

## **EVALUATION PLAN**

**MANAGING AUTHORITY OF EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL**

**COOPERATION PROGRAMMES**

**INTERREG V-A COOPERATION PROGRAMME:**

**GREECE – BULGARIA 2014-2020**

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## Introduction

The Evaluation Plan was developed in compliance with provisions of the following regulations:

- Common Provision Regulation (CPR) - Regulation (EC) No 1303/2013, in particular Preamble 54 and Articles 50, 54, 56, 110 and 114,
- European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Regulation – Regulation (EC) No 1299/2013, in particular Preamble 26 and Article 14,

and the Commission guidance documents on Monitoring and Evaluation<sup>1</sup> and on Evaluation Plans<sup>2</sup>. The present evaluation plan follows the DG REGIO “Guidance Document on Evaluations Plans” and includes the following sections:

- evaluation objectives, coverage and coordination (section 3)
- evaluation framework (section 4)
- planned evaluations (section 5) and more specifically:
  - a table with all planned evaluations, their subject and rationale, proposed inquiry methods, data requirements and availability, estimated durations and required deadline for results, and an indicative budget (section 5.1);
  - indicative evaluation questions per Specific Objective and/or type of evaluation (section 5.2)

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation - European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund, Concepts and Recommendations (March 2014): [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd\\_2014\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans (February 2015): [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/evaluation\\_plan\\_guidance\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/evaluation_plan_guidance_en.pdf).

# The Evaluation Plan

## 1. Objectives, Coverage, Coordination

### 1.1. Evaluation Objectives and rationale

According to the regulations, each priority axis needs to be evaluated - at least once during the programming period<sup>3</sup> - regarding how ERDF support contributes to its objectives. Reviews of effectiveness and impact of the Programme are also essential for obtaining information on the achievements of the Programme and for allowing design and/or management optimization changes during or after the programming period. Such evaluations also illustrate how the available resources are used to obtain area benefits and hence add to greater transparency towards the general public.

The present evaluation plan covers both impact and implementation evaluations aiming, on one hand, at capturing the effects of the intervention and, on the other hand, at examining how well the Programme is being implemented and managed.

The main objectives of the Evaluation Plan of the cooperation Programme INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 are:

- to design **an effective framework for planning and implementing such Programme and impact evaluations which will provide** the Managing Authority and the implementing bodies with **reliable and timely information** in order for them to **make informed decisions** on necessary corrections or improvements to the Programme which will ascertain its success;
- to provide the **parameters and mechanisms that will ensure the quality of such evaluations** through proper planning, proper evaluation focus, proper identification and collection of data, etc.;
- to ensure the **availability of all necessary resources for funding and managing** these evaluations;
- to ensure **reliable and timely inputs for reporting** to European Commission Services (ECS) on Programme implementation (annual and final implementation reports); and
- to **facilitate the synthesis of findings** from different Member States by ECS.

Considering that there is a particular focus on “results” for the 2014-2020 programming period, the evaluation places a heavier weight on the “end-users” of Programme actions and hence includes more surveys, case studies and other forms of inquiry assessing the impacts that the Greece-Bulgaria cooperation Programme has on its intended targets (i.e. on conducting the relevant impact and special purpose evaluations).

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<sup>3</sup> Reg.1303/2013, art. 56: *At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support from the European Structural & Investment (ESI) Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority.*

The above will allow the evaluator to conclude:

- not only whether the Programme is actually achieving its said objectives in each priority;
- but also whether the Programme is contributing to the targets of the EU2020 objectives.

### ***1.2. Coverage of the evaluation plan***

As stated in Art 54 (1) of the CPR and in guidance documents, the content of the Evaluation Plan concerns mainly the following areas:

- Evaluations on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Programme; and
- Impact evaluations.

The geographic area covered by the Evaluation Plan is the Programme eligible area, which comprises of 11 NUTS III regions, i.e.:

- BG413 - Благоевград (Blagoevgrad)
- BG422 - Хасково (Haskovo)
- BG424 - Смолян (Smolyan)
- BG425 - Кърджали (Kardzhali)
- EL111 - Έβρος (Evros)
- EL112 - Ξάνθη (Xanthi)
- EL113 - Ροδόπη (Rodopi)
- EL114 - Δράμα (Drama)
- EL115 - Καβάλα (Kavala)
- EL122 - Θεσσαλονίκη (Thessaloniki)
- EL126 - Σέρρες (Serres)

Finally, in terms of time-coverage, the Evaluation Plan extends until the conclusion of all cooperation Programme activities, i.e. year 2023.

### ***1.3. Coordination***

The Greek National Coordination Authority (NCA) coordinates the planning and execution of all evaluations under the Greek Partnership Agreement 2014-2020 including all programmes funded by ERDF, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

Within this role, NCA:

- prepares guidance on how to plan for evaluations;
- offers assistance and directions with regards to the time-coordination of evaluations – in order to make aggregations of conclusions possible;
- provides assistance during the execution of evaluations and during programme revisions;
- prepares unified directions, terms of reference, and evaluation questions for similar actions so that evaluations of different programmes can derive conclusions using comparable methodologies;
- prepares guidance on how evaluations of different programmes need to provide inputs that can be aggregated at national level;
- provides advice on the quality of evaluations;
- organizes trainings on evaluation for Managing Authority staff; and
- facilitates access to information during evaluations.

The respective coordination functions in Bulgaria are ensured by the Bulgarian National Authority which is the Ministry of Regional Development.

The Managing Authority for all European Territorial Cooperation Programmes in Greece (IPA II CBC Greece-fYROM and TNC programme Balkan-Mediterranean) – including the cooperation programme Greece-Bulgaria - is seated at the same Ministry as NCA, and ensures coordination with the Greek sectoral and regional programmes. In particular, Unit A' (Planning and Monitoring of MCS, horizontal issues and Interreg Europe) of MA is coordinating evaluation issues internally, liaises with NCA, assesses the relevant needs and drafts the necessary training plan. Unit A' also, represents MA in the Evaluation Network (see below) coordinated by NCA.

In addition, in order to facilitate the effective transfer of experiences/knowledge among responsible Ministries, other responsible public bodies and Managing Authorities, the NCA organizes the Evaluation Network. The main tasks of this network are to:

- provide input on methodological tools, on indicators, on evaluation plans, on the progress of evaluations, etc; and
- to exchange experiences and good practices regarding the evaluations.

#### ***1.4. Relevant evidence available-Data Sources***

Evaluations during the 2014-2020 period should consider – among other evidence (to be collected by the evaluator):

- the outcomes of previous evaluations and all the relevant analyses/studies carried out during 2007-2013; and

- the analyses/studies carried out during Programme preparation for the present programming period.

These include:

- The ON-GOING EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME: GREECE-BULGARIA 2007-2013 and in particular the deliverables:
  - Deliverable 2 which includes a detailed horizontal evaluation of the Programme (i.e. strategy assessment and the significance of socio-economic changes for the Programme, effectiveness and efficiency of implementation including an assessment of the monitoring system through quantified indicators, the evaluation of Programme added-value with important recommendations for the next period, and the evaluation of the management systems);
  - Deliverable 3 which includes the results from a survey among the final beneficiaries of the Programme which touched-upon procedural issues (i.e. the project selection process, implementation and reporting requirements, etc.), and upon cross-border issues (i.e. benefits to the beneficiaries and to the CB area from the Programme and how these outcomes will be used in the long-run, impacts on final beneficiary capacity, sustainability of outcomes, and views on current and future challenges for the cross-border area); and
  - Deliverable 6 which includes the synthesis report from previous deliverables and the evaluator's proposal for the next programming period.
- The INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 programming document, as approved by ECS.
- The preparatory material for the development of the INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 programming document and its calls, and more specifically:
  - The Diagnostic Report, which was submitted as Annex 1 in deliverable 2 of the Technical Assistance contract for the preparation of the Programme;
  - The Methodological Note on Indicator Calculations, which was submitted as accompanying documentation with the final Programme draft;
  - The Entrepreneurship Survey, which was conducted in April 2015 in order to document baseline conditions for the entrepreneurship conditions in the CB area and in order to establish the baseline value for the indicator «Entrepreneurial business support environment» (IP 3a);
  - The Biodiversity Survey, which was conducted in April 2015 in order to document baseline conditions for biodiversity preservation conditions in the CB area and in order to establish the baseline value for the indicator «% of Natura areas reporting excellent or good degree of conservation» (IP 6d); and



- The study «SMEs and cooperation initiatives in the cross-border area», which was conducted in June-July 2016 in order to evaluate the effects of previous<sup>4</sup> Programme initiatives on CB area businesses and to assess the complementarity and synergy between the Greece-Bulgaria cooperation Programme and mainstream Programmes for the 2014-2020 programming period in the area of SME support.

