comparison between the two groups highlighted the effects of the evaluated procedures in relation to the stated objectives and results that the interventions aim at. Counterfactual analysis is “a comparison between what actually happened and what would have happened in the absence of intervention”.

General characteristic of the method for testing control and treatment groups (Counterfactual impact evaluation using control groups applied in the Difference in differences option).

**The counterfactual impact evaluation** allows for a thorough and systematic view of whether the objectives of a given policy or intervention have been achieved, as well as the causal effects of the policy. These features are essential for assessing the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the policy. The method consists of comparing indicators observed in both groups. In essence, the method is quantitative and there are requirements for the volume and quality of information.

The choice of this method of assessment, and in particular the “Difference in Differences” option, is dictated, on the one hand, by the advantages that the method provides and, on the other hand, taking into account the availability and nature of the basic analytical information available to the team and the information it plans to collect through research. The method requires data with a clear time frame, a clearly defined impact group and intervention area, an accurate assessment and selection of observed parameters in the control and impact group, as well as taking into account trends in the target group prior to the implementation of the assessed policy, relatively ‘clean’ of side-factors environment in both groups. The data to be collected and analysed partially correspond to these characteristics and allow this type of assessment to be carried out under different limitations, which are mentioned in the text of each section. The risks to the qualitative application of this method are mainly related to the provision of appropriate information and whether there is a direct link between the intervention and the results achieved. In the present case, a further limitation is the comprehensiveness of certain interventions (e.g. BG05M2OP001 -2.011-001 “Support for success” covering 74.3 % of schools in the country, with the remaining 23.7 % not similar in profile and falling within the group of schools without concentration of vulnerable groups, respectively in the group of schools that do not fall under the criterion of “

educational level of parents (guardians)”<sup>3</sup>. In practice, the control sample was selected by only 2 % of schools, which made it difficult to achieve maximum similarity (by the method of the closest doppelgangers) and there are differences between the two groups, which also affect the quasi-experimental design of the evaluation and hence the results. The application of the counterfactual evaluation method requires the presence of two samples with highly similar characteristics, however, difficulties with recruiting individuals from both groups can occur. Due to restrictions to download a control sample that is similar to the main sample (schools involved in the procedures), different samples have been used that can, to a certain extent, provide comparability between school groups (such as those not falling under the vulnerability criterion “educational level of parents (guardians)” and those that are in groups 1 to 5 under the vulnerability criterion “ educational level of parents (guardians)”. Such subgroups and their results are discussed in section 4.5.2.

### Limitations and challenges to construct the control sample

Due to the wide range of interventions, the construction of a control group of schools was a serious challenge. The reasons for this are that out of a total of 2349 schools in Bulgaria, the procedures under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020 cover 1,793 schools. However, among the remaining 556 schools, too few have a similar profile to the schools, which are included in the Priority Axis 3 interventions.

Distribution of institutions into groups according to the criterion ‘educational level of parents (guardians)’ under the Regulation on the financing of institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, adopted by Council of Ministers Decree No 219 of 5 September 2017, Annex No 6a to Article 52b(2), which shall enter into force on 1 January 2018 among the schools participating and not participating in the procedures under evaluation:

Table5 Profile of participating and non-participating schools

Number of non-participating and participating schools in the evaluated procedures				
Breakdown of institutions into groups according to the criterion “educational level of parents (guardians)”	Not participating	Participate in 1 procedure	Participate in 2 procedures	Participate in 3 or more procedures
Group 0 (does not fall under the vulnerability criterion)	539	686	84	11
Group 1	6	124	24	4
Group 2	3	127	38	4
Group 3	4	129	27	11
Group 4	2	173	53	10
Group 5	2	213	60	15

This effectively put the evaluation team in difficulty in selecting a control group of schools. For the purpose of the evaluation, control schools were selected among both - schools not included in the projects

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of the analysis, the grouping of institutions under the Regulation on the financing of institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, adopted by Council of Ministers Decree No 219 of 5 September 2017, Annex 6a to Article 52b(2), which enters into force on 1 January 2018, is used.

under evaluation selected out of the population of the group 1 to 5 schools (marked in red in the table above), and from schools that did not fall under the vulnerability criterion group “education level of parents/ guardians” and which were also not involved in project activities under the evaluated procedures. However, as a profile, control schools that fall into groups 1 to 5 are composed predominantly of schools of group 1 and 2, while the participating schools that fall into groups 1 to 5 have a different profile according to the criterion “educational level of parents (guardians)” – more than half are in groups 4 and 5. This creates significant difficulties in the counterfactual analysis, as the number of schools from which control schools can be selected is too small to find statistical similarity (full doubles) and a general categorical similarity (affiliation to any of the vulnerability groups) is sought. Precisely because of this feature, by some indicators, the control group gives better results than the main one. In order to avoid this methodological constraint, the Contractor’s team has taken an approach, where possible, to compare the results of the main group before and after the intervention (mainly under the NEE and SME indicators) and to take into account the impact of the evaluated procedures.

Non-participating and participating schools in procedures under Priority Axis 3						
	Non-participating	Participating	Non-participating	Participating	Non-participating	Participating
<b>Group 0*</b>	539	781	96.9 %	43.6 %	x	x
<b>Group 1</b>	6	152	1.1 %	8.5 %	<b>35.3 %</b>	15.0 %
<b>Group 2</b>	3	169	0.5 %	9.4 %	<b>17.6 %</b>	16.7 %
<b>Group 3</b>	4	167	0.7 %	9.3 %	23.5 %	16.5 %
<b>Group 4</b>	2	236	0.4 %	13.2 %	11.8 %	<b>23.3 %</b>
<b>Group 5</b>	2	288	0.4 %	16.1 %	11.8 %	<b>28.5 %</b>

\*do not fall under the vulnerability criterion

Breakdown of institutions into groups according to the criterion “educational level of parents (guardians)”					
As a percentage of respondents		Percentage of parents with lower than secondary education (%)			
		over 60 %	40-60 %	20-39 %	up to 20 %
<b>% of parents with lower than primary education</b>	over 50 %	5	4	3	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion
	30-50 %	4	3	2	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion
	10-30 %	3	2	1	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion
	up to 10 %	2	1	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion

In different parts of the analysis, depending on the evaluation questions and the objectives that the analysis sets itself, the control group of schools was compared to all participating schools or only with the participating schools that fall into groups 1 to 5 under the criterion “educational level of parents

(guardians)". In the present case, that criterion was used as an indirect indicator of vulnerability, as there is no other indicator or data that can serve as a measure of the vulnerability of the population of students or their parents. Data on the proportion of students from vulnerable groups were also not available to the evaluation team, but only information on which schools fall into the group of schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups and which are in the group of schools with a lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups.

**Fieldwork:** The primary information was collected through telephone interview method CATI and online surveys via CAWI. For each procedure after the completion of the fieldwork, a logical inspection and verification of the collected data was carried out (a check of the collected data is carried out to establish whether the respondent has sincerely answered the questions or filled randomly "in directions", whether all questions are answered, whether the answers are logical, etc.), and the processing of the data is carried out by applying appropriate statistical methods for data analysis.

#### **Description of CATI/Computer Assisted Telephone Interview/**

Phone interviews carried out using the CATI method are conducted through a system of quality control at software and supervisor level, through specialised software and project leader, who monitors compliance with the set criteria for interviewing the target group and the exact questioning of respondents. The telephone interview questionnaire is programmed in a specialised CATI platform. Respondents' responses are accumulated on a server and after the survey is completed they are downloaded in the form of a file convenient for statistical processing (excel;Sav).

#### **Description of CAWI/Computer Assisted Web Interviewing/**

The CAWI/**Computer Assisted Web Interviewing/** survey is part of a questionnaire-based methodology provided to the respondent via email, panel or website.

The main focus of CAWI surveys is on the design of the interview questionnaire, as the response rate is directly related to the quality of the questionnaire itself.

The pre-made questionnaire is programmed in a specialised Internet-based platform for conducting CAWI surveys. Respondents fill out the questionnaire themselves, without assistance from third parties. The CAWI software, on the one hand, allows respondents to respond quickly and accurately to the questions, where the program itself monitors compliance with all filters, references and acceptable number of answers to the relevant questions, and on the other hand, real-time fieldwork control. Respondents' responses are accumulated on a server and after the survey is completed they are downloaded in the form of a file convenient for statistical processing (excel. Sav).

### **3.6. Statistical data on the methodology for carrying out the evaluation**

In addition to the information collected through qualitative and quantitative methods, the evaluation also uses statistical data from the national external evaluations in Bulgarian language and mathematics in grades 4 and 7 and the results from the state matriculation exams in Bulgarian in grade 12. This data was used at the school level. NSI data from the 2021 census were also used for the relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 from the population of the same age by statistical regions, districts and municipalities and data from the implementation of the Mechanism for the joint work of institutions in covering, including and preventing the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age. Micro data of the participants in each of the procedures within the scope of the evaluation and NSI data from census 2021 – Population by ethnicity, statistical regions, districts and municipalities as up to 07.09.2021 are used.

#### IV. EVALUATION UNDER THEMATIC STRAND EFFECTIVENESS: RESULT ORIENTATION AND LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES UNDER INVESTMENT PRIORITY 9I AND 9II UNDER PRIORITY AXIS 3 OF THE PROGRAMME

##### 4.1. What is the progress (including the achievement of final targets) in implementing the Priority Axis 3 indicators aimed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups such as Roma, including milestones and targets in their performance framework?

For the purpose of answering this evaluation question, an analysis of the indicators set out in the evaluated procedures was carried out in the context of the assessment of the progress made against the values of the indicators at Priority Axis 3 level and investment priority, aimed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups, including Roma as of 30.9.2022.

OP “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020 (OP SESG)<sup>4</sup> is a key instrument for achieving the objectives adopted by the Republic of Bulgaria within the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The programme is structured into five priority axes (PAs) with a total budget of BGN 1.349 billion (European and national funding). The first three main axes propose solutions to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, namely:

- ensuring access to quality education: condition of complete participation of citizens in the inclusive economy/PA 2 “Education and lifelong learning” – quality education, PA 3 “Educational environment for active social inclusion” – accessible education/.
- development of scientific, research and innovation potential in the Republic of Bulgaria: condition for the development of smart economy/PA 1 “Research and Technological Development” – development of research potential/; PA 2 – quality of higher education, access to and quality of lifelong learning vocational education and training. They are all key activities to bridge the gap between research and education systems, on the one hand, and the needs of business and the labour market, on the other hand/. The strong synergy between these additional measures is an argument in favour of using the two-fund approach in the OP SESG – funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for PA 1 and funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) for PA 2 and PA 3.

The subject of this evaluation is the Priority Axis 3 procedures aimed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups, including Roma, referred to in the Technical Specification. The third priority axis “Educational environment for active social inclusion” provides funding through the European Social Fund for a total of BGN 229.2 million or 16.99 % of the total budget of the Programme, invested in measures for active inclusion and socio-economic integration. The interventions under this priority axis aim to build an educational environment that promotes the development of the potential of each child and student for personal development, as well as successful realisation and socialisation. It also relies on the effective integration into the education system of children, students and young people from ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups. The implementation of PA 3 aims at higher quality and better access to education by creating a supportive environment for education for children and students with special educational needs.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pageId=32> - Version 5.0/approved by the EC on 07.05.2021/



Priority Axis 3 includes measures under thematic objective 9 "Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and all forms of discrimination under two investment priorities:

- Investment priority 9i (IP9i) – Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation and better employability. The allocation is EUR 22 099 394.50 (ESF). Investment priority 9i Specific Objective – Increase the number of educational institutions providing a supportive environment for inclusive education. Investment priority 9i funds are planned to support the implementation of measures both to achieve the national Europe 2020 target of reducing the number of early school leavers (up to 11 %) and indirectly to reduce the number of people living in poverty by 260 000 by 2020;
- Investment priority 9ii (IP 9ii) – Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as Roma. The allocation is EUR 77 527 675.50 (ESF). Specific objective – Increasing the number of children and pupils from marginalised communities, including Roma, who are successfully integrated through the education system. The funds are intended to support measures for the integration of children at risk of exclusion from the education system for reasons related to belonging to closed and marginalised ethnic groups. In this sense, PA 3 measures are complementary to national measures. The development of a favorable educational environment creates the prerequisites for: 1) reduction in the number of drop-outs (a significant percentage of them belong to minority groups at risk) and 2) better realisation of the labour market as a means of increasing employment and reducing social exclusion. Both results are in direct relation to the national Europe 2020 targets: reduce by 260,000 people living in poverty and increase the employment rate to 76 %.

According to data from the public portal "Information System for Management and Monitoring of EU Funds in Bulgaria 2020"<sup>5</sup> (UMIS) for the period of the evaluation under the PA 3, a total of 27 operations have been financed, 15 of which are grant procedures under the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) approach financed under the OP SESG. According to the Technical Specifications for this procurement, four operations are outside the scope of the evaluation, namely: BG05M2OP001-3.018 "Supporting inclusive education"; BG05M2OP001-3.003 "Providing conditions and resources for the construction and development of supportive environment in kindergartens and schools for implementation of inclusive training – Phase 1"; BG05M2OP001-3.019 "Supporting vulnerable groups for access to higher education"; BG05M9OP001-2.056 "Socio-economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 2."

In order to achieve the objectives of Priority Axis 3 in OP SESG the following indicators are defined:

*Table 6 Common result indicators for which a target of PA 3 and programme-specific result indicators corresponding to the specific objective have been set*

Identifier	Code	Unit of measurement	Base value 2014	Target value 2023
<b>I. Investment Priority 9i</b>				
Children aged between 3-6 who have received early prevention services which aim to prevent educational difficulties	P3111	number	150	500
Kindergartens, who have provided a supportive environment for early prevention of learning difficulties	P3113	number	25	43
<b>II. Investment Priority 9ii</b>				
Children, students and youths from ethnic	P3211	number	30 000	45 000

<sup>5</sup> <https://2020.eufunds.bg/bg/7/0>

minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system				
Share of pedagogical specialists among those involved in actions under the OP qualified to work in multicultural environment	P3212	%	90	90
Share of persons (including Roma), who have received certificates for successfully completed literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP.	P3213	%	71	80

Table7 Common and specific output indicators under PA 3

Identifier	Code	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023
<b>I. Investment Priority 9i</b>			
Children and school students with special educational needs, participating in activities, supported by the IP9i	3111	number	2 300
Full day kindergartens/united childcare institutions supported to provide supportive environment for early prevention of learning difficulties	3112	number	155
<b>II. Investment Priority 9ii</b>			
Children, students, and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration	3211	number	56 250
Pedagogical specialists involved in training to work in a multicultural environment	3212	number	3 600
Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP	3213	number	20 000

Table8 Indicators in the Performance Framework under PA 3

Identifier	Code	Unit of measurement	Milestone 2018	Final target 2023
Certified funds	F3	Euro	16 751 919,6	117 208 319,00
<b>I. Investment Priority 9i</b>				
Children and school students with special educational needs, participating in activities, supported by the IP9i	I3111	number	1 500	2 300
<b>II. Investment Priority 9ii</b>				
Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration	I3211	number	1 500	56 250

The procedures under this evaluation include measures under investment priority IP 9ii “Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as Roma”. Only procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” has been programmed under both investment priorities of PA 3, and it sets specific indicators for the operation, including such referring to indicators under the PA, but without having set target values. In the Application Conditions, the MCSO indicators are broken down and additional target values are set for the indicators that directly refer to indicators at programme level-3112, 3211 and P3211. These indicators track the contribution of

BG05M2OP001-3.005 to the investment priorities, but no data on their implementation is available at the time of preparation of this report due to the fact that the operation is still in implementation. In response to a question to the MA, it was clarified that the progress on the additionally set target values of indicators will be reported in the final report.

Due to the above, the procedure is not included in the assessment of the contribution of the operations under assessment to the achievement of the objectives at the level of the investment priority and priority axis of the OP SESG, and accordingly, in this part of the evaluation report, only the contribution of the other procedures assessed to the IP 9ii are a subject. Evidence of the level of achievement of the planned results of this procedure is provided in response to evaluative question 6. It is apparent from the above that, after taking into account the final results, the procedure is expected to make a significant contribution to the relevant initiators under IP 9ii and IP 9i.

The total contribution of the evaluated procedures to the achievement of IP 9ii is presented in the following tables.

*Table 9 Contribution of the procedures assessed to the achievement of the output indicators under IP 9ii of PA 3*

Identifier	Code	Unit of measurement	Target value 2023	Verified value
Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration	3211	number	56 250	47 991
Pedagogical specialists involved in training to work in a multicultural environment	3212	number	3 600	2 688
Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP	3213	number	20 000	11 406

The contribution of the evaluated procedures to the target under indicator 3211 is slightly above 85 %. Here it should be noted that according to the Annual Report on the implementation of the OP SESG for 2021, the total cumulative value of the indicator is 102 684 or almost twice above the target value, which gives grounds for suspicion of underestimating the target value of the indicator in the Programme.

Indicator 3212 also reported a high rate of progress in the evaluated procedures against the target value of the Programme – above 75 %. Here, unlike the results of indicator 3211, in the 2021 Annual Implementation Report of the SESG, the cumulative value of the indicator was only 271, which may be due to progress in the implementation of measures reported by the indicator in 2022, including under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical professionals to work in a multicultural environment”, in which only from the other procedures assessed this indicator is reported.

Progress is also observed in the contribution of indicator 3213, which is slightly above 57 % compared to the OP target. The indicator is included in the two evaluated adult literacy procedures – Phase 1 and Phase 2, of which Phase 2 is still in operation. The performance of the Phase 1 indicator is overachieved – 107 %. However, in the case of Phase 2, with the target value of the indicator 12 000, the contracted for projects is only 4 036, meaning that there is a serious risk of not achieving the indicator value set in the Programme.

*Table10 Contribution of the procedures assessed to the achievement of the IP 9ii result indicators of PA 3*

Identifier	Code	Unit of measurement	Base value 2014	Target value 2023	Verified value
Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system	P3211	number	30 000	45 000	27 516

Share of pedagogical specialists among those involved in actions under the OP qualified to work in multicultural environment	P3212	%	90	90	13,82
Share of persons (including Roma), who have received certificates for successfully completed literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP.	P3213	%	71	80	73.47 Phase 1 and 3.75 % Phase 2 of the “Elderly Literacy” procedure

The contribution of the operations subject to this assessment to the target value of indicator P3211, similarly to the performance indicator 3211, is relatively high, slightly above 61 %, when reported in the Annual Implementation Report of the OP SESG for 2021, a cumulative value above 141 %.

A low contribution rate is observed under indicator P3212, which can be explained by the fact that procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”, which is only reported in implementation and the final results of the measures have not yet been achieved and reported.

The contribution to the performance of result indicator P3213 is a consequence of the implementation of procedures BG05M2OP001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1” and Procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – Phase 2”. While in the first phase the indicator was reached almost 92 %, the second phase procedure, which was in place at the time of preparation of this report, reached a book value of 3.75 %. To the extent that the baseline value of the indicator is 71 % and the achievement of Phase 1 is 73.47 % and in the absence of sufficient data to assess the progress under Phase 2 given the early stage of implementation at the time of the assessment, this indicator should be considered with the potential to present a risk of non-achievement of the target set.

With regard to the indicators in the performance framework under PA 3 of the OP SESG, it can be concluded that the milestones of the indicators included in the performance framework for 2018 have been achieved, as reported in the Annual Implementation Report of the OP SESG for 2018.

Under indicator I3211 “Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration” the final target for 2023 has already been reached and almost doubled.

The financial indicator F3 as of 2018 reported certified funds under PA 3 amounting to EUR 21 436 018.71 with a milestone of EUR 16 751 919.6.

As of 2021, the certified resources under PA 3 amounted to EUR 48 746 470.33 or close to 42 % of the 2023 final target.

As of 30.9.2022, the funds verified under the evaluated procedures amounted to BGN 118 991 445.08 or EUR 60 839 359.80 and the certified expenditure, respectively BGN 114 376 917.39 or EUR 58 479 989.26.

The contribution of the evaluated procedures as of 30.9.2022 to the achievement of the target value of the financial indicator under PA 3 of OP SESG as of 30.9.2022 is almost 50 %.

#### **4.2. What are the external factors and the extent to which they have influenced the achievement/non-achievement of the indicators set?**

External factors that have influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the indicators set for the purpose of answering the evaluation question can be conditionally divided into two groups: significant

factors, largely unforeseen and affecting a wide range of socio-economic relationships, and factors external to the implementation of operations and projects, which are rather sectoral or even local, but are not initially foreseen in their planning or at least not entirely. The impact can be identified by actions taken by the MA, the MC, the beneficiaries and, of course, established by the actual achievement or non-achievement of the indicators at the level of the operation or project.

The first group of external factors are publicly visible, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, accompanied by a wave of refugees, rising energy prices and rising inflation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an end to face-to-face forms of schooling since 13 March 2020. A reorganisation of the learning process, remote learning in electronic environment and other remote forms of learning were needed. This, along with other adverse effects on households, the economy and socio-economic relations in general, is summarised as a challenge in the report of the World Bank (WB) "Bulgaria: Early childhood education and care, general education and inclusion: situation analysis and policy orientation recommendations, where *"The growing gap in achievement and decline in learning due to the pandemic can have long-lasting consequences if not addressed systematically in the new strategic framework. Students lagging behind in the educational process will be demotivated and will be at greater risk of dropping out of school. The loss of household income due to COVID-19 will also test their ability to keep pupils in school, increasing the share of young people out of school and hindering the transition to higher education"*.<sup>6</sup> Similar is the perception of the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable communities in the Republic of Bulgaria's National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030): "The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the vulnerability of isolated and marginalised Roma communities and demonstrated the urgent need for a more effective and comprehensive policy response at national and European level." The most vulnerable groups are most affected by the distance learning, according to MES analysis of online education and distance learning<sup>7</sup>. The same analysis argues that teachers have brought additional stress, emotional pressure and a number of new challenges that require a new type of support for teachers. In the study conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science, 40 % of teachers and 60 % of the directors said that the students' knowledge deteriorated as a result of online distance learning, with more than a third of them seeing a decrease in the academic performance of the students.

In addition to the necessary regulatory changes for the reorganisation of the educational process undertaken by the Ministry of Education, the MA of the OP SESG also reacted to the challenges posed by the containment measures. Outside the direct operational measures, such as the temporary suspension of project activities, adaptation of a number of processes, etc., REACT-EU resources were made available to finance measures in the education system under the thematic objective 'Supporting crisis repair caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy'.

Another unforeseen external factor is the war in Ukraine with the subsequent economic effects and refugee pressure, especially in the first months. In December 2022, the monthly inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 0.9 % compared to the previous month, while annual inflation in December 2022 compared to December 2021 was 16.9 %<sup>8</sup>. It is inevitable that this presents the beneficiaries with serious challenges and the social and educational system under great pressure to address the challenges of the refugee wave.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pageId=451>

<sup>7</sup> 'Distance learning in electronic environment 2020-2021: Implications and look forward' – Main trends in the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic and recommendations for an effective and safe course of the 2021/2022 school year, July 2021, <https://www.mon.bg/bg/news/4268>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Inflation2022-12\\_TDOVI2Z.pdf](https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Inflation2022-12_TDOVI2Z.pdf)

An external factor of sectorial importance for the implementation of operations is the amendment of basic regulations, e.g. the adoption by the National Assembly of the Law on Pre-School and School Education (PSE) in force since 1 August 2016, the Ordinance on Inclusive Education, Ordinance No 5 of 3 June 2016 on pre-school education, Ordinance No 10 of 1 September 2016 on the organisation of activities in school education, Regulation No 15 of 22 July 2019 on the status and professional development of teachers, directors and other pedagogical professionals, etc., which have a direct effect on the operations carried out within the scope of the evaluation. For some of the operations, acceptance occurs during implementation, while others are reflected in their planning at the level of an operation or project. Such is also Decree No 100 of 8 June 2018 establishing and operating a mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the drop-out of children and pupils in compulsory pre-school and school age (Mechanism). Such are the normative changes, such as compulsory inclusion in the system of pre-school education of children from 4 years of age, the abolition of fees for nurseries and kindergartens as of 1 April 2022, etc. A similar factor is the increase in salaries of pedagogical specialists. The starting teacher's salary at the beginning of 2017 was BGN 660 and for 2021 it reached BGN 1260. The average salary for pedagogical specialists in 2020 was BGN 1,547, or about 11 % above the national average salary, while in 2015 the average salary for pedagogical specialists was about 6 % below the national average<sup>9</sup>. There are many external factors of this nature that directly or indirectly influence the achievement or failure to achieve the indicators of the operations under assessment.

Outside of this type of factors are the external environmental factors related to the specific implementation of an operation or project, such as the presence or not of sufficient motivation of the target groups, the presence or not of a supportive environment (local and national institutions, local community, partners, etc.) and others. The list of local external factors is, of course, not exhaustive, but due to some specificities of activities and target groups in this type of operations, perhaps the two mentioned are most prominent. E.g. under the Strategy for reducing the rate of early leavers from education 2013-2020, the reasons for leaving the education system can be economic, social, educational, ethnocultural and even institutional, it is logical that those for non-participation in the education system are similar. Almost always, a multi-purpose, complex and interdisciplinary approach with the participation of various stakeholders, such as family, local community, local and central institutions, various pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, is needed to carry out the activities.

In order to establish the extent to which the external factors for achieving or failing to achieve the indicators set were influenced, a question was included in the survey carried out among the representatives of the beneficiaries whether they had not fulfilled at least one of the indicators envisaged or were convinced that they would not achieve it. The aim of this question was to establish the opinion of those who achieve the indicators, which external factors have contributed to this, and therefore those who do not achieve them, which external factors have influenced this.

In the framework of the survey, representatives of only 4 out of 105 beneficiaries replied that they have not or will not achieve a type of output indicator or result. They implement projects under procedures BG05M2OP001-3.017, BG05M2OP001-3.020 and the CLLD approach. Of these, one gave the specific reason<sup>10</sup>: *“Number of educational mediators – the indicator will not be achieved because only a few partners have appointed mediators. With an indicative number – 30 persons (as many as there were in the partnering schools at the time of submission of the project proposal), only 5 people are currently involved. School directors share that, in order to provide funds for a mediator, they have to participate in other programmes and the opportunities have been limited for the last school year.”* Another of the beneficiaries considers that, based

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<sup>9</sup> The data are taken from the “Strategic Framework for Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)”

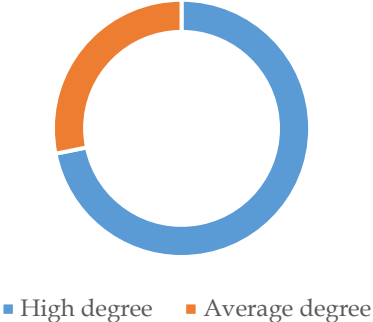
<sup>10</sup> The texts in italics and quotation marks are quotes of the participants in the survey, interviews and focus groups

on an extension of the project which it implements under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017, despite the challenges it will be able to achieve the indicators set, and for the difficulties it has considered that the factors that have greatly influenced are: lack of willingness to participate on the part of the target groups, changed circumstances and obstacles to the implementation of the envisaged activities as a result of containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak and rising inflation and the accompanying difficulties in the financial provision of the planned activities. A beneficiary implementing a project under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 considers that the following factors have an impact on the failure to achieve the indicators: the changed circumstances and obstacles to the implementation of the envisaged activities, as a result of the containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak – to a high extent, the low willingness of target groups to participate, and rising inflation and the accompanying difficulties in the financial provision of the planned activities – to a low extent. A beneficiary with a CLLD project considers that the reason is a change in the structure of vulnerable groups and, in his opinion, the external factors that have influenced the failure of the indicator to a high degree are: the changed circumstances and obstacles to the implementation of the envisaged activities as a result of containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak and rising inflation and the concomitant difficulties in the financial provision of the planned activities.

The assessment of the beneficiaries’ representatives under procedures BG05M20P001-3.001, BG05M20P001-3.002, BG05M2OP001-3.017, BG05M9OP001-2.018, BG05M2OP001-3.020 and the CLLD procedure for the external factors that influenced the achievement of the indicators set out in the survey responses are laid out in the following figures.

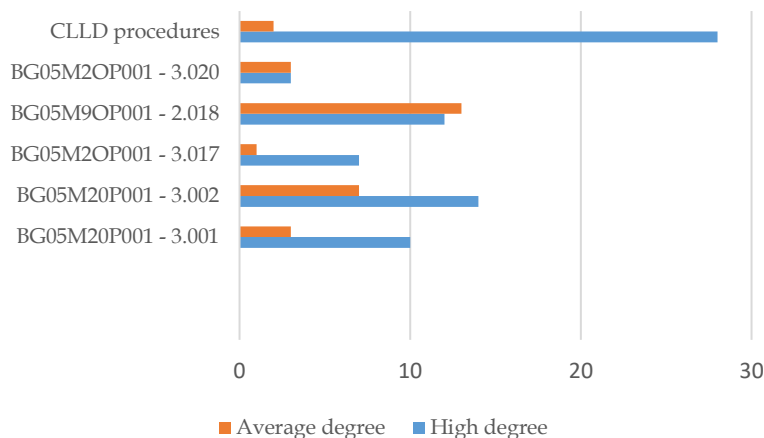
Figure 4 Factor Influence Degree: "Desire to participate on behalf of the target groups"

The importance of the “Desire to participate on behalf of the target groups” factor is assessed with a high degree of 72 % and an average of 28 %, out of a total of 103 evaluations, confirming the role of the motivation and commitment on behalf of the target groups for the success of the envisaged activities and thus the achievement of the planned indicators for the beneficiaries in the scope of the study, irrespective of the procedure under which they are funded.



The results of the respondents’ assessment of this factor by type of procedure are presented below:

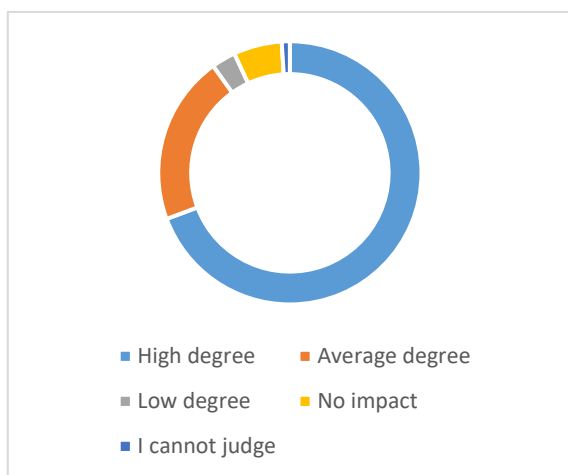
Figure 5 Quantitative distribution of the assessments by type of procedure for factor: “Desire to participate on behalf of the target groups”



Beneficiaries of CLLD procedures give a much more frequent assessment “high degree” of the impact of this factor than the beneficiaries of the other procedures. Beneficiaries under two procedures give a relatively equal number of high and medium impact assessments. These are the procedures BG05M9OP001-2.018 and BG05M2OP001-3.020. In the assessments of the other beneficiaries, the assessments

of a high level of influence have a significant predominance.

Figure 6 Factor Influence Degree: "Support and assistance from stakeholders, municipal administrations and civil society organisations"

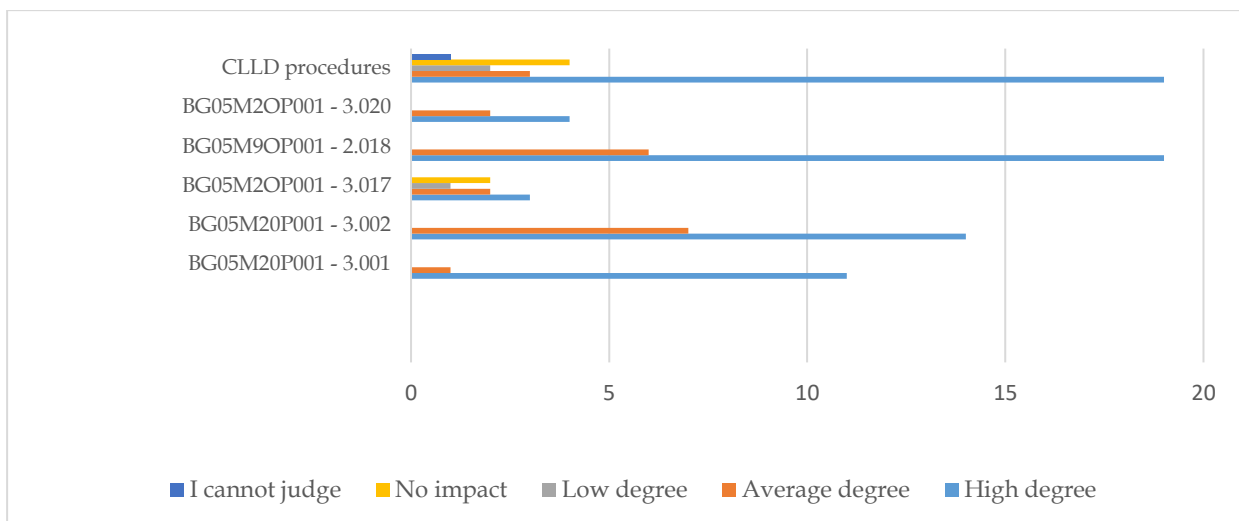


The importance of the “Support and assistance from stakeholders, municipal administrations and civil society organisations” factor was highly assessed in 69 % of the evaluations, with an “average” of 21 % of the assessments, with a “low degree” in 3 % of the assessments, 6 % of respondents indicated that there was no influence and in 1 % of the evaluations (1 score), it was considered that it could not be estimated, out of a total of 101 given estimates of the degree of influence of this factor.

The quantification of the assessments of the degree of influence of the factor by procedures is presented in the figure below:

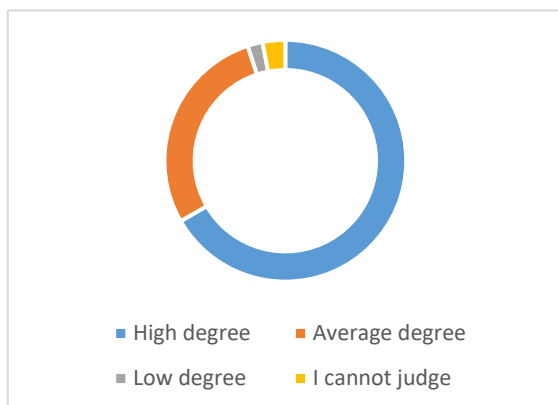
Figure7 Quantitative distribution of the assessments by type of procedure for factor: “Support and assistance from stakeholders, municipal administrations and civil society organisations”





It is noteworthy that those who evaluated this factor with “low degree”, “no impact” and “I cannot judge” are among the beneficiaries of two types of procedures: BG05M2OP001-3.017 and CLLD procedures.

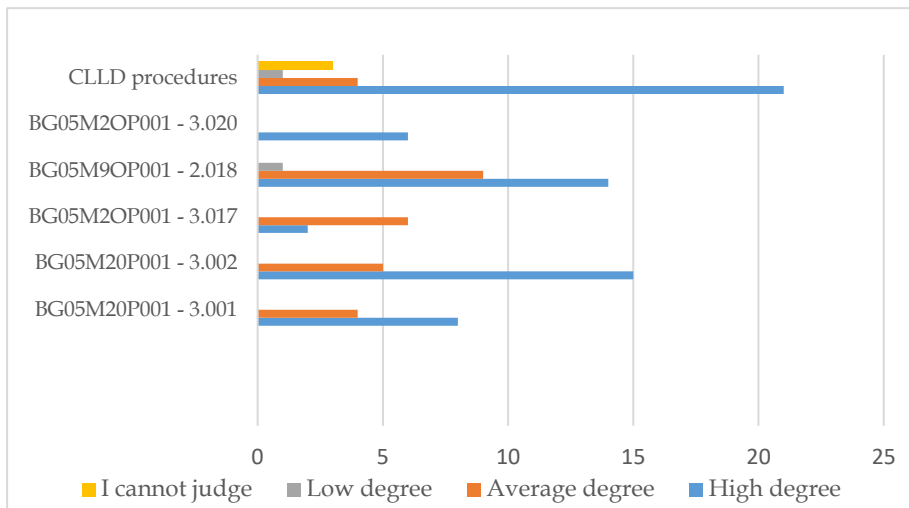
Figure 8 Factor Influence Degree: “Adequate regulatory framework, administrative acts and instructions of the MA, applicable to the implementation of the activities and the achievement of project results”



The influence of the factor “Adequate regulatory framework, administrative acts and instructions of the MA applicable in the implementation of the activities and the achievement of project results” was assessed with a high impact of 67 % of the beneficiaries, with an average impact of 28 %, with a low level of 2 %, and with “I can not judge” 3 % of the beneficiaries responded. There is no evaluation “no influence”. The total assessments given for this factor are 99.

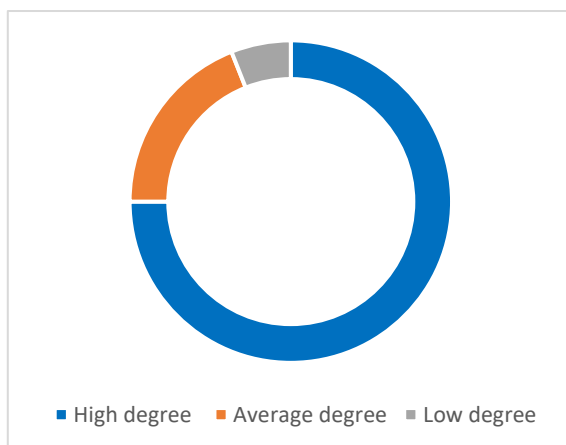
The quantification of the assessments of the degree of influence of the factor by procedures is presented in the following figure:

Figure 9 Quantitative distribution of the assessments by type of procedure for factor: “Adequate regulatory framework, administrative acts and instructions of the MA applicable to the implementation of the activities and the achievement of project results”



It is noteworthy that those who assessed this factor with a “low degree” of influence and “I cannot judge” are again among the beneficiaries mainly in CLLD procedures. This factor was also given an assessment “low degree” by one of the beneficiaries under BG05M9OP001-2.018.

Figure 10 Factor Influence Degree: “Adequate response of the MA, other institutions and/or partners involved, enabling the implementation and adaptation of the envisaged activities to the changed environment following the introduction of containment measures against the Covid-19 outbreak”

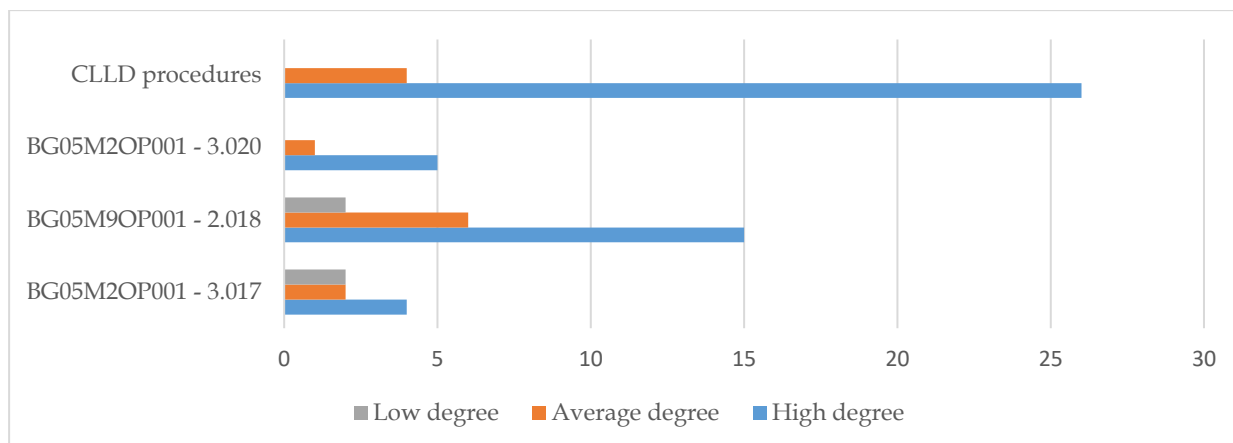


In terms of the impact of the MA’s response, the other institutions and/or partners involved, enabling the implementation and adaptation of the envisaged activities to the changed environment following the introduction of containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak, 75 % of respondents reported a “high degree” of influence, 19 % average and 6 % low from a total of 67 assessments. The beneficiaries of the procedures BG05M2OP001-3.017, BG05M9OP001-2.018, BG05M2OP001-3.020 and the CLLD procedures, the duration of preparation or implementation of whose projects overlaps with the

start of the pandemic, expressed their views on this factor. Opinions “no influence” and “I can't judge” have not been noted.

The quantification of the assessments of the degree of influence of the factor by procedures is presented in the following figure:

Figure11 Quantitative distribution of the assessments by type of procedure for: “Adequate response of the MA, other institutions and/or partners involved, enabling the implementation and adaptation of the envisaged activities to the changed environment following the introduction of containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak”



In addition to the survey among beneficiaries, interviews were conducted with participants in the project management teams of the Ministry of Education and Science, beneficiary of three of the procedures: BG05M2OP001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1”, BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the pre-school education system” and BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success”. Regarding external factors, one of the main ones mentioned in the context of the project “New Chance for Success” under BG05M2OP001-3.004 was the one related to the specificities of the target group: *“Some of them found a job in the course of the project and preferred to support their families rather than attend the courses. Some of them found a way to balance, of course. Some of them went abroad. This is a very mobile target group... People who are also of an active working age, which suggested when they find a job to prefer to support themselves.”*<sup>11</sup> In the context of the project “Support for success” under BG05M2OP001-2.011, the main external factor mentioned was COVID-19: *“In reality, part of the trainings that were planned for the children and part of the interest activities failed to be fully realised. Especially in 2020, concerning the interest activities... This can be noted as a difficulty, but not substantial”, “We can say rather that despite Covid we have achieved the expected results. The same applies to career guidance. During Covid, you can't do career guidance online because it's not always possible. But in the end, this activity is also successfully implemented.”* As for whether they have received assistance from the MA in overcoming the difficulties: *“Yes, certainly, because even before the introduction of online learning elsewhere, we had their permission. Of course, with parameters guaranteeing the implementation of activities, such as recordings during training and interest activities, because it is more specific there. They gave it to us, and we were prepared. Where possible, it was carried out with their permission and assistance, because so far no such thing has been done and schools had concerns about whether if they carry out certain activities online and remotely, costs will be recognised.”*, *“Similarly, we received support for the training of pedagogical specialists for the implementation of the toolkit.”*, *“They prepared other unit costs tailored to the needs of online learning. Accordingly, with reduced amounts, but still with the possibility to carry out this activity.”*<sup>12</sup>

The degree of influence of the external factors to achieve the indicators set can be ordered as follows, based on the “high degree” assessments of the survey carried out among beneficiaries: The most influencing factor is the adequate response of institutions, including MAs and other stakeholders, during the exceptional containment measures put in place against the COVID-19 pandemic (75 %). Next, but with almost the same degree of influence is the motivation of the target groups to participate in project activities (72 %). Immediately afterwards, again with a similar and also high degree of influence is the presence of support and assistance from municipal administrations and civil society organisations (69 %) and the existence of adequate regulations, administrative acts and instructions of the MA applicable in the implementation of the activities and the achievement of project results (67 %).

<sup>11</sup> Interview held with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science on 13.1.2023

<sup>12</sup> Interview held with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science on 12.1.2023

A relatively small number of beneficiaries have noted that they have not achieved, or will not achieve, a planned indicator, and the external factors identified by them that have influenced this are related to: unclear regulations and administrative acts leading to the absence of a planned target group, a lack of willingness to participate on behalf of the target groups, obstacles to the implementation of the envisaged activities as a result of the containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak and rising inflation and the concomitant difficulties in the financial provision of the planned activities.

#### 4.3. Is the selection of target groups adequate in the grant award procedures under evaluation and are they in line with the indicators set out?

For the purpose of this evaluation question, a detailed analysis of the underlying intervention logic in the MCSO and the Conditions/Guidelines for applicants falling within the scope of the evaluation was carried out, i.e. what are the needs or problems identified, the objectives to be achieved in order to decide what resources are envisaged or used, what activities are planned or implemented, and what performance and result indicators set or achieved.

The results of the documentary analysis of the adequacy of the selection of target groups are summarised in the following table.

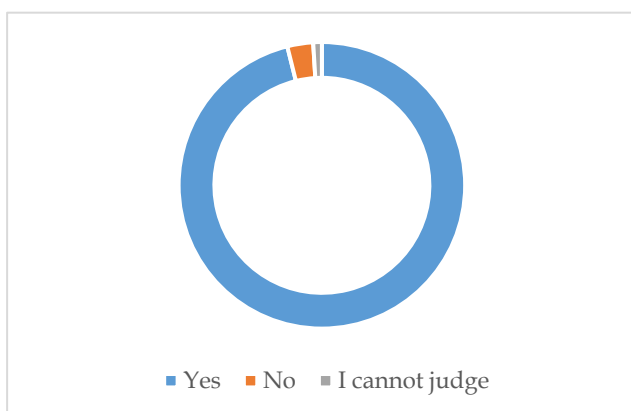
*Table 11 Results of the analysis of the adequacy of the selection of target groups*

Procedure	Results of the analysis
BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children"	The target groups are adequately selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are largely targeted at the selected target groups, which in turn are overall in line with the indicators set in the necessary way to achieve the objectives. An exception is made by "children from marginalised groups" from the target groups, who do not necessarily enter the included in activities groups, respectively the change is not tracked in the output indicator, given that its corresponding indicator at programme level is 3211 "Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration".
BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection"	The target groups are largely adequately selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are aimed at the selected target groups, which in turn are overall in line with the indicators set in the necessary way to achieve the objectives.
BG05M20P001-3.004 "Adult literacy — Phase 1"	The target groups are selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are aimed at the selected target groups, which in turn correspond generally to the indicators set in the manner necessary to achieve the objectives. However, it is noticeable that target groups are defined without a lower age limit, unlike the output indicator.
BG05M90P001-2.018 "Social-economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education — Component 1"	The target groups are adequately selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are aimed at the selected target groups, which in turn are overall in line with the indicators set to achieve the objectives. Again, "children and students from marginalised groups" is part of the target groups that are not excluded from participation in the activities but are not included in the output indicator.
BG05M20P001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education"	The target groups are adequately selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are aimed at the relevant target groups, which in turn correspond to the set result indicators, but in the output indicators are set out "Kindergartens supported under the OP to provide an environment for active inclusion in the pre-school education system (including for early prevention of learning difficulties)",

	which are subsequently missing in the result indicators. Although, probably part of the indicator is related to output and result indicator under IP 9i. In addition, in the Application Conditions, a breakdown was made with set target values of some of the indicators, which directly correspond to indicators in the OP SESG and for which particular targets were set.
BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”	The target groups are adequately selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are aimed at the selected target groups, which in turn correspond to the indicators set. However, it is noticeable that no result indicator related to the educational mediators is provided, but that the output indicator includes elements of such as one for a result.
BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success”	The target groups are adequately selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are aimed at the selected target groups, which in turn correspond to the result indicators set.
BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy — 2”	The target groups are adequately selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are aimed at the selected target groups, which in turn correspond to the result indicators set. In the output indicators there is an additional indicator for the procedure: “Persons who have acquired basic education in the framework of the operation and continued in the first upper secondary education or vocational training and/or started/remained in employment within six months of their participation in operations”. Part of this indicator has the characteristics of a long-term result indicator according to the ESF Regulation.
Grant awarding procedures under the CLLD approach with funding under the OP SESG.	The target groups are adequately selected according to the problems identified and the objectives set. The activities are aimed at the selected target groups, which in turn correspond to the result indicators set.

In addition, in the framework of the survey conducted, 96 % of the responding representatives of beneficiaries (in total 103) considered that the selection of target groups in the procedures was adequate and they are in line with the indicators set, 3 % considered that it is not adequate and not in line with the indicators set, and 1 % (one beneficiary) noted that it could not judge.

Figure 12 Answers to the question: “In your opinion, is the selection of target groups in the procedures adequate and are they consistent with the indicators set?”



Respondents who consider that the selection of target groups is not adequate justify their opinion by the lack of educational mediators, where target groups of the project are pedagogical specialists and educational mediators and the view that the target group can be expanded – one of the beneficiaries under the CLLD procedure.

In conclusion, it can be summarised that the selection of target groups under the procedures that are in the scope of the evaluation is adequate and they comply with the indicators set out, with some exceptions:

Target groups (“children from marginalised groups” and “children and students from marginalised groups” – in the second case) are not part of the groups expected to be obligatory included in the

activities under procedures BG05M20P001 -3.001 and BG05M9OP001-2.018 and are therefore not included in output indicator. On the other hand, the change is monitored by the output indicator at the level of OP 3211 “Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration (number)”.

Adequately defined target groups, including “children and students seeking or receiving international protection” or similar, definition of activities addressing this target group and subsequently linking to performance and result indicators that do not seem to include this specific target group foreseen under the specific operation (BG05M20P001-3.001, BG05M20P001-3.002 and BG05M9OP001-2.018). In this case, the definition set of the indicator P3211<sup>13</sup> “Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system (number)” in OP SESG also includes “All activities will also be aimed at children and students seeking or receiving international protection” and this is probably the reason why they are not explicitly included in the relevant indicator.

In one case (under procedure BG05M20P001-3.004) the target groups are defined without an age limit, as opposed to the output indicator.

Output indicators that track the change in the situation of the target group as a result rather than as output (BG05M20P001-3.020).

It is noteworthy that the result indicator at programme level P3211 “Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system (number)” does not appear to be specifically defined in terms of the change in the situation related to the supported participants, which should be achieved as a result of the activities carried out under the operations that contribute to its achievement.

#### **4.4. To what extent are the data collected for the calculation of indicators reliable and qualitative? What should be the parameters of the collected data?**

The ESF monitoring in the 2014-2020 programming period is carried out through common indicators, which are set out in Annex I of the ESF Regulation (1304/2013) and programme-specific indicators that are not mandatory. Besides that, it is possible to introduce additional indicators for the operation itself if the intervention logic implies it.

The monitoring of the programmes is based on three types of indicators – financial, implementation, and result<sup>14</sup>.

The financial indicators relate to the total amount of eligible expenditure entered into the accounting system of the certifying authority and certified by it, in accordance with point (c) of Article 126 of Regulation No 1303/2013. They may be used to monitor progress in terms of the payment of the funds available for any operation, measure or programme in relation to its eligible cost. They are compulsory in the Performance Framework.

Output indicators relate to operations supported. An output is considered what is directly produced/supplied through the implementation of an ESF operation, measured in physical or monetary units. Outputs are measured at the level of supported people, supported entities (entities are defined as organisations – a group of people formally organised to pursue a collective objective that can both implement and be supported through projects, and should only be taken into account if they

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<sup>13</sup> <https://monitorstat.nsi.bg/Report/Info?id=708121d6-326a-4f26-89b5-099efa3963f6>

<sup>14</sup> Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy, European Social Fund, Guidance document, August 2018

benefit directly from ESF support that leads up to costs), provided goods or services delivered. They are set at the level of investment priorities or specific objective.

Result indicators capture the expected effects on participants or entities brought about by an operation. Result indicators should correspond to the specific objectives set out for each investment priority selected. They go beyond output indicators in so far as they capture a change in the situation, in most cases related to supported entities or participants. They must be set as closely as possible to the activities carried out under the relevant investment priority in order to minimise external factors that could affect the reported value of result indicators.

The general ESF indicators are a limited set of output and result indicators set out in Annexes I and II of the ESF Regulation<sup>15</sup> and they represent the minimum set of indicators for each OP co-financed by the ESF, with Annex I relevant to the SESG OP.

The Regulation requires that detailed data on each participant be collected and stored without setting specific requirements on how or at what level this information should be maintained. The data collected cover personal information, such as gender, age, labour market status, level of education, etc., including certain data relating to special categories of personal data pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

Cases where the information may not be complete are limited to data indicators relating to special categories of data.

Data relating to long-term result indicators relating to the situation of participants 6 months after leaving the operation, where they are more likely not to be in direct contact with the beneficiary, as well as for some other indicators, including implementation, are not necessary for all participants, but for a representative sample of the participants under the investment priority.

The general output indicators refer to both individuals (individuals benefiting directly ESF support) and entities.

Article 125 (2) (e) of the General Regulation requires the MA to establish a computerised system for recording and storing data on each operation necessary for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verification and auditing, including data on individual participants in operations, where applicable.

At a national level, in particular for the OP SESG, the approach is centralised and is regulated by Council of Ministers Decree No 243 of 20 September 2016. This Ordinance<sup>16</sup> lays down the terms, conditions and mechanism for the functioning of the UMIS and for the conduct of proceedings before the managing authorities through the UMIS. The Ordinance ensures that the structure and content of the information introduced under programmes using UMIS comply with the minimum requirements of Annex III of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 480/2014 of 3 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) 1303/2013. The data is entered by the beneficiaries in the UMIS.

For the purposes of the annual reports and data reporting to the EC, for the time being there is no automatic generation of the reports in the UMIS, but such functionality is planned according to data

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<sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>16</sup> Council of Ministers Decree 243 of 20 September 2016 laying down the conditions, procedure and mechanism for the functioning of the Information System for the Management and Monitoring of the Funds from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and on the conduct of proceedings before the managing authorities through the UMIS, <https://lex.bg/en/laws/ldoc/2136906184>

from the MA of the OP SESG<sup>17</sup>. As a result, to prepare the data for these purposes, they are extracted aggregated by the UMIS and are subject to further validation and processing in the MA.

The National Statistical Institute (NSI) has developed a unified metadata document in accordance with the Eurostat Reference Metadata Structure (ESMS).

The data on the result indicators of the operational programme under the general ex-ante conditionalities in Annex II to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 are automatically accessed by the NSIs in the UMIS for their follow-up.

The metadata of the result indicators are available on the website of the information system Monitorstat<sup>18</sup>, maintained by the NSI.

In two of the projects of DB MES (BG05M2OP001-2.011 and BG05M2OP001-3.005) internal information systems were established to facilitate the monitoring and reporting of projects.

In carrying out expenditures verification, the MA performs validation of participants' data through the National Electronic Information System for Pre-School and School Education (NEISPSE)<sup>19</sup> and verification for the purposes of demarcation between different operations, including at the level of participant<sup>20</sup>, which provides reasonable guarantees regarding the quality of the data collected. These additional checks at the time of this evaluation are hampered due to a change in the procedure for accessing NEISPSE data resulting from the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and the access is restricted on the basis of a "concrete data request" principle, which requires additional administrative efforts on behalf of the administration in the MA.

In the programming period 2014-2020, indicators related to minorities and people of foreign origin are subject to specific definition at national level. This is done for OP SESG.<sup>21</sup>

Information on minority/migrant status is one of the special categories of data under Regulation (EU) 2016/679. This indicator also covers some of the most marginalised groups and it is possible that some of the supported individuals are reluctant to provide not only sensitive personal data, but also basic personal data which is subject to the requirement of completeness of the data. The Practical Guide<sup>22</sup> for Data Collection and Validation, in point 5.6.2, states that such persons must be supported if they meet the eligibility criteria, but should not be calculated as participants for monitoring purposes. An exception and described approach is also envisaged in cases where e.g. persons from ethnic minorities such as Roma are reluctant to qualify as such.

With regard to the criterion of quality of the data collected for the calculation of the indicators of the evaluation question, in line with the understanding of this concept according to the Guide<sup>23</sup>, the following aspects are analysed:

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<sup>17</sup> Focus group of representatives of the MA held on 19.12.2023

<sup>18</sup> <https://monitorstat.nsi.bg/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://cioo.mon.bg/>

<sup>20</sup> Interview with the MA on the CLLD approach, held on 26 January 2023

<sup>21</sup> <https://monitorstat.nsi.bg/bg/Report/Info?id=708121d6-326a-4f26-89b5-099efa3963f6>

<sup>22</sup> Annex D – Practical guidance on data collection and validation, monitoring and evaluation of European Cohesion Policy, European Social Fund, Guidance

<sup>23</sup> Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy, European Social Fund, Guidance document, August 2018



- Accuracy, which refers to the correct recording of the current situation and requires the monitoring systems to have the capacity to allow retroactive correction of data in cases of recording errors.
- Comparability, which refers to comparisons in time and across countries and therefore depends on the adoption of common definitions regarding the collection and treatment of data.
- Coherence, which refers to the adequacy of the data to be reliably combined in different ways.

Based on UMIS functionalities that allow adjustments to data where necessary, the existence of common definitions for the majority of indicators (the common for ESF, without the exceptions foreseen) and the metadata of OP SESG indicators can have reasonable assurance that the three main data quality criteria are met.

In order to ensure data quality, the Regulation requires the availability of values of all indicators for all selected investment priorities and comprehensive validation – all data should be subject to a validation procedure as to whether they are complete and internally consistent.

The validation of the data should be in two levels, at the individual record level and at the aggregate level.

At the participant's individual record level, in order to ensure completeness and internal consistency before data aggregation, in essence, each individual record should contain at least the general output indicators covering insensitive personal data (e.g. gender, labour market status, level of education, etc.). Immediate results should cover the same population of participants as the output indicators, only when exiting the operation. Long-term common indicators should cover a smaller population of participants, as long as each is based on a representative sample of the relevant participants. In this case, the sample size and number of replies completed shall be reported together with the annual implementation report. The completeness of the records is monitored during the expenditures verification, as already indicated, and the risks are reduced by the design of UMIS functionalities.

Verification of the internal consistency of participation records means ensuring that the links between the different related variables are compatible and consistent – to a large extent this risk is reduced by the possibility of only one variable being introduced in the UMIS for a type of indicator to be used for the calculations, and the additional checks carried out by the MA during the verification of expenditures provide a reasonable assurance of the quality of the data.

The checks at an aggregate level are carried out by the MA in the preparation of the annual report, with aggregated data on operations being extracted from the UMIS and their preparation for the purpose of the report is carried out by the MA of the OP SESG.

The Practical Guide<sup>24</sup> for Data Collection and Validation recommends, in addition to common definitions and guidelines, that common standards and procedures be followed by all organisations involved in data collection to ensure data quality. It is observed that the MA of the OP SESG applies a rather procedurally based approach, where clarifications about the indicators are provided specifically – for the specific operation, possibly dictated by the different operation-specific indicators, and a large part of the specifics in data collection are unified by default according to the standard functionalities of the UMIS used. There is no separate part/section dedicated to indicators in the Management Manual of the OP SESG.

With regards to the reliability of the data, it should be borne in mind that microdata are submitted to the UMIS by the beneficiaries who are committed to the data reliability. They are checked by the MA

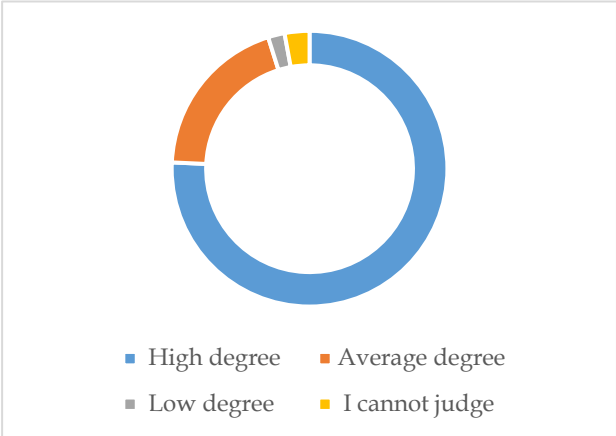
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<sup>24</sup> Annex D – Practical guidance on data collection and validation, monitoring and evaluation of European Cohesion Policy, European Social Fund, Guidance

during the verification of expenditure, including through NEISPSE and, if necessary, corrections are made. The information system for monitoring and management (UMIS) is centralised and has the possibility to provide aggregated data. From this perspective, it could be argued that the data collected and stored for the indicators are guaranteed through reliable procedures and an automated information system.

In the framework of the survey conducted among the beneficiaries, the question “To what extent are the data collected by the MA for calculating the indicators reliable and qualitative?” was included. The answers are presented in the following figure.

Figure 13 Answers to the question: “To what extent is the data collected by the MA to calculate the indicators reliable and qualitative?”



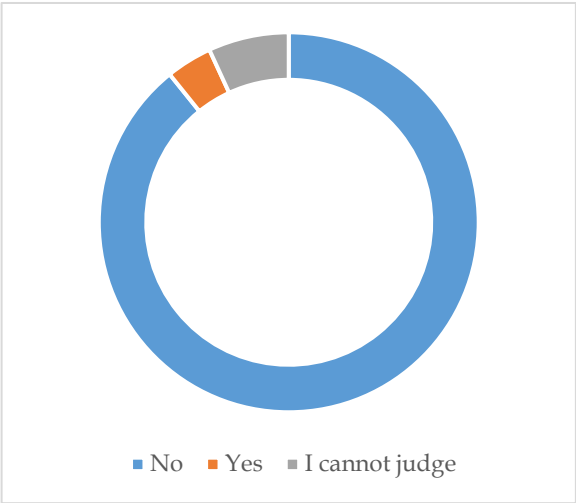
Around 76 % of the 103 representatives of beneficiaries indicated a “high degree” response, slightly above 19 % indicated an “average degree” response, about 2 % “low degree”, and around 3 % cannot judge.

The answer to this question should be seen to a large extent as an assessment by the beneficiaries of the system used to collect and calculate the data on the indicators of the procedures covered by the evaluation, rather than as a compliance with the applicable requirements.

The parameters of the data collected are detailed in the Guide “Monitoring and evaluation of the European Cohesion Policy, ESF, 2018” and detailed in its Annex D: “Practical Guide to Data Collection and Validation”.

In the framework of the survey conducted among the beneficiaries, the following question was included: “Do you have any suggestions for changes in the parameters of the data collected?”.

Figure14 Answers to a question: “Do you have any suggestions for changes to the parameters of the data collected?”.



About 89 % of the total 102 representatives of beneficiaries did not propose changes in the parameters of the data collected. About 4 % have, and about 7 % cannot judge.

The answers to this question include suggestions for changes in the following directions: “To pay more attention to qualitative and not just quantitative dimensions. To carry out an impact assessment”, “Simplify the microdata tables” (both proposals are from beneficiaries under procedure BG05M20P001-3.017), ‘Request the result indicator for performance on the basis of what has been submitted as an interim report and not as in the final report where it is expected from us

to look for where all children and students are studying and where they are enrolled’ (proposal by a beneficiary under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018). The following finding was made by a beneficiary under the CLLD procedure “The specific indicator of children and students from ethnic minorities can not always be reached due to the annual decrease in the number of students”.

During the interviews with representatives of DB MES was shared the view that it is good for projects, such as “New chance for success” to track, as difficult as it may be, the realisation of the participants who are involved in the project, which would be a good indicator of the practical success of such a project.

During the focus group with representatives of the MC, it was noted that overall the system of established indicators did work in terms of monitoring progress, despite a number of imperfections of some of the indicators, including general imperfections, unresolved at European level. The need to introduce new indicators to monitor the qualitative change resulting from the activities carried out in relation to the participants in the operations was underlined.

Based on the documentary analysis carried out and the analysis of the results of the survey, it can be argued to a high degree that the data collected for the calculation of the indicators are reliable and qualitative. The analysis highlighted several directions in which it is necessary to carry out actions to improve the processes that guarantee reliability and quality, such as improving the possibilities for carrying out further validation of the microdata in the NEISPSE, establishing a procedure in the Manual for the management of the OP SESG, concerning the way data is collected and processed for the purpose of reporting under the programme, including with regard to common long-term result indicators, for the procedures for which it is applicable.

The parameters of the data collected derive from the applicable regulations and are set out in detail in the Guide “Monitoring and evaluation of the European Cohesion Policy, ESF, 2018” and detailed in its Annex D: “Practical Guide to Data Collection and Validation”.

With regards to proposals for changes to the parameters of the data collected, in the context of such data beyond the minimum mandatory, the proposals from stakeholders may be limited to the following: introducing new indicators to track the qualitative change resulting from the activities carried out in relation to participants in operations and making further efforts to better define the main indicators related to the integration of vulnerable groups.

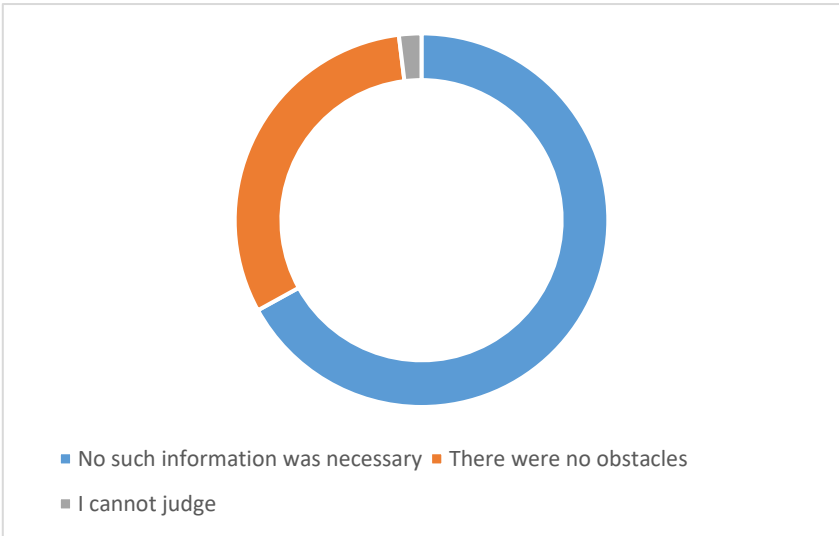
#### **4.5. Is it necessary to introduce additional data collection from other sources such as administrative registers, sociological surveys, etc.? Have any obstacles been identified to the use of information from administrative registers for the purposes of the implementation of projects under the OP SESG, aimed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups, including Roma, and what are the possible solutions for overcoming them?**

The type of mandatory data collected and processed for monitoring purposes directly stems from the applicable data collection and processing requirements for indicators under Regulations 1303/2013 and 1304/2013, as well as from the requirements specifically applicable to the general indicators set out in Annex I of the ESF Regulation (1304/2013). Data relating to long-term result indicators, for operations to which it is applicable, relating to the situation of participants 6 months after leaving the operation, where they are more likely not to be in direct contact with the beneficiary, as well as for some other indicators, are not necessary for all participants, but for a representative sample of participants under the investment priority. Accordingly, they may be collected through a sociological survey or other type of survey, including data from national registries, if applicable, and maintain compatible data. For example, for tracking a common long-term result indicator related to the labour market status 6 months after the participant’s exit from the operation, data from a survey or national registers could be used (e.g. in BG05M2OP001-3.020, but a different approach has been taken). The Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy, ESF, 2018 and its Annex D sets out what criteria the sample and data collection requirements for common long-term indicators should comply with and how data from existing national registers could be used. With regards to specific indicators and those

general ones whose definition is national responsibility, the type of data required is directly related to the definitions of the indicators and data by which it is determined to be reported.

When it comes to the type of data required for evaluation purposes, it is in most cases necessary to conduct sociological surveys in order to establish the effect of change from the interventions implemented or to answer evaluation questions, by identifying data that could be described mainly by qualitative characteristics and, in some cases, by quantitative ones. To a large extent, their type and scope is determined by the evaluation questions asked and the availability or non-availability of accessible administrative data. Of course, the sociological studies are an essential tool for impact evaluation. Where a counterfactual impact evaluation is applied, it is advisable, regardless of which approach is used to step on quantitative data that could be administrative data or data from targeted studies. Such data in the case of PA 3 of the OP SESG could, for instance, be data on educational attainment, matriculation exam results, etc., for both the surveyed group and the control group, if applicable, etc.

Figure15 Answers to the question: "Have you identified any obstacles to the use of information from administrative registers during the project?"



In the framework of the survey conducted among the beneficiaries, the question of whether there were obstacles to the use of information from administrative registers was included. Around 67 % of 103 respondents indicated that no such information was needed, around 31 %, that there were no obstacles and around 2 % that they could not judge. No one replied that he had difficulties.

During the interviews with representatives of the DB Ministry of Education and Science, no information on obstacles to the use of information from administrative registers was received. It was specified that data from NEISPSE is mainly used.

During the focus group with MA, difficulties were shared with regard to the use of NEISPSE information, insofar as access is restricted on the basis of a "data request" principle, which requires additional administrative efforts by the administration in the MA.

Beyond the necessary data resulting from the requirements of the relevant Regulations, the Guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy, ESF, 2018 and detailed in its Annex D: The 'Practical guide on data collection and validation', as well as those resulting from the definition of the relevant indicator, the need for additional data and the use of additional sources, such as administrative registers and sociological surveys, shall be determined by the needs for the purpose of the evaluations of the operations and the specific evaluation questions.

Based on the survey and analysis carried out, it can be argued that no obstacles have been identified to the use of information from administrative registers for the purpose of the implementation of projects under the OP SESG, with one exception: difficulties experienced by the MA with regard to the use of information from NEISPSE . Accordingly, overcoming this difficulty is related to bringing the

mechanism of access to the information system in line with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and the Personal Data Protection Act<sup>25</sup>.

#### 4.6. To what extent do the operations under the OP SESG which are the subject of this evaluation achieve the planned results in the short, medium and long term?

For the purpose of the evaluation covered by this procurement, including the answer to this evaluation question, a detailed analysis of the procedures assessed was carried out in terms of the target and reporting values of the defined indicators of the operations. The main objective of the analysis was to assess the extent to which the planned results are achieved, both against the targets set under the MCSO and the Guidelines/Conditions for Application and the target values set by the projects in the evaluated procedures. The results of the analysis are set out in *Annex 17* to this report – Reference of the planned and achieved values of the indicators under the assessed procedures under PA 3.

As already mentioned in the answer to the evaluation question “*What is the progress (including the achievement of the final targets) in the implementation of Priority Axis 3 indicators aimed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups such as Roma, including milestones and targets in their performance framework?*”, only in procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the pre-school education system” are included measures under both investment priorities of PA 3. All other operations have programmed activities under Investment Priority 9ii focused on the integration of marginalised communities.

In assessing the results of the analysis carried out, the following limitations and assumptions should also be taken into account with regard to the data collected:

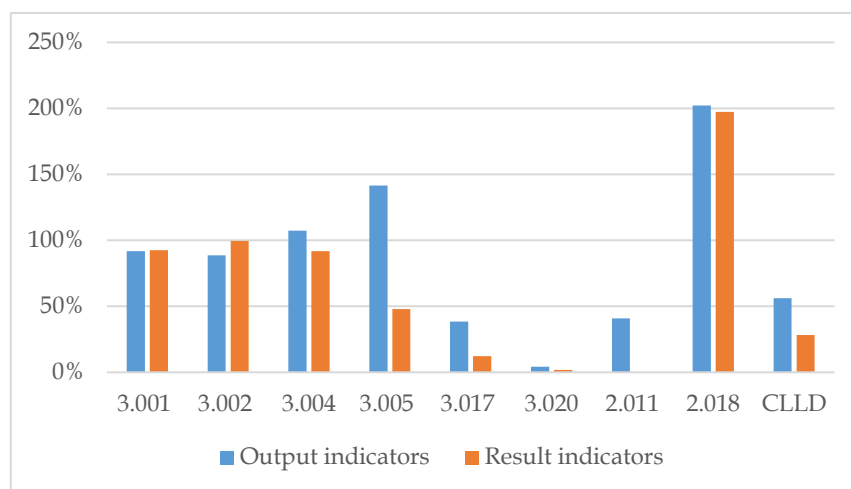
- Data provided by the MA were used as the main source of information on the values of the indicators of the operations under evaluation. The analysis of the data revealed that in some cases the discontinued projects had availability of target or reporting values of the indicators. Consultation of the UMIS public module for the same projects found that for some of them the values were not reported and for others they were zeroed. In this regard, and in order to avoid distortion of the results of the analysis, the availability of target and reporting values of the indicators of discontinued projects has not been taken into account in this report;
- According to the Technical Specification, “*The evaluation must cover all grant award procedures which, at the time of conclusion of the contract under this procurement, have completed their implementation under Priority Axis 3 or have a critical mass of performance and result indicators implemented – for example, after one academic year from the start of the implementation of the project activities.*” Part of the operations under assessment are still in implementation, another part has been completed, but the final results of the project implementation have not yet been reported. In this regard, the assessment of the progress of the implementation of the indicators and the achievement of the results reported by them at the time of drafting this report should not be absolutised;
- Procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” is implemented under two priority axes – Priority Axis 2 and Priority Axis 3. For the purposes of this evaluation, only data on the achievement of the results under Priority Axis 3 have been taken into account.

The next few figures show the percentage ratio of the output and result indicators achieved under the evaluated procedures, compared to the targets of the MCSO indicators and the Guidelines/Instructions for Applicants and of the target values indicated in the projects.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135426048>

Figure 16 Percentage ratio of the verified values of indicators to the target values set in the MCSO and the Guidelines/Conditions for Applicants



According to the data, the highest rate of implementation of both types of indicators was observed in procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Socio-economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1", where the targets are almost doubled. The result indicator 'Group net

enrolment coefficient in the different stages of education – initial stage' is not included in the calculations as it is yet to be reported. The first three procedures indicated in the figure were completed with almost full achievement of the set results.

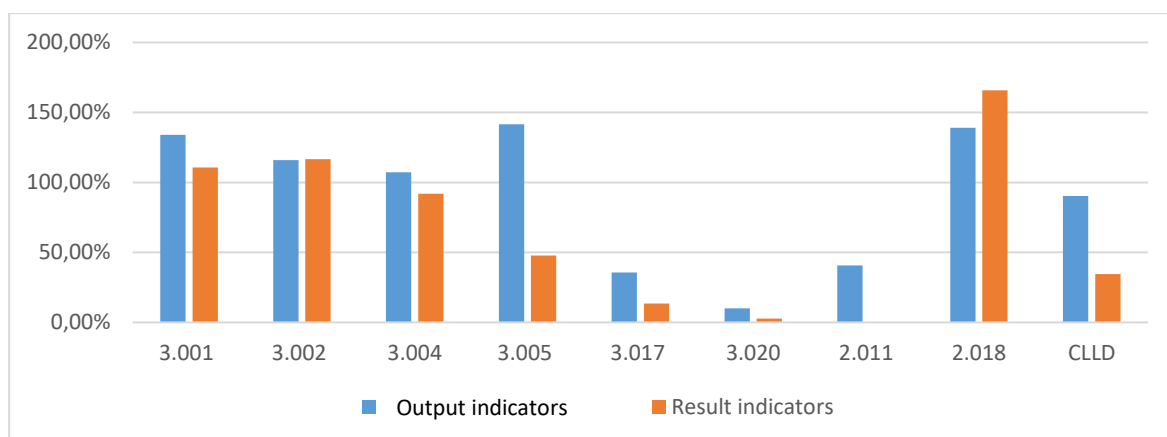
With regard to procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the pre-school education system" it should be noted that the performance indicators were achieved above 140 %. Two of the indicators (Number of national motivation campaigns for parents in the target group and Number of national campaigns to overcome negative public attitudes and non-discrimination), which are currently zero, are not included in the calculations. According to data from the interview held on 13.1.2023 with a representative of the DB Ministry of Education and Science, the campaigns have been conducted and are about to be reported with the final report. Of the result indicators under the procedure, non-performance is observed in the indicator "Group net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens", for which with a base value 78.40 % and a target value set – an increase of 2 %, for the period of the operation it was reported 78.70 %.

The lowest values of the indicators were observed in BG05M2OP001-3.020 "Adult literacy – 2" and BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 "Support for success", which at the time of preparation of this report are still in implementation. Characteristic of the procedure "Adult Literacy – 2" is that in the Instructions for application<sup>26</sup> to the output indicator I3213 "Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP" with a target value of 12 000 pcs. are included four indicators, respectively I3213-1, I3213-2, I3213-3 and I3213-4, for which no separate target values were defined, whereas the verified values of the four indicators were compared to the target value of the main indicator I3213.

Under the procedure 'Support for success' no values of result indicators have been reported and such should be expected in the future given that the operation is still in execution.

Figure 17 Percentage ratio of the verified values of indicators to the target values set in projects

<sup>26</sup> <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=news&p=detail&newsId=917>

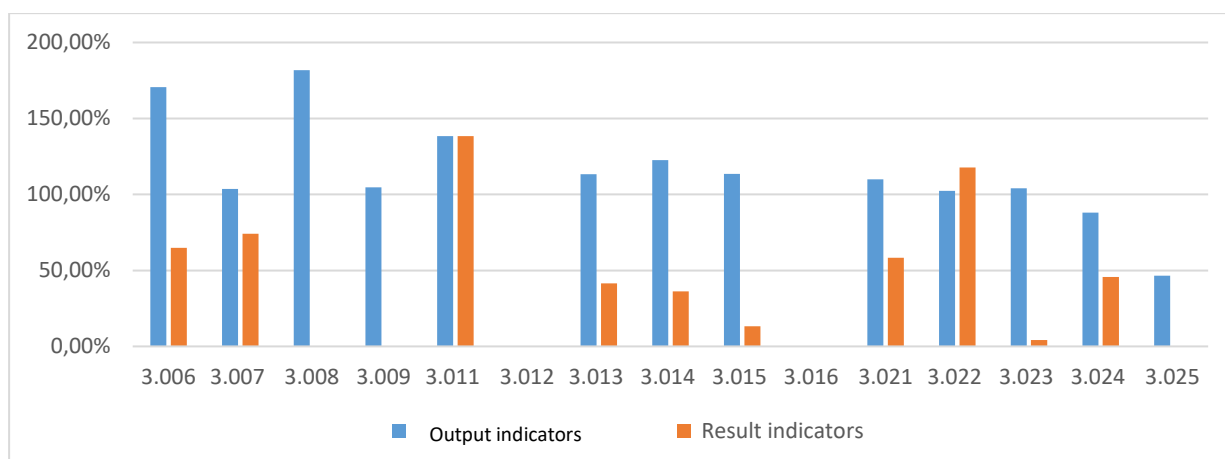


The data show that overall the project targets for the indicators are closer to those reported and verified. The ratios of both incisions of the analysis do not deviate significantly except for some differences that merit comment. For example, under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures for improving access to education – Component 1 – The target value of the performance indicator "Children, students, and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration" under the Instructions of Application<sup>27</sup> is set at 6 000 persons from the target groups, while set under the projects it amounts to 8 720, respectively for the result indicator "Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system" – 4 800 and 5 709. In both cases, the reporting and verified values significantly exceed the target values. One of the possible reasons is rooted in the process of programming the operation, the analysis of the changes in which shows that the target values of the indicators are underestimated in view of the extension of the implementation period and the increase in the budget, without having a proportionate or sufficiently justified reflection on the increase in the values of the indicators.

Particular attention deserves the difference in the values set in the CLLD grant award procedures. The target value of the MCSO performance indicator for "Children, students, and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration" is 7,500, while for individual LAG projects the total target is 4,670. As a result, the percentage of performance of the indicator in both cases is 56, 23 % and 90.30 %. At the same time, it should be noted that in essence the verified value of the indicator can be interpreted as an overachievement, given the budget set in the MCSO to achieve the target values of the indicator. That is, with only about 5 % of the planned funds have been achieved over 56 % of the planned values of the indicator.

Figure18 Percentage ratio of the reporting values of indicators to the target values set in projects under separate CLLD grant award procedures

<sup>27</sup> <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=news&p=detail&newsId=533>



Here it should be noted that under procedures BG05M2OP001-3.012 “LAG Karlukovski Karst – Cherven Bryag-Iskar” – Measure 7 “Access to quality education through integration into the education system of children and students from marginalised communities, including Roma” and BG05M2OP001-3.016 “Struma – Simitli, Kresna and Strumyani” measure 3.9ii “Integration through education” implementation has not been reported. The majority of the procedures are in implementation, with data showing that massively the output indicator has been achieved, while with few exceptions (procedures 3.011 and 3-022) the result indicator is far from reaching the target value.

With regard to the analysis of the achieved values of the indicators in the evaluated procedures, it can be concluded that, with some exceptions, the indicators achieve their target values, with significant exceedances of the target values in some cases. One of the reasons could be the underestimation of the objectives to be achieved, expressed by setting in the MCSO and the Instructions/Guidelines for Application target values for the indicators of the procedures. Another reason may be sought in the legislative changes made in the field of education and the implementation of a systematic approach to mobilise the educational institutions to include them in measures under the Programme. This view was expressed by the participants in the focus group held on 19 December 2022 with representatives of the MA.

There is a failure to achieve the operation-specific result indicators “net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens – 84 %” according to BG05M2OP001-3.001 and the similar one under BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Group net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens – 2 % increase for the period of the operation”. For the similar indicator under BG05M9OP001-2.018 data are not reported yet. The data on non-achievement are final for BG05M2OP001-3.001, and for BG05M2OP001-3.005 current. The causes and extent of the intervention’s impact on this type of indicators should be carefully analysed or whether too ambitious targets are set. In addition, when assessing the achievements under this indicator at the level of the final report under the last procedure, it is also necessary to take into account the normative changes leading to mandatory inclusion in the system of pre-school education of children from 4 years of age and the abolition of kindergarten fees.

For result indicators at the level of operations that are directly related to corresponding indicators at the OP level, the following can be found:

In the short term, the operations under OP SESG which are subject to this evaluation achieve the planned results. The operations completed (BG05M2OP001-3.001, BG05M2OP001-3.002 and BG05M2OP001-3.004) as a whole, achieved the planned results to a high extent. In the medium term, operations under implementation based on the progress of output indicators and data on contracted result indicators – are achieving at an expected pace the planned results. In the longer term these operations are expected to achieve the planned results at the end of the programming period and, in



some cases to significantly exceed them, such as the result indicator P3211 “Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system”.

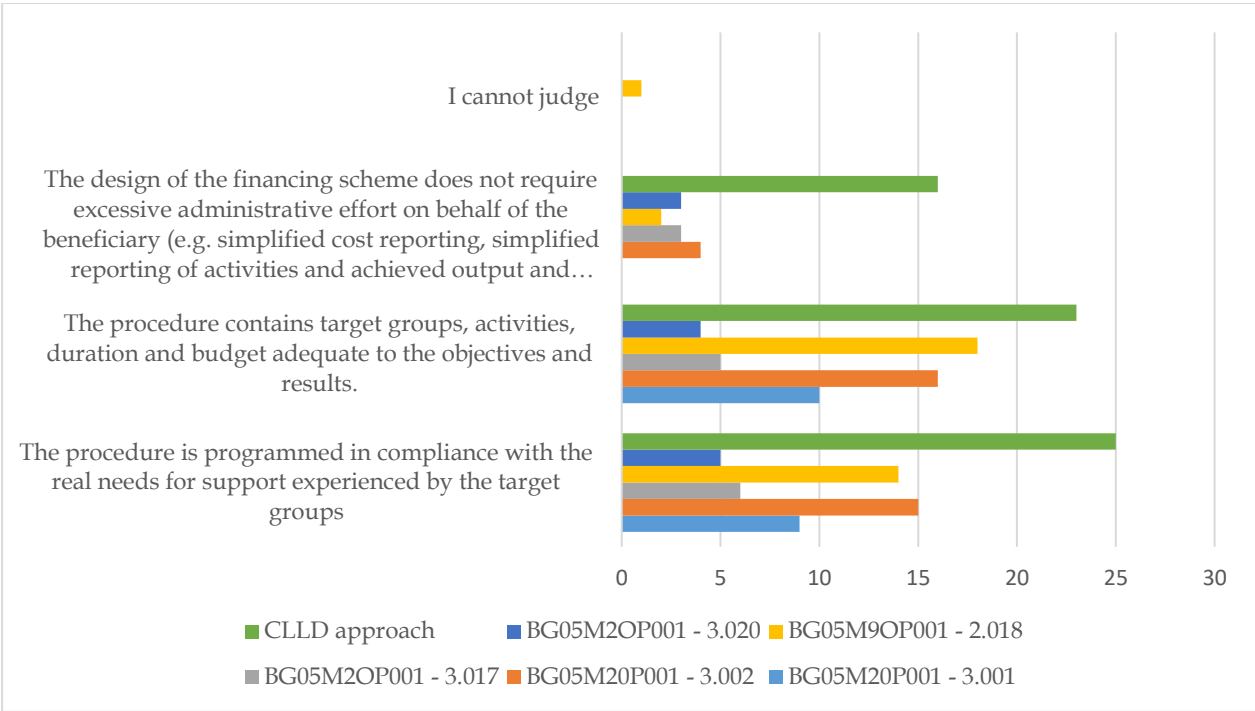
**4.7. What helps or hinders the achievement of the objectives and results of the operations under the OP SESG subject to this evaluation?**

Some of the factors, and in particular external factors that help or hinder the achievement of the objectives and results of operations, are addressed in the response to evaluation question 4.2., in the context of achieving/failing to achieve the indicators set.

Within the framework of the survey conducted with representatives of the beneficiaries, their opinion on what they believe contributes to the achievement of the objectives and results of the procedure under which they are implementing or implemented a project was examined and external factors were excluded from the questions. The study also included a question of what hinders the achievement of goals and results.

To the first question, out of 105 respondents who participated in the survey, about 72 % answered that the greatest contribution to achieving the objectives and results, have the included in the procedure adequate to the objectives and results target groups, activities, duration and budget. Almost as much – 70 % – consider that it contributes to achieving the objectives and results that the procedure is programmed in line with the real needs for support to the target groups and around 27 % note that a contribution is made by the fact that the funding scheme has a design that does not require excessive administrative effort on behalf of the beneficiary (e.g. simplified cost accounting, easy reporting of activities and output and result indicators, etc.). One beneficiary replied, “I can't judge.” The distribution of views by procedures is set out below.

Figure 19 Answers to a question: “What do you think contributes to achieving the objectives and results of the procedure under which you are implementing/implemented a project?”



During the interviews with DB MES, the following prerequisites for achieving the goals and results were outlined: adequately selected target groups; the existence of an information system facilitating the

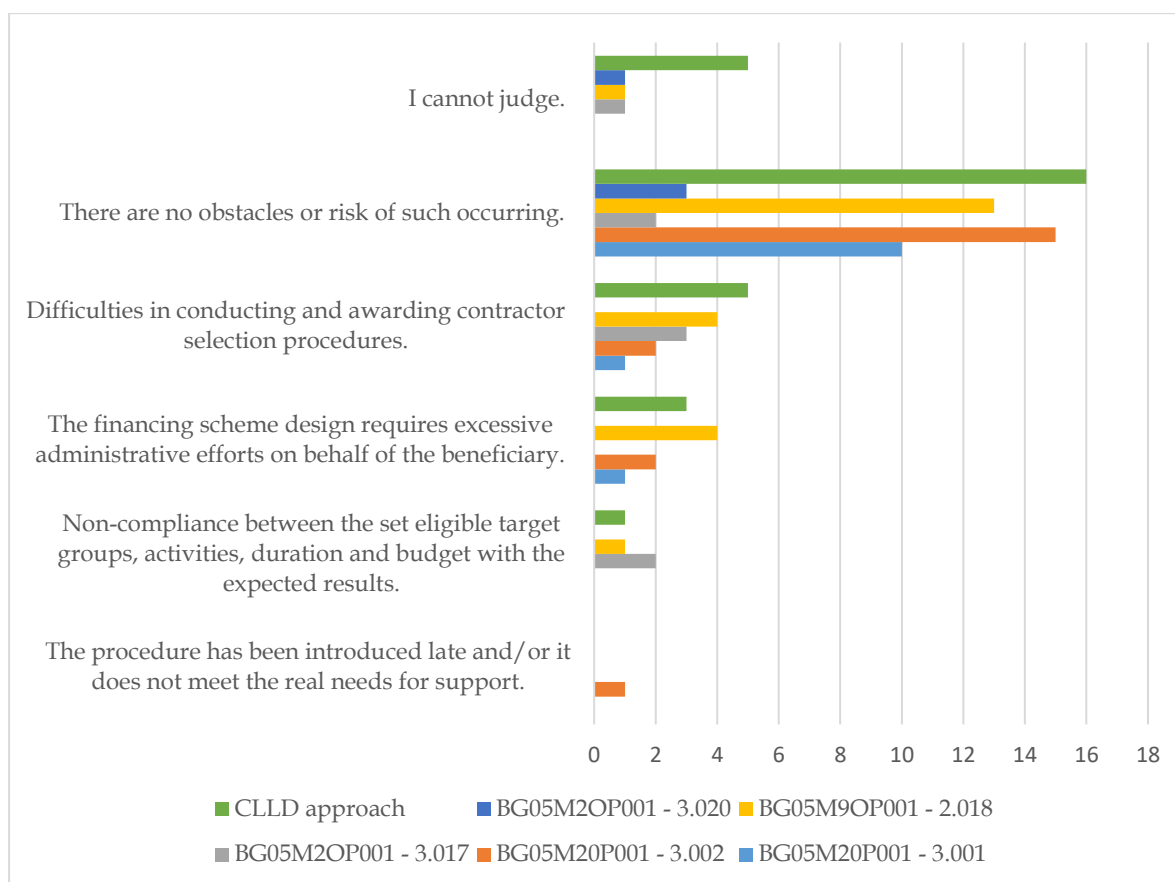
administration of the project; availability of simplified cost options; a systematic approach with established and working inter-institutional links and an established role of educational mediators; easing schools and kindergartens from administrative burden in projects implemented by the Ministry of Education, compared to participation under grant schemes through selection procedures. In addition, during the COVID-19 containment measures, the main supporting role in reducing the damage to the educational process was played by the educational mediators (for projects to which it is relevant). The motivation of educational mediators, career consultants (in "Support for Success") and pedagogical specialists is perceived as a major factor in achieving the results.

During the focus group with the MA, it was shared the view that projects such as "Support for Success" and "Active Inclusion" could be considered successful, contributing to the following factors: a systemic approach, a contribution to a paradigm shift in education, insofar as they were created in response to the new challenges arising from the new legislation adopted at that time (Law on Pre-School and School Education of 2016, regulations, etc.), including even changing key concepts, territorial scale, ability to mobilise educational institutions and all actors involved: teachers, parents, pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, etc.

During the focus group with representatives of the MC, the following views were shared, which could be accepted, as such with regard to the factors contributing to the achievement of the objectives and results of the operations subject to this evaluation: adequately selected target groups; a correct approach to the defined indicators to the extent possible (despite a number of concomitant difficulties, including ambiguities at European level); the introduction of simplified cost options; reducing the time of verification of expenditures; overall, the implementation of a systematic approach to kindergartens and schools with a focus on the activities carried out by the educational mediators (procedures BG05M2OP001-3.005 and BG05M2OP001-2.011), despite some remarks regarding the source of funding (Priority Axis 3 for BG05M2OP001-3.005 and partly for BG05M2OP001-2.011) and other comments and proposals for future similar projects.

When asked "What do you think is/was an obstacle to achieving the objectives and results of the procedure under which you are implementing/implemented a project?", around 56 % of the 105 participants in the survey indicated that they did not identify obstacles to the achievement of the objectives and results of the procedure under which they were implementing or are implementing a project. Around 14 % experienced difficulties in conducting and awarding procedures for selecting a contractor. For 10 %, the design of the funding scheme requires excessive administrative effort on behalf of the beneficiary. For 4 %, there is a non-compliance between the eligible target groups, activities, duration and budget with the expected results, and one beneficiary considers that the procedure is late and/or does not meet the actual support needs. 8% said they couldn't judge. The following figure shows the distribution of opinions by procedure.

*Figure20 Answers to a question: "What do you think is/was an obstacle to achieving the objectives and results of the procedure under which you are implementing/implemented a project?"*



The views of beneficiaries on other obstacles to the achievement of objectives and results in the procedures under evaluation are to be noted. Some of them are: *“The preparation of project proposals, approval, conclusion of a contract and subsequent implementation is sometimes carried out in a time frame where it is difficult to plan the dynamics of the movement of children and students. Migration, which is linked to the employment of parents and a change of residence in/out of the country. In addition, budgeting lacks a mechanism/opportunity to plan budgets with “reserve”, taking into account inflation/force majeure”* (beneficiary under BG05M2OP001-3.001), *“The conditions of the procedure require training of pedagogical specialists with full attendance. The project was launched at the end of 2022 and given the COVID – limitations, it was difficult to consider how and in what way we could succeed with the implementation. Another major challenge is the provision of educational mediators, which is a variable in each new school year. Thirdly, inflation is a serious problem and may be an obstacle to the implementation of activities”* (BG05M2OP001-3.017), *“Under the current scheme, target groups, activities, results are well planned, but budget constraints, in this case the low flat rate, do not allow a high quality of implementation without the beneficiaries of the projects investing their own resources”* (BG05M2OP001-3.017), *“Inability to implement the project activities due to containment measures in place, coinciding with the time of implementation of activities”* (BG05M2OP001-3.020), *“The project was implemented in a long period of complex exceptional epidemic situation and introduced in relation to COVID – 19 health measures and restrictions, which is why some of the activities have been postponed and others have been carried out with interruption periods”* and *“Difficulties in working with the project partner”* (beneficiaries of CLLD procedures).

It is clear that the other difficulties mentioned can, in summary, be summarized to the following: difficulties in planning the dynamics of the movement of children and pupils related to the mobility or migration of parents resulting from employment opportunities; the provision of educational mediators in procedures which provide measures for them due to unpredictability of their availability; low unit costs, barriers caused by COVID-19 containment measures and difficulties in working with partners.