With respect to the findings from prior evaluations<sup>5</sup>, particular attention should be given –during the evaluations of the present programme - to the following issues:

- Whether the new programme has managed to increase its added-value:
  - beyond a higher geographic concentration of financial resources in the CB area and in smaller population centers than through mainstream programmes; and
  - beyond the intangible benefits received by the beneficiaries from the cooperative nature of the projects (such as “exchange of good practice”, “capacity building”, “joint strategies”, “gain of respect and trust” between the cooperating partners and “access to wider networks of cooperation”);
  - More specifically, the evaluations should investigate whether the new programme has increased:
    - the incidence of the genuinely joint projects (i.e. increased the cross-border character of the interventions); and
    - the rate of capitalization of prior experiences;
- Whether the new programme has managed to increase its return on investment (i.e. produce more tangible results) than the programme of the previous programming period;
- Whether the new programme has made the implementation-related changes that foster effectiveness and result orientation such as:
  - concentrate more on the results of the interventions than on the absorption of funds, i.e.:
    - assign to content-related project selection criteria a higher weight than implementation-related criteria, introduce the “sustainability of results”, “cross-border cooperation and capitalization” and “holistic / interdisciplinary approach” as separate criteria;
    - fully implement a risk appraisal and management system; and
    - implement a more meaningful monitoring system (i.e. better indicators, more accurate reporting system);

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<sup>4</sup> 2000-2006 programming period and 2007-2013 programming period.

<sup>5</sup> Which the evaluators should carefully review by studying the reports mentioned above.

- actively attract other types of final beneficiaries apart from public entities (such as socio-economic actors and civil society organizations); and
- actively promote more comprehensive/holistic interventions instead of incremental actions;
- Whether the programme has made the implementation-related changes that facilitate smooth programme progress such as:
  - resolving the “expenditure verification” and “flow-of-financing” delays noted during the previous programming period;
  - simplifying the “burdensome” administrative procedures for final beneficiaries; and
  - increasing the institutional capacity of final beneficiaries to administer the projects, especially with respect to handling the procurement processes and performing Lead Partner duties.

With respect to the design of the new programme, the evaluations should investigate whether the findings from prior evaluations (i.e. concentration on open borders and increased mobility of people and goods; integration of the cross-border area in terms of social services, educational levels, living conditions, administrative procedures and systems; joint defence mechanisms against exogenous threats to the area; and effective responses to the environmental and climate-change issues) and the findings from the Diagnostic Report (i.e. the strengths of rich natural environment and resources, the proximity to the TEN-T network, the considerable agricultural and industrial potential as well as the research potential; the opportunities of capitalizing on the good interaction between GR-BG stakeholders and on the RIS3 strategies; the weaknesses of mountainous and remote character with low urbanization and depopulation trends, severe infrastructure challenges and high susceptibility to climate change, low accessibility and low internet connectivity, stagnant economic growth with low innovation content, high unemployment with poverty and social exclusion, and public health challenges) continue to be valid for the CB area and whether the new programme addresses them effectively.

Finally, the evaluations should investigate whether greater synergies and complementarities between ETCP and mainstream 2014-2020 programmes has been achieved as compared to the prior programming period.

Additionally, the following data sources are available and should be used for calculating the values for the Programme results indicators:

- For *Value of annual CB area exports*: SEBE (Greece) and NSI (Bulgaria).
- For *Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC*: Authorities for Civil Protection from each country.

- For *Annual tourist overnight stays at accommodation establishments*: ELSTAT (Greece) and NSI (Bulgaria)
- For *% of characterized surface water bodies in GES*: Ministry of Environment: Special Secretariat for Water Resources (Greece) and Ministry of Environment (Bulgaria)
- For *Number of operating border crossings*: Egnatia Odos S.A.
- For *Annual visits to primary healthcare/ Annual visits to secondary/tertiary healthcare*: Regional Health Units or ESYnet – if functional at the time of evaluation – (Greece) and Annual Health Reports (Bulgaria)
- For *Social enterprise employees in the CB area*: Social Enterprises Registers in both countries

Last but not least, final beneficiaries have been instructed to regularly collect – and report – data pertaining to the output indicators of the programme as follows:

The main output indicator to be monitored by **I.P. 3a projects** is the *number of enterprises receiving support* from the project. This measures the number of specific businesses or entrepreneurs that will receive specific services from each project during the duration of the project. For example, each project must count all the businesses to which incubation services have been provided, or all the businesses that have received marketing services, or any other service from project partners, etc. Caution will be taken not to double-count the same businesses if they receive more than one types of support from the project. For that reason, project beneficiaries will keep detailed lists of the end user businesses. These lists must include unique identifiers like their VAT number. Project partners will have the responsibility for deriving from these lists the exact number of businesses assisted by their project and report them to MA/JS. In case of doubt or during spot controls or during Programme evaluations (mid-term, ex-post, etc), MA/JS can examine these lists, so project partners need to keep them at least until the end of 2023.

The other output indicator to be monitored by I.P. 3a projects is the *number of new enterprises receiving support*. For all practical purposes, since this I.P. targets only new or newly established businesses, the value of this indicator is identical to the previous indicator.

The main output indicator to be monitored by **I.P. 3d projects** is the *number of enterprises receiving support* from the project. This measures the number of specific businesses or entrepreneurs that will receive specific services from each project during the duration of the project as above. Another output indicator to be monitored by I.P. 3d projects is the *number of enterprises receiving non-financial support*. For all practical purposes, since no financial support is to be provided by the project, the value of this indicator will be identical to the previous indicator.

Finally all projects involving clusters and value-chains<sup>6</sup> will report on the indicator *number of clusters and other collaborative schemes composed of stakeholders/enterprises from both sides of border*. This indicator measures the number of new clusters or value-chains created by the Programme and the number of already existing clusters which received support services from the Programme. In order to avoid double-counting, project partners should report to MA/JS both the number of clusters assisted by their project and the names of the clusters.

The main output indicator to be monitored by **I.P. 6c projects** is the *annual number of visitors at the assisted sites*. For all participating sites that already charge a ticket or entry fee, the number to be reported is the annual number of tickets (measured from January 1st until December 31st of the same year).

For all participating sites that do not already charge a ticket or entry fee, there will be an obligation to establish such a measuring system and obtain baseline measurements immediately after the signing of the contract with the Managing Authority. These measurements can be done manually or through the use of automated systems. Should automated systems be used, a single entry point is required. It is preferable that baseline measurements extend over a period of one year, but if this is unrealistic, they can be done over a period of 6 months or less (sampling method) and the visitor figures can be extrapolated to cover an entire year.

Indicator values will be reported each year to MA/JS. Two different measurements are needed for the calculation of the indicator: one for the baseline measurement (baseline), and one corresponding to the reporting year (attained value). The indicator value is the difference between the two values, i.e. attained value – baseline). Beneficiaries are responsible for reporting both the baseline value and the attained value to MA/JS every year (at the end of the year) until the end of the Programme, i.e. end of 2023. The figures reported for the attained values must be the product of comprehensive and not sample counting (i.e. all visitors must be measured for an entire year)<sup>7</sup>.

The other output indicator to be monitored by I.P. 6c projects is the *number of cultural and/or natural assets rehabilitated/protected*. For the purposes of this indicator, an “asset” is considered to be either an entire protected area (e.g. national park, Natura 2000, etc), or a group of cultural or historic buildings forming an integral total (e.g. all the buildings in an archeological site, or in a traditional village, etc), or a museum with all its objects, or an entire art collection, etc.

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<sup>6</sup> A value chain is a set of productive activities that a specific industry performs in order to deliver a valuable product or service to the market (final consumer). For example a value chain in the dairy industry can consist of actors representing genetic research, artificial insemination, cattle raising, milk production, dairy industries, marketing research, product development, logistics and product distribution, branding and advertising, etc. It can take the form of an “informal network” (i.e. participating actors simply sign an MoU) which comes together for a specific reason (e.g. to improve quality).

<sup>7</sup> For the annual calculation of the indicator value, the attained value will most likely differ from year to year, but the baseline will remain fixed.