In order to further refine the degree of seriousness of the obstacles encountered, the survey included a question to the beneficiaries whether they had significant difficulties in the implementation of the project activities which led to: substantial modification of the financing contract, significant delays in the implementation of activities, failure to achieve planned indicators, financial corrections, etc.

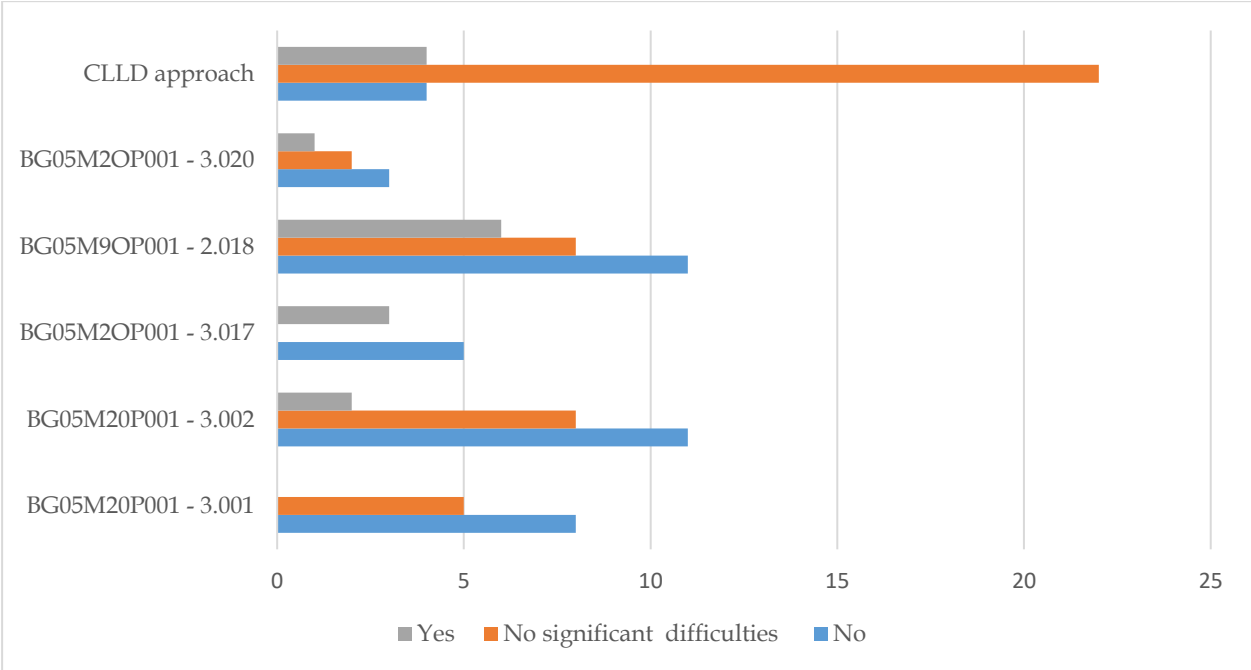
To this question out of 103 respondents, only around 41 % noted that they had no difficulties, around 44 % that they had no significant difficulties and around 15 % that they had substantial ones.

The groups of reasons invoked which led to significant difficulties, in the opinion of the beneficiaries, are as follows:

- Difficulties and delays in the implementation of activities due to the COVID-19 containment measures put in place (9 beneficiaries).
- Problems in conducting procedures for the designation of a contractor/public procurement (2 beneficiaries).
- Delays caused by budget changes during the evaluation or as a result of a legal dispute between the beneficiary and the MA (2 beneficiaries).
- Difficulties with partners requiring changes to the funding contracts (2 beneficiaries).
- Difficulties in providing participants from the target group (1 beneficiary).

The distribution of responses by procedures is presented in the figure below:

Figure21 Answers to a question: "Have you experienced any significant difficulties in the implementation of the project activities that led to: substantial modification of the financing contract, significant delays in the implementation of activities, failure to achieve planned indicators, financial corrections, etc.?"



During the interviews with the DB MES, the following difficulties were identified:

In the performance of "A New Chance for Success": delays caused by public procurement procedures, delays due to preparatory activities, difficulties in achieving indicators (which were nevertheless achieved) caused by the dynamics of the target group, lack of simplified cost options, resulting in excessive administrative difficulties and a lack of information system facilitating administration, again led to difficulties in collecting and processing data.

For the three projects with DB MES, difficulties were identified as a result of the containment measures put in place against the COVID – 19 outbreak.

During the focus group with the MA, it was shared the view that “Adult literacy – Phase 2” (BG05M2OP001-3.020) faces the biggest difficulties at the moment and the opinions about the reasons are that:

- Such a procedure is very difficult to implement when it is on the principle of awarding grants with selection of project proposals. In Phase 1, the results according to the representative of the MA were very good when MES was the Direct Beneficiary. Such a resource and such mobilisation, according to the shared opinion, is only according to the competences and capabilities of an institution as the Ministry of Education and Science, and the beneficiaries are now experiencing difficulty to cope with it.
- Another opinion is that the reason Phase 2 is not so successful is due not to the fact that the schools themselves do not know how to work, but simply the scheme is quite different. They are accustomed to working on a standard that is given to them by the Ministry of Education, where they have to simply perform it. Now it is a little more difficult for them, as they can not and purely technically do not know how to report, and consequently much fewer schools in the country are covered.
- The demographic factor, according to a representative of the MA, also has a great influence, because if the procedure had been implemented with a Direct beneficiary MES, it would have been possible to react and involve other schools with more participants from the target group, while when there is a fixed number of participants, there is no possibility to react. These are factors that cannot be influenced, given demographic factors and especially migration processes.
- In addition, under the procedure there are initially fewer contracts than expected, and according to one opinion, the submitted project proposals were very few because the NGOs themselves have a number of limitations related to State aid. Therefore, it is also expected that there will be a lower achievement of the indicators under this procedure.

During the focus group with representatives of the MC, the following views were shared with regard to the factors that make it difficult to achieve the objectives and results of the operations subject to this evaluation. They can be summarized as follows:

- It is difficult to translate the achieved good practices into systemic change. Doubts about the degree of analysis of studies and their consideration in the design of new procedures.
- Change of the practice with regard to the application of State aid or De minimis to the participation of NGOs and to educational integration operations. In the first programming period OP HRD and at the beginning of the programming period 2014-2020 in the first three procedures for awarding grants through selection of project proposals, OP SESG did not applied De minimis to educational integration activities carried out by NGOs. As of 2019, this approach has changed and for NGOs carrying out educational integration activities, a De minimis starts to apply (following new requirements set by the Ministry of Finance, according to information from the MA). The accumulation of aid under the De minimis for the majority of experienced NGOs also explains the low level of negotiation under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020, which was preceded by BG05M2OP001-3.017, where most experienced NGOs have already been approved for funding. *“Schools prefer, smaller schools, that organisations should take the bureaucratic burden of project preparation, reporting, etc., and schools only carry out activities and therefore did not apply.”*

- Amount of advance payment in case of a grant agreement. *“Another serious problem that has always been the case under the OP SESG and all other programmes, these are the low advances. A 20 % advance payment means that every organisation has to put a lot of money into the implementation of these projects.”...And that’s a stumbling block for many of the smaller organisations. They are practically unable to implement these projects because they do not have the necessary financial resources.”*
- Financial corrections imposed not at the cost recovery stage but after the completion of the project. *“Financial corrections are imposed not immediately upon reimbursement of expenditures, but after expenditures have been reimbursed, once the project has been completed and ex-post review and financial corrections are applied. That is, the organisation has entered money, it has been cashed and recovered, and then financial corrections are imposed. For example, this is not a problem for municipalities. Municipalities often have financial corrections, but they have a place to get funds to use for these corrections. In the case of NGOs, this has nowhere to come from and organisations face bankruptcy in practice.”*
- Amounts of simplified cost options are inadequate to the current conditions: where hotel accommodation is included, where unit costs for lecture hours are foreseen, etc. The reason is the increase in prices due to inflation.

In conclusion, it could be summarised that the most relevant factors contributing to the achievement of the objectives and results of the procedures are those contained in the procedures: adequate to the objectives and results target groups, activities, duration and budget, and that the procedures are programmed in line with the real needs for support to the target groups. The interviews and focus groups emphasise the key role of the motivation of the professionals involved in the implementation of activities, as well as the managers<sup>28</sup> of/from the relevant institution/organisation, which is committed to the implementation of the specific project.

With regards to the obstacles encountered to achieve the objectives and results of the procedures, the beneficiaries mostly did not respond to having met them, and around 14 % had a problem with the implementation of procedures for selection of a contractor and for about 10 % the design of the procedure required excessive administrative effort during implementation. For more than twice as many of them, there is a non-compliance between some of the set components: eligible target groups, activities, duration and budget with the expected results. Other difficulties encountered were caused by COVID-19, accompanying containment measures and the resulting changes in the educational process. Other common difficulties identified are the mobility of target groups and the size of simplified cost options. In particular, NGOs are also directly affected by a change in the practice with regard to the application of a State aid or a De minimis to the implementation of educational integration activities by NGOs. This, according to their representative in the MC, leads to the impossibility of participating in the procedures due to cumulation of aid under the De minimis and has a direct impact on the degree of negotiation of the latter procedures, such as BG05M2OP001-3.020. In addition, a number of project or procedure-specific obstacles identified above have been noted.

#### **4.8. What factors determine the better performance of certain operations than others financed under the Programme?**

Evaluation Question 2 has already analysed the external factors and the extent to which they have influenced the achievement/non-achievement of the indicators set, and in evaluative question 7 – the

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<sup>28</sup> Focus group with representatives of the MC of OP SESG, held on 30.1.2023

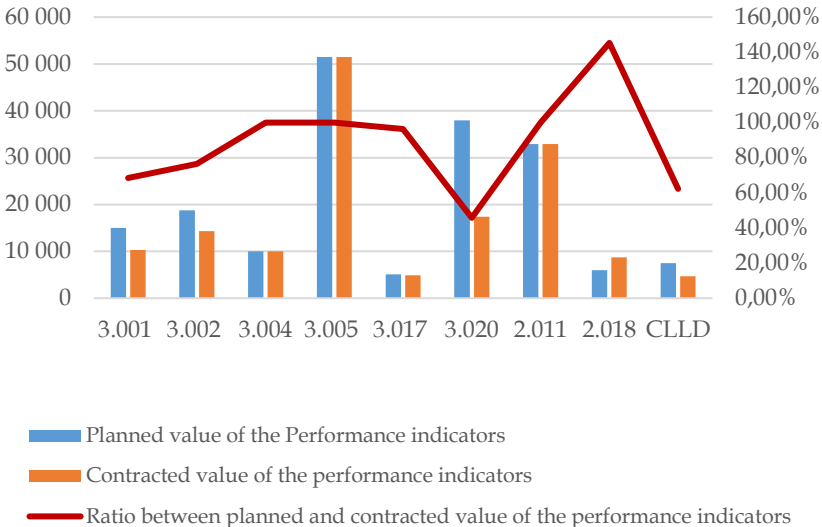
factors that help or hinder the achievement of the objectives and results of the operations under the SESG OP, which are the subject of this evaluation, have already been analysed.

In order to answer this evaluation question, it is first necessary to identify at least a relatively objective method by which to determine which operations are better performing, in order to be able to carry out an analysis according to their characteristics, which might be the factors which contributed to this.

The method we set out to identify procedures that can be claimed to deliver better results consists of two combined approaches: identification of the procedures that can be claimed to have achieved the intended output and result indicators or from the progress up to date are expected to achieve them and identification of the procedures that achieve a higher level of cost efficiency per unit of like product.

Overall, all procedures in the scope of the evaluation are expected to achieve the planned output and result indicators, except for one “Adult literacy – 2” (BG05M2OP001-3.020), where around one third of the programme-specific output indicator was contracted, and in some procedures, such as BG05M9OP001-2.018 and BG05M2OP001-3.005 and BG05M2OP001-2.011 result indicators are likely to be significantly exceeded.

Figure 22 Target values of planned MCSO output indicators and such contracted under projects presented by procedures

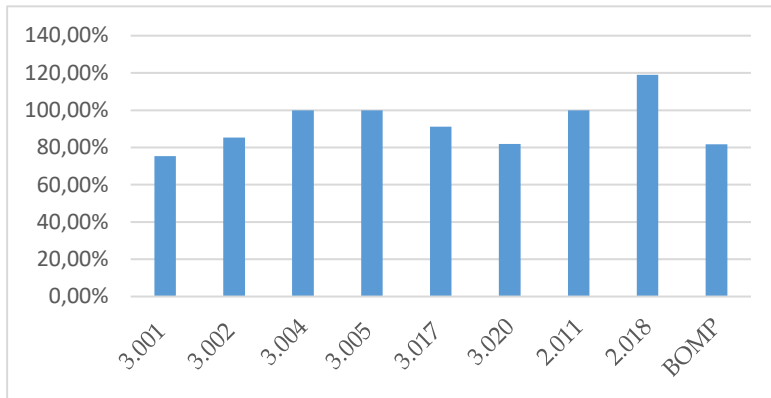


This means that under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020, the programme-specific output indicator 3213 “Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP” is seriously jeopardised. The possible reasons for this are set out in the answer to evaluative question 4.7.

As regards CLLD procedures, the MCSO sets a framework against the expectations of LAG activity, but the planning approach is “bottom-up” through the strategies of the Local Action Groups, which defines different funding parameters and indicators. However, the MCSO has not been updated according to what is set out in the strategies, both in terms of indicators and the budget allocated to the operation.

In terms of results, the figure below may give orientation for the procedures to be executed, which are at risk of not achieving the result indicators and which are not, according to the level of contracted indicators, compared to those laid down in the MCSO.

Figure23 Ratio between target values of result indicators contracted by projects to the target values of MCSO result indicators



For some of the procedures, result indicators should be monitored with caution and along with the outputs from the implementation, insofar as they report a share of participants involved in an activity that have successfully completed it (e.g. BG05M2OP001-3.004, BG05M2OP001-3.020 and BG05M2OP001-3.017) and not a number of such participants.

It is apparent from the figure that there does not appear to be a procedure that is at real risk of failure to achieve the result indicators, as for BG05M9OP001-2.018, overachievement is already guaranteed by the projects-contracted result indicators.

The result indicators of the completed procedures look as follows:

Table 12 Implementation of result indicators for completed procedures against MCSOs

Procedure	Execution of result indicators
BG05M2OP001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children"	"Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system" — implementation of 93.17 % "Net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens" — from a planned achievement of 84.00 % of the coefficient was achieved 77.17 %.
BG05M2OP001-3.002 "Educational integration of pupils from ethnic minorities and/or applicants or beneficiaries of international protection"	"Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system" — implementation of 99.51 %
BG05M2OP001-3.004 "Adult literacy — Phase 1"	"Share of persons (including Roma), who have received certificates for successfully completed literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP." — 91.84 %.

Since the individual indicator for the procedure BG05M2OP001-3.001 'Net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens' is not defined as a change compared to a baseline level, it can be formally concluded that it is 91.87 %, but the figure thus derived does not provide information on the specific contribution of the evaluated procedure.

The results reported show that the completed procedures achieved to a large extent, almost at 100 %, the planned result indicators related to the programme.

Among the other procedures, as already indicated, in a serious risk of failure to achieve the planned output indicators is only "Adult literacy — 2" (BG05M2OP001-3.020), where is contracted around one third of the programme-specific output indicator and at formal risk the CLLD.

According to the second approach, although relatively justified, it can be assumed that operations that achieve better results are those that achieve greater efficiency per unit of like product (output indicator), provided, of course, that the products and results of the operations are at least substantially similar, the target groups and activities also.



From this point of view, on the basis of the analysis carried out, the following sets of procedures can be identified as comparable:

- BG05M2OP001-3.004 and BG05M2OP001-3.020;
- BG05M2OP001-3.001 and BG05M2OP001-3.005;
- BG05M2OP001-3.002 and BG05M2OP001-2.011;
- BG05M9OP001-2.018 and CLLD procedures.

The benchmarks and the comparative analysis of the cost efficiency of similar products under these procedures is described in point 4.1.3 of the evaluation report under the thematic strand "Efficiency of the operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (output indicators) and adequacy of the applied simplified cost reporting methodologies'.

When considering the above procedures, it should be borne in mind that only procedures BG05M2OP001-3.004, BG05M2OP001-3.001 and BG05M2OP001 -3.002 have been completed. I.e. final performance data for the rest are not yet available and the comparison for the purpose of establishing cost efficiency is based on the planned output indicators and reported ones available at the time.

For the first pair of comparable procedures BG05M2OP001-3.004 and BG05M2OP001-3.020, it is questionable where the higher cost efficiency of similar products was achieved, since the reported costs reached for the participation of a person from the targeted group under the first procedure were almost similar to those contracted under the second one. The second procedure is still ongoing and when the verified expenditures data becomes available, it will be possible to assess the cost efficiency of similar products and for which one is higher.

*Table13 Macrocharacteristics of BG05M2OP001-3.004 and BG05M2OP001-3.020*

The Criteria	BG05M2OP001-3.004	BG05M2OP001-3.020
Territorial scope	National.	National, but given that it is a selection procedure for project proposals, as a result there is no full national coverage.
Way of implementation	Procedure for granting a grant directly with DB MES.	Procedure for selection of project proposals for awarding a grant.
The target group	Similar.	Similar.
Eligible activities	Partly similar.	Partly similar.
Eligible costs	Partly similar.	Partly similar.
Result Indicators	Similar.	Similar.
Applicability of simplified cost options	No.	Yes.

After the closure of procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020, it may prove to be more cost-effective for similar products, but on the other hand it will not be able to achieve the programme-specific output indicator, although the reasons for this are unlikely to lie in the macro-parameters of the procedure.

In this case, the macro-characteristics are as follows: National scale, but given that it is a selection procedure for project proposals, as a result there is no full national coverage. Procedure for the selection of project proposals for awarding grants. Availability of simplified cost options.

For the second pair of comparable procedures BG05M2OP001-3.001 and BG05M2OP001-3.005, it can be concluded that, at least on the basis of the data available, the second procedure achieves greater cost efficiency for similar products.

*Table14 Macrocharacteristics of BG05M2OP001-3.001 and BG05M2OP001-3.005*

The Criteria	BG05M20P001-3.001	BG05M20P001-3.005
Territorial scope	National, but given that it is a selection procedure for project proposals, as a result there is no full national coverage.	National.
Way of implementation	Procedure for selection of project proposals for awarding grants.	Procedure for granting a grant directly with DB MES.
The target group	Similar.	Similar.
Eligible activities	Partly similar.	Partly similar.
Eligible costs	Partly similar.	Partly similar.
Result Indicators	Similar.	Similar.
Applicability of simplified cost options	No.	Yes.

In this case, the macro-characteristics are as follows: It's a national scale. Procedure for awarding a grant directly with DB MES. Availability of simplified cost options.

For the third pair BG05M20P001-3.002 and BG05M20P001-2.011 it can be concluded that, at least on the basis of the data available, the second procedure achieves greater cost efficiency for similar products.

*Table15 Macrocharacteristics of BG05M20P001-3.002 and BG05M20P001-2.011*

The Criteria	BG05M20P001-3.002	BG05M20P001-2.011
Territorial scope	National, but given that it is a selection procedure for project proposals, as a result there is no full national coverage.	National.
Way of implementation	Procedure for selection of project proposals for granting a grant.	Procedure for granting a grant directly with DB MES.
The target group	Similar.	Similar.
Eligible activities	Partly similar.	Partly similar.
Eligible costs	Partly similar.	Partly similar.
Result Indicators	Similar.	Similar.
Applicability of simplified cost options	No.	Yes.

In this case, the macro-characteristics are as follows: It's a national scale. Procedure for awarding a grant directly with DB MES. Availability of simplified cost options.

For the fourth pair of comparable, albeit only to a certain extent, procedures BG05M9OP001-2.018 and CLLD procedures, the values of the contracted and verified expenditures per person from the target groups under both procedures are quite similar, and as evidenced by the data, the CLLD grant procedures are more efficient than procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018.

*Table16 Macrocharacteristics of BG05M9OP001-2.018 and CLLD procedures*

The Criteria	BG05M9OP001-2.018	CLLD procedures
Territorial scope	Local, at the level of a specific municipality.	Local, in the area of operation of the LAG.
Way of implementation	Direct grant award procedure with DB municipalities.	Procedures for selecting project proposals for awarding grants.
The target group	Similar.	Similar.
Eligible activities	Partly similar.	Partly similar.
Eligible costs	Partly similar.	Partly similar.
Result Indicators	Identical + additional	Identical
Applicability of simplified cost options	Partly	Partly

Characteristic of both procedures is the specifics of the way of implementation. Procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 was programmed as direct delivery with specific beneficiaries municipalities/regions of municipalities/with updated municipal plans for Roma integration for the period 2015-2020, in accordance with the National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012-2020. The CLLD procedures are programmed for implementation through selection of projects to a CLLD strategy implemented by the LAG/FLAG, agreed with the MA of the SESG OP and approved Instructions for Application, including specific criteria set out in the approved CLLD strategies, in accordance with the instructions of the MA.

Unlike the other procedures under assessment and procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 and those under the CLLD approach are implemented at local level. The scope of procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 is the territory of municipalities with updated municipal plans for Roma integration for the period 2015-2020, in accordance with the National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012-2020, which have approved concepts, after pre-selection by the CCU. The CLLD approach procedures are implemented in the territories eligible under Article 4 of Council of Ministers Decree No 161/2016 – the LAG/FLAG territories approved for implementation of CLLD strategies.

The comparative analysis of the planned value of one person from the target group is irrelevant due to the fact that the planned funds under the CLLD procedures have not been updated following the agreements concluded to implement CLLD strategies towards a reduction. Detailed analysis in this regard has been carried out and described in point 4.1. of the Report on thematic strand Efficiency<sup>29</sup>.

In CLLD procedures, the macro-characteristics are as follows: Local territorial scope, on the territory of the LAG concerned. Procedures for the selection of project proposals for the award of grants carried out by the relevant action group. A higher degree of possibilities for applying simplified cost options than for BG05M9OP001-2.018.

During the focus group with representatives of the MA, it was shared the view that projects such as “Support for Success” BG05M2OP001-2.011 and “Active Inclusion” BG05M2OP001 -3.005 can be considered successful, as the following factors contributed to this: a systematic approach; contributing to a paradigm shift in education insofar as they are created and responding to the new challenges resulting from the new legislation adopted at that time (Law on Pre-School and School Education of 2016, regulations, etc.), including even changing key concepts; territorial scale, ability to mobilise educational institutions, all participants through teachers, parents, pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, etc.

On the other hand, the benefits of the selection procedures for awarding a grant are also taken into account: *“Their achievement is extremely important for something else. They enter places where the state does not even know they exist.”*

Similar is the view on the role of “Support for Success” BG05M2OP001-2.011 and “Active Inclusion” BG05M2OP001 -3.005, expressed during the interviews conducted with the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science involved in the management of the two operations.

During the focus group with representatives of the MC it was expressed the opinion that in general the procedures announced had contributed to the objectives of the related strategic documents and OPs, but a perplexity was expressed from the redirection of the funds under PA 3 after the first grant schemes, mainly to projects with DB MES. It was noted that under PA 3 there are good procedures for awarding grants. A participant in the discussion on behalf of the MC also shared the following: *“There were some*

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<sup>29</sup> Report under the thematic strand "Efficiency of operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (output indicators) and adequacy of simplified cost reporting methodologies applied"

*good projects in which indeed, the children improved their school behavior and the relations between children of different ethnicities.”...Whether this happened under systematic projects such as “Support for preschool education” and “Support for success”, there I can no longer say. It’s probably somewhere yes, and somewhere not. But especially on systemic projects, I think that this impact has been achieved to a lesser extent than on some of the projects under the grant procedures. A lot depends on how much you do the activities with your heart and with an innovative thought. System projects do not imply doing them with an innovative thought. There it is enough just to do some hours of additional training, to provide the reporting documents and that’s it. While on some of the grant projects, certainly not all projects, there is always this danger that some projects are realised meaningfully and others are completely meaningless. But some of the grant projects certainly had a change in impact.”*

The operations in the scope of the evaluation generally achieve or are expected to achieve the planned results or even exceed them in some cases. This for the purpose of the evaluation question can be defined as good results. Some are more cost-effective for a like product than others, but this is not sufficient to conclude that they perform better than others, even on formal criteria. Whether the results of a procedure are good directly depends also on the extent to which they have satisfied an identified need or have solved a particular problem and achieved the objectives set. Accordingly, depending on the nature of the need or problem, as well as the objectives set, one instrument is more appropriate than another.

Based on the analysis carried out, it can be concluded that, in addition to the external and internal factors already discussed in the answers to other evaluation questions contributing to the achievement of the planned indicators, a common factor in the analysed operations with better cost efficiency per unit of like product and which achieve the planned results is the existence of simplified cost options. The full national coverage in combination with the implementation of operations by the DB is a serious prerequisite for achieving better performance of operations in cases where the objectives set imply a systemic approach. Funding schemes through project selection procedures shall be assessed as a prerequisite for achieving better results where a local approach, a targeted approach or an individualised design and approach to the implementation of activities is needed and a high degree of pro-activity or innovation is expected to solve problems and achieve the objectives of operations.

#### **4.9. To what extent have the operations implemented under the Operational Programme SESG, subject of this evaluation, contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020) and of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)?**

The answer to the evaluation question presupposes, first of all, a fine-tuning of the operations of the OP SESG in relation to the period of validity of the two strategic documents examined. For the period of operation of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020) and the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020), the following procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG have been implemented: BG05M9OP001-2.018 ‘Integrated measures to improve access to education’, BG05M2OP001 -3.001 ‘Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children’, BG05M2OP001-3.002 ‘Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection’, BG05M2OP001-3.004 ‘Adult literacy – Phase 1’, BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the pre-school education system”, BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” and procedures for awarding grants under the CLLD approach.

The strategic objective of *the National Strategy for Roma Integration (2012-2020)*<sup>30</sup> is to create conditions for equal integration of Roma and Bulgarian citizens in vulnerable situation from in the social and economic life by ensuring equal opportunities and equal access to rights, goods, goods and services, participation in all public spheres and improving the quality of life in compliance with the principles of equality and discrimination. In connection with this strategic objective, the Strategy considers the various priority areas such as education, health, housing, employment, rule of law and non-discrimination, culture and media, as fundamental to Roma integration. For the purposes of this evaluation, the measures under the Education Priority, which are linked to funding from the OP SESG, are examined.

Table 14 shows the contribution of the operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG, which is assessed on the basis of a study and analysis of the monitoring reports for the implementation of the NSRIRB for 2016<sup>31</sup> and 2017<sup>32</sup>, of the measures and sources of funding set out in the National Action Plan 2015-2020 for the implementation of the NSRIRB 2012-2020<sup>33</sup> and by analysing the objectives, activities and target groups set out in the above procedures. The analysis of the contribution shows that out of 26 measures under the “Education” priority in the NSRIRB 2012-2020, 13 are implemented mainly through the implementation of the evaluated procedures, and 3 out of the 26 measures set out in total do not require funding.

The evaluation question presupposes the examination of the extent to which the operations carried out under the OP SESG, subject to this evaluation, contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the NSRIRB 2012-2020. For this purpose, the comparability of the results set out in the National Implementation Plan of the NSRIRB 2012-2020 is analysed, which takes into account the achievement of the results set out in the Strategy on the implementation of the measures, with the results reported on the operations under evaluation of the OP SESG. The achievements of the OP SESG are reported through output and result indicators concerning the overall scope of the interventions against the target groups, the expected result and the implementation of the specific objectives for the priority axis and investment priority concerned. Our analysis shows that they are not comparable to the indicators set in the NIP of the NSRIRB 2012-2020. This is also reflected in the 2017 Administrative Monitoring Report on the implementation of the “National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria” (2012-2020), where to the corresponding measures under NRIS 2012-2020 is indicated the total number of participants in the applicable indicators of the corresponding OP funded procedure. For example in the NIP of NSRIRB 2012-2020 under Measure 1.2.2. “Support for Roma children and pupils to equalise their starting positions when entering kindergarten /school” result is “Supported Roma children and pupils to equalise their starting positions when entering kindergarten/school”, result indicator is “Number of supported children and students”, target value of 3 500, and the set result indicators under the procedures that contribute to achieving the result of this measure 1.2.2 are as follows: under procedure BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children” – “Net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens – 84 %” and “Number of children from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated into the educational system – 12 000”; under procedure BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” – “Number of students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated into the education system – 15 000” and under procedures for granting a grant under the CLLD approach – “Number of children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated into the education system – at least 5000”. In the 2017 administrative monitoring report on the implementation of the NSRIRB 2012-2020 for measure

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<sup>30</sup> Source: <https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726>

<sup>31</sup> 2016 Administrative Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020), source: <https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726>

<sup>32</sup> Administrative Monitoring Report 2017 on the implementation of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020), source: <https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726>

<sup>33</sup> The source: <https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726>

1.2.2, the following is specified: “The procedure started on 27.7.2016, 52 projects were funded for 2016, of which 1 was terminated, for 2017 another 3 projects were funded, and the number of children from ethnic minorities (including Roma) involved in educational integration measures is 7 055”.

In addition, at the macro level, it should be noted that the implementation of the measures under the priority “Education” of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) contributes to the implementation of National Goal 4 “Share of early leavers of the education system of 11 % by 2020 and share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary education – 36 % by 2020” and indirectly contributes to the achievement of National Goal 5 “Reduction of the number of people living in poverty by 260 thousand”. The national targets are set out in the *National Reform Programme implementing the Europe 2020 strategy*. In this sense, it can be stated that the operations under Priority Axis 3 of the SESG OP also contribute to the achievement of these national objectives.

Table 17 Contribution of the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG to achieve the objectives of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)

National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG that contribute to achieving the objectives of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)						
Objectives, tasks and measures under the NSRIRB 2012-2020 in pursuit of an operational objective: “Covering and retaining Roma children and students in the education system. Ensuring quality education in a multicultural educational environment”	BG05M9OP001-2.018	BG05M20P001-3.001	BG05M20P001-3.002	BG05M2OP001-3.004	CLLD	BG05M2OP001-3.005	BG05M2OP001-2.011
<b>Goal 1: Ensuring the right to equal access to quality education, including through the integration of Roma children and students in ethnically mixed kindergartens and schools</b>							
<b>Task 1.2: Providing conditions for maximum coverage and early adaptation in the pre-school and school education system for Roma children and students</b>							
Measure 1.2.2. Support for Roma children and students to equalise their starting positions when entering kindergarten/ school		✓	✓		✓	✓	
<b>Goal 2: Improving the quality of education in the separate kindergartens and schools in the large Roma neighbourhoods and in rural regions where Roma children and students are studying mainly</b>							
<b>Task 2.1: Increasing school readiness and providing a supportive environment and differentiated care for each child and student</b>							
Measure 2.1.1. Provision of additional training in Bulgarian language for pre-school children for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue if necessary	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Measure 2.1.2. Provision of additional training in Bulgarian language if necessary for students for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue	✓		✓		✓		
<b>Goal 3: Training in a spirit of tolerance and non-discrimination in kindergartens and schools. Preservation and development of the cultural identity of Roma children and students</b>							
<b>Task 3.1: Formation of knowledge of the culture, traditions and values of different ethnic groups to build conscious tolerance</b>							
Measure 3.1.2. Overcoming discriminatory attitudes towards Roma children and students through integration activities (excursions,	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

events to mark dates from the holiday calendar, campaigns)							
Measure 3.1.3. Working with school boards and parent associations to overcome negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
<b>Task 3.2: Development of various forms of intercultural education aimed at preserving and developing the cultural identity of Roma</b>							
Measure 3.2.1. Support activities aimed at preserving and developing the cultural identity of Roma children and pupils	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
<b>Objective 4: Prevention of school drop-out and literacy of illiterate and illiterate Roma adults</b>							
<b>Task 4.1: Prevention of dropping out of school for Roma children and students</b>							
Measure 4.1.1. Inclusion of Roma children and students in a variety of extracurricular and out-of-school activities to overcome learning difficulties and school retention	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Measure 4.1.2. Introduction of measures for coverage and prevention of dropping out of the education system	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
<b>Task 4.2: Inclusion of Roma adults in further education</b>							
Measure 4.2.1. Literacy and training of illiterate and illiterate Roma people who have not completed an initial stage or a completed grade from the lower secondary stage				✓			
<b>Purpose 5: Implementation of various forms and programs for working with children with gaps in mastering the educational content and for drop-outs in order to reintegrate them</b>							
<b>Task 5.1: Increasing the flexibility and permeability of different education models</b>							
Measure 5.1.1. Introduction of a system for validating knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal learning and informal learning				✓			
<b>Goal 6: Inclusion of parents of Roma children and students in the educational process and strengthening their participation in school life</b>							
<b>Task 6.1: Increasing the commitments of parents of Roma children and students to their children's education</b>							
Measure 6.1.1. Participation of parents of Roma children and students in parent clubs/school boards	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Measure 6.1.2. Joint activities between parents, including parents of Roma children, to overcome negative societal attitudes is related to joint activities between parents, including parents of Roma children, to overcome negative public attitudes, to create partnerships between kindergartens, schools and parents	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

Measure 6.1.3. Activities to raise the awareness of parents of Roma children and students about the benefits of education is specific, aimed at parents of children and students from ethnic minorities, including Roma	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
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*The Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)*

<sup>34</sup> is a document that is in line with international documents and standards in the field of children’s rights and the rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities and its objectives are prioritised in the following areas: “Full socialisation of children and students from ethnic minorities”, “Ensuring equal access to quality education for children and students from ethnic minorities”, “Promoting intercultural education as an integral part of the process of modernisation of the Bulgarian educational system” and “Conservation and development of the cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities”. Table 14 shows the contribution of operations under Priority Axis 3 of the OP SESG to SEICSEM 2015-2020 and is assessed on the basis of an analysis of the<sup>35</sup> activities set out in the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy, as well as by analysing the objectives, activities and target groups set out in the above procedures. The analysis of the contribution shows that out of the 21 actions planned under the 4 strands, 6 are mainly implemented through the implementation of the evaluated procedures, and 3 of the 21 measures set out in total do not require funding.

Apart from the above, there is an overlap between the activities set out in the Implementation Plan of SEICSEM 2015-2020 and the measures for the implementation of the objectives of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020), in particular: activity 1.4. “Working with school boards and parent associations to overcome negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards different ethnic groups” is identical to measure 3.1.3. “Work with school boards and parent associations to overcome negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes”; activity 2.3. “Providing if necessary additional training in Bulgarian language for children and pupils for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue” is identical to measures 2.1.1. “Providing, if necessary, additional training in Bulgarian for pre-school children for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue” and 2.1.2. “Providing, if necessary, additional training in Bulgarian language for students for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue”; activity 4.4. “Conservation and development of the cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities in the educational process, including in optional and mandatory selection classes” – with measure 3.2.1. “Supporting activities aimed at preserving and developing the cultural identity of Roma children and students”. The set result indicators and target values for these activities/measures are almost identical/under activity 2.3 of the Implementation Plan of SEICSEM 2015-2020. The set result indicator is “Number of supported children and students” with a target value of 5 000, and the set result indicators under measures 2.1.1. and 2.1.2 of the NAP of the NSRIRB 2012-2020 are “Number of children involved in the education, including with Roma background” with a target of 2 500 and “Number of students included in training, including with Roma background” with a target value of 5 000/.

The reference to the overlap of the activities and measures under the plans for the implementation of the two strategies under evaluation supports the above conclusion regarding the examination of the extent to which the operations implemented under the OP SESG, which are the subject of this evaluation, contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Strategies. For SEICSEM 2015-2020, the conclusion is similar to that made in the study of the same issue concerning the NSRIRB 2012-2020, not only because the two strategies have identical measures/activities and indicators for

<sup>34</sup> The strategy builds on the strategy approved by the Minister of Education and Science in 2004 and updated in 2010 with the same name, which is the first sectoral document contributing to the development of Bulgarian education in the context of the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities.

<sup>35</sup> Source: <https://web.mon.bg/bg/10068>



implementation, but also because the Implementation Plan of SEICSEM 2015-2020 sets out indicators for the implementation of the planned activities, which are not comparable to output and result indicators set by the OP SESG.

In addition, the participants in the focus group with representatives of the MC of OP SESG share that the procedures under Priority Axis 3 are in full compliance with the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration 2012-2020 and the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities 2015-2020.<sup>36</sup>

Table 18 Contribution of the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG to achieve the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)

Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG that contribute to achieving the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)						
Objectives and activities set out in the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)	BG05M9 OP001- 2.018	BG05M20 P001-3.001	BG05M20 P001-3.002	BG05M20 P001-3.004	CLLD	BG05M20 P001-3.005	BG05M20 P001-2.011
<b>Strategic Objective 1. Full socialisation of children and students from ethnic minorities</b>							
Activity 1.4. Working with school boards and parent associations to overcome negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards different ethnic groups	✓	✓	✓			✓	
<b>Strategic Objective 2. Ensuring equal access to quality education for children and pupils from ethnic minorities</b>							
Activity 2.3. Provision of additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue if necessary	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Activity 2.4. Providing additional qualification of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural educational environment, including specialised teaching in Bulgarian to children for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue						✓	
Activity 2.7. Additional work with students from ethnic minorities at risk of dropping out and/or early school leaving	✓		✓		✓		✓
Activity 2.8. Supporting students from vulnerable ethnic communities to continue high school education	✓		✓	✓			✓

<sup>36</sup> Focus group with representatives of the MC of OP SESG, held on 30.1.2023

Strategic Objective 4. Preserving and developing the cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities							
Activity 4.4. Preserving and developing the cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities in the educational process, including in optional and mandatory selection classes	✓	✓	✓		✓		

In conclusion, it should be noted that Priority Axis 3 procedures BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Integrated measures to improve access to education”, BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children”, BG05M2OP001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M2OP001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1”, BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”, BG05M2OP001-2.011 „Support for success“, as well as grant award procedures under the CLLD approach have a significant contribution to the achieving of the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020) and the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) however, a concrete degree to which they contribute cannot be provided due to non-comparability between the set results in the Implementation Plans of the two strategies, with the results that are reported under the OP SESG evaluated operations.

#### 4.10. Is there a causal link between the intervention(s) carried out under the operations under Priority Axis 3 and the results achieved?

To the extent that the result indicators achieved under the operations covered by the evaluation are expected to capture the expected effects for the participants or entities resulting from the implementation of the operation, to correspond to the specific objectives set for each investment priority selected and be directly linked to the activities, a detailed analysis of the underlying intervention logic in the MCSO and the Instructions/Guidelines for Application was carried out in order to respond to the question thus asked, within the scope of the assessment, i.e. what are the needs or problems identified, what are the objectives to be achieved, what resources are envisaged or used, what activities are planned or implemented, whether they contribute to the achievement of the output and result indicators set or achieved. The following are the findings of the analysis of compliance of intervention with result indicators by procedures:

Table 19 Results of causation analysis between intervention and results achieved

Procedure	Results of the analysis
BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children”	There is a causal link between intervention and results achieved, except for an unclear link between the activities and the individual result indicator for the procedure, defined as “Net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens” — 84 %. As such, this indicator is not defined as a change from a baseline value, is not linked to the location of the implementation of the projects and it is questionable to what extent its dynamics do not depend more on external factors than is a consequence of a change as a result of the activities of the funded projects.
BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”	There is a causal link between intervention and results achieved.
BG05M2OP001-3.004 “Adult literacy — Phase 1”	There is a causal link between intervention and results achieved.

BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1"	There is a causal link between intervention and planned results.
BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education"	There is a causal link between intervention and planned results. Under this operation is set a quantifiable operation-specific result indicator measuring qualitative change for children from vulnerable groups, which is directly related to the activities carried out: "Relative share of children from vulnerable groups with progress in Bulgarian language from their participation in the operation – 85 %."
BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"	There is a causal link between intervention and planned results.
BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success"	There is a causal link between intervention and planned results. Under this operation is set a quantifiable operation-specific result indicator measuring qualitative change for students from vulnerable groups, which is directly related to the activities carried out: "Improved educational outcomes of students from marginalised groups such as Roma, after completion of a school term or school year within the project implementation period – 10 %."
BG05M2OP001-3.020 "Adult literacy – 2"	There is a causal link between intervention and planned results.
Procedures for grant awarding under the CLLD approach with funding under OP SESG	There is a causal link between intervention and planned results.

As a result of the analysis, a causal link between interventions (including activities) and achieved results of the operations within the scope of the evaluation was identified however, with one exception.

In some of the operations, new operation-specific quantifiable indicators were introduced for this type of participants which track qualitative changes in the situation related to the participants when exiting the operation.

## V. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1. Methods and approach to reflect conclusions and recommendations

The presentation of the conclusions and recommendations in this report is based on an analysis that clearly shows causal links. The conclusions of the implemented evaluation are based on the following elements:

- A condition assessed by a criterion is a fact (or several facts) that the Contractor has established (actual status). This objective reality has been established by carrying out various evaluation procedures and is supported by evidence.
- Reason – the reason for the discrepancy between the criterion and the condition will be identified and indicated (why the difference exists). The reason is the link, supported by evidence, between the observed unacceptable state and the desired state.

The conclusions derive directly from the analyses and the recommendations are based on the conclusions. With regards to the quality of the recommendations, we have followed the following quality elements:

- the recommendations are specific, i.e. specify exactly what, how and by whom it should be carried out;
- the recommendations shall be understandable, clear and unambiguous;
- the recommendations are motivated;
- the recommendations are addressed (proposing a specific vision of the responsibilities of the relevant implementing institutions);
- provide an indication of the possible period of application;
- specify the target groups to which information is to be disseminated and the appropriate channels of communication;
- propose a methodology and approach to reflect in the applicable procedures and processes that the MA of OP SESG uses in the management and implementation of the Programme and/or in its change.

During the preparation of this assessment the following requirements set out in the technical specification of the Contracting Authority are met:

- 1) Compliance to needs: Adequate addressing the need for information formulated by the Contracting Authority;
- 2) Appropriate scope: Careful examination of the rationale of the Programme, its products, results and impact, interaction with other policies and unexpected effects;
- 3) Openness of the process: Identification of all stakeholders; involving stakeholders and target groups in the preparation of the evaluation and in the discussion of results to take account of different perspectives;
- 4) Reliability of data: Primary and secondary data collected are appropriate and reliable in view of their expected use and analysis;
- 5) Depth of analysis: Quantitative and qualitative data are analysed in accordance with established practices and in a way that provides relevant answers to all evaluation questions;
- 6) Plausible and well-founded results: The conclusions and results are logical and justified in terms of data analysis and interpretation, including appropriate explanations and hypotheses;
- 7) Impartial conclusions: The soundness and impartiality of the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation;
- 8) Clear and credible report: The report shall describe the context and purpose and the organisation and results of the evaluation in such a way that the information provided is easily understandable and verifiable;
- 9) Objective and applicable conclusions and recommendations: The findings stem from the evaluation analysis; the conclusions stem from the findings made; the recommendations made are relevant to the findings and conclusions; the evaluation provides useful recommendations for the Contracting Authority and other stakeholders, and they are applicable in practice and are sufficiently detailed and clear to be implemented.

## **VI. EVALUATION UNDER EFFICIENCY STRAND: ACHIEVING AN OPTIMAL RATIO BETWEEN INPUTS AND OUTPUTS (OUTPUT INDICATORS) AND ADEQUACY OF THE APPLIED SIMPLIFIED COST ACCOUNTING METHODOLOGIES**

The evaluation questions defined in the Technical Specification imply that the evaluation under the 'Efficiency strand should be focused on two main sets of questions, each of which is logically linked:

- efficiency evaluation, measured as a ratio between inputs and outputs, including answers to the main evaluation question 4.1. "What is the cost efficiency of these procedures, measured as a ratio between inputs and outputs?" and the logically related sub-questions 4.1.3. "A comparative analysis of the cost efficiency of similar products under the covered procedures" and 4.1.4. "What are the costs of participating in the operation of a person from the target group?";

and

- evaluation of the adequacy of the simplified cost reporting methodologies applied, including sub-questions 4.1.1. "Are the flat rates for financing activities for organisation and management of projects financed by the OP SESG adequate, the standard tables for the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects financed by the OP SESG, the standard scales of unit costs?" and 4.1.2. "Findings, conclusions and recommendations on the use of simplified cost options under OP SESG".

This report will preserve the structure of the evaluation questions of the Technical Specification while taking into account their logical connection in the two groups.

### **6.1. What is the cost efficiency of these procedures, measured as a ratio between inputs and outputs?**

The efficiency evaluation relates to an analysis of two main indicators defined in the present case as inputs and outputs.

For the purpose of this evaluation, the term "input resources" should be understood as spending or verified expenditure. Output indicator data are used for the analysis of "products achieved" as set out in the Technical Specification.

The subject of this evaluation are the procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020 (OP SESG)<sup>37</sup> aimed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups, including Roma, referred to in the Technical Specification. The third priority axis "Educational environment for active social inclusion" provides funding through the European Social Fund for a total of BGN 229.2 million or 16.99 % of the total budget of the Programme, invested in measures for active inclusion and socio-economic integration.

Priority Axis 3 includes measures under thematic objective 9 "Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and all forms of discrimination under two investment priorities:

- Investment priority 9i (IP 9i) – Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation and better employability. The allocation is EUR 22 099 394.50 (ESF).;
- Investment priority 9i (IP 9ii) – Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as Roma. The allocation is EUR 77 527 675.50 (ESF).

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<sup>37</sup> <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pageId=32> - Version 5.0/approved by the EC on 07.05.2021/

According to data from the public portal “Information System for Management and Monitoring of EU Funds in Bulgaria 2020”<sup>38</sup> (UMIS), a total of 27 operations have been financed for the period of the evaluation under the PA 3, 15 of which are grant procedures under the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) approach financed under the OP SESG. According to the Technical Specifications for this procurement, four operations are outside the scope of the evaluation, namely: BG05M2OP001-3.018 “Supporting inclusive education”; BG05M2OP001-3.003 “Providing conditions and resources for the construction and development of supportive environment in kindergartens and schools for implementation of inclusive training – Phase 1”; BG05M2OP001-3.019 “Supporting vulnerable groups for access to higher education”; BG05M9OP001-2.056 “Socio-economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 2.”

The analysis of the evaluated procedures found that only one of them – BG05M2OP001- 3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” included measures under both investment priorities of PA 3. All other operations have programmed activities under Investment Priority 9ii focused on the integration of marginalised communities.

For the evaluation of the efficiency strand, a detailed analysis of the procedures assessed was carried out in terms of the planned, contracted and verified financial means. The analysis of the target, achieved and verified values of the output indicators was carried out for the purpose of the evaluation under the “Efficiency” strand included in the Evaluation Report under the strand. In order to avoid unnecessary repetitions, this report will use only the results of this analysis required for the assessment of the efficiency.

In assessing the results of the analysis carried out, certain limitations and assumptions should be taken into account as regards the data collected:

- According to the Technical Specification, “*The evaluation must cover all grant award procedures which, at the time of conclusion of the contract under this procurement, have completed their implementation under Priority Axis 3 or have a critical mass of performance and result indicators implemented – for example, after one academic year from the start of the implementation of the project activities.*” Part of the operations under evaluation are still in implementation, another part have been completed, but the final results of the projects implementation have not yet been reported. In this respect, the evaluation of the performance of the indicators and the amount of expenditures verified at the time of drafting this report should not be absolutised;
- Procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” is implemented under two priority axes – Priority Axis 2 and Priority Axis 3. For the purpose of this evaluation, only data on the achievement of the results under Priority Axis 3 have been taken into account;
- Due to the specificity of the activities, in some of the procedures there is a combination of essentially different output indicators, while the funding is set for the project/procedure as a whole. This does not allow the determination of a value per unit of each product (output indicator) in a given procedure. In this regard, and in line with the methodology adopted for calculating the efficiency ratio, only the output indicators related to the participation of target groups were taken into account.

With regards to the expenditures indicator, an analysis was carried out of the changes in the values from the programming phase of the procedures to the implementation stage, respectively verification of the expenditure incurred.

*Table 20 Amount of programmed and verified funds under the evaluated procedures as at 30.9.2022*

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<sup>38</sup> <https://2020.eufunds.bg/bg/7/0>

Procedure number	Programmed funds		Contracted funds	Verified expenditures
	The first version	The final version		
BG05M2OP001-3.001	10 000 000.00 BGN	20 000 000.00 BGN	16 320 741,63 BGN	13 284 377.16 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.002	25 000 000.00 BGN	25 000 000.00 BGN	23 083 403,56 BGN	17 274 529.21 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.004	25 000 000.00 BGN	19 070 732,00 BGN	19 070 732,00 BGN	11 981 366.40 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.005	82 500 000.00 BGN	82 500 000.00 BGN	72 136 200.00 BGN	48 520 542.74 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.017	7 000 000.00 BGN	7 000 000.00 BGN	6 580 069.71 BGN	1 890 155.17 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.020	15 000 000.00 BGN	15 662 042.93 BGN	5 862 361,91 BGN	252 723.86 BGN
BG05M2OP001-2.011	10 923 698.00 BGN	22 987 530,00 BGN	22 987 529.15 BGN	9 207 643.48 BGN
BG05M9OP001-2.018	5 000 000.00 BGN	20 000 000.00 BGN	14 283 181.85 BGN	12 640 367.31 BGN
CLLD procedures	80 000 000.00 BGN	10 153 634.80 BGN	9 209 266.59 BGN	3 939 739.75 BGN

*The source: MCSO, UMIS, MA*

The data on the amount of the programmed funds are derived from the Methodology and criteria for selecting the operations under the procedures adopted by the Monitoring Committee under OP SESG and the corresponding changes thereto, published on the website of the Executive Agency. With regard to the CLLD procedures, the amount of programmed funds is based on the 12 Agreements for the implementation of the CLLD approach with funding from the OP SESG. The public module of the UMIS was used as a source of information on the amount of the contracted funds and the amount of the verified funds is based on information requested and provided by the MA of the OP SESG.

The analysis at the **programming stage** of the financial resources of operations shows that, with few exceptions, there are no significant changes from the initially planned budgets. The double increase of the budget under procedure BGO5M2OP001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children" is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the initially set values of the indicators, which means that the balance is respected in the programming of the measures under the operation.

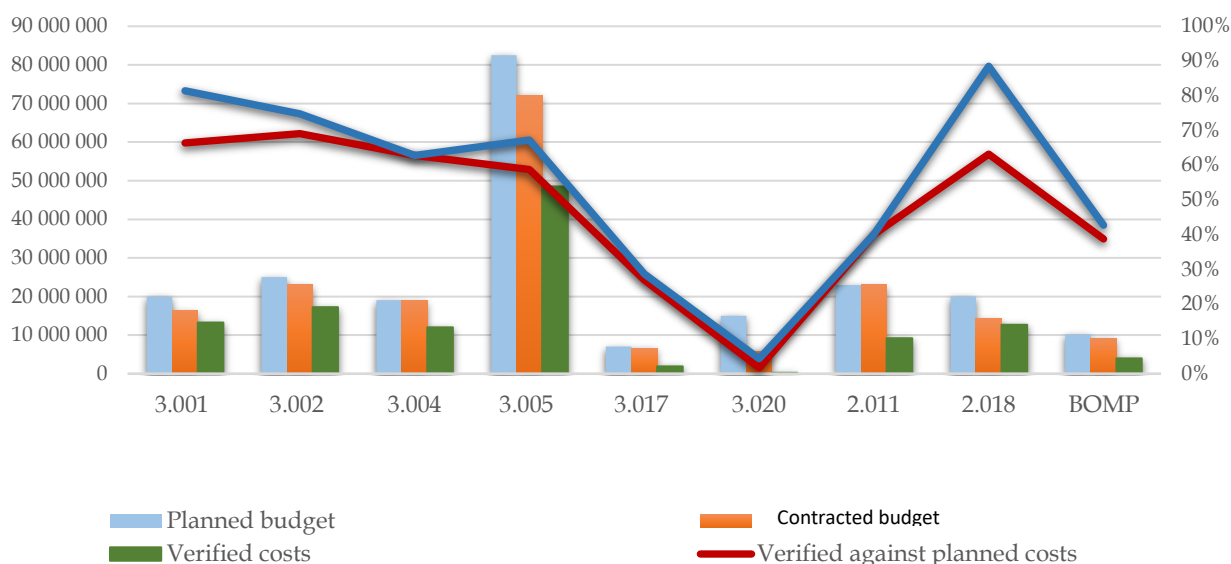
The changes in the budget under procedure BG05M2O P001-2.011 "Support for success" are a consequence of the specificity of the operation, which is programmed under two priority axes – PA 2 and PA 3. With the change of procedure in the MCSO from October 2021, activities under IP 9ii were included, for which funding was set at BGN 10 923 698.00. In May 2022, another change in the MCSO was made, which increased the budget under PA 3 to BGN 22 987 530.00, without this being related to a change in the activities or the values of the indicators, but it is further substantiated.

A significant increase in the initial funding was also observed under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Socio-economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1. As can be seen from the timeline of MCSO changes, they relate to an increase in the budget, the duration of the measures from 2016-2019 to 2016-2023, as well as a to a change in the operation-specific result indicators. At the same time, the targets for the two components in total of the output indicator "Number of children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) involved in educational integration and reintegration measures – 6 000" as well as the result indicator "Number of children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated into the education system – 4 800" remain unchanged according to the MCSO, although the argumentation for the change with an increase in the budget in the MCSO is indicated, that for Component 1 only for the approved 52 municipalities, the distribution of the indicators between the two components should not be respected and the output and result indicators, as laid down in the approved criteria, should be only for Component 1. However, this justification is not reflected in the MCSO, there is no separation of indicators between the components, even at a later stage, and the Conditions for Applicants under Component 1 lay down the common indicators for both components. In addition, assuming that the argumentation is followed, it is not clear how the target values for Component 2 of the same MCSO were derived. There is an insufficiently linked increase in funding to the planned results. This statement is supported by the fact that according to the results of the analysis of the achievement of the target values of the indicators, the verified value of the output indicator under the procedure exceeds double the target value, the budget here has been increased fourfold and the planned indicators are increased

by only about two fifths, if we follow the logic of the argumentation towards the change. Here is the place to note that this is the first of its kind integrated operation involving measures under three operational programmes (OP RD, OP HRD and OP SESG). In the opinion of the participants in the interviews with representatives of the CCU and the MA of the OP HRD, the procedure presented a serious challenge, both at the programming stage and at the stage of the implementation of the activities. This also explains to some extent the necessary changes in the predefined parameters of the procedure under OP SESG.

The following graph presents the dynamics of change in the values analysed for programmed and contracted budgets, the verified expenditures, as well as the percentage ratios in two sections – verified, compared to programmed expenditures and verified, compared to contracted costs under the evaluated procedures as of 30.9.2022.

Figure 24 Changes in the values of programmed, contracted and verified funds under the evaluated procedures as at 30.09.2022



The results of the analysis of the **negotiated** procedures under assessment do not differ significantly from those at the programming stage. Again, most procedures do not experience significant imbalances. An exception is procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2”, in which the percentage of contracted versus planned funds is only 39 %. BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2” is programmed as a procedure for awarding a grants through selection of project proposals. From the analysis of the<sup>39</sup> lists published on the website of the Executive Agency Programme Education, it is clear that only two project proposals were not admitted to a technical and financial assessment and approved for funding were 18 project proposals totalling BGN 5 862 361.91. The focus group of representatives of the MC of the OP SESG, held on 30 January 2023, took the view that one of the possible reasons for the lack of a sufficient number of project proposals under the procedure was the requirement for the procedure to apply the rules on de minimis aid (de minimis rule) within the meaning of Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) to de minimis aid published in Official Journal of the EU L 352 of 24.12.2013 for activities of an economic nature under European and national provisions and case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union. This requirement led to the refusal of potential beneficiaries to participate in the procedure. The analogous procedure BG05M2OP001-3.004 ‘Adult literacy’ in its first phase was programmed as a grant operation with a

<sup>39</sup> <https://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pagelid=327>



direct beneficiary – the Ministry of Education, for which the application of a State aid rules does not apply. A similar opinion was expressed in the focus group held on 19.12.2022 with representatives of the MA.

Regardless of the reason, the low percentage of contracted funds, as well as target values of the indicators under the procedure, leads to a risk of failure to achieve the MCSO parameters of the operation.

In November 2016, the Monitoring Committee of OP SESG approved the MCSO for procedures “Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas” under the CLLD approach for a total amount of BGN 80 million. In the second call for selection of the LAG and CLLD strategies under the OP SESG, 16 procedures were opened under 12 Agreements for the implementation of the CLLD approach with funding from the OP SESG for a total amount of BGN 10 153 634.80. 9 209 266.59 BGN were contracted.

One of the possible reasons for the derogatory low contracting rate, compared to the pre-set budget framework of BGN 80 million, is the finding described in the Audit Report of the Court of Auditors,<sup>40</sup> namely “The first reception (from 15.2.2016 to 31 May 2016) is based on an order of the Minister of Agriculture and Food, an invitation to select the LAG and strategies for CLLD under sub-measure 19.2. .... The call does not include ESF support through the OP SESG, due to the lack of readiness to participate under the approach – an established methodology for technical and financial evaluation and selection criteria for operation “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas.” The report concludes that the availability of financial resources not included in the CLLD strategies under operational programmes compared to the initially foreseen financial resources for inclusion in the strategies is due to:

*“the participation of the OP SESG only in the second call for selection of the LAGs and CLLD strategies, due to uncertainty about the application of multi-fund funding under the first call for CLLD 2016 and the absence of criteria approved by the MC of the OP SESG for the selection of CLLD operation.”*

Decision of the Monitoring Committee of OP SESG of the 8th meeting, held on 18 May 2018, mandated the MA of the OP SESG to amend by written procedure the MCSO of operation “Ensure access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas” in order to release funds for which no agreements have been concluded for the implementation of CLLD strategies. At the date of issue of this report, no information is available for the conduct of such a written procedure. The Audit Report of the Court of Auditors states that the Managing Authority of the OP SESG provides that in the event of a subsequent amendment of the operational programme, the amount under code 06 “Community-led Local Development Initiatives” of OP SESG is to be reduced in accordance with the financial resources agreed in the CLLD strategies. As can be seen from the latest updated version of the OP<sup>41</sup>SESG, in Table 10: Dimension 4 – Territorial implementation mechanisms under point 2.A.9 ‘Categories of intervention’ of the programme for code 06. “Community-led Local Development Initiatives”, the ESF allocations are initially set at EUR 35 058 863,59 (total for CLLD 80 669 620 leva) and have not been revised downwards in line with the decision of the Monitoring Committee and the assurance of the MA.

Funds for the implementation of CLLD strategies are programmed as part of PA 3, IP 9ii. Relocating the unspent resource from them for operations within the same IP does not require a specific change in the OP SESG. In this regard, the MA’s failure to undertake the relevant steps for the implementation of the MC decision and amendment of the OP SESG to release funds for which no agreements have been

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<sup>40</sup> Audit No 0300201119 “Monitoring and evaluation of the Community-led local development approach” for the period from 1 January 2015 to 31.12.2019

<sup>41</sup> Approved by the EC on 7.5.2021

concluded for the implementation of CLLD strategies and update the amount in Table 10: Dimension 4 of the Programme only carries an informational risk.

Despite the low contracting rate for operation “Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”, the level of achievement of the performance indicator compared to the MCSO value is over 56 %, which means that more than half of the planned results have been achieved with less funds.

The two curves in the above graph reflect the ratio of the verified to the correspondingly programmed and contracted amounts of operations at the **implementation stage**. Logically, operations that have completed their implementation report the highest percentage of verified funds against programmed/agreed funds. These are BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M20P001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1” and BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups”. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1 (the last procedure has been added to this group for analysis purposes because, although not formally completed, due to the progress and reporting of data could be considered as such). The remaining operations are in implementation at the time of the drafting of this report and, accordingly, conclusions on this element of the evaluation under the Efficiency strand would be premature and inaccurate.

In conclusion, the results of the analysis of the financial implementation and the comparison of the verified expenditure against the programmed and contracted financial resources show that overall the envisaged resource is not fully used, even in the procedures completed. The funds under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures for improving access to education – Component 1 have been used to the highest extent. Under this procedure the percentage of verified against contracted funds is 88.50 % followed by procedure BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children” with 81.40 %. On the other hand, the utilisation rate of the financial resources under the completed procedures, measured as the ratio of the verified funds to the programmed funds, moves in the order of 63 to 69 %.

The lowest absorption rate is under procedure BG05M20P001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2” (1.68 % verified against programmed and 4.31 % verified compared to contracted), which although the operation is still in implementation, is a prerequisite for the existence of a risk of failure to achieve the planned values.

The other key indicator for the assessment of efficiency is related to the products achieved. As already stated, in this case the measurement of the products is determined to be carried out by means of output indicators. Given the limitations and assumptions described, the output indicator data related to the participation of target groups will be used for the purpose of calculating the efficiency ratio. One of the operations evaluated, BG05M20P001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2” is characterised by the presence of several individual output indicators for the procedure, most of which include the target group involved in the implementation of Activities 1 and 2 and reported through the programme-specific indicator “Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP”. According to the MCSO and the Conditions of Application, only indicator I 2323 “Persons wishing to validate knowledge, skills and competences” may include targeted persons who are not involved in the implementation of Actions 1 and 2. In the absence of sufficient data to limit them, only the number of persons reported under the programme-specific output indicator was used for the purpose of calculating the efficiency ratio. A detailed analysis of the progress in the achievement of the indicators, including those for output, was carried out in the evaluation under the “Effectiveness” strand. In this report, these indicators will be considered through the prism of their relationship with inputs (in this case programmed, contracted and verified funds).

The following table sets out the values of the two indicators for each of the procedures taken into account in the efficiency assessment.

Table 21 Programmed, agreed and verified value of the financial resource and the indicators for execution as of 30.9.2022

Name of the procedure		Programmed Value	Contracted value	Verified value
<b>BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children"</b>				
financial resource in BGN		20 000 000,00	16 320 741,63	13 284 377,16
indicator	Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in educational integration and reintegration measures	15 000	10 265	13 752
<b>BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of pupils from ethnic minorities and/or applicants or beneficiaries of international protection"</b>				
financial resource in BGN		25 000 000,00	23 083 403,56	17 274 529,21
indicator	Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in educational integration and reintegration measures	18 750	14 323	16 615
<b>BG05M20P001-3.004 "Adult literacy – Phase 1"</b>				
financial resource in BGN		19 070 732,00	19 070 732,00	11 981 366,40
indicator	Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP	10 000	10 000	10 723
<b>BG05M20P001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education"</b>				
financial resource in BGN		82 500 000,00	72 136 200,00	48 520 542,74
indicator	Children participating in active inclusion activities in pre-school education (among them children from marginalised communities, including Roma, involved in educational integration and reintegration measures)	50 000	50 000	76 648
<b>BG05M20P001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"</b>				
financial resource in BGN		7 000 000,00	6 580 069,71	1 890 155,17
indicator	Educational mediators involved in trainings under the procedure	1 500	219	31
	Pedagogical specialists involved in trainings for work in a multicultural environment	3 600	4 692	2 688
<b>BG05M20P001-3.020 "Adult literacy – 2"</b>				
financial resource in BGN		15 000 000,00	5 862 361,91	252 723,86
indicator	Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP	12 000	4 036	683

<b>BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 "Support for success"</b>				
financial resource in BGN		22 987 530,00	22 987 529,15	9 207 643,48
indicator	Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in educational integration and reintegration measures	32 898	32 898	13 407
<b>BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1</b>				
financial resource in BGN		20 000 000,00	14 283 181,85	12 640 367,31
indicator	Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in educational integration and reintegration measures	6 000	8 720	12 132
<b>Procedures for granting a grant under the CLLD approach</b>				
financial resource in BGN		10 153 634,80	9 209 266,59	3 939 739,75
indicator	Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in educational integration and reintegration measures	7 500	4 670	4 217

Source: MCSO, UMIS, MA

From the point of view of the products achieved in relation to inputs, the efficiency of the procedures is expressed by calculating the efficiency indicator, namely **'Value of the cost of participation of one person in the target group'**. The definition and calculation of this indicator in fact also responds to the evaluation sub-question **4.1.4 "What are the costs of participating in the operation of a person from the target group?"**, included in the Technical Proposal of the Contractor under this procurement. In order not to break the logic of the evaluation under the 'Efficiency' strand, the response to this sub-question is set out in this part of the report.

The following table presents the results of the calculation of the efficiency indicator of the three main stages – programming, contracting and implementation.

Table 22 Value of expenditure for participation of one person from the target group under the evaluated procedures as at 30.9.2022

Procedure number	Programmed costs	Agreed costs	Verified costs
BG05M2OP001-3.001	1 333.33 BGN	1 589.94 BGN	966.00 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.002	1 333.33 BGN	1 611.63 BGN	1 039.69 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.004	1 907.07 BGN	1 907.07 BGN	1 117.35 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.005	1 650,00 BGN	1 442.72 BGN	633.03 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.017	1 372.55 BGN	1 339.86 BGN	695.17 BGN
BG05M2OP001-3.020	1 250,00 BGN	1 452.52 BGN	370.02 BGN
BG05M2OP001-2.011	698.75 BGN	698.75 BGN	686.78 BGN
BG05M9OP001-2.018	3 333.33 BGN	1 637.98 BGN	1 041.90 BGN
CLLD procedures	1 353.82 BGN	1 972.01 BGN	934.23 BGN

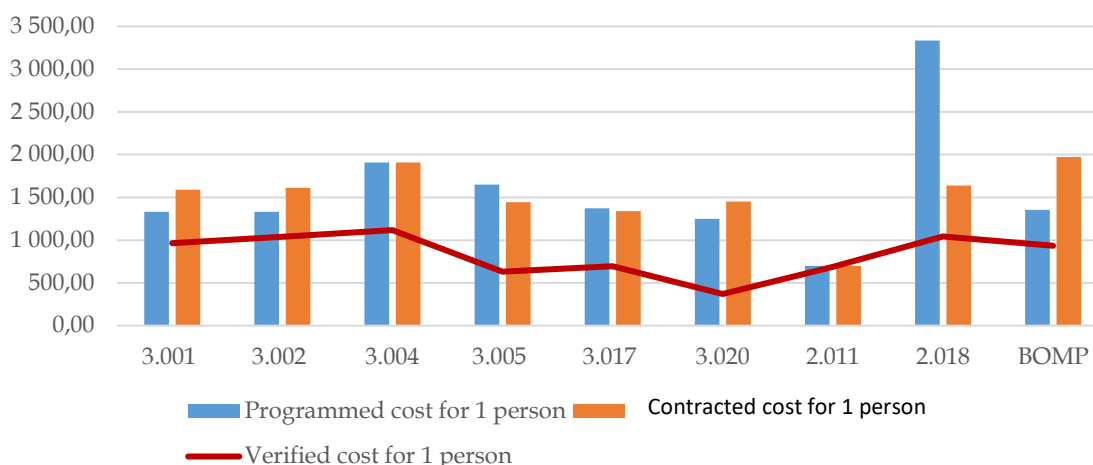
Source: own calculations

According to the data, the lowest cost per person of the target group in the completed procedures was achieved under operation BG05M2OP001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children" and the highest under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.004 "Adult literacy – Phase 1". Of the procedures that are currently still in implementation, the lowest cost is observed under

BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2”. Here it should be noted that for the procedures for which it is applicable, a uniform cost standard for a child/student per budget year and an estimated number of output indicators, as well as other historical data available for determining unit costs, has been used in the determination of funding. Since 2018, unit costs based on historical data are applied under the OP SESG.

An important part of the analysis is the monitoring of the evolution of the values of the three stages, which is presented in the following graph.

Figure 25 Changes in the cost of the participation of one person from the target group at the programming, contracting and implementation stage as of 30.9.2022



The Lowest cost per person compared to the pre-planned and contracted amount is observed under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the pre-school education system”, mainly due to the serious overachievement of the set value of the output indicator, with less than planned funds spent. Low cost per person compared to planned was also reported under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2”, but here it should be borne in mind that overall the operation has a low rate of implementation at the specified reporting date. The biggest dynamic is observed in operation BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1 – mainly due to almost double the value of verified output indicators.

The final result of the efficiency assessment is expressed by *the efficiency factor* presented in two sections: ratio between programmed and verified values of output indicators and inputs and ratio between contracted and verified values of output indicators and inputs according to the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Programmed costs for participation of 1 person} - \text{Verified costs of 1 person}}{\text{Programmed costs for participation of 1 person}}$$

and

$$\frac{\text{Contracted costs for participation of 1 person} - \text{Verified costs for participation of 1 person}}{\text{Contracted costs for participation of 1 person}}$$

A procedure can be defined as efficient in cases where the efficiency ratio is zero (in the balance between programmed/contracted and achieved costs of one person’s participation) or with a positive value. The higher the value of the coefficient, the more efficient an operation could be determined. That is, in equal other conditions with less programmed or contracted financial resources the result set have been achieved or exceeded. In cases where the value of the coefficient is low or close to zero, it can be concluded that, other things being equal, the planned result is achieved with expenditures close to the

financial resources provided for it. Inefficiencies are observed in cases where the available resource has achieved less than the expected results.

The results of the calculation of the efficiency coefficient in both sections are presented in the following table.

Table23 Efficiency Coefficient of the procedures under assessment

Procedure number	Relative to programmed values	Relative to contracting values
BG05M2OP001-3.001	0,28	0,39
BG05M2OP001-3.002	0,22	0,35
BG05M2OP001-3.004	0,41	0,41
BG05M2OP001-3.005	0,62	0,56
BG05M2OP001-3.017	0,49	0,48
BG05M2OP001-3.020	0,70	0,75
BG05M2OP001-2.011	0,02	0,02
BG05M9OP001-2.018	0,69	0,36
CLLD procedures	0,31	0,53

Source: own calculations

On the basis of the results, it can be reasonably concluded that, in general, the procedures subject to this evaluation meet the efficiency criteria to the extent that, other things being equal, the result has been achieved or exceeded by less than the previously planned and agreed financial means. These results can be considered definitive in relation to the procedures that have completed their implementation – BG05M2OP001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M2OP001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M2OP001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1” and BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1”. The data for the other procedures should be accepted on condition and as a provisional photograph of their implementation until the date by which it is accepted to be analysed or 30.9.2022.

**6.1.1. Are the flat rates for financing activities for organisation and management of projects financed by the OP SESG adequately defined, the standard scales of the eligible hourly remuneration of the persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects financed by the OP SESG, the standard scales of unit costs?**

Within this evaluation question, an analysis was carried out of the three main types of simplified costs applied in the procedures under assessment, namely:

- Flat rates for financing activities for the organisation and management of projects financed by OP SESG;
- Standard tables for the eligible amount of the hourly remuneration of the persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects financed by the OP SESG;
- Standard scales of unit costs.

**Flat rates for financing activities for the organisation and management of projects**

For the purposes of the question whether the flat rates for financing activities for the organisation and management of projects financed by the OP SESG have been adequately defined, an analysis of the compliance of the applied in the procedures subject to evaluation, flat rates for financing activities for organisation and management of projects with the regulatory requirements and the principles set out therein was carried out. The flat rate approach was implemented in accordance with Article 68(b) a flat rate of up to 15 % of eligible direct personnel costs, without requiring the Member State to carry out calculations for determining the applicable rate – for projects with a grant amount below BGN 100 000 and Article 67(1)(d) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 –<sup>42</sup> ‘flat-rate financing determined by applying a percentage to one or more specified categories of costs’ for the other projects. The method for establishing the amounts in the latter case shall be carried out in accordance with paragraph 5(a) of that Article: a fair and verifiable calculation method based on: statistics, other objective information or expert judgement; verified historical data for individual beneficiaries; or the application of the usual cost accounting practices of individual beneficiaries; The limit on amounts under this approach is laid down in Article 68(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013: a flat rate of up to 25 % of eligible direct costs, provided that the rate is calculated on the basis of a fair, equitable and verifiable calculation method or a method applied under grant schemes financed entirely by the Member State for a similar type of operation and beneficiary.

At national level, the approach to determining the flat rates is reproduced in Article 55(1)(4) of the Law on the management of European funds under shared management LMEFSM<sup>43</sup> ‘Financing at a flat rate determined by applying a percentage to one or more specified categories of expenditures’ and further developed in Article 5(3)(1) and (4) of Decree No 189 of 28 July 2016 laying down national rules on the eligibility of expenditures under programmes co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds for the programming period 2014-2020<sup>44</sup> and Article 8(1) and (2) of that decree.

On the basis of § 7 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of Council of Ministers Decree 189 of 2016, the CMC 253 of 2017<sup>45</sup> subsequently amended 2018 adopted the National Methodology for determining the flat-rate amounts for financing activities for the organisation and management of projects co-financed by the ESIF. The methodology is also in line with the EC guidelines for simplified cost reporting in accordance with the Guideline for Simplified Cost Options (EGESIF\_14-0017<sup>46</sup>). It includes: a detailed description of the source database to which the proposed calculation method should be applied to determine the specific amount of the flat rate; a calculation method to determine the specific amount of the flat rate and a description of the categories of costs to which the specific amount (percentage) of the flat rate determined by the proposed calculation method should be applied in order to determine the eligible amount of costs for organisation and management. In essence, the application of the methodology should ensure the implementation, compliance and documentation of a correct, fair and verifiable method of calculating flat rates for individual operational programmes based on statistical data or other objective information and verified historical data for individual beneficiaries.

It should be noted here that Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 deals with the concept of ‘indirect costs’, which is broader than ‘organisation and management costs’.

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<sup>42</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/BG/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303> - Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 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 and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

<sup>43</sup> <https://lex.bg/en/laws/ldoc/2136715858> - as last amended, SG No 102 of 23 December 2022. Previous title Law on the management of the resources of the European Structural and Investment Funds (LMEFSM )

<sup>44</sup> <https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136891659>

<sup>45</sup> <https://pris.government.bg> unpublished

<sup>46</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu> - Guidance on Simplified Cost Options

On the basis of the approved national methodology, the applicable legal framework and the Commission’s guidelines for simplified cost accounting, the MA of the OP SESG adopts the “Methodology for setting a flat rate for financing activities for organisation and management in competitive selection procedures and direct award under Priority Axes 2, 3 and 5 of OP SESG by applying the National Methodology adopted by Decision of the Council of Ministers No 253 of 3 May 2017<sup>47</sup>.” The methodology and the amounts of the flat rate for calculating the eligible costs for organisation and management for four groups of projects (grant amount 100 001-400 000 BGN; BGN 400 001-1 000 000; over BGN 7 million with a concrete beneficiary MES and the participation of many educational institutions; more than BGN 7 million with a concrete beneficiary MES and award of public contracts) were approved by the Head of the MA of the SESG on 5.9.2018 – Report No 80811-606/05.09.2018. With amendments and additions to the Methodology – Section 2a and Section 2b, approved by the Head of the MA of the SESG with a report with work number 2-336/21.02.2020, the amount of the flat rate for calculating the eligible costs for organisation and management of projects was determined by the grant amount of BGN 1 to 7 million and special rules are laid down for calculating the flat rate in some specific cases of projects with a grant amount exceeding BGN 7 million.<sup>48</sup>

When setting the flat rates for groups of beneficiaries in the case of a similar type of operation, the MA should document its actions. Below is a table showing the correlation between the documentation requirements and the available documentation from the application of the methodology adopted by the MA of the OP SESG:

*Table 24 Conformity between the documentation requirements and the sources of information for the application of the Methodology for setting a flat rate for financing activities for organisation and management in competitive selection procedures and direct award under priority axes 2, 3 and 5 of the OP SESG*

The MA shall document at least the following:	Source of information – publicly available
The description of the calculation method, including the main stages of the calculation	The Methodology
The sources of the data used for the analysis and calculation, including an assessment of the relevance of the data in relation to the envisaged operations and an assessment of their quality	The methodology, annexes to the methodology
The calculation itself to determine the corresponding value of the flat rate of the amounts to be financed for project organisation and management activities	Annexes to the Methodology
Reasons for selecting the population of projects on the basis of which the flat rate will be determined, including justification of the similarity of projects	The Methodology

According to the National Methodology, OP SESG uses a database of projects from OP HRD 2007-2013, Priority Axis 3 and 4. The projects to be used for the OP SESG are grouped according to the size of the grant in the range groups (stratas).

<sup>47</sup> <https://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pagelid=139>

<sup>48</sup> The title and scope of the Methodology changed in December 2020 in relation to the creation of a new Priority Axis 5. Equal access to school education in crisis, financed by the European Social Fund under the ReactEU mechanism, with report 12-310/09.12.2020



For projects with a grant of less than BGN 100 000 financed under the OP SESG, a flat rate of 15 % of the eligible direct personnel costs is applied for the calculation of indirect costs.

For the calculation of the flat rate for the financing of projects in the range of BGN 100 001-400 000 and BGN 400 001-1 000 000 was used the complete database of implemented projects, with the adaptation of the data. According to the Methodology and based on the National Methodology, the concept of “organisation and management costs” for these projects should also cover publicity and visualisation costs and audit and accounting services, where applicable. For competitively selected projects, only publicity costs are taken into account, as the actual costs of audit and accounting services (scheduled at that time as direct costs) are negligible.

For the calculation of the flat rate for the financing of projects with a grant amount of more than BGN 7 million, the complete database of implemented projects was used, with the necessary adaptation of the data. According to the Methodology, the concept of organisation and management costs for these projects should also cover publicity and visualisation costs, audit and accounting services costs, the remuneration of directors and accountants of the participating educational institutions in accordance with paragraph 6 of the Additional Provisions of the LMEFSM and the costs of setting up information systems for reporting. In accordance with the nature of the direct actions and the way in which the technical and financial implementation is carried out, projects with a grant amount of more than 7 million are differentiated into 2 groups:

- Projects with a specific beneficiary MES, in the technical and financial implementation of which involve higher education institutions, regional education departments, schools and/or kindergartens (according to § 6 of the Additional Provisions of LMEFSM);
- Projects with a specific beneficiary MES, which are mainly implemented by the DB and cover homogeneous activities or procurement.

For the calculation of the flat rate for financing projects with a grant amount of BGN 1 to 7 million, the complete database of implemented projects was used, with the necessary adaptation of the data. According to the Methodology, the concept of organisation and management costs for these projects should also cover publicity and visualisation costs, audit and accounting costs and the costs of setting up information reporting systems.

Special rules have been introduced for calculating the flat rate applicable to projects with a grant amount exceeding BGN 7 million, when the planned budget for each of the two groups of direct actions (type 1 and type 2) is more than BGN 7 million.

When calculating the flat rate applicable to projects with a grant amount exceeding BGN 7 million, when the planned budget for each of the two activity groups (type 1 and type 2) is more than BGN 7 million, the MA applies the following approach:

1. Assignment of each of the planned direct actions/sub-activities to a type 1 or group of type 2 activities;
2. Establishment of the general budget necessary for the implementation of Type 1 direct actions (these resources are spent by the participating educational institutions);
3. Establishment of the general budget necessary for the implementation of Type 2 direct actions (these funds are spent by the direct beneficiary);
4. Calculation of the flat rate applicable to the individual case under consideration by applying the following formula:  $URICC = (UR1 \times GB1 + UR2 \times GB2) / (GB1 + GB2) \times 100$

Where

FRICC – Flat rate (percentage) applicable to the individual case under consideration

FR1 – Flat rate (percentage) applicable to type 1 projects

GB1 – General budget for the implementation of Type 1 direct actions

FR2 – Flat rate (percentage) applicable to type 2 projects

GB2 – General budget for the implementation of Type 2 direct actions

The calculated value shall be rounded according to the general mathematical principle of rounding to the nearest number. The flat rate shall be calculated ex officio by the evaluation committee upon completion of the technical and financial evaluation on the basis of the approved activities and costs. The flat rate fixed shall be recorded in the administrative contract and shall be applied to the eligible direct costs of the project concerned. The flat rate may also be calculated before the publication of the call for participation, if the conditions for applying for the procedure set out maximum cost limits for Type 1 and Type 2 activities. In this case, the calculations shall take into account the maximum permissible values of the general budget, the budget for Type 1 activities and the budget for Type 2 activities.

Depending on the nature of pending procedures under the OP SESG and after additional arguments recorded in the Conditions of Application, and to ensure that the method for calculating the flat rate is fair, and verifiable, the MA may decide to apply the described approach for calculating the flat rate also in some intermediate cases where:

- ✓ the project includes direct activities of type 1, i.e. activities in the technical and financial implementation of which involve many educational institutions (as partners or under § 6 of the Additional Provisions of LMEFSM );
- ✓ the project includes direct activities of type 2, i.e. homogeneous activities or the award and execution of large public procurements;
- ✓ the total budget required for the implementation of the direct actions type 1 does not exceed BGN 7 million and/or
- ✓ the total budget required for the implementation of type 2 direct actions does not exceed BGN 7 million.

For grant selection procedures under priority axes 2, 3 and 5 of the OP SESG, in accordance with the method set out in the national methodology, the following flat-rate amounts have been set for calculating the eligible costs for project organisation and management:

- BGN 100 001-400 000 grant – flat rate of 12 %
- BGN 400 001-1 000 000 – flat rate of 11 %
- BGN 1 000 001-7 000 000 grant – a flat rate of 10 %

The flat rate shall apply to the eligible direct costs of the project. Flat rates may also be applied in direct award procedures with a concrete beneficiary MES if the grant amount for the participating educational institutions is determined by means of a draft budget drawn up for the specific case and approved in advance by the Managing Authority. The flat rate at the amount of BGN 1 to 7 million is also applicable in direct grant procedures for specific beneficiaries under priority axes 2, 3 and 5 of OP SESG, co-financed by the European Social Fund.

- Over BGN 7 million – a flat rate of 15 %

It shall apply if the following conditions are cumulatively fulfilled: projects with a concrete beneficiary, in the technical and financial implementation of which participate as partners or in accordance with § 6 of the Additional Provisions of LMEFSM higher schools, RIE, schools, kindergartens, other educational institutions; participating educational institutions spend most of the budget allocated to direct actions; the budget for direct actions spent by the specific beneficiary does not exceed BGN 7 million.

- Over BGN 7 million – a flat rate of 3 %

It shall apply if the following conditions are met: projects which are mainly implemented by the direct beneficiary and cover uniform activities or procurement; if educational institutions (as partners or in accordance with § 6 of the Additional Provisions of LMEFSM ) participate in the technical and financial

implementation of the project, then the budget for the implementation of the direct activities of the project, spent by the participating educational institutions, shall not exceed BGN 7 million.

- Over BGN 7 million – a flat rate of 3 % to 15 %, which is calculated in accordance with the approach described in the special rules for calculating the flat rate applicable to projects with a grant amount exceeding BGN 7 million.

It shall apply if the following conditions which are cumulatively fulfilled: projects with a direct beneficiary MES, in the technical and financial implementation of which participate as partners or in accordance with § 6 of the Additional Provisions of LMEFSM higher schools, RIE , schools, kindergartens, other educational institutions; the budget for the implementation of the direct activities of the project, spent by the participating educational institutions, exceeds BGN 7 million; the budget for the implementation of the direct activities of the project, spent by the direct beneficiary, exceeds BGN 7 million.

- Over BGN 7 million – a flat rate of 3 % to 15 %, which is calculated in accordance with the approach described in the special rules for calculating the flat rate applicable to projects with a grant amount exceeding BGN 7 million.

It shall apply on an ad hoc basis if the following conditions are cumulatively fulfilled: the Conditions of Application provide further justification for the need to apply this approach in order to ensure that the method for calculating the flat rate is fair, and verifiable; the project includes direct activities of type 1, i.e. activities in the technical and financial implementation of which involve many educational institutions (as partners or under § 6 of the Additional Provisions of LMEFSM ); the project includes direct activities of type 2, i.e. homogeneous activities or the award and execution of large public procurements; the total budget required for the implementation of type 1 direct actions does not exceed BGN 7 million and/or; the total budget required for the implementation of type 2 direct actions does not exceed BGN 7 million.

The flat rate shall apply to the eligible direct costs of the project.

The following are the costs of organisation and management of the procedures under assessment and their percentage:

*Table25 Applicability and flat rate for costs for organisation and management of the procedures under assessment*

Procedure	Applicability of a flat rate for organisation and management costs	Percentage
BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children"	Not applicable	Up to 10 % of the total eligible costs.
BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection"	Not applicable	Up to 10 % of the total eligible costs.
BG05M20P001-3.004 "Adult literacy – Phase 1"	Not applicable	Up to 6 % of the total eligible costs of the project.
BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1"	The term "indirect costs" is used. The flat rate is set as a percentage of the direct eligible costs of the project proposal. Depending on the total amount of eligible costs of the project proposal, which is determined as the sum of the total amount of grant under the OP HRD + the total	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– less than BGN 200,000-9 %,</li> <li>– from BGN 200 001-400 000-9 %,</li> <li>– from BGN 400 001-600 000-6 %,</li> <li>– from 600 001-1 000 000 BGN – 7 %.</li> </ul>

	amount of grant under the OP SESG, the amount of the flat rate is determined.	
BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”	Projects with an eligible amount of a grant of over BGN 7 million with a specific beneficiary MES, in the technical and financial implementation of which participate RIE, schools and/or kindergartens – for expenditures for organisation and management, including the costs of information and communication – flat rate according to the Methodology.	Up to 15 % of direct eligible costs.
BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”	Indirect costs, including organisation and management costs and information and communication costs – a flat rate according to the Methodology.	– Projects up to BGN 400 000-12 % of the direct eligible costs of the project. – Projects over BGN 400 000-11 % of the direct eligible costs of the project.
BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success”	Projects with an eligible amount of a grant of over BGN 7 million with a concrete beneficiary MES, in the technical and financial implementation of which participate RIE, schools and/or kindergartens – for expenditures for organisation and management, including the costs of information and communication – flat rate according to the Methodology.	Up to 15 % of direct eligible costs.
BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2”	Indirect costs, including organisation and management costs and information and communication costs – a flat rate according to the Methodology.	– A grant from BGN 250 000 to BGN 400 000-12 % of the eligible direct costs; – A grant from BGN 400 001 to BGN 750 000-11 % of the eligible direct costs;
Procedures for awarding grants under the CLLD approach with funding under the OP SESG	Indirect costs – flat rate	For a grant below BGN 100 000, 15 % of eligible direct personnel costs or 40 % of eligible direct staff costs, which include all other eligible costs, including indirect costs; for grants from BGN 100 001 to BGN 391 166-12 % of the eligible direct costs.

Based on the documents reviewed and the methodology and approach applied by the MA of the OP SESG, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The flat rates for indirect costs, in this case defined as “organisation and management costs”, are defined in accordance with the principles and requirements laid down in Regulation 1303/2013 and the EC Guidelines for simplified cost options (EGESIF\_14-0017). The approach is in line with the requirements of LMEFSM and Decree 189 of 2016. The national methodology for determining the flat-rate amounts for financing activities for the organisation and management of projects co-financed by the ESIF has been implemented by the MA of the OP SESG by means of the “Methodology for setting a flat rate for financing activities for organisation and management in competitive selection procedures and direct award under priority axes 2, 3 and 5 of the OP SESG by applying the National Methodology adopted by Council Decision No 253 of 3 May 2017”. The methodology is tailored to the type of beneficiaries, the type of procedures, the way of implementation of projects, a full sample of similar projects and the method of setting a flat rate in the different hypotheses is verifiable. From this point of view, it can be concluded that the flat rates laid down are adequate in so far as they are derived from a method of determination resulting from the application of the applicable legal framework in one of the national methodologies and the EC Guidelines on simplified cost options (EGESIF\_14-0017).

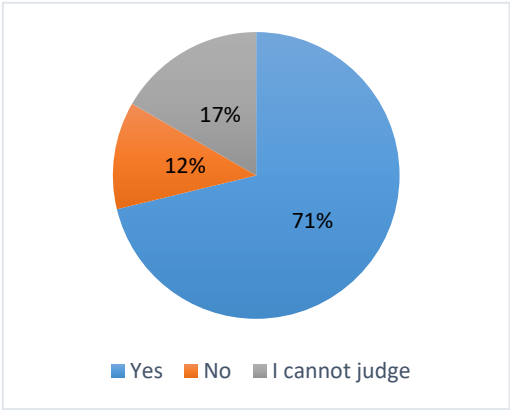
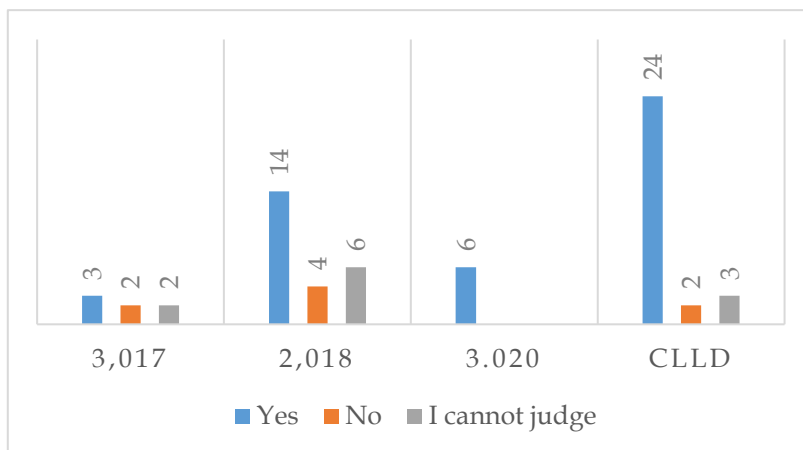


Figure 26 Are the flat rates for financing activities for the organisation and management of projects financed by the OP SESG adequately defined?

In the survey conducted among beneficiaries of the procedures under evaluation, the question “Are the flat rates for financing activities for organisation and management of projects financed by the OP SESG adequately determined?” were answered by representatives of 66 beneficiaries in four of the procedures subject to evaluation. More than 71 % of them consider that the flat rates are adequately defined, more than 12 % think they are not, and a little less than 17 %

cannot judge.

Figure27 Allocation of responses from Figure 4 by procedure



As can be seen from the figure for the distribution of answers by procedure, the largest number of respondents positively answered to the question are beneficiaries implementing projects under the CLLD grant procedure, followed by beneficiaries under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to

education – Component 1' and BG05M2OP001-3.020 'Adult literacy – 2'. The largest number of respondents who responded negatively to the question were beneficiaries under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "social economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1. One possible reason could possibly be explained to some extent by the fact that the flat rates under this procedure are lower than the others, in the presence of quite complex activities requiring strong coordination in these projects. This is also reflected in one of the comments of a negatively answering beneficiary: *"High administrative burden, which is linked to the different and many implementation activities of the project."*<sup>49</sup>

Despite the predominant percentage of respondents who consider that the flat rates for financing project organisation and management activities have been adequately defined, there are also some comments mainly related to the level of the rates. For example, a little more specific considerations give the following comments: *"The team that manages the project and is responsible for achieving the set indicators receive very low salaries – amounting to BGN 200. The requirement for the existence of employment contracts is another obstacle to finding a good management team."* and *"During the years, especially in the case of long-term projects (with a period of implementation 2-3 years), the flat rates do not change, which does not allow the costs of organising and managing the project to increase in the event of a change in the economic situation – since 2020, the minimal wage has increased 3 times – it has increased from 610 to 780 BGN, i.e. an increase of 27.87 % has been achieved, and the flat rate has remained unchanged."*

**Standard tables for the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects.**

To answer this evaluation sub-question, an analysis was carried out to find out whether the determination of the eligible amount of hourly remuneration in the standard tables for the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects complies with the regulatory requirements and the principles set out therein. The approach for determining the eligible amount of hourly remuneration in the standard tables has been implemented in accordance with Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Article 67(5)(a): a fair and verifiable calculation method based on: statistics, other objective information or expert judgement; verified historical data for individual beneficiaries; or the application of the usual cost accounting practices of individual beneficiaries and according to the Standard Table of Hourly Rates for projects financed by ESI Funds for the 2007-2013 programming period. For OP SESG has been introduced a Standard Table for the eligible amount of the hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects co-

<sup>49</sup> Here, as in other parts of the report, the texts noted in italics and quotes are quotes of the participants in the survey and interviews.

financed by the European Social Fund under Priority Axis 2, 3 and 5 of the Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth”.

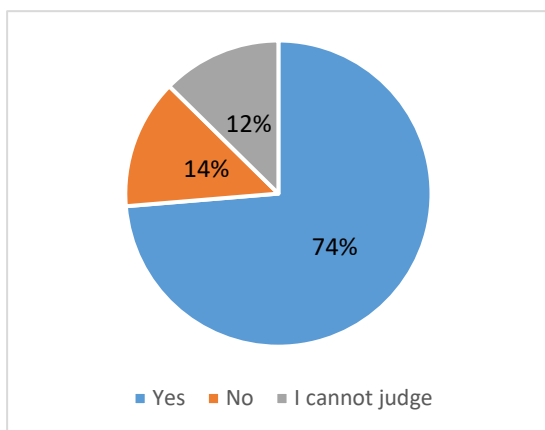
The standard table for the eligible hourly remuneration of employees (updated values applicable for the period after 1.9.2018) was approved by the Head of the MA of the SESG on 5.9.2018 – Report No 80811-606/05.09.2018. The title and scope of the Standard Table changed in December 2020 in relation to the creation of a new Priority Axis 5. Equal access to school education in crisis, financed by the ESF under the ReactEU mechanism, with a report with work number 12-310/09.12.2020.

The standard table of hourly rates was established in 2014 on the basis of project implementation data in the previous programming period 2007-2013, taking into account statistical and other objective data from 2013. The Standard Table for the eligible hourly remuneration itself introduces 10 expert positions and 3 levels of professional experience. The hourly rates for the period after 1.9.2018 have been adapted taking into account the changes in the social security expenditures and the increase of the average wages in the respective spheres. In line with the approach adopted, expert positions were first allocated to economic activities for which statistic data are available of the average annual gross wage of employees in the activity concerned, then the updated hourly remunerations in the field of education were calculated, for “Information technology and information services activities”, for “Legal, accounting, architectural and engineering activities, technical testing and analysis; consultancy activities on management” and for “Advertising and veterinary activities; other professional activities”, the calculation being allocated to the three levels of the hourly rate for the relevant expert positions and, at the end of the process, a summary standard table of hourly remunerations applicable for the period after 1.9.2018 was established. For all other items, the applicable hourly rate is calculated in accordance with Article 5(3)(6) of Council of Ministers Decree No 189/2016 by dividing the annual gross wage costs in the accounts for the last year by 1720 hours, in accordance with point 3.2 of the Guideline on Simplified Cost Options of the European Commission (EGESIF\_14-0017). The latter calculation method can also be used for the items listed in the Standard Table. The standard table can also be used for the planning of external services through procurement, and the necessary funds (estimated value) may be based on the remuneration for the necessary staff to carry out the activity, the hourly rate being in accordance with the Standard table of remuneration under the OP SESG, and up to 10 % additional costs (including all other necessary costs such as materials, equipment, rents, etc.) may be added to the calculated means of remuneration.

In so far as the Standard Table itself states ‘The above hourly rates may be applied, both at the application stage, to justify the necessary costs and at the implementation stage if the remuneration costs actually incurred are taken into account’ and from its application, it can be concluded that the use of the Standard Table to justify the necessary costs or to take into account actual remuneration costs cannot be considered as a simplified cost option within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Article 67(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013: standard scale of unit costs. In this regard, the Standard Table will be considered as a document based on the principles set out in Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Article 67(5)(a), but not directly linked to the application of simplified cost options.

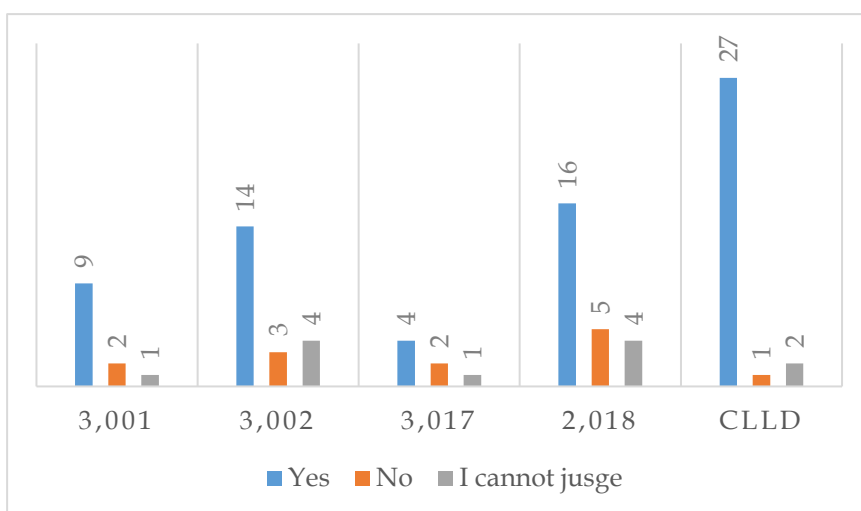
The method thus established for determining hourly rates corresponds to a combined approach between Article 67(5)(a)(i) and (a)(ii). It is duly documented, verifiable (including the calculations) and creates conditions for correct and equal treatment of the beneficiaries. From this point of view, it can be argued that the amounts of the hourly rates in the Standard Table on the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects co-financed by the European Social Fund under Priority Axis 2, 3 and 5 of the Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” are adequately defined.

*Figure28 Are the values in the standard tables for the eligible amount of hourly remuneration adequately determined?*



In the survey conducted among beneficiaries under the evaluated procedures, the question “Are the values in the standard tables for the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects financed by the OP SESG adequately determined?” were answered by representatives of 95 beneficiaries under five of the procedures. Just under 74 % of them responded positively, slightly below 14 % negative and over 12 % that they could not judge.

Figure29 Allocation of the responses from Figure 5 by procedure



The satisfaction with the values set out in the standard table of eligible hourly remuneration is again highest among beneficiaries under CLLD grant procedures.

The comments of the negatively responding beneficiaries can be summarised in two groups: low rates of hourly remuneration, such as “The set values are very low and

*this created a problem when recruiting specialists” and “The hour limit for lecturers is also very low and allows only the recruitment of trainers who do not offer high quality and modern training methods. The same trainers have been training pedagogical professionals for years, offering low prices without a visible result” and a large difference in the hourly rates set between the persons recruited with experience and those without experience, e.g. “The salary margin between individual employees with experience and without experience is large.” and “The hourly rates for teachers are high enough for those with experience and unrealistically low for those without experience.”*

### Standard scales of unit costs.

The answer of this evaluation sub-question is requiring an analysis whether the determination of unit costs complies with the regulatory requirements and the principles set out therein. To the extent that standard scales per unit are specific to individual procedures within the scope of evaluation and far from covering all of them, a list of procedures where such a simplified option is an eligible cost is set out below:

Table 26 Procedures for which the use of a standard scale of unit costs is applicable

Procedure	Use of a standard scale of unit costs
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BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”	Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the pre-school education system” and methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs
BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”	Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” and a methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs
BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success”	Standard scale of unit costs for procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” and methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs
BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2”	Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2” and methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs

In addition, such a possibility is granted as of February 2021 for synchronous distance learning in electronic environments under procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011 and BG05M2OP001-3.005. The possibility of applying a standard scale of unit costs is determined by adding to the existing tables new types of unit costs according to the Standard Table of Unit Costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.010 “Qualification of pedagogical specialists” and a methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs.

The standard scales of unit costs applied are a simplified cost option under Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Article 67(1)(b): standard scale of unit costs and Article 55(1)(2) in accordance with the LMEFSM .

*Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001- 3.005 “Active inclusion in the pre-school education system” and methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs.*

Unit costs are calculated on the basis of the amounts of costs in Annex XIV with the types of operations and the amount of costs, on the basis of standard scales of unit costs and lump sums in accordance with Article 14(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013<sup>50</sup> to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2195,<sup>51</sup> in combination with the methods referred to in Article 67(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The standard table on the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects co-financed by the European Social Fund under Priority Axis 2, 3 and 5 of the Operational Programme on Science and Education for Smart Growth, which is itself determined on the basis of Article 67(5)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 was also used for part of the calculation of the estimated costs. In addition, unit costs are linked to the applicable legislation, the specificity of the beneficiary and the requirements for the activities carried out. The methods used in the methodology are traceable and documented, correct – to the extent that the calculation seems reasonable and fair – to the extent that the approach, albeit specifically geared to costs related to the specific activities, is based on objective and verifiable characteristics of the beneficiary and the operation.

*Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” and a methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs.*

This unit costs are also calculated on the basis of a combination of methods referred to in Article 67(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The standard table on the eligible hourly remuneration of persons

<sup>50</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/bg/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1304> - 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) No1081/2006

<sup>51</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/BG/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32015R2195> - Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2195 of 9 July 2015 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund as regards the definition of standard scales of unit costs and lump sums for the reimbursement of expenditure by the Commission to Member States

employed in connection with the implementation of projects co-financed by the European Social Fund under Priority Axis 2, 3 and 5 of the Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth”, which is itself determined on the basis of Article 67(5)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 was also used for part of the calculation of the estimated costs. The data sources for the calculations are varied and take into account the specificity of each expenditure according to the activity to which it is bound, the applicable legislation and the characteristics of the beneficiary.

*Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 ‘Support for success’ and methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs*

In this case, as in the case of procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005, unit costs were calculated on the basis of the amounts of costs in Annex XIV with the types of operations and the amount of costs, on the basis of standard scales of unit costs and lump sums in accordance with Article 14(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2195, in combination with the methods referred to in Article 67(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The standard table on the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects co-financed by the European Social Fund under Priority Axis 2, 3 and 5 of the Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth”, which is itself determined on the basis of Article 67(5)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, was also used for part of the calculation of the estimated costs. In addition, unit costs are linked to the applicable legislation, the specificity of the beneficiary and the requirements for the activities carried out. The methods used in the methodology are traceable and documented, correct – to the extent that the calculation seems reasonable and fair – to the extent that the approach, albeit specifically geared to costs related to the specific activities, is based on objective and verifiable characteristics of the beneficiary and the operation.

*Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2” and methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs*

Unit costs have been calculated in accordance with Article 67(5)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 on the basis of statistical data or other objective information summarising the implementation of two similar projects in the past: project BG051PO001-4.3.01-0001 “New chance for success”, financed under Operational Programme “Human Resources Development 2007-2013” – launched in March 2011 and ended October 2015 and project BG05M2OP001-3.004-0001 “A new chance for success”, funded under Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth 2014-2020” – launched on 21.9.2016 and ended on 31 January 2020. The rules applied in the implementation of the two above projects are the same and are determined by an instruction issued by the Minister of Education and Science. The calculations take into account the latest available data on costs incurred and verified in the implementation of project BG05M2OP001-3.004-0001. The estimated average costs are adjusted taking into account changes in labour costs, based on statistical data. The method used in the methodology is traceable and documented, correct – to the extent that the calculation appears to be justified and fair – in so far as the approach, albeit specifically geared to costs related to the specific activities, is based on objective and verifiable characteristics of the beneficiary and the operation.

*Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.010 “Qualification of pedagogical specialists” and methodology justifying the estimated amounts of costs*

This standard scale of unit costs is included in the scope of the assessment in relation to the applicability of part of the derived cost amounts for procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011 and BG05M2OP001-3.005. In particular, these are: training for upskilling without physical presence, for which 1 qualification credit has been awarded, training for upskilling without physical presence, for which 2 qualification credits have been awarded and training for upskilling without physical presence, for which 3 qualification credits have been awarded.

Unit costs are calculated on the basis of a combination of methods referred to in Article 67(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The standard table on the eligible hourly remuneration of persons

employed in connection with the implementation of projects co-financed by the European Social Fund under Priority Axis 2, 3 and 5 of the Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth”, which is itself determined on the basis of Article 67(5)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, was also used for part of the calculation of the estimated costs. The data sources for the calculations are varied and take into account the specificity of each expenditure according to the activity to which it is bound, the applicable legislation and the characteristics of the beneficiary. The table was subject to indexation due to a significant increase in wages in the education sector. The amendments to Articles 49, 60 and 89 of Regulation No 15/2019, published<sup>52</sup> in the State Gazette No 101 of 27 November 2020, allow the attendance part of the training to be carried out by means of synchronous distance training in an electronic environment. As a result of this change, changes are also made to the Standard Table, enabling synchronous distance learning in an electronic environment.

From the above, it can be concluded that the Standard scales of unit costs examined and the methodologies justifying the derived amounts of costs rely on a variety of data sources, taking into account the specificity of each expenditure according to the activity, and similar data are used to determine similar costs where is possible. They use a variety of methods, but similar for the determination of similar costs, as an example is the convertibility of the derived amounts of costs into one with the methods and data used between different projects (Procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011 and BG05M2OP001-3.005 to use parts of the Standard scale of unit costs under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.010). The calculations are reasonable and as close to the reality as possible. The approaches taken, albeit in some cases specific to the expenditures related to specific activities, are based on objective and verifiable characteristics of the beneficiary and the operation. The methods applied are duly documented in the relevant Standard scale of unit costs, which includes at least: the description of the calculation method, including the main stages of the calculation; the sources of the data used for the analysis and calculation, including an assessment of the relevance of the data in relation to the envisaged operations and an assessment of their quality; the calculation itself to determine the corresponding value of the simplified cost option.

On this basis, it can be assumed that, where applicable, the principles of Article 67(5)(a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 have been complied with and in other cases the relevant requirements of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 and the Guidelines on simplified cost options of the European Commission (EGESIF\_14-0017) are complied with. The provisions of the LMEFSM and Council of Ministers Decree 189 of 2016 are aligned. From this point of view, it can be assumed that the amounts of costs in the Standard scales of unit costs are adequately defined.

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<sup>52</sup> <https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2137195301> - Ordinance No 15 of 22 July 2019 on the status and professional development of teachers, directors and other pedagogical professionals

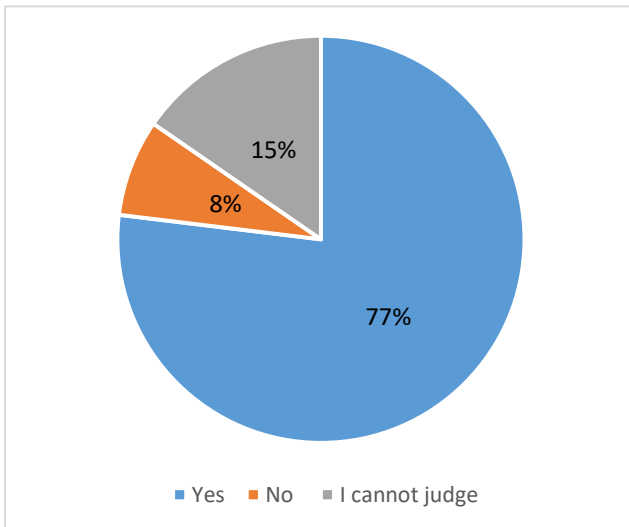


Figure 30 Are the values in the standard scales of unit costs adequately determined?

In the survey conducted among beneficiaries under two of the procedures subject of evaluation, the question “Are the values in the standard scales of unit costs adequately determined?” was answered by representatives of 13 beneficiaries in two of the procedures assessed. Just under 77 % responded positively, slightly below 8 % negative and just over 15 % that they could not judge.

The data from interviews with representatives of the DB MES indicate that “simplified costs definitely facilitate the reporting mechanism” and, in terms of

the adequacy of their determination, that the values in the standard scales of unit costs are adequately defined over the time of their determination. In the current situation, due to the rising inflation in not all the cases the unit costs are acceptable. Under BG05M2OP001-3.005 the amount of unit costs was acceptable for the activities carried out at the start of the project, but is no longer considered as such. E.g. “the costs of training of pedagogical specialists are not adequate to what can actually be provided as quality face-to-face training”.

Data from the MC focus group indicate that the application of simplified cost options is considered to be significant progress in reducing the administrative burden for beneficiaries and, on the other hand, speeding up verification and payments. As regards the adequacy of their determination, it was shared that at least part of the determined unit costs is already considered inadequate to the current conditions, e.g. where hotel accommodation is included, where unit costs for lecture hours are foreseen, etc. The reason is the increase in prices due to inflation.

Data from the focus group with representatives of the MA indicate that the application of simplified cost options leads to a reduced burden of work at the verification stage for checking job reports, the overall information on the employment relationship of the given person, job descriptions, hourly rates. Checks which, if simplified cost options are not applied, are extremely slowing down the workflows as they involve processing a lot of additional information and hence delaying verification. The application of simplified cost options is considered an exceptional facilitation and leads to a shortening of the verification period. This allows the MA to focus efforts on more on-the-spot checks and to focus more on “implementation alone and results achieved from the given activities rather than on the expenditures”. Representatives of the MA acknowledge that following the initial difficulties for beneficiaries resulting from the new cost reporting line following the introduction of simplified cost options with the first such procedures, this approach has led to a significant reduction in the administrative burden for the beneficiaries. With regards to the adequacy of their determination, it was noted that the expenditures are updated periodically (with each new procedure).

### 6.1.2. Findings, conclusions and recommendations on the use of simplified cost options under the OP SESG

Based on the analyses carried out and the study carried out on the three groups of simplified cost options, the main findings, conclusions and recommendations are summarised in this point of the

evaluation report under the Efficiency strand. According to the requirements of the Contracting Authority, the findings, conclusions and recommendations should be described in a table at the end of the report in the respective direction, the findings, conclusions and recommendations set out in this point are also included in the table at the end of the Report.

### **Findings:**

When determining and subtracting the amounts of simplified cost options under OP SESG, the principles, where applicable, or the requirements of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, as well as the Guidelines for simplified cost options of the European Commission (EGESIF\_14-0017) are respected. The approach is also in line with the national legislation. Where data are used, they are statistical, other objective information or verified historical data for individual beneficiaries. The cost categories covered by simplified cost options are exhaustively described. The calculation methods used are documented and seem justified.

While in a number of cases separate approaches have been introduced for different assumptions of implementation of operations (e.g. flat rates for organisation and management costs and standard scales of unit cost), justification based on the type of beneficiary (including partners if foreseen), type of operation, mode of implementation and, if applicable, specific regulatory requirements for the relevant cost-generating activities is available.

The flat rates for financing organisation and management activities are defined as a percentage of direct costs and, in one case, as a percentage of direct personnel costs. The approach has been updated with the addition of new application hypotheses from February 2020.

Overall, over 70 % of the beneficiaries who participated in the survey conducted and answered questions related to the adequacy of simplified cost options answered positively. Only around 12 % and 8 % are the negatively answered respondents in relation to the two types of simplified cost options. With regard to the Standard Table for the eligible hourly remuneration of persons employed in connection with the implementation of projects, the negative replies are around 14 %. Positive on the similar questions raised during the interviews were also the reactions of the representatives of the Ministry of Education, in their capacity as a direct beneficiary under the evaluated procedures. This shows a rather good perception by the beneficiaries of the simplified cost options introduced by the MA of the OP SESG, as well as the amounts set.

In the context of the survey, some of the beneficiaries identified difficulties in applying simplified cost options due to increased inflation and increased costs.

### **Conclusions**

The approaches and methods for determining the rates and amounts of simplified cost options have been established in accordance with the principles, where applicable, and the requirements of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 as well as the European Commission's Guidelines on Simplified Cost Options (EGESIF\_14-0017). It is also taken into consideration the applicable national legislation. Based on this, it can be argued that the rates and the amount of simplified cost options are adequately defined.

In addition, difficulties have been identified under projects resulting from a lack of update of some of the amounts set out in simplified cost options against the background of rising inflation and rising costs. There are comments in this direction from beneficiaries under the evaluated procedures participating in the survey conducted. There are also comments from beneficiaries on the way unit costs are formed for hourly remuneration.

To the extent that, for BG05M2OP001-3.20, the last open procedure within the evaluation scope and the future procedures under the Education Programme have been established a mechanism enabling a periodic assessment during the implementation of projects pursuant to Article 184 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 and a timely update of the amounts set out in standard scales of unit costs in the

event of significant changes in market prices and other relevant circumstances, it can be concluded that the MA has taken the necessary action to overcome those difficulties.

## Recommendations

No recommendations

### 6.1.3. Comparative analysis of the cost efficiency of similar products under the covered procedures

To answer this evaluation question, an analysis of the procedures under assessment was carried out in terms of the similarity between the different procedures, focusing on the main objectives and results to be achieved with their implementation.

As a result of the analysis carried out, several pairs of procedures with similar products were identified, with products referring to the defined performance indicators.

Table 27 Criteria for determining similarity in procedures BG05M2OP001-3.004 and BG05M2OP001-3.020

The Criteria	Comparability
Duration of time	partial
Territorial scope	full
Way of implementation	non-comparability
The target group	full
Eligible activities	partial
Eligible costs	partial
Result Indicators	to a large extent
Planned Budget in BGN	the partial
Agreed budget in BGN	non-comparability
Cost of 1 person	partial
Applicability of simplified cost options	non-comparability

For the two procedures analysed, the specific performance indicator for OP SESG was defined, namely “Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education under the OP”. The procedures are aimed at educating adults.

The same objectives of the procedures also prejudge the full or partial similarity of most of these additional comparability criteria. Three of the criteria show a discrepancy in parameters, which also has a significant impact on cost efficiency.

Procedure BG05M2OP001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1” was implemented through a procedure for direct negotiation with a direct beneficiary – Ministry of Education, while the chosen approach for implementing procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2” is a competitive selection of project proposals. As a consequence of the application of the two approaches, the percentage of the agreed funds against planned funds differs significantly, in the first case it is 100 % and in the second case 39 %. It should be clarified here that the Phase 1 procedure has undergone a change in the budget of BGN 25 million initially adopted by the MC, reducing it to BGN 19 070 732, as agreed subsequently. On the other hand, the approved budget under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2” amounting to BGN 15 million has not been amended, with the agreed funds under the procedure being BGN 5 862 361,91.

The possible reasons for this difference are described in point 4.1 of this report.

For procedure BG05M2OP001-3.004, no simplified cost options have been applied and fixed percentages have been set for organisation and management costs respectively up to 6 % of the total eligible costs of

the project and 1 % for information and publicity costs. Under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020, a standard scale per unit for direct costs and a flat rate for indirect costs were applied.

In the end, the agreed costs for the participation of one person from the target groups did not differ significantly, as under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.004 it was BGN 1 907.07 and under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 – BGN 1 452.52. It should be noted here that the book value under the first procedure is close to the one contracted under the second procedure, namely BGN 1 415.07. Procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 is still in implementation and therefore no reasonable conclusions on the efficiency of the implementation of its measures can be drawn.

The other pair of procedures aimed at similar products are BG05M2OP001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children” and BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the pre-school education system”, the interventions of which are focused on children from vulnerable groups, parents and teachers.

Table28 Criteria for determining similarity in procedures BG05M2OP001-3.001 and BG05M2OP001-3.005

The Criteria	Comparability
Duration of time	partial
Territorial scope	full
Way of implementation	non-comparability
The target group	to a large extent
Eligible activities	partial
Eligible costs	partial
Result Indicators	partial
Planned Budget in BGN	non-comparability
Agreed budget in BGN	non-comparability
Cost of 1 person	partial
Applicability of simplified cost options	non-comparability

Here, as with the first group of procedures analysed, the way of implementation of the procedures is different – procedure BG05M2OP001-3.001 was implemented through a procedure for the selection of project proposals and the other BG05M2OP001-3.005 by direct negotiation with a direct beneficiary – the Ministry of Education. The difference in the amount of funding determined for the two procedures is also significant – BGN 20 million, of which BGN 16 320 741.63 contracted under BG05M2OP001- 3.001 and contracted BGN 72 136 200.00 out of BGN 82 500 000.00 under BG05M2OP001-3.005.

The comparative analysis of unit costs between the two procedures shows identical dynamics between programmed, contracted and reporting values. The verified values of the expenditure for participation per person are significantly lower than the planned ones – BGN 966.00 against BGN 1 333.33 for BG05M2OP001-3.001 and BGN 633.03 against BGN 1 650.00 for BG05M2OP001-3.005. In both cases, more than the contracted output indicators were achieved with less than the contracted funds. In this sense, both procedures can be defined as economical and efficient. Another question is whether these results are not due to insufficient precision at the programming stage of operations in the sense of overestimating the planned budget or underestimating the target values of the indicators against realistic values based on an in-depth preliminary analysis

The third pair of procedures with a similar product, for which a comparative cost analysis has been carried out, include measures aimed at students from vulnerable groups at risk of dropping out of the education system, parents and pedagogical specialists – BG05M2OP001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” and BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success”.

Table29 Criteria for determining similarity in procedures BG05M2OP001-3.002 and BG05M2OP001-2.011

The Criteria	Comparability
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Duration of time	partial
Territorial scope	full
Way of implementation	non-comparability
The target group	to a large extent
Eligible activities	partial
Eligible costs	partial
Result Indicators	partial
Planned Budget in BGN	partial
Agreed budget in BGN	partial
Cost of 1 person	non-comparability
Applicability of simplified cost options	non-comparability

And the third pair of procedures analysed is characterised by a different approach to the implementation of operations – BG05M20P001-3.002 was implemented through an open procedure for the selection of project proposals and BG05M20P001-2.011 through direct grant with a direct beneficiary – the Ministry of Education.

Characteristic to note from the analysis of the cost efficiency of these procedures is that with almost identical amounts of the planned funds – BGN 25 million under BG05M20P001 -3.002 and nearly BGN 23 million under BG05M20P001 -2.011, the target values of the output indicators differ significantly – 18 750 students and young people from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in educational integration and reintegration measures under BG05M20P001-3.002, compared to 32 898 under BG05M20P001- 2.011, that is to say almost double the number. On this basis, it could be concluded that procedure BG05M20P001-2.011 was programmed to a greater degree of cost efficiency – BGN 698.75 per unit of product versus BGN 1 333.33 under BG05M20P001-3.002. In the analysis of the implementation of the parameters set for the two efficiency indicators, changes in the ratios were observed. For example, with 69 % of the planned funding under procedure BG05M20P001-3.002 more than 88 % of the target values of the output indicator were achieved and the verified value of expenditure per participant in the target group was reduced to BGN 1 039.69. That is to say, the procedure has been implemented in a more efficient way than the planned values. Such a change is not observed in procedure BG05M20P001-2.011, for which the reporting values at present do not differ materially from the planned ones.

Relative similarity can also be inferred from procedures BG05M9OP001 -2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1" and procedures for awarding grants under the CLLD approach. Both types of procedures are characterised by a high complexity of implementation – Procedure BG05M9OP001 -2.018 is implemented through the application of an integrated approach under two OPs –OP HRD and OP SESG, while the procedures for awarding grants under the CLLD approach are implemented through the application of an integrated territorial approach.

Table30 Criteria for determining similarity under procedures BG05M9OP001-2.018 and CLLD

The Criteria	Comparability
Duration of time	partial
Territorial scope	partial
Way of implementation	non-comparability
The target group	to a large extent
Eligible activities	partial
Eligible costs	partial
Result Indicators	partial
Planned Budget in BGN	non-comparability
Agreed budget in BGN	partial



Cost of 1 person	partial
Applicability of simplified cost options	partial

Characteristic of both procedures is the specifics of the way of implementation. Procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 was programmed as direct provision with beneficiaries municipalities/regions of municipalities/with updated municipal plans for Roma integration for the period 2015-2020, in accordance with the National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012-2020. The CLLD procedures are programmed for implementation through selection of projects in compliance to a CLLD strategy implemented by the LAG/FLAG, agreed with the MA of the SESG and with approved conditions for application, including specific criteria set out in the approved CLLD strategies, in accordance with the guidelines of the MA.

Unlike the other procedures under assessment the procedure BG05M9OP001- 2.018 and those under the CLLD approach are implemented at local level. The scope of procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 is the territory of municipalities with updated municipal plans for Roma integration for the period 2015-2020, in accordance with the National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012-2020, which have approved conceptual concepts, after pre-selection by the CCU. The CLLD approach procedures are implemented in the territories eligible under Article 4 of Council of Ministers Decree No 161/2016. – the LAG/FLAG territories approved for implementation of CLLD strategies.

The comparative analysis of the planned value of one person from the target group is irrelevant due to the fact that the planned funds under the CLLD procedures have not been updated following the agreements concluded to implement CLLD strategies towards a reduction. A detailed analysis in this regard is carried out and described in point 4.1 of this report.

The values of the contracted and verified expenditures per person from the target group under the two procedures are quite similar, according to procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 they are BGN 1 637.98 and BGN 1 041.90, and for CLLD procedures 1 972.01 BGN and BGN 934.23 respectively. As evidenced by the data, the procedures for submitting the grant under the CLLD approach are characterised by a higher degree of efficiency compared to procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018.

As a result of the comparative analysis of the cost efficiency of similar products under the covered procedures, it can be concluded that under the programming of similar measures were used the both approaches to implementation - direct negotiation with a direct beneficiary and selection of project proposals. The analysis of the different approaches does not justify direct impact of the choice of how procedures are implemented on cost efficiency.

#### **6.1.4. What are the costs of participating in the operation of a targeted person?**

The answer to that question is in the answer to Question 4.1 ‘What is the cost efficiency of those procedures, measured as a ratio between inputs and products achieved?’ as part of the efficiency assessment methodology.

## VII. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1. Proposed methods and approach to reflect conclusions and recommendations

The presentation of the conclusions and recommendations in this report is based on an analysis that clearly shows causal links. The conclusions of the evaluation are based on the following elements:

- A condition assessed by a criterion is a fact (or several facts) that the Contractor has established (actual status). This objective reality has been established by carrying out various evaluation procedures and is supported by evidence.
- Reason – the reason for the discrepancy between the criterion and the condition will be identified and indicated (why the difference exists). The reason is the link, supported by evidence, between the observed unacceptable state and the desired state.

The conclusions derive directly from the analyses and the recommendations are based on conclusions. With regards to the quality of the recommendations, we have followed the following quality elements:

- the recommendations are specific, i.e. specify exactly what, how and by whom it should be carried out;
- the recommendations shall be understandable, clear and unambiguous;
- the recommendations are motivated;
- the recommendations are addressed (proposing a specific vision of the responsibilities of the relevant implementing institutions);
- provide an indication of the possible period of application;
- specify the target groups to which information is to be disseminated and the appropriate channels of communication;
- propose a methodology and approach to reflect in the applicable procedures and processes that the MA of OP SESG uses in the management and implementation of the Programme and/or in its change.

During the preparation of this evaluation the following requirements set out in the technical specification of the Contracting Authority are met:

- 1) Accordance to the needs: Adequate addressing the need for information formulated by the Contracting Authority;
- 2) Appropriate scope: Careful examination of the rationale of the Programme, its products, results and impact, interaction with other policies and unexpected effects;
- 3) Openness of the process: Identification of all stakeholders; involving stakeholders and target groups in the preparation of the evaluation and in the discussion of results to take account of different perspectives;
- 4) Reliability of data: Primary and secondary data collected are appropriate and reliable in view of their expected use and analysis;
- 5) Depth of analysis: Quantitative and qualitative data are analysed in accordance with established practices and in a way that provides relevant answers to all evaluation questions;
- 6) Plausible and well-founded results: The conclusions and results are logical and justified in terms of data analysis and interpretation, including appropriate explanations and hypotheses;
- 7) Impartial conclusions: The soundness and impartiality of the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation;

8) Clear and credible report: The report shall describe the context and purpose and the organisation and results of the evaluation in such a way that the information provided is easily understandable and verifiable;

9) Objective and applicable conclusions and recommendations: The findings stem from the evaluation analysis; the conclusions stem from the findings made; the recommendations made are relevant to the findings and conclusions; the evaluation provides useful recommendations for the Contracting Authority and other stakeholders, and they are applicable in practice and are sufficiently detailed and clear to be implemented.

## VIII. EVALUATION UNDER THE IMPACT EVALUATION STRAND

### 4.1. Increasing the number of educational institutions providing a supportive environment for inclusive education

#### 4.1.1. Do the PA3 measures of the Programme have an impact on reducing disparities in learning outcomes in different settlements?

The answer to this evaluation question is based on an analysis of data from the national external evaluations in grade 4 and 7 in Bulgarian language and mathematics and the state matriculation exam in Bulgarian language in grade 12 in the educational institutions that have participated in the following procedures: BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education” – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” and procedures implemented within the framework of the CLLD Approach “Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”.

For the purposes of the present evaluation question, the learning outcomes are examined through the data from the national external evaluation in grade 4 and 7 in Bulgarian language and mathematics and the state matriculation exam in Bulgarian language in grade 12, which is mandatory for the acquisition of secondary education. In order to take into account the effects of the evaluated procedures, the dynamics of external evaluation results and state matriculation exams in 2015 (the year before the start of the first procedures in the scope of the assessment) and 2022 (the last year for which data from NEE and SME are available) were followed. Due to the lack of individual data at student level, the results were examined on average for schools participating in the evaluation procedures (school-level results). In order to analyse learning outcomes in different settlements, an analysis of the changes over time (in the period 2015 and 2022) in the arithmetic averages of the schools involved in the interventions was made, analysing the percentiles<sup>53</sup>, as some of the exams had changed the assessment methodology and the points awarded, they could not be compared over time. Therefore, the most correct and relevant way to evaluate the change in learning outcomes in different settlements and the differences identified can be made by analysing the percentiles.

Table 31 Dynamics of the supported schools' external assessment and state matriculation exam results in 2015 and 2022

Percentiles*	Capital		District city		Small town		Village		Total	
	2015	2022	2015	2022	2015	2022	2015	2022	2015	2022
NEE 4th grade Bulgarian language Percentile	0,549	0,579	0,625	0,564	0,503	0,479	0,342	0,337	0,435	0,420
NEE 4th grade Mathematics Percentile	0,486	0,562	0,616	0,534	0,493	0,459	0,354	0,361	0,435	0,422

<sup>53</sup> Percentiles are a statistical measure of the position dividing the orderly distribution of the data into one hundred equal parts. This position measure provides information about the percentage of observations of a variable, arranged from the lowest to the highest, which are below its value. Thus, the 20th percentile (P20) would be the value of the variable located at the boundary of the first 20 units of observation.

NEE 7th grade Bulgarian language Percentile	0,508	0,561	0,540	0,535	0,478	0,477	0,375	0,339	0,435	0,418
NEE 7th grade Mathematics Percentile	0,449	0,504	0,483	0,466	0,453	0,455	0,415	0,384	0,437	0,421
SME Bulgarian language	0,502	0,502	0,443	0,418	0,430	0,397	0,318	0,343	0,435	0,410

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group)

\*The higher the value, the higher the order of the schools (from the lowest to the highest average of students) is the corresponding subgroup.

In terms of time plan, after analyzing the results of the national external evaluation (NEE) and state matriculation exams (SME), the most tangible change is achieved by the schools participating in projects under the evaluated procedures in the capital. In the schools participating in the projects evaluated in the capital, the results of the NEE improve on almost all exams and remain almost unchanged on the SME. In the district cities, there has been the largest decline in the performance of students in the schools participating in the evaluated projects. They decline on all types of external evaluation and SME. In small towns, there was a lower decline (mainly the results of NEEs in grade 4 and SME) and remained almost unchanged in the NEE in grade 7. The decline in small towns is weaker than the decline in results in regional cities, and in villages the results that students demonstrate for 2022 are maintained in mathematics and achieve a slight decrease in Bulgarian language and literature in grades 4 and 7 and a slight increase in SME. However, considering the baseline (2015) for each of the types of settlements, we can summarise that the assessed procedures fail to contribute to a significant improvement in the villages and small towns, and in the district cities there is even a slight decrease.

**In terms of NEE results in grade 4**, the measures in the capital achieve the most tangible change, while in the district cities the largest drop in student performance is observed. In small towns, there is a lower decline compared to the decline in results in the regional cities, and in the villages the results that students demonstrate for 2022 are maintained in mathematics and achieve only a slight increase in Bulgarian language and literature.

The performance of the students is similar in the **national external evaluations after 7th grade** – in the capital there is a slight increase in the performance of students, in schools supported by the evaluated procedures. In the district cities there was a decrease in the score in mathematics, where the decrease was by an average of 5 percentage points. In small towns, the level of performance of students is maintained and this shows that the PA3 measures have an impact, as in similar schools, in a small town, which have not received funding under OP SESG, there is a decrease in the results in Bulgarian language and literature by 15 percentage points and in mathematics by 23 percentage points. There was a slight decrease in the results that the students in the villages showed in the national external evaluation in Bulgarian language and literature, as well as a slight decrease in the results in mathematics.

Figure 31 Supported schools – change 2022 compared to 2015

Supported schools – change 2022 compared to 2016 (percentages)	Capital	District city	Small town	Village
4. grade Bulgarian language and literature 2015-2022	0,030	–0,061	–0,024	–0,005
4. grade Mathematics 2015-2022	0,076	–0,082	–0,034	0,007

7. grade Bulgarian language and literature 2015-2022	0,053	−0,005	0,000	−0,036
7. grade Mathematics 2015-2022	0,055	−0,017	0,002	−0.031
12. grade Bulgarian language and literature 2015-2022	0,000	−0,025	−0.033	0,025

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group)

	improvement
	unchanged
	deterioration

The results demonstrated at the state matriculation exam in Bulgarian language show the slightest fluctuations, both temporally and between different types of settlements in the country. The results of students in the capital and small towns are close to the results demonstrated by the students in 2015. In the district cities there was a slight decrease in the results demonstrated for 2022 compared to 2015. However, the schools in the villages showed a positive result in 2022 compared to 2015 and although the increase was not large, similar schools in the villages that were not supported by PA3 of OP SESG showed a decrease in the results from 2022 compared to 2015 by 9 percentage points, i.e. the difference shown by the supported schools compared to the unsupported is 13 percentage points<sup>54</sup>.

The same analysis carried out scheme by scheme shows similar results. Except for those participating in procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 'Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" – Component 1, all other schools in the capital participating in activities under OP SESG increase their performance and their positions on external evaluations (after comparing 2022 with 2015). In district towns, small towns and villages, there is also a decline in almost all procedures and almost all exams. This shows that the overall results by type of settlement do not differ significantly according to procedures. The evaluated procedures fail to reduce differences in learning outcomes in different settlements.

<sup>54</sup> A comparison with the control group in the villages was possible because in this category (schools in villages) there are a sufficient number of schools to be analysed. For the other two groups – small towns and district cities – the number of units is less than 5, therefore a comparison is not possible.

Table32 Results of schools from different types of settlements according to their participation according to procedures (2015 and 2022)

Capital						
		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups <sup>55</sup>	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups <sup>56</sup>			
		Procedure 2.011	Procedure 2.011	Procedure 3.002	CLLD	Procedure 2.018
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2015	0,23	0,68	0,33	0,58	0,67
NEE MAT 4th grade	2015	0,14	0,63	0,32	0,51	0,58
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2015	0,16	0,63	0,36	0,63	0,64
NEE MAT 7th grade	2015	0,14	0,56	0,27	0,39	0,54
SME 12th grade	2015	0,19	0,56	0,61	0,45	0,49
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2022	0,21	0,73	0,37	0,82	0,58
NEE MAT 4th grade	2022	0,20	0,70	0,39	0,81	0,47
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2022	0,18	0,70	0,32	0,82	0,59
NEE MAT 7th grade	2022	0,20	0,62	0,30	0,88	0,48
SME 12th grade	2022	0,22	0,57	0,65	0,51	0,45
District city						

<sup>55</sup>for the school year 2021-2022

<sup>56</sup>for the school year 2021-2022

		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups <sup>57</sup>	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups <sup>58</sup>			
		Procedure 2.011	Procedure 2.011	Procedure 3.002	CLLD	Procedure 2.018
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2015	0,33	0,75	0,57	.	0,86
NEE MAT 4th grade	2015	0,35	0,73	0,59	.	0,79
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2015	0,24	0,64	0,54	.	0,66
NEE MAT 7th grade	2015	0,27	0,56	0,55	.	0,54
SME 12th grade	2015	0,17	0,51	0,57	0,31	0,75
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2022	0,22	0,72	0,54	.	0,55
NEE MAT 4th grade	2022	0,25	0,65	0,54	.	0,40
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2022	0,20	0,66	0,54	.	0,49
NEE MAT 7th grade	2022	0,22	0,55	0,52	.	0,32
SME 12th grade	2022	0,17	0,49	0,54	0,26	0,61
<b>Small town</b>						
		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups <sup>59</sup>	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups <sup>60</sup>			

<sup>57</sup>for the school year 2021-2022

<sup>58</sup>for the school year 2021-2022

<sup>59</sup>for the school year 2021-2022

<sup>60</sup>for the school year 2021-2022



		Procedure 2.011	Procedure 2.011	Procedure 3.002	CLLD	Procedure 2.018
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2015	0,39	0,65	0,51	0,60	0,46
NEE MAT 4th grade	2015	0,38	0,64	0,50	0,60	0,43
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2015	0,35	0,62	0,47	0,57	0,38
NEE MAT 7th grade	2015	0,36	0,56	0,48	0,52	0,37
SME 12th grade	2015	0,30	0,57	0,46	0,48	0,46
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2022	0,34	0,66	0,48	0,52	0,37
NEE MAT 4th grade	2022	0,34	0,60	0,46	0,50	0,36
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2022	0,33	0,64	0,49	0,49	0,40
NEE MAT 7th grade	2022	0,36	0,55	0,47	0,47	0,36
SME 12th grade	2022	0,26	0,54	0,39	0,45	0,36
<b>Village</b>						
		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups <sup>61</sup>	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups <sup>62</sup>			
		Procedure 2.011	Procedure 2.011	Procedure 3.002	CLLD	Procedure 2.018
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2015	0,29	0,54	0,33	0,29	0,27
NEE MAT 4th grade	2015	0,32	0,59	0,35	0,35	0,26

<sup>61</sup>for the school year 2021-2022

<sup>62</sup>for the school year 2021-2022

NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2015	0,39	0,53	0,43	0,41	0,32
NEE MAT 7th grade	2015	0,22	0,51	0,39	0,07	0,25
SME 12th grade	2022	0,28	0,58	0,29	0,28	0,24
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2022	0,31	0,56	0,31	0,29	0,29
NEE MAT 4th grade	2022	0,27	0,61	0,28	0,28	0,20
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2022	0,34	0,55	0,32	0,41	0,31
NEE MAT 7th grade	2022	0,23	0,60	0,33	0,12	0,20

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (principal group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP NSER and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

Table33 Change in the positions of schools from different types of settlements involved in the different procedures (2022-2015)

Capital						
		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups			
		Procedure 2.011	Procedure 2.011	Procedure 3.002	CLLD	Procedure 2.018
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2022-2015	-0.02	0,05	0,04	0,24	-0.09
NEE MAT 4th grade	2022-2015	0,06	0,07	0,07	0,3	-0.11
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2022-2015	0,02	0,07	-0.04	0,19	-0.05
NEE MAT 7th grade	2022-2015	0,06	0,06	0,03	0,49	-0.06
SME 12th grade	2022-2015	0,03	0,01	0,04	0,06	-0.04

District city						
		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups Procedure 2.011	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups Procedure 2.011	Procedure 3.002	CLLD	Procedure 2.018
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2022-2015	-0.11	-0.03	-0.03		-0.31
NEE MAT 4th grade	2022-2015	-0.1	-0.08	-0.05		-0.39
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2022-2015	-0.04	0,02	0		-0.17
NEE MAT 7th grade	2022-2015	-0.05	-0.01	-0.03		-0.22
SME 12th grade	2022-2015	0	-0.02	-0.03	-0.05	-0,14
Small town						
		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups Procedure 2.011	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups Procedure 2.011	Procedure 3.002	CLLD	Procedure 2.018
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade	2022-2015	-0.05	0,01	-0.03	-0.08	-0.09
NEE MAT 4th grade	2022-2015	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.1	-0.07
NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade	2022-2015	-0.02	0,02	0,02	-0.08	0,02
NEE MAT 7th grade	2022-2015	0	-0.01	-0.01	-0.05	-0.01

<b>SME 12th grade</b>	2022-2015	-0.04	-0.03	-0.07	-0.03	-0.1
<b>Village</b>						
		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups			
		Procedure 2.011	Procedure 2.011	Procedure 3.002	CLLD	Procedure 2.018
<b>NEE Bulgarian language and literature 4th grade</b>	2022-2015	-0.01	0,04	-0.04	-0.01	-0.03
<b>NEE MAT 4th grade</b>	2022-2015	-0.01	-0.03	-0.04	-0.06	0,03
<b>NEE Bulgarian language and literature 7th grade</b>	2022-2015	-0,12	0,08	-0.15	-0.13	-0,12
<b>NEE MAT 7th grade</b>	2022-2015	0,12	0,04	-0.07	0,34	0,06
<b>SME 12th grade</b>	2022-2015	-0.05	0,02	0,04	-0.16	-0.04

Based on the analysis carried out, no evidence has been identified to point out that the measures implemented under the evaluated procedures contribute to reducing differences in learning outcomes in different settlements. The differences are preserved, as positive changes are observed only in the capital, small towns and villages have a similar representation of NEE and SME in the period before and after the implementation of the activities, whereas in the district cities there is a slight decrease.

#### 4.1.2. What is the impact of PA3 of the Programme at regional level (at the levels of NUTS 2, NUTS 3 and municipality) on reducing the share of early school leavers?

The answer to this evaluation question is based on data from the NSI on early school leavers aged 18-24 in the country and at the levels of NUTS 2, NUTS 3 and municipality, as well as data from the implementation of procedures: BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1 and BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection".

The reason for choosing these procedures is the fact that, depending on the time period of implementation of the activities, only in these procedures it is possible that part of the participants by 2021 have entered the group 18-24 years (based on the age of the participants and the period of implementation of the activities).

In the two procedures, the persons who are covered in the activities and who can reach the age of 18 by 2022<sup>63</sup> are 8308. At the same time, the decline of early school leavers<sup>64</sup> among 18-24 year-olds is equivalent to about 4,000 per year.

*Table 34 Falls in the number of early school leavers aged 18-24 years*

Period	Decline in thousand of persons
2019-2022	13 thousand.
2020-2022	8.7 thousand.
2021-2022	6.4 thousand

*Source: data of NSI Labour Force Survey and Population Census 2021, own calculations*

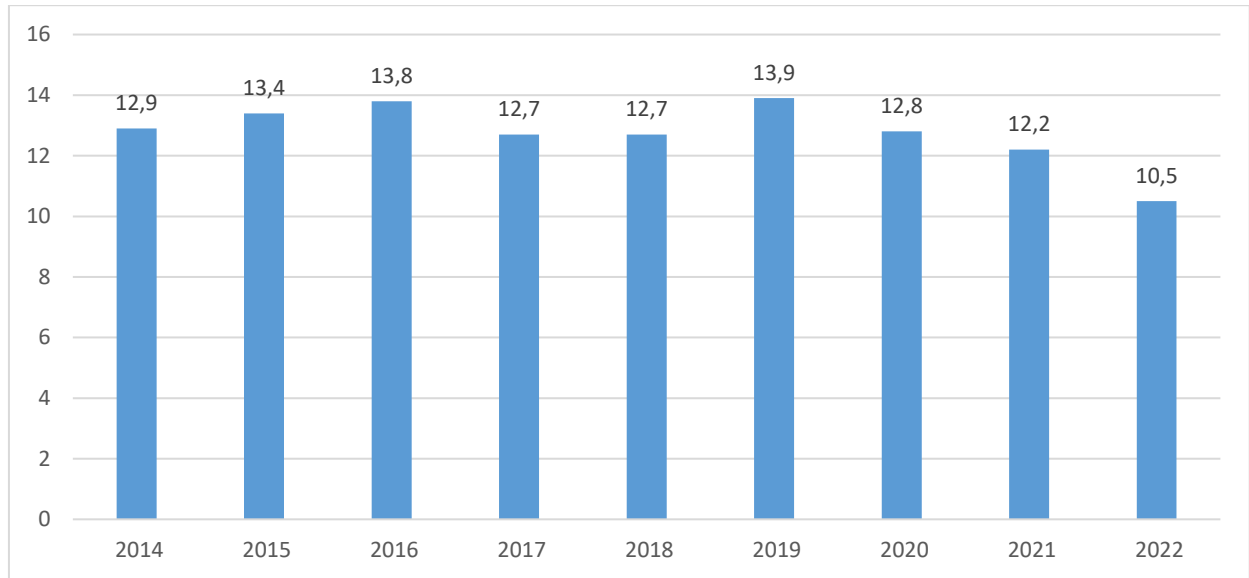
Given the period of implementation of the two procedures, which are within the scope of this analysis and the observed downward trend in the indicator after 2020, as well as the development of national policies and the introduction of a Mechanism for the joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the drop-out of children and students from compulsory pre-school and school age, we can conclude that the assessed procedures have an impact on reducing the number (and the share) of early school leavers at the age of 18-24, but it is difficult to quantify this impact. However, with a high degree of probability, we can conclude that, in so far as the period of decline of the indicator coincides with the period of entry into the 18-24 age group of the persons involved in the procedures and the fact that the activities, interventions and

<sup>63</sup> These persons are under the age of 24 as the period after completion of operations is less than five years.

<sup>64</sup> Early school leavers are those aged between 18 and 24 who have completed only primary education or lower level of education and who no longer participate in any form of education or training, <https://monitorstat.nsi.bg/bg/Report/Info?id=f197c367-c6a0-46bd-affe-6ee0e850c6dc>

objectives of the procedures work towards reducing the share of early school leavers, it can be concluded that the activities under the evaluated procedures have a positive impact over this indicator.

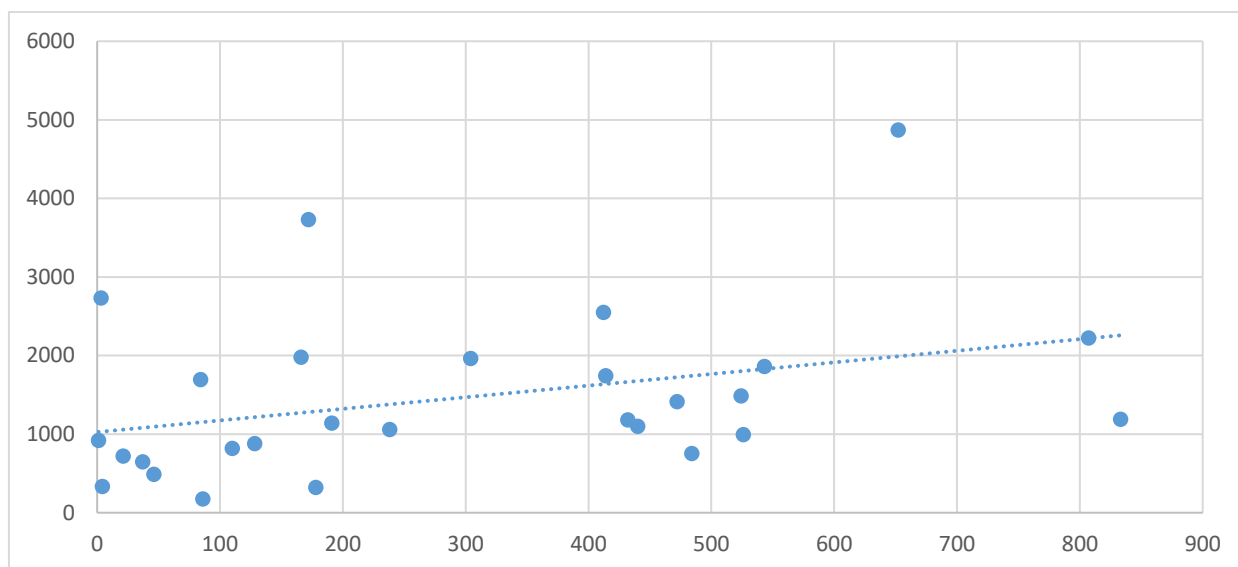
Figure32 Relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 in the population of the same age



Source: NSI, Labour Force Survey

To establish the link, we have examined in more depth whether there is a correlation between the number of people involved in the procedures and early school leavers according to administrative areas. This link is weak but positive, and yet it shows that, where there is a higher number of early school leavers, more students are covered in the procedures, indicating that the activities of the evaluated procedures are targeted in the administrative areas most in need. Respectively, the latter have been highly likely to have influenced the positive change in the indicator. Due to data limitation, a change in the indicator by administrative domain is not possible to be calculated, which does not allow us to examine more precisely the impact of the evaluated procedures on the decline of early school leavers aged 18-24.

Figure33 Association coefficient between the number of participants in procedures by district and the number of early school leavers aged 18-24 from the population of the same age by district



Horizontal axis X – those participated in procedures BG05M20P001 - 3.002 and BG05M9OP001 - 2.018 who have reached the age of 18-24 in the research period depending on the time of implementation of the activities under the evaluated projects, Vertical axis Y – Early school leavers aged 18-24 by the population of the same age

Source: NSI, Labour Force Survey and Census data 2021, own calculations.

## NUTS 2 level

The data used are from the NSI and cover the period 2014-2021. Although the activities under OP SESG started later, the existence of a longer dynamic timeline outlines the general context in which the evaluated procedures were implemented, as well as the values of the indicator in several consecutive years prior to the start of the procedures within the scope of this evaluation.

In comparison, between 2014 and 2021, on average, a dynamic in the share of early school leavers is observed. In the period 2014-2016 there was a slight increase (in this period there were no implemented activities under OP SESG, as the procedures are under preparation). Within the 2016-2018 there is a slight decrease, followed by a short-term increase in the indicator in 2019 and again a decline in the next two years.

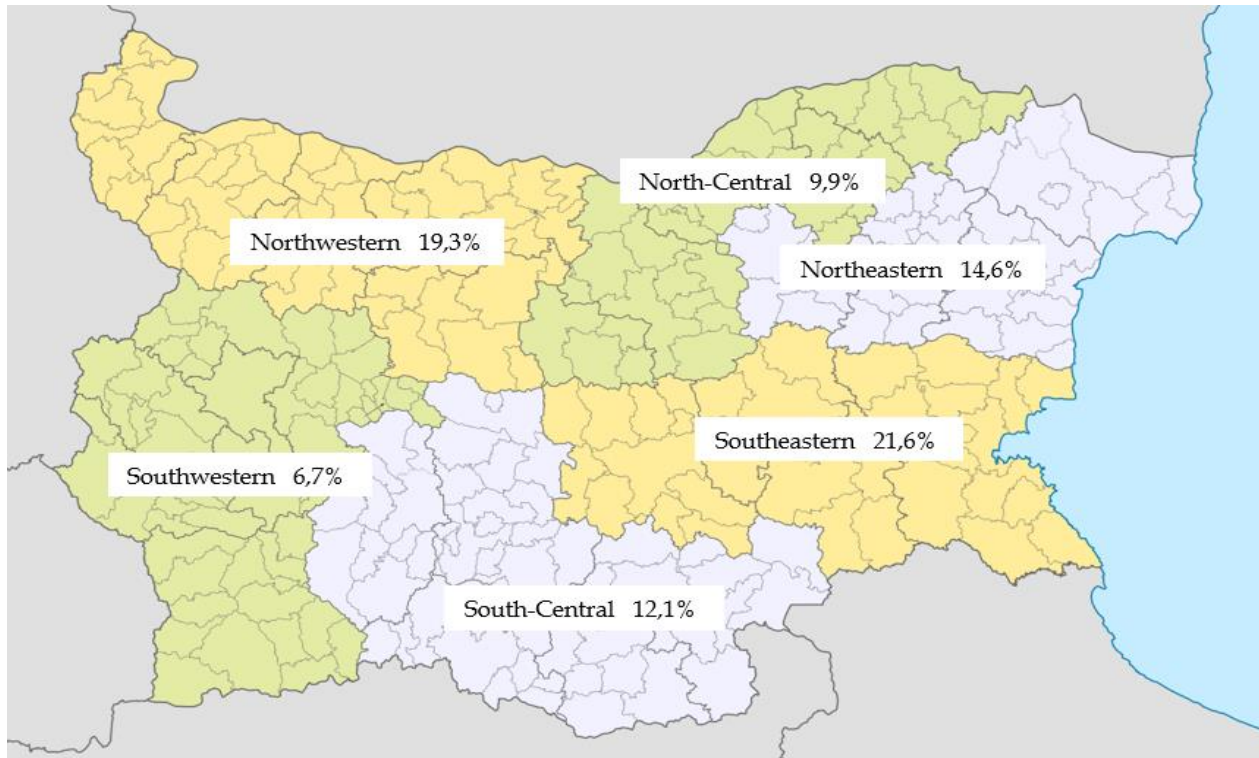
Table35 Relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 in the population of the same age by statistical regions

Relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 of the population of the same age by statistical region								
								(%)
Statistical regions (NUTS2)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Total</b>	12,9	13,4	13,8	12,7	12,7	13,9	12,8	12,2
<b>North-West Region</b>	20,8	23,1	27,7	21,6	19,8	22,9	20,0	19,3
<b>North-Central Region</b>	17,9	15,2	14,0	14,3	11,0	7,5	12,7	9,9
<b>North-Eastern Region</b>	15,6	16,0	14,1	12,7	16,5	18,7	12,5	14,6
<b>South-Eastern Region</b>	16,8	19,3	21,2	22,0	22,6	27,2	24,4	21,6

<b>South-West Region</b>	5,9	5,7	5,7	4,7	4,7	5,6	5,2	6,7
<b>South Central Region</b>	13,0	15,3	16,4	15,9	15,8	16,3	15,1	12,1

Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

Figure34 Relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 of the population of the same age by statistical region



Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

At NUTS 2 level, there are different dynamics of increases and decreases in the share of early school leavers in the years 2014-2021. In the three northern planning regions there is a decrease in the proportion of early school leavers, while in the southern regions this is only the case for the Southern Central Region.

The North-West planning region saw an increase in the share of early school leavers between 2014 and 2016, and after 2016 there was a decrease in their share. Up to 2021, the drop rate is 19.3 %, which means that there has been a 1.5 % drop compared to 2014. Despite this decline, the North-West region remains one of the two regions with the highest share of early school leavers.

In the North-Central region, there was the largest drop in early school leavers – 8 % between 2014 and 2021, with a share of 9.9 % by 2021 – the second lowest dropout rate in the country.

The Northeastern region achieves a 1 % reduction in the share of early school leavers between 2014 and 2021, up to 14.6 % by 2021.

Among the southern planning regions, the South East region has the highest dynamics in the share of early school leavers over the years, with fluctuations within 10 percentage points for 2014-2019. Since 2020, the share of early leavers has been reduced, but it remains the highest in the country at 21.6 %. Compared to 2014, there was a 4.8 % increase in dropouts.



The Southwestern planning region has the lowest rates of dropout from the education system – an average of 5.5 % over the period 2014-2021. The results fluctuated consistently by about 1 percent between the years, with the drop-out rate for the whole region being 6.7 % for 2021, which is 0.8 % higher than in 2014.

The Southern Central Region achieved a fall of 0.9 % in the drop-out rate between 2014 and 2021, with no fluctuations of more than 3 % for this indicator within the researched period. As of 2021, the rate of dropouts is 12.1 %, which is very close to the national average of 12.2 %.

As far as data on the time series of the studied indicator at the level of districts and municipalities are not available, it is not possible to trace categorically the impact of the evaluated procedures at the municipality, district and region level.

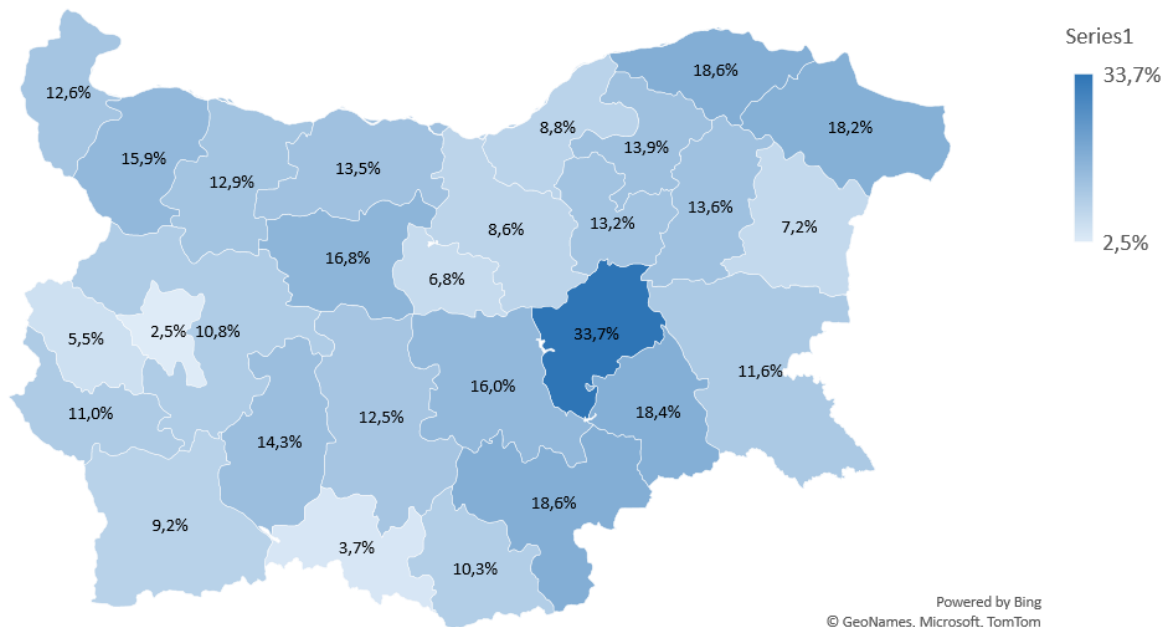
### NUTS level 3

As of 2021, the country has seen a significant difference in the results on the indicator of early school leaving among the districts of the country (NUTS 3) – within 30 % among the districts with the lowest values and those with the highest values. In most regions (NUTS 2) there is at least one area (NUTS 3) that stands out with lower dropout rates compared to the region average (NUTS 2).

In the North-Western region, the districts of Vidin (12.6 %) and Vratsa (12.9 %) have the lowest dropout rates. In North Central region, with the lowest drop rate is Gabrovo – 6.8 %, and in the Northeastern region the district with the lowest drop rate is Varna – 7.2 %.

In the South-East region, the high average dropout rate is mainly due to the indicator in the district of Sliven, which also has the largest share of dropout in the whole country – 33.7 %. Smolyan District has the lowest drop-out rate in South-Central Region – 3.7 % and Sofia City District has the lowest share in the South-Western region – 2.5 %.

Figure 35 Relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 as share of the population of the same age by district



Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

The districts in the country can be divided into 5 groups according to the proportion of early school leaving . Group 1 – the areas with the lowest rates of dropout are: Sofia – city (capital), Smolyan and Pernik. They are characterised by a dropout of less than 6 %. Group 2, which is characterised by a drop rate of between 6.8 % and 9.2 %, belongs to the districts of Gabrovo, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse and Blagoevgrad. The third group is characterised by a higher drop-out rate of between 10.3 % and 14.3 % (in yellow in the table below).

The districts with drop-out rates of between 15.9 and 18.6 % belong to group 4. These are the regions of Montana, Stara Zagora, Lovech, Dobrich, Yambol, Haskovo and Silistra. Group 5 contains the district with the highest proportion of dropouts in the whole country – the district of Sliven – with a 33.7 % share of early dropouts from the education system. With a high degree of probability, this result for the district of Sliven is due to the high proportion of representatives of marginalized groups, including Roma among the inhabitants of the municipality.

*Table36 Grouping of districts by early school leaving rate in the country*

Group 5	Sliven	33,7
Group 4	Silistra	18,6
	Haskovo	18,6
	Yambol	18,4
	Dobrich	18,0
	Lovech	16,8
	Stara Zagora	16,0
	Montana	15,9
Group 3	Pazardzhik	14,3
	Razgrad	13,9
	Noisy	13,6
	Pleven	13,5
	Targovishte	13,2
	Vratsa	12,9
	Vidin	12,6
	Plovdiv	12,5
	Burgas	11,6
	Kyustendil	11,0
	Sofia	10,8
	Kardzhali	10,3
	Group 2	Blagoevgrad
Ruse		8,8

	Veliko Tarnovo	8,6
	Varna	7,2
	Gabrovo	6,8
Group 1	Pernik	5,5
	Smolyan	3,7
	Sofia (capital)	2,5

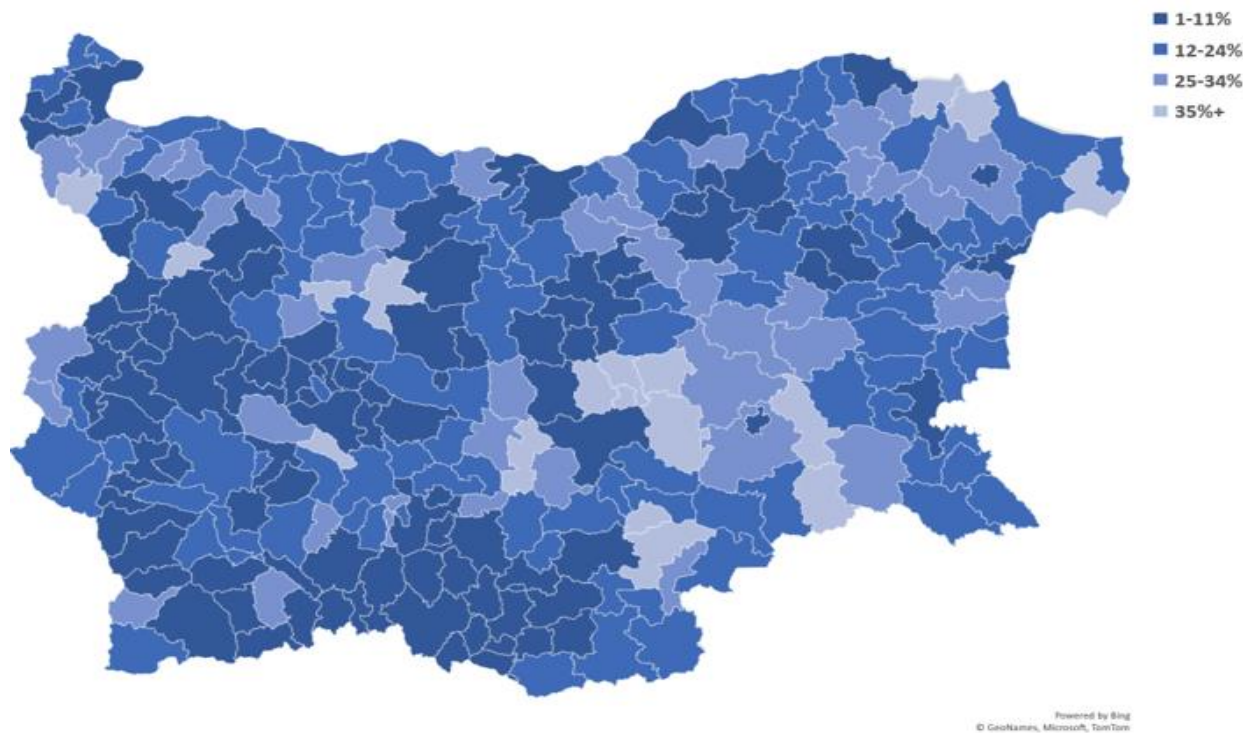
Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

### Municipality level

At the level of the municipality, 4 different groups can be formed, according to the share of early school leaving in the country. There is no strong concentration of municipalities that fall into the same group, according to the proportion of early school leaving from the same region (NUTS 2), but there is some accumulation of poorly performing municipalities in the South East Planning Region.

The following map illustrates the differences between municipalities in the indicator early school leavers. As the map shows, the municipalities with the lowest values (dark blue zones) prevail. Despite this overall positive picture, there are serious differences observed between municipalities and areas with a high share of early school leavers. With a share of over 35 % there are 18 municipalities and between 25 and 34 % early school leavers, there are a total of 36 municipalities. This shows that about one-fifth of the municipalities in the country are critically high on this indicator (light spots). These data illustrate that the inequalities in the Bulgarian education system are still very strong and the efforts to overcome barriers and factors for early school leaving must continue.

*Figure36 Relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 as share of the population of the same age by municipality*



Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

Municipalities with more than 35 % early school leavers are presented in the following table.

Table37 Municipalities with a relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 of the population of the same age as at 7 September 2021 over 35 %

<b>Chuprene</b>	<b>64,3</b>	<b>Krushari</b>	<b>47,7</b>	<b>Kavarna</b>	<b>39,0</b>
<b>Kaynardzha</b>	57,9	Yablanitsa	45,6	Harmanli	37,7
<b>Tvarditsa</b>	55,4	Varshets	41,9	Bolyarovo	37,1
<b>Daskalovi</b>	53,6	Simeonovgrad	41,2	Ugarchin	36,4
<b>Nikolaevo</b>	50,7	Maglizh	41,1	Lesichovo	35,9
<b>Gurkovo</b>	47,9	Straldzha	40,1	Nova Zagora	35,7

Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

Presented in the table below, 36 municipalities have a share of early school leaving between 25 % and 34 %:

Table38 Municipalities with a relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 from the population of the same age on 7 September 2021 between 25 % and 35 %

<b>Sungurlare</b>	<b>34,4</b>	<b>Ruzhintsi</b>	<b>32,1</b>	<b>Kotel</b>	<b>28,2</b>
<b>Sredets</b>	34,2	Nikola Kozlevo	32,1	Medkovets	27,4
<b>Chirpan</b>	34,0	Tundzha	31,2	Strazhitsa	27,0
<b>Krivodol</b>	33,7	Sliven	30,9	Belogradchik	26,9
<b>Krichim</b>	33,7	Lukovit	30,8	Tran	26,9
<b>Brezovo</b>	33,5	Antonovo	30,7	Borovan	26,6
<b>Treklyano</b>	33,3	Dimovo	30,3	Alfatar	26,5
<b>Lyubimets</b>	33,3	Yakimovo	30,1	Pavel Banya	26,2

<b>Dobrichka</b>	33,1	Pravets	29,8	Rakitovo	26,1
<b>Sadovo</b>	33,0	Stamboliyski	29,6	Vetovo	25,3
<b>Dolni Chiflik</b>	32,6	Borovo	29,4	Dolni Dabnik	25,1
<b>Strumyani</b>	32,2	Ihtiman	29,1	Polski Trambesh	25,1

Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

On average, the share of early school leaving in 2021 was 12.2 %. Municipalities in the third group are those that have a drop-out rate around the average to twice the national average. This group consists of 97 municipalities.

Table39 Municipalities with a relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 from the population of the same age on 7 September 2021 between 12 % and 25 %

<b>Valchi Dol</b>	<b>24,9</b>	<b>Provadia</b>	<b>20,0</b>	<b>Berkovitsa</b>	<b>16,4</b>
<b>Dulovo</b>	24,5	Karnobat	20,0	Topolovgrad	15,9
<b>Byala</b>	24,4	Karlovo	19,9	Elena	15,7
<b>Avren</b>	24,4	Tzenovo	19,8	Stambolovo	15,7
<b>Garmen</b>	24,3	Kaspichan	19,8	Ivanovo	15,5
<b>Varbitsa</b>	24,2	Parvomay	19,6	Radnevo	15,4
<b>Nikopol</b>	24,1	Balchik	19,5	Pomorie	15,2
<b>Kaolinovo</b>	24,1	Brusartsi	19,4	Teteven	14,7
<b>Glavinitsa</b>	24,0	Venez	19,3	Aytos	14,7
<b>Dolna Mitropolia</b>	23,9	Svilengrad	19,3	Gulyantsi	14,6
<b>Tervel</b>	23,5	Oryahovo	19,2	Tutrakan	14,6
<b>Malko Turnovo</b>	23,3	Levski	19,0	Tsarevo	14,5
<b>Madzharovo</b>	23,1	Iskar	18,9	Elhovo	14,5
<b>September</b>	23,0	Isperih	18,8	Samokov	14,5
<b>General Toshevo</b>	22,7	Ruen	18,4	Bobov Dol	14,5
<b>Perushtitsa</b>	22,6	Valchedrum	18,3	Coast	14,3
<b>Opan</b>	22,5	Pavlikeni	18,3	Belitsa	14,1
<b>Ivaylovgrad</b>	22,5	Sitovo	18,3	Rila	14,1
<b>Kaloyanovo</b>	22,4	Boynitsa	18,2	Nevestino	14,0
<b>Kubrat</b>	22,1	Byala Slatina	18,2	Devnya	13,8
<b>Kameno</b>	21,8	Sozopol	18,0	Dimitrovgrad	13,8
<b>Boychinovtsi</b>	21,5	Suhindol	17,8	Kyustendil	13,7
<b>New market</b>	21,4	Zavet	17,8	Sevlievo	13,6
<b>Dalgopol</b>	21,3	Galabovo	17,8	Mizia	13,5
<b>Smyadovo</b>	21,3	Gramada	17,6	Petrich	13,5
<b>Krumovgrad</b>	21,1	Hayredin	17,5	Aksakovo	13,4
<b>Letnitsa</b>	21,0	Samuil	17,5	Botevgrad	13,2
<b>Dve Mogili</b>	20,8	Suvorovo	17,5	Shabla	13,1
<b>Bratsigovo</b>	20,7	Omurtag	17,3	Pazardzhik	13,1
<b>Cherven bryag</b>	20,6	Compound	17,3	Novo selo	12,7
<b>Rakovski</b>	20,5	Pordim	17,2	Kozloduy	12,5

<b>Roman</b>	20,4	Zlataritsa	17,2	Chavdar	12,5
<b>Slivo field</b>	20,2	Dolna banya	17,0	Peshtera	12,3
<b>Hitrino</b>	20,2	Earth	16,7	Razlog	12,2
<b>Maritsa</b>	20,2	Knezha	16,6	Targovishte	12,1

Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

The fourth group includes municipalities that show results on the indicator “early school leaving”, which are around the average and below the national average. This is the best performing group, with this group being the largest of the four, including 103 municipalities, namely:

Table 40 Municipalities with a relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 from the population of the same age as at 7 September 2021 around and below the national average

<b>Primorsko</b>	<b>11,9</b>	<b>Troyan</b>	<b>8,0</b>	<b>Ruse</b>	<b>4,4</b>
<b>Velingrad</b>	11,9	Panagyurishte	8,0	Zlatitsa	4,4
<b>Lom</b>	11,8	Vetrino	7,9	Pernik	4,4
<b>Mineralni Bani</b>	11,8	Etropole	7,9	Svoege	4,3
<b>Byala</b>	11,7	Lovech	7,8	Tryavna	4,2
<b>Chiprovtsi</b>	11,5	Plovdiv	7,8	Kostenets	4,1
<b>Nessebar</b>	11,5	Pleven	7,6	Banite	4,1
<b>Kirkovo</b>	11,1	Rodopi	7,6	Mirkovo	4,0
<b>Haskovo</b>	10,9	Vratsa	7,4	Blagoevgrad	3,9
<b>Popovo</b>	10,8	Hadzhidimovo	7,4	Kostinbrod	3,8
<b>Veliki Preslav</b>	10,7	Silistra	7,3	Sarnitsa	3,8
<b>Kazanlak</b>	10,7	Sandanski	7,3	Ardino	3,8
<b>Strelcha</b>	10,7	Gorna Oryahovitsa	7,1	Sapareva Banya	3,5
<b>Malina</b>	10,3	Devin	7,0	Lyaskovets	3,4
<b>Asenovgrad</b>	10,3	Momchilgrad	7,0	Varna	3,4
<b>Yambol</b>	10,1	Svishtov	6,9	Luky	3,4
<b>Georgi Damyanovo</b>	10,0	Elin Pelin	6,9	Chernoochene	3,4
<b>Beloslav</b>	10,0	Mezdra	6,7	Dospat	3,2
<b>Dryanovo</b>	9,9	Dobrich-city	6,6	Sopot	3,1
<b>Kardzhali</b>	9,9	Opaka	6,6	Chepelare	3,0
<b>Razgrad</b>	9,8	Anton	6,5	Veliko Tarnovo	2,7
<b>Montana</b>	9,7	Kocherinovo	6,5	Madan	2,7
<b>Kula</b>	9,5	Vidin	6,0	Gabrovo	2,5
<b>Gotse Delchev</b>	9,5	Tsar Kaloyan	5,9	Sofia	2,5
<b>Slivnitsa</b>	9,4	Yakoruda	5,9	Borino	2,5
<b>Breznik</b>	9,4	Dragoman	5,8	Zlatograd	2,4
<b>Puppet</b>	9,3	Shumen	5,7	Rudozem	2,3
<b>Belene</b>	9,0	Satovcha	5,4	Dzebel	2,0
<b>Simitli</b>	9,0	Kresna	5,2	Pirdop	1,8
<b>Dupnitsa</b>	8,9	Radomir	5,2	Boboshevo	1,5
<b>Hisarya</b>	8,8	Batak	5,1	Bozhurishte	1,2

<b>Stara Zagora</b>	8,5	Smolyan	4,8	Koprivshitsa	1,0
<b>Makresh</b>	8,3	Belovo	4,7	Nedelino	0,4
<b>Godech</b>	8,2	Burgas	4,5	Apriltsi	–
<b>Loznitsa</b>	8,1	Bansko	4,5	Chelopech	–
				Kovachevtsi	–

In addition, it should be noted that there is a lack of data for the period 2015-2021 on how the indicator moved by municipalities therefore, an analysis of the dynamics of the change in the share of early school leavers cannot be conducted.

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Based on the analysis carried out, it can be argued that the projects implemented under the evaluated procedures moderately, along with other measures such as the introduced Mechanism for the joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age, contribute to a decrease in the share of early school leavers. For the period 2015-2022 (the start-up period of the evaluated procedures that could have an impact on this indicator), the relative share of early school leavers aged 18-24 decreased by 2.9 percentage points to 10.5 %. As long as there is no data on the dynamic order of the surveyed indicator at the level of districts and municipalities, it is not possible to precisely monitor the impact of the evaluated procedures at the level of the municipality, district and region.

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#### 4.1.3. What is the territorial distribution of the children, students and parents from marginalized groups including Roma included in the operations, and is it adequate for the demographic structure of the population – at the level of municipality, district and NUTS 2 region?

The answer to this evaluation question is based on microdata of participants (children, students and parents) in the following procedures: BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, “BG05M2OP001-3.005 Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and procedures under the CLLD approach, as well as data from the NSI.

In order to answer this question, an analysis was made of the persons from vulnerable groups and persons of Roma origin who participated in the procedures and their distribution on the territory of the country, at the level of the municipality, district and region of NUTS 2 level, compared with the NSI data from the 2021 population census for population by ethnicity, statistical regions, districts and municipalities as of 7.9.2021. For each procedure is calculated the distribution of the participating representatives of minorities on<sup>65</sup> the territory of the country and the distribution of the Roma participants on the territory of the country. These results are compared with the distribution of the population on the basis of the total number of

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<sup>65</sup> The indicator “minorities” and the indicator “Roma” from the micro-data files provided by the MA of OP SESG are used.

representatives of minorities (sum of the population defined as Turks, Roma, etc.) and only the number of Roma as a share of the population of the same municipalities in which activities were carried out under each of the procedures. Thus, for each procedure, a comparison of the territorial distribution of the participants with a distribution of the population of these two groups (“minorities” and “Roma”) on the territory of the municipalities in which projects were implemented was made.

Students from 223 municipalities have participated in project BG05M2OP001 -2.011-001 “Support for success”, where the difference in the share of the Roma population in a given municipality compared to the total Roma population in the country and the share of the participants in the procedure as a share of all persons participating in the procedure does not exceed 2 percentage points. Due to the large volume, these results are given in *Annex 17 to this report*. They show that overall the scope of the target groups in the project corresponds to the distribution of the Roma population in the country. Similarly, the representatives of minorities from a municipality in which project BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 has been implemented as a share of all minority representatives in the country correspond to the proportion of minority representatives covered by the project compared to all minority representatives covered in the procedure.

Participants from 102 municipalities have participated in project activities under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education” – Component 1. A comparison between the the profile of the participants in the activities registered in the microdata as representatives of minorities and the distribution of self-identified minority residents (Turks, Roma and “other”) in the 2021 census, shows that the distribution of participants corresponds to the population distribution of these municipalities according to this indicator. The data are similar according to the indicator Roma and residents of the municipalities, who have defined themselves as Roma in the 2021 census. This shows that the distribution of participants is adequate to the demographic structure of the population in these municipalities. The maximum differences do not exceed 4 percentage points.

Children from 95 municipalities have participated in project activities under procedure BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children” in a similar comparison, the maximum difference between the share of persons who have participated in the activities and who have defined themselves as representatives of minorities and the share of residents who have identified themselves as minorities (Turks, Roma and “other”) in the 2021 census does not exceed 4 percentage points. The results are similar for the “Roma” indicator. This shows that the distribution of participants is adequate to the demographic structure of the population in these municipalities.

Students from 134 municipalities have participated in project activities under procedure BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” where the difference in the share of Roma population from a given municipality against the total Roma population in the country in these municipalities and the share of the participants in the projects as a share of all Roma persons participating in the projects does not exceed 3 percentage points. These results show that overall the scope of the target groups in the projects is fully in line with the distribution of the Roma population in the country. Similarly, representatives of minorities from a municipality in which projects under procedure 3.002 have been implemented as a share of all minority representatives in the country correspond as values to the proportion of minority representatives of the same municipality covered in these projects (calculated on the basis of all minority representatives covered in the procedure).

Children from 243 municipalities participated in activities under project BG05M2OP001-3.005-004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”, the comparison between the profile of the participants in the activities registered in micro data as representatives of minorities and distribution of self-identified minorities (Turks, Roma and “other”) residents of these municipalities in the 2021 census shows that the

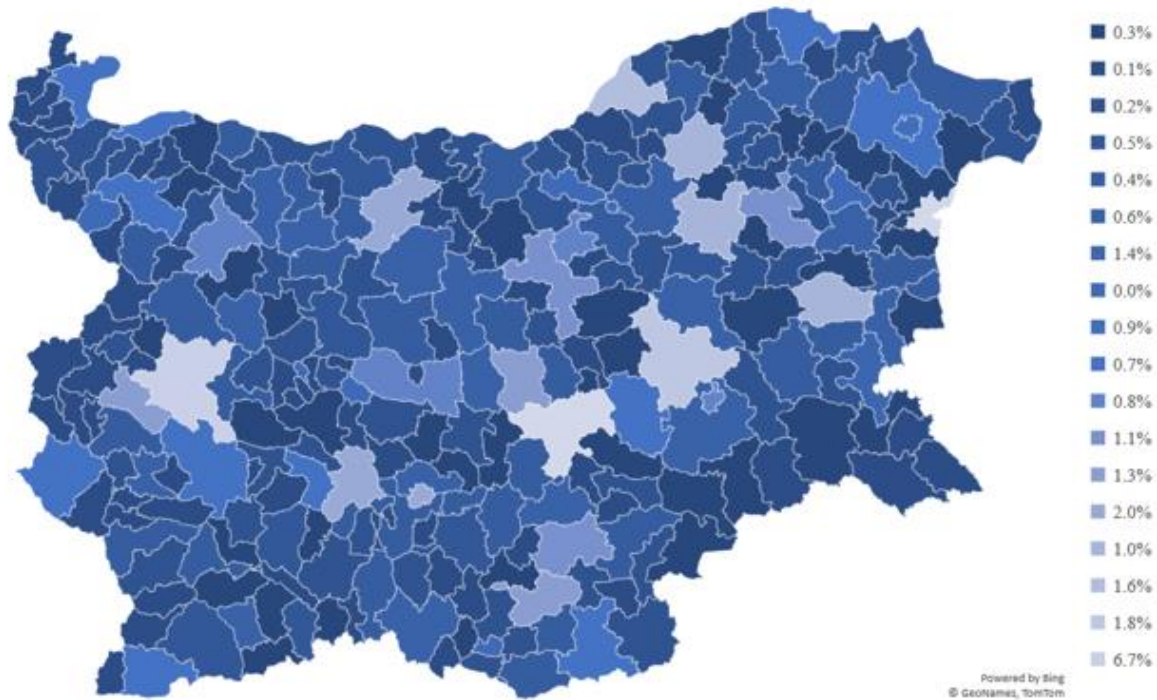


distribution of participants corresponds to the population distribution of these municipalities according to this indicator. The figures are similar on the indicator Roma and residents of the municipalities that defined themselves as Roma in the 2021 census. This shows that the distribution of participants is adequate to the demographic structure of the population in these municipalities. The maximum differences shall not exceed 3 percentage points.

Out of 34 municipalities there are more than 3 participants in procedures under the CLLD approach “Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”. These are the only procedures where there are significant shifts between the share of minority participants in each of the participating municipalities within these procedures against to the share of Roma and minority populations in the same municipalities (according to NSI data). This discrepancy is due on the one hand to the inclusion of very heterogeneous municipalities (e.g. Kardzhali, Haskovo, which are large municipalities, and the number of participants is disproportionate to their population from minorities and Roma ethnic origin – i.e. their share is underestimated), on the other hand, small municipalities, with a large number of inhabitants from minorities and Roma also have a disproportionately low number of participants (e.g. Duloovo). At the same time, another phenomenon is observed, municipalities such as Tundzha have included participants who are almost equal to the number of Roma and minority populations in this municipality, making them one of the most represented municipalities (overrepresented) among the participants in the projects under the procedures. Lukovit also has a large number of participants, which is disproportionate to the population of minorities and the Roma population in the municipality. These deviations of course also have their explanations, in so far the CLLD approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas” is based on the submission of project proposals in selection procedures, the number of participants depends to a large extent on the activity of the local stakeholders. I.e. to the extent that the territorial scope of the LAG depends on the activity of stakeholders in both strategic planning and application, we should rather accept this deviation as a natural result of the specificities of the procedures under the CLLD approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”. Moreover, the total number of participants is relatively small – just over 8,300 persons.

Based on the calculations made for the procedures that fall in the scope of the present evaluation, it can be summarised that, in general, the differences, as far as they exist, are negligible (less than 5 percentage points), which shows that the territorial distribution of activities within the individual projects and procedures is fully adequate to the demographic structure of the population in the country - at the level of municipality, district and NUTS 2 region. An exception is the CLLD approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”, but the very mechanism of implementation of the procedures and their small scope (in terms of number of municipalities and number of persons) are a prerequisite for distortions vis-à-vis the population and demographic structure of these municipalities.

*Figure 37 Schools participating in the procedures evaluated*



Source: NSI, Labour Force Monitoring

As a whole, the evaluated procedures cover the entire territory of the country and correspond to the demographic structure of the population, including the structure of representatives of vulnerable groups, ethnic minorities, including the Roma, in territorial terms.

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As a whole, the assessed procedures cover the territory of the country, and the territorial distribution of children, students and parents from vulnerable groups, including Roma, is consistent with the demographic structure of the population – at the level of municipality, district and NUTS 2 region. An exception is the CLLD approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”, but the very mechanism of implementation of the projects and their small scope (in terms of number of municipalities and number of persons) are a prerequisite for distortions vis-à-vis the population and demographic structure of the municipalities involved.

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#### 4.1.4. Is the coordination at the level of procedures and projects appropriate to the municipal plans for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities?

In answering this question an analysis of the following procedures was carried out: BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children", BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection" and procedures under the CLLD approach "Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas".

The other procedures follow national policies and/or laws and/or by-laws with a lower degree of localisation at municipality level and are expected to be drafted in line with them.

Eligible in procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" – Component 1 are only municipalities/regions of municipalities/ with updated municipal plans for Roma integration for the period 2015 - 2020, in accordance with the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration 2012 - 2020, which are explicitly stated as direct beneficiaries of the assistance of the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development 2014-2020" and in the criteria for selecting operations under the two programmes approved by the Monitoring Committees and which have successfully passed the pre-selection of concepts to the CCU.

In the framework of procedure BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children" and procedure BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection" are included activities for the development and adoption of annual municipal action plans, in accordance with the regional strategy for Roma integration or municipal programs for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities (the activity should be financed at the expense of the respective municipality). In addition, according to the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration 2012 - 2020, the municipality is set to have an action plan developed and approved by the municipal council on the priorities of the strategy.

The municipality may also have an adopted municipal program for the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities. In the event that at the time of application the municipality does not have such a document it is imperative to draw up and accept one of them. According to the requirements of the procedure, a project will be considered successful only if, at the date of submission of the request for final payment, in addition to the project indicators achieved, compliance of the implemented activities with (the objectives of) the respective annual plan or programme for each year of implementation of the project has been achieved.

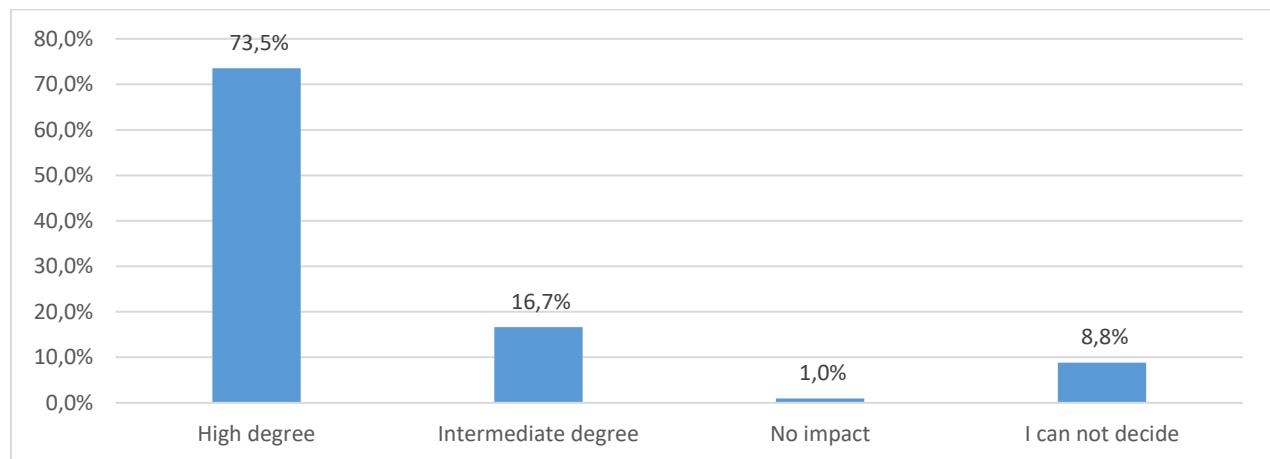
Under the CLLD approach, the local development strategies should be in line with the municipal plans for the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities. In addition, as eligible activities in the application guidelines are also pointed "other activities included in municipal programmes of a similar nature".

The activities foreseen for funding under the procedures covered by this evaluation and the projects implemented under these procedures correspond to the key objectives and priorities of the existing municipal Roma integration plans for the period 2015 - 2020. They provide for a number of interventions, including in the following areas: Prevention of early dropping out of education and training (activities for identification of students at risk of dropping out, individual support, additional trainings to overcome gaps in learning content, additional training in subjects for prevention of learning difficulties, interest activities,

reintegration into the education system of young people under 18 years of age, dropouts, etc.); Trainings of teachers and pedagogical specialists for working in a multicultural environment; Working with parents of children and students from vulnerable groups; Career counselling; Initiatives to overcome negative stereotypes; Initiatives to promote the cultural identity of ethnic communities; and others.

A survey among beneficiaries of the procedures covered by this evaluation, carried out for the purposes of the analysis, showed that 74 % of respondents highly assessed the degree of compliance of the procedure under which they are implementing or have implemented a project with the municipal plans for the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities, and 17 % considered it average. In practice, the share of those who consider that there is no impact is negligible (only 0.9 %) and 8 % find it difficult to respond. This shows that, in general, the activities and measures implemented correspond to the priorities set out in the municipal plans for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities.

Figure 38 Would you share your evaluation of the degree of compliance of the procedure under which you are implementing/have implemented a project with the municipal plans for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities?



Source: survey among beneficiaries of the procedures assessed

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The collected data leads to the conclusion that coordination at the level of evaluated procedures and projects with the municipal plans for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities is carried out appropriately and the planned activities correspond to the key planned interventions at municipal level.

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#### 4.1.5. What is the territorial distribution of educational institutions that have provided a supportive environment at the level of municipality, district and NUTS 2 region?

The answer to this evaluation question is based on data on the educational institutions participating in the project BG05M2OP001-3.005-004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”, since there are funded activities to provide a supportive environment for early prevention of learning difficulties and activities explicitly targeting children with special educational needs (SEN) under IP 9i only under this

project. “Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation and improving employability”.

At the time of this evaluation, the sub-indicator for this project related to IP 9i “Kindergartens that provided a supportive environment for early prevention of learning difficulties” was not separately reported and therefore the territorial distribution of educational institutions that provided a supportive environment at the level of the municipality, region and NUTS 2 region cannot be analysed specifically.

However, if we proceed from the hypothesis that all kindergartens included in the project have been given the opportunity, if necessary, to provide services to children with SEN and have provided a supportive environment for early prevention of learning disabilities, the analysis carried out on the territorial distribution of educational institutions, which have participated in the activities to provide a supportive environment for inclusive education and early prevention of learning difficulties, implemented in the framework of procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005-004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” indicates national coverage.

The following two maps present the distribution of the participating kindergartens (in 263 municipalities) and pre-school groups in schools – (in 110 municipalities) (under project BG05M2OP001-3.005-004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”) by municipalities.