The output indicator to be monitored by **I.P. 6d projects** is the *surface area of habitats supported* (from the project) *in order to attain a better conservation status*. This measures the number of hectares that all supported – by project activities – habitats cover.

In cases where a project refers to one specific habitat, calculation of an indicator value is rather simple. It only requires an approximate mapping of the area covered by the specific habitat. In cases where project activities cover all habitats within specific protected areas, calculation of the indicator value is also simple as there are specific area estimates for all protected areas (from the decree establishing them).

In both cases, project Lead Partners will report to MA/JS both the indicator value and the precise areas it refers to in order to avoid double-counting (e.g. in cases of Natura areas it is sufficient to report the official identification number, in other cases some geographic reference such as e.g. coordinates or description may be necessary). In cases where a project refers to multiple overlapping habitats (which do not constitute an institutionally protected natural area), then project partners need to clearly delineate the areas covered (by providing some geographic reference such as e.g. coordinates or description) and net-out the overlapping area in their calculation. Both this information should be reported to MA/JS.

The output indicator to be monitored by **I.P. 6f projects** is the *surface water resources under joint monitoring*. This counts the annual water resources that are placed under joint monitoring - as a result of the project water management activities - measured in cubic hectometers (hm<sup>3</sup>), i.e. millions of cubic meters. For each CB river system there are estimates of the annual water resources in the respective river basin management studies that have been conducted by the Greek and Bulgarian responsible authorities (i.e. Ministries of environment).

Projects adopting an integrated river-basin approach will report the entire amount of river resources as the value of the output indicator. Projects that target specific segments, will estimate the amount of water resources from that segment only. In order to avoid double-counting, project Lead Partners should report to MA/JS both the indicator value and the surface water body it refers to (either by name, if it is an entire river, or by both the name and the specific number designated to it, if it is a segment).

The main output indicator to be monitored by **I.P. 8 projects** is the *population covered by improved health services* from the project. This measures the number of residents within the area of reference of the specific project and not to the number of people that actually receive services by the project during its implementation period. For example, for projects targeting primary healthcare units, the reference population is the resident population in the area of responsibility of the respective unit. For preventive care actions, the population covered is the resident population within the areas that the action has targeted, irrespective of whether they have actually participated or not. Project Lead Partners will estimate the covered population and report this figure to MA/JS.

Another output indicator to be monitored by I.P. 9a projects is the *number of health care institutions reorganized, modernized or reequipped*. For all practical purposes, this includes all primary healthcare units, all centers of reference, all hospitals (e.g. if they participate in telemedicine actions and receive ICT equipment), etc. where such investments are made. The number of such institutions will be reported by Lead Partners to MA/JS.

Finally, I.P. 9a also monitors the output indicator *number of health ICT systems developed*. This refers to ICT applications/solutions for healthcare (such as telemedicine applications, remote diagnostic tools, self-monitoring systems for chronic patients, multi-lingual patient portals, ICT applications supporting patient mobility, etc) and not ICT infrastructure which may be part of a primary healthcare unit renovation project. The number of such applications will be reported by Lead Partners to MA/JS.

The main output indicator to be monitored by **I.P. 9c projects** is the *number of participants in social entrepreneurship projects promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion across borders*. This indicator measures the number of persons employed by the assisted social enterprises or involved in running the assisted social enterprises. If a project supports social franchising, then both the “mother” social enterprise and the “franchise” are both counted as “assisted enterprises”. If a project supports horizontal training schemes for social entrepreneurship, then the indicator measures the training participants, etc.

## ***1.5. Mechanisms for coordination and information exchange on and for evaluations.***

### ***1.5.1. Existing Bodies and their roles***

#### **Monitoring Committee (MC)**

The cooperation Programme Monitoring Committee has a decisive role in the preparation, adoption and implementation of the Evaluation Plan. **All major Programme partners from both participating countries are represented in the MC and can therefore directly influence the evaluation process.**

The MC examines, approves and reviews the evaluation plan (article 110 (2) of CPR) and possible subsequent amendments and revisions that might arise from emerging needs. The MC reviews at least once a year the progress in the implementation of the Evaluation Plan and decides on Programme amendments based on the findings of the evaluations (Article 110 (1) (b) of CPR). The review of the evaluation plan could be combined with the approval of the annual implementation reports in which progress made in implementing the evaluation plan is reported.

#### **Managing Authority (MA) and Joint Secretariat (JS)**

The administrative management of all planned evaluations lies within the responsibility of the cooperation Programme MA and JS. Explicitly, this means monitoring the transparency and impartiality of tender procedures, ensuring competence of external evaluators, **supervising and facilitating the data collection, the analysis and the drafting processes**, making sure that all quality assurance guidelines for the evaluation reports are followed and **ensuring that appropriate follow-up - based on evaluation findings – will be taken by the cooperation Programme**. More specifically:

- The MA prepares the plan in cooperation with the Joint Secretariat (JS) and presents it to the MC members;
- When relevant, it prepares and presents to the MC members an updated evaluation plan;
- After MC approval of each version of the evaluation plan, the MA submits the plan to the European Commission for information through the SFC system;
- It prepares and presents - at least once a year - a “follow-up and status of the evaluation plan” report;
- The MA is responsible for the tendering of external evaluation expertise.
- The Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat carry out all activities related to the execution of evaluations (contracting, coordinating/facilitating with Programme stakeholders, ensuring quality control of evaluation reports, coordinating with the National Authorities, EC, INTERACT and other institutional stakeholders, disseminating evaluation results);
- The Managing Authority presents the evaluation results to the MC and proposes Programme amendments whenever appropriate/necessary.

### **Joint Steering Group**

A Joint Steering Group (SG) shall be appointed in order to **coordinate the process of the evaluation**. Members of the SG will be drawn from the MA, representatives of both countries, important stakeholders and/or academics or other experts recommended by the MA. . The purpose of a SG would be to fulfill both an institutional and a technical function. Indicative responsibilities of the SG shall include:

- Advise on the terms of reference;
- Ensure that the interests of all major stakeholders/partners are taken into consideration and involvement of the institutions which might have to act on the recommendations;
- Safeguard the technical quality of the evaluation from a methodological viewpoint and guarantee independence and impartiality of the evaluation;
- Support the evaluation work;
- Assess the quality of the deliverables; and
- Ensure that evaluation activities are conducted in a professional and ethical manner.

### **European Commission**

In compliance with the Rules of Procedure of the Programme, the European Commission will have an advisory role and **will therefore be consulted at all stages of the evaluation process.**

## **2. Evaluation Framework**

### **2.1. The evaluation function**

The Monitoring Committee (MC), representing the Partners States, is the *decision actor* of the evaluation function as it has a steering and deciding role with regards to the development and implementation of the evaluation plan but also with regards to Programme amendments based on the findings of the evaluations.

The Managing Authority (MA) and Joint Secretariat (JS) on the other hand are the *operational actor* of the evaluation function as they carry out all activities related to the set up and implementation of the evaluation plan (i.e. MC meetings, contracting with external evaluators, coordinating of information and evaluation activities, quality control, coordinating with EC, INTERACT, other INTERREG Programmes, etc.).

The external evaluator team is the *technical/executive actor* of the evaluation function as it is responsible for carrying out the evaluations, drawing conclusions and proposing amendments to the Programme and improvements in the implementation mechanisms.

Finally, in compliance with the Rules of Procedure (RoP) of the Programme, the European Commission has an *observer and advisory role* and can therefore advise the MC, the MA and the JS at all stages of the evaluation process.

### **2.2. The evaluation process**

The MA - in cooperation with the JS - designs and delivers the evaluation plan to the MC for approval. The MA prepares the plan in cooperation with the JS. The MC is expected to discuss and approve the evaluation plan (and also approve any amendments which are deemed necessary in the future).

All foreseen evaluations will be executed via external evaluators – who have not been involved in the implementation of the Programme in any way – in order to guarantee independence and impartiality.

Evaluations will be structured in two or three different contracts, to be decided:

- either on the basis of the timing of the various evaluations (1<sup>st</sup> contract to deliver final deliverable on 30/6/2018, 2<sup>nd</sup> on 30/6/2020, and 3<sup>rd</sup> on 30/6/2023);
- or on the basis of the theme(s) of the evaluations to be included in the contracts (1<sup>st</sup> contract to include the Programme evaluation and the update of Programme evaluation, 2<sup>nd</sup> contract to include all impact and special evaluations).



The MA is responsible for the tendering of external experts. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation will be drafted with the support of the JS. For the ToR, Commission guidance will be used as well as previous MA experience on public procurement and evaluations.