Figure39 Kindergartens participating in procedure 3.005, by municipalities

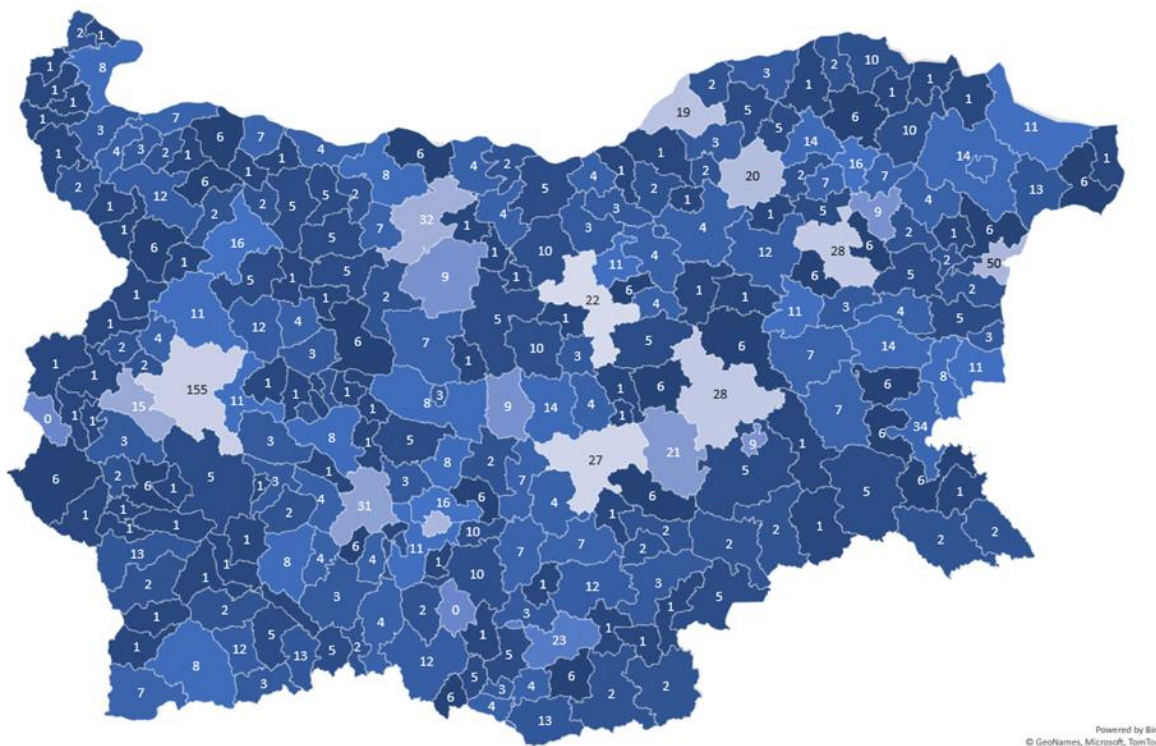
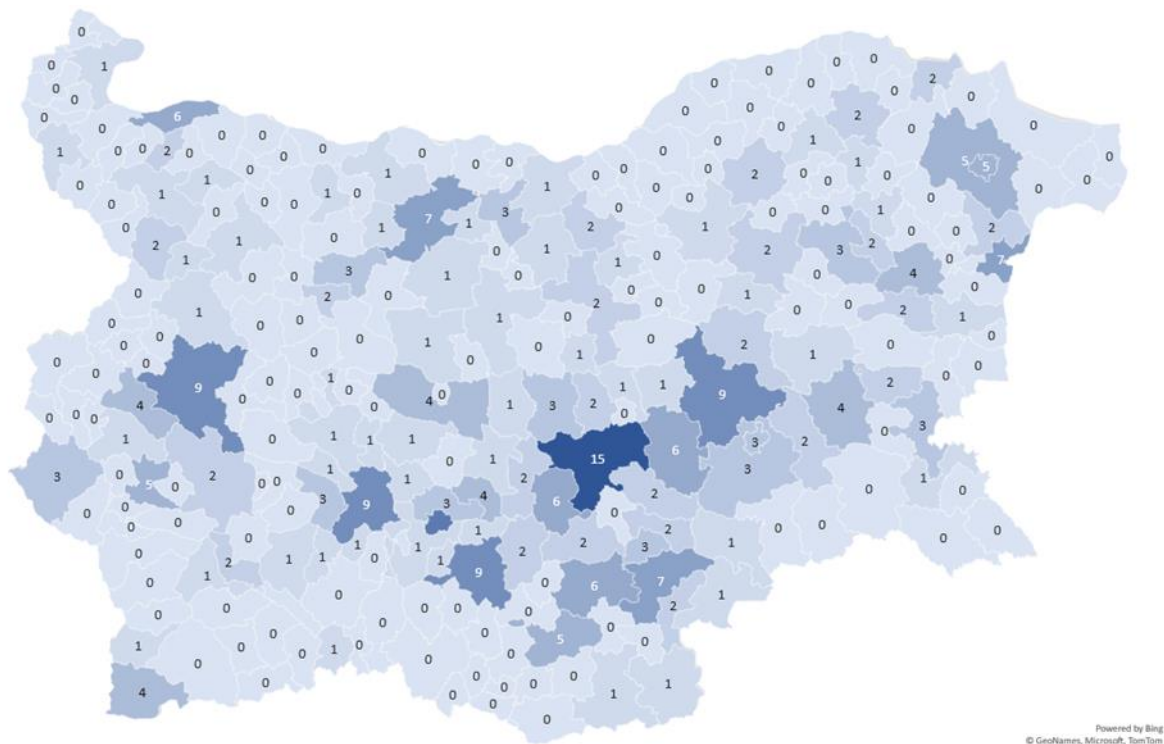


Figure40 Sools participating in procedure 3.005, by municipalities



The territorial distribution of the educational institutions that provided a supportive environment, if we proceed from the hypothesis (given the fact that this sub-indicator at the time of the assessment was not taken into account) that this happened in all kindergartens and pre-schools covered by project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” is practically with national coverage. This shows the best territorial distribution of the institutions covered.

#### 4.2. Increasing the number of successfully integrated children and students from marginalized communities through the education system, including Roma

4.2.1. Are activities in support of interaction in a multicultural educational environment and interscholastic activities effective with a view to integrating students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the education system?

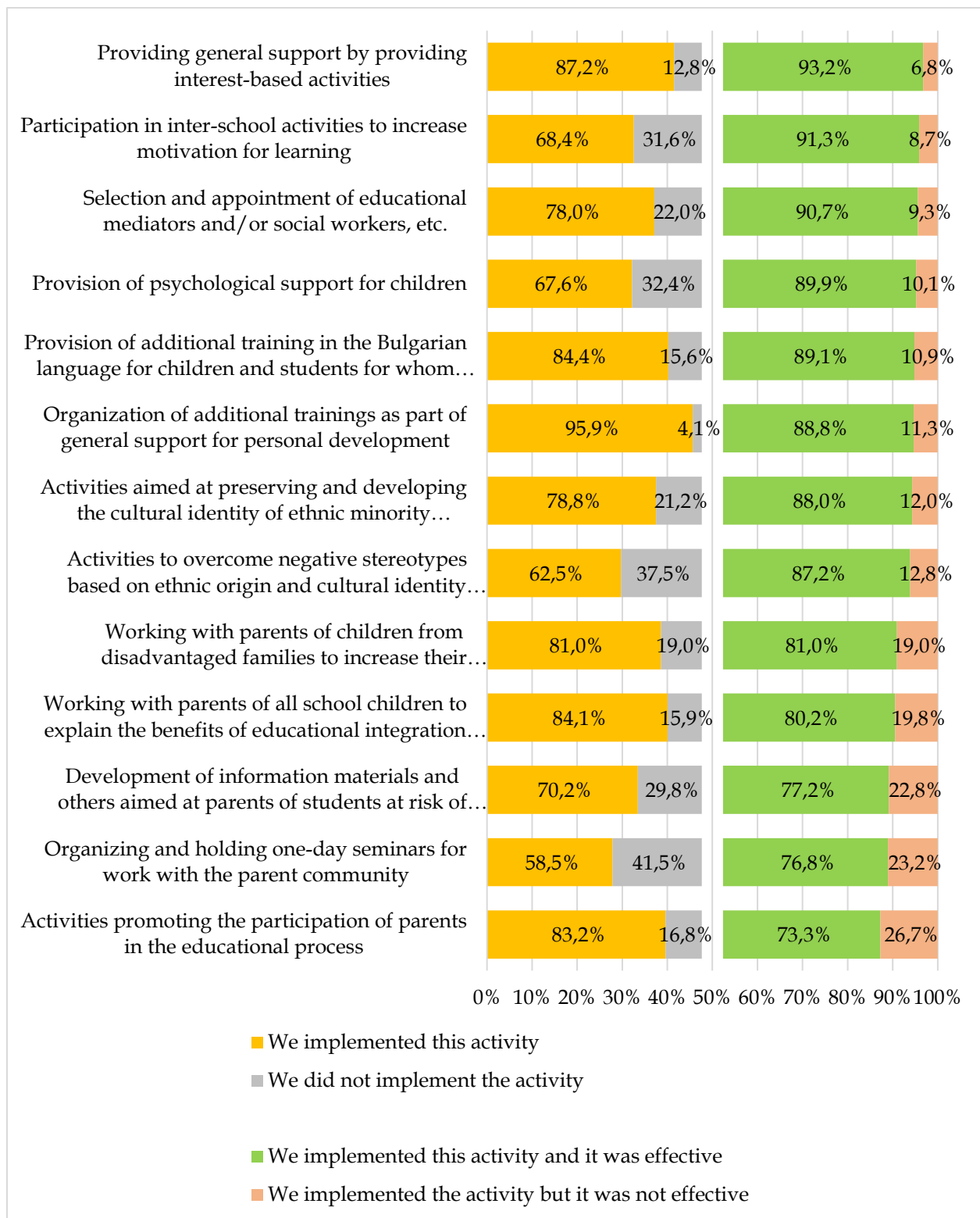
For the answer to this evaluation question, data related to the implementation of procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021 - 2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education - Component 1”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” and procedures implemented under the CLLD Approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas” were analysed.

Research among teachers who are in educational institutions that have participated in the implementation of the procedures within the scope of this evaluation explores the effectiveness of the activities carried out in support of interaction in a multicultural educational environment and interscholastic activities, with a view to integrating students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the education system.

The implementation of the different activities varied, although in almost all procedures aimed at school education all activities of this group were eligible. The most widespread are activities aimed at additional training and additional activities, while slightly less common are activities aimed at working with parents and overcoming negative stereotypes. There are no significant differences between schemes in terms of the level of implementation of each of these activities.

A survey among teachers shows that the most effective activities to support interaction in a multicultural educational environment are **“interest activities”**, participation in **“interscholastic activities to increase motivation”**, **“appointment of mediators”**, **“providing psychological support for children”** and **“providing additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom the Bulgarian language is not mother tongue”**. Participation in interscholastic activities and psychological support have been evaluated very often as effective, but the share of those performing two activities is just under 70 %. These data show that there is a need to develop additional activities for interscholastic partnerships, which will be the basis for students’ communication, exchange of good practices and development of joint projects, as they are assessed as very effective and their continuation and dissemination among the remaining 30 % who have not implemented them would have a positive impact. Psychological support for children from ethnic minorities was also carried out according to 67.6 % of teachers, with 89.9 % of them describing it as an effective measure for the integration of students from vulnerable groups. The provision of psychological support within the educational system is provided for in the legal framework and, as the results of the study show, the presence of psychologists to work with children and increase their motivation in partnership with educational mediators could significantly improve the integration of children and students from vulnerable groups.

*Figure 41. Activities implemented in support of interaction in a multicultural educational environment and interscholastic activities with a view to integrate students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the education system and assessing their effectiveness*



Source: Survey data of teachers in school education, main group of schools involved in the procedures

Provision of additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom Bulgarian is not their mother tongue was performed as an activity according to 84 % of teachers, with just over 89 % describing this activity as effective. The ones performing activities aimed at preserving and developing the

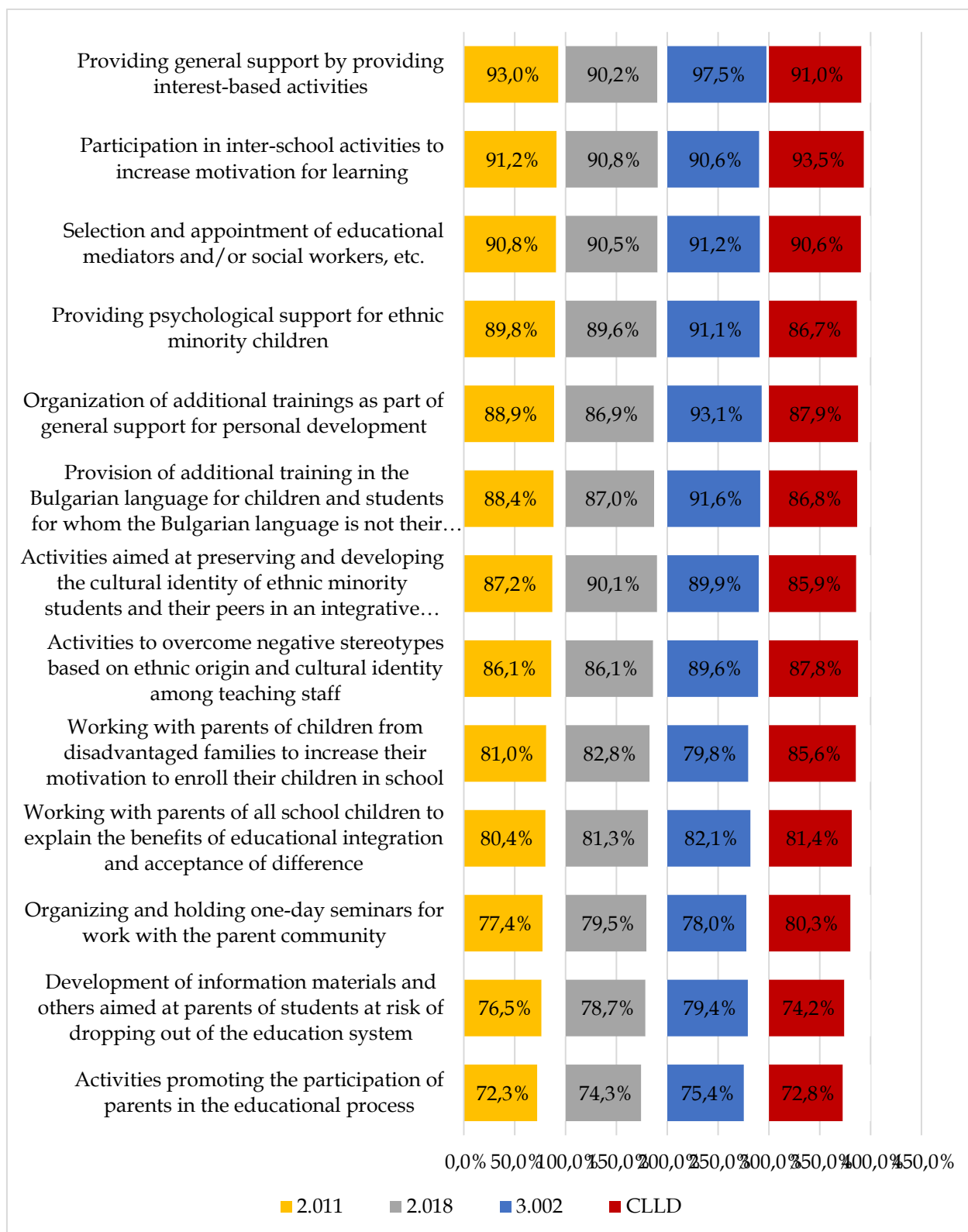


cultural identity of ethnic minorities students and their peers in an integrative multicultural educational environment also relatively categorically identify them as effective (88 %).

Evaluated with a high level of effectiveness are also the activities aimed at working with parents of all school children to explain the benefits of educational integration and acceptance of difference (80.2 %) and working with parents of children from disadvantaged families to increase their motivation to enrol their children in school (81 %). In total, about 19-20 % said that the activities aimed at working with parents were not effective. These measures, on the one hand, present a greater challenge for school authorities and, on the other hand, longer work is needed to achieve more meaningful and sustainable results. The results also show that it is necessary to develop additional capacity for working with parents from vulnerable groups, by improving the effectiveness of this type of activities and giving practical guidance on how to better work with parents to participate in the upbringing of children, their socialisation and increase their motivation for education of their children. **Working with parents is still a challenge for educators and further training is needed to acquire skills for these activities, as in most cases they do not develop within university courses and the basic training of educators for their implementation is weak. Part of these activities are important to be carried out together with mediators and other stakeholders at local level in order to have greater synergy and increasing the efficiency and results.**

The differences in teachers' assessments of the effectiveness of each of the activities, depending on their participation in the different procedures, are minimal. The reason for this is, in the first place, that schools are very often involved in more than one procedure, which makes it difficult to distinguish the contribution of each of them, while at the same time their opinions relate to the effectiveness of this activity, but are not linked to its implementation in a specific procedure. As far as there are differences, they are rarely more than 5-6 percentage points, which, against the background of the high proportion of teachers who assess individual activities as effective and where there is a statistical error in the evaluations, demonstrates rather similarities in the evaluations of scheme activities.

*Figure 42 Activities that helped effectively integrate students from vulnerable groups by procedures*



Source: Survey data of teachers and other pedagogical specialists in school education, main group of schools involved in the procedures

**However, as far as there are some differences and accumulations, we can note that teachers who indicate that their school has participated in projects under procedure BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” more often define different activities as effective, for example, they rate the provision of additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom Bulgarian is not mother tongue as an effective measure. Among these, there is a relatively higher proportion of teachers who consider additional training as part of personal development support as effective, same as the evaluation of interest activities.**

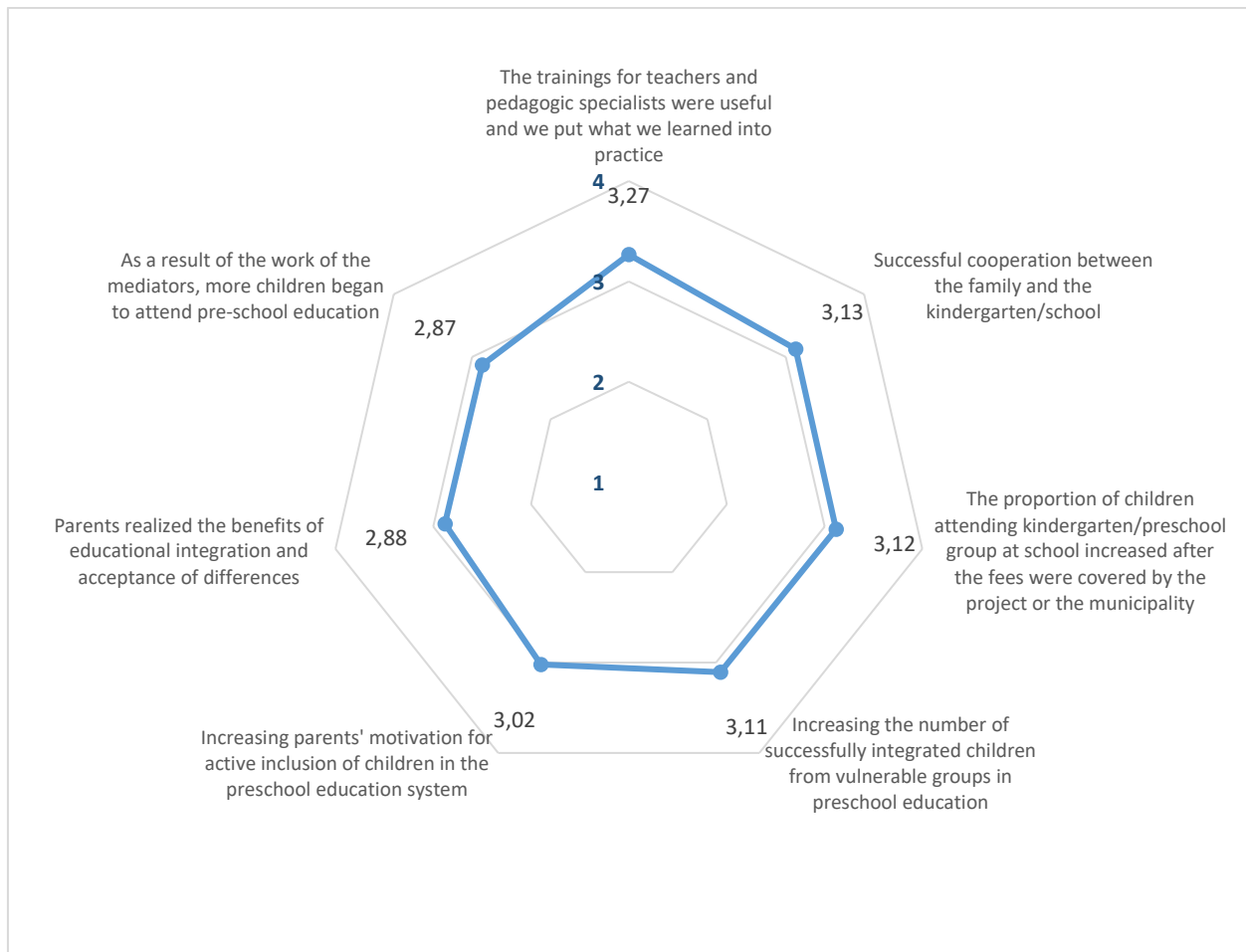
**The provision of psychological support for children from vulnerable groups and the provision of additional training for children for whom the Bulgarian language is not mother tongue have also been evaluated as more effective by pedagogical specialists who declare that their school has participated in projects under procedure BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”.**

The measures to create a motivating environment for students by engaging in interscholastic activities and involving parents in the inclusion of their children in the education system have been positively evaluated by teachers. The results of the study show that interscholastic activities were assessed in the vast majority of cases as contributing rather to a high and very high degree to creating a motivating and positive environment through interscholastic activities and initiatives (average score 3.11 on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 is “very low” and 4 is “very high”).

Similarly, the data obtained from specialists working in schools and kindergartens in the country highly appreciate the effectiveness of providing additional activities with children for whom the Bulgarian language is not mother tongue. With an average score of 3.27 (on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “very low” and 4 is “very high”), teachers indicate that additional trainings for mastering the official language, before entering first grade, have contributed to the achievement of the objective “Access to Education”. The mastery of Bulgarian language plays an essential role in the integration of students in the educational system and is one of the strong factors for preventing dropping out and overcoming the barriers to learning. The offering of subsequent support for integration without overcoming the deficits in the knowledge of the Bulgarian language loses its effectiveness, which clearly confirms the need to direct measures towards timely addressing the problem of Bulgarian language proficiency before entering the first grade. Thus, the educational process is secured and students are more integrated into school education.

As a result of the implementation of the activities in kindergartens to improve interaction with parents and other stakeholders, trainings for teachers and pedagogical specialists were most often carried out. These activities were assessed as useful and pedagogical specialists indicated that they had used what they had learned in practice (average score 3.27). Often, activities related to ensuring successful cooperation between the family and the kindergarten/school and this type of activities were also highly rated (average score 3.13). In a relatively large proportion of kindergartens, the proportion of children attending a kindergarten/pre-school group in school increased after the fees were covered by the project or the municipality (average score 3.12) and the number of successfully integrated children from vulnerable groups in pre-school education increased (average score 3.11). These kindergartens are most often found in small towns and villages in the country.

*Figure43. Which of the following have you achieved as a result of the implementation of the projects – “Interaction with parents and other stakeholders” strand*

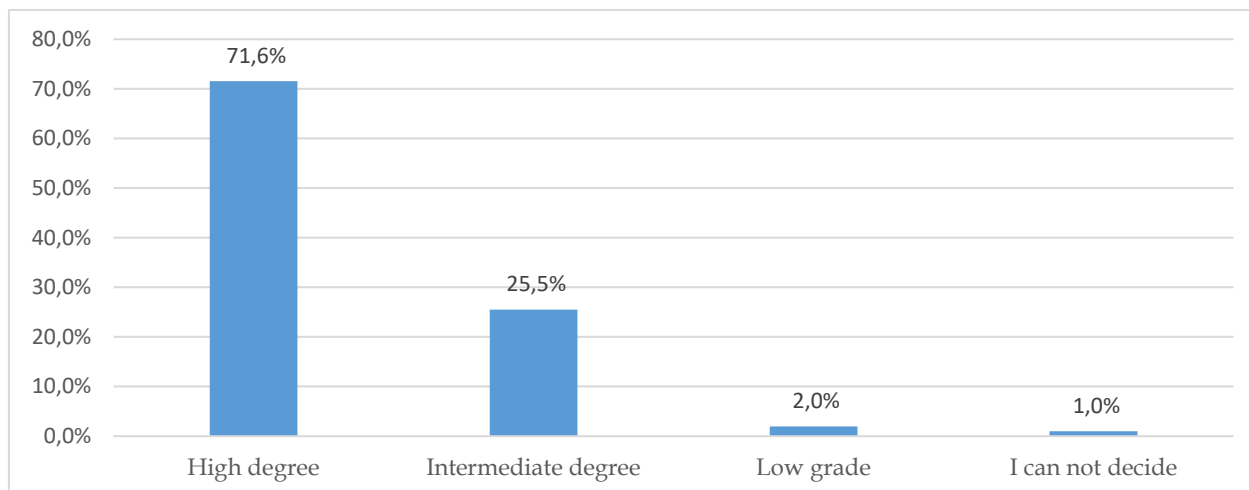


Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools involved in the procedures

Beneficiaries of projects implemented in the framework of the evaluated procedures assess to a high degree the impact of the project activities in support of the interaction in a multicultural educational environment (71.6 %) and of interscholastic activities for the integration of students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the education system (66 %). Respectively, 24.3 % - 25.5 % considered that the impact of the project activities supporting interaction in a multicultural educational environment and interscholastic activities was "medium degree" and only between 2 % and 3.9 % considered that the project activities had a low degree of impact.

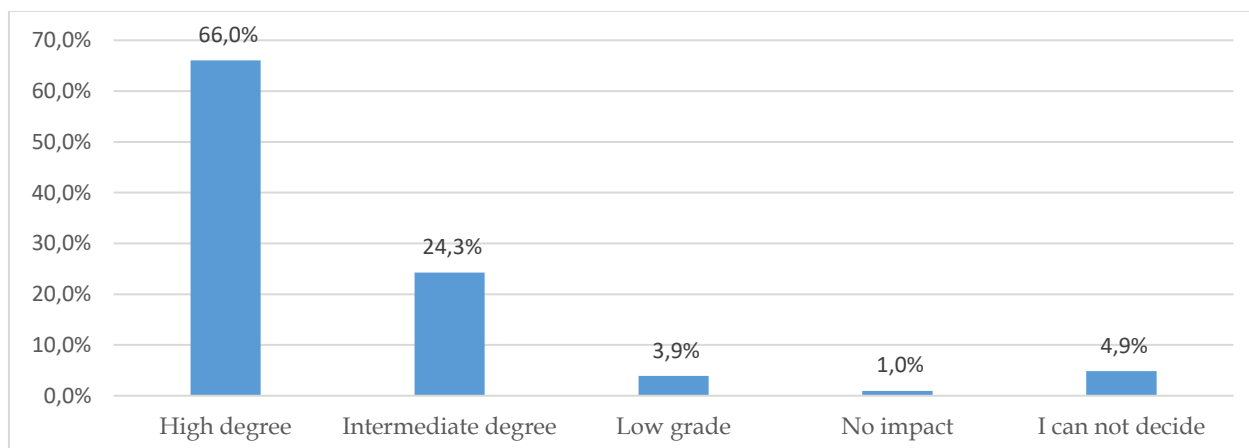
While interscholastic activities for the integration of students from marginalized groups, including Roma, in the education system are relatively more often considered to be low – the proportion of teachers who shared this opinion remains low at 3.9 %.

Figure44 Would you share your assessment of the impact of the project activities supporting interaction in a multicultural educational environment?



Source: survey among beneficiaries of projects under Priority Axis 3 "Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion" of Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020

Figure45 Would you share your assessment of the impact of the project activities supporting between school activities for the integration of students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the education system?



Source: survey among beneficiaries of projects under Priority Axis 3 "Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion" of Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020

The activities implemented in support of interaction in a multicultural educational environment and interscholastic activities with a view to integrating students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the education system have been assessed by pedagogical specialists and beneficiaries as effective to a high degree.

Activities to support interaction in a multicultural educational environment and interscholastic activities, with a view to integrating students from marginalized groups, including Roma, in the education system have largely contributed to creating a motivating and positive environment to promote students' achievements, competences and creative outcomes, in the opinion of pedagogical specialists.

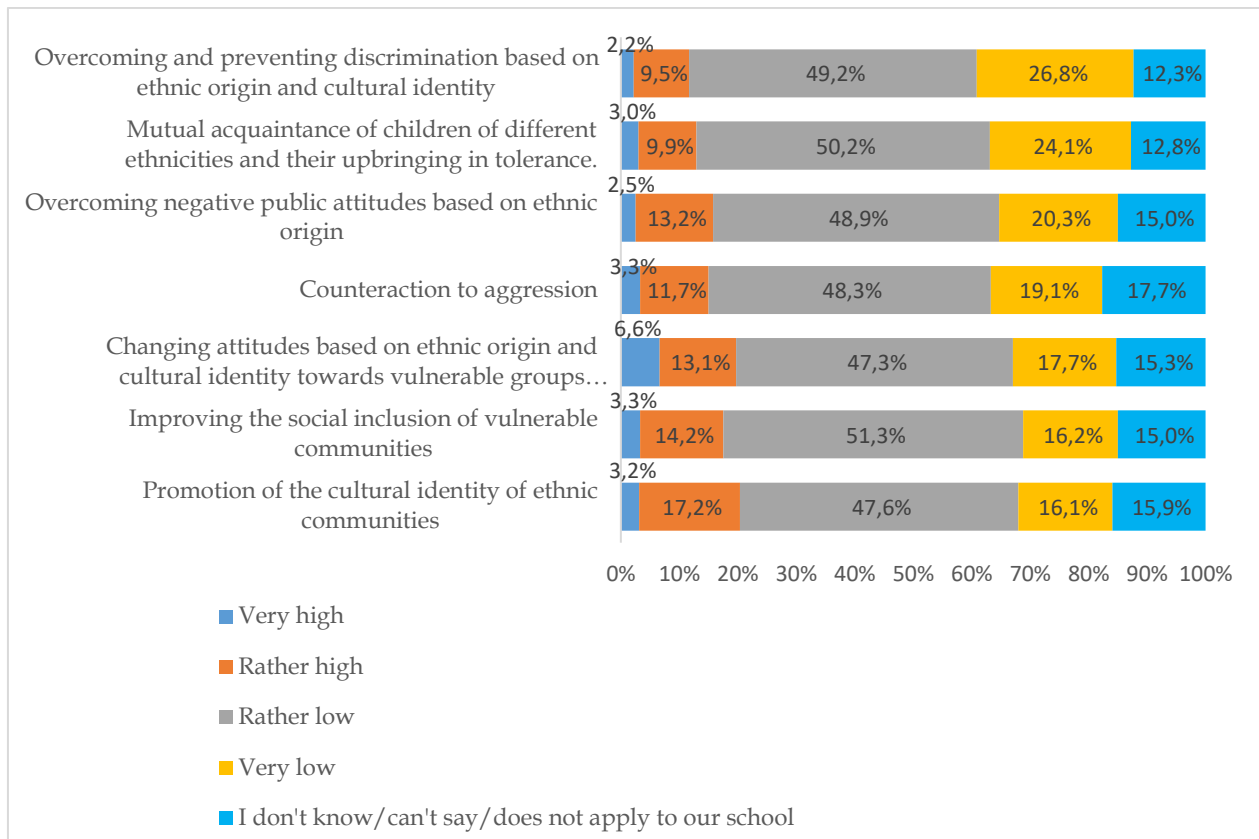
#### 4.2.2. Are attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity changing towards marginalized groups (including Roma) in the supported educational institutions in comparison to those who were not involved in PA 3 operations?

For the purpose of answering the present evaluation question, a survey was carried out among a main research group of teachers in schools participating in procedures under PA3 of OP SESG, a control group of teachers from similar profile schools, who have not participated in procedures, a main research group of parents of children from schools participating in the procedures, a control group of parents of children from similar profile schools, who have not participated in the procedures, and pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and pre-school education, who participated in procedures under PA3 of OP SESG. The analysis used data related to the following procedures: BG05M2OP001-2.011-0001 "Support for success" (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures for improving access to education", BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection", BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children", BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" and procedures under the CLLD approach.

#### Opinion of the pedagogical specialists

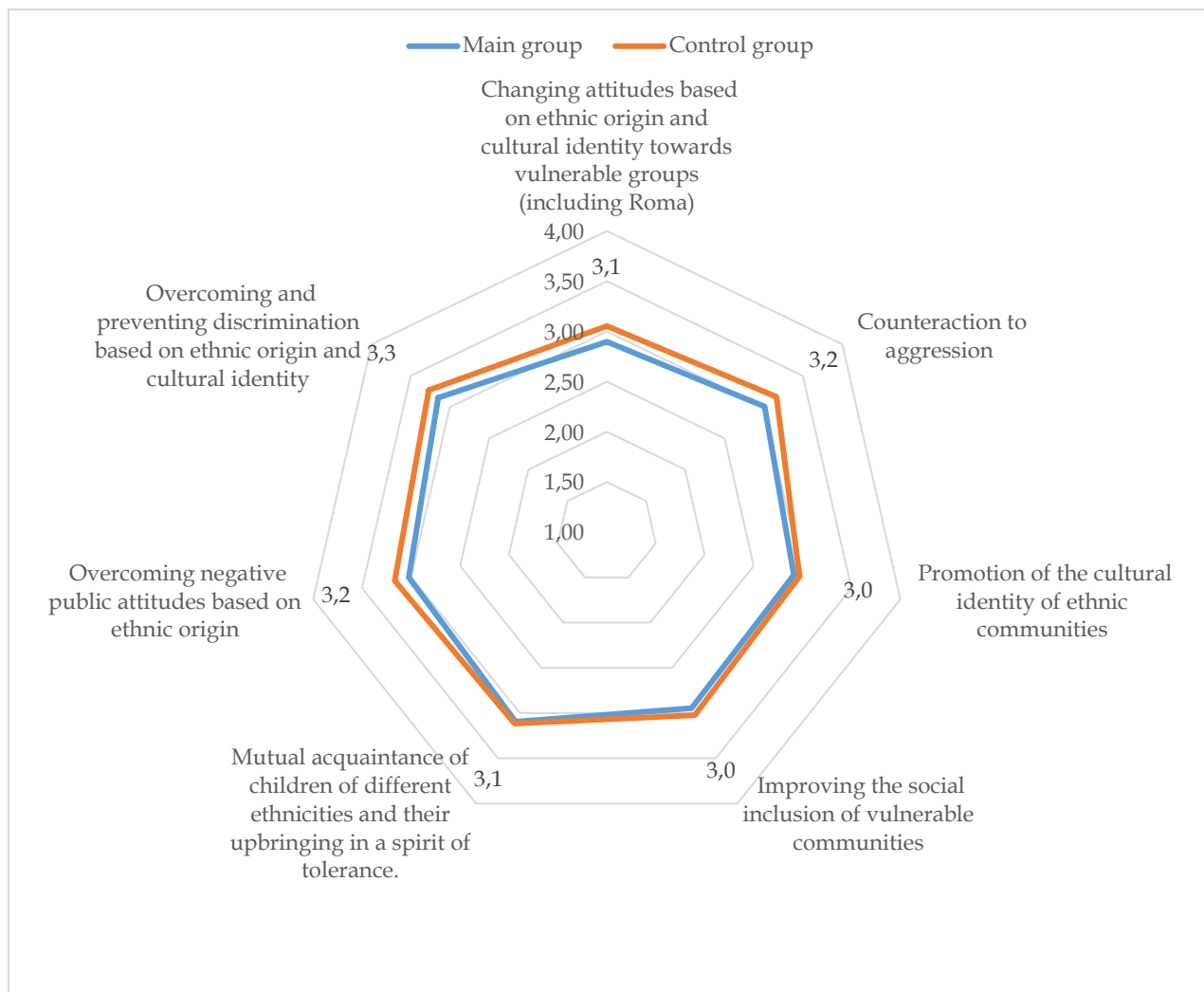
A total of 65 % of the interviewed **teachers from the main research group** associate the activities implemented under the projects with a change in attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma), 67.5 % believe that the implemented projects have contributed to improving the social inclusion of vulnerable communities, and 69.2 % believe that the activities implemented in the projects under the PA3 of OP SESG have contributed to overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin. The largest share of teachers agree that the projects implemented have contributed to overcoming and non-discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity (76 %) and mutual familiarization of children from different ethnicities and educating them in a spirit of tolerance (74.3 %).

*Figure 46. Which of the following have you achieved as a result of the implementation of the projects – the "Tolerance and Overcoming Discrimination" strand*



Source: Survey among teachers from the main group of schools involved in the procedures

Figure47 Comparison between the views of primary and control school teachers on changes in attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity in relation to marginalized groups (including Roma)



Source: Study among teachers from primary and control groups of schools

\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'Very Low' and 4 'Very High'

The survey among teachers from the main and control groups of schools showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of their evaluation of attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma). This shows that, although they were not included in projects under the evaluated procedures, the schools in the control group assessed similarly the achievements in terms of changing attitudes based on the ethnic origin and cultural identity of vulnerable groups (including Roma). These results may be due to both general equality and non-discrimination policies and other projects implemented within the education system.

The opinion of teachers according to their participation in projects from different procedures does not differ significantly. However, we can identify a few more significant differences:

- **The schools involved in procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" - Component 1, have achieved the highest degree of counteracting aggression.**
- **Mutual acquaintance of children of different ethnicities and their upbringing in a spirit of tolerance was achieved to the highest degree in procedure BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational**



integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection" and procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" – Component 1.

- Overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin achieves the highest score in schools participating in procedure BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection".
- The schools involved in the CLLD approach are the most attesting to achievements in overcoming and preventing discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity.

Table 41 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG have contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?(average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'very low' and 4 'very high')

Activities funded under OP SESG	2.011	2.018	3.002	CLLD
Changing attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma)	2,89	3,01	3,01	2,93
Counteraction to aggression	3,00	3,07	3,04	2,98
Promotion of the cultural identity of ethnic communities	2,91	3,02	3,00	2,95
Improving the social inclusion of vulnerable communities	2,95	3,02	3,02	3,01
Mutual acquaintance of children of different ethnicities and their upbringing in a spirit of tolerance.	3,10	3,15	3,21	3,17
Overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin	3,03	3,07	3,14	3,06
Overcoming and preventing discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity	3,16	3,16	3,18	3,21

Source: Survey among teachers from the main group of schools involved in the procedures

Table 42 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?

Activities funded under OP SESG	Degree	2.011	2.018	3.002	CLLD
		COL %	COL %	COL %	COL %
Changing attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma)	To a very low degree	7.9 %	5.3 %	4.5 %	9.5 %
	Rather to a low degree	15.8 %	14.0 %	17.1 %	13.5 %
	Rather, to a high degree	55.6 %	55.0 %	51.8 %	51.6 %
	To a very high degree	20.7 %	25.7 %	26.6 %	25.4 %
	To a very low degree	4.0 %	3.1 %	2.0 %	7.4 %

<b>Counteraction to aggression</b>	Rather to a low degree	15.0 %	11.1 %	17.7 %	13.1 %
	Rather, to a high degree	57.6 %	61.7 %	54.5 %	53.3 %
	To a very high degree	23.3 %	24.1 %	25.8 %	26.2 %
<b>Promotion of the cultural identity of ethnic communities</b>	To a very low degree	3.8 %	2.3 %	2.4 %	6.6 %
	Rather to a low degree	21.5 %	12.9 %	20.9 %	16.5 %
	Rather, to a high degree	55.2 %	65.5 %	51.5 %	52.1 %
	To a very high degree	19.6 %	19.3 %	25.2 %	24.8 %
<b>Improving the social inclusion of vulnerable communities</b>	To a very low degree	4.1 %	1.8 %	2.4 %	5.4 %
	Rather to a low degree	16.7 %	14.7 %	19.2 %	14.7 %
	Rather, to a high degree	59.5 %	63.5 %	52.4 %	53.5 %
	To a very high degree	19.6 %	20.0 %	26.0 %	26.4 %
<b>Mutual acquaintance of children of different ethnicities and their upbringing in a spirit of tolerance</b>	To a very low degree	3.4 %	3.6 %	1.4 %	3.8 %
	Rather to a low degree	11.8 %	8.3 %	11.7 %	9.2 %
	Rather, to a high degree	56.5 %	57.4 %	50.9 %	53.4 %
	To a very high degree	28.3 %	30.8 %	36.0 %	33.6 %
<b>Overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin</b>	To a very low degree	2.9 %	2.9 %	1.0 %	3.1 %
	Rather to a low degree	15.9 %	11.0 %	16.2 %	17.3 %
	Rather, to a high degree	56.3 %	62.4 %	51.0 %	50.4 %
	To a very high degree	24.8 %	23.7 %	31.9 %	29.1 %
<b>Overcoming and preventing discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity</b>	To a very low degree	2.4 %	2.9 %	1.4 %	3.8 %
	Rather to a low degree	10.8 %	7.6 %	12.4 %	10.8 %
	Rather, to a high degree	55.5 %	59.6 %	52.9 %	46.2 %
	To a very high degree	31.3 %	29.8 %	33.3 %	39.2 %

Source: Survey among teachers from the main group of schools involved in the procedures

Activities aimed at preserving and developing the cultural identity of students from ethnic minorities and their peers in an integrational multicultural educational environment have had a positive effect on the effective integration of students from vulnerable groups (including Roma). This view is shared by about 60 % of the teachers interviewed. This type of activity was carried out, but did not achieve an effect according to only 9 % of the teachers surveyed. Among approximately one third of the teachers who took part in the survey, they reported that this type of activity had not been performed. Meaning that, where the activity is performed, it achieves efficiency according to about 87 % of teachers.

**The highest impact in terms of activities aimed at preserving and developing the cultural identity of students from ethnic minorities and their peers in an integration multicultural educational environment is registered in schools that have carried out activities under projects funded under the Programme: BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to**

improve access to education" (90.1 %) and BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection" (89.9 %). The effectiveness of the activity is reported in 87.2 % of the schools that carried out activities under project BG05M20P001-2.011-0001 "Support for success", as well as among almost 86 % of schools that carried out activities under the CLLD approach "Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas". However, to a large extent, despite these small differences, we can say that all four procedures achieve relatively similar high results in this direction.

Actions to overcome negative stereotypes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity among pedagogical specialists have had a positive impact on the effective integration of students from vulnerable groups (including Roma) according to about 87 % of teachers who performed this type of activities and assessed them as effective. The activity was carried out but had no effect according to only 13 % of teachers.

The greatest impact in terms of activities aimed at overcoming negative stereotypes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity, according to pedagogical specialists, is present in schools that have implemented activities under projects financed under OP SESG BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection" (89.6 %) and the CLLD approach "Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas" (87.8 %). Around the average level of impact of the activity are schools that have implemented activities under project BG05M20P001-2.011-0001 "Support for success" (86.1 %) and BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" (86.1 %). Again, the results show rather similar high evaluations of the implementation of the procedures.

#### Opinion of teachers in kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools

According to the data from a survey conducted among **pedagogical specialists in kindergartens** and pre-school groups in schools participating in procedures BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education", BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children", BG05M20P001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" and the CLLD approach "Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in difficultly accessible areas", BG05M20P001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" and the CLLD approach "Providing access to quality education in **small settlements and in difficultly accessible areas**", as a result of the implementation of activities under the projects, were successfully implemented in the implementation of the project activities.

The following achievements are highlighted as a result of the implementation of project activities:

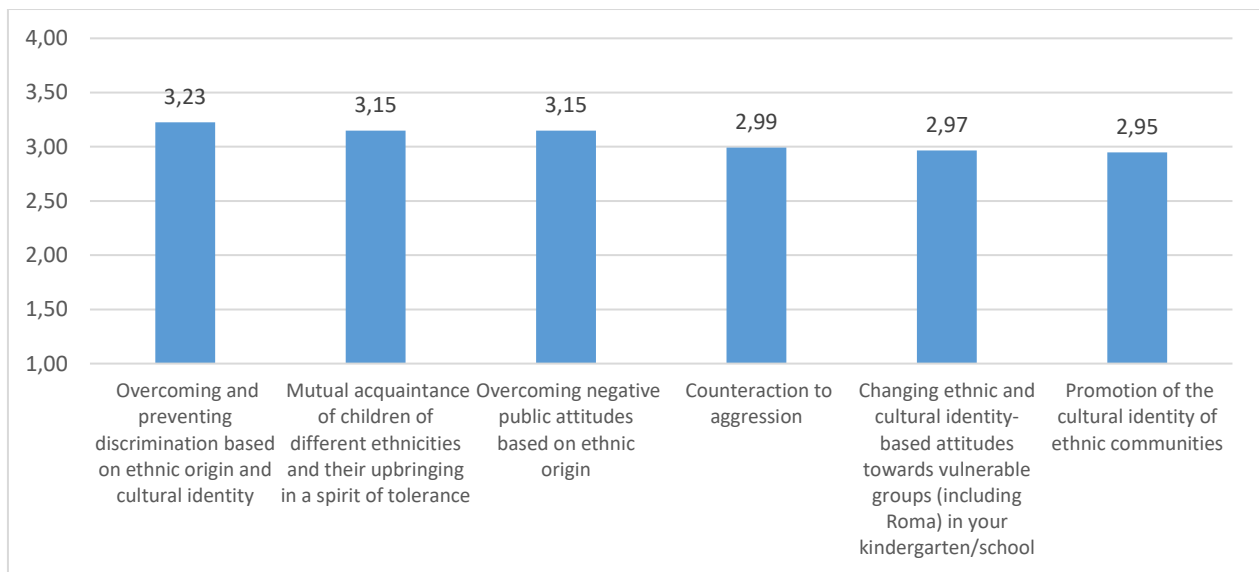
- **Overcoming and preventing discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity** (24.3 % "very high"; 73.7 % cumulative share "very high" and "rather to a high degree");
- **Mutual acquaintance of children of different ethnicities and their upbringing in a spirit of tolerance** (22 % "very high" rating; 71.2 % cumulative share "very high" and "rather to a high degree");
- **Overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin** (21.5 % "very high" rating; 69.8 % cumulative share "very high" and "rather to a high degree");
- **Changing attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma) in kindergarten/school** (15 % "very high" rating; 65.3 % cumulative share "very high" and "rather to a high degree").

The lowest positive assessments regarding their successful implementation are the promotion of the cultural identity of ethnic communities and counteracting aggression:

- **Promotion of the cultural identity of ethnic communities** (12.5 % 'very high'); 60.5 % cumulative share "very high" and "rather to a high degree");
- **Counteraction to aggression** (15.2 % 'very high'; 45.1 % cumulative share "very high" and "rather to a high degree").

The opinion of pedagogical specialists on the achieved goals is moderately positive. According to them, they were implemented to a high degree (estimates between 2.95 and 3.23 on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is very low and 4 is very high). The activities were best able to overcome or prevent discrimination (3.23), contributed to mutual acquaintance of children of different ethnicities (3.15) and helped to overcome negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin (3.15). The remaining goals, although slightly behind, also received high estimates (around the position "to a high degree").

Figure 48 Which of the following have happened in your school/ kindergarden as a result of the implementation of the project/ projects activities?



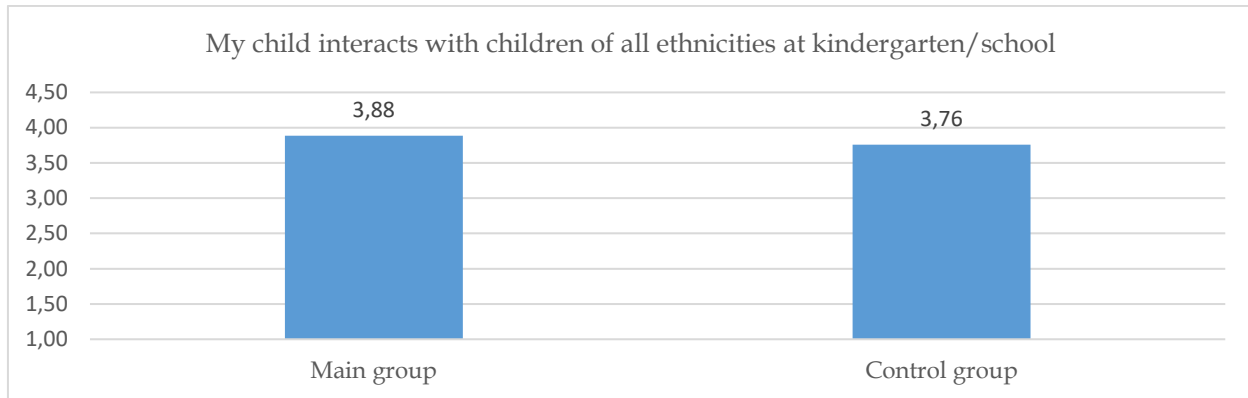
Source: Survey among pedagogical specialists in kindergardens and schools (pre-school education) from the main group, involved in the procedures educational institutions

\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'very low' and 4 'very high'

### Parents' opinion

Parents' opinion shows that in their opinion their children interact with their peers of all ethnicities. This opinion is shared by a large proportion of parents interviewed from the main group, and the average score is very close to the peak of the scale (3.83). The rating of parents out of the control group was lower (3.76).

Figure 49 Interaction of children with their peers from different ethnicities



Source: Survey among parents from the main group of schools involved in the procedures and control group schools

\*A scale from 1 to 4 is used, where 1 is "very low" and 4 is "very high"

According to a survey conducted **among parents of children from schools involved in the procedures**, the question "In which of the following activities organized by your child's school did you or your child take part?", in 13 % of the cases, parents indicated that schools organized cultural activities and holidays dedicated to the cultures of all ethnic minorities. In approximately 8 % of the cases, parents reported that teachers had spoken to parents of all students to explain to them that it was important to get along with people of all ethnicities.

Such discussions have also been held in schools that have not participated in the procedures, as they are part of the general methods of educational integration and their implementation is a common practice and is also used outside projects under OP SESG.

Compared to parents of students who study in schools having participated in procedures under PA3, parents of children from schools who have not participated in the procedures under PA3 of OP SESG, less often declare that there have been talks between parents and teachers on topics related to tolerance and understanding between all ethnicities.

The majority of parents of students from schools which participated in project activities funded under the evaluated procedures are adamant that their children communicate with their peers of all ethnicities at school. The highest categorality is reported among parents of children whose families are mainly spoken Roma language.

No significant differences were recorded in comparison of attitudes among parents of school-age children in schools participating in the projects and among the control group of parents of children from schools who did not participate in the procedures. **However, overall, the proportion of parents who consider that their children communicate with their peers of all school ethnicities is slightly higher among parents of children from schools who participated in the procedures evaluated than among the control group of parents of children from schools who did not participate in the procedures.**

Table 43 To what extent do the following statements apply to you or your child: "My child interacts with children of all ethnicities at school"

To what extent do the following statements apply to you or your child: "My child communicates with children of all ethnicities at school"	They don't agree at all	Rather, they disagree	Rather agree	Fully agree	They cannot decide

<b>Parents of school-age children in participating schools (main group)</b>	0.2 %	2.6 %	10.3 %	80.9 %	6.1 %
<b>Control group of parents of children from schools who have not participated in the procedures (control group)</b>	0.0 %	2.4 %	18.6 %	76.3 %	2.8 %

*Source: Data from a survey of parents of school-age children in schools participating in the projects and among a control group of parents of children from schools which did not participate in the procedures*

Among schools that have not participated in project activities under the evaluated procedures, there is also a high degree of motivation to overcome negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin, as well as to promote the cultural identity of ethnic communities. According to the survey conducted among the control group of teachers in schools who did not participate in procedures, approximately 80 % over the past 7 years have managed to implement activities to promote tolerance and overcome discrimination.

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Data from the survey among parents of children and students from vulnerable groups and pedagogical specialists from schools and kindergartens participating in the procedures evaluated show that, in general, the activities carried out have succeeded, to a rather high or high degree, to contribute to a change in attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma), which also happened in educational institutions that did not participate in these operations. It means that the system of pre-school and school education manages to address the problems identified in a similar manner, regardless of whether the institution concerned is involved in a project under the procedures evaluated or not and implement the related national and local policies, allocating different resources to achieve similar objectives.

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#### 4.2.3. Are the attitudes towards education of the parents of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma, changing compared to those who were not part of the operations?

This evaluation question largely overlaps with question 4.5.2 in the part: Impact of procedures on the attitude of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma, to the educational process.

However, some specificities are also highlighted in this section.

The analysis used data related to the following procedures: BG05M2OP001-2.011-0001 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001 -2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and procedures under the CLLD approach.

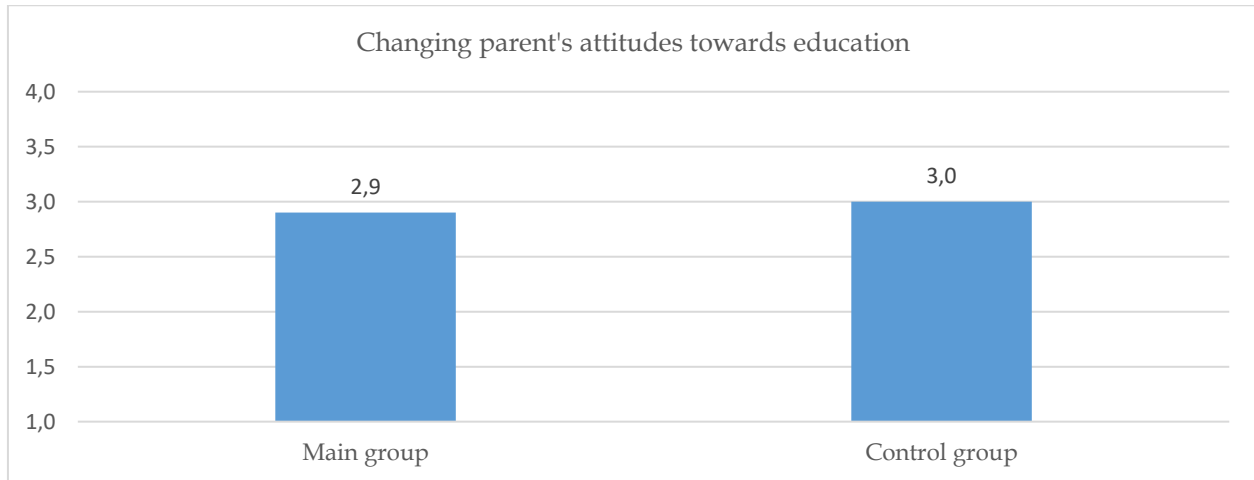
For the purpose of answering the present evaluation question, a survey was carried out among a main group of teachers in schools participating in procedures under PA3 of OP SESG, a control group of teachers from schools who did not participate in procedures, a main group of parents of children from schools participating in the procedures, a control group of parents of children from schools who did not participate

in the procedures and pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and pre-school education, who participated in procedures under PA3 of the Programme. The study covers the following target groups and presents an analysis of the results recorded:

### School education

There is no significant difference in the opinion of teachers from the main and the control groups of schools regarding the change in attitudes towards education. Both groups believe “to a high extent” that education is important.

Figure 50 Which of the following have happened in your school as a result of the implementation of project/ projects activities?

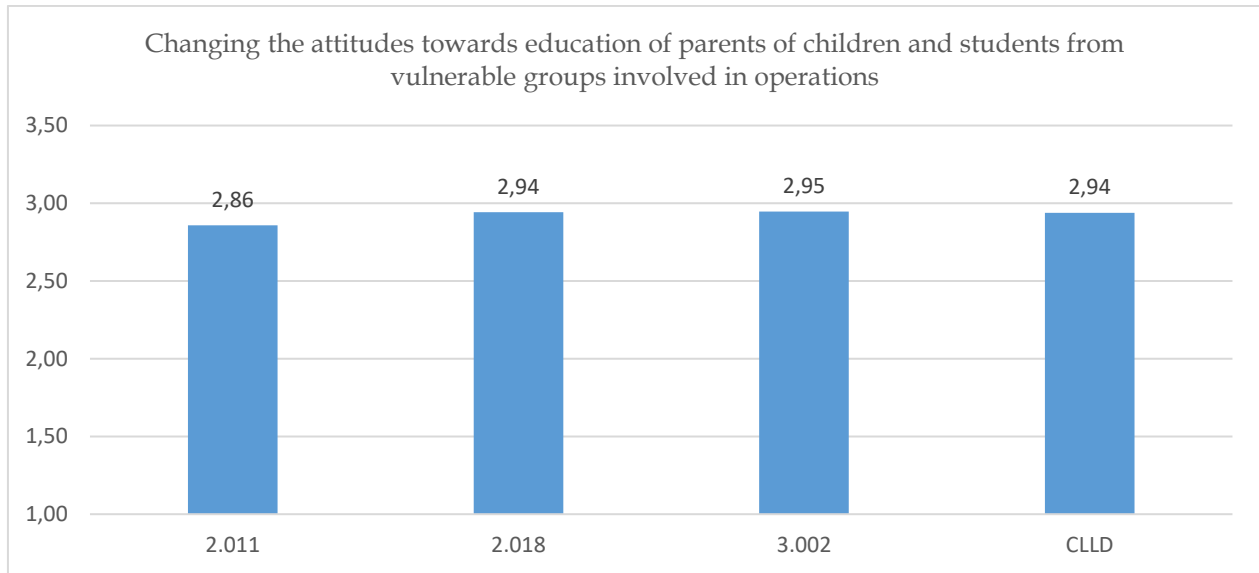


Source: Survey among teachers from the main group of schools involved in the procedures

\*A scale from 1 to 4 is used, where 1 is “very low” and 4 is “very high”

There are no differences of opinion among teachers depending on which of the procedures the school is involved in. Teachers who teach students from vulnerable groups in schools who have participated in the project under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” indicate to a lesser extent a change in attitudes of parents. The reason for this is that about 40 % of the schools in this project are schools with a lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups (Annex No 2 of Order RD09-1396 of 9 July 2021), which is why the intensity of the change, respectively of the assessments, is lower.

Figure51 Which of the following have happened in your school as a result of the implementation of project/ projects activities?



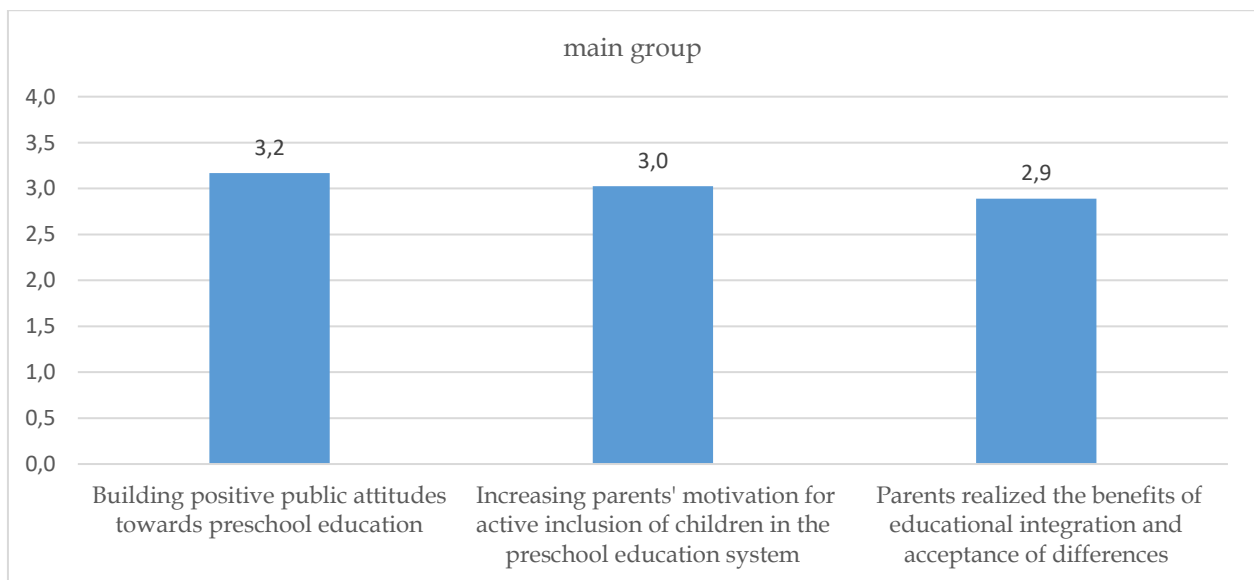
Source: Survey among teachers from the main group of schools involved in the procedures

\*A scale from 1 to 4 is used, where 1 is "very low" and 4 is "very high"

### Pre-school education

Pedagogical specialists in kindergartens also give moderately high estimates of the changes they observe in parents' attitudes. They are concentrated about 3 on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is "very low" and 4 is "very high". This corresponds to a "high" opinion. These assessments show that pedagogical specialists take into account the changes in parents' attitudes and believe that they have a positive impact on the inclusion of children in the educational system.

Figure52 Which of the following have happened in your school/ kindergarten as a result of the implementation of the project/ projects activities?



Source: Survey among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) from the main group educational institutions involved in the procedures

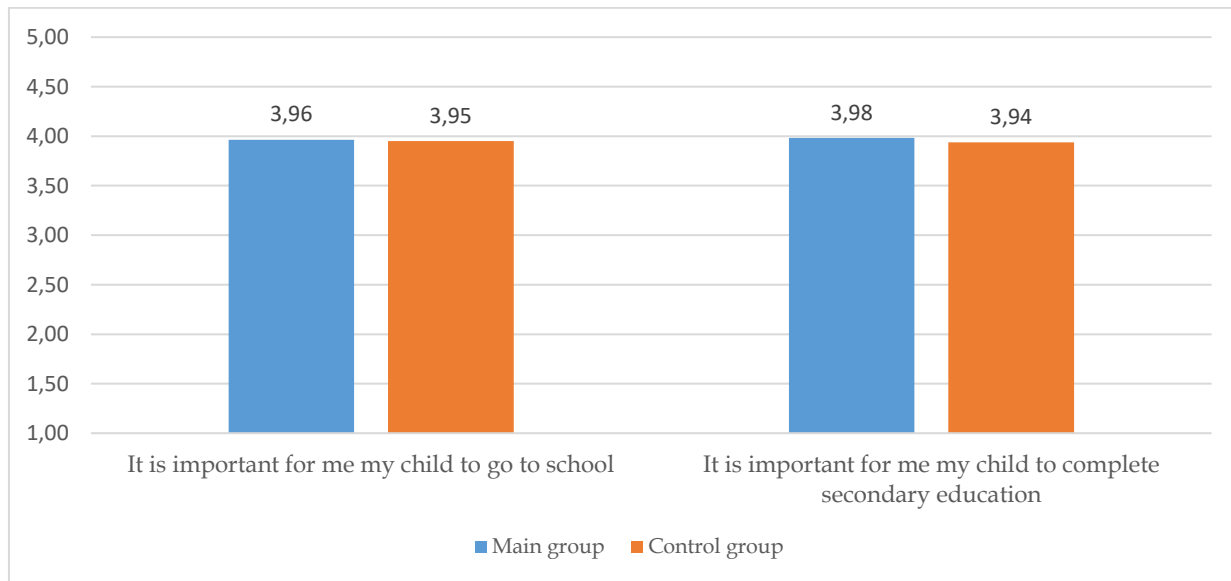


\*A scale from 1 to 4 is used, where 1 is "very low" and 4 is "very high"

### Parents

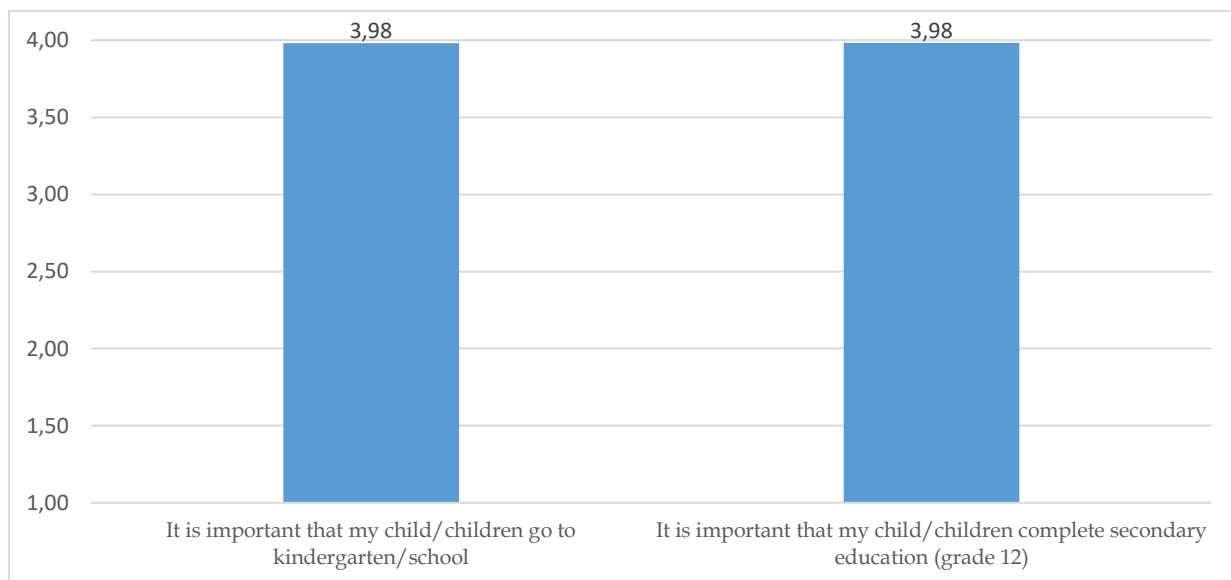
The differences in opinion of parents from the main and control groups of schools are negligible and practically have no practical impact. For both groups, it is important that their children go to school and complete secondary education. There are similar opinions among parents of children in kindergartens and preschool groups in schools.

Figure53 To what extent do the following statements apply to you:



Source: Survey among parents from the main group of schools involved in the procedures and control group schools

Figure54 To what extent do the following statements apply to you:



Source: Survey among parents in kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) from the main group of educational institutions involved in the procedures

According to the data from the survey conducted among parents of school-age children studying in schools **participating in projects under the procedures BG05M20P001-3.002, BG05M9OP001-2.018, BG05M2OP001-2.011 and procedures under the CLLD approach, all parents are adamant that it is most important for them that their children complete secondary education (12th grade), as well as to go to school.** These are top priorities for virtually every parent, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, profession or income.

Overall, the data confirm that efforts to increase the motivation of parents, especially from marginalized groups, including Roma, for the **active inclusion of their children in the education system are working.** The same applies to activities aimed at **motivating and encouraging positive attitudes towards education** among parents of children and students from vulnerable groups involved in operations.

When comparing the data between parents of students studying in schools participating in projects under the procedures evaluated and the control group of parents of children from schools who have not participated in the procedures, the following is established:

- For both the main and control group of parents, it is important that the child completes secondary education (12th grade) and goes to school;
- Among the parents of students, both in schools participating in the procedures evaluated and among parents whose children are studying in schools that did not participate, there is a similar proportion of those who share the view that their children's desire to go to school has increased in recent years.

**In general, it is evident that the registered assessments have extremely high values and the differences between grades among parents from schools covered by the procedures evaluated and among parents of school students who did not participate in the procedures are negligible. For every parent, it is important that his/ her child completes secondary education (12th grade), is motivated to learn and attend school. These are fundamental values for each parent and basic principles in the work of each pedagogical specialist, which is why it would not be possible to highlight a tangible difference as a result of the impact of procedures under PA3 of OP SESG. While there is no difference between the main and control groups, these results show that a transformation has taken place in the educational system and parents from vulnerable groups have become more motivated to send their children to school, although they have not yet been able to fully achieve results in regular self-training and a sensitive and lasting increase in educational outcomes.**

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The activities carried out contribute to a high degree to increasing attitudes towards the importance of education for the children among the parents of children and students from marginalized groups involved in operations and play an essential role in increasing the motivation of children and students themselves to participate in the educational process. A similar high degree of motivation of parents, children and students to participate in the educational process is observed in the control group, as similar processes take place in the uncovered schools, either due to the implementation of other activities, or due to the adoption and implementation of the overall national policy on the enrollment of children at school and the implementation of the Mechanism for joint work of institutions on enrollment and inclusion in the education system of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age.

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#### 4.2.4. Are the attitudes towards future labour market realization of students from marginalized groups covered by PA3 operations changing?

This issue has been addressed in detail in responding evaluation question 4.5.2. (sixth, last sub-point): Impact of procedures on the attitude towards professional realization of children and students from the marginalized groups, including Roma.

The attitudes towards professional realization of students from vulnerable groups change to a moderate extent according to the opinion of teachers in schools participating in the procedures evaluated. According to data from the survey among parents – a high level of desire for professional realization has been achieved among students after completing secondary education, as well as claiming to a high degree that students have received information about where and how they can work after completing secondary education.

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It can be assumed that according to the opinion of teachers to a moderate degree, and according to the opinion of parents to a high degree, the attitude towards professional realization of students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved.

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#### 4.3. Improving the qualification of teachers and pedagogical specialists in the educational system to work in a multicultural environment

The answers of the group of evaluation questions under 4.3 are based on a survey of a total of 794 pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists having received trainings in the framework of the evaluated grant procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”, funded under the OP SESG.

The profile of the educational institutions out of which representatives are included in the survey is presented in the table below.

Due to the fact that no specific identification is available in the micro data provided to enable pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists to be identified, the survey was conducted among all individuals included in the micro data. The survey concluded with only 3 surveys filled in by educational mediators, which was insufficient for the purposes of statistical summaries and for this reason they have not been analyzed.

Table 44 Profile of educational institutions out of which representatives are included in the survey

<b>Educational institution</b>	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>16.5 %</b>
	Primary school	3.3 %
	School (1st to 10th grade)	7.4 %
	Primary school	29.9 %
	Secondary school	27.7 %
	Vocational high school	13.2 %
	Profiled high school	2.0 %
<b>Administrative</b>	Burgas	18.5 %
	Sofia (capital)	9.6 %
	Ruse	9.1 %
	Pazardzhik	8.4 %

district	Pleven	7.8 %
	Sofia region	6.5 %
	Vratsa	5.7 %
	Plovdiv	5.2 %
	Kardzhali	5.0 %
	Silistra	3.9 %
	Blagoevgrad	3.7 %
	Stara Zagora	3.4 %
	Montana	2.9 %
	Sliven	2.6 %
	Lovech	2.1 %
	Targovishte	1.3 %
	Veliko Tarnovo	1.0 %
	Vidin	1.0 %
	Pernik	1.0 %
	Varna	0.8 %
	Gabrovo	0.5 %
Type of settlement	Capital	9.6 %
	District city	28.7 %
	Small town	38.1 %
	Village	23.6 %

The figure below presents the profile of schools/ kindergartens in relation to the share of children/ students whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian. In 57.3 % of the schools and kindergartens included in the scope of the survey, the proportion of children and students whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian is over 50 %. In 15.3 % of the schools and kindergartens, the share of these children is between 25 % and 50 %, 11.2 % falls in the range between 5 % and 25 %, and in 16.3 % of the schools and kindergartens the share of children and students whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian is up to 5 %.

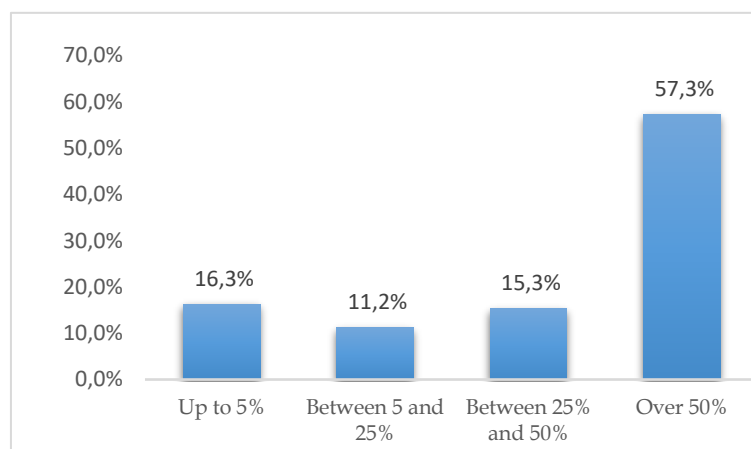


Figure 55. Share of children/ students whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian, from kindergartens/schools included in trainings under project BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” and involved in this study

Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

The pedagogical specialists who participated in this survey are: directors (7.4 %), deputy directors (4.3 %), teachers (27.8 %), head teachers (2.8 %), senior teachers (45.7 %), educators (4.1 %), child teachers (4.6 %), resource teachers (2.0 %), ICT managers (0.5 %) and pedagogical advisers (0.8 %).

The share of women among these pedagogical specialists is 90.3 % and of men 9.7 %. The highest shares of pedagogical specialists fall into the age categories 50-59 (37.2 %) and 40-49 years (32.2 %). The study also involved younger pedagogical specialists – up to 29 years old (3.3 %), 30-39 years old (14.4 %) and older teachers aged 60 years and older (12.9 %).

Teachers and pedagogical specialists with diverse experience are covered – with experience of less than 5 years (12.7 %), between 5 and 10 years (17.0 %), between 11 and 20 years (19.5 %), with the highest share of specialists - with experience of more than 20 years (50.9 %).

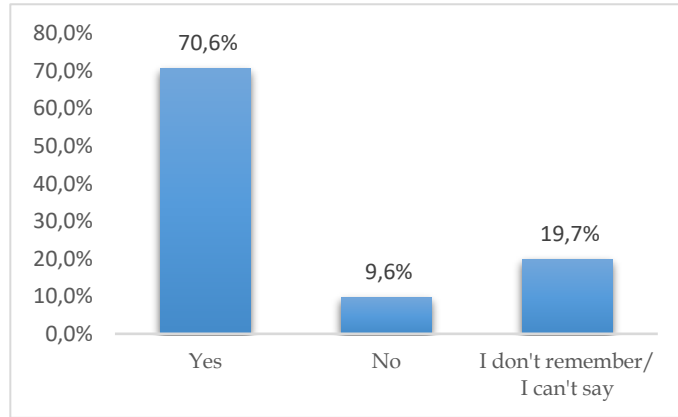
Table45 Profile of survey respondents

Position taken	Director	7.4 %
	Deputy Director	4.3 %
	Teacher	27.8 %
	Head teacher	2.8 %
	Senior teacher	45.7 %
	Educator	4.1 %
	Child teacher	4.6 %
	Resource teacher	2.0 %
	ICT manager	0.5 %
	Pedagogical advisor	0.8 %
Gender	Man	9.7 %
	Woman	90.3 %
Age	Up to 29 years	3.3 %
	30-39 years	14.4 %
	40-49 years	32.2 %
	50-59 years	37.2 %
	60 years and older	12.9 %
Experience	Less than 5 years	12.7 %
	Between 5 and 10 years	17.0 %
	Between 11 and 20 years	19.5 %
	Over 20 years	50.9 %

#### 4.3.1. Are the themes for training of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators, adequate to the needs identified in the Programme?

The study of the adequacy of the training topics implies an analysis of whether consultations, conversations and surveys were held in schools and kindergartens before conducting trainings to work in multicultural environments in order to identify the main problems that pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists encounter in their daily work. Evident from the data presented in the figure below, 70.6 % of respondents indicated that they had been involved in preliminary consultations, conversations and surveys. This approach has made it possible to identify the needs of the target group and to address them directly through the topics of the proposed trainings in order to increase the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment.

Figure56 Before conducting the trainings for work in a multicultural environment in your school/kindergartens, were consultations/conversations/surveys carried out to identify the main problems that pedagogical professionals encounter in their daily work?



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

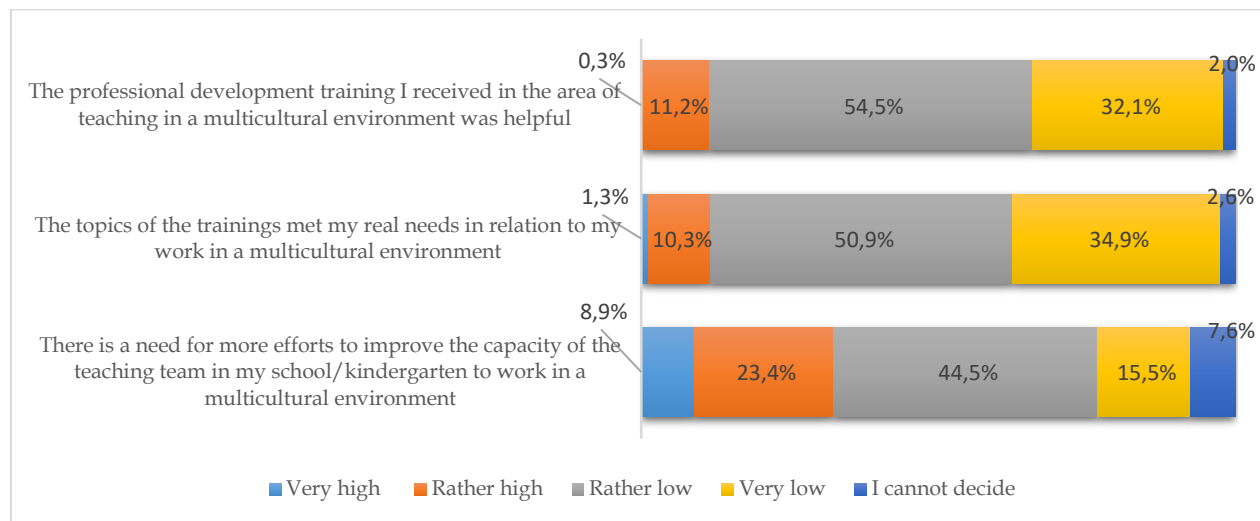
In terms of usefulness and how well they address the real needs, the analysis of the data obtained shows the following

The professional development trainings in the field of teaching in a multicultural environment were useful for a total of 86.6 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists and this usefulness was assessed "very high" by 32.1 % and "rather to a high degree" of 54.5 %. Only 11.2 % benefited "rather low" and 0.3 % "very low".

The training topics responded to the real needs of 85.8 % of pedagogical specialists in relation to their work in a 'very high' multicultural environment (34.9 %) or rather to a high degree (50.9 %), and for 10.3 % to 'rather low' and 1.3 % - 'very low'.

Despite the benefits of the trainings received and the addressed needs of pedagogical specialists, according to a total of just over half of the respondents (60.1 %) there is a need 'very high' (15.5 %) or rather 'high' (44.5 %) to make additional efforts to improve the capacity of pedagogical teams to work in a multicultural environment.

Figure57. Please share the extent to which the following statements apply to you:



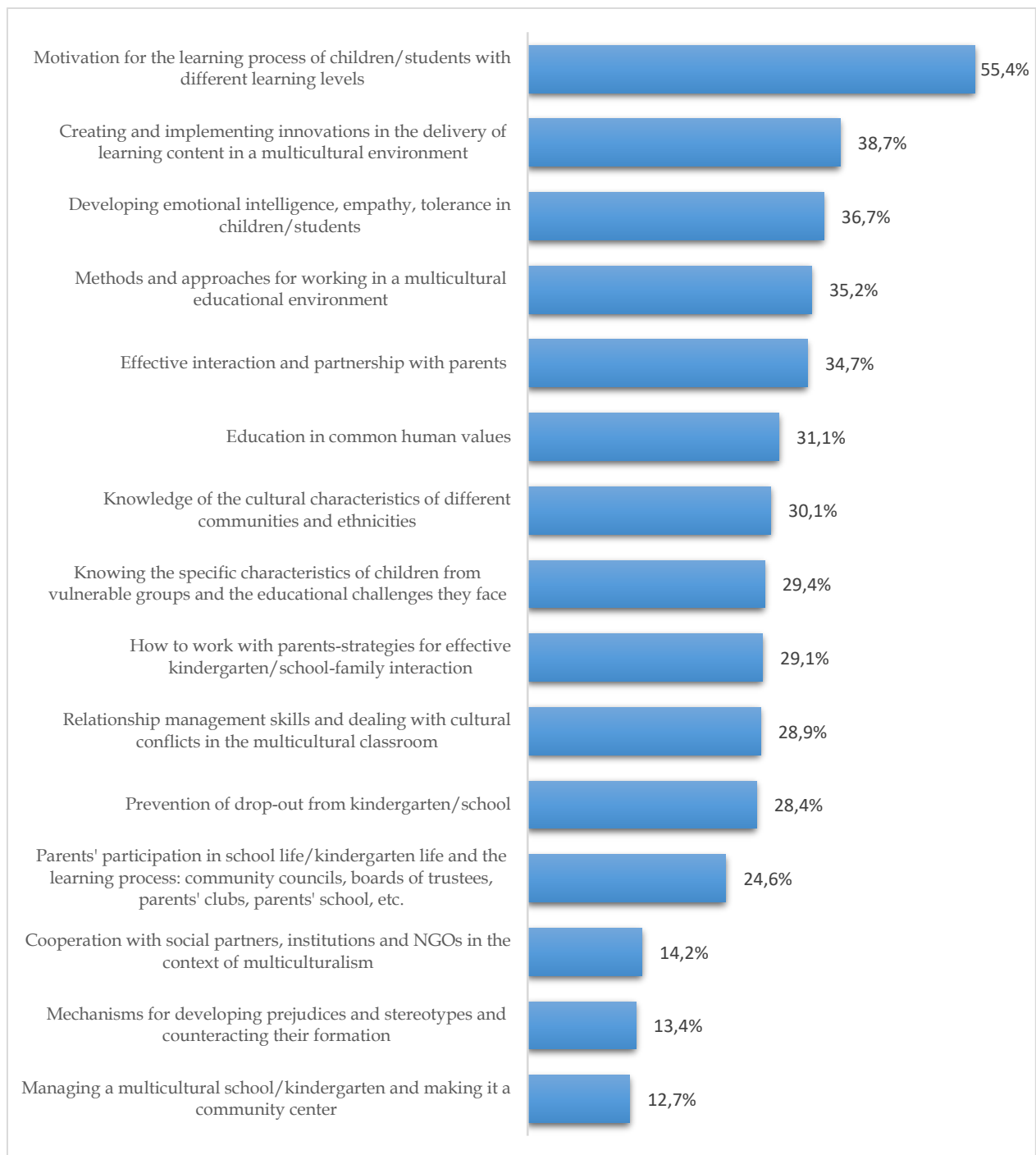
Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017  
"Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

Evident from the data presented in the figure below, the topic on which pedagogical specialists demonstrate the highest interest and willingness to engage in training in the future is "**Motivation for the learning process of children/students with different learning levels**" (55.4 %), followed by 4 topics that are also of great interest:

- **Creating and implementing innovations in the delivery of learning content in a multicultural environment (38.7 %);**
- **Developing emotional intelligence, empathy, tolerance in children/students (36.7 %);**
- **Methods and approaches for working in a multicultural educational environment (35.2 %);**
- **Effective interaction and partnership with parents (34.7 %).**

The analysis shows that the attention of pedagogical specialists is mostly attracted by the larger, practically oriented, fundamental themes in terms of working in a multicultural environment. They would prefer to receive additional trainings and be given specific guidance on how to support and motivate students with different levels of learning in the educational process; how in general to teach in a multicultural environment – what methods and approaches to apply, how to innovate in the classroom. Also, they would like to learn how to work in order to develop soft skills in children and students (emotional intelligence, empathy, tolerance) and how to stimulate parents to partner more actively with the educational process. The high interest shown in these fundamental themes is an indicator that the process of capacity development in pedagogical specialists for effective work in a multicultural environment is in its initial stage and additional efforts are required to establish a solid foundation of practical knowledge and skills on the topic. In the future, this fundamental, practice-oriented knowledge could be upgraded with complementary, specific and more closely focused trainings concerning different topics and aspects of working in a multicultural environment.

*Figure58. Training topics for acquiring and upgrading the knowledge and skills to improve work in a multicultural environment, in which the pedagogical specialists from schools and kindergartens would participate in the future*



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"



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The training topics under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” have responded to the identified needs of the pedagogical specialists in the kindergartens and schools involved in connection with their work in a multicultural environment.

In addition to the shared satisfaction and benefits of the trainings, it should be noted that the implemented procedure provokes significant interest among pedagogical specialists for additional trainings in the future focusing on: motivation to learn in children/students; creating and implementing innovations in delivering learning content in a multicultural environment; developing emotional intelligence, empathy, tolerance in children/students; methods and approaches for working in a multicultural educational environment and effective interaction and partnership with parents. The above speaks of the need for additional efforts to improve the capacity of pedagogical teams to work in a multicultural environment.

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#### 4.3.2. To what extent do pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators, apply what they have learned in practice?

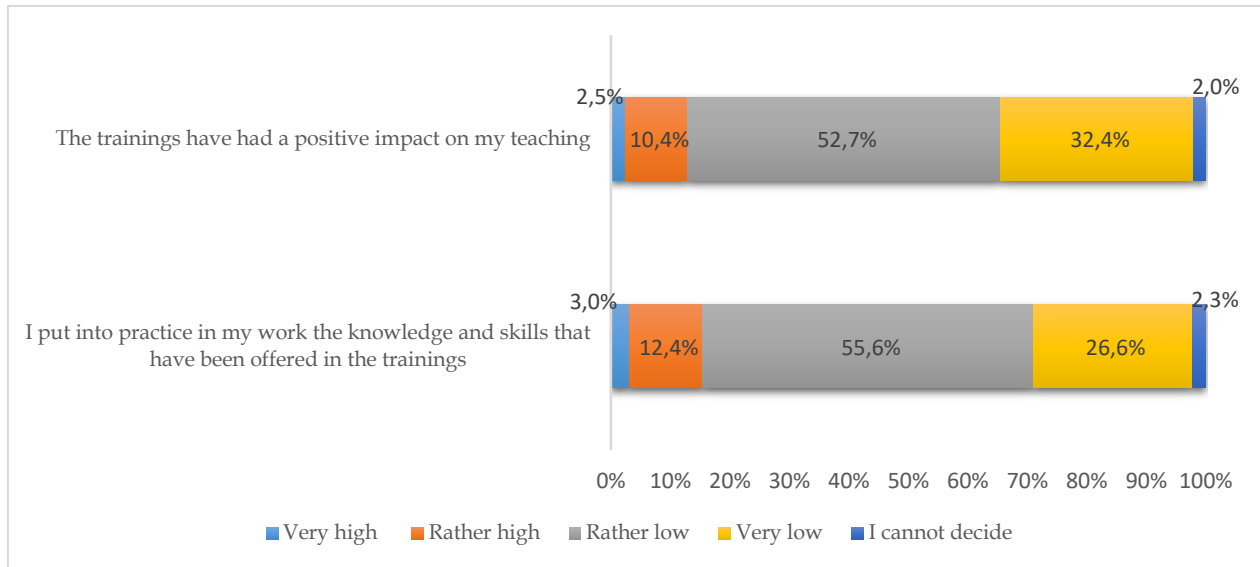
The study of the degree to which pedagogical specialists apply what has been learned in practice has been studied through analyzed data on the application of knowledge and skills in practice and the influence of what has been learned on their teaching methods. In addition, an impact related to the improvement of their qualifications and opportunities for professional growth as a result of their participation in the trainings has been studied.

With regard to the extent to which pedagogical professionals put into practice the acquired knowledge and skills in multicultural training, the analysis of the data presented in the figure below shows the following:

Trainings received had a positive impact on the teaching of a total of 85.1 % of pedagogical professionals, indicating ‘very high’ (32.4 %) or rather ‘high’ (52.7 %), while for 10.4 % the impact was ‘rather low’ and for 2.5 % ‘very low’.

A total of 82.2 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists put in practice ‘very high’ (26.6 %) or rather ‘high’ (55.6 %) the knowledge and skills they acquired during multicultural training. What is learned is applied “rather low” by 12.4 % of respondents and by 3 % “very low”.

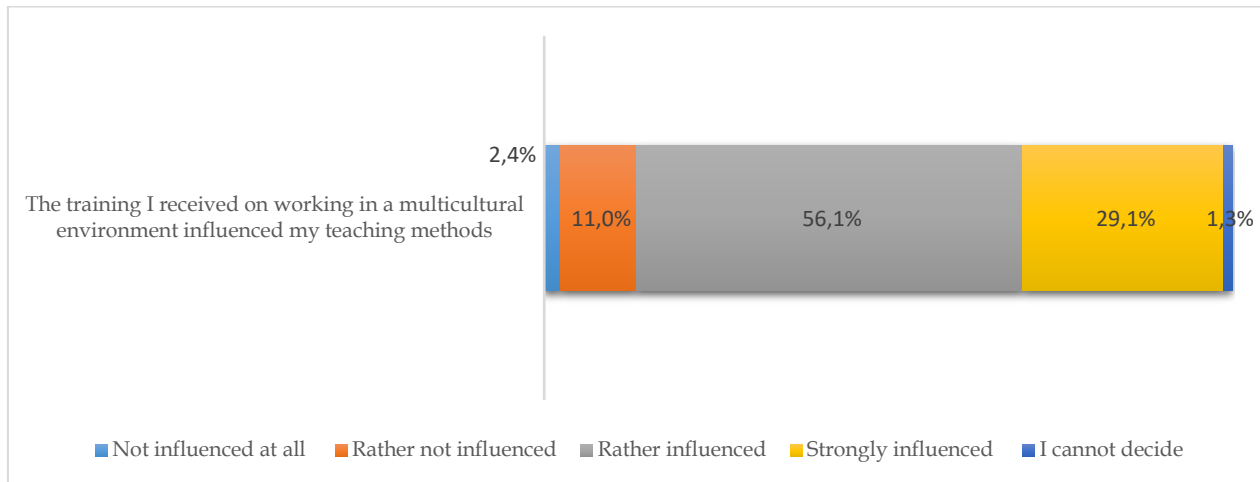
*Figure 59 To what extent do you put into practice the knowledge and skills offered within the trainings for work in a multicultural environment*



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

A very high percentage of respondents (total of 85.2 %) considered that the trainings received had an impact on teaching methods – ‘very high’ (29.1 %) and ‘rather to a high level’ (56.1 %). For only 11 % of the pedagogical specialists, training had no impact on their teaching methods, and 2.4 % had no influence at all.

Figure60. Assessment of the impact of trainings in multicultural environments on teaching methods



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

As an additional effect of the trainings, the impact of the trainings on improving their qualifications and opportunities for professional growth can be noted. Data from the survey show that the qualification of 91 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists has increased as a result of participation in trainings to work in a multicultural environment, with 70.3 % of the respondents training has given more opportunities for career advancement.

Figure61. Did you improve your qualifications as a result of the training?

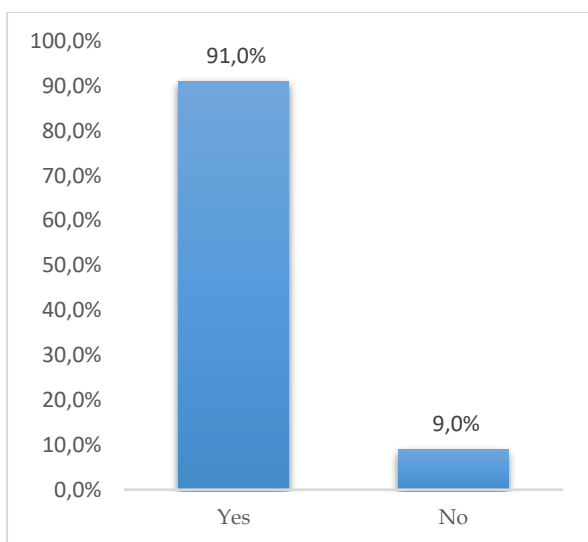
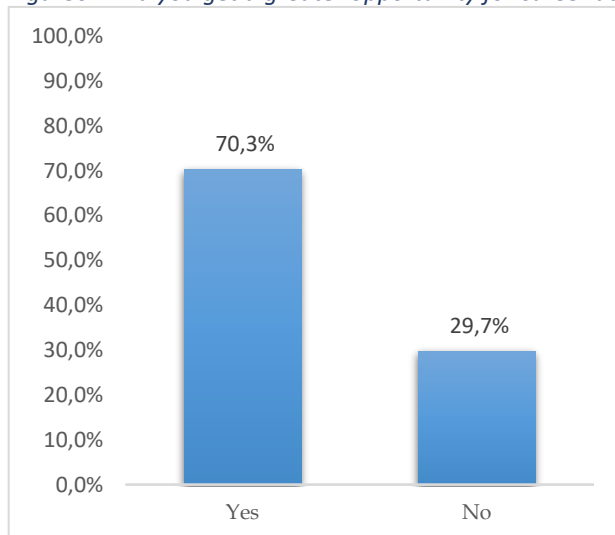


Figure62. Did you get a greater opportunity for career advancement as a result of the training?



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

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The pedagogical specialists involved in the activities to increase their capacity for teaching in a multicultural environment apply to a high degree what they have learned during the trainings in their practice. More than 85.2 % of the trained pedagogical specialists believe that the trainings received have influenced their teaching methods to a high degree. It is important to note that the qualification of 91 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists has been increased as a result of participation in the trainings for working in a multicultural environment, and for 70.3 % of the respondents the training has given greater opportunity for career advancement.

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#### 4.3.3. What is the impact of activities to increase the teaching capacity in a multicultural environment of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators, in improving the educational environment for children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma?

In order to study the impact of activities to increase teaching capacity in a multicultural environment of pedagogical specialists to improve the educational environment for children and students from vulnerable groups, beyond analyzing data on specific questions asked about the impact of these activities on the educational environment, specific statements are constructed, which also provide an answer to the evaluation question, by measuring impact on: children and students from vulnerable groups, their attitudes and the development of their potential; interaction between pedagogical specialists and parents of children/students from minorities and different cultures; interaction between children/students, pedagogical specialists, educational mediators and parents; motivation and change of attitudes of pedagogical specialists and the achievement of tolerance and overcoming discrimination in the classroom. The construction of the specific statements and, accordingly, the study of their influences is provoked by the legal definition of “Educational Environment” given in the Law on Pre-school and School Education<sup>66</sup>, in particular: a set of conditions, factors and elements ensuring the effective conduct of the educational process and active interaction of all stakeholders to achieve sustainability in the functioning of the system of pre-school and school education.

#### **Assessment of the acquired new knowledge and skills for teaching in a multicultural environment**

Generally the trainings conducted have a direct, positive impact on the capacity and skills of pedagogical specialists and have contributed to improving the educational environment for children and students from marginalized groups. They have developed the skills of pedagogical specialists and have contributed to easier and better communication between all stakeholders. About half of the surveyed pedagogical specialists have mastered new and more effective working methods in a multicultural environment during the trainings (54.4 %). Again, approximately half of the pedagogical specialists have acquired competences to teach knowledge and shape skills in children and students to perceive ethnocultural differences and develop tolerance towards cultural and ethnic diversity (48.9 %).

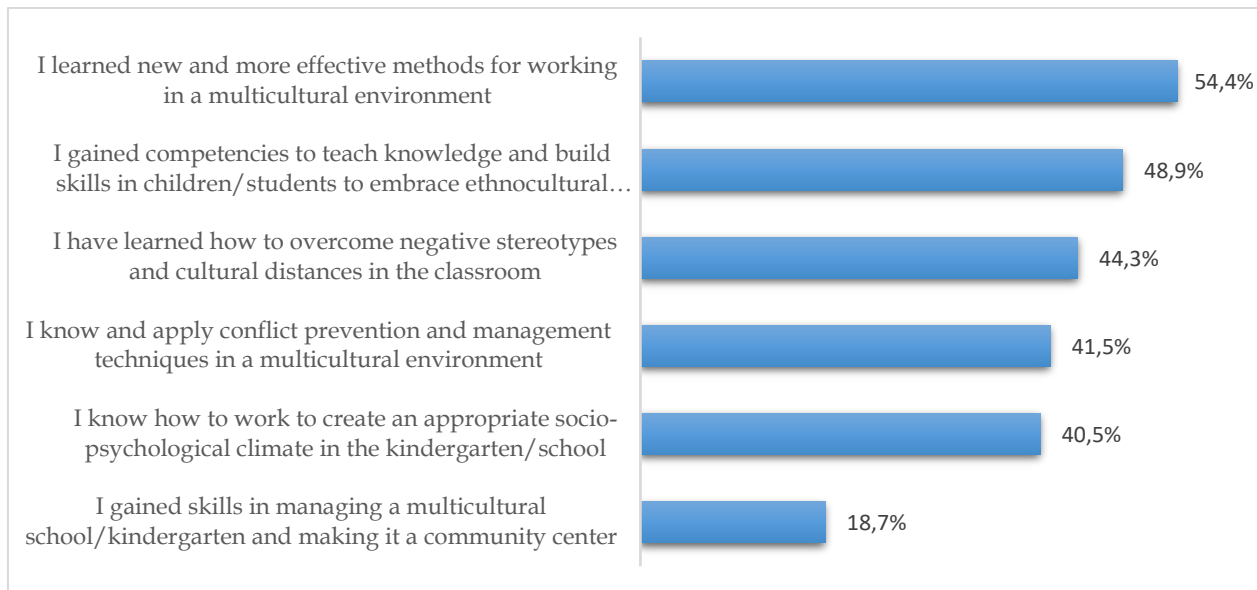
As is apparent from the data presented in the figure below, a relatively high proportion of pedagogical specialists have also mastered approaches to overcoming negative stereotypes and cultural distances in the classroom (44.3 %), have mastered and put into practice conflict prevention and management techniques in a multicultural environment (41.5 %) and are confident in their knowledge of creating a suitable socio-psychological climate in kindergarten or school (40.5 %).

The smallest is the share of respondents who have acquired skills to manage a multicultural school and kindergarten and make them a community center (18.7 %). This lower share can be explained by the specificity of the task itself, which is aimed rather at the management of educational institutions. In the current survey, the share of directors who participated was 7.4 % and of the deputy directors - 4.3 %. At the same time, this objective includes engagement with stakeholders, working with parents and involving local communities, skills for which pedagogical specialists are not yet fully prepared.

*Figure 63 What new knowledge and skills to work in a multicultural environment did you acquire after the trainings were passed?*

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<sup>66</sup> Promulgated in SG No [79](#) of 13.10.2015, in force as of 1.8.2016, as amended and supplemented, No 11 of 2.02.2023



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

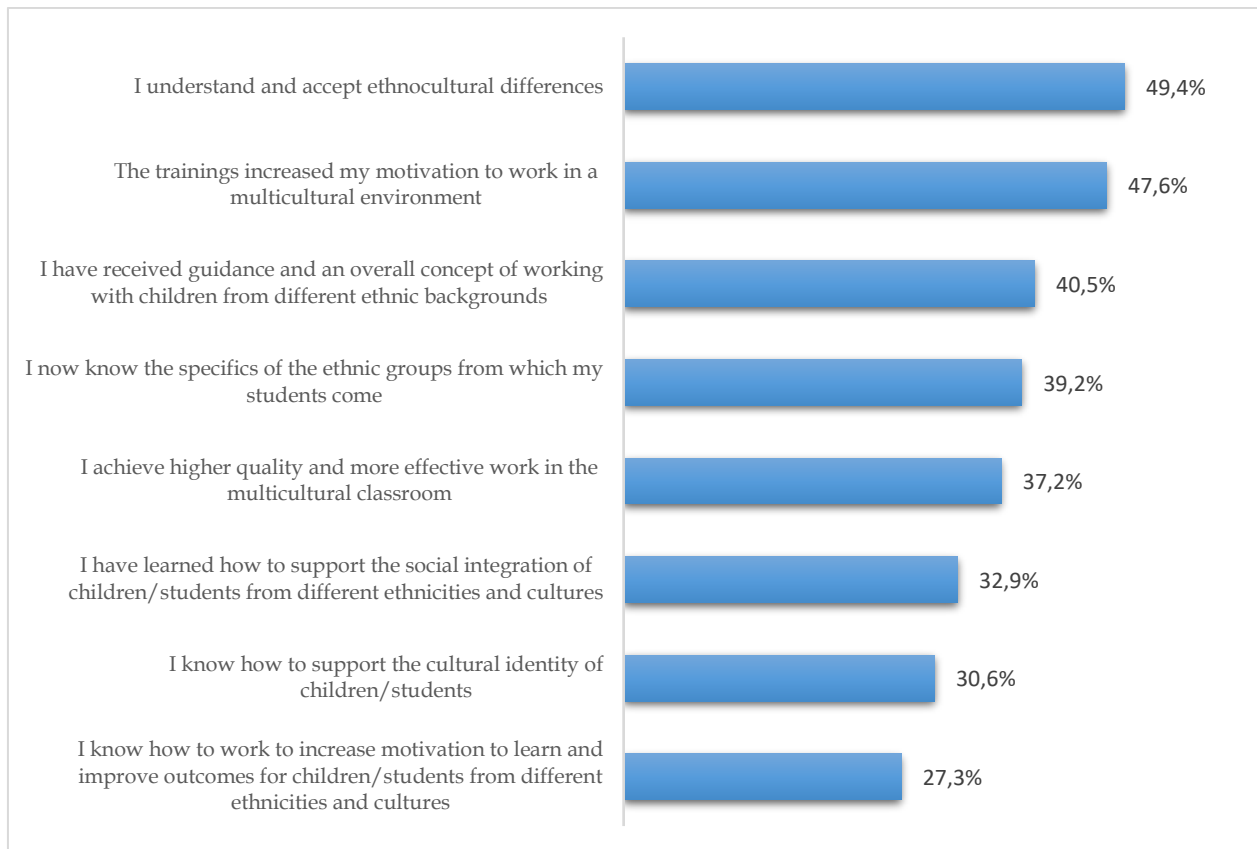
In terms of working with children and students from different ethnicities and cultures (see figure 32 below), the trainings had the highest impact on the understanding of ethnocultural differences by pedagogical specialists and their motivation to work in a multicultural environment. The completed trainings provoked an understanding of the ethnocultural differences in 49.4 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists and increased the motivation to work in a multicultural environment to 47.6 % of them.

Guidelines and overall concept for working with children and students from different ethnic groups received 40.5 % of the pedagogical specialists and 39.2 % as a result of the trainings already know the specificities of the ethnic communities from which their students/educators originate. The achievement of better quality and effective work in the multicultural classroom is a consequence of the training, which affects the work of 37.2 % of pedagogical specialists.

The scope of the learning impacts in terms of pedagogical specialists' adoption of approaches to support the social integration of children and students from different ethnicities and cultures (32.9 %), to support the cultural identity of these children (30.6 %) and to increase their motivation to learn and improve their performance (27.3 %) is somewhat narrower.

These influences from the trainings set a good framework of understanding and motivation for working in a multicultural environment by pedagogical specialists, which is backed up with knowledge about the specifics of work in such a multicultural environment, a comprehensive concept is set and specific approach and methods of work are proposed for pedagogical specialists. Further specialists need to be supported methodologically in applying the acquired knowledge in practice in order to achieve the social integration of children and students from different ethnicities and cultures, support their cultural identity and increase their motivation to learn and improve their educational outcomes.

Figure64. What new knowledge and skills to work in a multicultural environment did you acquire after the trainings related to working with children/students from different ethnicities and cultures?



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

In summary, **the trainings have largely influenced the understanding and motivation of pedagogical specialists, but have not yet been able to fully (to the extent necessary) improve their skills to deal with specific aspects of working in a multicultural environment, as longer trainings and practice in a real working environment are needed for a more complete development of these skills.** The assessment of the usefulness of trainings should be taken into account and, if possible, such trainings for work in a multicultural environment should be organized on a regular basis so as to expand the range of pedagogical specialists who have undergone trainings, as well as the spectrum of topics covered.

### Impact of trainings on the educational environment

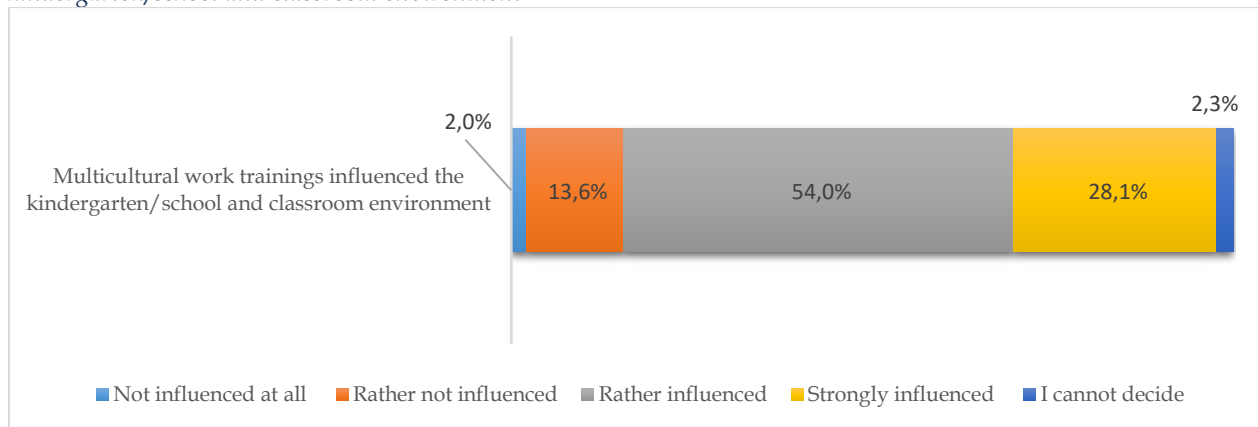
The training for working in a multicultural environment has had a positive impact on the educational environment for children and students from vulnerable groups, according to the opinion of 79.4 % of the interviewed teachers who participated in the trainings under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment". Only about one-fifth of the pedagogical specialists (19.8 %) currently have no significant change in the environment as a result of the training (see figure below).

Figure65. In general, how did learning to work in a multicultural environment affect the educational environment for children and students from vulnerable groups?

Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

The trainings for working in a multicultural environment within the project BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” affected the environment in the kindergarten/school and the classroom according to a total of 82.1 % of the interviewed pedagogical specialists who took part in this survey. This opinion cites ‘very high’ 28.1 % of respondents and rather ‘high’ – 54.0 %. A relatively small proportion are pedagogical specialists (13.6 %), who do not report direct impact of trainings on the environment and the classroom, and according to another 2 % there is no impact at all.

Figure66. Assessment of the impact of the trainings for working in a multicultural environment on the kindergarten/school and classroom environment



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

### Impact of the trainings on children and students, their attitudes and their potential development

Multicultural training also has a positive impact on key indicators related to the educational environment (see figure below):

**Trainings for working in a multicultural environment have contributed to the full coverage of students in school education.** This statement is supported by a total of 80 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists (‘very high’ (23.6 %) or ‘rather to a high degree’ (56.4 %)). The claim “Rather low” was valid for 12.6 % and “very low” for 4.1 % of the respondents.

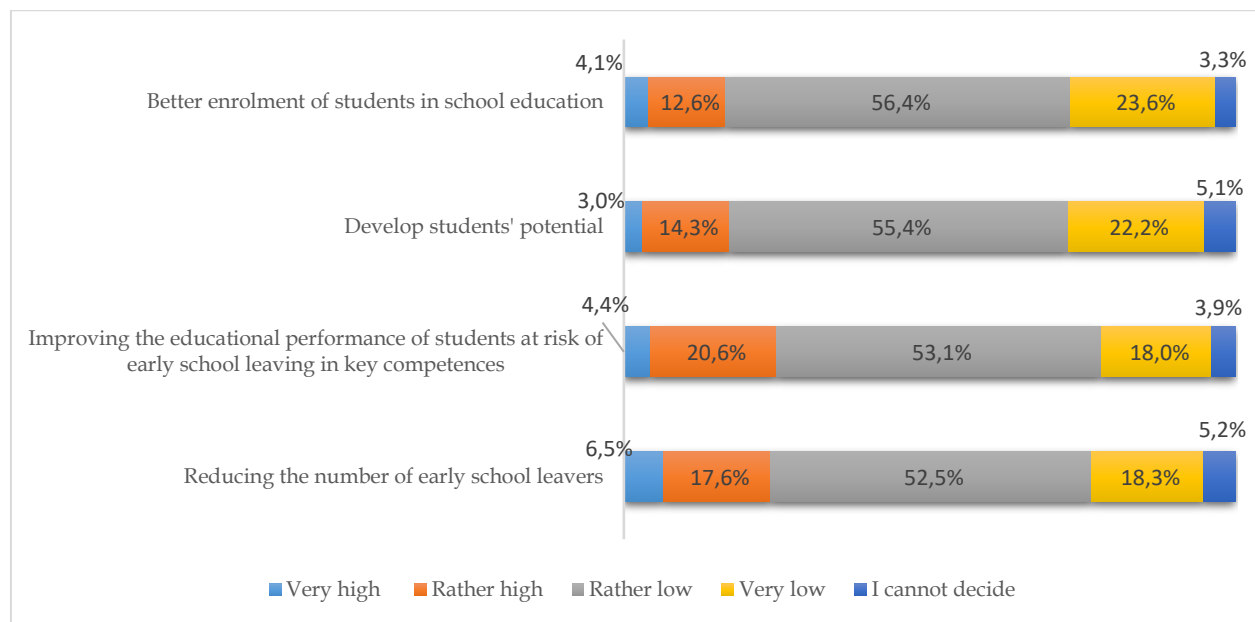
**The trainings also helped to develop the potential of students,** with a total of 77.6 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists agreeing ‘very high’ (22.2 %) or rather ‘high’ (55.4 %), 14.3 % – ‘rather low’ and 3 % ‘very low’.

For 71.1 % of pedagogical specialists, **training contributed to improving the educational attainment of students at risk of early school leaving when mastering key competences** (‘very high’ (18.0 %) or rather ‘high’ (53.1 %)). According to 20.6 %, the effect is “rather low” and for 4.4 % it is “very low”.

**Pedagogical specialists also confirm the impact of training for working in a multicultural environment on the reduction of the number of students who left the education system early.** A total of 70.8 % of the

surveyed pedagogical specialists confirmed the validity of the impact as “very high” (23.6 %) or “rather to a high degree” (56.4 %). For 12.6 % this impact is valid “rather low” and for 4.1 % – “very low”.

Figure 67. Degree in which the trainings for working in a multicultural environment funded under OP SESG have contributed to the realisation of the objective “Coverning and Educational Achievements”



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

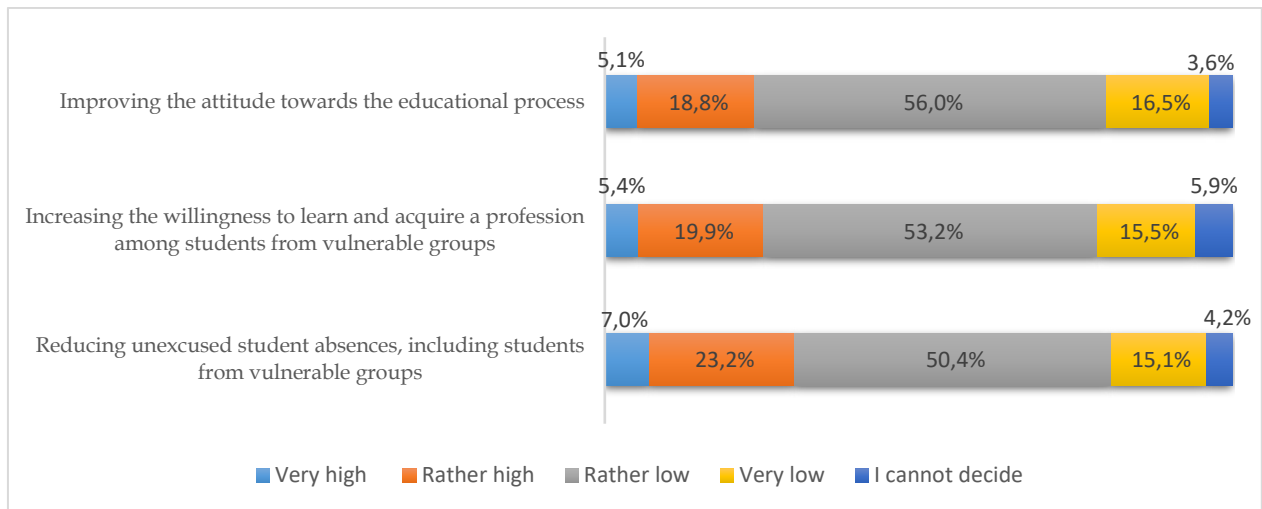
The data also show that as a result of the trainings under the project, **attitudes towards the education of children and students at risk of early school leaving have also improved.** In total, 72.5 % of pedagogical specialists considered that training ‘very high’ (16.5 %) or rather ‘high’ (56.0 %) contributing to improving the attitude of children and students at risk of early school leaving.

**The trainings had an impact on the willingness to learn and acquire a profession among students from vulnerable groups,** according to a total of 68.7 % of pedagogical specialists (“very high” (15.5 %) or rather “high” (53.2 %)). “Rather low” is the impact according to 19.9 % of the pedagogical specialists and “very low” – according to 5.4 %.

**The unexcused absences of students, including students from vulnerable groups, have decreased under the influence of trainings to work in a multicultural environment,** according to a total of 65.5 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists (“very high” (15.1 %) or rather “high” (50.4 %)). According to 23.2 %, the impact is “rather low” and according to 7.0 % it is “very low”.

Figure68. Degree in which the trainings for working in a multicultural environment, funded under OP SESG have contributed to the realisation of the objective “Accompaniment to education and inclusion in the educational process”



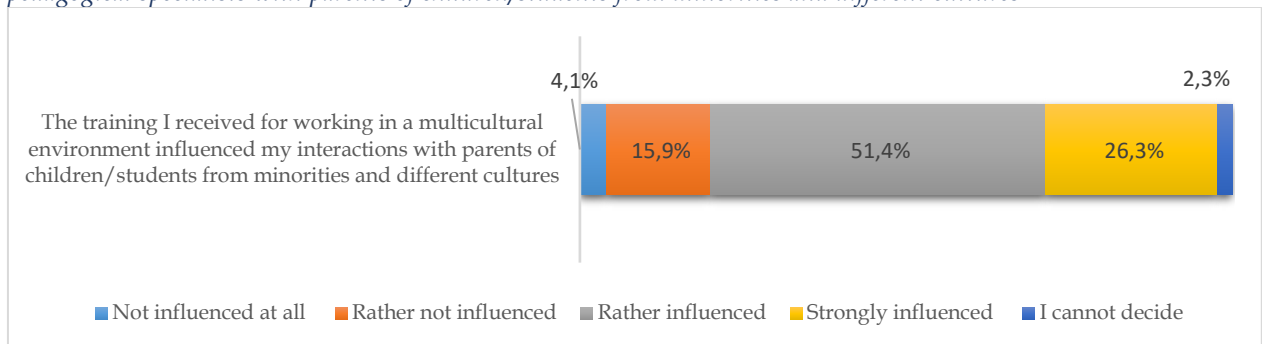


Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

### Impact of the trainings on the interaction of pedagogical specialists with parents of children/students from minorities and different cultures

For the purpose of the evaluation, it is also important to reflect the assessment given by the pedagogical specialists regarding their interaction with parents of children/students from minorities and different cultures. The figure below shows that the **training courses for working in a multicultural environment influenced the interaction with parents of children and students from minorities and different cultures** according to a total of 77.7 % of the pedagogical specialists, with 26.3 % of the cases having a strong influence and 51.4 % – to some extent. For 15.9 % of the pedagogical specialists, training did not have an impact on their interaction with parents, and 4.1 % had no influence at all.

Figure69. Assessment of the impact of the trainings for working in a multicultural environment on the interaction of pedagogical specialists with parents of children/students from minorities and different cultures



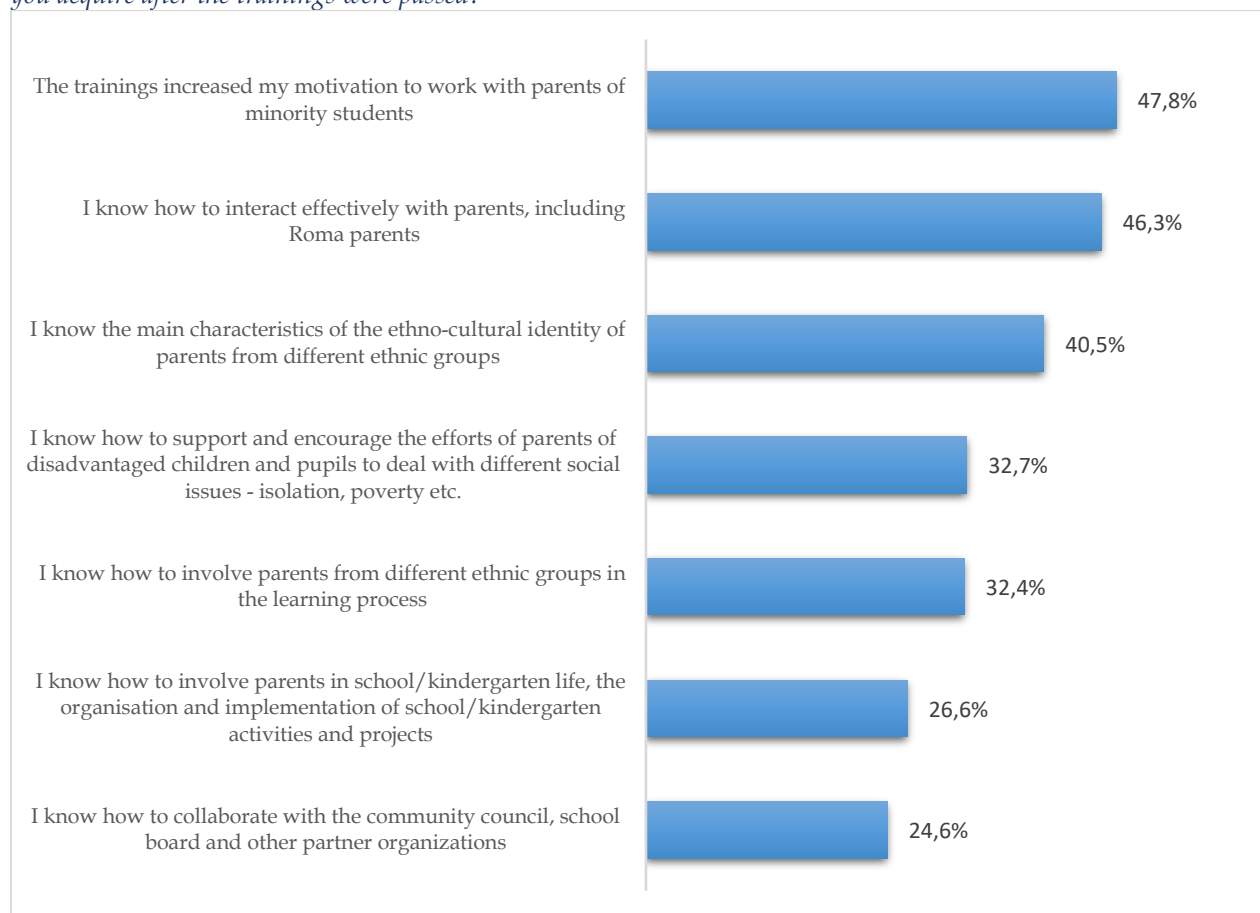
Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

In terms of the knowledge and skills of pedagogical specialists, trainings to the highest degree have affected the motivation of pedagogical specialists to work with the parents of students from different ethnicities and cultures (47.8 %) and their approaches for effective interaction with parents, including Roma parents (46.3 %). Some of the pedagogical specialists have learned about the main characteristics of the ethno-cultural identity of parents from different ethnicities (40.5 %).

A smaller share (around one third) of the surveyed pedagogical specialists (32.7 %) as a result of the trainings received have acquired the necessary skills to support and encourage the efforts of parents of disadvantaged children and students to deal with various social problems, such as isolation, poverty, etc., and know how to engage parents of different ethnic backgrounds in the learning process (32.7 %).

Even smaller (around a quarter) is the share of pedagogical professionals who, as a result of trainings for working in a multicultural environment, have acquired skills to involve parents in school life/life in kindergarten, organize and implement activities and projects of the school/ kindergarten (26.6 %) and have learned how to cooperate with the public council, school board and other partner organisations (24.6 %). As mentioned in the previous sections, these skills require more preparation, require to be shared by the school management and the whole school team, and also require many additional skills and motivation and conviction in their meaning and effectiveness. Sharing good practices between individual teachers and school teams and establishing professional support networks for working in a multicultural environment would therefore be extremely useful.

Figure70. What new knowledge and skills to work in a multicultural environment related to working with parents did you acquire after the trainings were passed?



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

**An additional effect of training for working in a multicultural environment is the created conditions for successful socialization of children from ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups, the realisation of which is evidenced by a total of 78.8 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists "to a very high degree"**

(19.4 %) or “rather to a high degree” (59.4 %). Rather, to a low extent, trainings have had this effect for 14.4 % of respondents and 4.5 % believe that the effect is available “to a very low degree”.

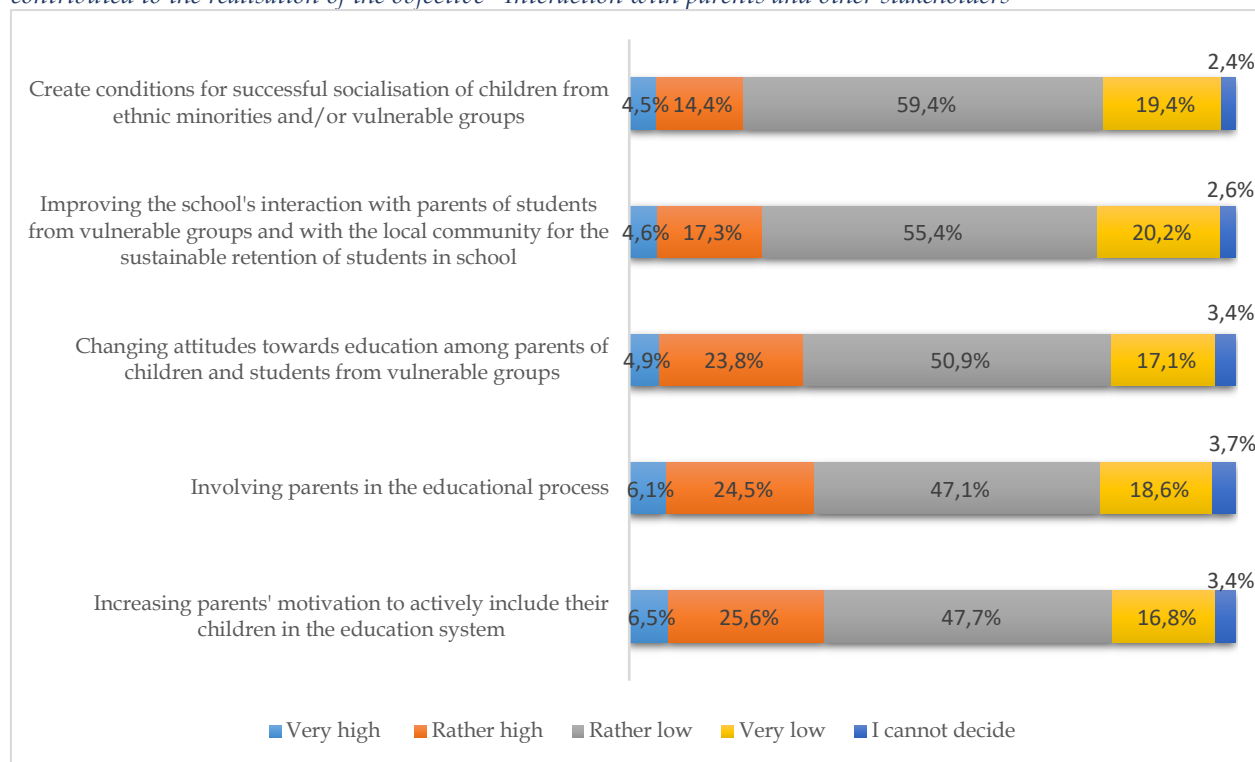
**Improving the school’s interaction with the parents of students from vulnerable groups and with the local community for the sustainable retention of students in school is also among the effects of training** according to a total of 75.5 % of “very high” pedagogical specialists (20.2 %) or rather “high” (55.4 %). According to 17.3 %, the interaction was influenced “rather to a low degree” and according to 4.6 % – “very low”.

**The trainings had an impact on the attitudes towards education of parents of children and students from vulnerable groups** according to a total of 68.0 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists marking “very high” (17.1 %) or “rather to a high degree” (50.9 %). “Rather low” attitudes of parents were influenced according to 23.8 % of pedagogical specialists and 4.9 % considered the influence to be “very low”.

Trainings for working in a multicultural environment also influenced **the involvement of parents in the educational process** according to a total of 65.7 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists “very high” (18.6 %) or “rather to a high degree” (47.1 %). According to nearly a quarter (24.5 %) the impact of training on the involvement of parents is “rather low” and according to 6.1 % – “very low”.

**Parents’ motivation for the active inclusion of their children in the education system increased as a result of the project** according to a total of 64.5 % of pedagogical specialists (“very high” (16.8 %) or “rather to a high degree” (47.7 %). According to 25.6 % of the respondents, parents’ motivation was influenced “rather to a low degree” as a result of the project, and according to 6.5 % – “to a very low degree”.

Figure 71. Degree in which the trainings for working in a multicultural environment, funded under OP SESG, have contributed to the realisation of the objective “Interaction with parents and other stakeholders”

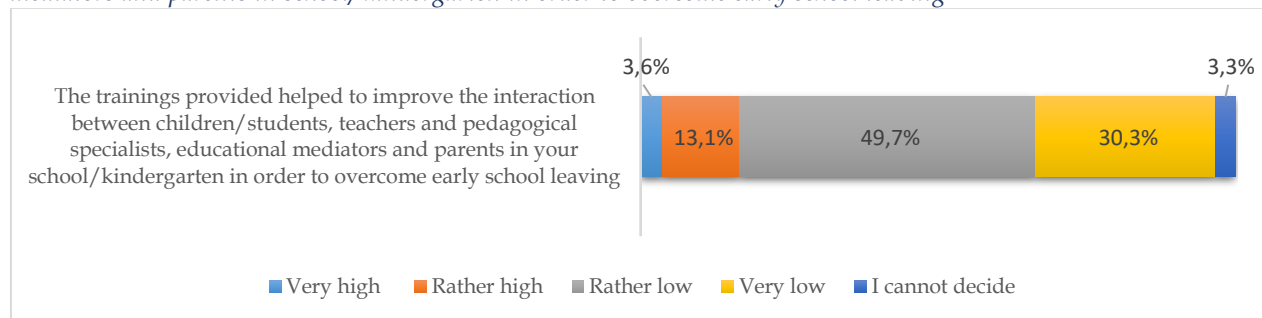


Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

### Impact on the interaction between children/ students, pedagogical specialists and parents in terms of overcoming early school leaving

The trainings provided helped to improve the interaction between children/students, pedagogical specialists, educational mediators and parents in terms of overcoming early school leaving “to a very high extent” (30.3 %) or rather “high” (49.7 %) – i.e. a total of 80 % of teachers in schools and kindergartens who took part in the trainings considered that they were useful for better communication and interaction between all parties and participants in the educational process. For 13.1 % the effect is “rather low” and for 3.6 % – “very low”.

Figure72. Improving the interaction between children/ students, teachers and pedagogical specialists, educational mediators and parents in school/ kindergarten in order to overcome early school leaving

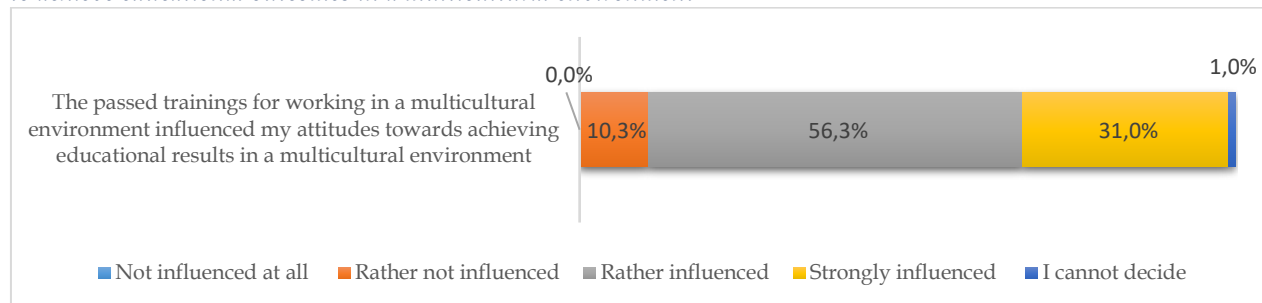


Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

### Impact on motivation and change of attitudes of pedagogical specialists

One of the main direct effects of the project is to change the attitudes of pedagogical specialists to achieve educational outcomes in a multicultural environment, which have changed as a result of the trainings. A total of 87.3 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists confirmed this effect fully (31.0 %) or to some extent (56.3 %), while only 10.3 % considered that their attitudes were rather not influenced by the training and 1.3 % were categorically unaffected.

Figure73. Impact of the trainings for working in a multicultural environment on the attitudes of pedagogical specialists to achieve educational outcomes in a multicultural environment

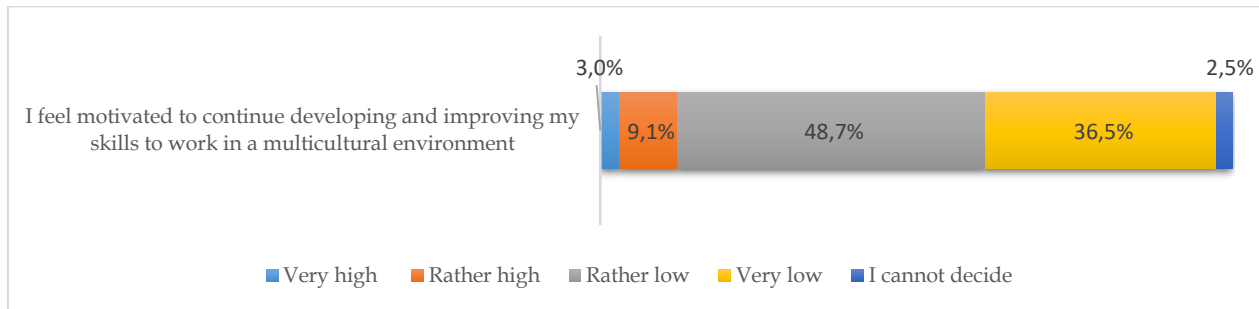


Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

The project also has a long-term impact on the attitudes of pedagogical specialists, of whom a total of 85.3 % say they feel “very high” (36.5 %) or rather “high” (48.7 %) motivated to continue developing and

improving their skills to work in a multicultural environment. The motivation of 9.1 % of pedagogical specialists is “rather low” and 3.0 % – “very low”.

Figure74. Degree in which pedagogical professionals feel motivated to continue developing and improving their skills to work in a multicultural environment



Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

### Tolerance and overcoming discrimination

**Trainings for working in a multicultural environment contributed to the mutual knowledge of children of different ethnicities and their upbringing in a spirit of tolerance**, according to 80.5 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists “to a very high degree” (21.0 %) or “rather to a high degree” (59.5 %). According to 13.2 %, the contribution is “rather low” and 3.6 % – “very low”.

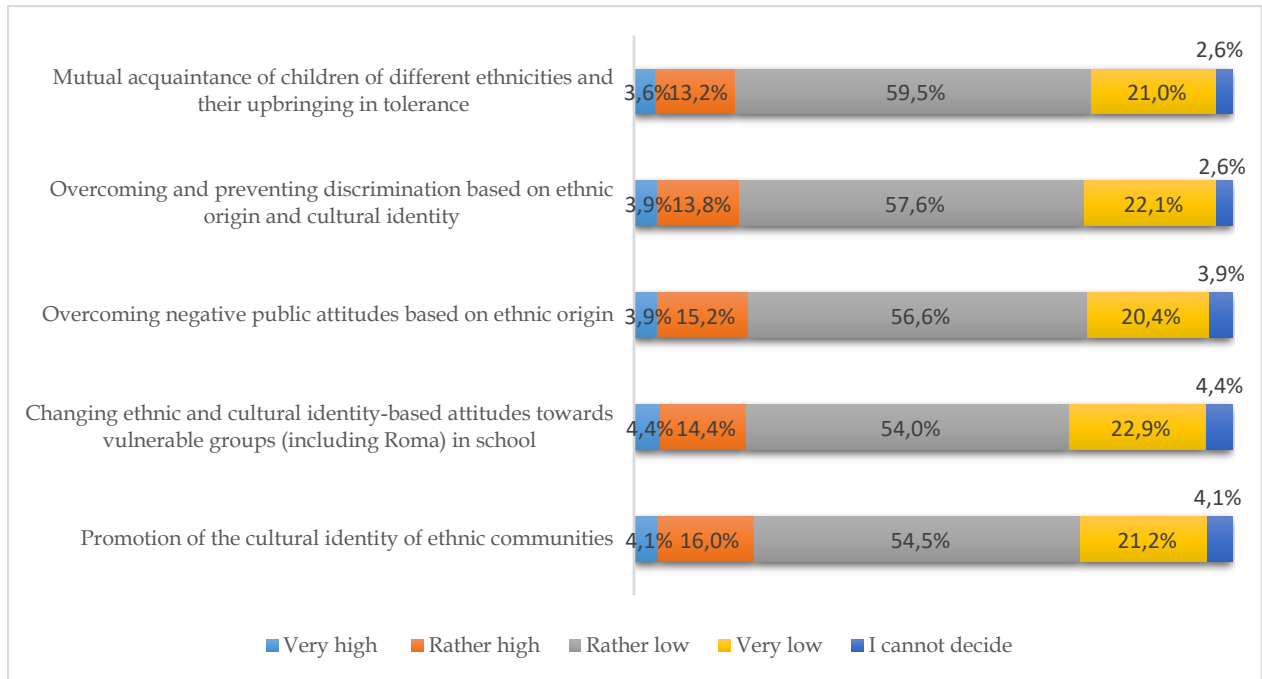
**The effect was also achieved in terms of overcoming and non-discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity**, according to 79.7 % of pedagogical professionals this was achieved “to a very high degree” (22.1 %) or “rather to a high degree” (57.6 %). The effect was “rather low” for 13.8 % and “very low” for 3.9 %.

**Some negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin have been overcome as a result of training for working in a multicultural environment** according to a total of 77 % of pedagogical specialists “very high” (20.4 %) or “rather to a high degree” (56.6 %). According to 15.2 %, a similar effect was observed “rather low” and 3.9 – “very low”.

**The trainings caused a change in attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma) at school**, according to a total of 76.9 % of surveyed pedagogical specialists “very high” (22.9 %) or “rather to a high degree” (54.0 %). Such a change is the result of training “rather low” according to 14.4 % of the respondents and “very low” – according to 4.4 %.

**Among the effects of training for working in a multicultural environment is the promotion of the cultural identity of ethnic communities** according to a total of 75.7 % of the pedagogical specialists “very high” (21.2 %) or “rather to a high degree” (54.5 %). According to 16 %, the effect is valid “rather low” and according to 4.1 % – “very low”.

Figure75. Degree in which the trainings for working in a multicultural environment, funded under OP SESG, have contributed to the realisation of the objective “Tolerance and overcoming discrimination”

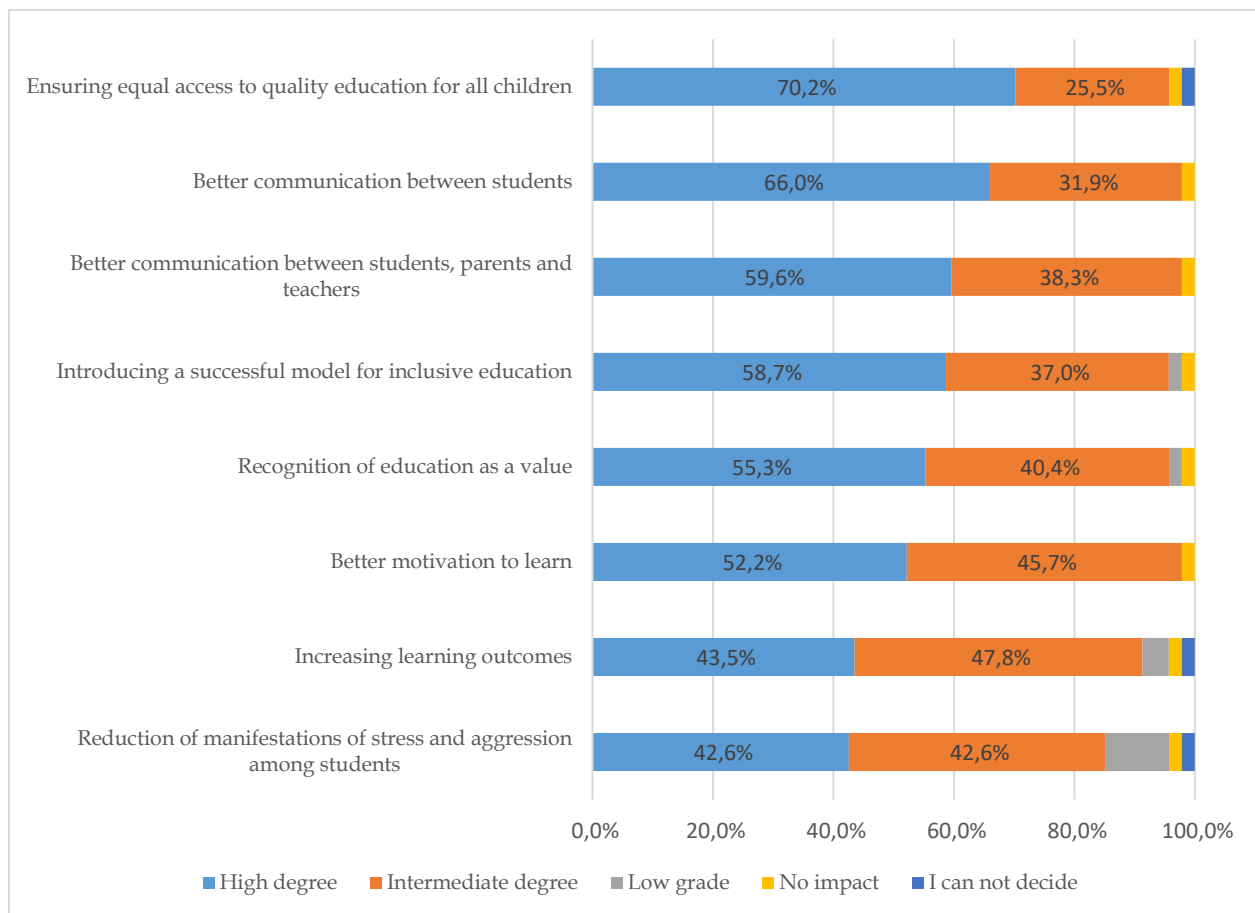


Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

### Opinion of Beneficiaries

The assessment of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools who participated in the trainings under procedure BG05M2OP001 -3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” for the impact of the activities for increasing the capacity for teaching in a multicultural environment on the educational environment for children and students from vulnerable groups is fully supported by the shared opinion of the survey among the beneficiaries. As evident from the data presented in the figure below, the impact of the activities evaluated on the educational environment is undeniable.

Figure 76 Please indicate to what extent activities to increase teaching capacity in a multicultural educational environment of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators, have contributed to improving the educational environment



Source: Survey among beneficiaries of projects under Priority Axis 3 "Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion" of Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020

The activities implemented to increase the teaching capacity in a multicultural environment of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment" have had a positive impact on improving the educational environment for children and students from vulnerable groups, according to the opinion of 79.4 % of the teachers interviewed.

Examined in detail, to the greatest extent, the impact has been achieved by:

- positive impact on the fuller involvement of students in school education, the development of their potential, the improvement of the educational attainment of students at risk of early school leaving, and the willingness to study and acquire a profession among students from vulnerable groups;
- improving the interaction of pedagogical specialists with parents of children/students from minorities and different cultures, influencing the attitudes towards education of parents of children and students from vulnerable groups, including parents in the educational process and increasing parents' motivation for active inclusion of their children in the educational system;

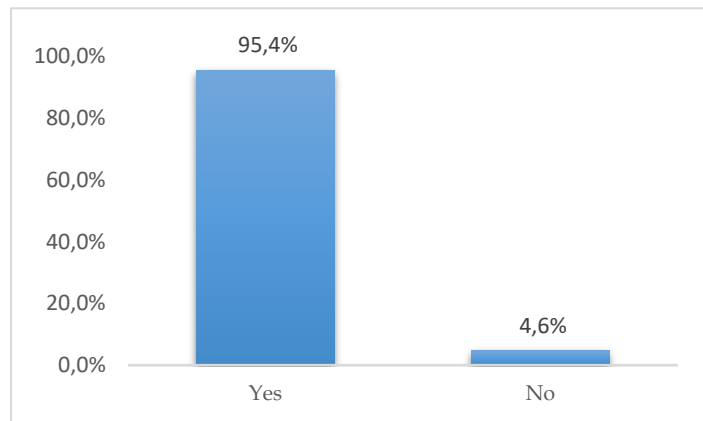
- changing the attitudes of pedagogical professionals to achieve educational outcomes in a multicultural environment and increasing their motivation to continue developing and improving their skills for working in a multicultural environment;
- getting to know each other's children and students from different ethnicities and upbringing them in a spirit of tolerance and overcoming and preventing discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity.

#### 4.3.4. What unplanned effects on teachers and pedagogical specialists from the implementation of the measures can be indicated?

The evaluation did not identify unplanned effects on the pedagogical specialists involved in the implementation of the projects under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment. Overall, the satisfaction with the trainings is very high, as well as their usefulness for the work of teachers and pedagogical specialists.

Almost all teachers and pedagogical specialists surveyed (95.4 %) expressed satisfaction with the trainings for working in a multicultural environment.

*Figure 77. Are you satisfied with the organization and manner of training? (data from a survey of teachers and pedagogical specialists who participated in the trainings under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017)*

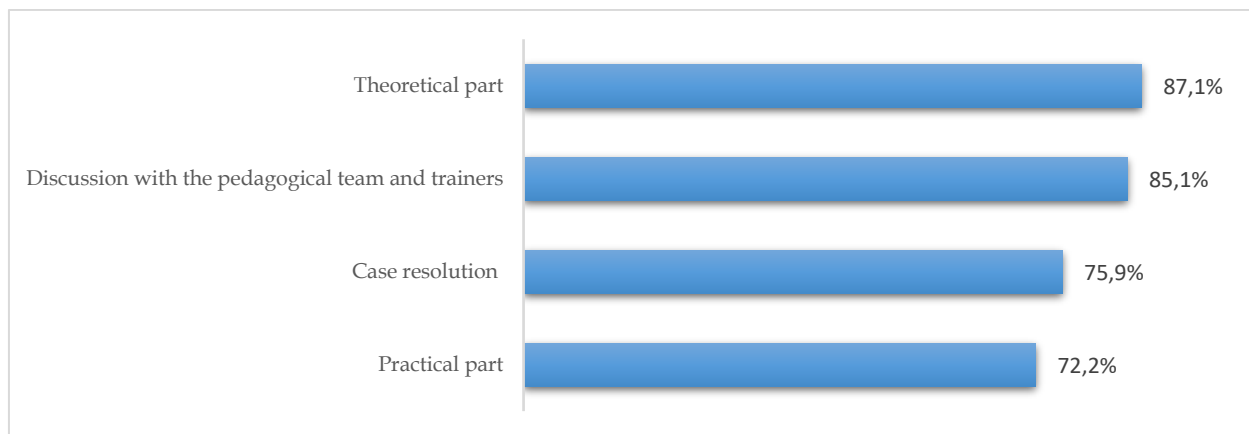


*Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"*

An additional attestation on the quality of the trainings is also their content (see figure below). They contained practical and theoretical parts, including discussions and case-solving. This combination of training approaches demonstrates generally adequate content that has been adapted to the local specificities of the training institutions involved in the projects. The trainings included most often theory (87.1 %) and discussions with the pedagogical team and trainers (85.1 %). Cases resolutions (75.9 %) and practical part (72.2 %) are also highly involved.

*Figure78. The trainings passed included:*





Source: Data from a survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/ schools, procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"

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No unplanned effects of the implementation of the measures were identified.

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#### 4.4. Reducing the share of early school leavers, sustainably retaining students in the education system and including children from marginalized groups in the educational system

4.4.1. What is the proportion of children and students from marginalized groups supported by the operations, including Roma, who continue to higher education and what is their ratio to children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma, who have not been subject to measures under the OP SESG operations under consideration?

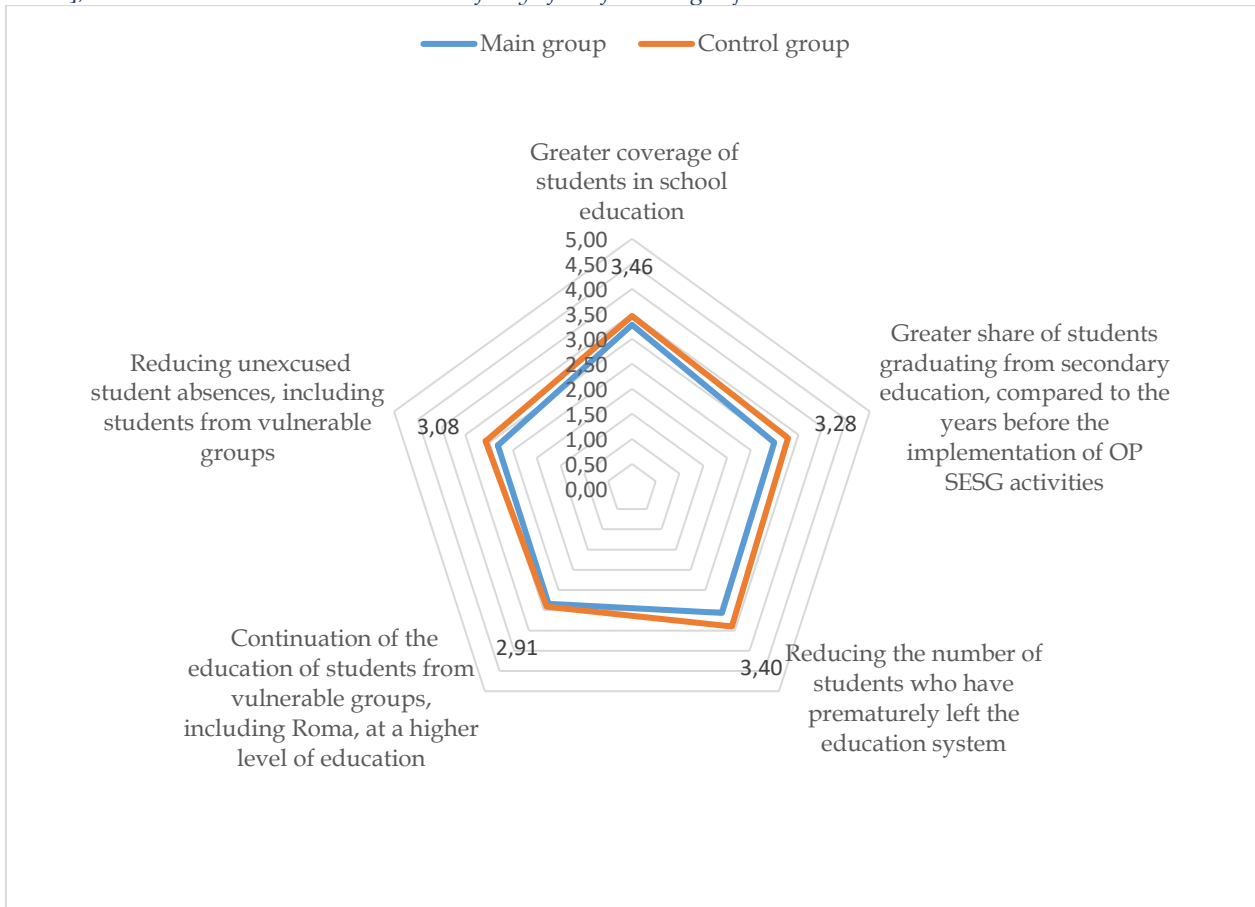
The answer to this evaluation question is based on an analysis of data related to procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 "Support for success" (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection" and the CLLD approach "Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas".

In order to track students who continue to higher education, we need to have individual data on each individual and his/her transition to a higher level of education. Tracking every child's path without such data is impossible, especially when changing school or moving to another locality. Due to the lack of institutional data through which we can provide a direct answer to this question, the evaluation team developed a series of indicators through which it gathered information on the ongoing processes regarding student retention in school.

There are no statistically significant differences to the benefit of participating schools in terms of outcomes and effects related to completion of secondary education and reduction of early school leavers. On the one hand, the reasons for this are that in general, in addition to OP SESG, efforts are also made in this direction through national policies and through the Mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age. On the other hand, it is necessary to build up a longer period of validity of the measures identified in order to make the results more visible and sustainable. While differences are not statistically significant in favour of the procedures evaluated, support for these activities should continue, as they are an important tool for improving access

to education and preventing early school leaving. The following graph presents an assessment of the impact of activities based on teachers' opinions.

Figure79 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school [for main group: funded under OP SESG], have contributed to the realization of any of the following objectives?

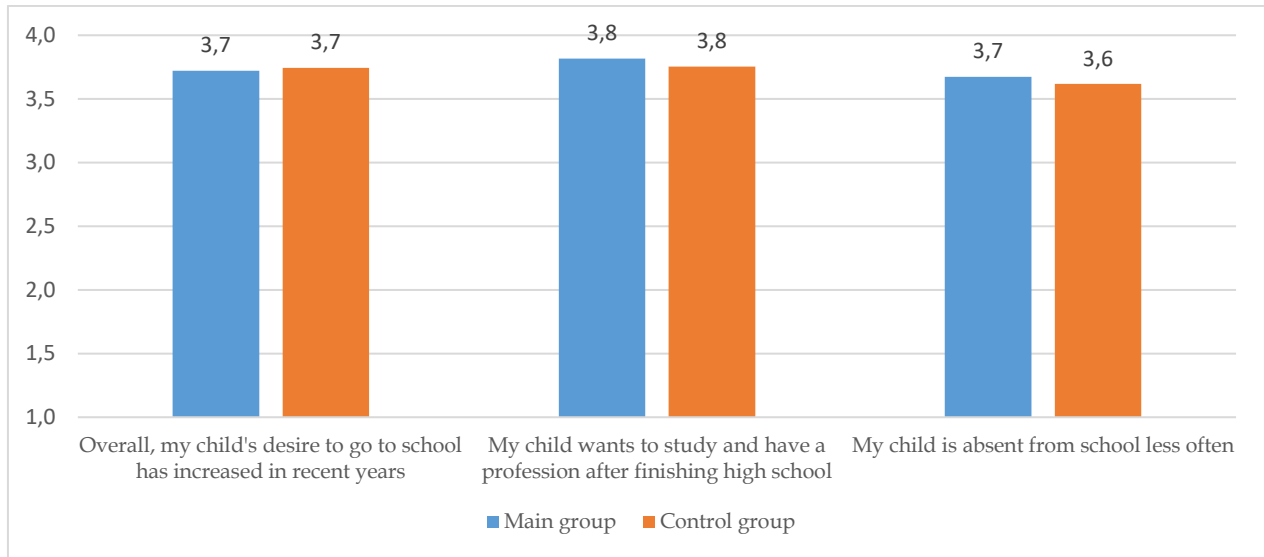


Source: Survey among teachers in school education institutions, comparison between main and control groups

\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'very low' and 4 'very high'

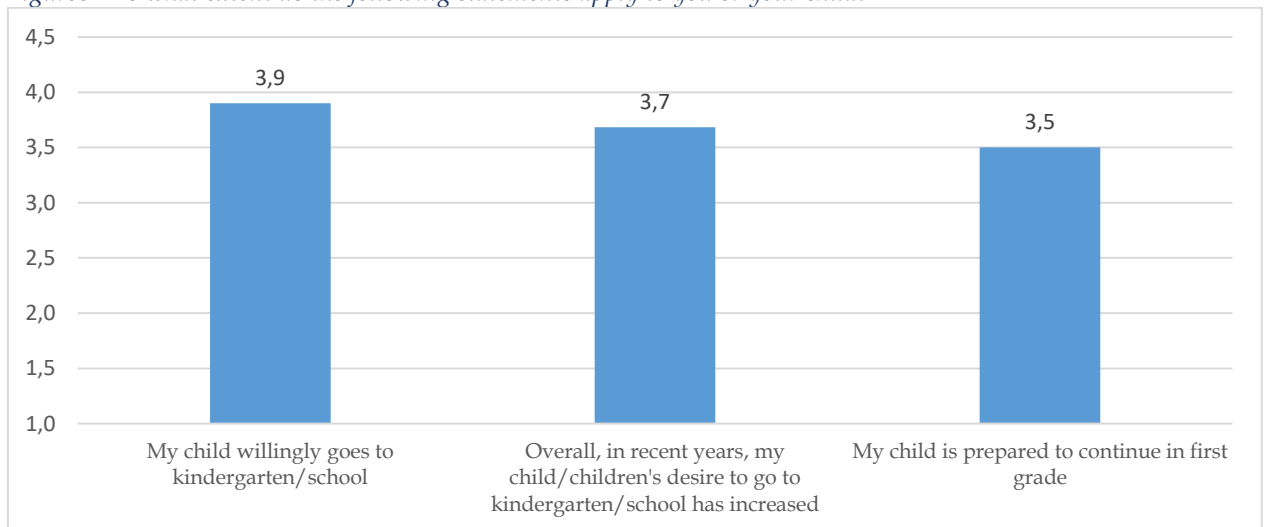
The opinions of parents are significantly more positive, and again there is similarity between the main and control groups.

Figure80 To what extent do the following statements apply to you or your child:



Source: Study among parents of school-age children, comparison between main and control groups

Figure81 To what extent do the following statements apply to you or your child:



Source: Survey among parents of children in kindergarten, main group

Experts' views on the effects of the evaluated procedures to reduce early school leavers are also clearly positive, and they see the exceptional role of the evaluated procedures for the implementation of national and European strategic documents in the direction of covering students in school education and reducing the share of early school leavers:

*"I believe that at the level of policies we have had an enormous impact on reducing the rate of early school leaving, we have ensured equal access to education and inclusion for children, we have made sure that vocational education is linked to the labour market. Not professional, but children can be prepared through our procedures." (Focus group with MA)<sup>67</sup>*

<sup>67</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the MA of OP SESG on 19.12.2022

*“But, each of our procedures meets priorities at national and European level” (Focus Group with MA)*

The effects of the projects, and in particular the figure of mediators on the coverage of children and students, are also taken into account in the opinion of the experts:

*“Mediators have also proved very important so that children can continue to attend kindergarten and this smooth transition from kindergarten to continue to school can be done very well.” – Focus Group with MA*

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There are no statistically significant differences benefiting the participating schools in terms of the results and effects of the activities of the evaluated procedures related to the completion of secondary education and the reduction of early school leaving. On the one hand, the reasons for these are that, in general, in addition to the procedures evaluated, efforts are also made in this direction through the national programmes and through the Mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the early school leaving of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age. On the other hand, in order to have more sustainable results in terms of reducing early school leavers, a longer period of time is needed and a build-up of efforts to motivate and reach out to students at compulsory preschool and school age.

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#### 4.4.2. What is the contribution of Priority Axis 3 of the Programme in reducing the share of early school leavers?

The answer to this evaluation question is also based on an analysis of data related to procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” and the CLLD approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas” and other sources.

The persons who are involved in activities under the OP SESG and who by 2022 have reached the age of 18 or older<sup>68</sup> are 8308. At the same time, the drop in early school leavers among 18-24 year-olds is equivalent to about 4,000 per year.

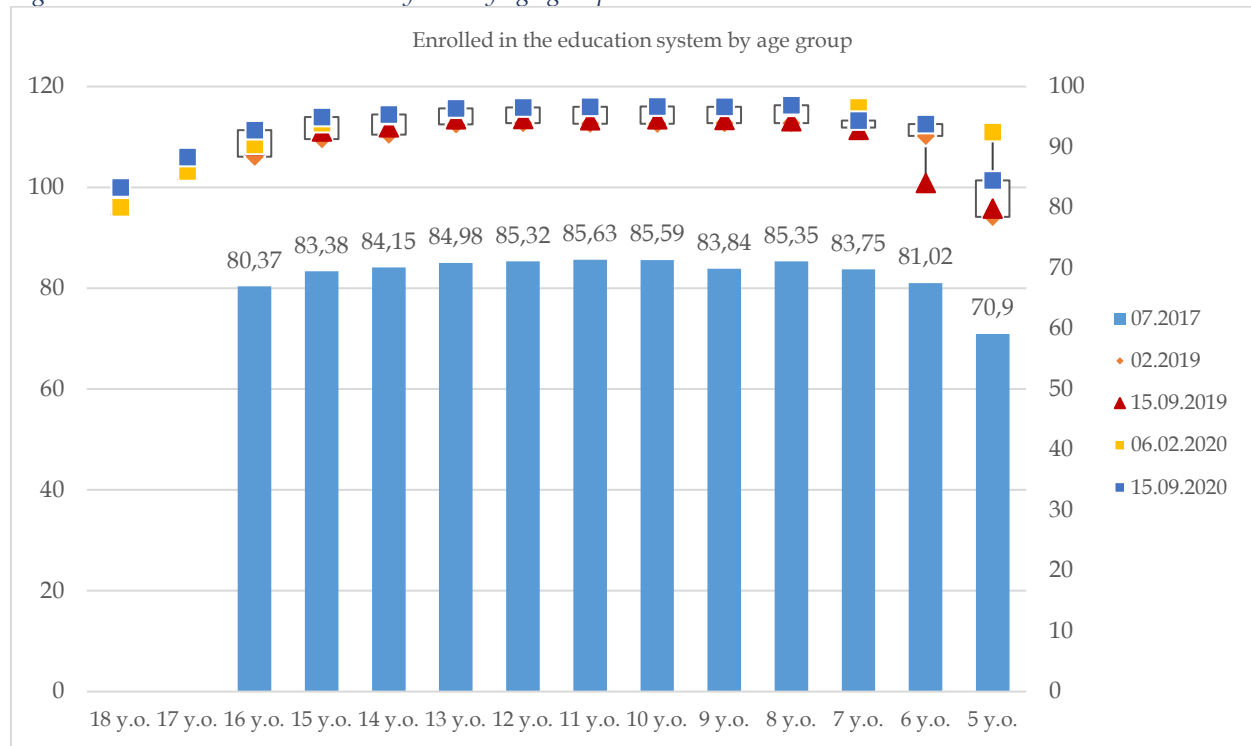
Given the period of implementation of the two procedures, which are within the scope of this analysis and the observed downward trend in the indicator after 2020, as well as the development of national policies and the introduction of a Mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age, we can conclude that the efforts to implement projects under the procedures evaluated have an impact on reducing the number (and proportion) of early school leavers, but it is difficult to quantify this impact. To the extent that the period of increase in the share of enrolled in the education system by age log coincides with the period of implementation of project activities and since the activities, interventions and objectives of the procedures work towards reducing the share of early school leavers, we can conclude with a great deal of confidence that the activities under PA 3 have a positive impact on this indicator and contribute to an increase in the share of enrollments in the education system.

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<sup>68</sup> These persons are less than 24 years old, as the period after completion of operations is less than five years

**Between 2016 and 2021, the share of early school leavers aged 18-24 of the population of the same age fell from 13.8 % to 12.2 % or the overall decrease was 1.6 percentage points.** Since the projects funded under OP SESG within the scope of this assessment in practice include almost all schools in the country (1,793 schools in total), we can assume that Priority Axis 3 makes a significant contribution to reducing the share of early school leavers in this period. Overall, if we measure the effect as a percentage, this would mean that the procedures assessed contribute to reducing early school leavers by 11.5 % (for leavers since 2016). This decline in only five years is significant, although municipalities still remain, where the share of early school leavers remains critically high (see section 4.1.2 of this report).

Figure82 Enrolled in the education system by age group



Source: Data from the implementation of the Mechanism for joint work of institutions on coverage, inclusion and prevention of dropping out of the education system of children and students in compulsory pre-school and school age, published in the Report "Bulgaria: Early childhood education and care, general education and inclusion: situational analysis and policy guidance recommendations", World Bank <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pageId=451>

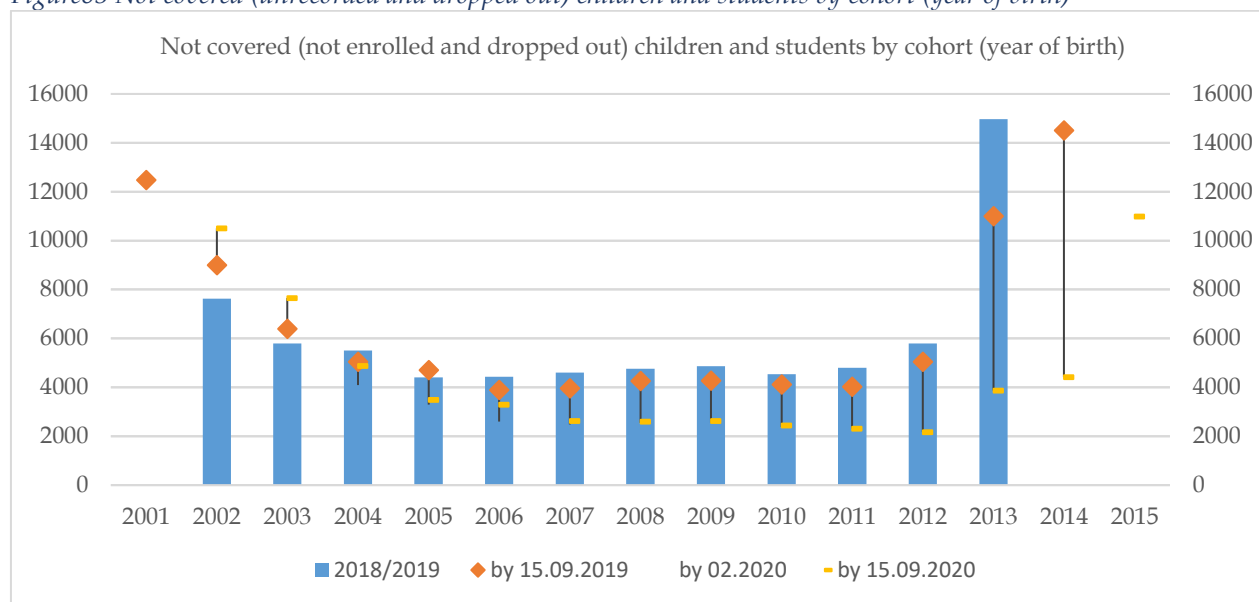
From 2013 to 2019, the positive trend for early school leavers was interrupted, increasing from 12.5 % in 2013 to 13.9 % in 2016. In 2017, this negative trend was interrupted, with a decrease of 1.1 percentage points, close to the 2013 value (12.7 %). In 2018, the percentage ratio was maintained, but in 2019 there was again an increase to 13.9 %. Over this period, the share of ESL on average for EU countries shows a steady and stable downward trend, from 11.9 % in 2013 to 10.30 % in 2019, approaching the target value of 10 %, while in Bulgaria the processes are less positive.

The increase of 1.2 percentage points in 2019 is explained, on the one hand, by several interruptions in the educational process during the year due to declared flu holidays, and, on the other hand, by the migration of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age with parents working outside the country. There is no individual monitoring mechanism to track their number and determine their profile. A positive step is that as part of the Mechanism for cooperation between institutions for inclusion in the

education system of children and students of pre-school and school age, data on children who are not included in the education system due to their departure abroad have been collected.

The implementation of the Cooperation Mechanism between institutions for inclusion in the education system of children and students of pre-school and school age yields short-term positive results – the number of students not covered by the education system decreases in almost all cohorts. The graph below presents the decrease in unrecorded or dropped from 2018 to 2020.

Figure83 Not covered (unrecorded and dropped out) children and students by cohort (year of birth)



Source: Data from the implementation of the Mechanism for joint work of institutions on coverage, inclusion and prevention of dropping out of the education system of children and students at compulsory pre-school and school age, published in the Report "Bulgaria: Early childhood education and care, general education and inclusion: situational analysis and policy guidance recommendations", World Bank <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pageId=451>

**Among the activities concerning the coverage, inclusion, inclusion and prevention of dropping out of the educational system of children and students at compulsory pre-school and school age, the following were most often carried out:**

- Organizing additional trainings as part of the overall support for personal development (88.3 %);
- Application of a methodology including various tools for assessing systemic gaps and difficulties in learning content by students (88.3 %);
- Identification of students at risk of early school leaving (87.5 %);
- Additional trainings in the second upper secondary school stage to overcome gaps in learning content in order to successfully perform SME under the Bulgarian language, as well as SME on other subjects of general education (87 % have performed this activity);
- Implementation of general support through additional training in subjects (87.4 %);
- Identifying the specific needs to provide individual support to each student at risk of early school leaving (86.8 %);
- Implementation of general support through career guidance for high school students (80.4 % have performed this activity);
- Implementation of general support through career guidance for lower secondary school students (from 5th to 7th grade) (79 %)

- Provision of additional activities with students from ethnic minorities at risk of dropping out of school (79.8 %);
- Implementation of general support by providing interest activities (79.3 %);
- Provision of additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom Bulgarian is not native (77 %);
- Organizing and conducting trainings for pedagogical specialists to implement the toolkit for early identification of students at risk of early school leaving and for a differentiated approach in determining their needs for individual support (76.7 %);
- Working with parents of all educated children to explain the benefits of educational integration and acceptance of difference (74.1 %).

The following activities concerning the coverage, inclusion and prevention of dropping out of the educational system of children and students at compulsory pre-school and school age have been rarely carried out:

- Reintegrating into the educational system of young people under 18 who dropped out of school (39.7 % performed this activity);
- Organizing and conducting day-to-day workshops to work with the parent community (47.6 % have carried out this activity).

The activities carried out concerning the coverage, inclusion and prevention of dropping out of the education system of children and students at compulsory pre-school and school age generally achieve high scores in terms of the results achieved. Among them, the following activities stand out as the best working ones:

- Implementation of general support by providing interest activities (93.2 %);
- Organizing and conducting trainings for pedagogical specialists to implement the toolkit for early identification of students at risk of early school leaving and for a differentiated approach in determining their needs for individual support (92.2 %);
- Participation in inter-school activities to increase motivation to learn (91.3 %);
- Selection and appointment of educational mediators and/or social workers, etc. (90.7 %);
- Providing psychological support to children from ethnic minorities (89.9 %);
- Provision of additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom Bulgarian is not native (89.1 %);
- Organizing additional trainings as part of the overall support for personal development (88.8 %);
- Activities aimed at preserving and developing the cultural identity of students from ethnic minorities and their peers in an integration multicultural educational environment (88 %);
- Implementation of general support through further training in subjects (87.9 %).

Compared to the above activities, a lower performance rate is recorded for the following activities, but more than three quarters of teachers say they are effective:

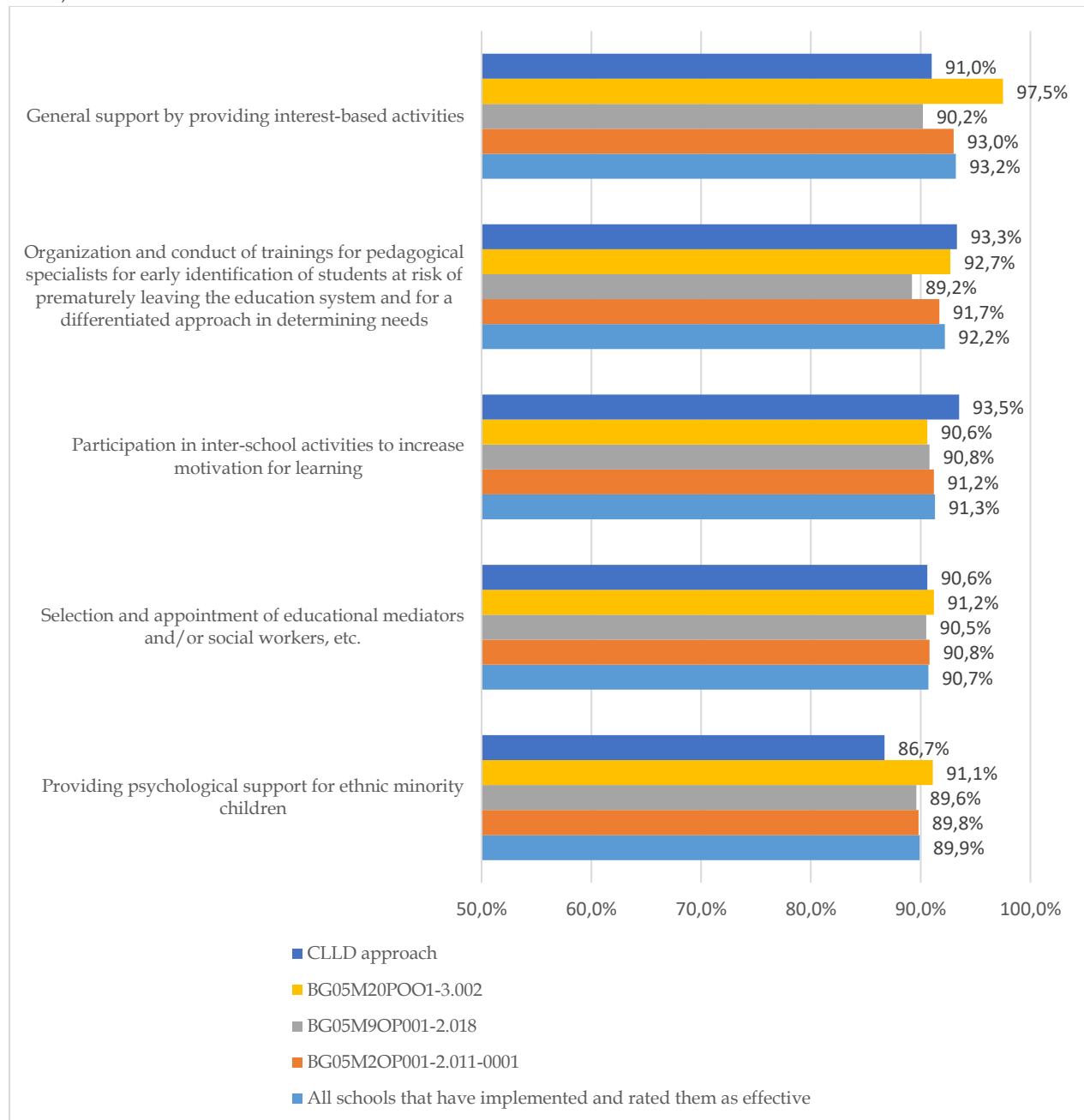
- Activities promoting the involvement of parents in the educational process (73.3 %);
- Reintegrating into the education system of young people under 18 who drop out of school (74.6 %);
- Organizing and conducting one-day workshops to work with the parent community (76.8 %);
- Development of information materials and others aimed at parents of students at risk of dropping out of the education system (77.2 %).

The activities identified as contributing to a greater impact, namely - implementation of general support by providing interest activities and organizing and conducting trainings of pedagogical specialists for the implementation of the toolkit for early identification of students at risk of early school leaving and for a differentiated approach in determining their needs for individual support - were assessed with the greatest effect most often by representatives of schools that were beneficiaries under procedures BG05M20P001-

3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education” and the CLLD approach “Ensure access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”.

With some exceptions, there are generally no statistically significant differences in the effectiveness of activities among beneficiary schools under different procedures.

Figure84. Activities that have supported the successful integration of students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, in schools



Source: Survey among teachers from schools involved in procedures under PA3, cross-stabulation in procedures under PA3 of OP SESG

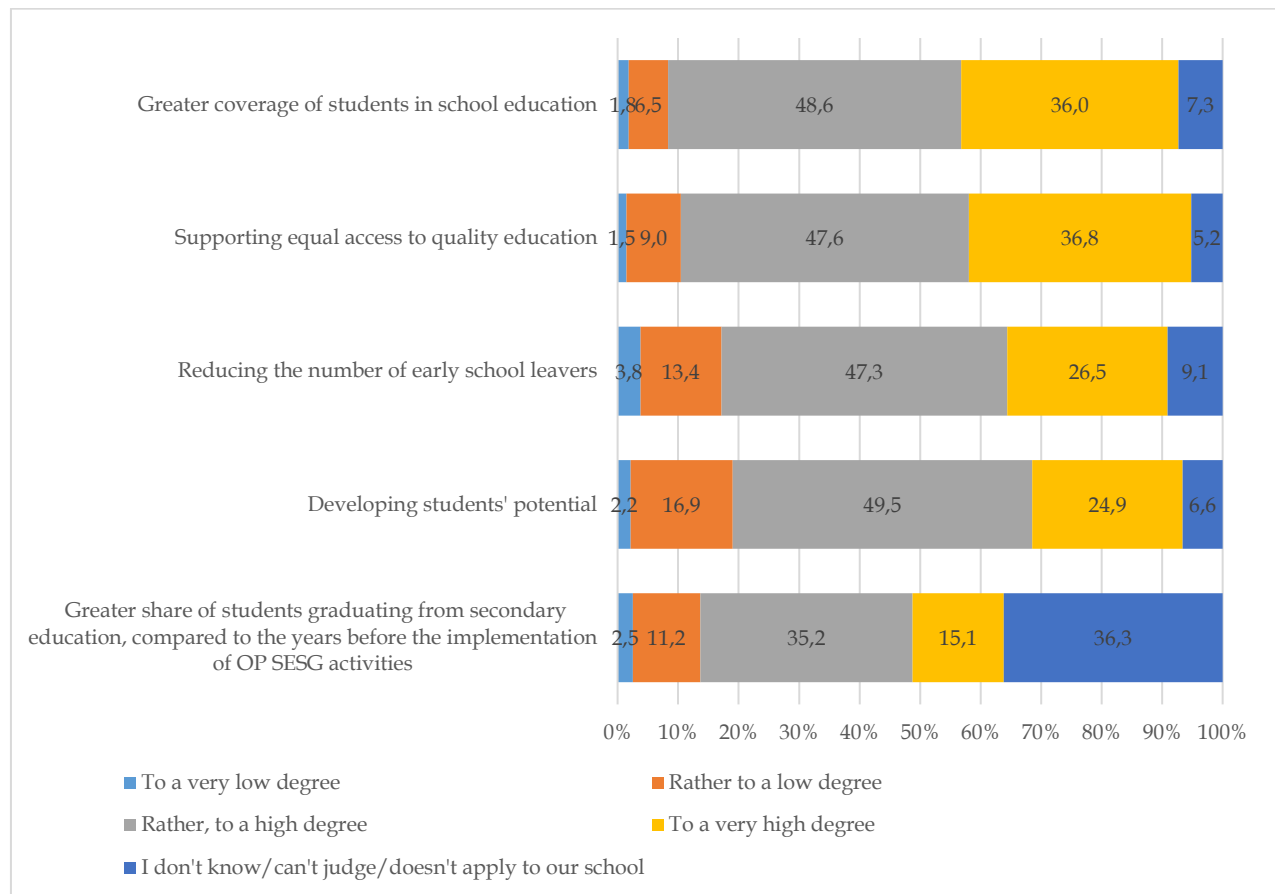


**Ensuring access to education for all children is a key and priority goal for the education system in Bulgaria.** For the successful integration of all children in the education system, including students from ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups, their sustainable retention in the education system, as well as the inclusion of children from marginalized groups, multiple targets have been defined.

According to the survey of teachers in schools involved in the procedures, the following sub-objectives are the most successful:

- **Greater coverage of students in school education** (84.5 % cumulative share of high scores for the contribution of the activity, with a maximum 'very high' score of 36.0 % and a 'high' rate by 48.6 %);
- **Supporting equal access to quality education** (84.4 % cumulative share of high scores for the contribution of the activity, with the maximum 'very high' score being indicated by 36.8 % and 'high' by 47.6 %);
- **Development of the potential of students** (74.4 % cumulative share of high scores for the contribution of the activity, with the maximum 'very high' score being indicated by 24.9 % and 'more highly' by 49.5 %);
- **A reduction in the number of early school leavers** ( 73.8 % cumulative share of high scores for the contribution of the activity, with a maximum 'very high' score by 26.5 % and a 'high' rate by 47.3 %).

Figure 85. To what extent did you achieve each of those identified as a result of the implementation of the activities under OP SESG?



*Source: Survey among teachers from schools participating in procedures under PA3 of OP SESG*

A lower cumulative share was reported in terms of the assessment of the respondents specialists regarding the **increase of the share of students completing secondary education compared to the years before the implementation of the activities under OP SESG**. Approximately 50 % generally agree with the statement – the maximum “very high” score is indicated by 15.1 % and “rather to a high degree” by 35.2 %. However, this is mainly due to the appreciably higher response rate “I cannot judge/doesn't apply to our school” – 36.3 %.

Among the activities related to the provision of support for pre-school education, which are or have been carried out in kindergartens and schools funded under OP SESG, the highest effectiveness is reported in terms of the activity of providing additional Bulgarian language education to children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian (76.9 %).

According to the survey carried out among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and pre-school education involved in the procedures, progress has been reported towards meeting objectives related to interaction with parents and other stakeholders. As a result of the implementation of project activities related to interaction with parents and other stakeholders, high efficiency is reported in terms of the following:

- Improving the quality of work in kindergarten/school (83.7 % cumulative share, with the maximum ‘very high’ score being 28.8 % and ‘high’ 54.9 %);
- Building positive public attitudes towards pre-school education (78.9 % cumulative share, with the maximum ‘very high’ score being 30.6 % and ‘high’ 48.3 %);
- Increasing the number of successfully integrated children from vulnerable groups in pre-school education (72.1 % cumulative share, with the maximum ‘very high’ score being 20 % and ‘rather high’ 52.2 %);
- The proportion of children attending a kindergarten/pre-school group in school has increased after the fees have been covered by the project or the municipality (67.3 % cumulative consent rate, with the maximum ‘very high’ score being 25.4 % and ‘rather high’ 42 %).

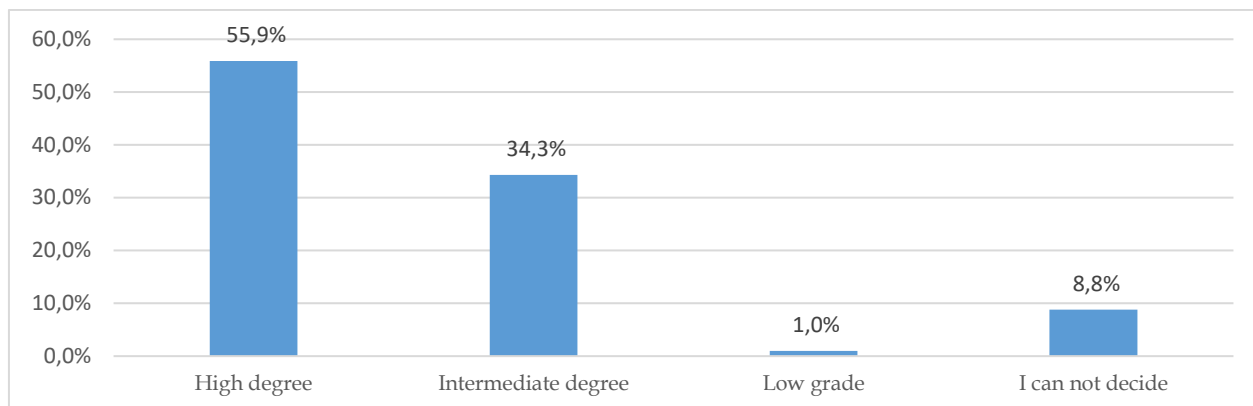
As a result of the implementation of project activities related to interaction with parents and other stakeholders, moderate effectiveness is reported in relation to the following activities:

- We had at our disposal the necessary specialists to meet the additional needs of children with special educational needs (45.6 % cumulative share, with the maximum “very high” score being 17 % and “rather high” – 28.6 %);
- As a result of the work of mediators, more children began to attend pre-school education (42.4 % cumulative share, with the maximum “very high” score being 17 % and “rather high” – 28.6 %);
- We had a psychologist at our disposal to consult and work with the children on specific cases when needed (41 % cumulative share, with the maximum score “very high” being 16.3 % and “rather high” – 24.7 %);

The lower score rate is at the expense of the high proportion of responses “I cannot judge” and “it does not apply to our school/our kindergarten”. The activities listed below have achieved efficiency among schools and kindergartens that have participated in the evaluated procedures under PO3 and implemented the specific activities.

The survey among beneficiaries shows that, in their view, the activities under the procedures assessed contribute to reducing the share of early school leavers. In total, 90 % of the beneficiaries interviewed (55.9 % high and 34 % medium).

*Figure86 To what extent did the project activities contribute to reducing the share of early school leavers?*



Source: Survey among beneficiaries of projects under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

The experts recognize the important role of the activities under OP SESG in reducing the share of early school leavers and linking the trends to the implementation of the procedures evaluated:

*“the indicator, which was the only one targeting vulnerable groups at the time, was that of reducing the proportion of early school leavers, and my personal opinion is that if these procedures were not available, the indicator would be in a much worse position than the value we have in our programme.”<sup>69</sup>*

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Despite the strong positive opinions of beneficiaries and teachers regarding the success of the activities, other circumstances should also be taken into account, in order not to report unambiguously the contribution of the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme in reducing the share of early school leavers. On the one hand, the procedures evaluated cover almost all schools in which children from vulnerable groups are trained, and this is a reason to believe that they make a significant contribution to the decline of early school leavers. At the same time, in addition to these procedures, several parallel processes and parallel efforts to reduce early school leavers take place during the evaluation period: through the Mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, integrate and prevent the drop-out of children and students at compulsory pre-school and school age, through national programmes and, last but not least, through projects funded from other sources.

The lack of individual data (for each student involved and his/ her path in the educational system) also makes it very difficult to take into account the effects of the programme on reducing the share of early school leavers.

Due to the above circumstances, it can be assumed that the procedures under assessment contribute moderately to reducing the share of early school leavers.

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<sup>69</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the MA of OP SESG on 19.12.2022

#### 4.4.3. Are attitudes towards informed decisions being developed by students from marginalized groups, including Roma for continuing education?

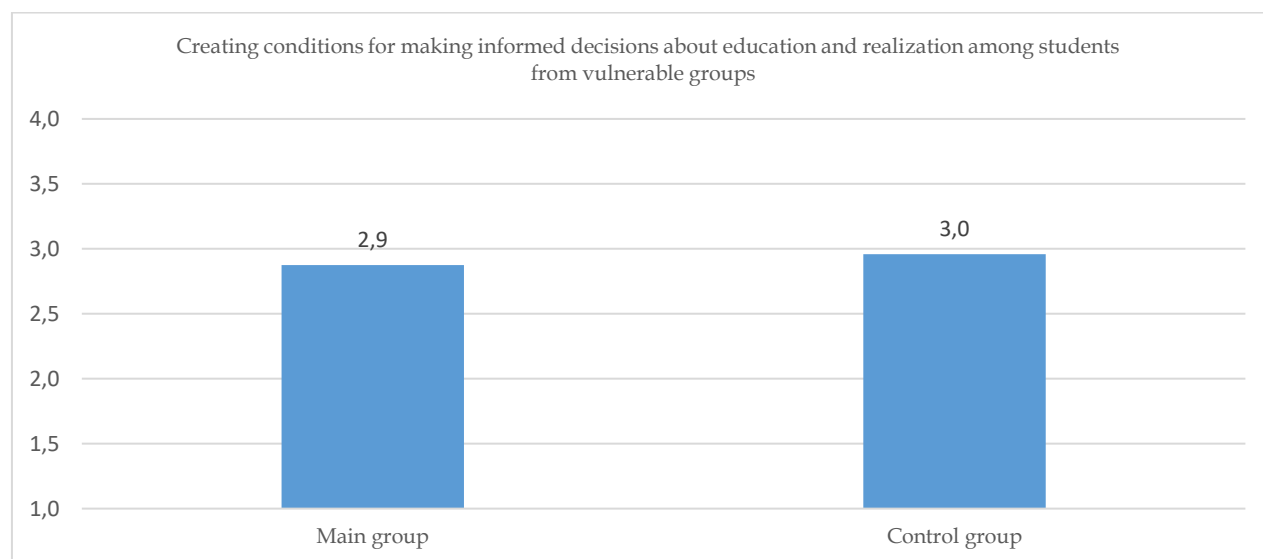
The answer to this evaluation question is based on an analysis of data related to the following procedures: BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M2OP001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” and CLLD approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”.

In order to identify changes in student attitudes, we have interviewed teachers and parents, drawing on their opinions a conclusion on the degree of achievement of the goals set by the procedures evaluated.

The schools that participated in procedures under PA3 of OP SESG carried out the following activities, which helped students to make informed decisions about continuing education:

- Implementation of general support through career guidance for high school students (80.4 % have performed this activity);
- Implementation of general support through career guidance for students in lower secondary education (from 5th to 7th grade) (79 %).

Figure 87 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school [for main group: funded under OP SESG], have contributed to the realization of any of the following objectives?



Source: Survey among a main and control group of teachers, school education

To measure the results of these activities on students’ attitudes, a survey was conducted among teachers from the main and control group of schools. In both the main and control group of schools, these attitudes are shared to a high degree (average score 3 on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “very low” and 4 is “very high”). The differences between the two groups are minimal. This shows that similar activities and efforts take place in schools that have not implemented projects under the procedures evaluated, so we cannot take into account significant differences between main and control group of schools.

Although this activity was large-scale, a small part of the parents found out about it. Only 6.8 % of parents in the schools covered by the OP SESG report that such activity has been carried out.

Parents in the control group reported significantly less that their child’s school was supported in the form of career guidance for students from 5th to 7th grade, for successful continuation of secondary education (0.8 %). These results show that there is still a need for more active involvement of parents in the educational process and informing them about what is happening in the school environment.

Table 46 In which of the following activities organized by your child’s school did you or your child participate?

In which of the following activities organized by your child’s school did you or your child participate?	Parents –main group	Parents – control group
Career guidance was carried out to prepare students (grade 5th to 7th grade) for further education in upper secondary education.	6.8 %	0.8 %

Source: Study among the main and control groups, parents

In addition, based on the analysis under section 4.5.2, it can be assumed that, according to the pedagogical specialists, as a result of the projects implemented, the attitude towards the educational process of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved moderately and, according to the parents’ opinion, to a significant extent. Changing the attitudes and motivations of children and parents is the key for further steps to increase educational outcomes, which is why we can recognise that important prerequisites for successful integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, have been achieved.

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As a result of the implementation of the procedures evaluated, conditions were created for forming attitudes for taking informed decisions by students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, for continuing education. Although this process has started and many of the schools covered by the procedures evaluated have carried out this activity, the achieving of more lasting results requires more time and accumulation. Career guidance has played an important role and has been instrumental in taking informed decisions and increasing motivation for realisation after graduation.