The follow-up and status of the evaluation plan as well as any evaluation findings and recommendations necessitating further action will be discussed at the MC at least once a year.

### ***2.3. Involvement of partners***

For the purpose of involving competent partners in the Programme evaluation, Programme implementing bodies may engage a pool of national experts - covering the thematic fields of Programme specific objectives – via focus groups in order to provide specific inputs to the Programme evaluation, its findings and follow-up measures. Also - as indicated in the programming document – the Programme aims to take on board partners’ opinions during the evaluation of the Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 Programme through the following mechanisms/procedures:

- Through the operation of the Monitoring Committee. Active involvement of CB area stakeholders in the operation of the Monitoring Committee will be ensured by publicizing the draft agendas of the MC meetings and a summary of the minutes, including all the information regarding the evaluations and their findings. This will allow them to actively participate by sending in specific input and by being updated on the latest developments. Finally, the MA will publish a summary of the relevant decisions of the Monitoring Committee meetings in order to keep all area stakeholders informed of the outcomes.
- Through inception meetings and info-days. All CB stakeholders will be given the opportunity to participate at the inception meetings carried out before each call for proposals during which information is customarily disseminated from the MA to the potential beneficiaries but also valuable input is gathered from them. This input will be used by the evaluator(s) in order to enrich their conclusions about the Programme.
- Through participation in the evaluations. Finally, a sample of CB area stakeholders and persons from target groups will participate in the evaluation process via targeted surveys, interviews, focus groups, workshops, impact and operational evaluations.

Care will be taken to involve all types of Programme partners in the evaluation process and more specifically:

- public authorities that maintain territorial responsibility for the Programme eligible areas (e.g. regional authorities, Municipalities, etc.);

- public authorities that maintain thematic/sectoral responsibility in the intervention areas of the cooperation Programme (e.g. Ministries, Natura site management authorities, transport authorities, Universities, research or standards institutions, civil protection authorities, etc.);
- collective bodies that maintain thematic/sectoral responsibility in the intervention areas of the cooperation Programme (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, professional associations, scientific committees, etc.);
- civil society umbrella organizations and collective bodies that maintain thematic/sectoral responsibility in the intervention areas of the cooperation Programme (e.g. associations of special or under-represented groups, national level charities, associations of specific purpose civil groups, environmental groups, etc.);
- the private sector; and
- the general public.

#### ***2.4. Evaluation expertise***

Article 54 (3) of the CPR regulation states that evaluations are to be carried out by experts (internal or external) that are **functionally independent** from the authorities responsible for Programme implementation. The structures of the MA and JS do not foresee separate departments/units dealing with evaluation matters and therefore such functional independence cannot be ensured by doing the evaluations in-house. Therefore all evaluations will be carried out by external experts.

Still, since the Programme intends to promote the efficient use of the human and financial resources allocated to evaluation activities, and to ensure ownership of such activities by the Programme, internal resources (from MA and JS) will be used to the greatest extent possible - without endangering independence and impartiality – in order to facilitate the evaluation tasks. This can be done through the following functions:

- Collecting, compiling and providing the contractor with documents and other internal information from the implementation process (e.g. guides, project call and proposal information, project fiches of the approved projects, project reports, financial data, risk management data, monitoring committee meeting minutes, communication material such as emails, letters, etc.)
- Facilitating the data collection process by providing contact information of project partners, by informing project partners and other Programme stakeholders that they are about to be contacted by the evaluator, by sending out official letters and notifications to target populations before the surveys, by motivating Programme partners to participate in evaluation activities, by putting the evaluator in contact with National Authorities responsible for various thematic fields (e.g. Ministries) in order to collect necessary information for impact assessments, obtain opinions, etc.

- Organizing and hosting meetings between the evaluator and the stakeholders involved in the programming and implementation of the cooperation Programme either for consulting/feedback purposes or for interviews, as well as workshops or meetings of the thematic expert focus groups (if used).
- Translating evaluation material (letters and other communications, questionnaires, etc.) into the National languages of the two participating countries and providing interpretation services during meetings and workshops related to the evaluation process.
- Facilitating the feedback process (from the MC and the Programme partners to the evaluator) on the quality of the deliverables, on issues that have not been adequately covered, on conclusions not supported by evidence, on differing assessments/opinions of the stakeholders or the thematic expert focus groups (if such groups are used), etc.

For each evaluation, a monitoring committee will be formed –according to the provisions of the relevant legislation, which will be responsible for checking on the progress of the evaluations, for discussing with the evaluators issues pertaining to the methodological approach, for resolving institutional or other obstacles, for reviewing evaluation deliverables and for controlling the quality of the evaluation in general (on the basis of the quality criteria listed under section 4.9.4 below).

### ***2.5. Training Programmes on evaluation***

The MC will also consider the option of organizing training activities in support of the evaluation process for the Managing Authority, Joint Secretariat, and Monitoring Committee representatives, if deemed necessary. Such training activities may refer to:

- planning and managing the evaluation process;
- quality control of evaluation reports;
- qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods; and
- methods for impact assessment.

In view of the greater focus of this programming period on results and the already gained experience by the MA and JS staff from previous evaluations on across-the-board Programme evaluations, training on impact assessment methods may be deemed more necessary than other topics. The budget indicated under section 4.8 does not include such training costs.

The training activities mentioned above could be structured in two different training seminars:

- Seminar A: to include general concepts and methods of evaluations, planning and managing the evaluation process and quality controlling the evaluation reports. The seminar would have a 5-day

duration and should be offered for up to 15 members of MA and JS8. The cost of the seminar is roughly estimated at 8000€.

- Seminar B: to include quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods and impact assessment methods. The seminar would have a 5-day duration and would include a home-exercise as well. It will be at an advanced level and should be offered only to MA/JS members that already have some exposure to evaluation concepts. It should be offered for up to 15 members of MA and JS9. The cost of the seminar is roughly estimated at 10000€.

In addition, Unit A' of the Managing Authority assesses the training needs and ensures that all involved staff members have access to relevant trainings organized by other entities i.e. Interact, the Evaluation Network, etc.

## ***2.6. Use and Communication strategy***

The first and foremost care of the Programme is to use evaluation outcomes as a tool to improve on the implementation mechanisms of the current Programme by primarily focusing on effectiveness (result-orientation) and secondarily on efficiency (highest and best use of Programme resources). The second care is to use evaluation outcomes as an input to the development process of the next programming document (2021-2027).

With respect to the transparency of the Programme, the results of the evaluations - pursuant to Art. 54 (4) of the CPR - will be made available to the public. This will be done primarily through the annual implementation reports, where the results of the evaluations are summarized alongside the progress of the Evaluation Plan. The annual implementation reports (AIR) will be published on the Programme website. Also a citizen's summary of each evaluation will be published on the Programme website shortly after its approval by MA.

In addition, the Programme will actively promote the findings of evaluations through different communication and dissemination activities (e.g. through thematic workshops for beneficiaries, target groups, policy makers and other stakeholders; through social media and community development, whenever relevant) as they are foreseen in the Programme communication strategy.

Finally, all the evaluation reports accompanied by supporting documents, executive summaries and citizen's summaries will be uploaded to the SFC and be made available to the EC, as suggested in the EC Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans.

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<sup>8</sup> Members of the evaluation monitoring committees should be encouraged to take the seminar.

<sup>9</sup> The seminar should be taken only by members of the MA/JS that will specialize in evaluation issues and will act as "internal evaluation expertise" within the MA/JS structure in the long-run.

## 2.7. Timetable

The timing of evaluations has to take 2 factors into consideration:

- the *evaluability* of the Programme; and
- the *usability* of the evaluation findings.

The evaluability of a Programme increases as the Programme moves towards its completion, a greater volume of information is available to the evaluator and hence evaluation conclusions are more rigid, more reliable and better documented. On the contrary usability of evaluation findings – for making corrections in the implementation of the current Programme - diminishes as the Programme comes to its conclusion<sup>10</sup>. Hence, evaluations should be carried out as late as possible in order to increase evaluability, but as early as possible in order to have sufficient time to make changes that will improve Programme effectiveness and efficiency.

For that reason, it is important that each evaluation begins with an “evaluability assessment”. Wherever evaluability is low – at the time when the specific evaluation is conducted – the evaluator should note that the conclusions drawn are conditional to validation (and hence to be applied with caution) and that the evaluation must be repeated at a later time in order to validate or refute the evaluation results.