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#### 4.4.4. What methods of educational integration and inclusive education have been used? How they are used in the direction:

In answering this question, data related to procedures were used: BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, “BG05M2OP001-3.005 Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach “Ensure access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”.

- Reducing the share of early school leavers (ESL):

In general, the vast majority of the activities carried out under the procedures evaluated are directly or indirectly relevant<sup>70</sup> for reducing the share of early school leavers. Only those activities that have a direct role in preventing drop-out are presented in this section, as the remaining activities are presented in other sections of the evaluation report.

The activities performed, as well as their impact on the results, as measured by the teachers' opinions, are presented in the figures below. The results show that almost all activities are characterized by high performance. Several activities remain behind, but still they get positive evaluations of their usefulness from over 75 % of the teachers. These are working with parents (activities encouraging parents' participation in the educational process) and reintegrating into the education system of young people up to 18 years old who have dropped out of school. These results show that some teachers still find it difficult to work with families, and that it is more difficult and slower to see progress and the outcome of this activity. Further training needs to take into account the importance of these activities as well as the appropriate methods for their implementation, while at the same time motivating teachers to work towards the reintegration of any child who is at risk of dropping out. Very often teachers perceive their work only in the classroom and more difficult to accept a role that requires communicating with local communities and participating in the reintegration into education of dropouts.

However, the results clearly point out that the whole range of methods of educational integration has been applied and assessed as successful by teachers.

Due to the diversity of eligible activities within each procedure, different activities are implemented with different coverage within the participating schools and kindergartens. All of them have an overall impact on the results achieved and the changes that have occurred for the target groups, intervening at different levels – from training of teachers and pedagogical specialists, through support for students and working with parents, to working with the general public (and parents of all children) to change attitudes and overcome discrimination.

The largest part of the activities were targeted in the following several directions:

- Identification of students at risk of early school leaving;
- Identifying the specific needs to provide individual support to each student at risk of early school leaving;
- Implementation of general support through career guidance for upper secondary school students;
- Implementation of general support through career guidance for students from lower secondary education (from 5th to 7th grade);
- Organizing and conducting trainings for pedagogical specialists to implement the toolkit for early identification of students at risk of early school leaving and for a differentiated approach in determining their needs for providing individual support;
- Additional trainings in the upper secondary school stage to overcome gaps in learning content in order to successfully lay SME in Bulgarian language, as well as SME in other subjects of general education.

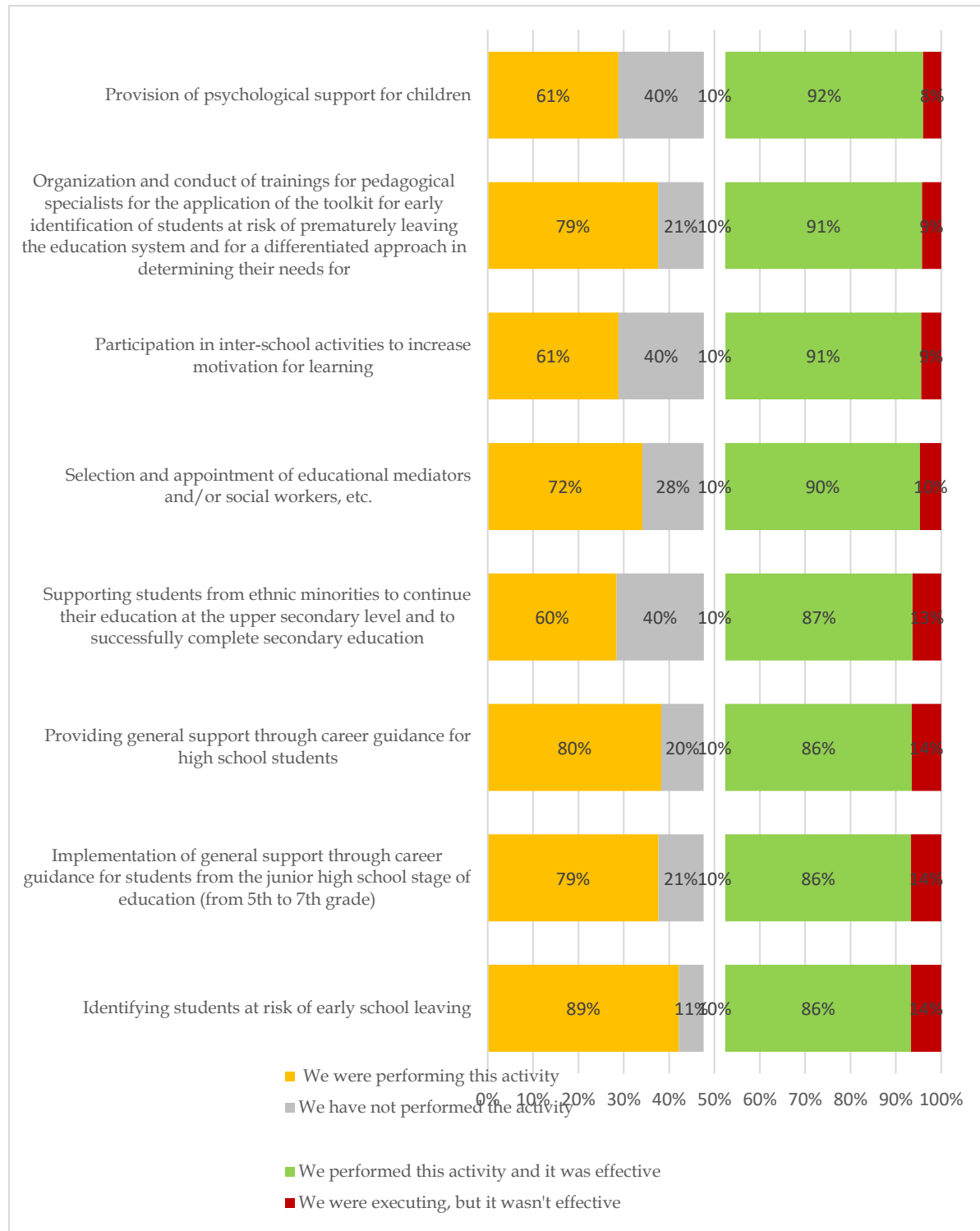
The remaining activities were carried out in a smaller part of the schools. Gaining experience in such a wide range of activities has improved the capacity of school authorities to carry out such activities. It would be

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<sup>70</sup> The additional trainings in the main subjects, as well as the extracurricular activities in interest, training in Bulgarian language, general support for personal development, etc. play an indirect role

good for the implementation of such measures in the future to build on the current assessment by improving and extending the scope of measures that have been less targeted by taking into account the needs and implementation capacities.

Figure 88 Which of the following activities were carried out in your school? and Which of the following activities helped to effectively integrate students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, into your school?



Source: Survey among teachers in schools involved in the procedures evaluated

Figure 89 Which of the following activities were carried out in your school? and Which of the following activities helped to effectively integrate students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, into your school?

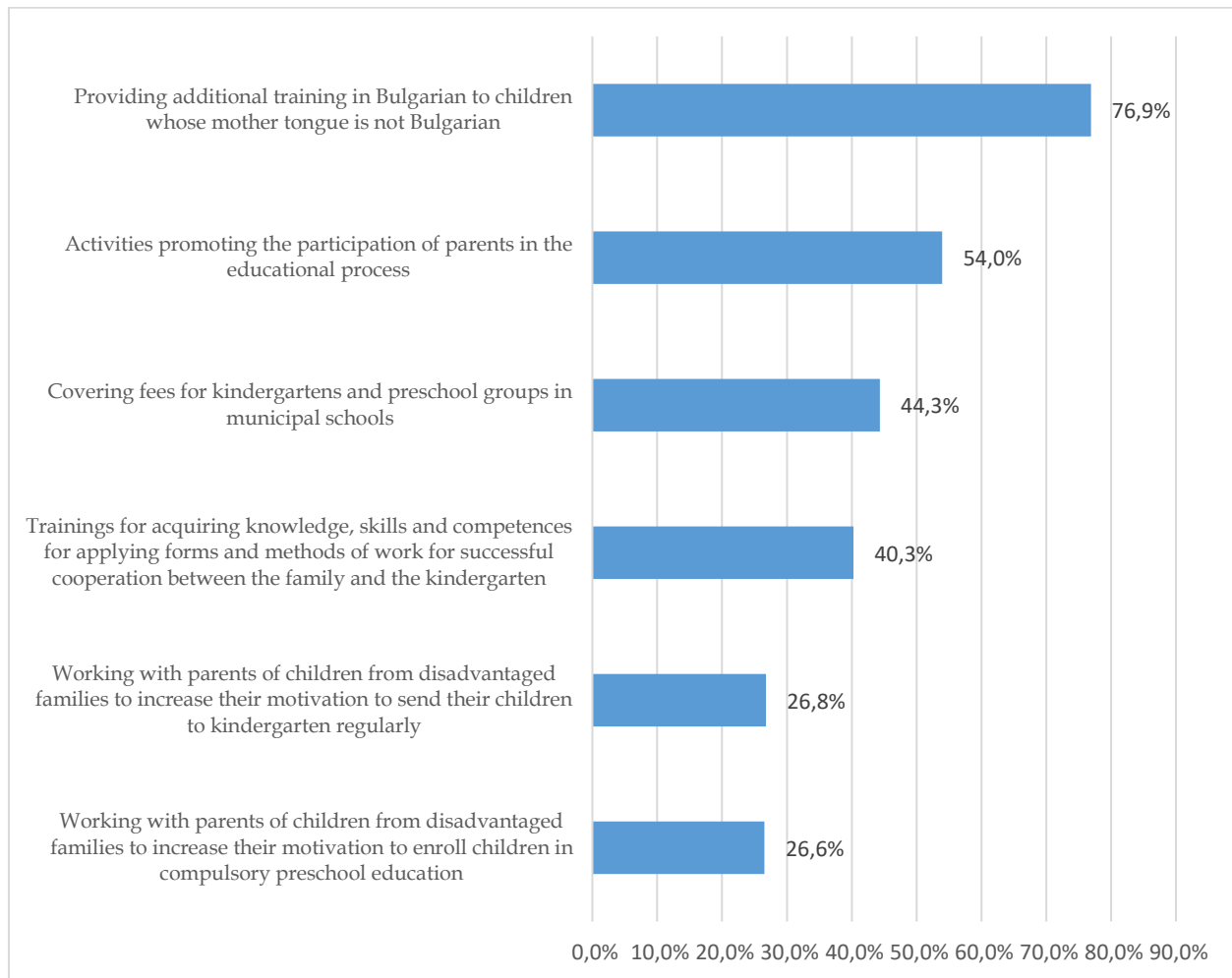




Source: Survey among teachers in schools involved in procedures evaluated

Pedagogical specialists in kindergartens performed a smaller set of activities, given the specifics of the educational process in preschool education. The most widely available is the additional training in Bulgarian language for children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian. About half of the educators said they had worked with parents, and 40 % said they had participated in trainings to acquire knowledge and skills for cooperation between the family and kindergarten.

Figure90 Which of the following activities related to the provision of pre-school support are carried out or have taken place in your kindergarten/ school?



Source: Survey among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools involved in the procedures (main group)

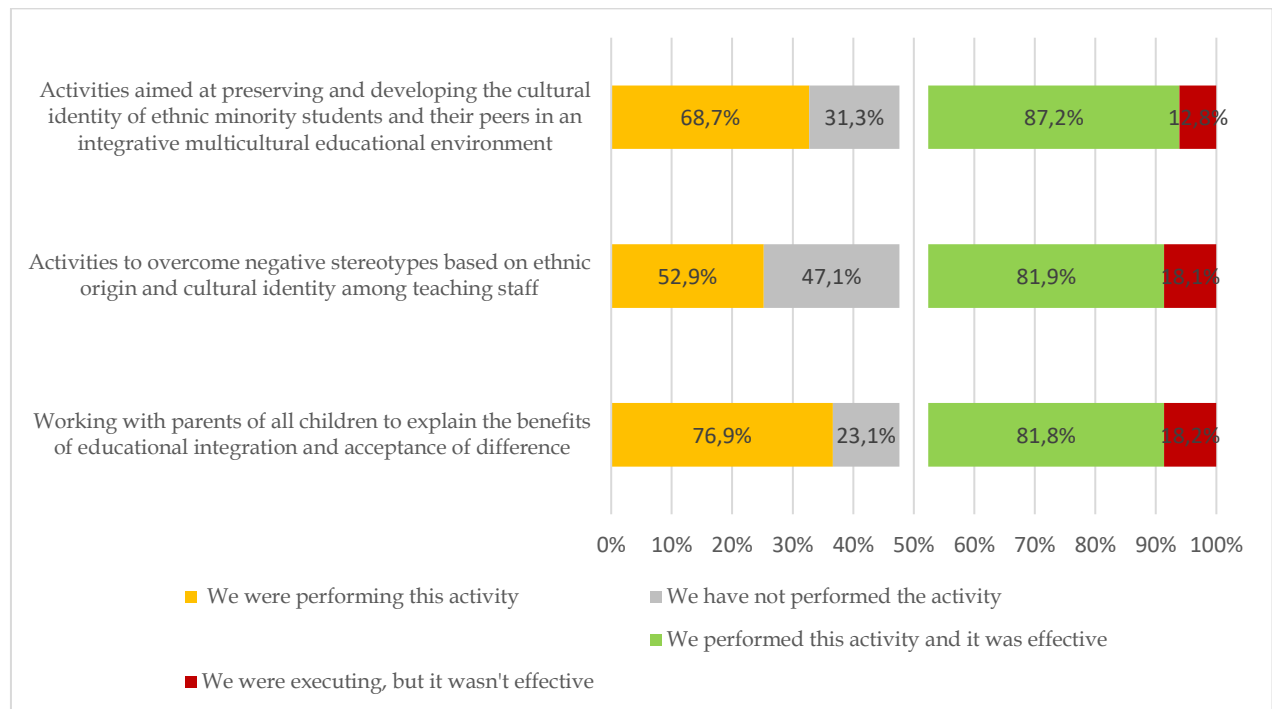
#### Overcoming discrimination:

The activities to overcome discrimination have been carried out with different scopes in the schools and kindergartens covered. To overcome discrimination, activities that included working with parents and preserving and developing the cultural identity of students from ethnic minorities were used to the greatest

extent. In a slightly smaller part of the projects, activities were implemented which had wider objectives and scope, namely: overcoming negative stereotypes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity among pedagogical specialists.

They were rated as having a significant effect of more than 80 % of the interviewed teachers. Due to the specificities of these activities, it is necessary to build additional capacity and train educators how to work with parents, families and local communities.

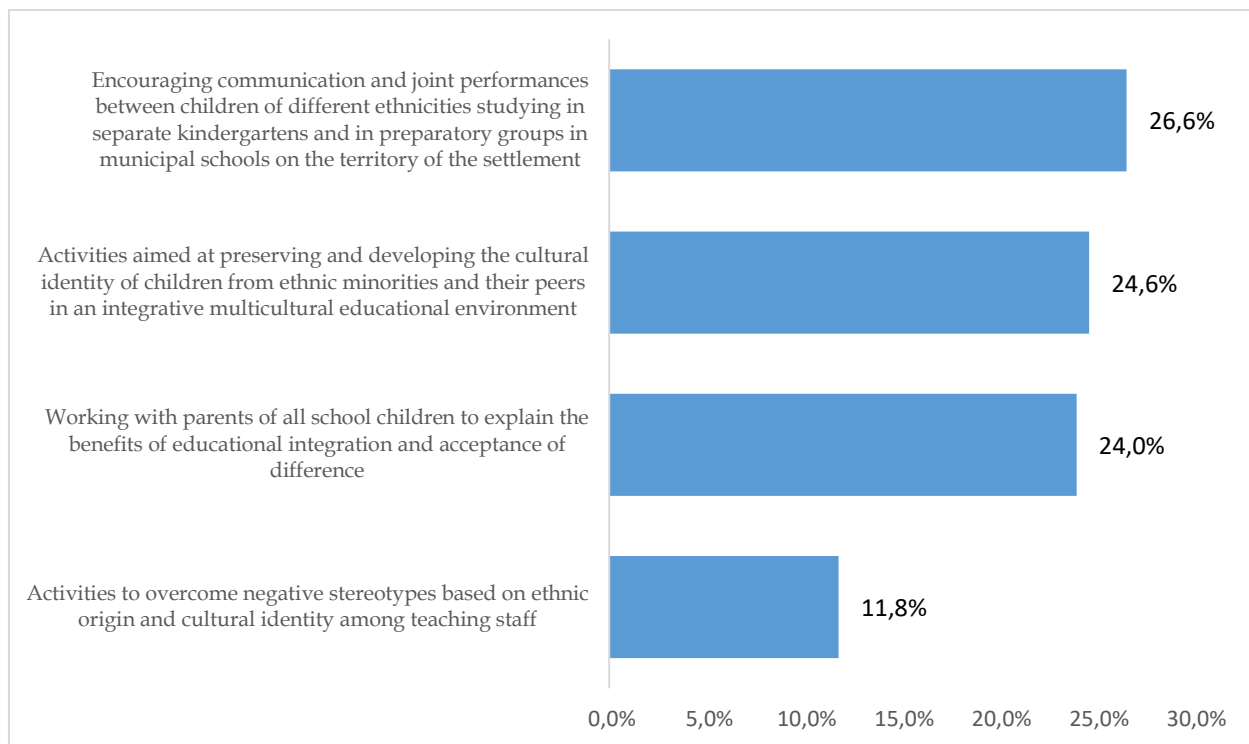
Figure91 Which of the following activities were carried out in your school? and Which of the following activities helped to effectively integrate students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, into your school?



Source: Survey among teachers in schools involved in the procedures evaluated

These activities have a slightly smaller scope in kindergartens. This is probably related to the specifics of the projects and the available resources.

Figure92 Which of the following activities related to the provision of pre-school support are carried out or have taken place in your kindergarten/school?



Source: Survey among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools involved in the procedures (main group)

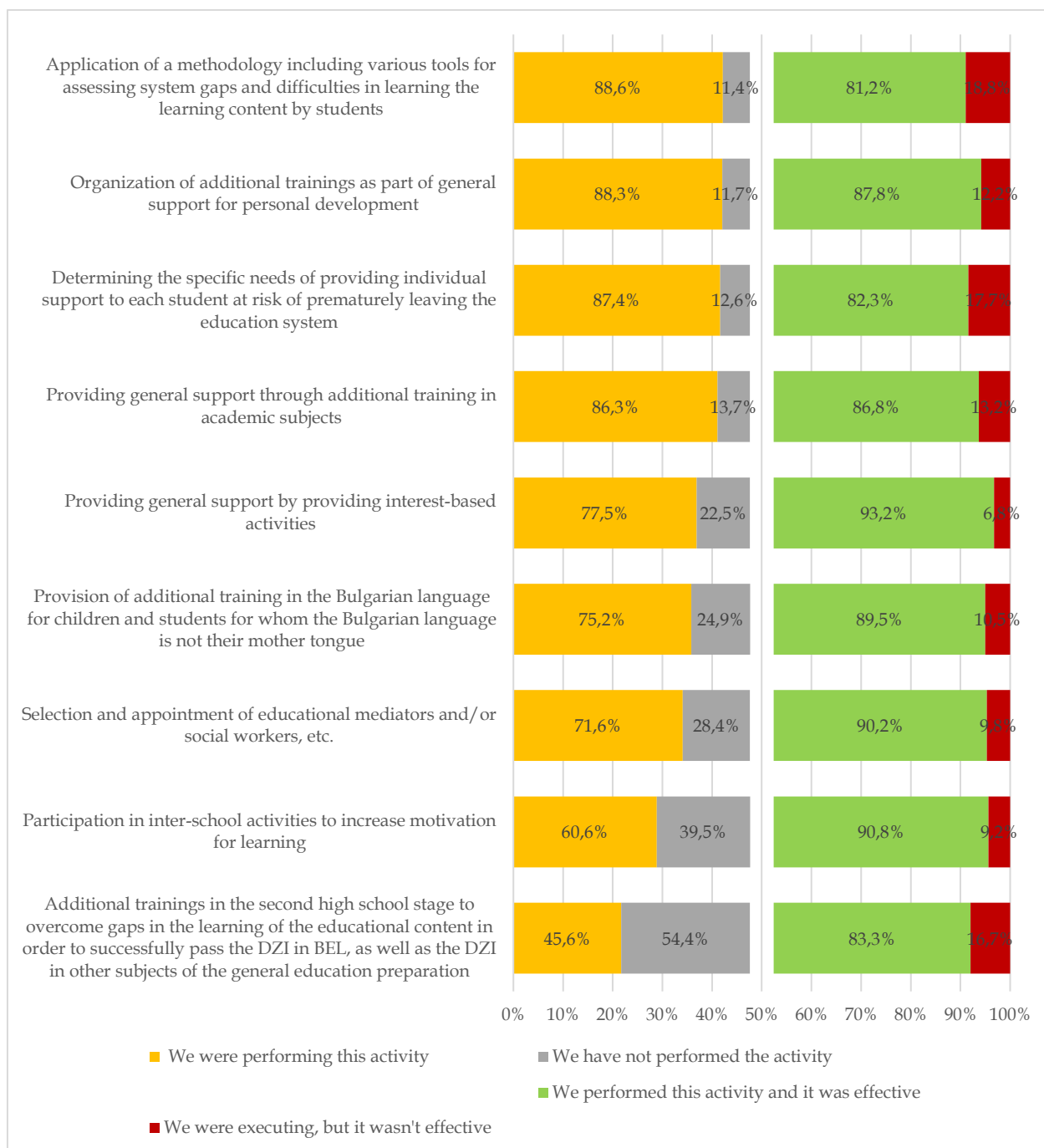
### Improving the educational outcomes of children and students from marginalized communities, including Roma.

In order to improve educational outcomes, a wide range of activities have been implemented, the most common being:

- Selection and appointment of educational mediators and/or social workers, etc.;
- Providing additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom the Bulgarian language is not native;
- Providing general support through the provision of interest activities;
- Implementation of general support through further training in subjects;
- Identifying the specific needs to provide individual support to each student at risk of early school leaving;
- Organizing additional trainings as part of general support for personal development;
- Application of a methodology including various tools for assessing systemic gaps and difficulties in learning content by students.

Scores of impact on the achievement of results of all activities are high (over 80 % of teachers give a positive opinion of their impact).

Figure93 Which of the following activities were carried out in your school? and Which of the following activities helped to effectively integrate students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, into your school?

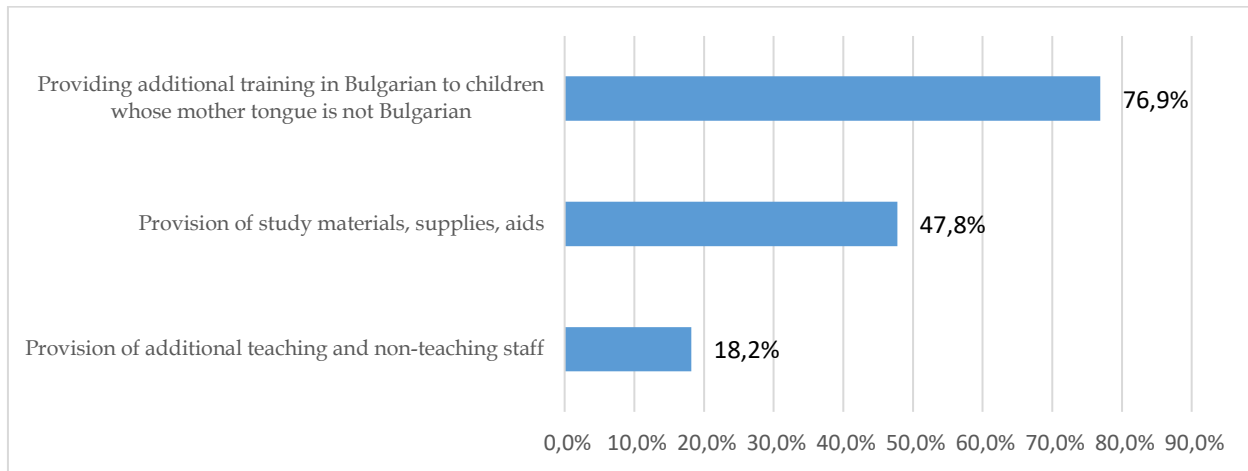


Source: Study among teachers, main group

The largest number of activities include various activities that aim to fill gaps in students' knowledge, to prepare them for NEE and SME or to develop their language skills in Bulgarian language. This group of activities was implemented in about two thirds of schools, with no significant differences between procedures.

The activities performed in kindergartens are more limited in number, the most common being the provision of additional Bulgarian language education for children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian.

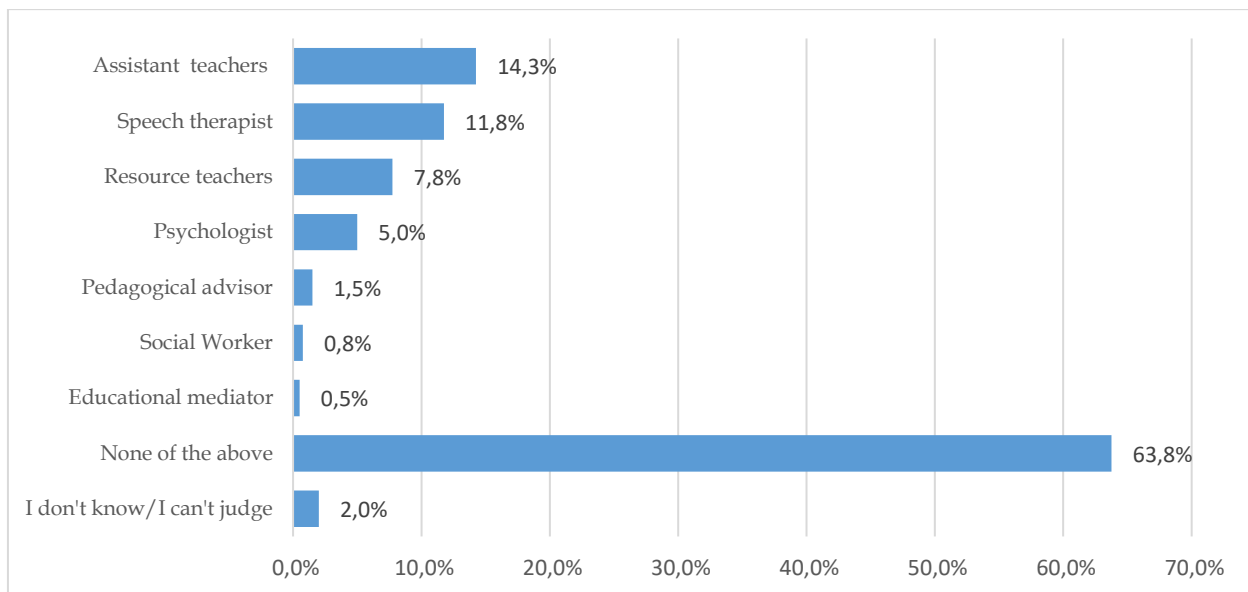
Figure94 Which of the following activities related to the provision of pre-school support are carried out or have taken place in your kindergarten/school?



Source: Study among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools involved in the procedures (main group)

As part of inclusive education activities that have an impact on all three strands (reducing early school leavers, non-discrimination and improving educational outcomes), the support resource has been used. Nearly a third of the parents of children in kindergarten said they had received such support for their children.

Figure95 Support from which of the following specialists has used your child in recent years in the kindergarten/school he/she attended:



Source: Survey among parents of children from kindergartens participating in the procedures

In qualitative research, experts recognize the crucial role of educational mediators and the impact this figure has in the education process:

*“For children from marginalized communities, special and targeted support for this group is the recruitment of educational mediators. These educational mediators work with families, support the institution through interaction,*

*and sometimes with the child himself/herself, when it is necessary or possible according to the person who is employed. And this is extremely valuable support specifically for children from marginalized communities.” (Interview with representatives of DB MES)<sup>71</sup>*

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The implemented projects include a wide range of methods and activities to reduce the share of early school leavers by overcoming discrimination, improving educational outcomes and educational integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma. Depending on the specificities of the projects, some of the methods have been applied and therefore the activities are carried out with greater intensity, while others cover a smaller share of schools and kindergartens (respectively students and children). In general, almost all methods stand out with a high degree of relevance within the specific educational context.

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#### 4.4.5. What are the unplanned effects on the operation-supported children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma, related to reducing the share of early school leaving?

In answering this evaluation question, data related to procedures were used: BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, “BG05M2OP001-3.005 Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach “Ensure access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”.

The evaluation did not identify any unplanned effects on children and students from vulnerable groups supported by the operations evaluated. All interventions collectively aim to increase the educational integration of students from marginalized groups, including Roma, by contributing to reducing the share of early school leavers. In general, the implemented measures, in addition to their direct effects on students, also contribute to increasing the capacity to carry out activities and work in a multicultural environment by increasing the training of teachers and non-pedagogical specialists to work with children from vulnerable groups and to more professionally meet their specific needs.

At the same time, however, experts stress that there are significant risks in implementing such interventions only on a project basis and losing their effects in periods where due to the nature of the project cycle there is no funding:

*“Certainly operations provide a great opportunity in the right direction for the integration of vulnerable groups, but the danger remains in many other operations, which we are also working on and monitoring and not leaving everything on a project basis. That is, not just relying on things to go from one programming period to another without it becoming clear policies. It is particularly important not to forget the analysis of the results and data, and that each programme and each subsequent operation should be based on a clear analysis and monitoring of the results of the previous one. That is, to build on each time with the experience of the previous one and not to break the individual periods so as not to hang the contractors, delays in payments.” (MC Focus Group)*

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<sup>71</sup> An interview with representatives of DB MES for projects “New Chance for Success” and “Active Inclusion in the System of Preschool Education”, held on 13.01.2023

It is also important to look for greater systemic change that has not yet been achieved, although many of the processes have started:

*“Due to the lack of turning good practices into some systematicity, it is very difficult to distinguish between what has improved and what has deteriorated as a result of the projects. We certainly have very good examples of which we all wanted to go to the national level and spread in the system, but unfortunately they very often remain at the level of the concrete good intentions of the people who implement them. They fail to make systemic change. Right, for a number of reasons we don’t analyse now... This is probably one of the most basic big questions in these programs – what if that money goes for that, since it doesn’t lead to systemic change. And unfortunately, in the same way and for the same reasons, from one period to another, even for the same school or kindergarten, depending on who performs the same program activity, it may also depend on what the results are. That is, a change of team or director may turn out to be the end of good examples, or vice versa, strengthens them.”<sup>72</sup>*

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The evaluation did not identify any unplanned effects on children and students from vulnerable groups supported by the operations evaluated.

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#### **4.5. Improving the educational outcomes of children and students with special educational needs, from marginalized groups, including Roma and their achievements in mastering key competences**

##### **4.5.1. What is the link between the tools developed in the framework of the projects assessed and the educational outcomes of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma?**

The analysis for the answer to this evaluation question includes procedures: BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education” – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, “BG05M2OP001-3.005 Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach “Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”.

The tools applied in the procedures evaluated cover a wide range of educational needs and support teachers in the teaching process by developing key competences and skills in children and students and/or supporting their integration or reintegration into the educational process.

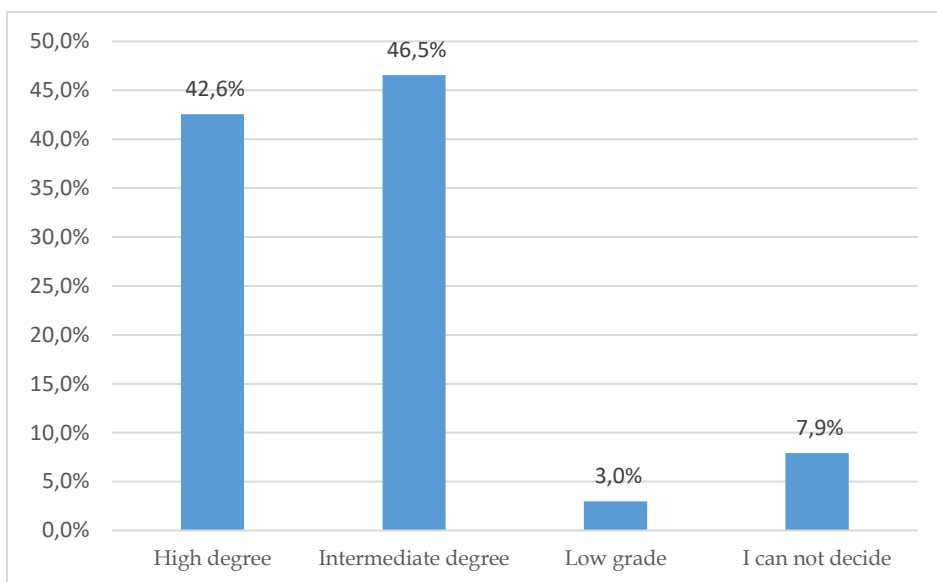
The beneficiaries’ views on the procedures evaluated (excluding BG05M2OP001-2.011 and BG05M2OP001-3.005) show that the instruments also have an impact on the educational outcomes of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma. According to 42 % of the respondents, the tools have a high impact, and 46 % - average.

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<sup>72</sup> A focus group held with representatives of the Monitoring Committee of OP SESG on 30.01.2023.

Figure 96 To what extent do the tools developed under the project affect the educational outcomes of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma?

Source: Survey of beneficiaries on the procedures under evaluation



### School education

#### Under procedures

**BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” and under procedures implemented under the CLLD approach,** no targeted funds are foreseen within the funded projects to develop specific tools for the implementation of the envisaged activities. Nevertheless, they have been implemented – existing, adapted or developed by the beneficiaries in order to be able to carry out the planned activities.

**Under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success”** a toolkit has been developed, which contains 15 tools for early identification of students at risk of early school leaving and for a differentiated approach in determining their needs for providing individual support. A total of 114 tests were developed by subject and by class. A manual of guidance on the implementation of the toolbox has been prepared. Trainings were held for trainers to implement the developed toolkit. Trainings of pedagogical specialists for the application of the toolbox have been carried out.

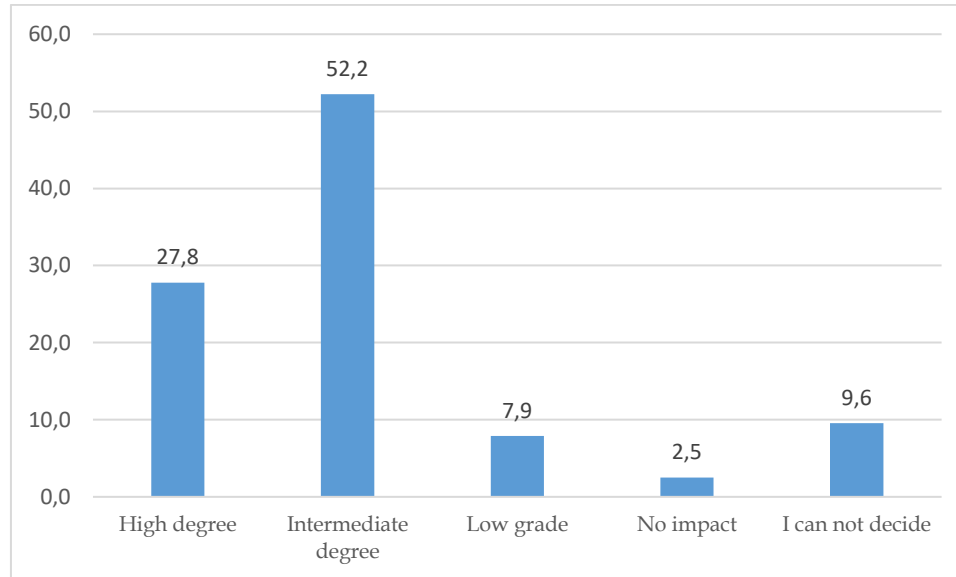
The toolkit for identifying needs and using a differentiated approach in determining the needs for individual support has created conditions for individual work that overcomes the backlog in educational achievements by assessing systemic gaps and difficulties in learning content by students. Thus, the toolkit simultaneously identifies students at risk of dropping out, but also identifies the specific needs to provide individual support to each student. An important part of the toolkit for work are additional trainings and general support for personal development to overcome systemic gaps and/or to prevent student difficulties. The implementation of the toolbox allows early identification of groups of students with various gaps and difficulties in learning content and applying a differentiated approach to determining their needs and providing individual support, as well as manages to assist teachers in planning topics, methods and approaches and in selecting the specific educational materials with which to work with students at risk of early school leaving.

According to the survey among teachers in the schools participating in the projects, the tools developed within the projects have an impact on the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma in high (28 %) and medium (52 %) rate. The reasons for these results are in the set



of factors that influence students' educational outcomes, which is why the role of the tools is important, but not the only determining factor in achieving higher educational attainment.

Figure 97 To what extent do the tools developed under the project affect the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma?



Source: Survey among teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the system of school education involved in the procedures

A correlation analysis of the results of teachers' opinions shows that the higher the score for the tools, the more positive the teachers' opinions about the educational achievements of the students and the change achieved as a result of the implemented projects.

Table 47 Correlation factor between teachers' assessments of the impact of the tools on the educational outcomes of students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, and assessments of educational outcomes resulting from implemented projects

Educational outcomes/achievements	To what extent do the tools developed under the project affect the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma?	
	Correlation coefficient of Pearson <sup>73</sup>	Significance level <sup>74</sup>
Improving educational attainment of students at risk of early departure	0,520	0,000
Improving the educational achievement of all students	0,496	0,000

<sup>73</sup> Pearson Correlation Coefficient – a single, summarized index of the degree to which two variables are linearly related or dependent on each other. Correlation is a coefficient that measures the relationship between two variables. The strength of the correlation is established by a linear correlation coefficient, which varies between -1 and +1. The magnitude of the coefficient is closer to zero, the weaker the dependence.

<sup>74</sup> Results are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (significance level)

<b>Achieving higher results for SME and NEE</b>	0,450	0,000
<b>Increasing the participation of students in extracurricular activities</b>	0,465	0,000
<b>Children with special needs received support and opportunity for further education</b>	0,421	0,000
<b>Students managed to make up for what was missed during the Covid-19 pandemic</b>	0,481	0,000
<b>Students have improved their skills in Bulgarian language</b>	0,539	0,000
<b>Students have improved their math skills.</b>	0,571	0,000
<b>We were able to support the development of students with talents and talents</b>	0,459	0,000
<b>We raised the level of literacy of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	0,596	0,000
<b>We have narrowed the gap between students in learning outcomes</b>	0,524	0,000

Source: Survey of teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the school education system involved in the procedures

The table below clearly shows that teachers who have applied a methodology to assess systemic gaps and consider it effective give higher scores of students' educational achievements. Conversely, teachers who have applied such a methodology but do not consider it effective give significantly lower scores of students' educational achievements.

Table48 Links between evaluations of the effectiveness of applying a methodology including different tools for assessing systemic gaps and learning difficulties by students and teachers' assessments of students' educational outcomes

Educational results/ achievements	Application of a methodology including various tools for assessing systemic gaps and difficulties in learning content by students		
	We have not applied a methodology	We applied a methodology, but it was not effective	We applied a methodology and it was effective
	Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'Very Low' and 4 'Very High'		
<b>Improving educational attainment of students at risk of early school leaving</b>	2,76	2,35	<u>2,99</u>
<b>Improving the educational achievement of all students</b>	2,79	2,45	<u>3,04</u>
<b>Achieving higher results for SME and NEE</b>	2,76	2,04	<u>2,77</u>
<b>Increasing the participation of students in extracurricular activities</b>	2,94	2,60	<u>3,26</u>
<b>Children with special needs received support and opportunity for further education</b>	3,29	2,92	<u>3,32</u>
<b>Students managed to make up for what was missed during the Covid-19 pandemic</b>	2,62	2,22	<u>2,84</u>
<b>Students have improved their skills in Bulgarian language</b>	2,78	2,17	<u>2,88</u>
<b>Students have improved their math skills</b>	2,68	2,06	<u>2,82</u>
<b>We were able to support the development of students with talents</b>	2,96	2,63	<u>3,09</u>

<b>We raised the level of literacy of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	2,77	2,13	<u>2,95</u>
<b>We have narrowed the gap between students in learning outcomes</b>	2,75	2,31	<u>2,92</u>

Source: Survey of teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the school education system involved in the procedures

Teachers who consider the trainings provided as pedagogical specialists to implement the toolkit for early identification of students at risk of early school leaving and a differentiated approach in determining their needs to provide individual support give higher assessments of the educational achievements of their students than teachers who consider that these trainings have not been effective.

*Table 49 Links between evaluations of the effectiveness of organizing and conducting training of pedagogical specialists for the implementation of the toolkit for early identification of students at risk of early school leaving and for a differentiated approach in determining their needs to provide individual support and teacher assessments of educational outcomes of students*

Educational results/ achievements	Organizing and conducting trainings of pedagogical specialists for the implementation of the toolkit for early identification of students at risk of early school leaving and for a differentiated approach in determining their needs for providing individual support		
	We have not carried out the activity	We did it, but it wasn't effective.	We carried out this work and it was effective.
	Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'Very Low' and 4 'Very High'		
Improving educational attainment of students at risk of early departure	2,74	2,15	<u>2,95</u>
Improving the educational achievement of all students	2,82	2,35	<u>3,00</u>
Achieving higher results for SME and NEE	2,48	1,97	<u>2,74</u>
Increasing the participation of students in extracurricular activities	2,76	2,26	<u>3,26</u>
Children with special needs received support and opportunity for further education	3,06	2,61	<u>3,34</u>
Students managed to make up for what was missed during the Covid-19 pandemic	2,38	2,06	<u>2,83</u>
Students have improved their skills in Bulgarian language	2,53	2,00	<u>2,86</u>
Students have improved their math skills	2,46	1,94	<u>2,77</u>
We were able to support the development of students with talents	2,66	2,37	<u>3,09</u>
We raised the level of literacy of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma	2,42	1,88	<u>2,94</u>
We have narrowed the gap between students in learning outcomes	2,46	2,18	<u>2,93</u>

Source: Survey of teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the school education system involved in the procedures

The results of teachers' assessments of the educational performance of students involved in activities in procedures performed in school education are presented in the table below. Although the results are similar, it should be noted that **procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 "Support for success" has the highest scores on indicators related to educational achievements.**

*Table 50 Which of the following happened in your school/children's garden as a result of the implementation of the project/project activities?*

Educational results/ achievements	Procedure			
	2.011	2.018	3.002	CLLD
Improving educational attainment of students at risk of early departure	<u>2,90</u>	2,84	2,84	2,90
Improving the educational achievement of all students	<u>3,00</u>	2,86	2,89	2,96
Achieving higher results for SME and NEE	<u>2,76</u>	2,51	2,57	2,73
Increasing the participation of students in extracurricular activities	<u>3,03</u>	3,05	3,19	3,24
Children with special needs received support and opportunity for further education	<u>3,28</u>	3,15	3,31	3,22
Students managed to make up for what was missed during the Covid-19 pandemic	<u>2,78</u>	2,68	2,68	2,73
Students have improved their skills in Bulgarian language	<u>2,86</u>	2,71	2,71	2,79
Students have improved their math skills	<u>2,80</u>	2,57	2,63	2,69
We were able to support the development of students with talents	<u>3,00</u>	2,96	2,96	3,14
We raised the level of literacy of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma	<u>2,81</u>	2,78	2,78	2,84
We have narrowed the gap between students in learning outcomes	<u>2,89</u>	2,84	2,70	2,88

*Source: Survey of teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the school education system involved in the procedures*

### Pre-school education

Under procedures BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children" and under procedures implemented under the CLLD approach, no targeted funds are foreseen under the funded projects for the development of specific tools for the implementation of the envisaged activities. Nevertheless, there have been applied existing, adapted or developed by the beneficiaries in order to be able to carry out the planned activities.

Under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" there has been developed a specialized methodology for additional training in Bulgarian language for children of preschool age, related to all age groups, for application in institutions of the pre-school education system,

methodology for the work of non-pedagogical staff and training programme, training of non-pedagogical staff and other stakeholders and educational aids and programmes, and already at project proposal level it is required to present a mechanism with a set of criteria for determining the concentration of children from vulnerable groups through a differentiated approach.

The views of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens on the tools developed under the project are also overwhelmingly positive, but the assessments are concentrated in the moderate positions on the scale (positively) rather than in the extreme positive values.

Table51 What is your rating for:

Assessment for:	Totally negative	Rather negative	Rather positive	Fully positive	I don't know/I don't know them
The developed methodologies (based on the game) for Bulgarian language education for children with another mother tongue/children who do not have a good command of Bulgarian – for all age groups (3-6 years old)	0.2 %	1.4 %	<u>51.7 %</u>	34.9 %	11.8 %
The developed reference books, tools, materials, software programmes for training, etc. in Bulgarian language for children with another mother tongue/children who do not have a good command of Bulgarian language – for all age groups (3-6 years old)		0.9 %	<u>54.5 %</u>	32.2 %	12.4 %

Source: Survey among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens

The correlation between the grades of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens for the tools and their assessments of the educational achievements of the students is moderate, rarely reaching 0.4. This shows that, unlike schools, kindergartens do not see such a direct link between educational outcomes and tools used.

Table52 Correlation factor between the evaluations of pedagogical specialists for the instruments and the evaluations of the educational outcomes achieved by the implemented projects

Educational results/ achievements	What is your assessment of: The developed methodologies (based on the game) for Bulgarian language education for children with another mother tongue/children who do not have a good command of Bulgarian – for all age groups (3-6 years old)
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	Correlation coefficient of Pearson <sup>75</sup>	Significance level <sup>76</sup>
<b>Educational outcomes of children from vulnerable groups have improved, including Roma</b>	0,356	0,000
<b>Improved communication skills in Bulgarian for children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	0,339	0,000
<b>Improved literacy rates for children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	0,364	0,000
<b>The mathematical skills of children from vulnerable groups have improved, including Roma</b>	0,331	0,000
<b>Increased knowledge of the natural sciences of children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	0,366	0,000
<b>The educational outcomes of children with special educational needs have increased</b>	0,402	0,000

Source: Survey among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens

Table53 Correlation factor between the evaluations of pedagogical specialists for the instruments and the evaluations of the educational outcomes achieved by the implemented projects

Educational results/ achievements	What is your assessment of: The developed reference books, tools, materials, software programs for training, etc. in Bulgarian language for children with another mother tongue/children who do not have a good command of Bulgarian language – for all age groups (3-6 years old)	
	Correlation coefficient of Pearson	Significance level
<b>Educational outcomes of children from vulnerable groups have improved, including Roma</b>	0,313	0,000
<b>Improved communication skills in Bulgarian for children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	0,308	0,000
<b>Improved literacy rates for children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	0,324	0,000
<b>The mathematical skills of children from vulnerable groups have improved, including Roma</b>	0,299	0,000
<b>Increased knowledge of the natural sciences of children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	0,312	0,000
<b>The educational outcomes of children with special educational needs have increased</b>	0,396	0,000

<sup>75</sup> Pearson Correlation Coefficient – a single, summarized index of the degree to which two variables are linearly related or dependent on each other. Correlation is a coefficient that measures the relationship between two variables. The strength of the correlation is established by a linear correlation coefficient, which varies between -1 and +1. The magnitude of the coefficient is closer to zero, the weaker the dependence.

<sup>76</sup> Results are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  (significance level)

Source: Survey among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens

The results of procedures performed in pre-school education are presented in the table below. They show that, in general, the differences in the assessments of the educational outcomes of children included in project activities under the procedures evaluated are small, but those participating in the activities under procedure BG05M2OP001 -3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” receive high scores on the scale. Almost all scores are just below or slightly above 3, indicating that overall the results achieved have high level of performance and create confidence about the achievements of the evaluated procedures and educational outcomes.

Table54 Which of the following have happened in your school/kindergarten as a result of the implementation of the project/projects activities?

Educational results/ achievements	Procedure			
	2.018	3.001	3.005	CLLD
Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'Very Low' and 4 'Very High'				
<b>Educational outcomes of children from vulnerable groups have improved, including Roma</b>	3,07	2,98	<u>3,07</u>	3,00
<b>Improved communication skills in Bulgarian for children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	3,09	3,07	<u>3,15</u>	3,06
<b>Improved literacy rates for children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	3,09	2,95	<u>3,09</u>	2,94
<b>The mathematical skills of children from vulnerable groups have improved, including Roma</b>	3,09	2,92	<u>3,03</u>	2,97
<b>Increased knowledge of the natural sciences of children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	3,01	2,94	<u>3,03</u>	2,97
<b>The educational outcomes of children with special educational needs have increased</b>	2,98	2,98	<u>2,90</u>	2,85

Source: Survey among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens

Within the framework of the projects falling into the scope of the evaluation on this evaluation question, specific instruments with funding from OP SESG were developed only under projects BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” and BG05M2OP001 -3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”. The other projects used existing, adapted or already developed tools to implement the envisaged activities. The beneficiaries of the evaluated procedures consider that the impact of the developed tools on the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups is significant.

Based on the dependencies studied and the correlation analysis of the results of the opinions of pedagogical specialists in schools, showing that the higher the score of the instruments, the more positive the teachers’ opinions about the educational achievements of the students and the change achieved as a result of the implemented projects, the following can be assumed: there is an impact of the tools developed within the projects on the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups, rather in average, due to the combination of factors influencing the educational outcomes of students. I.e., the role of instruments is important, but it is not the only determining factor in achieving higher educational attainment. The developed toolkit under BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” contributes to the

teachers' findings, although to a small extent, for higher educational outcomes of the students involved in activities compared to those included in activities under the other projects evaluated.

Regarding pre-school education, it can also be assumed that there is a moderate link between the assessments of pedagogical specialists for the tools developed under the projects evaluated and the assessments of the educational outcomes achieved by children from vulnerable groups, including Roma. Based on the comparison of the results by procedures, it can be assumed to a moderate extent that the tools developed under project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" contribute to the relatively high educational outcomes of children from vulnerable groups included in activities.

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4.5.2. Have the projects improved as a result of the implementation of the projects:

- the language skills of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma;
- the level of literacy of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma;
- the educational outcomes of children and students with special educational needs and to what extent, in relation to those who are not supported;
- the achievements of students included in activities under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme in NEE and SME vs. students not included in the Programme;
- the attitude towards the educational process of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma;
- the attitude towards professional realisation of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma.

#### **Impact of procedures on language skills and literacy levels of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma**

For the purpose of the analysis on this evaluation issue, the following procedures are covered: BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success" (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children", BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection", "BG05M2OP001-3.005 Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach "Ensure access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas".

In order to study the impact of the procedures evaluated on the language skills and literacy levels of children and students from marginalized groups, including children of Roma ethnic background, specific statements were constructed measuring the assessments of pedagogical specialists and parents regarding the achievement of each of the objectives set out in the Programme, namely: skills in Bulgarian language, math skills, literacy level and reducing differences. Depending on the specifics of the age group, for which pedagogical specialists and parents provide information and depending on the objectives defined in the projects, the questions are formulated in such a way that the answers reflect the expected changes and measure the achievements. Due to the lack of institutional data, within the framework of the evaluation, the answer to this evaluation question is sought through the opinion of teachers, pedagogical specialists and



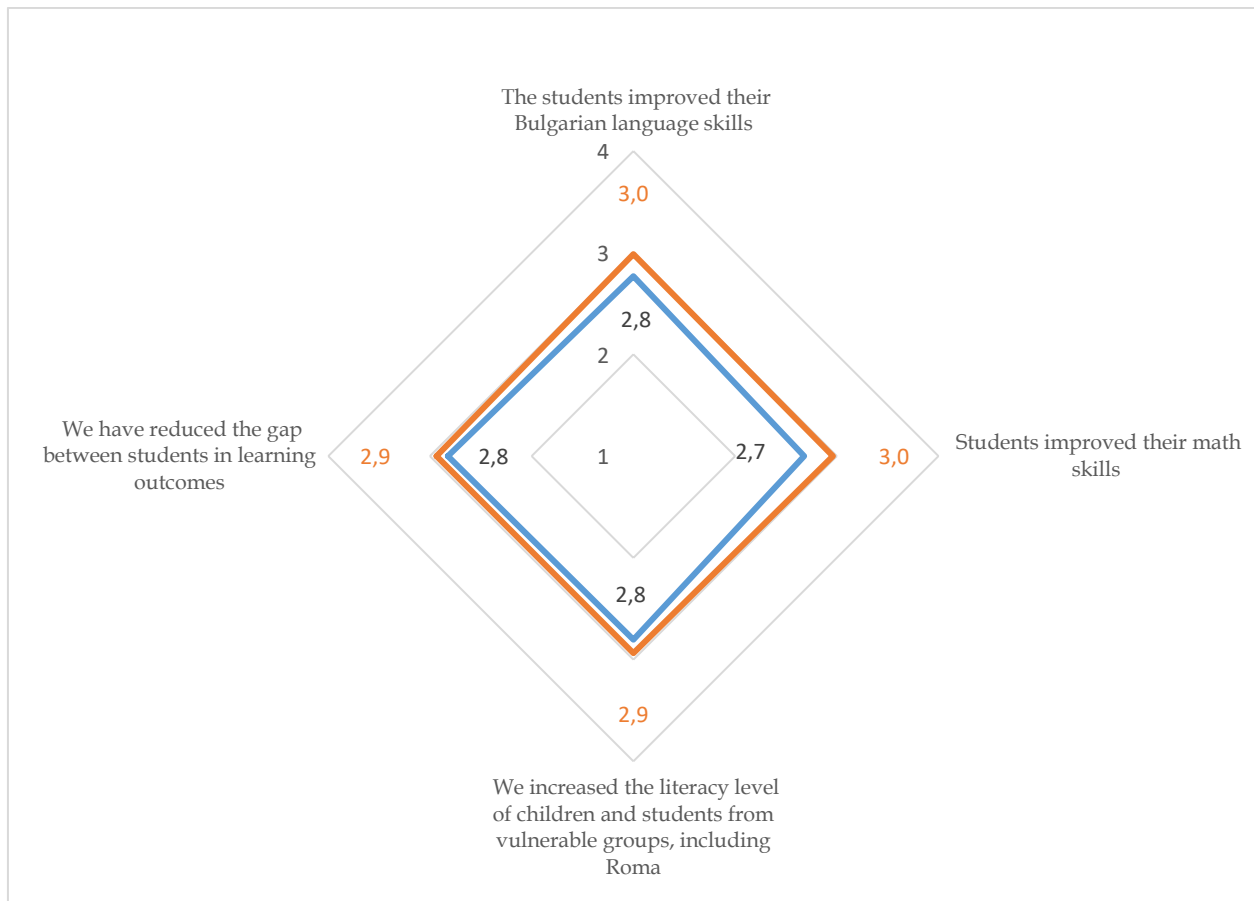
parents, and for part of it there has been used administrative data from public sources – about the results of the students from NEE and SME. Data from a survey with beneficiaries and focus groups are also used.

This is the place to note that due to the nature and scope of procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”, it was found that in practice it is impossible to identify a number of kindergartens or pre-school groups in schools that have similar concentration of vulnerable groups and have not participated in the procedures evaluated in order to serve as a control group in the study conducted among pedagogical specialists and parents of children in kindergartens.

According to teachers in schools who participated in the procedures, there has been progress in the level of literacy and skills in Bulgarian language and mathematics, but these have not been achieved to a very high degree, but rather to a high degree. Concentrating opinions on a score of 3 on a scale of 1 to 4 shows that overall this process has started but still achieves moderate results (for comparison, for example, ratings for increasing motivation and attitude towards the educational process receive much higher scores, as it would be seen in the following sections). As a result, teachers’ assessments of reducing the gap between students in learning outcomes are moderate. As we have seen in point 4.1.1., the distances in learning outcomes remain large. That is why it can be summarized that as a result of the support received the skills in Bulgarian language and the level of literacy, as well as the skills in mathematics are developing, but there is still a need for accumulation of knowledge and skills in order to increase the educational attainment of students from vulnerable groups more permanently and convincingly.

The comparison with the control group shows that the differences between the two groups are minimal, which makes it possible to conclude that, in general, the educational environment has created equal opportunities and in schools, which are not supported by the procedures under assessment, there are also similar views of teachers, either because of the implementation of national policies and programmes or because of the implementation of other projects.

*Figure 98. To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school have contributed to any of the following objectives?*

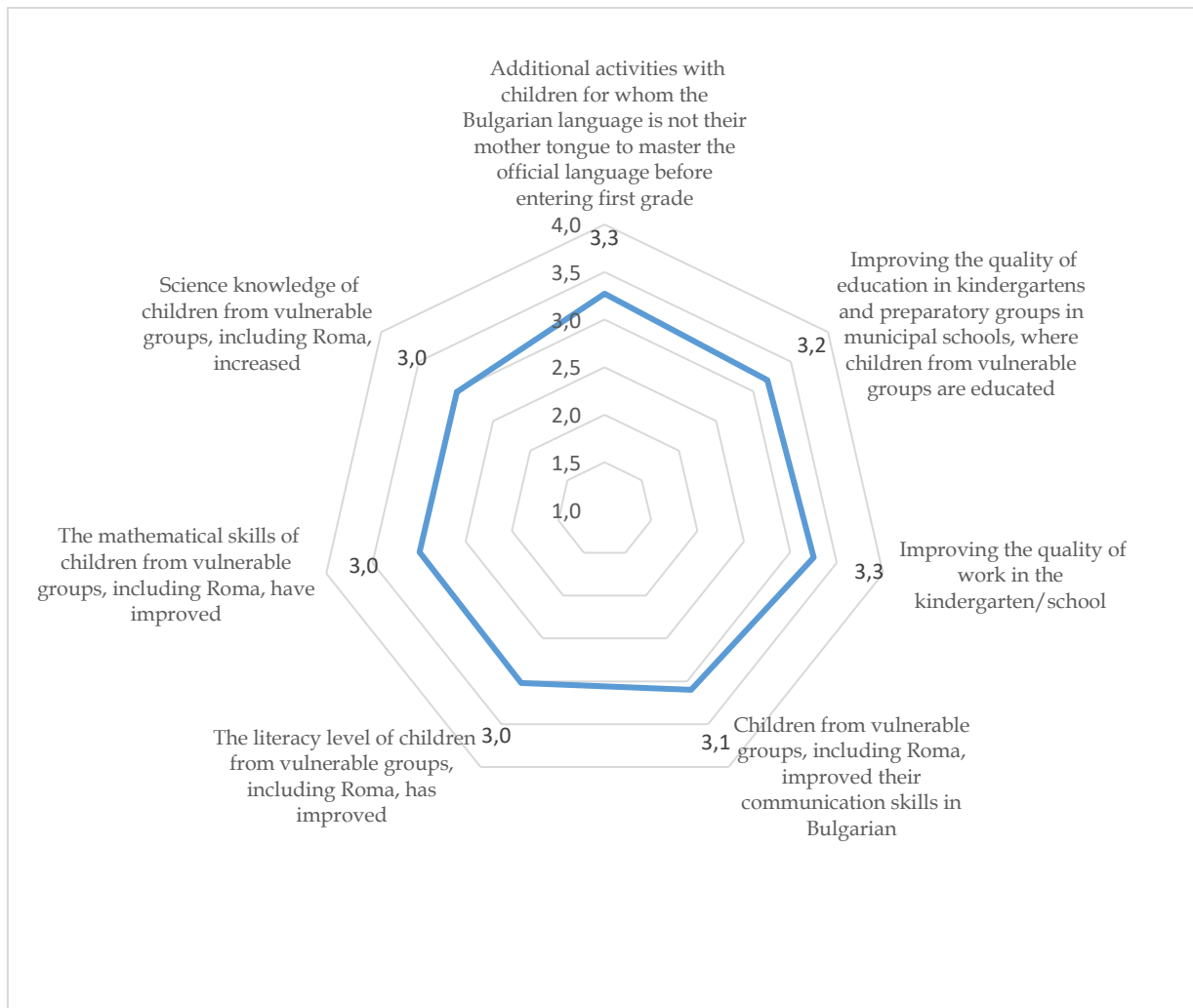


*\*Statistical distribution among teachers in schools (main group) who have been asked the question "To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG have contributed to the realization of any of the following objectives?"*

*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'very low' and 4 'very high'*

Similarly to the achievements in schools, in kindergartens there is also moderate progress in terms of communication skills in Bulgarian language, improving the level of literacy and increasing mathematical skills and knowledge of natural sciences. The average grades given by pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and preschool groups in schools to achieve each of these objectives is about 3.0-3.1 on a scale of 1 to 4. At the same time, the pedagogical specialists point out that the quality of teaching has improved and that the additional activities for children whose Bulgarian language is not mother tongue have been an important resource for students' preparation before entering first grade.

*Figure99 Which of the following have happened in your school/ kindergarten as a result of the implementation of the project/projects activities?*

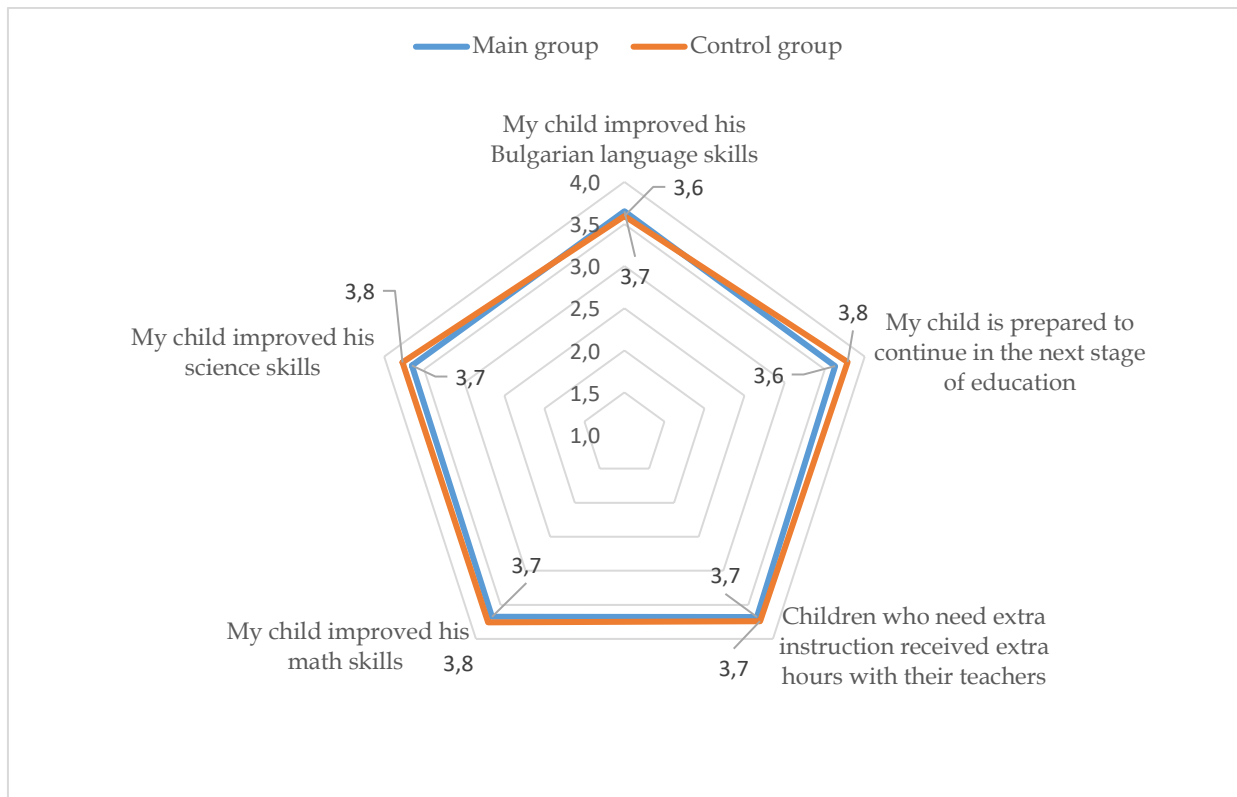


\* *Statistical distribution among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and schools (primary education) (main group) who have been asked the question "To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school/kindergarten funded under OP SESG have contributed to the realization of any of the following objectives?"*

\*\**Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'very low' and 4 'very high'*

The opinions of parents in schools are slightly more positive, with their assessments moving between 3.5 and 3.8 in different directions. They recognise the positive changes in their children as a result of the educational process. The difference between the main and control groups is small, showing that in general the education system has created equal opportunities and schools that are not supported by the procedures evaluated have similar results in terms of language skills and literacy levels of students (based on teachers' opinions) either because of national projects and programmes, or because of support under other projects.

Figure100 *To what extent do the following statements relate to you or your child: (comparison between main and control groups, survey among parents – school education)*

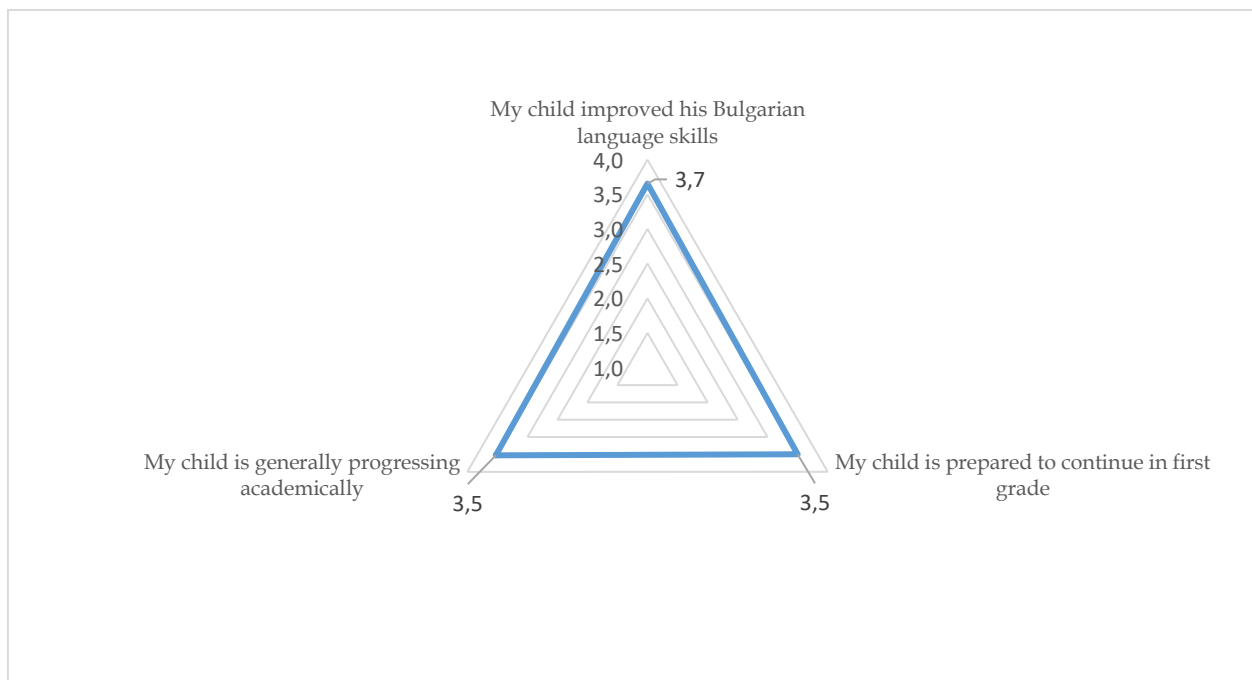


*\*Statistical distribution among parents (main group) and parents (control group) in school education*

*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'I disagree at all' and 4 'I totally agree'*

The opinions of parents of children in kindergartens also show a high level of achievement of the objectives related to Bulgarian language skills, preparation for entry to first grade and progress in education. Their ratings move between 3.5 and 3.7.

*Figure101 To what extent do the following statements relate to you or your child: (study among parents of children in kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools participating in projects under the procedures evaluated)*



*\*Statistical distribution among parents in kindergartens and preschool groups in schools*

*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'I disagree at all' and 4 'I totally agree'*

The opinion of the beneficiaries confirms the positive assessments regarding increasing the results in Bulgarian language of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma and children for whom the Bulgarian language is not mother tongue. Achieving these results is a key prerequisite for increasing educational outcomes in the next stages of education, as the Bulgarian language is the key for learning in all subjects.

*Figure102 To what extent did the project activities contribute/contribute to increasing the results in Bulgarian for children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma? (including those for whom the Bulgarian language is not mother tongue)*

*Source: survey among beneficiaries of the procedures assessed*

Experts also recognize the positive role of the activities:

*"Really, this [Support for Success] project enables all students from 1st to 12th grade to participate in it, so there is no bigger target group, because these are all students who are in secondary education. In addition, it also allows for the involvement of educational mediators for working with parents. Career consultants were also given the opportunity to work with students from grade 5th to 7th, which is also very working as a model." (interview with DB MES)<sup>77</sup>*

*"The substantial contribution of this project [Active Inclusion Project] is in two directions. Firstly, that kindergartens are indeed involved in such a project for the first time and can assess according to their needs on the ground what resources they need in order to improve the quality. This is an extremely valuable skill that is developing.*

<sup>77</sup> Interview for the project "Support for success" on 12.01.2023

*The second contribution, which is related to the development of the methodology for further training in Bulgarian, which of course can be used by all kindergartens and not only those included in the project and to support the efforts of all teachers who work with children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian.*

*The third thing, which is absolutely, in my view, the most significant effect on the whole system of pre-school education, which is yet to be measured, is the exemption from the obligation to pay fees for all children from nurseries and kindergartens for their visit, which was introduced in the framework of the project as of April 2022. February 2021 we paid only to children from vulnerable groups.’ (interview with DB MES)<sup>78</sup>*

### **Impact of procedures on the educational outcomes of children and students with special educational needs and to what extent, including those not supported**

Among the procedures evaluated there is only one in the scope of which measures are laid down for children with special educational needs – BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”. Due to the scope and nature of the project implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science and as far as no control group has been identified in the preparation of the study among pedagogical specialists in pre-school education, there is no approach in which to carry out the comparison, which presupposes the evaluation question. In this regard, only data from the survey of pedagogical specialists from kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools participating in the project under the procedure under evaluation were used in response to the evaluation question.

According to the opinion of the pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and pre-school groups of schools, the educational outcomes of children with special educational needs have increased as a result of the activities carried out. The average score for this statement was 2.9, which showed moderately positive results (on a scale of 1 to 4).

### **Impact of procedures on student achievements included in activities under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme in NEE and SME compared to students not included in the Programme**

The answer to this evaluation question analyzed data related to procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education” – Component 1, BG05M2OP001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection” and procedures implemented within the framework of the CLLD approach. Data from a survey conducted among teachers in schools who participated in projects funded under the procedures evaluated as well as publicly available administrative results data on NEE and SME were used.

Another important measure of educational achievements are the results of NEE and SME. A comparison with the non-programmed schools allows us to track the impact of the evaluated procedures. The opinion of teachers in schools was moderately positive (average score 2.6 – in the main group and 2.9 – in the control group on a scale from 1 to 4). The difference in teachers’ opinions between the main and control groups of schools is minimal and there is almost no practical expression (only three-tenths). However, it is interesting to note that the real results of NEE and SME highlight greater differences, respectively, the effects of the evaluated procedures can be measured.

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<sup>78</sup> Interview for projects “New Chance for Success” and “Active Inclusion in the System of Preschool Education” on 13.01.2023

Figure103. To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school have contributed to any of the following objectives?

*\*Statistical distribution among teachers in schools (main group) who have been asked the question “To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG have contributed to the realization of one of the following objectives? and teachers (control group) who have been asked the question “To what extent, in your school, you have managed to achieve each of these goals in the last 7 years?”*

*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is ‘very low’ and 4 ‘very high’*

The results of the National external evaluation and the State matriculation exams show that schools that have participated in activities funded under the procedures evaluated managed to maintain their positions in the period 2015-2022. In fact, all of these schools retain their positions. At the same time, the control group of similar schools that did not participate in activities funded under the procedures evaluated and had a similar profile (schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups) recorded a significant decrease. They fell to about 9-10 percentage points in the results of the different exams. Thus, while maintaining the positions of the participating schools (participation in the projects under the evaluated procedures helps them to maintain their positions and not to notice a decline) and in case of a decrease in the control group, the effects of the intervention are positive. If not for the activities funded under the evaluated procedures, the schools involved in the procedures would have reduced their performance by between 6 and 8 percentiles. That is, the measured impacts of the procedures evaluated on the educational attainment of students are within about 7-8 %. The only discipline in which neither the control nor the main group of schools have a change is the NEE in mathematics in grade 7. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the main and control groups of schools have very similar results in almost all disciplines in the pre-intervention period (2010 and 2015). However, at the end of the period (2022), the control group recorded a significant decrease, which we could assume would not have happened if schools had participated in the implementation of activities funded under the projects under evaluation.

Table 55 NEE and SME results of main and control groups of schools in 2010, 2015 and 2022

Percentiles	Year	Involved in activities under the evaluated projects	Control group of schools not involved in activities under the evaluated projects
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade</b>	2010 <sup>79</sup>	0,44	0,37
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade</b>	2010	<u>0,44</u>	<u>0,41</u>
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade</b>	2010	0,44	0,41
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade</b>	2010	<u>0,44</u>	<u>0,46</u>
<b>SME 12th grade</b>	2010	0,44	0,27
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade</b>	2015	0,43	0,40

<sup>79</sup> 2010 and 2015 are reference years that illustrate the trends and results of NEE and SME in the period prior to the implementation of the interventions under the evaluated procedures, as well as the similarities between the main and control groups before the intervention.

NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2015	<u>0,43</u>	<u>0,40</u>
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2015	0,43	0,42
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	2015	<u>0,44</u>	<u>0,48</u>
SME 12th grade	2015	0,43	0,35
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2022	0,42	0,31
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2022	0,42	0,30
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2022	0,42	0,34
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	2022	0,42	0,48
SME 12th grade	2022	0,41	0,25

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under the evaluated projects and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

Table56 Modification over time (2022 compared to 2015) of NEE and SME results of main and control group of schools and presentation of effects (differences)

Change 2022-2015		Participating in activities under the evaluated projects	Control group of schools not involved in activities under the evaluated projects	Effects (difference in differences)
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2022-2015	-0.02	-0.09	7.87 %
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2022-2015	-0.01	-0,10	8.34 %
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2022-2015	-0.02	-0.08	6.09 %
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	2022-2015	-0.02	0,00	-1.15 %
SME 12th grade	2022-2015	-0.02	-0.09	6.81 %

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP SESG and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

The results of procedures show that in terms of the results of NEE and SME, the most positive changes are observed among schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups participating in procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success”. This is understandable as this is the easiest target group to work – it includes a small share of students from vulnerable groups – therefore, in this group, the decrease between 2015 and 2022 is the smallest, and three of the five exams tested positive. Next, by results are schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups who participated in procedure BG05M2OP001 -2.011 “Support for success” and schools participating in procedure BG05M2OP001 -3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or



receiving international protection". The results here are characterized by a minimal decline, which is why, against the backdrop of the more significant decline in the control group of schools, positive effects are reported, albeit small in intensity (degree of prevalence and numerical dimension). Given the specific target groups with which the projects work, in practice the lower drop in the main group compared to the drop in the control group shows that the procedures evaluated managed to slow down the pace of lag and contribute to the progress of the students, which translates as a whole in 6 %-8 % better results after the implementation of the projects than they would have been without the investments made.

Table 57 Modification over time (2022 compared to 2015) of NEE and SME results for schools in the main group (by procedure) and the control group of schools

		2.011	2.011	3.002	CLLD	2.018	Control group
<b>Results of NEE and SME</b>		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups 80	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups 81				
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade</b>	2022-2015	-3.10 %	0.88 %	-2.70 %	3.90 %	6.66 %	-9.42 %
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade</b>	2022-2015	-0.96 %	-2.17 %	-3.02 %	5.12 %	4.91 %	-9.64 %
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade</b>	2022-2015	-4.30 %	2.31 %	-2.66 %	6.84 %	3.16 %	-7.78 %
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade</b>	2022-2015	-3.26 %	0.95 %	-5.74 %	1.53 %	2.72 %	-0.41 %
<b>SME 12th grade</b>	2022-2015	-2.35 %	-1.62 %	-5.65 %	2.48 %	8.52 %	-9.25 %

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP SESG and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

The results by procedure shows that the decline in the results of NEE and SME in the control group of schools was higher than in the schools participating in the procedures. The assessed influences were mostly positive (without national external evaluation in mathematics in grade 7). As a result, there are positive

<sup>80</sup>For the school year 2021-2022

<sup>81</sup>For the school year 2021-2022

effects in the following directions: in almost all modules of external assessment in school education and positive effects in the results in Bulgarian language of SME 12 grade.

Table 58 Difference in differences (effects) between changes over time in main and control school results

Effects		2_011	2_011	3_002	CLLD	2_018
		schools with a high concentration of students from vulnerable groups for the academic year 2021-2022	schools with lower concentration of students from vulnerable groups for the academic year 2021-2022			
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	difference in Differences	6.3 %	10.3 %	6.7 %	5.5 %	2.8 %
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	difference in Differences	8.7 %	7.5 %	6.6 %	4.5 %	4.7 %
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	difference in Differences	3.5 %	10.1 %	5.1 %	0.9 %	4.6 %
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	difference in Differences	-2.8 %	1.4 %	-5.3 %	-1.1 %	-2.3 %
SME 12th grade	difference in Differences	6.9 %	7.6 %	3.6 %	6.8 %	0.7 %

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP SESG and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

The study shows a very high dependence of school-level outcomes on the vulnerability level (by the criterion of the proportion of parents with lower than secondary and primary education). The higher the concentration of students from vulnerable groups in a school, the lower its scores, measured by NEE and SME as positioning in the ranking of schools through percentiles. The difference in results between group 1 and group 5 is between two and three times in favour of group 1. In schools with a high concentration of

students from vulnerable groups, distances are not simply not reduced, but on the contrary, they increase over time, which shows that working in them is a serious challenge for the education system.

Table 59 Average estimates (percentages) from NEEs and SMEs of schools of the main group according to the vulnerability group they fall into<sup>82</sup>

Average percentiles	School groups by vulnerability (by criterion "educational level of parents (guardians)")						
		do not fall under the vulnerability criterion	1	2	3	4	5
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2010	0,61	0,50	0,39	0,34	0,32	0,25
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2010	0,61	0,50	0,39	0,35	0,31	0,27
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2010	0,61	0,46	0,39	0,31	0,28	0,23
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	2010	0,58	0,47	0,39	0,31	0,31	0,32
SME 12th grade	2010	0,53	0,37	0,28	0,24	0,24	0,32
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2015	0,63	0,47	0,38	0,34	0,27	0,23
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2015	0,62	0,46	0,38	0,37	0,27	0,24
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2015	0,60	0,47	0,37	0,35	0,28	0,23
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	2015	0,54	0,45	0,36	0,38	0,35	0,34
SME 12th grade	2015	0,54	0,38	0,28	0,19	0,18	0,24
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2022	0,64	0,48	0,36	0,31	0,24	0,18
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2022	0,60	0,45	0,36	0,35	0,28	0,23
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2022	0,62	0,48	0,34	0,29	0,23	0,16
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	2022	0,55	0,47	0,36	0,33	0,31	0,28
SME 12th grade	2022	0,52	0,36	0,25	0,18	0,15	0,17

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP SESG and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

If in group 1, of the concentration groups of students from vulnerable groups, there is rather no change over time, in the other groups there is often a decrease, with the highest in schools with a higher concentration of students from vulnerable groups (groups 4 and 5). However, it should be noted that the decline in the control group is often higher than in the main group, which shows, although low positive effects, in the

<sup>82</sup> For the purposes of the analysis, the grouping of institutions under the Regulation on the financing of institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, adopted by the Council of Ministers Decree No 219 of 5 September 2017, Annex 6a to Article 52b(2), which enters into force on 1 January 2018, is used.

schools participating in the procedures evaluated from the groups of schools with the highest concentration of students from vulnerable groups. However, to the extent that these positive effects are only in some of the groups of schools, we cannot yet conclude that the procedures evaluated have managed convincingly to overcome the differences between the different types of school based on the concentration of vulnerable groups.

Table60 Modification over time (2022 compared to 2015) of NEE and SME results of schools in the main group broken down by group by criterion “educational level of parents (guardians)”

Main group		group 1	group 2	group 3	group 4	group 5
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2022-2015	0,00	−0.02	−0.03	−0.03	−0.05
NEE IN MATHEMATIC S 4th grade	2022-2015	0,00	−0.03	−0.02	0,01	−0.01
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2022-2015	0,01	−0.03	−0.06	−0.05	−0.07
NEE IN MATHEMATIC S 7th grade	2022-2015	0,02	−0.01	−0.05	−0.04	−0.06
SME 12th grade	2022-2015	−0.02	−0.03	−0.01	−0.02	−0.07

Table61 Change in time (2022 compared to 2015) of NEE and SME results of **control group** schools broken down by group by criterion “educational level of parents (guardians)”

Control group		group 1	group 2	group 3	group 4*	group 5*
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2022-2015	−0.23	0,03	−0.06		
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2022-2015	−0.22	0,32	−0.17		
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2022-2015	0,03	−0.19	−0.09		

<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade</b>	2022-2015	0,10	−0.25	−0.15		
<b>SME 12th grade</b>	2022-2015	−0.06	−0.13			

\*Too small number of schools to be included in the calculations

Table62 *Difference in differences (effects) between changes over time in main and control groups of school results broken down by group by 'educational level of parents (guardians)'*

Effects		group 1	group 2	group 3
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade</b>	Difference in Differences	23.04 %	−4.50 %	3.53 %
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade</b>	Difference in Differences	21.34 %	−34.19 %	14.51 %
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade</b>	Difference in Differences	−1.39 %	15.53 %	3.54 %
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade</b>	Difference in Differences	−8.02 %	24.00 %	9.93 %
<b>SME 12th grade</b>	Difference in Differences	3.57 %	9.53 %	

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP SESG and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

Table63 *Average estimates (percentages) from NEEs and SMEs of main and controlgroups of schools according to vulnerability or non-vulnerability<sup>83</sup>*

		Main group without vulnerability	Main group with a vulnerability above 1	Control group without vulnerability	Control group with a vulnerability above 1
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade</b>	2010	0,62	0,34	0,69	0,37
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade</b>	2010	0,61	0,34	0,70	0,41
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade</b>	2010	0,61	0,31	0,76	0,41
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade</b>	2010	0,58	0,35	0,80	0,46

<sup>83</sup> For the purposes of the analysis, the grouping of institutions under the Regulation on the financing of institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, adopted by the Council of Ministers Decree No 219 of 5 September 2017, Annex 6a to Article 52b(2), which enters into force on 1 January 2018, is used.

SME 12th grade	2010	0,52	0,29	0,71	0,27
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2015	0,63	0,31	0,69	0,40
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2015	0,62	0,32	0,73	0,40
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2015	0,60	0,32	0,71	0,42
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	2015	0,54	0,37	0,70	0,48
SME 12th grade	2015	0,54	0,26	0,74	0,35
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade	2022	0,64	0,28	0,68	0,31
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade	2022	0,60	0,31	0,67	0,30
NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade	2022	0,62	0,27	0,71	0,34
NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade	2022	0,55	0,33	0,64	0,48
SME 12th grade	2022	0,52	0,23	0,75	0,25

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP SESG and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

The vulnerability criterion in schools sets very significant differences in the results of NEEs and SMEs both in the main schools and in the schools out of the control group. The change in time between these two groups of schools in the main and control groups gives us reason to summarize the impact of the procedures under evaluation. Again, we observe that the decline in the control group is higher than the drop in the main group, and in both groups the decline in schools with the vulnerability criterion is greater than the drop in schools without one.

Table64 Modification in time (2022 compared to 2015) of NEE and SME results of schools in *the main control group* disaggregated by vulnerability or non-vulnerability

			Main group without vulnerability	Main group with a vulnerability above 1	Control group without vulnerability	Control group with a vulnerability above 1
NEE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE	IN 4th grade	2022-2015	0,01	-0.03	-0.01	-0.09
NEE MATHEMATICS	IN 4th grade	2022-2015	-0.02	-0.01	-0.05	-0.10
NEE BULGARIAN	IN	2022-2015	0,02	-0.05	0,01	-0.08

<b>LANGUAGE</b>	<b>7th grade</b>					
<b>NEE</b>	<b>IN</b>	2022-2015	0,01	-0.03	-0.06	0,00
<b>MATHEMATICS</b>	<b>7th grade</b>					
<b>SME</b>	<b>12th grade</b>	2022-2015	-0.01	-0.03	0,01	-0.09

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP SESG and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

The varying intensity of decline between the main and control groups also shows the impact of the procedures evaluated. Without the investment under the procedures evaluated, schools without the vulnerability criterion from the main group would be about 2 % lower and schools with vulnerability would have on average 4 % lower scores. The most significant effects in schools with the vulnerability criterion are noticeable in the exams in Bulgarian language and Mathematics in 4th grade, and in schools without it there are positive effects in all exams without SME 12th grade.

Table65 Difference in differences (effects) between changes over time in main and control group of schools results broken down by group by criterion of vulnerability or non-vulnerability

		Difference in Differences (Schools Without Vulnerability)	Difference in Differences (Schools with Vulnerability)
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 4th grade</b>	2022-2015	1.8 %	6.4 %
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 4th grade</b>	2022-2015	3.4 %	8.7 %
<b>NEE IN BULGARIAN LANGUAGE 7th grade</b>	2022-2015	1.8 %	3.2 %
<b>NEE IN MATHEMATICS 7th grade</b>	2022-2015	6.6 %	-3.0 %
<b>SME 12th grade</b>	2022-2015	-2.5 %	6.4 %

Source: Open Data Portal – eGOV.bg, own calculations, participating schools (main group) and control group of schools that have not participated in activities funded under OP SESG and have a similar profile (schools with high concentration of students from vulnerable groups)

For the purposes of the analysis, the grouping of institutions under the Regulation on the financing of institutions in the system of pre-school and school education, adopted by the Council of Ministers Decree No 219 of 5 September 2017, Annex 6a to Article 52b(2), which enters into force on 1 January 2018, is used.

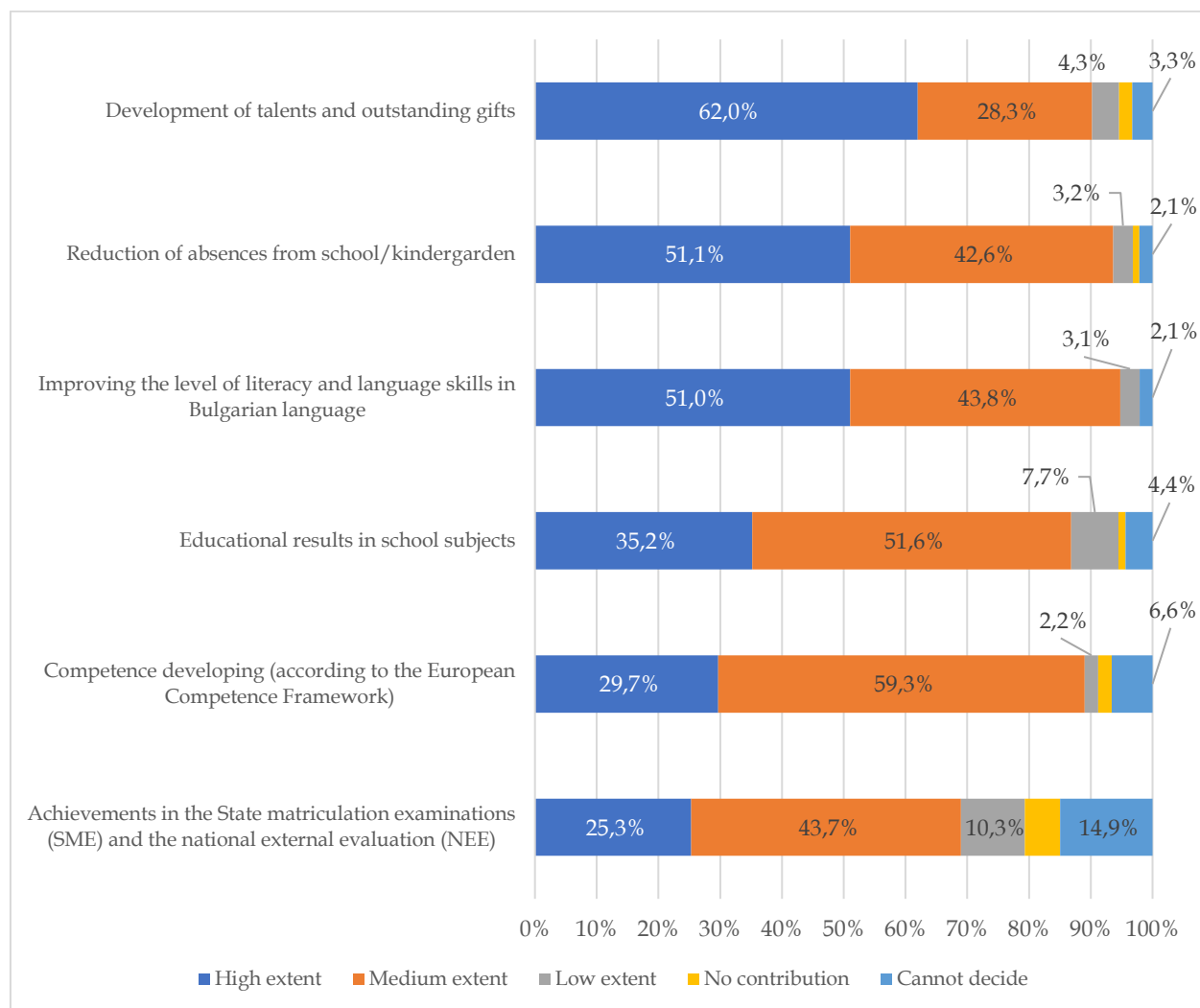
Table66 Distribution of institutions into groups by criterion “educational level of parents (guardians)”

Breakdown of institutions into groups according to the criterion “educational level of parents (guardians)”	
<b>As a percentage of respondents</b>	Percentage of parents with lower than secondary education (in %)

		over 60 %	40-60 %	20-39 %	up to 20 %
% of parents with lower than primary education	over 50 %	5	4	3	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion
	30-50 %	4	3	2	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion
	10-30 %	3	2	1	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion
	up to 10 %	2	1	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion	do not fall under the vulnerability criterion

The views of the beneficiaries who participated in the survey were also positive, and they, as well as the other groups surveyed, took the greatest account of achievements in covering and retaining students in the educational process and, to a lesser extent, achievement in educational outcomes and competence development (see figure below).

Figure 104 To what extent did/ do project activities contribute to enhancing learning outcomes?





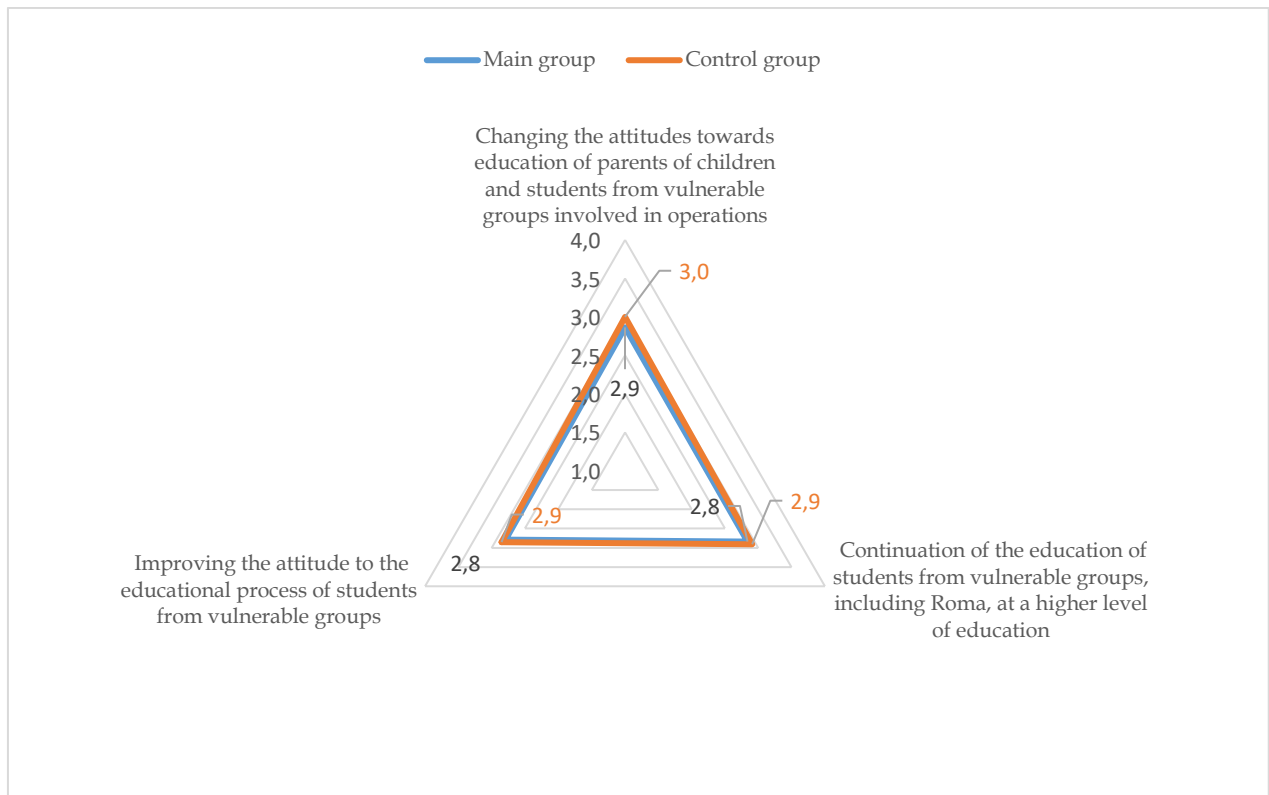
*Source: Survey among beneficiaries of the procedures evaluated*

### **The impact of procedures on the attitude of children and students from marginalized groups to the educational process, including Roma**

For the purpose of the analysis on this evaluation issue, the following procedures are covered: BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success" (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children", BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection", "BG05M2OP001-3.005 Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach "Ensure access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas". Data are also used from survey among pedagogical specialists in pre-school and school education and parents of children and students.

Data from the main and control group of teachers in terms of attitudes towards education and continuing education show that there are no significant differences between the two groups, which is an indicator that efforts to increase motivation to learn have resulted both in schools supported by projects under the procedures evaluated and in other schools that are likely to achieve their results thanks to the Mechanism for joint work of institutions in covering, including and preventing the drop-out of children and students at compulsory pre-school and school age or thanks to other projects and programmes. The objectives to which the activities funded under the evaluated procedures contributed moderately (average score 2.9-3.0) are to increase the willingness to learn and to continue learning.

*Figure105 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under the OP SESG contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?*

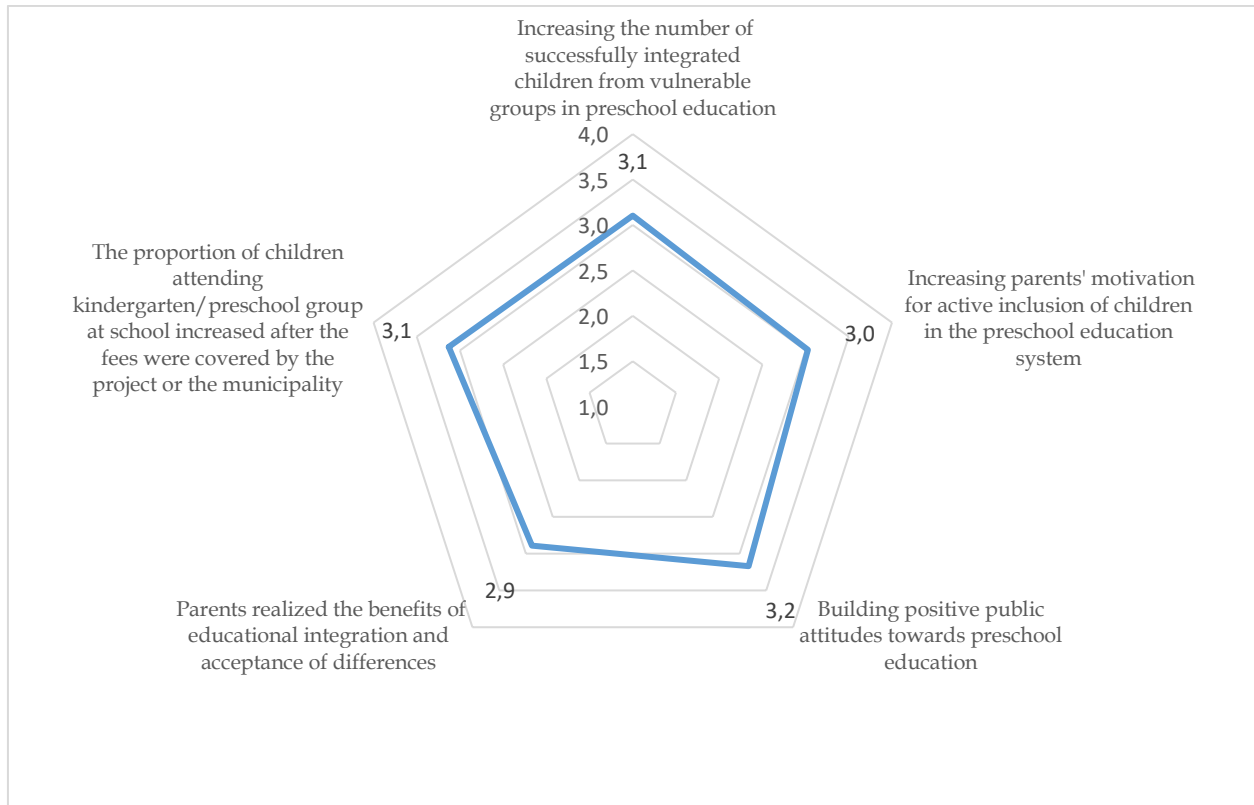


*\*Statistical distribution among teachers in schools (main group) who have been asked the question "To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG have contributed to the realization of one of the following objectives? and teachers (control group) who have been asked the question "To what extent, in your school, you have managed to achieve each of these goals in the last 7 years?"*

*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'very low' and 4 'very high'*

The impact of the procedures evaluated in pre-school education is similar – teachers believe that to a moderately high degree (average scores between 2.9 and 3.2) the number of successfully integrated children has increased, positive attitudes towards pre-school education have been built, parents have realized the benefits of the training and children attending kindergartens have increased their share. These results confirm the importance, necessity and timeliness of the implemented measures and the positive results they have for involving children in the educational process and increasing access to education.

*Figure106 Which of the following have happened in your school/kindergarten as a result of the implementation of the project/projects activities?*

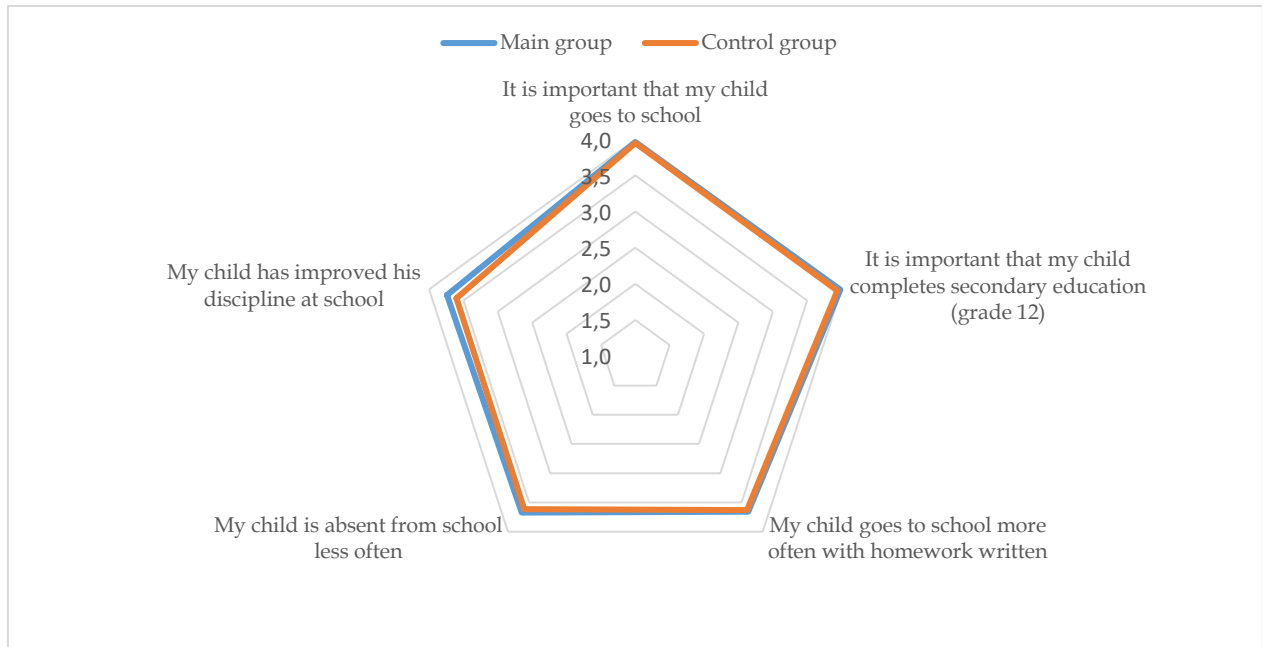


*\*Statistical distribution among pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) who have been asked the question "To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school/kindergarten, funded under the National Health and Social Policy Programme, have contributed to the realization of any of the following objectives?"*

*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'very low' and 4 'very high'*

The survey among parents confirms the results identified by the other target groups. Parents are motivated to send their children to school and have a positive attitude towards the educational process, realizing the importance of education for children and their future realization. As a result, children are less absent from school, self-training has improved, and the change in discipline is also positive. Changing the attitudes and motivations of children and parents is the key for further steps to increase learning outcomes, which is why we can recognise that important prerequisites for the realization of the educational process have been achieved.

*Figure107 To what extent do the following statements relate to you or your child: (comparison between main and control groups, study among parents)*

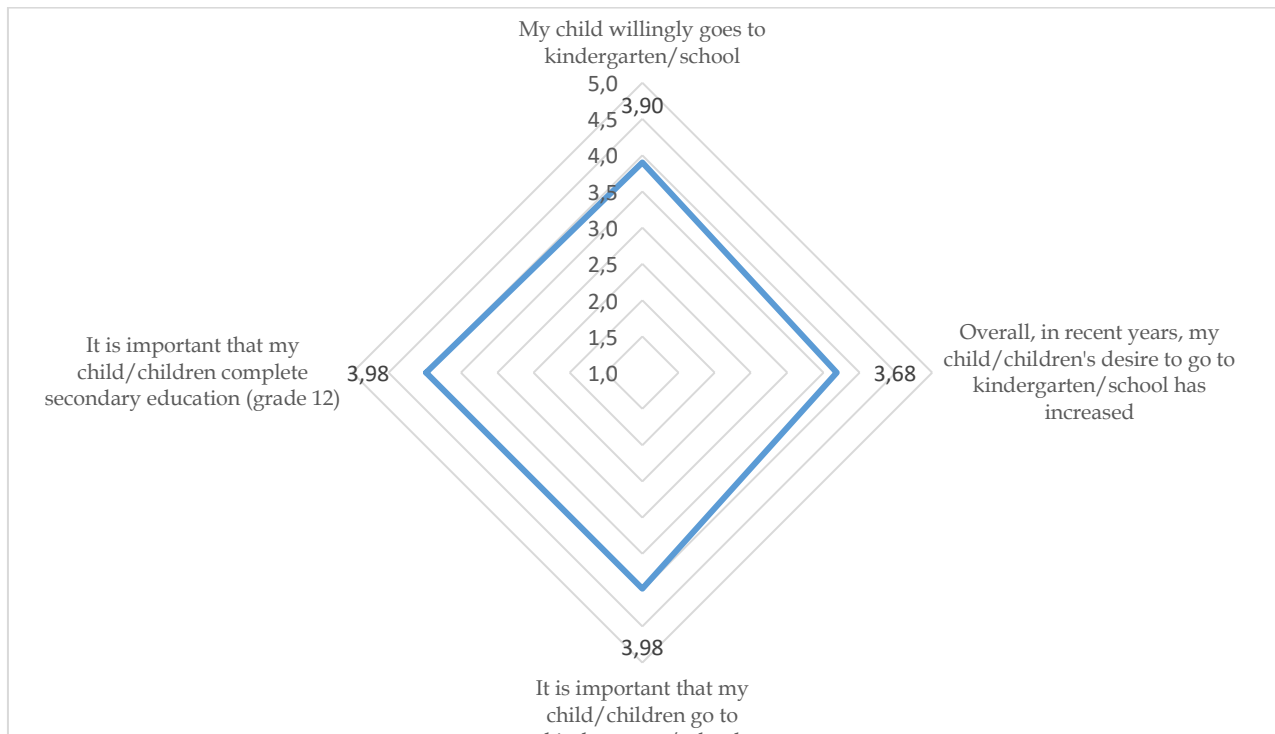


\*Statistical distribution among parents (main group) and parents (control group)

\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'I disagree at all' and 4 'I totally agree'

Figure108 To what extent do the following statements relate to you or your child: (comparison between main and control groups, research among parents of children in kindergartens and preschool groups in school)

Parents of children in kindergartens give similar opinions regarding the motivation and involvement of their children in preschool education.



*\*Statistical distribution among parents (main group) in kindergartens and preschool groups in school*

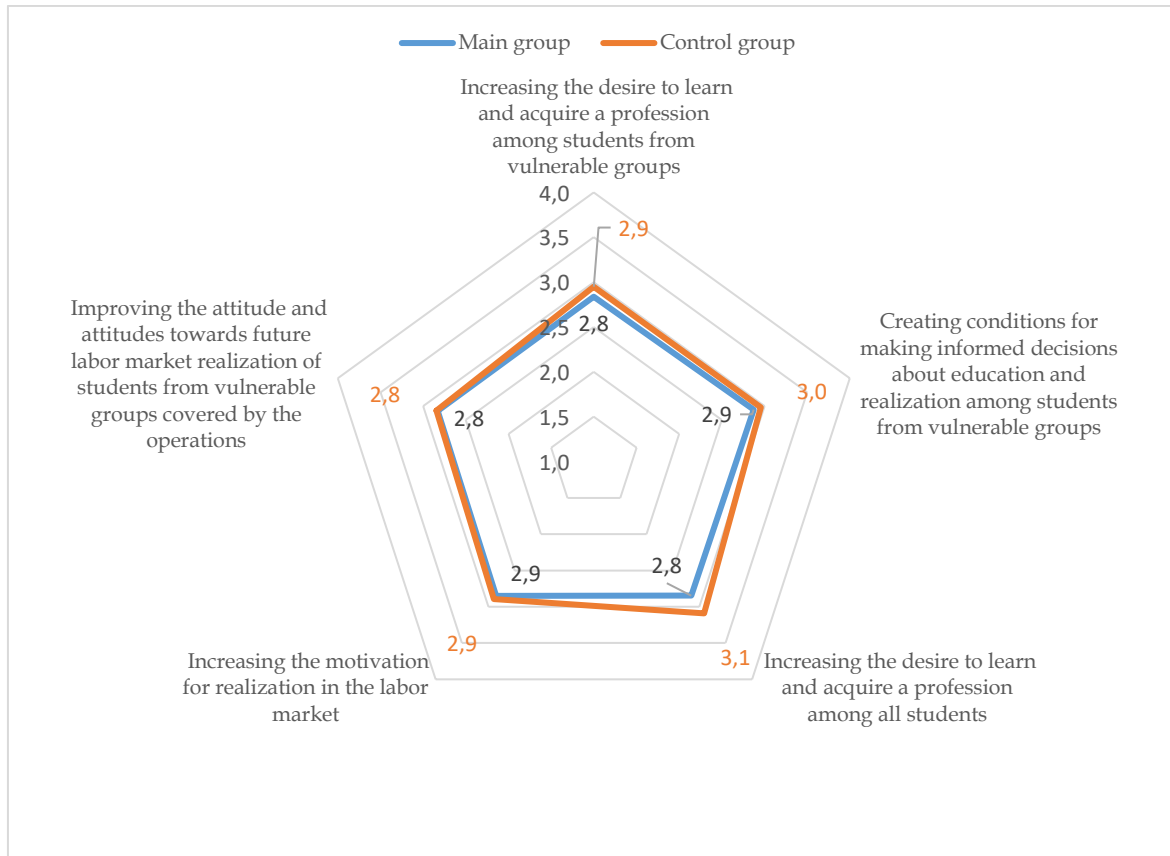
*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'I disagree at all' and 4 'I totally agree'*

### **Impact of procedures on the attitude towards professional realisation of children and students from marginalized groups, including Roma**

The answer to this evaluation question covers the following procedures: BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success" (activities implemented in 2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" – Component 1, BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection" and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach "Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas". Data are also used from a survey of teachers in school education and parents of children and students.

Attitudes towards professional realization of students from vulnerable groups change moderately in the opinion of the teachers in the schools participating in the procedures evaluated (average scores between 2.8 and 3.1 on a scale from 1 to 4). There is no significant difference between the views of teachers in the main and control groups. This shows that, in general, not only the procedures evaluated, but also the national policies and programmes have managed to create an environment in which the motivation of parents and students is increased so that they can take informed decisions about the realization of the students, improve attitudes towards education and motivation to learn and acquire a profession, as well as motivation for realization on the labour market.

*Figure109 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under the OP SESG contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?*

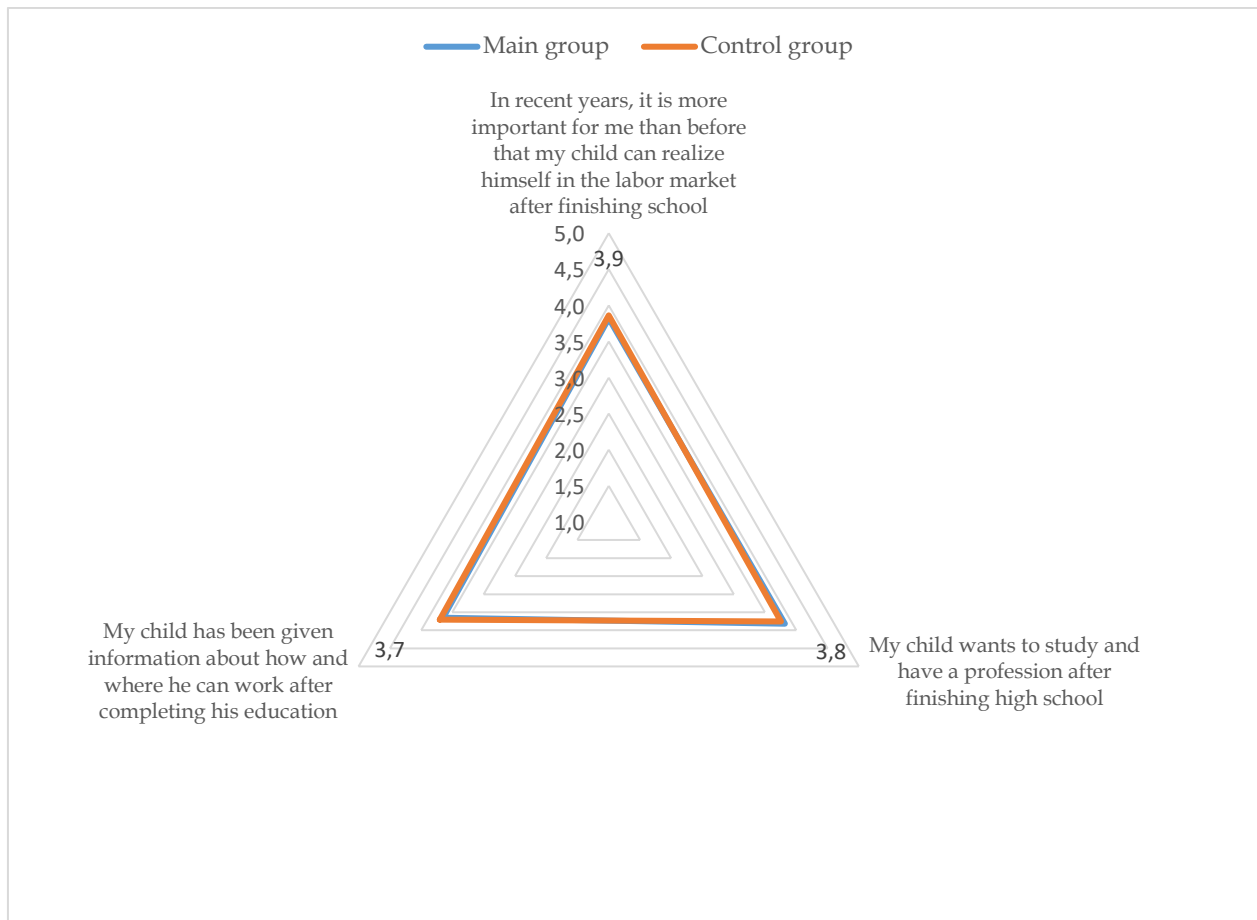


*\*Statistical distribution among teachers in schools (main group) who have been asked the question "To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG have contributed to the realization of one of the following objectives? and teachers (control group) who have been asked the question "To what extent, in your school, you have managed to achieve each of these goals in the last 7 years?"*

*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'very low' and 4 'very high'*

According to the survey among parents of children in school – among students in the primary and control groups, a high level of desire for professional development was achieved after graduating from secondary education (average score 3.82), as well as claim to a high degree that students have received information about where and how they can work after completing secondary education (average score 3.82).

*Figure110 To what extent do the following statements relate to you or your child: (comparison between main and control groups, study among parents)*



*\*Statistical distribution among parents (main group) and parents (control group)*

*\*\*Average scores on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'I disagree at all' and 4 'I totally agree'*

The activities carried out under the evaluated projects, according to teachers and beneficiaries, led rather to moderate and, according to parents, to a significant improvement in the language skills and literacy levels of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma.

The activities evaluated in the pre-school educational system, according to kindergarten teachers, led to moderate improvements in the learning outcomes of children with special educational needs.

Despite the general negative trends in students' NEE and SME results, it can be assumed that interventions under the evaluated procedures resulted in more than 6 % impact on NEE and SME results, with a higher impact in schools with higher concentration of students from vulnerable groups. This has led to the maintenance of the positions of the participating schools (their participation in projects under the evaluated procedures contributes to maintaining their positions and not to decline) and, in the event of a decrease in the control group, the effects of the intervention are positive. If not for the activities funded under the evaluated procedures, the schools involved in the procedures would have reduced their performance by between 6 and 8 percentiles. It means that improving the educational attainment of students from vulnerable groups remains a major challenge.

It can be assumed that, according to the pedagogical specialists, as a result of the projects implemented, the attitude towards the educational process of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved moderately and, according to the parents' opinion, to a significant extent. Changing the

attitudes and motivations of children and parents is the key for further steps to increase educational outcomes, which is why we can recognize that important prerequisites for successful integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma have been achieved.

It can be assumed that, according to the opinion of teachers to a moderate degree, and according to the parents' opinion, the attitude towards professional realization of students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved to a high degree. This impact should largely be seen in conjunction with improving the attitude of children and students from vulnerable groups to the educational process, including Roma, and as a prerequisite for future opportunities to improve educational outcomes.

#### 4.6. Complementarity with national education policies and programmes

4.6.1. What is the impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly to marginalized groups such as Roma under the Programme on education policies and regulatory frameworks?

4.6.2. Are there any changes in the main strategic documents and regulatory framework related to the implementation of the PA3 measures of the Programme?

The answer to the evaluation questions presupposes, firstly, an examination of the measures envisaged in the strategic documents and action plans/implementation in force in the period 2014-2020, which are financed under PA3 of the OP SESG, respectively the reported results of the identified measures. In particular, an analysis has been carried out: which are the strategic documents, the objectives of which are also achieved through the support of PA3 of the OP SESG, what are the measures set out in their action/implementation plans, financed under PA3 of the OP SESG and what results are reported. For this purpose, a study has been carried out on the following strategic documents and plans and reports for taking into account the measures envisaged:

*The Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)*<sup>84</sup> is a document that is in line with international documents and standards, in the field of children's rights and the rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities. The objectives of the Strategy are prioritized in the following directions: "Full socialization of children and students from ethnic minorities", "Ensure equal access to quality education for children and students from ethnic minorities", "Strengthening intercultural education as an integral part of the process of modernization of the Bulgarian educational system" and "Conserving and developing the cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities". The analysis of the examined documents shows that out of the 21 activities set out in the above 4 strands, 6 are mainly implemented through the implementation of the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 of the OP SESG, and for 3 of the 21 measures set out there is no need for funding.

Table 67 Contribution of the procedures evaluated under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG for the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)

<p><b>Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)</b></p>	<p><b>Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)</b></p>
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<sup>84</sup> The strategy builds on the strategy approved by the Minister of Education and Science in 2004 and updated in 2010 with the same name, which is the first sectoral document contributing to the development of Bulgarian education in the context of the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities.



Objectives and activities set out in the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)	BG05M 9OP001- 2.018	BG05M 20P001- 3.001	BG05M 20P001- 3.002	BG05M 20P001- 3.004	CLLD	BG05M 20P001- 3.005	BG05M 20P001- 2.011
<b>Strategic Objective 1. Full socialization of children and students from ethnic minorities</b>							
Activity 1.4. Working with school boards and parent associations to overcome negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards different ethnic groups	✓	✓	✓			✓	
<b>Strategic Objective 2. Ensuring equal access to quality education for children and students from ethnic minorities</b>							
Activity 2.3. Providing, if necessary, additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom Bulgarian is not a mother tongue	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Activity 2.4. Providing additional qualification of pedagogical specialists for work in a multicultural educational environment, including for specialized teaching of Bulgarian language to children for whom it is not a mother tongue						✓	
Activity 2.7. Additional work with students from ethnic minorities at risk of dropping out and/or early school leaving	✓		✓		✓		✓
Activity 2.8. Supporting students from vulnerable ethnic minorities to continue high school education	✓		✓	✓			✓
<b>Strategic Objective 4. Preserving and developing the cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities</b>							
Activity 4.4. Preserving and developing the cultural identity of children and students from ethnic minorities in the educational process, including in Free elected subjects and Compulsory elected subjects classes	✓	✓	✓		✓		

*The Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)*<sup>85</sup> was developed under the Council of the European Union Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving (2011/C 191/01) as well as the EU strategic framework for cooperation in education and training. The achievement of the strategy's objectives is achieved through three main strands: "Prevention aimed at preventing the causes of early school leaving", "Intervention that aims to create conditions for limiting early school leaving" and "Compensation that aims to help early school leavers to re-enter education or gain qualifications". The analysis of the documents examined, visualized in the table below, shows that the plans for the implementation of the strategy set out a total of 6 measures under the 3 main directions, which are implemented through the procedures implemented/implemented under PA3 of OP SESG.

Table 68 Contribution of the procedures evaluated under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG to achieve the objectives of the Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)

Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)				
<b>Objectives and measures set out in the Plans for 2016-2017 and 2018-2020 for the implementation of the Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)</b>	BG05M2 OP001- 3.001	BG05M2 OP001- 3.002	BG05M2 OP001- 3.017	BG05M9 OP001- 2.018	BG05M2 OP001- 2.011
<b>Objective 1: Policies to prevent early school leaving</b>					
Measure 2.1. Support for disadvantaged vulnerable groups to educate their children in kindergartens from the age of 3 with a view to their early socialization <sup>86</sup>	✓				
Measure 2.2. Additional training in Bulgarian language for children and students for whom Bulgarian is not mother tongue (including children and students seeking or granted international protection)		✓			
Measure 3.1. Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment through training of teachers from schools and kindergartens to apply alternative methods and approaches aimed at reducing functional illiteracy, retention in school and reducing the number of dropouts <sup>87</sup>			✓		
Measure 4.1. Application of the approved model of the Early Warning System to identify and track students at risk of dropping out		✓		✓	✓
<b>Objective 3: Policies to compensate the impact of early school leaving</b>					

<sup>85</sup> The document was adopted by Protocol No 44.11 of the Council of Ministers of 30.10.2013 and is valid until the end of 2020.

<sup>86</sup> The measure is foreseen in the Plan for 2016-2017 and the Plan for 2018-2020 for the implementation of the Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)

<sup>87</sup> The measure is foreseen in the Plan for 2016-2017 and the Plan for 2018-2020 for the implementation of the Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)

Measure 4.2. Inclusion of persons over the age of 16 in literacy courses or courses for learning content intended for study in lower secondary education classes <sup>88</sup>		✓		✓	✓
Measure 5.2. Reintegrating into the education system of young people under 18 who drop out of school <sup>89</sup>		✓		✓	

The *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020*<sup>90</sup> sets out the strategic framework of the state policy for education and training for the period 2014-2020, aimed at achieving the European objective of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The strategy identifies four main priorities aimed at: '1. Applying an educational approach that supports the development of all learners and contributes to building thoughtful, capable and proactive personalities capable of coping with change and uncertainty. Improving the quality of education and training, '3. Providing an educational environment for equal access to lifelong learning, active social inclusion and active citizenship' and "4. Promoting education and training tailored to the needs of the economy and changes in the labour market".

The measures envisaged in the Strategy are divided into eight impact areas, of which 3 are: *Impact area 1: Enabling the transition to a functioning lifelong learning system; Impact area 2: Providing conditions for expanding the scope and improving the quality of pre-school education and training and Impact Area 3: Applying a comprehensive approach to increasing educational attainment and reducing the share of early school leavers* contribute the following evaluated procedures: BG05M20P001-3.001 "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children"; BG05M20P001-3.002 "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection"; BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education"; BG05M2OP001-3.004 "Adult literacy – Phase 1"; BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment", BG05M2OP001-2.011 Support for success. As it can be seen from the table below, a total of 6 key tasks are fully implemented through the implementation of the above-mentioned procedures under PO3 of OP SESG.

*Table 69 Contribution of the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG for the achievement of the objectives of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-2020)*

National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-2020)	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-2020)					
Objectives, activities and tasks set out in the Action Plans for 2016, 2017 and 2019 implementing the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020	BG05M2 OP001- 3.001	BG05M2 OP001- 3.017	BG05M2 OP001- 3.002	BG05M2 OR001- 3.005	BG05M2 OP001- 3.004	BG05M2 OP001- 2.011
<b>Impact area 1: Enabling a transition to a functioning lifelong learning system</b>						

<sup>88</sup> The measure is foreseen in the Plan for 2016-2017 and the Plan for 2018-2020 for the implementation of the Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)

<sup>89</sup> The measure is foreseen in the Plan for 2016-2017 and the Plan for 2018-2020 for the implementation of the Strategy for preventing and reducing the share of dropouts and early school leavers (2013-2020)

<sup>90</sup> The document was adopted by Decision No 12 of the Council of Ministers of 10 January 2014 and is valid until the end of 2020.

<b>Activity 1.7. Development and expansion of the adult literacy system to ensure access to the labour market</b>						
Task 1.7.1. Operation "Elderly literacy – phase 1" <sup>91</sup>						✓
<b>Impact area 2: Providing conditions for expanding the scope and improving the quality of pre-school education and training</b>						
<b>Activity 2.1. Development of mechanisms to stimulate the inclusion of children in pre-school education and training and to support care from early childhood, especially for disadvantaged, Roma or with special educational needs, including with disabilities</b>						
Task 2.1.3. Project "Support for pre-school education and training of disadvantaged children" <sup>92</sup>	✓					
Task 2.1.4. Project "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment" – project selection procedure <sup>93</sup>		✓				
Task 2.1.1. BG05M2OR001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" <sup>94</sup>				✓		
<b>Impact area 3: Implement a comprehensive approach to increase educational attainment and reduce the share of early school leavers</b>						
<b>Activity 3.1. Development of the supporting environment in the school educational system for the implementation of inclusive learning through: support and motivation of pedagogical specialists for upskilling, stimulating teamwork; providing flexible forms of training</b>						
Task 3.1.1. BG05M2OP001-2.011 Support for success <sup>95</sup>						✓
<b>Activity 3.6 Extension of the opportunities for additional Bulgarian language education for children and students for whom the Bulgarian language is not mother tongue</b>						
Task 3.6.1 Operation "Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or granted international protection" <sup>96</sup>			✓			

The main objective of *the National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy (2014-2020)*<sup>97</sup> is to make functional literacy a national priority and to ensure cooperation in the field of literacy initiatives to be implemented by local, regional and national authorities, social partners, teachers and parents. The analysis of the examined documents shows that the plans for implementation of the Strategy set out a total of 14

<sup>91</sup> The task is set out in the Action Plans for 2016, 2017 and 2018 implementing the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020

<sup>92</sup> The task is set out in the Action Plans for 2016 and 2017 to implement the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020

<sup>93</sup> The task is set out in the Action Plans for 2016 and 2017 to implement the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020

<sup>94</sup> The task is set out in the 2019 Action Plan implementing the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020

<sup>95</sup> The task is set out in the 2019 Action Plan implementing the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020

<sup>96</sup> The task is set out in the 2017 Action Plan implementing the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020

<sup>97</sup> The document was adopted by Protocol No 43.5 of the Council of Ministers of 22.10.2014 and is in force until the end of 2020.

activities for the implementation of the 3 operational objectives, which are implemented through the procedures implemented/implementing under PA3 of OP SESG.

Table 70 Contribution of the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG for the achievement of the objectives of the National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy (2014-2020)

National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy (2014-2020)	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy (2014-2020)							
Objectives, measures and activities set out in the National Action Plan in implementation of the National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy in the Period 2015-2016 and 2017-2018	BG05 M2OP 001-3.001	BG05 M9OP 001-2.018	BG05M 2OP001 -3.017	BG05 M2OP 001-3.002	BG05 M2OP 001-3.005	BG05 M2O P001-3.004	BG05 M2O P001-2.011	CLLD
<b>Objective 1. Creating an environment conducive to promoting reading and improving literacy<sup>98</sup></b>								
<b>Measure 2. Helping parents improve their skills to engage and encourage their children to read and develop language skills</b>								
Activity 2: Organization of thematic parental meetings with parents of children and students from ethnic minorities on the importance of functional literacy		✓	✓			✓		
Activity 3: Organization of information meetings with parents of children and students seeking or granted international protection			✓			✓		
Action 4: Organization of courses for learning Bulgarian by parents of enrolled children from families seeking or granted international protection			✓			✓		
Activity 9: Development and validation of good practice models for collaboration with parents and the local community in support of literacy						✓		
Activity 10: School initiatives in support of reading activities with parents - "Club of Parents"/"Open Doors"		✓				✓		
<b>Objective 2. Increasing the level of literacy<sup>99</sup></b>								
<b>Measure 1. Assessment of the level of literacy</b>								
Activity 4: Organizing adult literacy courses						✓		

<sup>98</sup> All the activities described under Objective 1 are set out in the National Action Plan in implementation of the National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy in the period 2015-2016

<sup>99</sup> The activities described under Objective 2 are set out in the National Action Plan implementing the National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy in 2015-2016 and the Action Plan 2017-2018

Measure 2. Optimization of learning content standards and curricula								
Activity 2: Development of adapted adult learning programmes						✓		
Measure 3. Upskilling teachers to improve literacy levels								
Activity 2: Training of school teachers and educators to work in conditions of low literacy of the family and the social environment			✓			✓		
Activity 3: Trainings of teachers in Bulgarian language and literature "Strategies and practices for developing a toolkit for assessing the reading literacy of students"			✓			✓		
Activity 7: Conducting qualification activities aimed at diagnosis of learning difficulties			✓					
Activity 8: Training for the qualification of teachers to work in a multicultural environment			✓					
Activity 9: Training for acquiring qualification of teachers to teach Bulgarian language as a foreign language			✓			✓		
Objective 3. Increase participation and inclusion <sup>100</sup>								
Measure 1. Addressing socio-economic inequalities								
Activity 4: Organization of reading and Bulgarian language classes in the framework of the full-day organization of the school day for students from grade 1 to 8	✓				✓			✓
Measure 2. Bridging inequalities in bilinguals								
Activity 1: Provision of additional conditions for education in Bulgarian language and other subjects for bilingual children	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓

The strategic objective of the *National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)*<sup>101</sup> is to create conditions for equal integration of Roma and Bulgarian citizens in vulnerable situations from other ethnic groups in social and economic life by ensuring equal opportunities and equal access to rights, goods and services, participation in all public spheres and improving the quality of life in compliance with the principles of equality and non-discrimination. In relation to this strategic objective, the Strategy considers the different priority areas such as education, health, housing conditions, employment, rule of

<sup>100</sup> The activities described under Objective 3 are set out in the National Action Plan implementing the National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy in 2015-2016 and the Action Plan 2017-2018

<sup>101</sup> Source: <https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726>

law and non-discrimination, culture and media as fundamental to Roma integration. For the purpose of this evaluation, the envisaged measures under Priority “Education”, which are linked to funding from OP SESG, are considered. The table below shows the contribution of operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG and assessed on the basis of research and analysis of the monitoring reports for the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2016<sup>102</sup> and 2017<sup>103</sup> of the measures and sources of funding envisaged in the National Action Plan 2015-2020 for the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2012-2020<sup>104</sup> and by analyzing the objectives, activities and target groups set out in the above procedures. The analysis of the contribution shows that out of the 26 measures set out under Priority “Education” in the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2012-2020, 13 are mainly implemented through the implementation of the procedures evaluated, with 3 out of 26 measures not requiring funding.

In addition, it can be noted that the implementation of the measures under Priority “Education” of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) also contribute to the implementation of National Objective 4 “A share of early school leavers of 11 % by 2020 and a share of 30-34 years old with completed higher education – 36 % by 2020” and indirectly contributes to the achievement of National Objective 5 “Reducing the number of people living in poverty by 260 thousand people”. *The national targets are set in the National Reform Programme in implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy.*

Table 71 Contribution of the procedures evaluated under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG to the achievement of the objectives of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)

National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)						
Objectives, tasks and measures under National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2012-2020 in pursuit of an operational objective: “Covering and retaining Roma children and students in the education system. Providing quality education in a multicultural educational environment”	BG05M 9OP001 -2.018	BG05M 20P001- 3.001	BG05M 2OP001 -3.002	BG05 M2OP 001- 3.004	CLLD	BG05 M2OP 001- 3.005	BG05 M2OP 001- 2.011
<b>Objective 1: Ensure the right to equal access to quality education, including through the integration of Roma children and students in ethnically mixed kindergartens and schools</b>							
<b>Task 1.2: Providing conditions for maximum coverage and early adaptation in the system of pre-school and school education of Roma children and students</b>							
Measure 1.2.2. Support for Roma children and students to equalize their starting positions when entering kindergarten/school		✓	✓		✓		

<sup>102</sup> Administrative Monitoring Report 2016 on the implementation of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020), source: <https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726>

<sup>103</sup> Administrative Monitoring Report 2017 on the implementation of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020), source: <https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726>

<sup>104</sup> Source: <https://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726>

<b>Objective 2: Improving the quality of education in separate kindergartens and schools in large Roma neighbourhoods and rural regions, where mainly Roma children and students are taught</b>							
<b>Task 2.1: Increasing school readiness and providing a supportive environment and differentiated care for each child and student</b>							
Measure 2.1.1. Providing, if necessary, additional training in Bulgarian language for children of preschool age for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Measure 2.1.2. Providing, if necessary, additional training in Bulgarian language for students for whom the Bulgarian language is not a mother tongue	✓		✓		✓		
<b>Objective 3: Education in a spirit of tolerance and non-discrimination in kindergartens and schools. Preservation and development of the cultural identity of Roma children and students</b>							
<b>Task 3.1: Forming knowledge of the culture, traditions and values of different ethnicities to build conscious tolerance</b>							
Measure 3.1.2. Overcoming discriminatory attitudes towards Roma children and students through integration activities and (trips, events to mark dates from the festive calendar, campaigns)	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Measure 3.1.3. Working with school boards and parent associations to overcome negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
<b>Task 3.2: Development of various forms of intercultural education aimed at preserving and developing the cultural identity of Roma</b>							
Measure 3.2.1. Support activities aimed at preserving and developing the cultural identity of Roma children and students	✓	✓	✓		✓		
<b>Objective 4: Prevention of early school leaving and literacy of illiterate Roma adult</b>							
<b>Task 4.1: Prevention of early school leaving of Roma children and students</b>							
Measure 4.1.1. Involving Roma children and students in a variety of extracurricular activities in order to overcome learning difficulties and to retain in school	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Measure 4.1.2. Introduction of measures for coverage and prevention of early school leaving	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
<b>Task 4.2: Inclusion of Roma adult in forms of continuing education</b>							
Measure 4.2.1. Literacy and training of illiterate Roma people who do not have an				✓			



initial stage or a completed class from the lower secondary stage of education							
<b>Objective 5: Implementation of various forms and programmes for working with children with gaps in learning content and for school dropouts with a view to their reintegration</b>							
<b>Task 5.1: Increasing the flexibility and permeability of different education models</b>							
Measure 5.1.1. Introduction of a system for the validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal learning and informal learning				✓			
<b>Objective 6: Inclusion of parents of Roma children and students in the educational process and strengthening their participation in school life</b>							
<b>Task 6.1: Increasing the commitments of parents of Roma children and students to the education of their children</b>							
Measure 6.1.1. Participation of parents of Roma children and students in parent clubs/school boards	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Measure 6.1.2. Joint activities between parents, including parents of Roma children, to overcome negative public attitudes, to create partnerships between kindergartens, schools and parents	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Measure 6.1.3. Activities to raise the awareness of parents of Roma children and students about the benefits of education	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

The study of the impact of the evaluation procedures on education policies also suggests exploring a strategic framework within which inclusive education measures will operate in the next programming period, in particular two key strategies:

Priority “Education” of the *National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2021-2030)*<sup>105</sup>. The document reflects and prioritizes the main problems related to social inequalities and overcoming social exclusion, highlighting the links between the socio-economic exclusion of Roma, access to education and increasing inequality in income and living conditions. The link between the increasing demands of the labour market and the overcoming of educational deficits in marginal groups is also clearly formulated. At the strategic level, problems with equal access to education, multicultural education, language education and overcoming discrimination have been analyzed and addressed. With regard to the changes in the strategic framework, compared to the previous programming period, the document finds that the measures under educational integration and the reduction of poverty and social exclusion implemented in the framework of the *National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria*

<sup>105</sup> The document was adopted by the Council of Ministers Decision No 278 of 5.5.2022 and is valid until the end of 2030.

(2012-2020), respectively in the OP SESG, **should be** strengthened and focused in the programming period 2021-2027. In this sense, the PA3 procedures have had an impact on the strategic framework, which is confirmed by *the long-term objectives set out in the National Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2021-2030)* under Priority "Education", namely:

- Sustainability of policies for inclusion, sustainable inclusion and educational integration in pre-school and school education of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma;
- Sustainability of policies for educational desegregation and prevention of secondary segregation;
- Strengthening the role of kindergartens and schools of upbringing into values and transforming them into value-oriented behaviour;
- Formation and development of effective school communities with a focus on systematic work with parents;
- Focus on the formation and development of skills for life and work in the 21st century.

Beyond what is stated, the National Action Plan for the period 2022-2023 for the implementation of the Strategy sets out 5 measures, which<sup>106</sup> are implemented through the following procedures under PO3 of OP SESG: BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education"; BG05M2OP001-3.020 "Adult literacy - Phase 2"; BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment", BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success" and projects under the CLLD approach.

*Table72 Contribution of the procedures evaluated under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG to the achievement of the objectives of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2021-2030)*

National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2021-2030)	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the National Action Plan for the period 2022-2023 under Priority "Education"				
Objectives and measures set out in the National Action Plan 2022-2023 for the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021-2030	BG05M2OP001-3.005	BG05M2OP001-2.011	BG05M2OP001-3.017	BG05M2OP001-3.020	CLLD
<b>Objective 1. Effective coverage, inclusion and reintegration of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>					
Measure 1.1. Covering children from vulnerable groups, including Roma, in early childhood education and care and ensuring continuity of education in compulsory pre-school education for 4-5 and 6-years-olds.	✓				
<b>Objective 2. Providing conditions for the implementation of inclusive education and educational integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>					
Measure 2.1. Implementation of additional modules in Bulgarian language for children whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian, in order to overcome existing and					

<sup>106</sup> National Action Plan 2022-2023 for the implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021-2030

subsequent learning difficulties caused by lack of knowledge in the Bulgarian language	✓	✓			✓
Measure 2.2. Providing additional training in subjects, including during holidays, to overcome gaps in learning content, as well as for successful presentation of NEE and SME for students from vulnerable groups, including Roma		✓			
<b>Objective 3. Improving the quality of education in kindergartens and schools with a concentration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>					
Measure 3.2. Training for educational mediators and/or social workers			✓		
<b>Purpose. 7. Encourage the participation of persons from vulnerable groups, including Roma, in continuing education and/or vocational training and/or higher education</b>					
Measure 7.1. Adult literacy				✓	

*The strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)*<sup>107</sup> sets a clear framework for supporting inclusive education in the next 10 years. According to the strategy, inclusive education policies need to be continued and upgraded, with a particular focus on the full inclusion and inclusion in the educational process of children and students with special educational needs, from vulnerable groups, including Roma, of applicants or beneficiaries of international protection and migrants. There are measures for adaptation and smooth transition from family to educational environment, as well as transition between the different stages of pre-school and school education. Within Priority Area 5 “Effective Inclusion, Permanent Inclusion and Educational Integration” of the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030) are set out, which continue and complement the interventions under OP SESG, developed in detail in the following 9 areas:

- Overcoming barriers to access to education;
- Interaction with parents;
- Supporting the development of specialists;
- Applying an individual approach to children and students;
- Support for children and students with SEN;
- Integration of children from vulnerable groups;
- Support for children with talents;
- Prevention and reduction of aggression and discrimination;
- Expanding the educational function of educational institutions.

In addition, as it is apparent from the table below, 3 of the activities envisaged under Priority Area 5 “Effective inclusion, sustainable inclusion and educational integration” of the Strategy are set for implementation through the following procedures evaluated BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”.

<sup>107</sup> The document was adopted by Protocol No 13 of the Council of Ministers of 24 February 2021 and is valid until the end of 2030.

Table73 Contribution of the procedures evaluated under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG for the achievement of the objectives of the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)

Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)	
Priority areas and operational objectives set out in Action Plan 2024 towards the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)	BG05M2OP001-3.005	BG05M2OP001-3.017
<b>Priority Area 5. Effective inclusion, sustainable inclusion and educational integration</b>		
<b>Operational Objective 5.1. Overcoming regional, socio-economic and other barriers to access to education</b>		
Activity 2: Additional training in Bulgarian language for children from vulnerable groups. Project “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”	✓	
Activity 3: Active inclusion in pre-school education	✓	
<b>Operational Objective 5.3. Supporting the development of specialists in the system of pre-school and school education</b>		
Activity 3: Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment		✓

It is evident from the strategic objectives thus formulated in the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030) and the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030) the policies implemented through the procedures under PA3 of OP SESG will continue to be active until 2030 which demonstrates their impact on the strategic framework and is a guarantee for their sustainability. It is important to note that these measures have also found their place in the Programme “Education” 2021-2027 and in particular in PA1 Inclusive Education and Education Integration.

The analysis of documents relating to the policy impact of the procedures under evaluation and in particular the strategic planning can also be supported by the opinion of the MA experts: *at the level of strategic planning and synchronization with national targets, I believe that absolutely all procedures are clearly successful and have achieved, and have overachieved the set objectives, indicators*<sup>108</sup>. According to the experts gathered, the impact of the procedures on the policies and the regulatory framework is strongly positive, although its specific dimensions would be able to be recorded at a later stage. The impact is to reduce the number of early school leavers, to ensure equal access to education for all children and students, and to link education with the labour market.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the MA of OP SESG on 19.12.2022.

<sup>109</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the MA of OP SESG on 19.12.2022.

As a concrete example of policy impact, procedure BG05M2OP001 -2.011 “Support for success” can be given due to the fact that, after the project was completed in 2022, the Council of Ministers approved the National Programme “Support to Educational Mediators and Social Workers”<sup>110</sup>. During the interview<sup>111</sup> with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science in connection with the implementation of this procedure, the following was shared: “It is also good to say, you know that the policy of every project is to implement a policy that is then sustainable and that it becomes state policy. You know that when the project was completed on 30 June, the Ministry of Education and Science established a National Programme so that educational mediators and social workers can continue to work and support schools in their work with parents. You are most likely aware that how a national programme at the end of the year was extended by a decision of the Council of Ministers until 30 June 2023. Thus, in schools, all recruited educational mediators and social workers continue to work.”

In summary, the contribution of the evaluated procedures is presented in the table below:

Strategic document	Operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG								
	BG05 M9OP 001-2.018	BG05 M2OP0 01-3.001	BG05 M2OP 001-3.002	BG05 M2OP 001-3.004	BG05 M2OP 001-3.005	BG05 M2OP 001-2.011	BG05 M2OP 001-3.017	BG05 M2OP 001-3.020	CLLD
Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Strategy for Preventing and Reducing the Share of Dropouts and Early School Leavers (2013-2020)	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-2020)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
National Strategy for Promotion and Improvement of Literacy (2014-2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
National Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)					✓		✓		

<sup>110</sup> Approved by Decision No 302 of the Council of Ministers of 2022.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with representatives of DB MES for the project “Support for success” on 12.01.2023.

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It can be concluded that more than 50 activities and measures analyzed above, as set out in 7 strategic documents, would not have been implemented and thus would not achieve the results set out in them if the intervention/procedures under PA3 of OP SESG is/are not implemented. In this case, the impact is reflected in the significant contribution of the procedures evaluated to achieve the objectives of key strategic documents in the education sector through the implementation of a substantial part of the measures/activities set in them with the support of PA3 of OP SESG.

There is also an impact in view of continuity at the level of strategic documents: the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030) and the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030) set out strategic objectives similar to those implemented in the period 2014-2020 and through the contribution of the procedures under PA3 of OP SESG. It is also important to note that some of the measures have also found their place in the Programme “Education” 2021-2027 and in particular in PA1 “Inclusive education and educational integration”, while some of the activities under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” have been continued through the approved National Programme “Supporting educational mediators and social workers”, i.e. the policies implemented through the procedures under PA 3 of OP SESG will continue to be active in the long term, which is a guarantee of their sustainability.

No impact can be traced at the level of changes in the strategy papers related to the implementation of the evaluated procedures due to the fact that there is no evidence that the examined strategy papers for the 2014-2020 period have been modified/updated.

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The study of the impact of the procedures under PA3 of the Programme on the regulatory framework implies an examination of the changes in basic legal acts in the field of education during the implementation of the procedures evaluated and the reasons for these changes, and the specific impacts can be assessed mainly through the analysis of the opinions of experts from key institutions and organizations, which, in addition to their role as participants in the implementation of the procedures under PA3 of OP SESG, are also part of the process of policy development and the regulatory framework. The reasons for this are two:

- on the one hand, there is no documentary trace reflected in the motives to the Bill/Act on amendment and supplement to the main legal acts in the field of education, from which to draw a substantiated conclusion on the impact of the procedures on the regulatory framework, consisting of a concrete change of a legal act related to the implementation of the measures under PA3;
- on the other hand, the impact of PA3 procedures on the regulatory framework in the field of education is good to look at among respondents who are well aware of both the basic regulatory acts and the specificities of the implementation of the procedures assessed.

In the period December 2022 – January 2023, 3 interviews were conducted with representatives of DB MES on projects BG05M2OP001-2.011-0001-C04 “Support for success”; BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004-C03 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and BG05M2OP001 -3.004-0001-C04 “New Chance for Success”, as well as 2 focus groups with representatives of the MA of OP SESG and of the Monitoring Committee of OP SESG.

In the opinion of the experts from the MA<sup>112</sup>, the implemented practices and experience under **project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004-C03 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”** have a direct impact on solving a significant regulatory gap: *“It solved a regulatory paradox. You know that by law education*

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<sup>112</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the MA of OP SESG on 19.12.2022.

in Bulgaria up to the age of 16 is free and mandatory and at the same time we have fees for kindergartens. This project helped to resolve this regulatory paradox", and at the same time indirectly contributed to regulatory changes related to compulsory inclusion in the system of pre-school education of children from 4 years of age (amendment of Article 8(1) of the Pre-school and School Education Act, SG No 82/2020) and the abolition of fees for crèches and kindergartens; as of 1 April 2022, the amendments to the Pre-school and School Education Act<sup>113</sup>, as assessed by experts, have a positive impact on the attendance of kindergartens, especially by marginalized groups, and allow their full coverage and retention in the pre-school education system of all children in order to ensure effective, early socialization and smooth transition to school education. Confirming the opinion of the experts, according to a report by the World Bank<sup>114</sup> project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004-C03 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" is a good example of a transition from a pilot measure to a programme with an impact at system level.

With regard to **project BG05M2OP001-3.004-0001-C04 "New Chance for Success"** (BG05M2OP001-3.004 "Adult literacy - Phase 1"), the interviewed experts also highlighted a positive impact on the regulatory framework: during the interview with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science<sup>115</sup>, it was shared that the results of this procedure give grounds for a change in the application of the Law on pre-school and school education and certificates, as those issued within the project are assimilated to the documents that are issued in the system of the Ministry of Education and Science, which allows the validation of competences in the field of general education.

To summarize, the impact of PA3 procedures on education policies and regulatory frameworks is interpreted by the interviewed experts as an opportunity to upgrade the well-performing measures under PA3 of OP SESG to sustainable national policies. The interviewed representatives from the non-governmental sector in the MC<sup>116</sup> share the opinion that it is important that successful interventions under OP SESG develop into national policies: *"Certainly operations provide a great opportunity in the right direction for the integration of vulnerable groups, but the danger remains in many other operations, which we are also working on and monitoring and not leaving everything on a project basis. That is, not simply relying on things to go from one programming period to another without becoming clear policies."*

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Experience gained and good practices in the evaluation procedures under PA3: BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" and BG05M2OP001-3.004 "Adult literacy - Phase 1" have an indirect impact on the regulatory framework in the field of education.

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#### **4.7. Improving access to education of marginalized groups, including Roma, through the CLLD approach under OP SESG**

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<sup>113</sup> Amended of the Pre-school and School Education Act, issue 17 of 1.3.2022, in force as of 1.4.2022.

<sup>114</sup> World Bank, 2021, Report on Early Childhood Education and Care, General Education and Inclusion: situational analysis and policy guidance recommendations"

<sup>115</sup> Interview with representatives of DB MES for projects "New Chance for Success" and "Active Inclusion in the System of Preschool Education", held on 13.1.2023.

<sup>116</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the Monitoring Committee of OP SESG on 30.1.2023

#### 4.7.1. Overcoming socio-economic barriers to access to education for children and students from marginalized groups (identified barriers on the territory of the LAG for pre-school education, school education, vocational education)

The answer to this evaluation question is based on an analysis of the procedures implemented under the CLLD approach with funding from the OP SESG and the related documents and data from a survey conducted among beneficiaries under CLLD procedures.

An integrated approach to territorial development is aimed at reducing social, economic and territorial disparities. One of the mechanisms in the 2014-2020 programming period to address territorial challenges is the Community-led Local Development approach. This approach applies to rural areas and territories with specific characteristics specified in the National Spatial Development Concept according to the eligibility conditions of the programmes included in the approach. It is applied on a territorial basis, at the level of municipality or association of neighbouring municipalities and/or neighbouring settlements, part of the municipality(s). Local initiative groups (LAG) develop integrated and multi-sectoral local development strategies based on the characteristics of the specific territory and local needs and potential. Funding is multi-fund. In addition to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) through the Rural Development Programme, funding under the approach is carried out by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through OP „Environment“ and OP „Innovation and Competitiveness“ and the European Social Fund (ESF) through OP HRD and OP SESG.

The funding under OP SESG is a tool for overcoming the educational imbalances on the territory of rural areas in Bulgaria, within the framework of the community-led local development (CLLD) approach. In the context of the OP SESG, the CLLD approach helps to solve the problems of access to education for those at risk of early school leaving, as well as with effective inclusion and improvement of the educational outcomes of marginalized communities on the ground, taking into account local identity and local socio-economic problems, ensuring synergy of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).

MCSO “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas” addresses socio-economic barriers identified in the 2016 Report for Bulgaria – Commission Staff Working Document SWD(2016), which recognises that vulnerable students from socially disadvantaged families (including Roma) continue to face significant barriers in accessing and completing education, especially in rural areas. According to the report, while pre-school education is now mandatory for all children aged 5 and 6 (at the time of the Report), the participation of disadvantaged children in the education process is still limited due to poor educational infrastructure, lack of trained staff and hidden costs of education, especially in small settlements and hard-to-reach areas.

As regards the share of early school leaving, significant regional disparities are addressed, it is significantly higher among students in rural areas and marginalized groups. Low educational and social status, poor living conditions and difficulties in accessing quality education services are considered as key factors for the high share of early school leavers among marginalized rural communities. The risk of poverty or social exclusion is significantly higher in rural areas.

16 procedures under 12 Agreements for the implementation of the CLLD approach with funding from OP SESG have been opened. One of the procedures (BG05M2OP001-3.010) was not agreed.

The procedures financed in implementation of CLLD strategies under OP SESG, according to the MCSO contribute to achieving the following objectives:

- a) improving the quality of pre-school and school education, including vocational education, in small settlements;



- b) improving access to pre-school and school education, including vocational education, in small settlements;
- c) reducing the number of people not covered by the educational system, drop-outs and early school leavers.

In particular, CLLD procedures address a number of educational challenges in small settlements especially among marginalized communities:

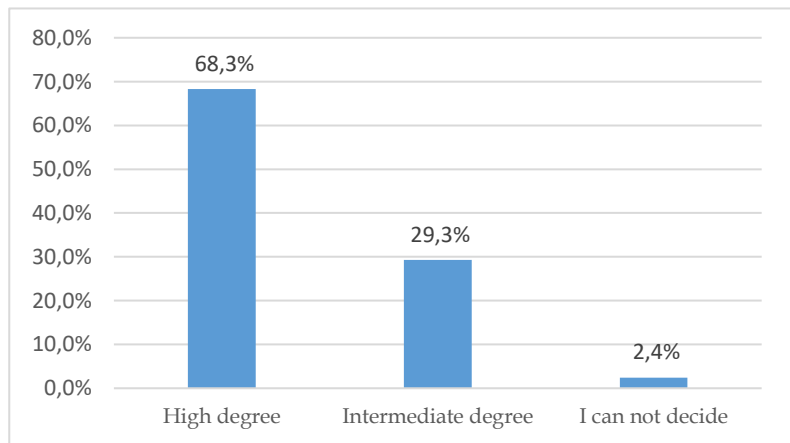
- the presence of children who are not in school, drop out and/or early school leavers;
- insufficient knowledge in Bulgarian language by children and students for whom the Bulgarian language is not native;
- existence of separate (so-called ethnic segregated) kindergartens and schools, especially in Roma neighborhoods;
- high percentage of students not pursuing secondary education, including post-primary vocational education;
- negative attitudes towards educational integration by students from marginalized groups and their parents, due to the lack of awareness of education as a value and a prerequisite for a successful start in life;
- low net enrolment rate in kindergartens and educational institutions of children and adolescents from marginalized communities/families.

The activities implemented within the projects correspond to the identified needs in the respective strategy on the territory of the LAG and create conditions for increasing access to education for children and students from vulnerable groups.

In the framework of the survey carried out among beneficiaries, 68 % of the beneficiaries under the CLLD approach indicated that as a result of the implementation of the activities, the identified socio-economic barriers were overcome to a high degree and 29 % - to an average.

*Figure 111 To what extent have the socio-economic barriers you identified in the LAG for access to pre-school, school, vocational education for children and students from marginalized groups been overcome as a result of the implementation of the project?*

*Source: Survey among beneficiaries of projects under Priority Axis 3 "Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion" of Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020*



According to the beneficiaries of procedures under the CLLD approach, the projects implemented managed to overcome the identified socio-economic barriers on the territory of the LAG for access to pre-school, school and vocational education for children and students from marginalized groups. This happened to a high degree according to 68 % of the respondents, and in average according to 29 %.

4.7.2. Contribution of CLLD projects to the educational integration of marginalized groups such as Roma – to reduce the share of early school leavers and/or dropouts of children and students from marginalized groups, to increase the coverage of children and students from marginalized groups in education (inclusion, return or retention in education, contribution to reducing segregation (if applicable), further education, etc.).

For the analysis on this evaluation question, data from opinion surveys of pedagogical specialists in educational institutions involved in CLLD procedures and of parents of children involved in project activities were used, as well as data from a survey conducted among beneficiaries under the CLLD procedures.

### School education

The survey conducted among teachers in schools implementing projects under the CLLD approach showed that overall the CLLD approach was able to support equal access to quality education at a very high degree (55.1 %) and rather to a high degree (40.8 %). It overcomes barriers to access to education for children and students from marginalized groups by contributing to a fuller coverage of students in school education (92 %), contributes to developing the potential of students (80 %) and reducing early school leavers (78 %). It is difficult for some teachers to tell with certainty whether the implementation of the projects affects the successful completion of secondary education. To a large extent, this is due to the fact that the projects were implemented in the period 2020-2023 and there is still insufficient accumulation of graduating cohorts. Another factor for these results is the fact that some of the schools are primary schools, which is why teachers fail to track the realization of their students and to compare it with previous periods.

Table 74 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?

Improving access to education	To a very low degree	Rather to a low degree	Rather to a high degree	To a very high degree	I don't know/I can't judge/it doesn't apply to our school
<b>Supporting equal access to quality education</b>		4.1 %	40.8 %	55.1 %	
<b>Fuller coverage of students in school education</b>	2.1 %	6.3 %	41.7 %	50.0 %	
<b>Developing the potential of students</b>		20.4 %	34.7 %	44.9 %	
<b>Reducing the number of early school leavers</b>	2.0 %	20.4 %	32.7 %	44.9 %	
<b>Higher share of students graduating from secondary education compared to the years before the implementation of the activities under OP SESG</b>		13.0 %	30.4 %	32.6 %	23.9 %

Source: Survey among schools involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach

At the same time, according to the teachers, the projects have managed to contribute to changing parents' attitudes towards the education of their children by improving their interaction with them and increasing

their motivation for the active inclusion of their children in the educational system. These achievements were assessed with positive responses (very high and rather high) by over 70 % of teachers (*see table below for each of the statements*).

*Table75 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?*

	To a very low degree	Rather to a low degree	Rather to a high degree	To a very high degree	I don't know/I can't judge/it doesn't apply to our school
<b>Interaction with parents and other stakeholders</b>					
<b>Creating a motivating and positive environment to promote students' achievements, competences and creative outcomes through inter-school activities and initiatives</b>		10.4 %	31.3 %	54.2 %	4.2 %
<b>Improving the school's interaction with the parents of students from vulnerable groups</b>	2.0 %	16.3 %	30.6 %	44.9 %	6.1 %
<b>Changing attitudes towards education of parents of children and students from vulnerable groups included in operations</b>	2.1 %	18.8 %	35.4 %	41.7 %	2.1 %
<b>Increasing parents' motivation for active inclusion of their children in the educational system</b>	2.0 %	22.4 %	32.7 %	38.8 %	4.1 %

*Source: Survey among schools involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach*

The projects implemented manage to support the specific needs of children and students, to contribute to enhancing their educational attainment and to make up for what was missed during COVID-19. At the same time, CLLD projects support training in Bulgarian language and Mathematics, but the assessments of teachers in these two subjects are in the moderate scale ("high") rather than in the extremely positive ones ("very high"). Similarly, the projects manage to reflect on the achievements of the students in their results from NEE and SME, but in moderate degree.

Two-thirds of the teachers interviewed who participated in CLLD activities believe that CLLD projects have managed to reduce the gap between students in learning outcomes, while around 32 % believe that this target has been achieved to a low level.

*Table76 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?*

	To a very low degree	Rather to a low degree	Rather to a high degree	To a very high degree	I don't know/I can't judge/it doesn't
<b>Educational achievements</b>					

	apply to our school				
<b>Children with special educational needs received support and opportunity for further education</b>	2.0 %	6.1 %	26.5 %	51.0 %	14.3 %
<b>Increasing the participation of students in extracurricular activities</b>	4.1 %	8.2 %	42.9 %	44.9 %	
<b>We were able to support the development of students with talents</b>	6.3 %	10.4 %	31.3 %	41.7 %	10.4 %
<b>Improving the educational achievement of all students</b>	2.1 %	16.7 %	47.9 %	33.3 %	
<b>Improving educational attainment of students at risk of early school leaving</b>	2.0 %	22.4 %	44.9 %	30.6 %	
<b>We have narrowed the gap between students in learning outcomes</b>	6.4 %	25.5 %	40.4 %	25.5 %	2.1 %
<b>We raised the level of literacy of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	4.3 %	14.9 %	51.1 %	23.4 %	6.4 %
<b>Students managed to make up for what was missed during the Covid-19 pandemic</b>	2.1 %	29.2 %	56.3 %	12.5 %	
<b>Students have improved their skills in Bulgarian language</b>	2.0 %	26.5 %	59.2 %	12.2 %	
<b>Students have improved their math skills</b>	4.1 %	32.7 %	53.1 %	10.2 %	
<b>Achieving higher results for SME and NEE</b>	6.1 %	30.6 %	57.1 %	6.1 %	

Source: Survey among schools involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach

Significant success of the projects under the CLLD approach is also related to the motivation for learning and realization on the labour market, including creating prerequisites for making informed decisions for realization on the labour market and choosing a future profession. These positive results are indicated by more than 75 % of teachers under the CLLD approach (specific results for individual statements are presented in the table below). As a result of project activities, the discipline and self-training of students is also improved, with the predominant grades there being rather in the moderate range rather to a high degree.

*Table 77 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?*

Attitudes for continuing training and realization on the labour market	To a very low degree	Rather to a low degree	Rather to a high degree	To a very high degree	I don't know/I can't judge/it doesn't apply to our school
<b>Creating conditions for making informed decisions on education and realization among students from vulnerable groups</b>	6.5 %	10.9 %	32.6 %	47.8 %	2.2 %
<b>Continuing the training of students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, in higher education</b>	4.3 %	10.9 %	41.3 %	41.3 %	2.2 %
<b>Increasing the willingness to study and acquire a profession among students from vulnerable groups covered by the operations</b>	8.5 %	17.0 %	31.9 %	38.3 %	4.3 %
<b>Increasing the desire to learn and acquire a profession among all students</b>	6.4 %	17.0 %	36.2 %	38.3 %	2.1 %
<b>Increasing motivation for realization on the labour market</b>	6.5 %	8.7 %	45.7 %	37.0 %	2.2 %
<b>Reduction of unexcused absences of students, including students from vulnerable groups</b>	2.1 %	17.0 %	44.7 %	34.0 %	2.1 %
<b>Improving attitudes and attitudes towards future labour market realization of students from vulnerable groups covered by the operations</b>	6.7 %	20.0 %	40.0 %	31.1 %	2.2 %
<b>More regular preparation of homework tasks for students, including students from vulnerable groups</b>	2.1 %	23.4 %	42.6 %	29.8 %	2.1 %
<b>Improving the attitude of students from vulnerable groups to the educational process</b>	4.3 %	17.0 %	51.1 %	27.7 %	
<b>Improving the discipline of students, including students from vulnerable groups</b>	8.5 %	12.8 %	53.2 %	25.5 %	

Source: Survey among schools involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach

Another important area in which CLLD projects have an impact, according to the teachers surveyed, is related to getting to know each other students from different cultures (89 %), overcoming or non-discrimination (85 %), overcoming negative public attitudes (81 %) and improving social inclusion of vulnerable communities (77 %). As a result of the activities implemented under the CLLD approach, the

cultural identity of ethnic minorities has been promoted and awareness of them has been raised (79 %). Another significant contribution from the activities carried out is the reduction of aggression (this influence is indicated by a total of 84 % of the teachers surveyed).

*Table78 To what extent do you think that the activities carried out by your school funded under OP SESG contributed to the achievement of any of the following objectives?*

Tolerance and overcoming discrimination	To a very low degree	Rather to a low degree	Rather to a high degree	To a very high degree	I don't know/I can't judge/it doesn't apply to our school
<b>Overcoming and non-discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity</b>	2.1 %	12.8 %	23.4 %	61.7 %	
<b>Getting to know each other's children from different ethnicities and educating them in a spirit of tolerance</b>	2.1 %	8.5 %	31.9 %	57.4 %	
<b>Overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin</b>	2.1 %	17.0 %	29.8 %	51.1 %	
<b>Improving the social inclusion of vulnerable communities</b>	4.3 %	17.0 %	27.7 %	48.9 %	2.1 %
<b>Changing attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma)</b>	4.3 %	13.0 %	32.6 %	47.8 %	2.2 %
<b>Counteraction of aggression</b>		13.6 %	38.6 %	45.5 %	2.3 %
<b>Promoting the cultural identity of ethnic communities</b>	4.3 %	10.9 %	34.8 %	43.5 %	6.5 %

*Source: Survey among schools involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach*

The survey conducted among parents of students in schools involved in activities funded under the CLLD approach showed that the responding parents agreed with the statement that it is important for children to go to school and complete secondary education, that the students have improved their educational outcomes and their skills in Bulgarian language, mathematics and science, that they communicate with children of all ethnic backgrounds in school and that the students themselves are willing to study and have a profession after completing secondary education. The agreement rate for these and other statements in the table below is above 93 %, with that of "completely agreeing" highest in terms of parents' conviction of the need to go to school and completion of secondary education (96.6 %) and lowest in terms of students' readiness to continue in the next stage of education, receiving additional support when the student has difficulties, as well as the opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, clubs and sports events (around 70 %).

*Table79 To what extent does it apply to you or your child:*

To what extent does it apply to you or your child:	I don't agree at all	Rather, I disagree	Rather agree	Totally agree
<b>It is important for my child to go to school</b>		0.6 %	2.8 %	96.6 %
<b>It is important that my child completes secondary education (12th grade)</b>		0.6 %	2.8 %	96.6 %
<b>The school supports the development of students with talents</b>		0.6 %	12.9 %	86.5 %
<b>In recent years, it is more important to me than before my child was able to enter the labour market after graduating from school</b>		3.6 %	10.1 %	86.4 %
<b>My child improved his/ her discipline at school</b>		0.6 %	15.7 %	83.6 %
<b>My child has a desire to study and have a profession after graduating from secondary education</b>			16.4 %	83.6 %
<b>My child's teachers communicate with me and give me information about how my child performs at school</b>	1.2 %	0.6 %	16.8 %	81.4 %
<b>My child has improved his educational results</b>		0.6 %	18.1 %	81.3 %
<b>Children who need additional training received additional hours with their teachers</b>		1.4 %	17.9 %	80.7 %
<b>My child is more likely to go to school with homework prepared</b>	0.6 %	0.6 %	18.1 %	80.7 %
<b>My child has improved his/ her skills in Bulgarian language</b>		1.3 %	18.8 %	80.0 %
<b>My child is less absent from school</b>	1.3 %	1.3 %	18.5 %	79.0 %
<b>My child has improved his/ her math skills</b>		1.3 %	20.5 %	78.2 %
<b>My child communicates with children of all ethnicities at school</b>		2.5 %	20.8 %	76.7 %
<b>My child managed to make up for what was missed during the Covid-19 pandemic</b>	0.7 %	1.4 %	22.1 %	75.9 %
<b>My child has improved his/ her natural science skills</b>		2.5 %	22.5 %	75.0 %
<b>In recent years, my child's desire to go to school has increased</b>		1.8 %	23.5 %	74.7 %

<b>My child receives the necessary extra support when there are difficulties</b>	2.6 %	3.9 %	22.6 %	71.0 %
<b>My child is prepared to continue in the next stage of education</b>	1.8 %	1.8 %	25.5 %	70.9 %
<b>My child participates more often in clubs, sports events and other extracurricular activities</b>		1.8 %	28.0 %	70.1 %

### Pre-school education

The survey conducted among teachers in kindergartens and schools (pre-school groups) who participated in the implementation of CLLD-based projects showed that a significant proportion of them (89 %) considered that the conditions for equal access to pre-school education had improved as a result of project activities. For 94 %, the activities provided the opportunity for additional Bulgarian classes for children for whom the mother tongue is not Bulgarian, 92 % of the activities performed led to an increase in the quality of education in kindergartens and preschool groups in schools, and according to 88 % of the pedagogical specialists, the activities contributed to creating conditions for the successful socialization of children from vulnerable groups. The prevailing positive scores are in the moderate “rather to a high” range.

*Table80 Which of the following have happened in your school/kindergarten as a result of the implementation of the project/projects activities?*

<b>Access to education</b>	<b>To a very low degree</b>	<b>Rather to a low degree</b>	<b>Rather to a high degree</b>	<b>To a very high degree</b>
<b>Improving conditions for equal access to pre-school education</b>	0 %	11.1 %	58.3 %	30.6 %
<b>Additional activities with children for whom the Bulgarian language is not mother tongue for mastering the official language before entering first grade</b>	0 %	5.7 %	54.3 %	40.0 %
<b>Access to education - Enhancing the quality of education in kindergartens and pre-school groups in municipal schools where children from vulnerable groups are taught</b>	0 %	8.1 %	59.5 %	32.4 %
<b>Creating conditions for successful socialization of children from vulnerable groups</b>	0 %	11.8 %	50.0 %	38.2 %

*Source: Survey among kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach*

About 4/5 of the teachers in kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) who responded to the survey considered that the activities carried out contributed to improving educational outcomes, communication skills in Bulgarian language and the level of literacy of children from vulnerable groups. Around 75 % of respondents believe that the activities have improved mathematical skills and increased knowledge of the natural sciences of children from vulnerable groups, and around 65 % have led to an increase in the



educational outcomes of children with special educational needs. It should be borne in mind that the agreement with these claims is mostly in the moderate range “rather to a high degree”.

Table81 Which of the following have happened in your school/kindergarten as a result of the implementation of the project/projects activities?

<b>Educational achievements and talent development</b>	<b>To a very low degree</b>	<b>Rather to a low degree</b>	<b>Rather to a high degree</b>	<b>To a very high degree</b>
<b>Educational outcomes of children from vulnerable groups have improved, including Roma</b>		17.1 %	65.7 %	17.1 %
<b>Improved communication skills in Bulgarian for children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>		17.1 %	60.0 %	22.9 %
<b>Improved literacy rates for children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	2.8 %	19.4 %	58.3 %	19.4 %
<b>The mathematical skills of children from vulnerable groups have improved, including Roma</b>	3.0 %	21.2 %	51.5 %	24.2 %
<b>Increased knowledge of the natural sciences of children from vulnerable groups, including Roma</b>	3.1 %	21.9 %	50.0 %	25.0 %
<b>The educational outcomes of children with special educational needs have increased</b>	3.8 %	30.8 %	42.3 %	23.1 %

Source: Survey among kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach

Data from the survey show that CLLD-funded activities in pre-school education, according to respondents, make a significant contribution to establishing an atmosphere of tolerance and non-discrimination, with 68 % of respondents leading to a change in attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups, including Roma, and 85 % have contributed to overcoming and non-discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity. Here, the agreement with these statements is again mostly in the moderate range “rather to a high degree”.

Table82 Which of the following have happened in your school/kindergarten as a result of the implementation of the project/projects activities?

<b>Tolerance and overcoming discrimination</b>	<b>To a very low degree</b>	<b>Rather to a low degree</b>	<b>Rather to a high degree</b>	<b>To a very high degree</b>
<b>Changing attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma) in your kindergarten/school</b>	0 %	32.4 %	50.0 %	17.6 %
<b>Counteraction of aggression</b>	0 %	26.5 %	50.0 %	23.5 %

<b>Promoting the cultural identity of ethnic communities</b>	0 %	29.4 %	47.1 %	23.5 %
<b>Getting to know each other's children from different ethnicities and educating them in a spirit of tolerance</b>	0 %	14.7 %	58.8 %	26.5 %
<b>Overcoming and non-discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity</b>	0 %	14.7 %	50.0 %	35.3 %
<b>Overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin</b>	0 %	14.7 %	58.8 %	26.5 %

Source: Survey among kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach

A survey of parents of pre-school children involved in activities funded under the CLLD approach showed that the respondent parents fully agree with the statement that children should attend kindergarten or school and that it is important to complete secondary education. From the answers to the other questions, it can be inferred that parents consider that children are willing to go to kindergarten, receive the necessary additional support when there are difficulties, have improved their Bulgarian language skills and communicate with children of all ethnicities (over 98 %), Not to that extent is supported the statement that children are prepared to continue in first grade (84 %) and generally progress in learning (78.5 %), with regard to the second 15 % replied "I do not agree at all".

Table83 To what extent do the following statements apply to you:

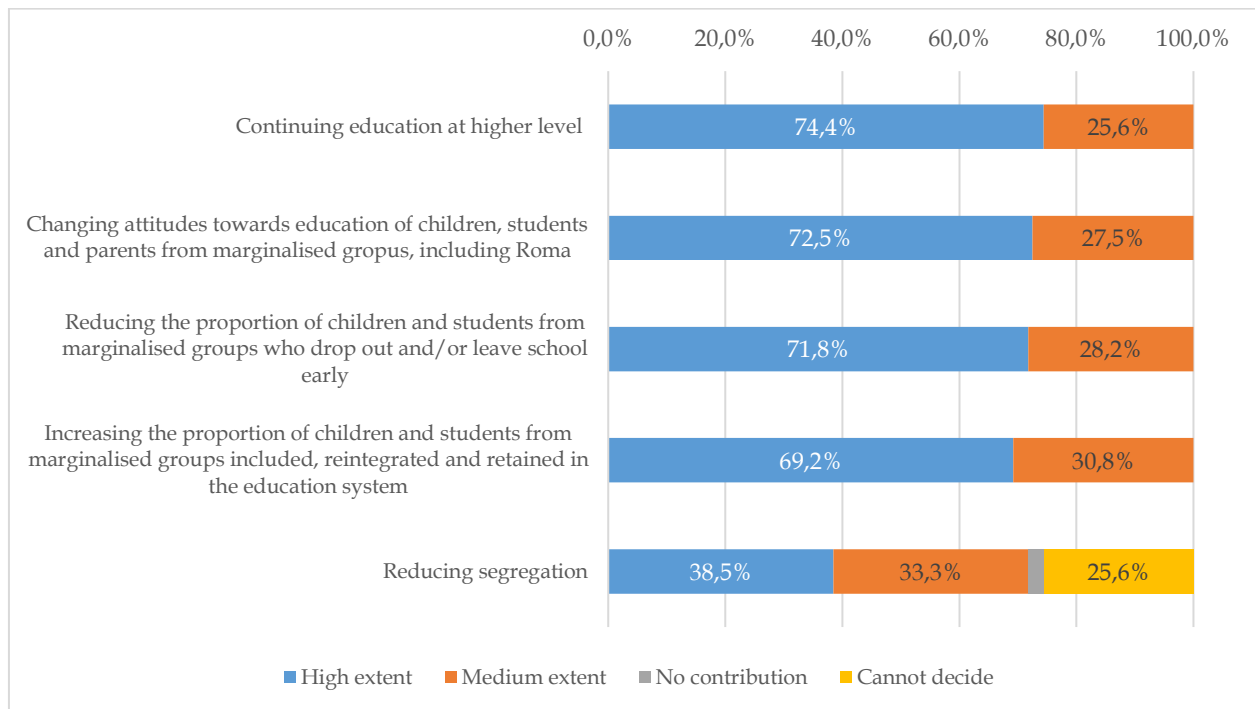
To what extent the following statements apply to you:	Totally agree	Rather agree	Rather I disagree	I don't agree at all
<b>My child is willing to go to kindergarten/school</b>	98.9 %		1.1 %	
<b>My child communicates with children of all ethnicities in kindergarten/in school</b>	95.8 %	2.1 %	2.1 %	
<b>My child receives the necessary extra support when there are difficulties</b>	75.0 %	22.8 %	1.1 %	1.1 %
<b>The assistant teacher works with my child and helps him/ her</b>	88.6 %	11.4 %		
<b>In general, in recent years, the desire of the child/children to go to kindergarten/school has increased</b>	91.3 %	7.6 %	1.1 %	
<b>My child has improved his/ her skills in Bulgarian language</b>	87.1 %	12.9 %		
<b>My child is ready to go to first grade</b>	67.4 %	16.3 %	7.0 %	9.3 %
<b>My child as a whole is progressing in learning</b>	69.6 %	8.9 %	6.3 %	15.2 %
<b>It is important for my child/children to go to kindergarten/school</b>	100.0 %			
<b>It is important that my child/children complete secondary education (12th grade)</b>	100.0 %			

Source: Survey among parents in kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) involved in the implementation of projects under the CLLD approach

## Beneficiaries

The opinion of the beneficiaries on the CLLD procedures in the framework of the survey was also overwhelmingly positive in terms of the contribution to further education, the change in attitudes towards education of children, students and parents from vulnerable groups, reducing the share of early school leavers and increasing the share of children and students from marginalized groups included, reintegrated and retained in the educational system. In terms of reducing segregation, respondents' views were strongly divided, around 39 % considered that the activities carried out had a high contribution, 33 % on average, and of the rest the majority replied that they could not judge.

Figure 112 Please indicate the extent to which the project activities contribute to the educational integration of marginalized groups, including Roma, according to the following indicators:



Source: Survey among beneficiaries of projects under Priority Axis 3 "Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion" of Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth" 2014-2020

According to teachers in school education, the activities carried out supported equal access to quality education at a very high level (55.1 %) and rather to a high level (40.8 %). They have contributed to overcoming barriers to access to education for children and students from marginalized groups by supporting a more comprehensive inclusion of students in school education, contributing to developing the potential of students and reducing early school leavers. They contribute to mutual knowledge of students from different cultures, overcoming or preventing discrimination, overcoming negative public attitudes and improving social inclusion of vulnerable communities. The projects implemented manage to support the specific needs of children and students, contribute to enhancing their educational attainment and to make up on what was missed during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, CLLD funded projects support training in Bulgarian language and Mathematics, but the assessments of teachers in these two subjects are in the moderate scale ("high") rather than in the extremely positive ones ("very high"). Similarly, the projects manage to reflect on the achievements of the students in their results from NEE and SME, but to a moderate degree.

The survey among parents of students in schools involved in activities funded under the CLLD approach shows that parents agree with the statements that it is important for children to go to school and to complete secondary education, that the students have improved their educational outcomes and their skills in Bulgarian language, Mathematics and science, that they communicate with children of all ethnicities in school and that the students themselves are willing to study and have a profession after completing secondary education. The rate of agreement on these statements is above 93 %, with that of “completely agreeing” highest in terms of parents’ convictions of the need to go to school and to complete secondary education (96.6 %) and lowest in terms of students’ readiness to continue in the next stage of education, receiving additional support when the student has difficulties, as well as the opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, clubs and sports events (around 70 %).

The survey conducted among teachers in kindergartens and schools (sub-school groups) who participated in the implementation of CLLD funded projects showed that a significant proportion of them (58.3 % rather high and 30.6 % very high) considered that the conditions for equal access to pre-school education had improved as a result of project activities. According to them, the activities carried out have led to an increase in the quality of education in kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools. They contributed to creating conditions for the successful socialization of children from vulnerable groups. They contribute to establishing an atmosphere of tolerance and non-discrimination, with 68 % of respondents leading to a change in attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups, including Roma, and 85 % have contributed to overcoming and non-discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity.

About 4/5 of the teachers in kindergartens and schools (pre-school education) who responded to the survey considered that the activities carried out contributed to improving educational outcomes, communication skills in Bulgarian language and the level of literacy of children from vulnerable groups. Around 75 % of respondents believe that the activities have improved mathematical skills and increased knowledge of the natural sciences of children from vulnerable groups, and around 65 % have led to an increase in the educational outcomes of children with special educational needs.

A survey of parents of pre-school children involved in activities funded under the CLLD approach showed that the respondent parents fully agree with the statement that children should attend kindergarten or school and that it is important the child to complete secondary education. From the answers to the other questions, it can be inferred that parents consider children are willing to go to kindergarten, receive the necessary additional support when there are difficulties, have improved their Bulgarian language skills and communicate with children of all ethnicities (over 98 %). Not to that extent is support the statement that children are prepared to continue in first grade (84 %) and generally progress in learning (78.5 %), with regard to the second 15 % answered “I do not agree at all”.

The opinion of the beneficiaries of the CLLD procedures in the framework of the survey was also overwhelmingly positive in terms of the contribution to further education, the change in attitudes towards education of children, students and parents from vulnerable groups, reducing the share of early school leavers and increasing the share of children and students from marginalized groups included, reintegrated and retained in the educational system.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the projects implemented under the CLLD approach make a significant contribution to the educational integration of vulnerable groups, prevent early school leaving and improve the quality of educational services, thus being able to adequately address the identified socio-economic barriers on the territory of the LAG for pre-school education, school education and vocational

education. Further efforts are needed in order to engage all participants in the educational process to improve the educational achievements of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma.

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4.7.3. Comparison of the CLLD approach with the other approaches (the systematic approach with a specific beneficiary MES, direct grant provision through an integrated project proposal, project selection procedure) to ensure access to education for children and students from marginalized groups (e.g. in relation to the specificity of the territory and the problems at local level for educational integration and coverage of the target groups – better addressing the problems, greater commitment/initiative of the local community and stakeholders, better working with parents, the role of the partnership compared to the lack of it in systemic projects; complementarity and demarcation between approaches – centralized/systemic and local/territorial under CLLD).

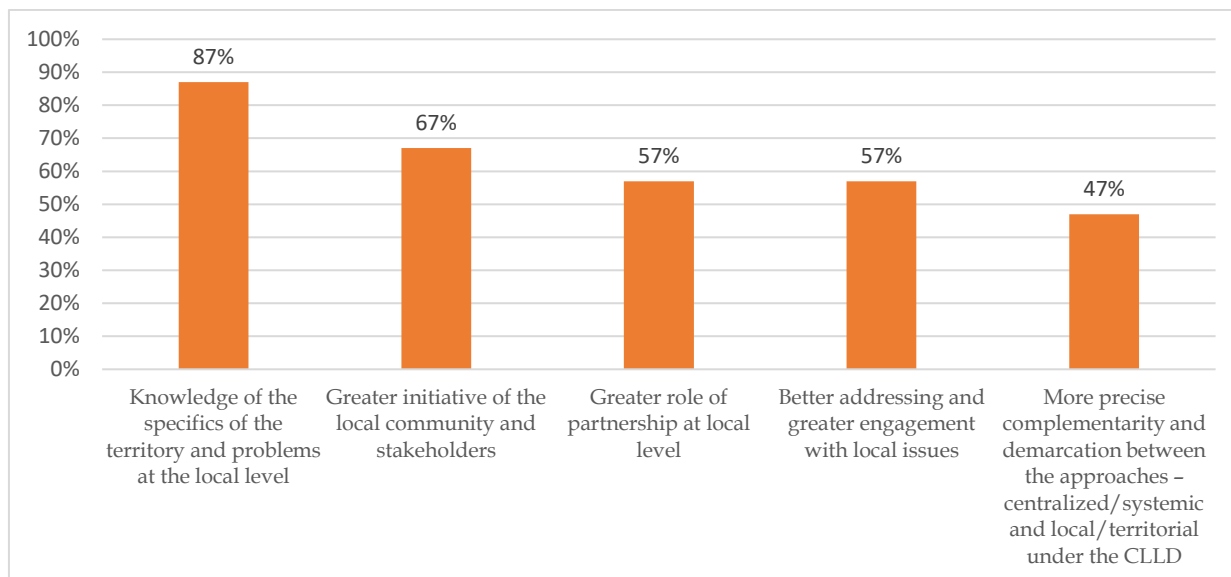
In order to answer this evaluation question, an analysis of data from the survey conducted among beneficiaries on the procedures under evaluation, as well as data from conducted focus groups, was carried out.

Within the procedures evaluated, four approaches were applied to grant aid: procedures with direct grant award with a direct beneficiary MES (systematic approach), procedures with direct award of grants with multiple specific beneficiaries through an integrated project proposal, procedures of project selection and financing of CLLD procedures.

The CLLD approach receives similar assessments in terms of the impact of the activities carried out as those of other procedures operating in the educational environment.

As the CLLD approach implies a closer view and better knowledge of local communities, it is characterized by some advantages over other procedures. The main advantages of the CLLD approach according to the beneficiaries are presented in the graph below: better knowledge of the specificities of the territory and problems at local level (87 %), better addressing and greater ownership of local problems (57 %), greater initiative of the local community and stakeholders (67 %), greater role of the partnership at local level (57 %), more precise complementarity and demarcation between approaches – centralized/systemic and local/territorial on CLLD (47 %).

*Figure 113 Please indicate what, in your view, are the advantages of the CLLD approach compared to the other approaches (approach with a direct beneficiary MES, direct grant award through an integrated project proposal, project selection procedure) to ensure access to education for children and students from marginalized groups?*



Source: Survey among beneficiaries of projects under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

In general, all approaches used to implement the activities have their advantages and disadvantages, and it is through their complementarity and synergy that the evaluated procedures achieve their objectives more flexibly, giving the opportunity to activate and involve all stakeholders, including the possibility of more innovativeness, the generation of new ideas and new approaches. Overall, in competitive selection procedures or through the CLLD approach, there is better interaction with stakeholders.

Within the framework of the in-depth interviews and focus groups, the expert opinions outline quite categorically the benefits of systemic projects with the direct beneficiary MES due to the nature of the educational system and the comprehensiveness of the measures. However, as far as possible, it would be good to combine systemic projects with the direct beneficiary MES with procedures for direct grant award through integrated project proposals, a procedure for selecting projects and CLLD funding procedures in order to implement more innovative approaches through the involvement of all stakeholders, to create the conditions for approving good practices from different educational contexts (European and other) and to enrich methodologically educational practices.

The views of stakeholders and experts are also in this direction:

*“But for example, what I am now proposing to colleagues, say, that schools have the opportunity to select organizations, community centers, clubs to help them carry out the activities. Be able to select and make available, by means of a simplified procedure, the school to provide resources to certain organizations to assist it in carrying out an activity.” (MC Focus Group)<sup>117</sup>*

The procedures for direct grant award through an integrated project proposal and project selection procedures have their advantage to operate in territories and cases where systemic projects are insufficient or cannot have an effect due to serious problems:

*“Now here is the time to say a few things about the grant schemes. There is at first sight what I said as criticism, there is no territorial scope, a small number of participants, they cannot carry out reform, etc. But their achievement is extremely important for something else. They go to places where the state doesn't even know they exist. You know*

<sup>117</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the Monitoring Committee of OP SESG on 30.01.2023

*yourself, I don't know how much you dealt with vulnerable groups, but in the Roma neighborhoods themselves there are even marginalized groups. This is the so-called fourth line of the work of Yosif Nunev, who describes the Roma neighborhoods in which they themselves are marginalized even by the Roma. Well, these grant schemes go right there, which is not a small achievement for me." (Focus group with representatives of the MA)<sup>118</sup>*

At the same time, still at operational level, the systemic approach with a direct beneficiary MES stands out as an approach with less administrative burden and better opportunities for concentration on the actual implementation of the activities:

*"We now as we make the assessment, I suppose you see the drastic difference in (...) between the grant schemes and the systematic approach. You see the drastic difference in the territorial approach. You see the drastic difference in everything that is done in it, as activities. That is, in the education system, a systemic approach is indeed the best solution that can be made. And in this regard, I believe that "Active Inclusion" and "Support for Success" are extremely successful in terms of really, we had to change gears with new legislation, new regulations and new paradigms in education. Accordingly, through these projects, the entire pre-school and school community was able to implement these reforms and from there to overachieve these indicators." (Focus group with MA representatives)*

*"Why are systematic projects successful and why they have overachieved the indicators... in order for the operational programme to be successful, a systematic approach must be applied. It was extremely important that most procedures, specifically under this priority axis, were set with a direct beneficiary MES. This is the only force in Bulgaria that can mobilize educational institutions, all participants through teachers, through parents, through pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialists, etc. and to harness them into something.*

*"despite the fact that all procedures are carried out successfully, I can most successfully refer to the 'Support for success' procedure for one main reason that administration is centralized and the administrative burden on schools is reduced compared to that if they were beneficiaries..." (Focus group with representatives of the MA)*

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In general, all approaches used to implement the procedures evaluated have their advantages and disadvantages, and it is through their complementarity and synergy that the evaluated procedures achieve their objectives more flexibly, giving the opportunity to activate and involve all stakeholders, including with the possibility of more innovativeness and better interaction with stakeholders in competitive selection procedures and an integrated territorial approach, including through the CLLD approach. The CLLD approach has strong advantages in terms of knowing the specifics at the local level and enabling the local community to be more proactive.

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#### 4.7.4. What is the assessment of the capacity, level of dialogue and coordination of the actors involved in the CLLD approach according to the key partners?

The answer to this evaluation question is based on an analysis of the regulatory framework related to coordination, dialogue and the role of the participants in the CLLD approach and a survey carried out among representatives of members of the funded LAGs under the OP SESG in terms of capacity, level of dialogue and coordination.

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<sup>118</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the MA of OP SESG on 19.12.2022.

The management bodies of the LAG are the General Assembly (GA), as a collective supreme body, the members of which are the municipality(s) from the territory of the LAG, and the Management Board (MB), as a collective management body. For the duration of the implementation of a local development strategy, the LIG provides a team of full-time staff to implement the local development strategy. The terms and conditions for the implementation of coordination between the managing authorities of the RDP, OP HRD, OPE, OPIC, OPSESG and LAG in relation to the implementation of the CLLD approach for the period 2014-2020 are regulated in Council of Ministers Decree No 161 of 4 July 2016. Coordination is foreseen in relation to the development, selection and implementation of local development strategies, as well as the projects supporting them under more than one ESIF. The approved strategies for both acceptances are 64 in total. Progress in the implementation of the CLLD approach is followed up by the Coordination Committee, based on reports and analyses submitted by the MA of the programmes. 16 procedures under 12 Agreements for the implementation of the CLLD approach with funding from OP SESESG have been opened with funds under OP SESESG. One of the procedures (BG05M2OP001-3.010) was not agreed.