There are three major milestones in the implementation of the Programme that scheduled evaluations need to take into account:

- The year 2018 mid-term review;
- The end of the current programming period and start of the next programming period (i.e. year 2020); and
- The actual conclusion of all Programme activities and hence materialization of all Programme results (i.e. year 2023).

The evaluations described in section 5 are therefore structured around these milestones.

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<sup>10</sup> In those instances, evaluation findings become more useful for the next programming period.

## **2.8. Budget**

The estimated budget for all the scheduled evaluations amounts to 81,500 euros plus VAT<sup>11</sup>. Detailed estimated amounts per type of evaluation are included in the table presented under section 3.1 (Planned Evaluations).

## **2.9. Quality management strategy**

To ensure quality of Programme evaluations, MA will adopt the guidelines of Annex 2 “Guidance on quality management of external evaluations”, contained in the “Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans” from DG REGIO (April 2014).

### **2.9.1. Preparation phase**

Adequate time will be foreseen to plan and procure evaluations. For the latter, specific criteria will be defined in the terms of reference (ToR) for the selection of evaluation contractor. They will relate in particular to competencies and expertise in evaluation - in particular evaluation of Cohesion policy and ETC Programmes - but will also ensure the independence and impartiality of the evaluator. The prospective evaluators will be required to propose a sound methodology for the performance of the evaluations under procurement, which will be one of the criteria for award of the contract.

During the phase of the tenderer selection, the MA will appoint a Selection Committee (SC) responsible for evaluating the bids against the criteria set out in the ToR.

### **2.9.2. General management**

A Steering Group (SG) will be appointed in order to coordinate the process of the evaluation. Additionally, an Official responsible for the evaluation and Key Contact Point with the evaluation experts will be appointed either from the MA or JS staff.

### **2.9.3. Project milestones and deliverables**

A kick-off meeting will be organized during which the contractor / evaluation team will be briefed about the ToR and about any special concerns or expectations by the MA, JS and National Authorities. The evaluation expert(s) will be required to produce an Inception Report (detailing the methodology to be used in carrying out the tasks of the ToR after they have reviewed initial data from Programme implementation). The inception report will be required to include the evaluability assessment of the different evaluation themes.

The evaluation expert(s) will be required to produce Interim<sup>12</sup> and Final Reports on the evaluations carried out. If the evaluation is lengthy, the evaluator may be required to produce monthly or bi-monthly progress

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<sup>11</sup> Final evaluation cost will depend on the bids submitted by external evaluation experts.

<sup>12</sup> Interim reports will be required only if the evaluation is lengthy.

reports. This is a precautionary measure in order to ensure that potential problems are dealt with in a timely fashion and that evaluation deliverables will be submitted in-time<sup>13</sup>.

The MA/JS will be responsible for the quality control of the evaluation deliverables, which will be checked against the quality standards listed below (section 4.9.4).

The MC will be regularly informed of the progress on evaluation activities, the outcomes and will also receive the evaluation reports.

## **2.9.4. Evaluation Quality Standards**

### **Rationale and purpose**

The rationale, purpose and intended use of the evaluation must be stated clearly in all evaluation reports addressing: why the evaluation is being undertaken at this particular point in time, why and for whom it is undertaken, and how the evaluation is to be used for learning and/or accountability reasons.

### **Scope**

All evaluation reports must define the scope of the evaluation. The evaluation scope must clearly define the time period evaluated, the target groups, the organizational set-up, the implementation arrangements, the policy and institutional context within which the evaluation was conducted and other dimensions covered by the evaluation. The evaluation should also note any discrepancies between planned and actual evaluation scope and the reasons behind it.

### **Evaluability**

The evaluation reports should clearly refer to the evaluability of the themes under examination. Specifically, it should be determined whether or not the intervention(s) or other dimensions of the Programme under evaluation are adequately defined and their results verifiable, and if evaluation is the best way to answer the questions posed by policy makers or Programme stakeholders.

### **Stakeholder involvement and ethical conduct of evaluation activities**

All evaluation reports should explain how relevant stakeholders were involved in the evaluation process - including the opportunity to contribute to evaluation design, to identify the issues to be addressed and the evaluation questions to be answered. Also, the reports should highlight how sensitive issues were handled and how cultural and ethnic sensibilities were respected (whenever applicable).

### **Intervention Logic**

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<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, the evaluator may be required to attend a brief monthly or bi-monthly progress reporting and coordination meeting with the Official Responsible for the Evaluation.

The evaluation report should describe and assesses the intervention logic or theory, including underlying assumptions and factors affecting the success of the intervention under evaluation or behind the evaluation method(s) used (e.g. in counterfactual evaluations, theory-based evaluations, etc.).

### **Validity and Reliability of Information Sources**

The evaluation report should describe the sources of information used (documents, respondents, administrative data, literature, etc.) in sufficient detail so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed. The evaluation report should explain the selection of case studies or any samples. Limitations regarding the representativeness of the samples must be identified.

Complete lists of interviewees and other information sources consulted must be included in the report, to the extent that this does not conflict with the privacy and confidentiality of participant opinions or other data.

### **Robustness and completeness of documentation**

The evaluation should cross-validate the information sources and critically assess the completeness, reliability and robustness of the data<sup>14</sup>.

### **Acknowledgment of the limitations of the evaluation**

The evaluation report explains any limitations in the process, methodology or data. It also indicates any obstruction of a free and open evaluation process which may have influenced the findings.

### **Clarity of reporting**

The evaluation report presents findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learnt separately and with a clear logical distinction between them. Findings flow logically from the analysis of the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions.

All evaluation reports should contain an executive summary<sup>15</sup> and clearly marked sections for conclusions and recommendations. The report should be concise and detailed data, tables and other documentation material should be generally included in Annexes unless necessary for the clarity of the presented arguments within the text of the report.

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<sup>14</sup> In cases statistical samples are used, the evaluation report should examine the representation and/or stratification of the sample and should perform all statistical tests required to determine the level of statistical significance of results. This is especially important in the framework of any econometric methods used for impact evaluations. Also, it would be good to test how robust the econometric results are by performing a sensitivity analysis.

<sup>15</sup> The summary provides an overview of the report, highlighting the main findings, conclusions, recommendations and any overall lessons.



### **Incorporation of stakeholder comments**

Relevant stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on the draft report. The final evaluation report reflects these comments and acknowledges any substantive disagreements (see below). In disputes about facts that can be verified, the evaluators investigate and change the draft wherever necessary. In case of opinion or interpretation, stakeholders' comments are reproduced verbatim in an Annex or in footnotes.

### **Acknowledgment of disagreements with the conclusions of the evaluator(s)**

Evaluation team members have the opportunity to dissociate themselves from particular judgements and recommendations put forth by Programme stakeholders during the feedback process on which they disagree. Any unresolved differences of opinion with the evaluation team must be acknowledged in the final report in a special Annex.

### **Systematic follow up on recommendations**

All evaluator recommendations should be systematically responded to by the relevant stakeholders and a table indicating the action to be taken and the person(s)/body responsible for it should be included in the final evaluation report. In case there is an update of the evaluation (e.g. Programme evaluation or impact evaluation), all previously agreed follow-up actions are tracked to ensure accountability of application.