In 2018, the National Association of Local Action Groups in Bulgaria was established. Among its objectives are: to represent competent local action groups vis-à-vis the managing authorities of the operational programmes and all other institutions, ensuring the necessary expertise for this; to create conditions for effective interaction between LAGs; to protect the interests of the LAG and to assist them in the implementation of the Community-led Local Development Strategies.

A survey conducted among representatives of CLLD members having received support under OP SESESG showed that overall the interaction, coordination and level of dialogue between the actors involved in the CLLD approach were good, according to key partners. The vast majority of respondents give a “high” or “very high” assessment of the capacity, level of dialogue and coordination of CLLD participants.

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The established regulatory framework concerning the CLLD approach participants and the level of self-organization of the local action groups, as well as the opinion of the representatives of the members of the CLLD implementing procedures with funding under OP SESESG, give grounds to assume that the capacity, the level of dialogue and the coordination of the participants involved in the CLLD approach correspond to their role in the processes to which they are engaged.

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#### **4.8. Assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on projects aimed at active inclusion and socio-economic integration of marginalized groups including Roma**

##### **4.8.1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of the activities of the projects under evaluation?**

The whole 4.8 group replies used data from a survey of beneficiaries of the procedures evaluated, focus groups and in-depth interviews, as well as data from a survey of the opinion of pedagogical specialists and parents.

The COVID-19 pandemic has a strong impact on the educational process in the country and has a direct impact on the implementation of the ongoing process activities during and after 2020. BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success”; BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education” – Component 1; Procedures implemented under the CLLD Approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”; ‘BG05M2OP001-3.005 Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education’; BG05M2OP001-3.017



“Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” and BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2”.

The challenges to the educational system arising from the state of emergency and containment measures give rise to the need to adapt quickly to the new situation and effectively reorganize the learning process by introducing distance learning in an electronic environment (DLEE). The MA of OP SESG established and sent instructions and published instructions in relation to the introduced state of emergency and compliance with containment measures in the implementation of projects, according to which the implementation of some of the envisaged activities could be remotely performed, using the opportunities provided by modern information and communication technologies.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the implementation of the activities of the projects in which the beneficiaries participated.

The survey among beneficiaries identified the following effects on the implementation of procedures carried out during and after 2020:

**BG05M20P001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”** – postpone the start of training activities, in some cases by more than 6 months; violation of the timetable for implementation of activities; reduced motivation and concentration among trainers and learners, etc. These data are also confirmed by the survey data of teachers from schools participating in the project under this procedure, according to which 48.6 % of respondents indicated that there was a delay in the implementation of the trainings.

**BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" – Component 1** – changes in the timetable for implementation of activities; transition to classes in the online environment; delays in the implementation of activities; interruptions over long periods and concentration of the implementation of activities in periods of lifting the pandemic restrictions; some of the activities were not carried out in full; no mass sub-activities have been carried out in order to avoid health risks; difficulties in selecting suppliers and services as well as in the performance of supply and service contracts due to market volatility have been identified; the transition to the DLEE is considered to have had a negative impact, demotivating and disengaging part of the target groups and the persons employed for the implementation of the project activities. In addition, activities such as overcoming negative public attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity and career counselling and career guidance during the pandemic could not be carried, the implementation of practical activities, etc.

**BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – 2”** – delay in the start of activities; change in the planned timetables for implementation of the activities, etc.

**CLLD approach procedures** – postponement of the start of activities; change in the timetables for the implementation of the activities; temporary impossibility for face-to-face organized group events and carrying out mass activities for children, students and parents – events, etc.; difficulties in carrying out procedures for the selection of suppliers and services, as well as the performance of supply and service contracts in relation to the project activities; in the event of discontinuation of attendance in kindergartens and schools, part of the activities for certain periods of time could not be carried out; in kindergartens there were periods of absence of children and during the transition to attendance classes; obstruction of activities with parents is indicated due to restrictions in the school’s access regime. In at least one of the cases, the pandemic required an extension of the duration of a project in order to allow all planned activities related to the participation of children in camps, competitions and festivals, etc.

The following effects of the pandemic on the activities carried out on the implemented activities can be identified for the projects with DB MES within the scope of the evaluation and activities during and after

2020, based on the information from the MCSO and interviews with representatives of the DB and the focus group conducted with the MA of the OP SESG:

**BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success”** – postponement of certain activities or changes in other activities related to new challenges; move to the online realization of activities for which it is possible.

A representative of the project management team stated: *“Real part of the trainings that were planned for the children and some of the interest activities failed to be realized until the end. Especially 2020 interest activities... This may be noted as a difficulty, but not substantial, “We can say rather that despite Covid we have achieved the expected results.” The same goes for career guidance. When there was Covid, you can't do career guidance online because it's not always possible. But in the end, this work is also successful.”*<sup>119</sup>

**BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”** – postponement in time of certain activities; changes in others related to new challenges.

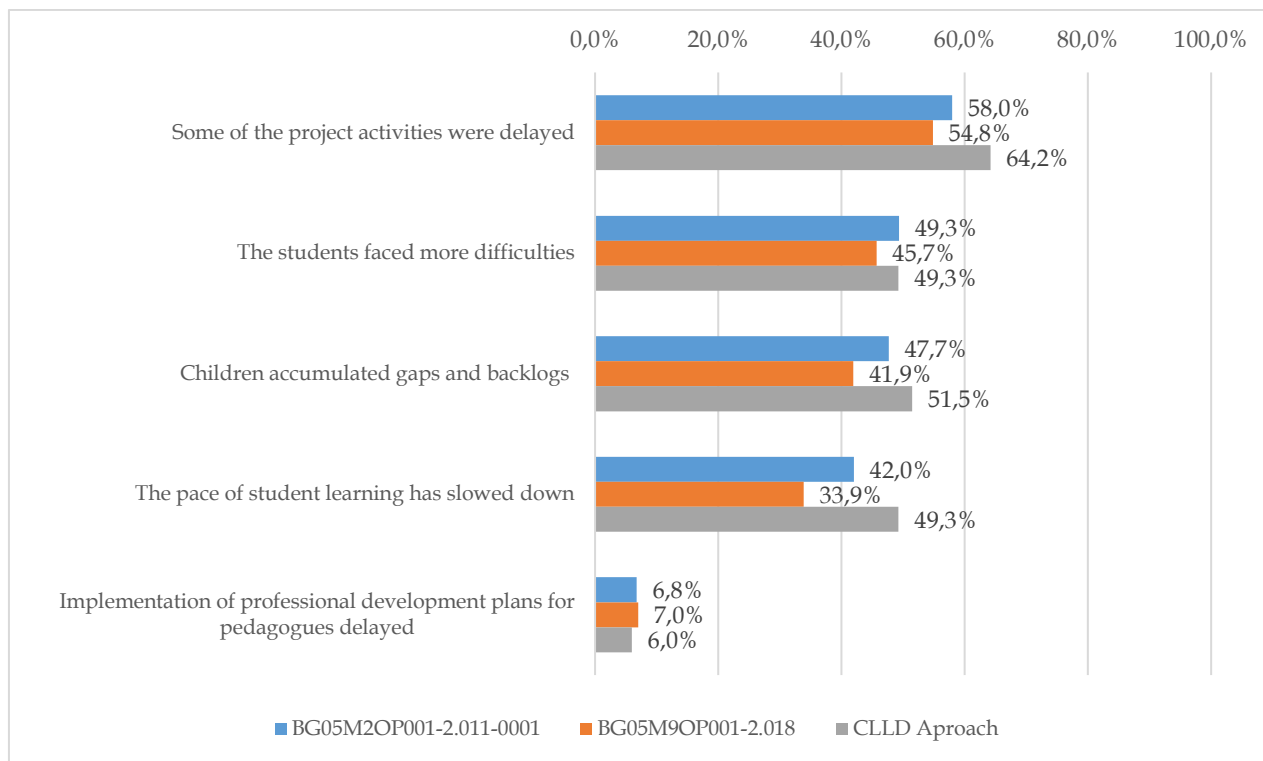
According to the survey of teachers in schools involved in the procedures, some project activities have slowed down in time (more than 59 %). The educational process was also extremely difficult, and students and their progress on the curriculum were the most affected – students worked harder than before the onset of the pandemic and the state of emergency (over 48 %), accumulated gaps and lags in terms of teaching material (around 47 %), the rate of learning slowed down (around 42 %). The implementation of teachers' professional development plans (below 7 %) was the least affected.

According to the questioned teachers there were experienced delays in some of the project activities implemented under the CLLD approach.

*Figure114. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of activities involving schools implementing project activities within the scope of the evaluation*

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with representatives of DB MES for the project “Support for success” on 12.01.2023.



Source: Data from a survey of teachers from schools participating in procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” (2021-2022), BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups”. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1 and procedures implemented under the CLLD Approach

Compared to the average level recorded in the country, teachers from schools in which activities were carried out under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 declare that the activities were affected to a lesser extent by the impact of the pandemic and the exceptional measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

According to the interviewed representatives of beneficiaries and participants in a focus group with members of the SC, almost all activities of the projects carried out at the time were affected by COVID-19, as their implementation in distance learning electronic environment for some of them was less effective and did not allow for a more meaningful participation of students. Where possible, projects were postponed to be implemented in a more appropriate period, either in the summer months or in periods where the pandemic had less action. For another part of the procedures, during the pandemic, the activities have been adapted to be carried out either online or outdoors, in the months in which it was possible:

*“The situation has made the implementation of the activities a little difficult, because when we talk about career guidance, it is best to do this in person. Online is a little difficult or almost impossible. (representatives of the team of the direct beneficiary, project “Support for success”).*

*“The pandemic certainly, especially on grant procedures, has had a very negative impact. For this reason, the “Qualification for working in a multicultural environment” from this summer started the activities. In practice, one year was lost because in order to do training, they have to be done live and there was no mechanism to do the training online. So that training is possible only after the pandemic has passed.” (member of the SC, representative of civil society).*

*“Otherwise, systematic projects have also sought a way to implement certain activities online, but it is better that the pandemic has passed and can be implemented live. Otherwise there were “Your Hours” in particular, there were ways for some of the activities to be carried out online.*

The introduction of the DLEE, combined with the application of strict sanitation measures in the presence periods, has put the education system in serious challenges.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the implementation of project activities under OP SESG. In some cases, the format of the planned activities could not be implemented and had to be changed, and in others, where a change in the form of implementation was not possible, the activities were postponed in time and implemented with some delay. More than 59 % of teachers in schools where project activities within the scope of this evaluation took place report delays in some of the projects implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused some significant difficulties in the educational process, such as slowing down the pace of learning and accumulation of gaps and backlog of learning material by students. This view is shared by over 42 % of teachers in schools where project activities within the scope of this evaluation were carried out.

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#### 4.8.2. What measures have been taken to address the difficulties and problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the discontinuation of face-to-face forms of schooling as of 13 March 2020. A reorganization of the learning process, distance learning in an electronic environment and other non-attended forms of learning has been required. In addition to the necessary regulatory changes to reorganize the educational process undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Science, the MA of OP SESG also reacted to the challenges posed by the containment measures. Beyond direct operational measures, such as the temporary suspension of project activities, adaptation of a number of processes, etc., REACT-EU resources were made available to finance measures in the educational system under the thematic objective 'Supporting crisis repair caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy'.

As part of the survey carried out among beneficiaries of the procedures evaluated, regarding the degree of impact of the MA's response, the other institutions and/or partners involved, enabling the implementation and adaptation of the envisaged activities, in line with the changed situation following the introduction of containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak, 75 % of the respondents indicated a high degree of influence, 19 % average and 6 % low. On this factor, beneficiaries of procedures BG05M2OP001-3.017, BG05M9OP001-2.018 - Component 1, BG05M2OP001-3.020 and CLLD approach procedures commented.

The survey among beneficiaries identified the following measures taken to overcome the difficulties and problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic at project level:

**BG05M2OP001-3.017 "Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment"** - using innovative teaching methods; holding online meetings with representatives of the partners; planning of activities after the lifting of restrictive measures; study of the number of pedagogical specialists from partner educational institutions who have green certificates; flexible schedule, consistent

with the restrictive provisions of the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Crisis Headquarters, etc.

**BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education" - Component 1** - extension of project activities; in kindergartens - reducing the number of children in a group, according to the requirements of the Ministry of Health for non-mixing of children from different groups for work in general groups, which was at the expense of the total number of hours of work with 1 child for additional learning in Bulgarian; for school students, in some cases it was not possible to fully achieve the common activities of children from marginalized groups with other students, especially in 2020; transition to online classes, online meetings of the project team; implementation of sanitary and hygienic measures in the implementation of project activities - disinfection of the halls, masks and precautions during the implementation; carrying out group activities according to health requirements and in the presence of fewer participants, etc.

**BG05M2OP001-3.020 "Adult literacy - 2"** - starting activities after some of the measures were dropped, in one case annex to the grant contract in order to extend the project activities, etc.

**Procedures carried out under the CLLD approach** - strict compliance with sanitary and hygiene requirements; changes in the timetable for implementation of the activities; temporary suspension of activities for the periods of orders issued by the Minister of Health and changing the schedule for catching up for missed hours; changes in the duration of contracts; conducting activities online.

**BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success"** - the activities are oriented from the end of the academic 2019-2020 and the school year 2020-2021 and to include in additional training students who have not participated in distance learning in an electronic environment. For the academic year 2021-2022, the transfer of funds from investment priority 9ii to PA 3 to BG05M2OP001-2.011 is oriented towards activities in the implementation of general support for the personal development of students from marginalized communities, to overcome accumulated learning difficulties and systemic gaps due to the COVID-19 crisis in order to reduce the risk of early school leaving, additional trainings in secondary school of students from marginalized communities to overcome gaps due to the COVID-19 crisis in order to successfully pass SME in Bulgarian language and literature for acquiring high school education and targeted work with parents of students from marginalized groups, such as Roma and early school leavers by involving educational mediators/social workers.

During this period, the role of educational mediators is further strengthened:

*"But when we talk about online learning and the difficulties we've had for some of the activities, we have to say that it was during distance learning in electronic environment that everyone was convinced how important the figure of the educational mediator who supported students in online learning. You have seen many pictures of educational mediators who distribute materials at home, print materials so that they can reach the students, etc. So that such a Covid situation, in addition to making it difficult to carry out the activities, at the same time showed other opportunities in the educational system, so that children receive quality education on time. Because no one underestimates the moment, but whatever the situation of children should be provided quality education." ...mediators have just established themselves as a necessity part of the educational system." (representatives of the team of the direct beneficiary of the project "Support for success").*

**BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" - the procedure has been extended mid-2021.** The project "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education" has provided psychological support to the families of the children, and the additional pedagogical staff appointed under the project has supported the efforts of the teams in kindergartens to provide the most secure, peaceful and

safe environment for children. Also in the framework of the project, there has been a serious expansion of the number of appointed educational mediators and the development of the functions of this profession.”<sup>120</sup>

From the point of view of project implementation, the experts from the MA of OP SESG indicate that the deadlines have been extended so that the activities can be implemented:

*“We reacted in a timely manner to the pandemic with an extension of the possibility to extend the deadlines of projects in order to be able to implement them. In the meantime, we have reacted, I am talking about the direct beneficiary, we have written many letters and instructions to them, if there is a possibility that certain activities can be carried out in electronic environment, then so be it.”<sup>121</sup>*

At the same time, conditions have been created for activities to be carried out outdoors in warm months to minimise the risks of the pandemic and the spread of the virus:

*“Support for success” has purchased tents in which different activities can be carried out when the weather allows. That is, during the summer months we afforded, and the teachers themselves took advantage of the opportunity after the school year ended, children who had significant gaps to be compensated by school education. That is to say, here too, we tried to support the schools and kindergartens themselves.” (representative of the MA of OP SESG).*

*“This pandemic has had a negative impact, as teachers share in various inspections. That is, here the educational mediator has to approach each child individually, because especially in marginalized groups, there many of the teachers complained that as a result of the distance learning of the children, many of them lost them as students. We're talking about getting married. That is, there are other factors, but here the mediators have had a very strong influence.” (representative of the MA of OP SESG)*

*“In the kindergarten, the children who are working with the additional training in Bulgarian language were also very difficult to recover, but we also allowed them this outsourced training to be outside the building, so that the gaps could be compensated.” (representative of the MA of OP SESG).*

Open questions from the survey among teachers involved in the individual procedures show that the key measures taken to address the difficulties and problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and implemented virtually in all schools were the following:

- Providing distance learning in an electronic environment;
- Providing the necessary equipment for teachers – tablets or computers;
- Introducing access to a teaching and administration platform in resources provided by the Ministry of Education and Science;
- Providing training among teachers to work in an electronic environment;
- Providing electronic educational resources and speeding up the process of introducing electronic logs.

The study also outlines a second set of measures to overcome the difficulties and problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which stem directly from the projects implemented at the time:

- Participation of educational mediators to support the educational process by walking around children’s and students’ homes;
- Providing tablets and/or computers for children and students;

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<sup>120</sup> Internal evaluation of system projects with Direct Beneficiary Ministry of Education and Science in the process of implementation under the Operational Programme (Final Report)

<sup>121</sup> Focus group held with representatives of the MA of OP SESG on 19.12.2022.

- Providing conditions for digital communication between parents and teachers by creating an electronic communication environment.

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The flexibility and adequacy of the MA of OP SESG to solve the problems encountered as a result of the introduced containment measures against COVID-19, the reorganization of the educational process and the introduction of the DLEE are assessed with a high degree of influence of 75 % of the respondents within the survey, and by an average of 19 % of the respondents. I.e. it can be assumed that for the successful implementation of the projects, despite the difficulties encountered, besides the skills of the management teams and the motivation of all participants in the activities, the actions taken by the MA are also crucial. The shift to online forms of implementation of activities, where possible, the adaptation of the implementation schedules and the duration of projects, where necessary, decision-making for outdoor activities in order to make up for the omitted and the implementation of innovative solutions to limit the damage of lockdown measures to the educational process are part of the concrete measures to overcome the difficulties and problems at the level of activities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The orientation of the activities under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success" from the end of the academic year 2019-2020 and in the school year 2020-2021 to include in additional training of students who have not participated in a distance learning in an electronic environment, as well as the transfer of funds from investment priority 9ii of PA 3 to BG05M2OP001-2.011 for the school year 2021-2022 for activities to support students from marginalized communities, including to overcome accumulated learning difficulties and gaps due to the COVID-19 crisis, can be assessed as a timely approach to reducing the risk of early school leaving.

The established support network for children and parents under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education", including psychologists, mediators and additional pedagogical specialists in one with the kindergarten teams, has played a significant role in reducing the impact on children and families of the restrictions imposed in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the opinion of the beneficiaries, in addition to the actions, commitment and motivation of the pedagogical specialists, a key role in keeping children and students at risk of early school leaving was played by educational mediators who maintained communication with families, provided home-based educational materials and fully supported online training.

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#### 4.8.3. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the participation of target groups in the implementation of the projects?

In order to answer this evaluation question, it should be taken into account that the lockdown measures put in place following the COVID-19 pandemic affect all processes in the educational system and that the evaluation procedures that take place during and after 2020 are affected to varying degrees depending on their start-up time, the activities envisaged and the target groups involved. Such procedures are: BG05M2OP001-2.011 (although only activities implemented during school year 2021/2022 financed under IP 9ii of PA 3), BG05M9OP001-2.018, BG05M2OP001-3.017, BG05M2OP001-3.020 and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach are covered by the evaluation. On the other hand, these procedures are based on the available data analysed in the Performance Report,<sup>122</sup> not only that the planned result indicators are not expected to fail, but even some procedures such as BG05M2OP001-3.005 and

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<sup>122</sup> Evaluation report on the thematic strand "Effectiveness of operations: Result orientation and level of achievement of the specific objectives under Investment Priorities 9i and 9ii under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme"

BG05M2OP001-2.011 are expected to overperformance. From this point of view, it can be assumed that the difficulties posed by the restrictions put in place against the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of implementation of the activities and thus the participation of target groups within the assessed procedures (referred to in response to evaluation question 4.8.1) have been largely overcome (as a result of the measures referred to in response to evaluation question 4.8.2), which allowed the planned target groups to be covered.

In addition, the projects with DB MES under the two procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011 and BG05M2OP001-3.005 contributed, in the opinion of the interested parties (see the reply to evaluation question 4.8.2) to significant softening, and in the case of BG05M2OP001-2.011 activities were also carried out to compensate for the negative impact of the restrictive measures and the necessary reorganization of the educational process by introducing the DLEE with regard to the educational outcomes of children from vulnerable groups, with a view to preventing early school leaving.

*The necessary transition to the DLEE in one with the other restrictive measures has led to increased vulnerability of vulnerable children and students, who are also target groups in some of the procedures covered by the evaluation and carried out during the pandemic. The most affected by the distance form of training are the most vulnerable groups, according to the analysis of distance learning in an electronic environment prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science. The same analysis states that for teachers, teaching and communication at a distance have brought additional stress, emotional stress and a number of new challenges that require a new type of support. According to the MES survey, 40 % of teachers and 60 % of the directors say that the students' knowledge has deteriorated as a result of the DLEE, with more than a third of them seeing a decrease in the academic performance of the students.<sup>123</sup>*

The main influences of these factors on target groups in schools are shown in Figure "Influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of activities involving schools implementing project activities within the scope of the evaluation". The COVID-19 pandemic has caused some significant difficulties in the educational process, such as slowing down the pace of learning and accumulation of gaps and backlog in learning material by students. This opinion is shared by over 42 % of teachers in schools where activities were carried out in the framework of projects under procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011, BG05M9OP001-2.018 and the CLLD approach.

Despite the efforts of all those involved in the education process, it is still a challenge to overcome these difficulties.

Data from the surveys conducted among teachers and parents of students indicate the following:

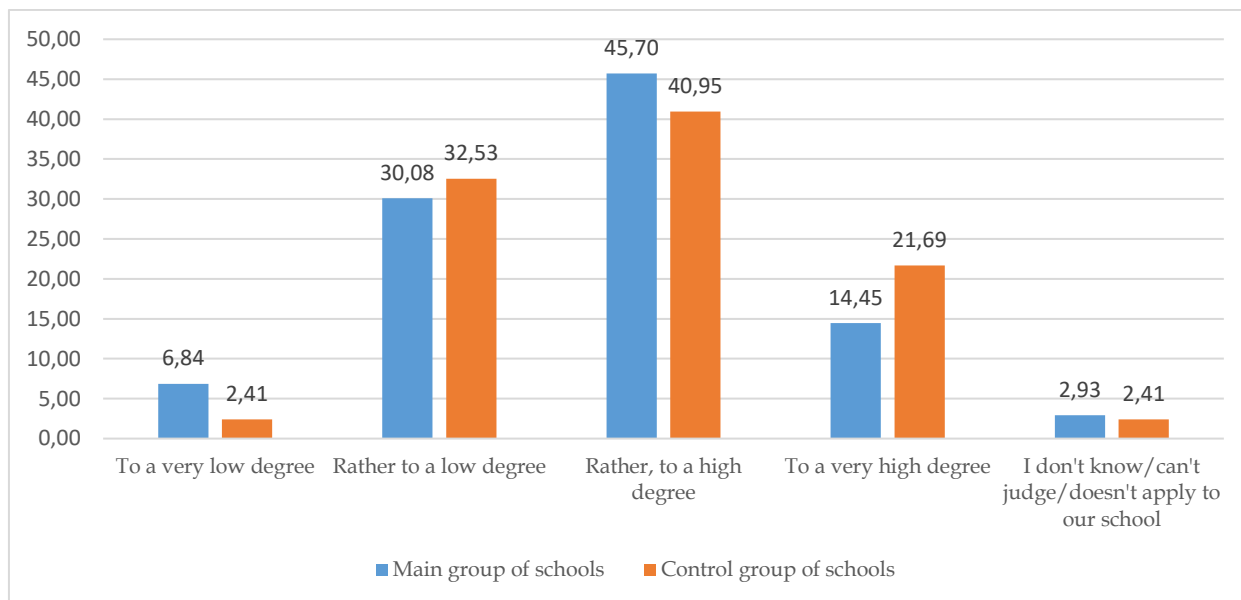
Compared to teachers in schools who participated in activities under the evaluated procedures, the share of teachers in schools who did not participate in such procedures and who believe that students have made up for what has been missed is similar. The difference between the two groups is in the degree of support for this statement: in the control group, a higher proportion than the main group responded "to a very high degree" (21.7 % vs 14.5 % in the main group). Approximately 35 % of teachers in the control group shared a concern that the students were not able to catch up on missed learning material, compared to about 37 % in the main group. Rather, these results show that for these indicators there is no statistically significant difference between a main group and a control group, and it can be assumed that around 62 % of teachers, regardless of whether they have participated in project activities in the framework of procedures within the scope of the evaluation or not, consider that students have been able to catch up to a high extent during the pandemic, and over 35 % that they have rather succeeded - in low and very low.

*Figure 115. Catching up on school missed learning material during the COVID-19 pandemic – teacher opinion*

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<sup>123</sup> <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pageId=451>



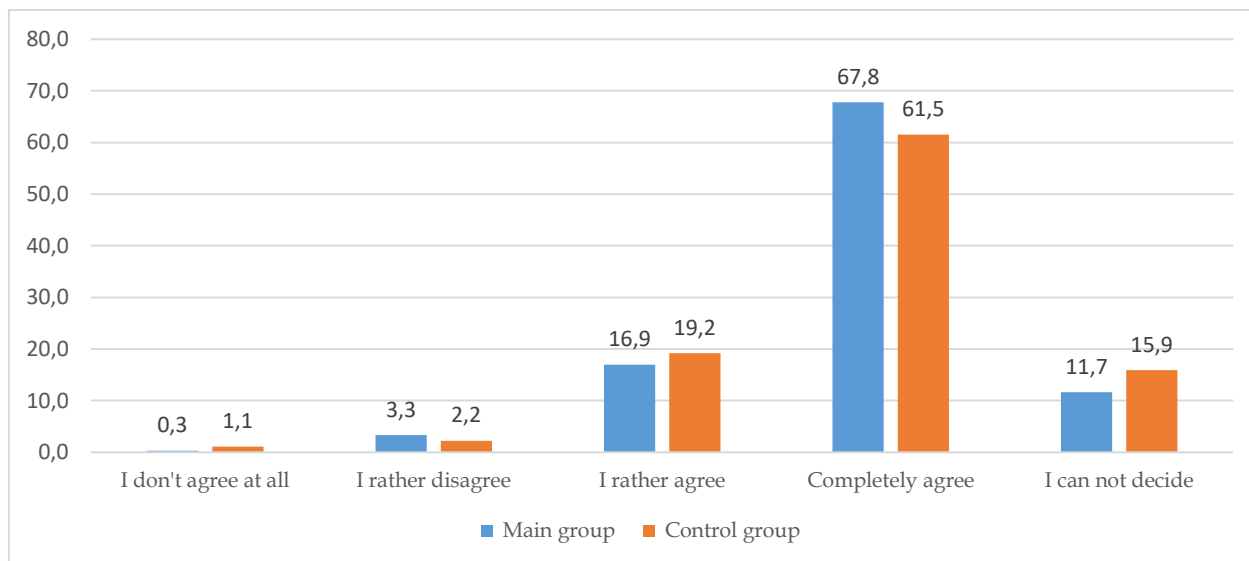


Source: Comparative data from surveys among a main group of teachers from schools participating in procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 "Support for success", BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups". Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1 and procedures implemented under the CLLD approach "Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas" and a control group of teachers from schools who have not participated in projects under the procedures evaluated

Compared to the registered attitudes of teachers in schools involved in the procedures, the proportion of positive assessments among parents about catching up on missed learning material is higher. According to the survey among parents of school-age children in schools participating in the projects, 8 out of 10 parents believe that their children managed to catch up with what was missed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The highest optimism about catching up on the missed learning material by their children declares people who indicate that their families are mainly spoken in Roma language.

There is no practically significant difference between parents in the main and control groups in terms of their opinion on whether the children managed to make up for what was missed during the pandemic. Both groups expressed overwhelmingly positive answers about whether the students had made up for what had been missed (over 80 %).

Figure116. Catching up on school missed learning material during the COVID-19 pandemic – parent opinion



Source: Comparative data from surveys among a main group of parents of students participating in procedures BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success”, BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups”. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1 and procedures implemented under the CLLD Approach “Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas” and among a control group of parents of school students who have not participated in projects on procedures within the scope of the evaluation

The COVID-19 pandemic did not directly affect the quantitative dimension of the participation of target groups in the projects, but had an impact on the implementation of the activities in which they were involved. Some of the planned activities have been implemented in an online format, while another part has been postponed over time. There has been a delay in implementation, both under procedures with direct grant and grant award procedures, through the selection of project proposals. Although around 62 % of teachers are of the opinion that students have been able to make up for the accumulated gaps during the pandemic, and more than 80 % of parents believe that their children have made up for what has been missed, there is still a need for further action to compensate for gaps and backlogs in terms of learning material by students and especially those from vulnerable groups.

#### 4.8.4. Lessons learned and good practices from dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic – Recommendations for the 2021-2027 programming period

With regard to the good practices and lessons learned that can be drawn in relation to the measures taken to address the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the implementation of the procedures under evaluation, apart from that indicated in the reply to evaluation question 4.8.2, the views of beneficiaries involved in the procedures evaluated were analyzed, where activities were most affected by the lockdown measures and the reorganization of the educational process:

*“The sharing of resources and the application of flexible approaches contributes to overcoming the difficulties caused by the pandemic. The good administrative experience and capacity of the team is important to address the challenges of the pandemic. The support of the MA of OP SESG gives confidence to the beneficiaries for the successful completion of the project activities in the newly created environment., “The involvement of mediators, experts, psychologists and*

*mentors has been assessed as a very successful practice, especially since mediators and mentors played a key role during the closure of schools due to COVID-19 and proved the usefulness of their work in the community on the ground". "it is not possible to work online with marginalized communities, direct contact and group activities are needed", "Organization and planning of group events more outdoors, in nature, in the courtyard of the educational institution, observing distances in group events, enhanced hygiene measures, etc." (beneficiaries under procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018).*

*"We had to be more creative, to look for new ways and methods of working, more outdoor activities, more individual activities...", "More adaptability to the implementation of the activities, some of which were conducted in an electronic environment". "The activities in the groups helped to restore the living contact between children and effective communication after the period of online learning". Developing teamwork skills and collaboration. Development of creativity among participants in the activities.", "Opportunity of school holidays to be realized in an online environment." (beneficiaries of procedures under the CLLD approach).*

Teachers involved in projects funded under the procedures evaluated share a number of impressions on lessons learned and good practices that have emerged in the framework of coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and adapting to the new situation and effectively reorganizing the learning process, which could serve as recommendations for the 2021-2027 programming period. It is stressed that there is a need to work hard towards improving skills for working with e-resources and in an electronic environment, increasing motivation to learn in students, as well as strengthening parental control. The role of educational mediators, psychologists and pedagogical specialists in softening the negative impact of the DLEE and the restrictive measures put in place is emphasised.

The following benefits, good practices and lessons learned for students from marginalized groups in general are reported:

- Enhancing digital competences, improving students' ICT skills, e-platforms and resources;
- Rethinking distance and home learning opportunities;
- In-person training, especially for vulnerable groups, is a better approach;
- Developing self-discipline, personal responsibility in students;
- Increasing interest in teamwork and mutual assistance;
- Strengthening the sense of belonging to the school and increasing motivation to learn;
- Achieving better results on subjects;
- Achieving higher levels of parental engagement in the educational process.

Among the advantages, benefits and good practices for the activities of pedagogical specialists in working with students from marginalized groups in general stand out:

- Enhancing digital competences for working with educational platforms and e-educational resources;
- The work of mediators has made a significant contribution to e-learning assistance;
- Improving teamwork;
- Diversification of training methods, including the implementation of innovative training methods;
- More active involvement of parents in school life;
- Improvement of communication with parents.

It is stressed that special attention is needed with regard to the specific problems of children and students from vulnerable groups. It is noted that they do not communicate in Bulgarian in their community, find it difficult to work in an electronic environment and are raised by parents or guardians with a low level of literacy, for whom education is not valuable. Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, socially disadvantaged children had difficulty accessing a computer, the internet and educational platforms. The need for more activities with students and teachers to enhance digital competence is stressed.

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The new situation and the need to reorganize the learning process in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic have created extremely difficult challenges to work together for teachers, students and their parents.

However, the necessary reorganization and transition to the DLEE, which on the one hand has deepened educational gaps among the most vulnerable groups, on the other, has become a catalyst for faster development of the digital competences of the participants in the process, has helped to develop some soft skills in some of the students (e.g. teamwork and self-discipline, personal responsibility), has stimulated the improvement of the teamwork of pedagogical specialists, the introduction of more diverse learning methods, more active participation of parents in school life, and has also led to a clearer separation of the role of mediators in the interaction between schools and students from vulnerable groups.

The situation of school and pre-school education in the country during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates some specificities in working with children and students from vulnerable groups, which should be taken into account when working in digital environments. Children and students from vulnerable groups often face technical problems to engage in education in digital environments due to difficult access to computer, internet and educational platforms. The conditions of online teaching and detachment from the school environment also have effects on the motivation, regular inclusion and educational achievements of these children, as often in the family environment of children and students from vulnerable groups it is not communicated in Bulgarian, and parents or guardians have a low level of literacy, for whom education is not important.

In the next programming period 2021-2027, account should be taken of the need to work harder towards improving the skills for working with electronic resources and in electronic environments of both teachers and students, increasing the motivation for learning of students from vulnerable groups, as well as increasing parental ownership of the educational process.

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#### 4.8.5. What are the main impacts (positive and negative) of COVID-19 on the implementation of the activities of the projects under evaluation?

The COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency measures to contain the spread of the pandemic and the adaptation to the distance learning in an electronic environment have highlighted some shortcomings in the educational system, but have also become an accelerator of other processes that are conducive to learning in the long term.

In the short term, the education system has largely succeeded in digitizing itself in emergency conditions under pressure from measures to contain the pandemic.

Among the negative consequences are the following:

- Challenges related to the existing digital skills of teachers and students as a result of the urgent reorganization of the educational process under the conditions of DLEE;
- Obstacles and difficulties in working with students from vulnerable groups in the context of the DLEE;
- Students from vulnerable groups had limited access to devices and the Internet;
- There is a drop in motivation for learning among some of the students;
- A lack of technique has been identified;

- DLEE was not sufficiently effective and complete due to planning difficulties.

Among the positive impacts identified by teachers from schools involved in the projects covered by the evaluation, the following are identified:

- Improving the skills to work with electronic resources and in an electronic environment. Points out that both teachers and students have entered the IT world more quickly;
- Using a wider variety of e-resources and educational platforms – many e-materials (tests, lessons, presentations) needed to work in DLEE have been produced;
- Virtual contact groups have been created between teachers and parents. Thus, a large proportion of parents were actively involved in the learning process during the pandemic, which is recognized by the pedagogical composition of schools as significant advances in teacher-parent communication. The role of the electronic diary in engaging parents in the educational process is confirmed;
- The state of emergency has favoured the development of project-based training and interactive forms of training – role-playing; development and improvement of social skills, participation in cognitive programmes and projects;
- E-learning has favoured individual consultations, including individual work with “lagging” students and identification of individual gaps.

The development and implementation of a number of practices and activities as a result of the necessary reorganization of the learning process and the transition to the DLEE, which could be beneficial both in future crisis situations and could be successfully implemented in the regular learning process in order to improve the training of teachers and students and to improve the quality of education in general seems justified. These are:

- Activities to create a supportive environment and mutual trust between the participants in the training process;
- Increasing the ability of students from vulnerable groups to work in electronic environments, work with e-textbooks and educational platforms;
- Mandatory digital training for teachers, students with parents engaged, where appropriate;
- Increased integration of ICT into training and education;
- Maintaining a good organization by the school team and school management to successfully support students and the learning process in emergency situations;
- Maintaining active communication with parents of children and students;
- Maintaining the role of school mediators and personal support teams for educational institutions;
- Continue the application in the learning process of electronic materials (tests, lessons, presentations) that were needed in the conditions of the DLEE, e-textbooks and electronic platforms.

## IX. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 9.1. Methods and approach to reflect conclusions and recommendations

The presentation of the conclusions and recommendations of this report is based on an analysis clearly showing causal links. The conclusions of the conducted evaluation are based on the following elements:

- A condition assessed by a criterion is a fact (or several facts) that the Contractor has established (actual state). This objective reality has been established by carrying out various evaluation procedures and is supported by evidence.
- Reason – the reason for the discrepancy between the criterion and the condition will be identified and indicated (why the difference exists). The reason is the link, supported by evidence, between the observed unacceptable state and the desired state.

The conclusions derive directly from the analyses and the recommendations are based on the conclusions. With regards to the quality of the recommendations, we have followed the following quality elements:

- the recommendations are specific, i.e. specify exactly what, how and by whom it should be carried out;
- the recommendations shall be understandable, clear and unambiguous;
- the recommendations are motivated;
- the recommendations are addressed (proposing a specific vision of the responsibilities of the relevant implementing institutions);
- provide an indication of the possible period of application;
- specify the target groups to which information should be disseminated and appropriate channels of communication;
- they propose a methodology and approach to reflect in the applicable procedures and processes, that the MA of OP SESG uses in the management and implementation of the Programme and/or in its change.

During the preparation of this evaluation the following requirements set out in the Technical Specification of the Contracting Authority are met:

- 1) Compliance to needs: Adequate addressing the need for information formulated by the Contracting Authority;
- 2) Appropriate scope: Careful examination of the rationale of the Programme, its products, results and impact, interaction with other policies and unexpected effects;
- 3) Openness of the process: Identification of all stakeholders; involving stakeholders and target groups in the preparation of the evaluation and in the discussion of results to take account of different perspectives;
- 4) Reliability of data: Primary and secondary data collected are appropriate and reliable in view of their expected use and analysis;
- 5) Depth of analysis: Quantitative and qualitative data are analysed in accordance with established practices and in a way that provides relevant answers to all evaluation questions;
- 6) Verifiable and well-founded results: The conclusions and results are logical and justified in terms of data analysis and interpretation, including appropriate explanations and hypotheses;
- 7) Impartial conclusions: The soundness and impartiality of the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation;
- 8) Clear and credible report: The report shall describe the context and purpose and the organization and results of the evaluation in such a way that the information provided is easily understandable and verifiable;

9) Objective and applicable conclusions and recommendations: The findings stem from the evaluation analysis; the conclusions stem from the findings made; the recommendations made are relevant to the findings and conclusions; the evaluation provides useful recommendations for the Contracting Authority and other stakeholders, and they are applicable in practice and are sufficiently detailed and clear to be implemented.

## 9.2. Findings, conclusions and recommendations

The final findings, conclusions, and recommendations can be accessed in section X. FINAL FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**X. FINAL FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**i. Effectiveness of operations: Result orientation and level of achievement of the specific objectives under Investment Priority 9i and 9ii under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme**

NO.	The Findings	Reference to the analyses in the report	Conclusions	Recommendations
1.	<p>The procedures subject to this evaluation show progress in their contribution to achieving the objectives of the OP SESG, in particular PA 3 of the programme, expressed by the output and result indicators. In some cases, the contribution of the evaluated operations to the achievement of the target values of the indicators under the Programme is in the order of 75 % to 85 %. An exception is observed in the indicators related to adult literacy, and due to the low size of the contracted value of the output indicator under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – Phase 2 there is a serious risk of non-achievement of the value of the indicator set in the Programme.</p> <p>With regard to the indicators in the Performance Framework for PA 3 of the OP SESG can be concluded that the milestones of the indicators included in the 2018 Performance Framework have been achieved as evidenced by the reported in the Annual Implementation Report of the OP SESG.</p> <p>Under indicator I3211 “Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration” the final target for 2023 has already been reached and almost doubled.</p>	Question 4.1.	<p>The procedures subject to this evaluation show progress in their contribution to achieving the objectives of the OP SESG, in particular PA 3 of the programme, expressed by the output and result indicators. In some cases, the contribution of the evaluated operations to the achievement of the target values of the indicators under the Programme is in the order of 75 to 85 %. An exception is observed in the indicators related to adult literacy, and due to the low size of the contracted value of the output indicator under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.020 “Adult literacy – Phase 2” there is a serious risk of non-achievement of the value of the output indicator set in the Programme.</p> <p>With regard to the indicators in the Performance Framework under PA 3 of the OP SESG, it can be concluded that the</p>	No recommendation



			<p>milestones of the indicators included in the Performance Framework for 2018 have been achieved, as reported in the Annual Implementation Report of the OP SESG for 2018. Under indicator I3211 “Children, students and youths from marginalised communities (including Roma) involved in measures for educational integration and reintegration” the final target for 2023 has already been reached and almost doubled.</p>	
2.	<p>According to the Methodology and Criteria for the selection of operations under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005, operation-specific indicators have been defined in its planning, which include indicators relevant to OP-level indicators to measure the contribution of the operation to the achievement of the objectives of the individual investment priorities (9i and 9ii) of PA 3. Subsequently, in the Application Conditions, the MCSO indicators are broken down and additional target values are set for the indicators that directly refer to indicators at programme level for which no reporting data are available at the date of issue of this report.</p>	Question 4.1.	<p>The absence of specified target values of programme-relevant MCSO indicators and, accordingly, the setting of those in the Conditions or Guidelines for Application, which are reported at the end of the projects, leads to the impossibility of an objective ongoing assessment of the contribution of the measures under an operation to the achievement of the objectives of the Programme. In addition, in so far as the indicators are part of the MCSO, they should be amended, including the</p>	<p>When programming operations, the MA to provide in the MCSO to be set target values for the indicators referring to OP indicators, as well as not to allow by Application Conditions or Guidelines to be set targets defined at the level of Conditions or Guidelines for Application, which are to be reported at the end of the projects.</p>

			setting of target values, by the MC, in accordance with Article 11(1)(1) of Council of Ministers Decree No 79 of 10 April 2014.	
3.	The degree of influence of the external factors to achieve the indicators set can be ordered as follows, based on the “high degree” assessments of the survey carried out among beneficiaries: The most influencing factor is the adequate response of institutions, including MAs and other stakeholders, during the exceptional containment measures put in place against the COVID-19 pandemic (75 %). Next, but with almost the same degree of influence is the motivation of the target groups to participate in project activities (72 %). Immediately afterwards, again with a similar and also high degree of influence is the presence of support and assistance from municipal administrations and civil society organisations (69 %) and the existence of adequate regulations, administrative acts and instructions of the MA applicable in the implementation of the activities and the achievement of project results (67 %).	Question 4.2.	The following external factors had the greatest influence to achieve the indicators set under the operations: the adequate response of the institutions, including the MA during the lockdown measures imposed as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the motivation for participation of the target groups in the project activities. The presence of support and assistance from municipal administrations and civil society organisations and the availability of adequate regulations, administrative acts and instructions of the MA, applicable in the implementation of the activities, are also of high influence.	No recommendation
4.	A relatively small number of beneficiaries have noted that they have not achieved or will not achieve a planned indicator. The assessment of the external factors that influenced the failure of beneficiaries to achieve indicators, as well as their shared opinion, identified three main groups of external factors related to the failure to achieve planned indicators: those related to the absence or lack of motivation of the target groups; those linked to difficulties resulting from obstacles to the implementation of the	Question 4.2.	The only example of non-availability of a target group is given by a beneficiary under BG05M2OP001-3.017 and refers to a lack of sufficiently appointed educational mediators in the project partners. From one case, it is difficult to assess whether it is a deficit in the planning of the	No recommendation

	<p>envisaged activities as a result of containment measures against the COVID-19 outbreak and those linked to financial challenges stemming from the rising inflation.</p>		<p>specific project proposal or the obstacle that has arisen is a consequence of the link between the presence of educational mediators and the implementation of other operations, which could have been foreseen by the MA in planning the operation, insofar as it monitors the implementation of other operations related to educational integration and reintegration. The lack of motivation of the target groups has been identified as a factor by another beneficiary under the same procedure, but in combination with the others mentioned in the finding and does not appear to have alone led to a risk of non-fulfilment of indicators.</p> <p>Overcoming the bottlenecks resulting from obstacles to the implementation of the envisaged activities as a result of containment measures against the spread of COVID-19 have been largely addressed through the necessary assistance and flexibility from the MA. As regards the difficulties associated with financial challenges stemming from the rising inflation, they are addressed with measures</p>	
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			that respond to the emerging challenges and are identified in the Efficiency Strand report.	
5.	Overall, it can be concluded that the selection of target groups for the procedures covered by the evaluation is adequate and they comply with the indicators set out, with some exceptions: In one case (BG05M2OP001-3.004) target groups are defined without an age limit, unlike the output indicator. In another case, target groups are not part of the groups that are expected to be necessarily included in activities and are therefore not included in an output indicator if there is a corresponding such on OP level.	Question 4.3.	The selection of target groups for the procedures in the scope of the evaluation is adequate and they correspond to the indicators set out, with some exceptions.	When planning future operations, the MA should ensure close monitoring of the intervention logic so as to ensure that the target groups comply with the indicators set.
6.	Based on the documentary analysis carried out and the analysis of the results of the survey, it can be argued to a high degree that the data collected for the calculation of the indicators are reliable and qualitative. The analysis highlighted several directions in which it is necessary to carry out actions to improve the processes that guarantee reliability and quality, such as improving the possibilities for carrying out further validation of the microdata in NEISPSE, establishing a procedure in the Management Manual of the OP SESG concerning the way data is collected and processed for the purpose of reporting under the programme, including with regard to the common long-term result indicators, for the procedures for which it is applicable.	Question 4.4.	Based on the documentary analysis carried out and the survey carried out, it can be argued to a high degree that the data collected for the calculation of the indicators is reliable and qualitative, but further actions are possible to improve the processes that guarantee reliability and quality.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To carry out the necessary coordinated actions by the units responsible in the MES system to improve the possibilities for carrying out additional validation of the microdata in NEISPSE. This recommendation should be implemented as soon as possible.</li> <li>2. To complement the procedure in the Management Manual of the OP SESG describing the approach, steps and units responsible for collecting and processing the data for monitoring and reporting purposes under the programme, with a description of the definitions of the indicators, the data sources for their tracking and a mechanism for verification and further validation for the purpose of monitoring and annual reports to the EC. To the extent that the operations under OP SESG complete their implementation by</li> </ol>

				the end of this year at the latest and given the expected introduction of functionalities in the UMIS for aggregating the data for indicators for the purpose of reporting under the programme, the MA should assess to what extent and whether it is not appropriate to take this recommendation into account in relation to the management manual of the Education Programme.
7.	Proposals for changes of the parameters of the data collected by stakeholders may be summarized as follows: introducing new indicators to track the qualitative change resulting from the activities carried out in relation to participants in operations and making further efforts to better define the main indicators related to the integration of vulnerable groups.	Question 4.4	There is an identified need to change the parameters of the collected data by changing the definitions of existing indicators or adding new ones tracking qualitative change in relation to the participants.	For further operations, it would be appropriate for the MA to take into account the proposal to make greater use of indicators to monitor the qualitative change resulting from the activities carried out in relation to the participants in operations and to make further efforts to better define the main indicators related to the integration of vulnerable groups. As a good example of quantifiable indicators that reflect qualitative change can serve the operations: BG05M2OP001-3.005, BG05M2OP001-2.011 and BG05M2OP001-3.020, where the established system of indicators is also used in the methodology for the assessment of project proposals, and the commitment to the different achievements is taken into account with different weight, according to the importance of the indicator for achieving the policy

				which the operation is contributing to.
8.	Based on the survey and analysis carried out, it can be argued that no obstacles have been identified to the use of information from administrative registers for the purpose of the implementation of OP SESG projects, with one exception – difficulties of the MA with regard to the use of information from NEISPSE.	Question 4.5.	Based on the survey and the analysis carried out, it can be argued that no obstacles have been identified to the use of information from administrative registers for the purpose of the implementation of OP SESG projects, with one exception.	See recommendation 6.1 to point 4.4.
9.	In the short term, the operations under OP SESG which are subject to this evaluation achieve the planned results. The operations completed (BG05M20P001-3.001, BG05M20P001-3.002 and BG05M20P001-3.004) as a whole, achieved the planned results to a high extent. In the medium term, operations under implementation based on the progress of output indicators and data on contracted result indicators – are achieving at an expected pace the planned results. In the longer term these operations are expected to achieve the planned results at the end of the programming period and, in some cases to significantly exceed them, such as the result indicator P3211 “Children, students and youths from ethnic minorities (including Roma) integrated in the education system”.	Question 4.6.	The observed in some cases a drastic exceedance of the target values of the indicators leads to a suspicion of underestimating the objectives set in the programming of both the operations assessed and the OPs as a whole.	The MA should ensure that the target values of the indicators of operations are preceded by precise analyses of the expected results of the interventions.
10.	The analysis found a failure to be achieved the operation-specific result indicators “net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens – 84 %” according to BG05M20P001-3.001 and the similar one under BG05M20P001-3.005 “Group net enrolment coefficient in kindergartens – 2 % increase for the period of the operation”.	Question 4.6.	The use of result indicators for which are set too ambitious targets or are susceptible to influence factors beyond the effect of the operation activities are an indication of a risk to the quality of planning or monitoring of interventions. In this case, the risk is not significant, because they are	The MA should carefully analyse whether these indicators have not set too ambitious targets or whether the reasons for non-achievement are linked to a limited degree of impact of the interventions on this type of indicators, with a view to their future use.

			additional indicators specific to the operation.	
11.	Contribution to the achievement of the objectives and results of the procedures covered by the evaluation have the following factors contained in the procedures: adequate to the objectives and results target groups, activities, duration and budget, and that the procedures are programmed in line with the real needs for support to the target groups. Interviews and focus groups highlight the key role of the motivation of the professionals involved in the implementation of activities, as well as the managers of/from the relevant institution/organisation, which is committed to the implementation of the specific project.	Question 4.7.	The adequate to the objectives and results target groups, activities, duration and budget and that the procedures are programmed in line with the actual needs for support to target groups, make a significant contribution to the objectives and results of the procedures.	No recommendation
12.	In line with the views of beneficiaries, representatives of the MC and representatives of the MA, no serious obstacles have been identified which negatively affect the achievement of the objectives and results of the procedures in the scope of the evaluation, with some exceptions and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which were addressed in answer to evaluative question 2.	Question 4.7.	No serious obstacles negatively affecting the achievement of the objectives and results of the procedures within the scope of the assessment have been identified, with some exceptions and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic considered in answer to evaluation question 2.	No recommendation
13.	The focus group of representatives of the MC under the SESG OP, held on 30 January 2023, shared an opinion that since 2019, for selection procedures for project proposals for the award of grants to NGOs for educational integration activities, a De minimis aid started to apply within the meaning of Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) to De minimis aid published in the Official Journal of the EU L 352 of 24 December 2013 for activities deemed to be of an economic nature. The	Question 4.7.	Considering educational integration activities carried out by NGOs as activities of an economic nature and, accordingly, the application of the rules for granting aid under De minimis leads to a limitation of the participation of experienced NGOs in selection procedures due to the accumulation of aid. The check of whether a grant confers a	The MA should, if necessary, carry out a further review with regard to the definition of the applicable aid rules for NGOs implementing activities/projects related to educational integration. If deemed appropriate, to review the experience of other Member States or consult the MF and DG Competition with a view to exploring how to overcome this obstacle. The recommendation

	<p>same issue was also mentioned in the focus group with representatives of the MA, in the context of a possible reason for the small number of applicants for funding under BG05M2OP001-3.020, due to the accumulated aid under de minimis from some of the more experienced NGOs, which makes their participation impossible.</p>		<p>competitive advantage is multifactorial and should be made on case by case basis, taking into consideration different circumstances, including the type and economic benefits of the entity that entered into the grant agreement and who is the final beneficiary of the aid.</p>	<p>should be taken into account in the programming of subsequent operations.</p>
14.	<p>In addition to the external and internal factors already discussed in the replies to other evaluation questions contributing to the achievement of the planned indicators, a common factor in the analysed operations with better cost efficiency per unit of like product and achieving the planned results is the existence of simplified cost options. The full national scope and implementation of the operations by DB is a serious prerequisite for achieving better performance of the operations in cases where the objectives set imply a systemic approach. Funding schemes through project selection procedures shall be assessed as a prerequisite for achieving better results where a local approach, a targeted approach or an individualised design and approach to the implementation of activities is needed and a high degree of pro-activity or innovation is expected to solve problems and achieve the objectives of the operations.</p>	Question 4.8.	<p>The full national scope and implementation of the operations by DB is a serious prerequisite for achieving better performance of the operations in cases where the objectives set imply a systemic approach. Funding schemes through project selection procedures shall be assessed as a prerequisite for achieving better results where a local approach, a targeted approach or an individualised design and approach to the implementation of activities is needed and a high degree of pro-activity or innovation is expected to solve problems and achieve the objectives of the operations. A common factor in the analysed operations with better cost efficiency per unit of like product and achieving the planned results is the existence of simplified cost options.</p>	<p>No recommendation</p>



15.	<p>Procedures under PO3 BG05M9OP001-2.018 “Integrated measures to improve access to education”, BG05M20P001-3.001 “Support for pre-school education and preparation of disadvantaged children”, BG05M20P001-3.002 “Educational integration of students from ethnic minorities and/or seeking or receiving international protection”, BG05M20P001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1”, BG05M20P001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”, BG05M20P001-2.011 „Support for success“, as well as grant award procedures under the CLLD approach have a significant contribution to the achieving of the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020) and the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) however, a concrete degree to which they contribute cannot be provided due to non-comparability between the set results in the Implementation Plans of the two strategies, with the results that are reported under the OP SESG evaluated operations</p>	Question 4.9.	<p>The operations under Priority Axis 3 of OP SESG have made a significant contribution to achieving the objectives of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020) and of the National Strategy for Roma Integration of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020).</p>	No recommendation
16.	<p>As a result of the analysis, a causal link between intervention and achieved results of the operations within the scope of the evaluation was found to exist, with one exception.</p>	Question 4.10.	<p>An operation-specific result indicator is planned, where it is questionable to what extent its dynamics do not depend more on external factors than on a change resulting from the activities of the funded projects.</p>	<p>When planning further operations, the MA should ensure that operations-specific result indicators are defined as close as possible to the planned activities below the relevant operation in order to minimise external factors that could affect their reported value.</p>
17.	<p>In some of the operations, new operation-specific quantifiable indicators were introduced for this type of participants which track qualitative changes in the situation related to the participants when exiting the operation.</p>	Question 4.10.	<p>The definition of quantifiable result indicators that measure new qualitative changes in the situation of the participants</p>	No recommendation

			when exiting the operation can be defined as good practice.	
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ii. **Efficiency of the operations: Achieving an optimal ratio between inputs and outputs (implementation indicators) and adequacy of the applied simplified cost reporting methodologies'**

NO. – NO.	The Findings	Reference to the analyses in the report	Conclusions/Conclusions	Recommendations
1.	The procedures subject to this evaluation meet the efficiency criteria to the extent that, other things being equal, with less than the pre-defined or contracted financial resources the result set have been achieved or exceeded. These results may be considered as final in respect of the procedures which have completed their implementation. The data for the other procedures should be accepted on condition and as a provisional photograph of their implementation until the date by which it is accepted to be analysed or 30.9.2022.	point 4.1.	The procedures subject to this evaluation meet the efficiency criteria to the extent that, other things being equal, with less than the pre-defined or contracted financial resources the result set have been achieved or exceeded.	No recommendation

2.	<p>Procedure BG05M9OP001-2.018 "Social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Integrated measures to improve access to education – Component 1 – a change towards an increase in the budget has been made without this being linked to a proportionate or sufficiently justified change in the activities or values of the indicators. Given that this is the first of its kind integrated operation covering measures under three operational programmes (OP RD, OP HRD and OP SESG), which, in the opinion of representatives of the CCU and MA of the OP HRD, poses a serious challenge, both in terms of planning and implementation of the measures, it can be assumed that the initial parameters of the procedure under the OP SESG did not reflect the real needs, which also required changes to the MCSO.</p>	point 4.1.	<p>The lack of a well-justified and activity-related increase in funding is an indication of insufficient ex ante analysis of the intervention to ensure that the real needs of the target groups are met. This is also supported by the results achieved under the procedure, which go well beyond what is planned.</p>	<p>In future planning of operations, especially involving complexity and diversity of activities and measures, the MA shall ensure that the programming of operations is preceded by a precise analysis ensuring that the envisaged financial resource is linked to the objectives, activities and indicators set.</p>
3.	<p>In November 2016, the Monitoring Committee of OP SESG approved the MCSO for procedures "Providing access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas" under the CLLD approach for a total amount of BGN 80 million. In the second call for selection of the LAG and CLLD strategies under the OP SESG, 15 procedures were opened and only BGN 8.7 million contracted.</p> <p>Decision of the Monitoring Committee of OP SESG of 8<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 18 May 2018 mandated the MA of OP SESG to amend by written procedure the operation "Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas" in order to release funds for which no agreements have been concluded for implementation of CLLD strategies. At the date of issue of this report, no information is available to be conducted such a written procedure. The Audit Report of the Court</p>	point 4.1.	<p>The funds for the implementation of CLLD strategies are programmed as part of PA 3, IP 9ii. Relocating the unspent resource from them for operations within the same IP does not require a specific change in the OP SESG. In this regard, the MA's failure to undertake the relevant steps for the implementation of the MC</p>	<p>Although, according to the MA, the unspent resources to finance the implementation of CLLD strategies have been reallocated, it is advisable for the MA to assess whether to submit a written</p>

	<p>of Auditors states that the Managing Authority of the OP SESG provides that in the event of a subsequent amendment of the operational programme, the amount under code 06 “Community-led Local Development Initiatives” of the OP SESG will be reduced in accordance with the financial resources agreed in the CLLD strategies. As can be seen from the latest updated version of the OP SESG, in Table 10: Dimension 4 – Territorial implementation mechanisms under point 2.A.9 “Categories of intervention” of the Programme for code 06. “Community-led Local Development Initiatives” provided for by the ESF are initially set at EUR 35 058 863,59 (total for CLLD 80 669 620 leva) and have not been updated downwards, in line with the decision of the Monitoring Committee and the assurance of the MA.</p>		<p>Decision and the amendment of the OP SESG to release funds for which no agreements have been concluded for the implementation of CLLD strategies and the update of the amount in Table 10: Dimension 4 of the Programme only carries an informational risk.</p>	<p>procedure to the MC to modify the MCSO of the operation “Ensure access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas”.</p>
4.	<p>When determining and subtracting the amounts of simplified cost options under OP SESG, the principles, where applicable or the requirements of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, as well as the Guidelines for simplified cost options of the European Commission (EGESIF_14-0017) are respected. The approach is also in line with the national legislation. Where data are used, they are statistical, other objective information or verified historical data for individual beneficiaries. The cost categories covered by simplified cost options are exhaustively described. The calculation methods used are documented and seem justified.</p> <p>While in a number of cases separate approaches have been introduced for different assumptions of implementation of operations (e.g. flat rates for organisation and management costs and standard scales of unit cost), justification based on the type of beneficiary (including partners if foreseen), type of operation, mode of implementation and, if applicable, specific regulatory requirements for the relevant cost-generating activities is available.</p>	4.1.1 and 4.1.2.	<p>The approaches and methods for determining the rates and amounts of simplified cost options have been established in accordance with the principles, where applicable and the requirements of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, as well as the European Commission’s Guidelines on Simplified Cost Options (EGESIF_14-0017). The approach is also in line with the national legislation. Based on this, it can be argued that the rates and the amount of simplified cost options are adequately defined.</p>	No recommendation
5.	<p>Difficulties have been identified under projects resulting from a lack of update of some of the amounts set out in simplified cost options against the background of rising inflation and rising costs. There are comments in this direction from beneficiaries under the evaluated procedures</p>	4.1.1 and 4.1.2.	<p>Difficulties have been identified under projects resulting from a lack of update of some of the</p>	No recommendation

	<p>participating in the survey conducted. There are also comments from beneficiaries on the way unit costs are formed for hourly remuneration.</p>		<p>amounts set out in simplified cost options against the background of rising inflation and rising costs. To the extent that, for BG05M2OP001-3.20, the last open procedure of the evaluation scope and the future procedures under the Education Programme has been established a mechanism allowing a periodic assessment during the implementation of projects pursuant to Article 184 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 and a timely update of the amounts set out in standard scales of unit costs in the event of significant changes in market prices and other relevant circumstances, it can be concluded that the MA has taken the necessary action to overcome those difficulties.</p>	
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### iii. Impact evaluation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
1.	<p>Based on the analysis carried out, no evidence has been identified to point out that the measures implemented under the evaluated procedures contribute to reducing differences in learning outcomes in different settlements. The differences are preserved, as positive changes are observed only in the capital, small towns and villages have a similar representation of NEE and SME in the period before and after the implementation of the activities, whereas in the district cities there is a slight decrease.</p> <p>Differences between schools in groups of “educational level of parents (guardians)” of students are also not overcome.</p>	Question 4.1.1	The distances along the axis of village - small town - district city - capital are still large. The procedures evaluated, together with the other instruments applied at national and local level, fail to overcome these differences, with still persisting differences between settlements and in some cases deepening.	<p>Continued investment and activities in addressing differences in learning outcomes across localities are needed, with a multifactorial approach affecting all components and participants in the educational process.</p> <p>Responsible institutions: MES, MA of PE</p>
2.	Based on the analysis carried out, it can be assumed that the projects implemented under the procedures evaluated moderately, along with other measures such as the introduced Mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, integrate and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age, contribute to a decrease in the share of early school leavers. For the period 2015-2022 (the start-up period of the evaluated procedures that could have an impact on this indicator), the relative share of early school	Question 4.1.2	It can be assumed that the projects implemented under the procedures evaluated moderately, along with other measures such as the introduced Mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, integrate and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age, contribute to a decrease in the share of early school leavers. As long as there is no data on the time series of the surveyed indicator at the level of districts and	It is necessary to continue investments and activities to prevent dropout with a focus on vulnerable groups, including Roma. It is necessary to regularly implement Council of Ministers Decree No 100/08.06.2018, amended and supplemented by Council of Ministers Decree No 259/14.10.2019 on the establishment and operation of a Mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, integrate and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>leavers aged 18-24 decreased by 2.9 percentage points to 10.5 %.</p> <p>As long as there is no data on the time series of the surveyed indicator at the level of districts and municipalities, it is not possible to clearly monitor the impact of the evaluated procedures at the level of municipality, district and region.</p>		<p>municipalities, it is not possible to clearly monitor the impact of the evaluated procedures at the level of municipality, district and region.</p>	<p>pre-school and school age. To conduct regular analyses of the implementation of the Mechanism and its results.</p> <p>Responsible institutions: MES, MA of PE.</p>
3.	<p>As a whole, the procedures evaluated cover the territory of the country, and the territorial distribution of children, students and parents from vulnerable groups involved in the operations, including Roma, corresponds to the demographic structure of the population - at the level of municipality, district level and NUTS 2 level. An exception is the CLLD approach "Ensuring access to quality education in small settlements and in hard-to-reach areas", but the very mechanism of project implementation and their small scope (in terms of number of municipalities and number of persons) are a prerequisite for distortions towards the population and demographic structure of the municipalities involved.</p>	Question 4.1.3	<p>As a whole, the procedures evaluated cover the territory of the country, and the territorial distribution of children, students and parents from vulnerable groups involved in the operations, including Roma, corresponds to the demographic structure of the population - at the level of municipality, district level and NUTS 2 level with the exception of the CLLD approach, in which the availability of procedures and projects with participants in certain municipalities is a direct consequence of the initiative and strategy of the particular LAG.</p>	No recommendation
4.	<p>The collected data give grounds to conclude that coordination at the level of procedures and projects with the municipal plans for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities is carried out appropriately and the planned activities correspond to the key planned interventions at municipal level.</p>	Question 4.1.4	<p>Coordination at the level of procedures and projects with municipal plans for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities is carried out appropriately.</p>	No recommendation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
5.	<p>The territorial distribution of educational institutions provided a supportive environment if we proceed from the hypothesis (given the fact that this sub-indicator at the time of the evaluation was not taken into account) that this happened in all covered under project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools is practically with national coverage. This shows the best territorial distribution of the institutions covered.</p>	Question 4.1.5	<p>The territorial distribution of educational institutions provided a supportive environment if we proceed from the hypothesis that this happened in all covered under project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” kindergartens and pre-school groups in schools, is practically with national coverage.</p>	No recommendation
6.	<p>The activities implemented in support of interaction in a multicultural educational environment and between school activities with a view to integrating students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the educational system have been highly assessed by pedagogical specialists and beneficiaries as effective.</p> <p>Activities to support interaction in a multicultural educational environment and inter-school activities, with a view to integrating students from marginalized groups, including Roma, into the educational system have contributed to a large extent to creating a motivating and positive environment to promote students’ achievements, competences and creative outcomes, according to the opinion of pedagogical specialists.</p>	Question 4.2.1.	<p>The activities implemented in support of interaction in a multicultural educational environment and between school activities with a view to integrating students from marginalized groups, including Roma, in the educational system are highly effective.</p>	<p>Activities supporting interaction in a multicultural educational environment and between school activities with a view to the integration of vulnerable groups, including Roma, are assessed as effective and should be continued. Responsible institutions: MES , MA of PE</p>
7.	<p>Data from the survey among parents of children and students from vulnerable groups and</p>	Question 4.2.2	<p>The activities implemented have succeeded to a rather high or high</p>	No recommendation



No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>pedagogical specialists from the schools and kindergartens participating in the procedures evaluated show that, in general, the activities carried out have managed to a rather high or high degree to contribute to changing attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma), which also happened in educational institutions that were not involved in these operations. It means that the system of pre-school and school education manages to address the problems identified in a similar way, regardless of whether the institution concerned is involved in a project under the procedures evaluated or not and implements the related national and local policies, allocating different resources to achieve similar objectives.</p>		<p>degree, to contribute to changing attitudes based on ethnic origin and cultural identity towards vulnerable groups (including Roma), which has also happened in educational institutions that have not participated in these operations. It means that the system of pre-school and school education manages to address the problems identified in a similar way, regardless of whether the institution concerned is involved in a project under the procedures evaluated or not and implements the related national and local policies, allocating different resources to achieve similar objectives.</p>	
8.	<p>The activities carried out contribute to a high degree to raising attitudes towards the importance of education for the children of the parents of the children and students from marginalized groups involved in the operations and play an essential role in increasing the motivation of the children and students themselves to participate in the educational process. A similar high degree of motivation of parents, children and students to participate in the educational process is observed in the control group, as similar processes take place in the schools not involved, either due to the implementation of other activities, or due to the adoption and implementation of the overall national policy on the inclusion of children in school and the implementation of the</p>	Question 4.2.3	<p>The attitudes towards education of the parents of children and students from vulnerable groups involved in the operations are increasing to a high degree as a result of the activities carried out. The same process is observed in the control group of parents, which is due to the implementation of similar activities with another source of funding in their children's schools.</p>	No recommendation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	Mechanism for joint work of institutions on enrollment and inclusion in the educational system of children and students of compulsory education of pre-school and school age.			
9.	<p>The topics of the trainings under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” have responded to a high degree to the identified needs of the pedagogical specialists in the kindergartens and schools covered in connection with their work in a multicultural environment.</p> <p>In addition to the shared satisfaction and the benefits of the trainings, it should be noted that the implemented procedure provokes a significant interest among pedagogical specialists for additional trainings in the future with focus: motivation for learning among children/students; creating and implementing innovations in delivering learning content in a multicultural environment; developing emotional intelligence, empathy, tolerance in children/students; methods and approaches for working in a multicultural educational environment and effective interaction and partnership with parents. The above points to the need for additional efforts to improve the capacity of pedagogical teams to work in a multicultural environment.</p>	Question 4.3.1	The topics of the trainings under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” have responded to a high degree to the identified needs of the pedagogical specialists in the kindergartens and schools covered in connection with their work in a multicultural environment.	<p>A significant interest has been identified among pedagogical specialists for further training in the future with a clear focus. The assessment of the usefulness of the trainings should be taken into account and, if possible, such trainings for working in a multicultural environment should be organized on a regular basis, so as to extend the range of pedagogical specialists trained as well as the spectrum of topics covered.</p> <p>Responsible institutions: MES, MA of PE</p>
10.	Pedagogical specialists involved in the activities to increase the capacity for teaching in a multicultural environment apply to a high	Question 4.3.2	Pedagogical specialists involved in the activities to increase the capacity for teaching in a multicultural	See the above recommendation under Evaluation question 4.3.1

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>degree what they have learned within the trainings in their practice. More than 85.2 % of the trained pedagogical specialists believe that the trainings received have influenced their teaching methods to a high degree. It is important to note that the qualification of 91 % of the surveyed pedagogical specialists has increased as a result of participation in the trainings for working in a multicultural environment, and for 70.3 % of respondents the training has given greater opportunity for professional growth.</p>		<p>environment apply to a high degree what they have learned in the trainings in their practice.  Включените в дейностите за повишаване на капацитета за преподаване в мултикултурна среда педагогически специалисти прилагат във висока степен наученото в рамките на обученията в своята практика</p>	
11.	<p>The activities implemented to increase the teaching capacity in a multicultural environment of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” have had a positive impact on improving the educational environment for children and students from vulnerable groups, according to the opinion of 79.4 % of the teachers interviewed.</p> <p>Examined in detail, to the greatest extent, the impact has been achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive impact on the fuller involvement of students in school education, development of their potential, improvement of the educational attainment of students at risk of early school leaving, and the willingness to study and acquire a profession among students from vulnerable groups;</li> </ul>	Question 4.3.3	<p>The activities implemented to increase the teaching capacity in a multicultural environment of pedagogical specialists and non-pedagogical staff, including educational mediators under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment” have had a positive impact on improving the educational environment for children and students from vulnerable groups.</p>	See the recommendation under Evaluation question 4.3.1

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving the interaction of pedagogical specialists with parents of children/students from minorities and different cultures, influencing the attitudes towards education of parents of children and students from vulnerable groups, including parents in the educational process and increasing parents' motivation for active inclusion of their children in the educational system;</li> <li>• changing the attitudes of pedagogical specialists to achieve educational outcomes in a multicultural environment and increasing their motivation to continue to develop and improve their skills for working in a multicultural environment;</li> <li>• mutual acquaintance of children and students from different ethnicities and educating them in a spirit of tolerance and overcoming and not allowing discrimination based on ethnic origin and cultural identity.</li> </ul>			
12.	No unplanned effects of the implementation of the activities of the projects financed under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.017 have been identified.	Question 4.3.4	None	No recommendation
13.	There are no statistically significant differences benefiting the participating schools in terms of the results and effects of the activities of the procedures evaluated related to the completion of secondary education and the reduction of early school leavers. On the one hand, the reasons for this are that, in general, in addition to the procedures evaluated, efforts in this direction are also made through national programmes and through the Mechanism for	Question 4.4.1	There are no statistically significant differences benefiting the participating schools in terms of the results and effects of the activities of the procedures evaluated related to the completion of secondary education and the reduction of early school leavers.	No recommendation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	joint work of institutions to cover, include and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age. On the other hand, in order to have more sustainable results in terms of reducing early school leavers, a longer period of time is needed and a build-up of efforts to motivate and reach out to students.			
14.	<p>Despite the strong positive opinions of beneficiaries and teachers regarding the success of the activities, other circumstances should also be minded, in order to take into account the contribution of the evaluated procedures under Priority Axis 3 of the Programme in reducing the share of early school leavers. On the one hand, the procedures evaluated cover almost all schools where children from vulnerable groups are educated, and this is a reason to believe that they have made a significant contribution to the decline of early school leavers. At the same time, in addition to these procedures, several parallel processes and parallel efforts to reduce early school leavers are taking place during the evaluation period: through the Mechanism for joint work of institutions to cover, integrate and prevent the drop-out of children and students of compulsory pre-school and school age, through national programmes and, last but not least, through projects funded from other sources.</p> <p>The lack of individual data (for each student involved in the activities and his/ her path in the educational system) also makes it very difficult to take into account the effects of the programme on reducing the share of early school leavers.</p>	Question 4.4.2	We can assume that the procedures evaluated contribute moderately in terms of reducing the share of early school leavers.	See recommendation related to Evaluation question 4.1.2

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	Due to the above circumstances, it can be assumed that the procedures evaluated contribute moderately in terms of reducing the share of early school leavers.			
15.	As a result of the implementation of the procedures evaluated, conditions have been created for the formation of attitudes for making informed decisions by students from vulnerable groups, including Roma for continuing education. Although this process has started and most of the schools covered by the procedures evaluated have carried out this activity, achieving more lasting results requires more time and accumulation. Career guidance has played an important role and has contributed to making informed decisions and increasing motivation for realization after graduation.	Question 4.4.3	As a result of the implementation of the procedures evaluated, conditions have been created for the formation of attitudes for making informed decisions by students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, for continuing education.	No recommendation
16.	The implemented projects include a wide range of methods and activities to reduce the share of early school leavers by overcoming discrimination, improving educational outcomes and educational integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma. Depending on the specifics of the projects, some of the methods have been applied and therefore the activities have been carried out with greater intensity, while others cover a smaller share of schools and kindergartens (respectively students and children). In general, almost all methods and activities carried out under the evaluated procedures stand out with a high assessment of the degree of applicability within the specific educational context.	Question 4.4.4	Almost all methods and activities carried out under the evaluated procedures stand out with a high assessment of the degree of applicability within the specific educational context.	The experience gained from the methods applied and the activities implemented to reduce the share of early school leavers by overcoming discrimination, improving educational outcomes and educational integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, should be used in programming new operations aimed at the integration and reintegration of vulnerable groups, including Roma. Responsible institutions: MA of PE

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
17.	Within the framework of the evaluation, no unplanned effects were found in relation to the children and students from vulnerable groups supported by the evaluated operations.	Question 4.4.5	None	No recommendation
18.	<p>Within the framework of the projects in the scope of the evaluation on this evaluation issue, specific instruments have been developed with funding from OP SESG only under projects BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” and BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education”. The other projects also used existing, adapted or developed tools to implement the envisaged activities. The beneficiaries of the procedures evaluated consider that the impact of the tools developed on the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups is significant.</p> <p>Based on the dependencies studied and the correlation analysis of the results of the opinions of pedagogical specialists in schools, which shows that the higher the score of the tools, the more positive the teachers’ opinions about the educational achievements of the students and the change achieved as a result of the implemented projects, the following can be assumed: there is an impact of the tools developed within the projects on the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups, rather in average, due to the combination of factors that influence the educational outcomes of students. I.e., the role of tools is important, but it is not the only determining factor in achieving higher</p>	Question 4.5.1	<p>The developed toolkit under BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” contributes to the teachers’ findings, although to a small extent, higher educational results of the students involved in activities compared to those included in activities under the other projects evaluated.</p> <p>Based on the comparison of the results according to procedures, it can be assumed that the tools developed under project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” contribute to the relatively high educational results of children from vulnerable groups involved in activities.</p>	<p>The tools developed under BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” and BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” should continue to be implemented, developed and upgraded in the system of school and, respectively, pre-school education.</p> <p>Responsible institutions: MES, MA of PE</p>

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>educational achievement. The developed toolkit under BG05M2OP001-2.011-001 “Support for success” contributes to the teachers’ findings, although to a small extent, higher educational outcomes of the students involved in activities compared to those included in activities under the other projects evaluated.</p> <p>With regard to pre-school education, it can also be argued that there is a moderate link between the assessments of pedagogical specialists for the tools developed under the evaluated projects and the assessments of the educational results achieved by children from vulnerable groups, including Roma. Based on the comparison of the results by procedures, it can be assumed to a moderate extent that the tools developed under project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” contribute to the relatively high educational results of children from vulnerable groups involved in activities.</p>			
19.	<p>The activities carried out under the evaluated projects, according to teachers and beneficiaries, have led rather to moderate and, according to parents, to a significant improvement in the language skills and literacy level of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma.</p> <p>The activities assessed in the pre-school educational system, according to kindergarten teachers, have led to moderate improvements in the educational outcomes of children with special educational needs.</p>	Question 4.5.2, 4.2.4	<p>The activities carried out under the evaluated projects, according to teachers and beneficiaries, have led rather to moderate and, according to parents, to a significant improvement in the language skills and literacy level of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma.</p> <p>The activities assessed in the pre-school education system, according to kindergarten teachers, have led to moderate improvements in the educational outcomes of children</p>	<p>It is necessary to continue, develop and upgrade investments and activities to improve the language skills and literacy of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, to improve the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, as well as children and students with special educational needs.</p> <p>Responsible institutions: MES, MA of PE</p>



No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>Despite the general negative trends in students' NEE and SME results, it can be argued that the interventions under the evaluated procedures have led to more than 6 % impact on NEE and SME results, with a higher impact in schools with higher presence of students from vulnerable groups. This has led to the maintenance of the positions of the participating schools (their participation in projects under the evaluated procedures contributes to maintaining their positions and not to declining) and, in case of a decline in the control group, the effects of the intervention are positive.</p> <p>Had it not been for the activities funded under the evaluated procedures, the schools involved in the procedures would have reduced their scores by between 6 and 8 percentiles. It means that improving the educational performance of students from vulnerable groups remains a serious challenge.</p> <p>It can be argued that, according to the pedagogical specialists, as a result of the projects implemented, the attitude towards the educational process of students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved to a moderate extent and, according to the parents' opinion - to a significant extent. Changing the attitudes and motivation of children and parents is the key for further steps to increase educational outcomes, which is why we can recognise that important prerequisites for successful integration of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma have been achieved.</p>		<p>with special educational needs.</p> <p>Despite the general negative trends in students' NEE and SME results, it can be argued that interventions under the evaluated procedures resulted in more than 6 % impact on NEE and SME results, with a higher impact in schools with higher presence of students from vulnerable groups.</p> <p>It can be argued that, according to the pedagogical specialists, as a result of the projects implemented, the attitude towards the educational process of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved moderately and, according to the parents' opinion, to a significant extent.</p> <p>It can be assumed that, according to the opinion of teachers to a moderate degree, and according to the parents' opinion to a high degree, the attitude towards professional realization of students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved.</p>	

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>It can be assumed that, according to the opinion of teachers to a moderate degree, and according to the parents' opinion, to a high degree, the attitude towards professional realisation of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma, has improved. This impact should largely be seen at one level with improving the attitude of children and students from vulnerable groups to the educational process, including Roma, and as a prerequisite for future opportunities to improve educational outcomes.</p>			
20.	<p>It can be concluded that the analysed more than 50 activities and measures set out in 7 strategic documents would not have been implemented and therefore would not achieve the intended results if the intervention (procedures under PA3 of OP SESG) was not implemented. In this case, the impact is reflected in the significant contribution of the evaluated procedures to achieve the objectives of key strategic documents in the education sector through the implementation of a substantial part of the measures/activities set in them with the support of PA3 of OP SESG.</p> <p>There is also an impact in view of continuity at the level of strategic documents: the Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030) and the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma (2021-2030) set out strategic objectives similar to those realized in the period 2014-2020 and through the</p>	Question 4.6.1	The assessed PA3 procedures have a significant impact on the achievement of the objectives of 7 of the main strategic documents in the education sector by implementing a substantial part of the measures set out therein.	No recommendation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>contribution of the procedures under PA3 of OP SESG. Some of the measures have also found their place in the Education Programme 2021-2027 and in particular in PA1 “Inclusive education and educational integration”, and some of the activities under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 “Support for success” have been continued through the approved National Programme “Support to Education Mediators and Social Workers”, i.e. the policies implemented through the procedures under PA3 of OP SESG will continue to be active in the long term, which is a guarantee for their sustainability.</p> <p>No impact can be traced at the level of changes in the strategy papers related to the implementation of the evaluated procedures due to the fact that there is no evidence that the examined strategy papers for the 2014-2020 period have been modified/updated.</p>			
21.	<p>Experience gained and good practices in the evaluation procedures under PA3: BG05M2OP001-3.005 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and BG05M2OP001-3.004 “Adult literacy – Phase 1” have an indirect impact on the regulatory framework in the field of education.</p>	Question 4.6.2	The implementation of some of the projects under assessment with DB MES has an indirect impact on the regulatory framework in the field of education.	No recommendation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
22.	According to the beneficiaries of procedures under the CLLD approach, the projects implemented managed to overcome the identified socio-economic barriers on the territory of the LAG for access to pre-school, school and vocational education for children and students from marginalized groups. This happened to a high degree according to 68 % of respondents, and an average degree according to 29 % of respondents.	Question 4.7.1	According to the beneficiaries of procedures under the CLLD approach, the projects implemented managed to overcome the identified socio-economic barriers on the territory of the LAG for access to pre-school, school and vocational education for children and students from marginalized groups.	No recommendation
23.	Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the projects implemented under the CLLD approach make a significant contribution to the educational integration of vulnerable groups, prevent early school leaving and improve the quality of educational services, thus being able to adequately address the identified socio-economic barriers on the territory of the LAG for pre-school education, school education and vocational education.	Question 4.7.2	The implemented projects under the CLLD approach with funding under OP SESG make a significant contribution to the educational integration of vulnerable groups, prevent early school leaving and improve the quality of education services.	The CLLD approach shows a good impact on the educational integration of vulnerable groups, preventing early school leaving and improving the quality of education services and should therefore continue to invest in it. Responsible institutions: MA of PE
24.	In general, all approaches used to implement the procedures evaluated have their advantages and disadvantages, and it is through their complementarity and synergy that the programme more flexibly achieves its objectives, giving the opportunity to activate and involve all stakeholders, including with the possibility of more innovation and better interaction with stakeholders in competitive selection procedures and an integrated territorial approach, including through the CLLD approach. The CLLD approach has strong advantages in terms of knowing the specifics at	Question 4.7.3	The approaches to implementing the procedures evaluated have their advantages and disadvantages, and it is through their complementarity and synergy that the programme more flexibly achieves its objectives by giving the opportunity to activate and involve all stakeholders, including with the possibility of more innovativeness and better interaction with stakeholders in competitive selection procedures and an integrated territorial approach, including through the CLLD	No recommendation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	the local level and enabling the local community to be more proactive.		approach.	
25.	The established regulatory framework concerning the CLLD approach participants and the level of self-organisation of the local action groups, as well as the opinion of the representatives of the members of the CLLD implementing procedures with funding under OP SESG, give grounds to assume that the capacity, the level of dialogue and the coordination of the participants involved in the CLLD approach correspond to their role in the processes to which they are engaged.	Question 4.7.4	The capacity, level of dialogue and coordination of actors in the CLLD approach correspond to their role in the processes they are engaged in.	No recommendation
26.	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the implementation of project activities under OP SESG. In some cases, the format of the planned activities could not be implemented and had to be changed, and in others, where a change in the form of implementation was not possible, the activities were postponed in time and implemented with some delay. More than 59 % of teachers in schools where project activities within the scope of this assessment took place report delays in some of the projects implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused some significant difficulties in the educational process, such as slowing down the pace of learning and accumulation of gaps and backlog of learning material by students. This view is shared by over 42 % of teachers in</p>	Question 4.8.1	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the implementation of the activities of the procedures evaluated carried out at its time. In some cases, the format of the planned activities could not be implemented and had to be changed, and in others, where a change in the form of implementation was not possible, the activities were postponed in time and implemented with some delay.</p> <p>At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused some significant difficulties in the educational process, such as slowing down the pace of learning and accumulation of gaps and backlog of learning material by students.</p>	No recommendation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	schools where project activities within the scope of this assessment were carried out.			
27.	<p>The flexibility and adequacy of the MA of OP SESG to solve the problems encountered as a result of the introduced containment measures against COVID-19, the reorganization of the educational process and the introduction of the DLEE are assessed with a high degree of influence of 75 % of the respondents within the survey, and by an average of 19 % of the respondents. I.e. it can be assumed that for the successful implementation of the projects, despite the difficulties encountered, besides the skills of the management teams and the motivation of all participants in the activities, the actions taken by the MA are also crucial. The shift to online forms of implementation of activities, where possible, the adaptation of the implementation schedules and the duration of projects, where necessary, decision-making for outdoor activities in order to make up for the omitted and the implementation of innovative solutions to limit the damage of lockdown measures to the educational process are part of the concrete measures to overcome the difficulties and problems at the level of activities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The orientation of the activities under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success" from the end of the academic year 2019-2020 and in the school year 2020-2021 to include in additional training of students who have not participated in distance learning in electronic environments, as well as the transfer of funds</p>	Question 4.8.2	<p>For the successful implementation of the projects, despite the difficulties encountered during COVID-19, in addition to the skills of the management teams and the motivation of all actors involved in the activities, the actions taken by the MA are also crucial.</p> <p>The orientation of the activities under procedure BG05M2OP001-2.011 "Support for success" from the end of the academic year 2019-2020 and in the school year 2020-2021 to include additional training of students who have not participated in distance learning in electronic environments, as well as the transfer of funds from investment priority 9ii of PA 3 to BG05M2OP001-2.011 for the school year 2021-2022 for activities to support students from marginalized communities, including to overcome accumulated learning difficulties and gaps due to the COVID-19 crisis, can be assessed as a timely approach to reducing the risk of early school leaving of students.</p> <p>The established support network for children and parents under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education", including</p>	No recommendation

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>from investment priority 9ii of PA 3 to BG05M2OP001-2.011 for the school year 2021-2022 for activities to support students from marginalized communities, including to overcome accumulated learning difficulties and gaps due to the COVID-19 crisis, can be assessed as a timely approach to reducing the risk of early school leaving.</p> <p>The established support network for children and parents under procedure BG05M2OP001-3.005 "Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education", including psychologists, mediators and additional pedagogical specialists in one with the kindergarten teams, has played a significant role in reducing the impact on children and families of the restrictions imposed in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>According to the opinion of the beneficiaries, in addition to the actions, commitment and motivation of pedagogical specialists, a key role in keeping children and students at risk of early school leaving was played by educational mediators who maintained communication with families, provided home-based educational materials and fully supported online training.</p>		<p>psychologists, mediators and additional pedagogical specialists in one with the kindergarten teams, has played a significant role in reducing the impact on children and families of the restrictions imposed in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>In addition to the actions, commitment and motivation of pedagogical specialists, educational mediators played a key role in keeping children and students at risk of early school leaving.</p>	
28.	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic did not directly affect the quantitative dimension of the participation of target groups in the projects, but had an impact on the implementation of the activities in which they were involved. Some of the planned activities have been implemented in an online format, while another part has been postponed over time. There has been a delay in</p>	Question 4.8.3	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic did not directly affect the quantitative dimension of the participation of target groups in the projects, but had an impact on the implementation of the activities in which they were involved. Although teachers are of the opinion that students have been</p>	<p>It is necessary to continue the measures affecting the educational outcomes of children and students from vulnerable groups, including Roma.</p> <p>See recommendation under Evaluation question 4.5.2.</p>

No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>implementation, both under procedures with direct grant and grant award procedures, through the selection of project proposals. Although around 62 % of teachers are of the opinion that students have been able to make up for the accumulated gaps during the pandemic, and more than 80 % of parents believe that their children have made up for what has been missed, there is still a need for further action to compensate for gaps and backlogs in terms of learning material by students and especially those from vulnerable groups.</p>		<p>able to make up for the accumulated gaps during the pandemic, and parents rather believe that their children have made up for what has been missed, there is still a need for further action to compensate for gaps and backlogs in terms of learning material by students and especially those from vulnerable groups.</p>	
29.	<p>The necessary reorganization and transition to DLEE on the one hand has deepened the educational gaps among the most vulnerable groups, on the other hand has become a catalyst for faster development of the digital competences of the participants in the process, has helped to develop some soft skills in some of the students (e.g. teamwork and self-discipline, personal responsibility), has stimulated the improvement of the teamwork of pedagogical specialists, the introduction of more diverse learning methods, more active participation of parents in school life, and has also led to a clearer separation of the role of mediators in the interaction between schools and students from vulnerable groups.</p> <p>The situation of school and pre-school education in the country during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates some specificities in working with children and students from vulnerable groups, which should be taken into account when working in digital environments. Children and</p>	Question 4.8.4	<p>The necessary reorganisation and transition to DLEE on the one hand has deepened the educational gaps among the most vulnerable groups, on the other has become a catalyst for faster development of the digital competences of the participants in the process, has helped to develop some soft skills in some of the students, stimulates the improvement of the teamwork of pedagogical specialists, the introduction of more diverse methods of learning, more active participation of parents in school life, and has also led to a clearer separation of the role of mediators in the interaction between schools and students from vulnerable groups.</p>	<p>In the next programming period 2021-2027, account should be taken of the need to work harder towards improving the skills for working with electronic resources and in electronic environments of both teachers and students, increasing the motivation for learning of students from vulnerable groups, as well as increasing parental ownership of the educational process.</p> <p>Responsible institutions: MA of PE</p>



No	Findings	Reference to the analyses in the Report	Conclusions	Recommendations
	<p>students from vulnerable groups often face technical problems to engage in education in digital environments due to difficult access to computer, Internet and educational platforms. The conditions of online teaching and detachment from the school environment also have effects on the motivation, regular inclusion and educational achievements of these children, as often in the family environment of children and students from vulnerable groups it is not communicated in Bulgarian, and parents or guardians have a low level of literacy, for whom education is not important.</p>			

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## ANNEXES

**Annex 1** – Methodology for conducting a survey of final beneficiaries’ opinion on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups such as Roma under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

**Annex 2** – Questionnaire for pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools for evaluation of activities under project BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

**Annex 3** – Results of an online survey of pedagogical specialists in kindergartens/schools for evaluation of the activities under project BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

**Annex 4** – Questionnaire for mediators for evaluation of activities under project BG05M2OP001-3.017 “Increasing the capacity of pedagogical specialists to work in a multicultural environment”

**Annex 5** – Questionnaire for pedagogical specialists in control schools

**Annex 6** – Results of an online survey of pedagogical specialists in control schools

**Annex 7** – Questionnaire for teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the school education system

**Annex 8** – Results of an online survey of teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the school education system

**Annex 9** – Questionnaire for parents of students in schools – Control group

**Annex 10** – Results of an online survey of parents of students in school – Control group

**Annex 11** – Questionnaire for parents of students

**Annex 12** – Results of an online survey of parents of students

**Annex 13** – Questionnaire for pedagogical specialists in the pre-school education system

**Annex 14** – Results of an online survey of pedagogical specialists in the pre-school education system

**Annex 15** – Questionnaire for parents of children in kindergartens and pre-school groups at school

**Annex 16** – Results of an online survey of parents of children in kindergartens and pre-school groups at school

**Annex 17** – Territorial distribution of the children involved in the operations, students and parents from marginalized groups, including Roma, and whether it is adequate to the demographic structure of the population – at the level of municipality, district and NUTS 2

**Annex 18** – Methodology for conducting a survey of beneficiaries’ views on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups such as Roma under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

**Annex 19** – Questionnaire to study the views of beneficiaries on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalised groups such as Roma, under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

**Annex 20** – Results of an online survey of beneficiaries

**Annex 21** – Methodology for carrying out a study, through an interview with direct beneficiaries under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020, on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalized groups such as Roma

**Annex 22** – Main questions for conducting an interview for the opinion of project management participants with MES in its capacity of a direct beneficiary on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalized groups such as Roma, under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” under Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

**Annex 23** – Scenario of an interview with representatives of the project management teams with MES in its capacity of a direct beneficiary (project BG05M2OP001-2.011-C04 “Support for success”)

**Annex 24** – Scenario of an interview with representatives of the project management teams with MES in its capacity of a direct beneficiary (project BG05M2OP001-3.005-0004-C03 “Active inclusion in the system of pre-school education” and project BG05M2OP001-3.004-0001-C04 “New chance for success”)

**Annex 25** – Key questions for conducting an interview on the CLLD approach on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalized groups such as Roma, under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” under Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

**Annex 26** – Scenario of an interview with representatives of the MA on the CLLD approach

**Annex 27** – Methodology for carrying out a study, through a discussion in a Stakeholder Focus Group on Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” of Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020, on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalized groups such as Roma

**Annex 28** – Main issues for conducting a focus group to study the opinion of members of the MC of OP SESG on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalized groups such as Roma, under Priority Axis 3 “Educational Environment for Active Social Inclusion” under Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

**Annex 29** – Scenario of a focus group with representatives of the MC of the OP SESG

**Annex 30** – Main issues for conducting a focus group to study the opinion of representatives of the MA of OP SESG on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of procedures directed directly or indirectly at marginalized groups such as Roma, under Priority Axis 3 “Educational environment for active social inclusion” under Operational Programme “Science and Education for Smart Growth” 2014-2020

**Annex 31** – Scenario of a focus group with representatives of the MA of OP SESG

**Annex 32** – Questionnaire for the representatives of the members of the Local Action Groups/CLLD approach/

**Annex 33** – Results of a survey carried out among representatives of the members of the Local Action Groups (CLLD approach)

**Annex 34** – Scenario of an interview with representatives of the CCU

**Annex 35** – Scenario of an interview with representatives of the MA of OP HRD

**Annex 36** – Reference of the planned and achieved values of the indicators under the evaluated procedures  
PA 3 as at 30.9.2022