### 3. Planned Evaluations

#### 3.1. Snapshot of scheduled evaluations

Evaluations	Duration and Deadline for final report		Subject and rationale	Method(s)	Data requirements	Availability/collecti on requirements	Estimated Budget
Programme evaluation	6 mon.	30/6/2018	<p>Evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of Programme implementation. This is a horizontal evaluation which covers the following themes: verification of appropriateness of strategy in view of changing socio-economic conditions (evaluation of Programme targeting), verification of effective and efficient implementation and monitoring systems, documentation of Programme progress (financial, outputs), forecasting of Programme target attainment. The evaluation derives conclusions/recommendations for necessary adjustments in the Programme budget, in the specific targeting of the calls, in the management procedures, etc.</p>	<p><b>Strategy evaluation:</b> desk review, SWOT analysis, theory-based methods</p> <p><b>Process and systems evaluation:</b> desk review, interviews</p> <p><b>Programme progress evaluation:</b> data collection and analysis (numerical and statistical) methods</p> <p><b>Forecasting of target attainment:</b> statistical methods</p>	Programming documents	Available	15.500,00 €
					Prior evaluations and surveys/studies	Available	
					Socio-economic data for the CB area	To be collected	
					Project selection application and scoring data; project fiches	Available	
					Financial commitments and payments data	Available	
					Contracting and project progress data	Available	
					Output indicator values (at project level)	Available	

1st Update of Programme evaluation	6 mon.	30/6/2020	Evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of Programme implementation. It provides updated assessments and conclusions/recommendations on all above themes and conclusions/recommendations for the next programming period.		Documents on structure and operation of management bodies (MC, MA, JS)	Available	9.000,00 €
					Implementation manuals/guides	Available	
					Information on procedural and management issues/problems	To be collected	
Outcome/impact evaluation	8 mon.	30/6/2018	Assessment of result indicators. The evaluation documents the attained values for the result indicators established by the Programme for each IP, and assesses the likely (expected) contribution of the Programme to these values through especially designed surveys/studies.	<b>Results assessment:</b> data collection and analysis (numerical) methods, surveys (for the survey-based indicators)  <b>Likely impact evaluation:</b> desk review, interviews, focus or comparison groups, case studies  <b>Impact evaluation:</b> especially designed surveys and/or econometric studies, data collection and analysis (statistical) methods	Result indicator values from public registers & surveys	To be collected	15.500,00 €
1st Update of Outcome/impact evaluation	6 mon.	30/6/2020	Assessment of result indicators and impact assessment. The evaluation provides updated attained values for the result indicators per each IP, assesses the observed contribution of the Programme to these values through especially designed surveys/studies and explains the reasons behind this contribution.		Impact coefficients / econometric data	To be collected	12.000,00 €
2nd Update of Outcome/impact evaluation	6 mon.	30/6/2023 Spring 2024	Assessment of result indicators and impact assessment. The evaluation provides final attained values for the result indicators per each				12.000,00 €

<p>pact evaluation</p>			<p>IP, assesses the final Programme contribution and explains the reasons behind it.</p>	<p><b>Explaining Programme contribution:</b> statistical methods, theory-based methods</p>			
<p>Evaluation of the Communication dimensions of the Programme</p>	<p>6 mon.</p>	<p>30/6/2020</p>	<p>Special Evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether the total of Programme communication actions have been effective at reaching all potential audiences, whether Programme information conveyed was clear, whether information sharing mechanisms (web-site, manuals, help-desks, etc.) were user-friendly and effective, and whether the Programme had sufficient exposure to general public (publicity) in order to ensure Programme visibility.</p>	<p><b>Evaluation of publicity mechanisms and activities:</b> desk review, interviews with MA/JS staff <b>Evaluation of effects on potential beneficiaries:</b> surveys, interviews, focus groups <b>Evaluation on Programme visibility:</b> public opinion survey</p>	<p>Information on publicity events</p>	<p>Available</p>	<p>4.500,00 €</p>
<p>Information material &amp; documentation</p>	<p>Available</p>						
<p>Data on publicity coverage / effects on target populations (beneficiaries, general public)</p>	<p>To be collected</p>						
<p>Cross-border Added Value evaluation</p>	<p>6 mon.</p>	<p>30/6/2023 Spring 2024</p>	<p>Special Evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether there have been positive effects on the CB area, which could not have been achieved in the absence of a cooperation Programme (i.e. merely through mainstream Programmes)</p>	<p><b>Evaluation of CB added value dimensions:</b> desk review, survey and interviews with project partners and (perhaps) other socio-economic stakeholders.</p>	<p>Data on CB area institutional capacity</p>	<p>To be collected</p>	<p>6.500,00 €</p>
<p>Data on CB area intervention theme parameters</p>	<p>To be collected</p>						

<p>Evaluation of the involvement and effects on final recipients</p>	<p>6 mon.</p>	<p>30/6/2023 Spring 2024</p>	<p>Special Evaluation. It will be performed on strategically selected themes (e.g. effects on SMEs) and will explore the effects implemented projects had on the specific target populations. The evaluation will be conducted at project level but the results/conclusions will be aggregated at Programme level. The purpose of the evaluation is to highlight a) the most effective types of interventions/services, and b) the most prominent needs of final recipients that require attention by the Programme.</p>	<p><b>Data collection methods on project activities and final recipients:</b> interviews with project partners, surveys <b>Impact evaluation on final recipients:</b> surveys, case studies.</p>	<p>Data from project partners Data from project final recipients</p>	<p>To be collected To be collected</p>	<p>6.500,00 €</p>
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## ***3.2. Indicative evaluation questions and focus<sup>16</sup>***

### ***3.2.1. Programme Evaluations***

Programme evaluations are horizontal, across-the-board evaluations which focus on three functional Programme areas: appropriateness of design, Programme effectiveness in delivering the outputs it was intended to deliver, and efficiency of Programme implementation bodies and mechanisms. The main purpose of conducting these evaluations is to either verify that Programme implementation is on-track (according to its objectives, given timetable and given resources) or to suggest corrective measures to get the Programme back on track.

The findings of the evaluation are the most important decision-making tools for deciding on potential Programme amendments and changes in the implementation structure of the current Programme.

Two such evaluations are scheduled for the 2014-2020 period:

- A **Programme evaluation**, which intends to provide input for the 2018 annual progress report; and
- An **update of Programme evaluation**, which intends to provide input for the 2020 annual progress report and lessons-learnt for the programming of the 2021-2027 period cooperation Programme.

#### **Indicative evaluation questions**

##### **Appropriateness of strategy**

- Are Programme objectives still relevant to the major issues/challenges in the CB area given any changes in the socio-economic environment?
- Is the Programme consistent with EU 2020 objectives and national policies?
- Is the Programme complementary to mainstream Programmes applicable in the CB area? Does it exploit potential synergies?
- Are Programme objectives appropriately addressed by the current policy mix given EU-wide experience, the evidence from previous evaluations, other Programme evaluations, the existing capacity of Programme beneficiaries and the experience from the calls for project proposals?
- Are there any undiscovered needs that could be tackled under this or a future cooperation Programme?

##### **Documentation of Programme progress**

- What is the Programme progress in fund commitments, contracting, etc.?

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<sup>16</sup> The contracted evaluation teams will be required to further develop the evaluation questions as part of their Inception Report.

- What is the degree of Programme fund absorption (payments) and how does it compare with the forecasted streams in the programming document?
- Which interventions exhibit low fund absorption and why?
- Based on information from project proposals (estimated values), what is the expected attainment of Programme outputs? How does it compare to the target values in the programming document?
- In cases of divergence between expected attainment values and target values (as per the programming document), what are the reasons behind it?
- Does theory and prior Programme experience support these expected output values?

#### Forecasting future attainment

- Based on payment track records from the current and past Programmes and on the selected projects, what is the expected final Programme fund absorption?
- Are there any fund loss risks due to decommitment rules?
- Based on information (actual measurements) from the projects' progress reports, what is the forecasted attainment of Programme outputs at the end of the programming period?
- In cases of divergence between expected values (from project proposals) and forecasted values (as per project reports), what are the reasons behind it?

#### Assessment of effectiveness and efficiency

- Is the overall management and control system effective (proper organization, adequate and well-trained staff, comprehensive, appropriate and easy to follow procedures, reliable and tractable information flow system, timely decision-making and reaction mechanisms, etc.)? What can be improved?
- Are decision-making processes clear and transparent?
- Which are the critical paths for Programme implementation (functional areas where potential bottlenecks can endanger the entire Programme)?
- How time-efficient and effective are the project generation, project selection and contracting processes? What can be done to increase time-efficiency and effectiveness of these processes?
- Is there a risk assessment and management process for projects? Is it effective?
- How effective is project implementation? Are there any specific types of actions (across projects) that systematically exhibit time delays, cost overruns, or any other problems in implementation?
- How effective are project monitoring procedures? Do project partners have follow-up and evaluation procedures addressing the effects of their projects on intended audiences (i.e. end-users of project outcomes/services, participants in project activities, etc.)? Do they report their findings to Programme MA/JS?

- Do project implementation rules promote effectiveness of project implementation? Do they promote Programme implementation effectiveness? Are they unnecessarily cumbersome (need for simplification) for beneficiaries?
- What are the major difficulties faced by the beneficiaries in implementing their projects? What measures should be taken to overcome them?
- Is the right balance of relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Programme - including their participation in the MC - from the point of view of effectively applying the partnership principle? Are there problems mobilizing any specific category of partners?
- Does the system of indicators cover all important Programme variables that need to be monitored in order to have an accurate picture of Programme effectiveness? Are the attainment values – as recorded - reliable and their reporting timely?
- Can Technical Assistance funds be used in any other way that will further promote Programme effectiveness and efficiency?
- Based on expected and forecasted output attainment values, how does the evaluator assess overall Programme effectiveness? Which are the internal and external factors affecting it? What can be done to increase effectiveness?
- What are the unit costs per Programme output and how do they compare with values from prior cooperation Programmes and/or other mainstream Programmes? How does the evaluator assess overall Programme efficiency in the use of funds? Which are the internal and external factors affecting it? What can be done to increase cost-efficiency?

### **3.2.2. *Impact Evaluations***

The purpose of impact evaluations is to establish Programme contribution towards the achievement of Programme intended results and especially towards the achievement of the result indicators for each of the Programme specific objectives. The “main<sup>17</sup>” and “additional” evaluation questions to be answered per each Specific Objective are highlighted below.

Wherever it is possible to distinguish between immediate/short-term results and long-term results, the evaluation should attempt to estimate both. Impact evaluations will use both theory-based and counterfactual methods (as appropriate), even though counterfactual methods will be preferred in order to measure Programme contribution.

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<sup>17</sup> The “main” evaluation questions are required and cannot be omitted or replaced by the evaluator. The “additional” evaluation questions are preferred (not required) and can be omitted or replaced by the evaluator if they are hard to document or if there is no easily obtainable evidence.



## **Indicative evaluation questions**

### **Priority Axis 1: A Competitive and Innovative Cross-Border Area**

#### **Specific objective 1: To improve entrepreneurship SME support systems**

##### Main Evaluation Questions

- What is the value of the result indicator “Entrepreneurial Business Support Environment”? How does it compare to the baseline value (2015)?
- If an improvement is measured, to what extent has the Programme contributed to this improvement? If no improvement is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain an updated value for the result indicator “Entrepreneurial Business Support Environment”. The evaluator will use the Entrepreneurship Survey (whole or in part), which was conducted in April 2015, as the basis of its inquest methodology. A sufficient sample of CB area enterprises will be selected taking care to include both SMEs that benefited from the programme and SMEs that did not (in order to measure the “policy-off” values). Caution must be used (e.g. through inclusion of appropriate questions) to control for impacts from other similar (mainstream) programmes.

It would also be preferable if the evaluator can control for “selection bias”, but given the difficulties in the CB area to obtain accurate and dependable records on SME populations and their characteristics, this may not be possible.

##### Additional Evaluation Questions

- To what extent has the overall entrepreneurial climate improved in the CB area (as compared to the 2015 survey)?
- How many new business support systems have been established in the CB area as a result of Programme projects?
- Has the Programme contributed to the development of new businesses? Has it contributed to higher survival of start-ups?
- Has entrepreneurial activity increased among underrepresented groups?
- Are there any unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

#### **Specific objective 2: To improve SME capacity to expand beyond local markets**

##### Main Evaluation Questions

- What is the value of the result indicator “Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports”? How does it compare to the baseline value (2013)?

- If an improvement is measured, to what extent has the Programme contributed to this improvement? If no improvement is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain an updated value for the result indicator “Total Value of Annual CB Area Exports” (published statistic). In order to document the contribution of the Programme towards this value, the evaluator will formulate a survey or use another counterfactual method (e.g. an econometric study). A sufficient sample of CB area enterprises will be selected taking care to include both SMEs that benefited from the programme and SMEs that did not (in order to measure the “policy-off” values). Caution must be used (e.g. through inclusion of appropriate questions) to control for impacts from other similar (mainstream) programmes.

It would also be preferable if the evaluator can control for “selection bias”, but given the difficulties in the CB area to obtain accurate and dependable records on SME populations and their characteristics, this may not be possible.

#### Additional Evaluation Questions

- To what extent have SME attitudes and behavior towards international markets improved in the CB area? To what extent has the Programme contributed to that?
- Is there – as a result of the Programme - increased awareness among CB area entrepreneurs to act on business opportunities beyond local markets?
- Have participant SMEs – as a result of the Programme – experienced a wider customer base?
- Is there evidence of enhanced integration of the CB area economy into global economy?
- Are there any unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

#### **Priority Axis 2: A Sustainable and Climate adaptable Cross-Border area**

##### **Specific objective 3: To improve CB cooperation on flood risk management plans at river basin level.**

#### Main Evaluation Questions

- What is the value of the result indicator “Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC”? How does it compare to the baseline value (2014)?
- To what extent has the Programme contributed to it? If no value is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain an updated value for the result indicator “Number of international river basin districts with jointly coordinated flood risks management plans in compliance with Directive 2007/60/EC” from the respective Greek and Bulgarian Ministries (published statistic). Even though it is unlikely that such plans may be formulated under any other programme or initiative, the evaluator will also need to account

for the number of such plans that were formulated via this programme in order to demonstrate its impact on the indicator.

#### Additional Evaluation Questions

- What change can be observed in the level of preparedness and ability of local actors to prevent/limit damage caused by CB natural disasters (floods)?
- To what extent has the Programme contributed to increased resilience to CB natural disasters (floods)?
- To what extent has the Programme contributed to the fulfilment of Directive 2007/60/EC requirements?
- Are there any unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

#### **Specific objective 4: To valorize CB area cultural and natural heritage for tourist purposes**

##### Main Evaluation Questions

- What is the value of the result indicator “Annual Tourist Overnight Stays at Accommodation Establishments”? How does it compare to the baseline value (2013)?
- If an improvement is documented, to what extent has the Programme contributed to it? If no improvement is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain an updated value for the result indicator “Annual Tourist Overnight Stays at Accommodation Establishments” (published statistic). In order to document the contribution of the Programme towards this value, the evaluator will formulate a survey or use another counterfactual method (e.g. an econometric study). A sufficient sample of CB area accommodation establishments will be selected taking care to include both establishments that benefited from the programme (i.e. in the immediate area of the interventions or benefiting from horizontal actions) and establishments that did not benefit (in order to measure the “policy-off” values). Caution must be used (e.g. through inclusion of appropriate questions) to control for impacts from other similar (mainstream) programmes.

Due to the indirect nature of the benefits accrued by accommodation establishments, the evaluator will not need to control for “selection bias”.

##### Additional Evaluation Questions

- To what extent has the Programme improved the ability of local and regional stakeholders to sustainably use cultural and natural resources for tourist purposes?
- To what extent has the Programme contributed to a better preservation status of CB area natural and cultural assets?

- To what extent has the Programme contributed to increased attractiveness of cultural and natural assets for local and international tourists?
- Are there any unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

**Specific objective 5: To enhance the effectiveness of biodiversity protection activities**

Main Evaluation Questions

- What is the value of the result indicator “% of Natura Areas Reporting Excellent or Good Degree of conservation”? How does it compare to the baseline value (2015)?
- If an improvement is measured, to what extent has the Programme contributed to this improvement? If no improvement is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain an updated value for the result indicator “Entrepreneurial Business Support Environment”. The evaluator will use the Biodiversity Survey (whole or in part), which was conducted in April 2015, as the basis of its inquest methodology. A sufficient sample of CB area Natura Areas will be selected taking care to include both Natura Areas that benefited from the programme and Natura Areas that did not (in order to measure the “policy-off” values). Caution must be used (e.g. through inclusion of appropriate questions) to control for impacts from other similar (mainstream) programmes.

It would also be preferable if the evaluator can control for “selection bias”, since it is possible that Natura Areas with more active management structures are both more likely to participate in such programmes (than other Natura Areas) and also more likely to be effective in introducing improvements in biodiversity conservation.

Additional Evaluation Questions

- What change can be observed in the incidence of applying common approaches in biodiversity in the CB area?
- Has biodiversity protection effectiveness (especially in the area of aquatic eco-systems) increased in CB area due to coordinated actions?
- What improvement can be observed in the incidence of pro-active species protection actions?
- Are there any unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

**Specific objective 6: To enhance water management.**

Main Evaluation Questions

- What is the value of the result indicator “% of Characterized Surface Water Bodies in GES” in the CB area? How does it compare to the baseline value (2014)?

- If an improvement is measured, to what extent has the Programme contributed to this improvement? If no improvement is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain an updated value for the result indicator “% of Characterized Surface Water Bodies in GES” from the respective Greek and Bulgarian Ministries (published statistic). Since the condition of surface water bodies depends on many variables – some of them controlled by programme interventions and others not controlled – the evaluator will need to perform a survey or other counterfactual method on the Authorities responsible for a sample of the CB area surface water bodies.

A sufficient sample of CB area surface water bodies will be selected taking care to include both water bodies that benefited from the programme and water bodies that did not (in order to measure the “policy-off” values). Caution must be used (e.g. through inclusion of appropriate questions) to control for impacts from other similar (mainstream) programmes.

It is unlikely that the evaluator will need to account for selection bias since these Authorities usually have wider jurisdictions and cover many water bodies.

#### Additional Evaluation Questions

- What change can be observed in the incidence of applying joint surface and/or groundwater management systems in the CB area?
- Are there any unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

### **Priority Axis 3: A Better interconnected Cross-Border Area**

#### **Specific objective 7: Improve cross-border accessibility**

#### Main Evaluation Questions

- What is the value of the result indicator “Number of Operating Border Crossings” in the CB area? How does it compare to the baseline value (2014)?
- If an improvement is measured, to what extent has the Programme contributed to this improvement? If no improvement is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain an updated value for the result indicator “Number of Operating Border Crossings” from Egnatia S.A. (published statistic). Even though it is unlikely that another programme or initiative may create a new border crossing, the evaluator will also need to investigate this possibility in order to affirm Programme contribution.

#### Additional Evaluation Questions

- To what extent has the Programme contributed to better CB connectivity and better connectivity of TEN-T with “less accessible areas”?

- To what extent has the Programme contributed to the reduction of travel time? What is the contribution (current and expected) of the Programme to this improvement?
- Are there any other, unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

#### **Priority Axis 4: A Socially Inclusive Cross-Border Area**

#### **Specific objective 8: To improve access to primary and emergency health care (at isolated and deprived communities) in the CB area**

##### Main Evaluation Questions

- What are the values of the result indicators “Annual Visits to Primary HealthCare” and “Annual Visits to Secondary/Tertiary HealthCare” in the CB area and most importantly the ratio of the two indicators? How does it compare to the baseline values (2013) and most importantly to the ratio of the two baseline indicators?
- If a shift is measured from secondary/tertiary to primary care, to what extent has the Programme contributed to this improvement? If no shift is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain updated values for the result indicators “Annual Visits to Primary HealthCare” and “Annual Visits to Secondary/Tertiary HealthCare” (published statistics) from the respective Greek and Bulgarian Ministries/Health Authorities. In order to document the contribution of the Programme towards this value, the evaluator will formulate a survey or use another counterfactual method (e.g. an econometric study). A sufficient sample of CB area primary and secondary/tertiary healthcare units will be selected taking care to include both units that benefited from the programme and units that did not (in order to measure the “policy-off” values). Caution must be used (e.g. through inclusion of appropriate questions) to control for impacts from other similar (mainstream) programmes.

It would also be preferable if the evaluator can control for “selection bias”, since it is possible that healthcare units with more active management structures are both more likely to participate in such programmes (than other healthcare units) and also more likely to be effective in introducing improvements in healthcare that may affect the ratio between primary and secondary/tertiary visits.

##### Additional Evaluation Questions

- To what extent has the Programme contributed to increased capacity and effectiveness of the primary health-care system (especially in underserved CB areas) and more specifically to increased diagnostic and therapeutic procedures and increased quality and efficiency of such services?
- To what extent has the Programme contributed to increased numbers of population from vulnerable groups and marginalized communities having access to health services?
- Are there any unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

## **Specific objective 9: To expand social entrepreneurship in the CB area**

### Main Evaluation Questions

- What is the value of the result indicator “Social Enterprise Employees in the CB area”? How does it compare to the baseline value (2014)?
- If an improvement is measured, to what extent has the Programme contributed to this improvement? If no improvement is measured, what are the reasons behind it?

The evaluator will obtain an updated value for the result indicator “Social Enterprise Employees in the CB area” (published statistics) from the respective Greek and Bulgarian Authorities. In order to document the contribution of the Programme towards this value, the evaluator will formulate a survey or use another counterfactual method (e.g. an econometric study). A sufficient sample of CB area social enterprises will be selected taking care to include both enterprises that benefited from the programme and enterprises that did not (in order to measure the “policy-off” values). Caution must be used (e.g. through inclusion of appropriate questions) to control for impacts from other similar (mainstream) programmes.

It would also be preferable if the evaluator can control for “selection bias”, since it is possible that enterprises with more active management structures are both more likely to participate in such programmes (than others) and also more likely to be successful in their entrepreneurial activity.

### Additional Evaluation Questions

- To what extent has the Programme contributed to increased delivery of social services to communities in CB areas with poor socio-economic indicators (poverty, etc.)?
- Have new social enterprises been established in the CB area? Have existing ones expanded or branched-out into new geographic areas? What was the contribution of the Programme towards it?
- Are there any unintended effects (negative or positive) of the Programme in this field?

### **3.2.3. Special Evaluations**

The evaluation plan includes three special purpose evaluations, i.e. evaluations that each one focuses on a single, particular dimension of the cooperation Programme or of its implementation. These evaluations are meant as “in-depth explorations” of these dimensions.

### **3.2.4. Evaluation of the Communication dimensions of the Programme**

There are several “communication dimensions” that need to be dealt by a cooperation Programme:

- Internal communication. Internal communication is the lifeblood of any organization. It helps organizations run smoothly by establishing links between people and functions, by creating understanding and promoting knowledge sharing. Good internal communication is also needed for

Programmes and means consistent messaging by ensuring that each stakeholder involved and their staff has a common understanding of the Strategy to be implemented.

- External communication. External communication is any information an organization distributes to actors outside the organization itself. External communication focuses on spreading news and information about the organization and its activities to the public and to external stakeholders. For the organizations working with EU Programmes, good external communication ensures that clear and consistent messages reach the beneficiaries and the target groups.
- Inter-cultural communication. Cross-border areas are customarily characterized by social groups with varying cultural backgrounds. This creates additional difficulties in the mode of communication since it increases the possibility of misunderstanding while it often has to overcome potential prejudice.
- Conflict resolution and team-building. One of the main goals of a cooperation Programme is to promote territorial & social cohesion. Central to this pursuit is the resolution of potential conflicts usually born from differential motives, differential incentives, and gains vs losses. Communication actions are essential to conflict resolution.
- The message. Communication strategies also differ depending on the message or information that needs to be relayed. There are several types of information that need to be disseminated by the Programme: information about the Programme in order to attract project proposals by potential beneficiaries, technical information in order to help beneficiaries at all stages of project generation and implementation, information to target groups about project activities, information that increases the visibility of the Programme and the role of EU funds to the general population, etc.

Communication activities are not only undertaken by Programme implementing agencies but also by the projects themselves. Therefore, the evaluation needs to consider not only the Programme Communication Strategy and how effectively it has been implemented but also a sample of project communication activities. Below are some indicative evaluation questions that can be answered by the evaluation.

#### **Indicative evaluation questions**

- Has the Programme identified all communication challenges and all intended audiences (including internal audiences and “key players” in the information dissemination process)? Has it considered these challenges from all perspectives (i.e. a *peoples’* perspective, a *process* perspective and a *cultural* perspective)? What about the communication approaches used by projects?
- Has there been interaction with the intended audiences to better understand their communication needs, priorities and preferences attributable to cultural, educational and/or other variation in the CB area? (both for Programme communication and project communication)



- Has the *analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation* cycle been used in order to design and redesign the process of communication? Has it taken into account lessons learnt from previous programming periods? What about the communication approaches used by projects?
- Has the communication strategy taken into consideration the possibility of misunderstanding, misinterpretations, and potential prejudice? What measures have been taken to minimize it? (both for Programme communication and project communication)
- Has the communication strategy incorporated more “*partnership*” vs “*authority*” modes of communication?
- Have communication activities (both for Programme communication and project communication) relayed clear and understandable messages to the intended audiences? What is the opinion of the audiences themselves?
- Which communication goals have been implemented more effectively?
  - Programme/project visibility in the CB area?
  - The role of EU funds?
  - The major challenges/issues faced by people in the CB area?
  - The tangible benefits accrued by the implemented projects?
  - How to get involved in the Programme as a beneficiary?
  - How to get involved in the Programme as a strategy/evaluation partner?
  - How to participate in project activities?
  - Other?
- Have communication activities promoted understanding of cultural differences in the CB area and respect among social groups? Which Programme or project activities in particular?
- Have communication activities created/reinforced collectivism in the CB area? Which Programme or project activities in particular?
- Have communication activities resulted in conflict resolution? Which Programme or project activities in particular?

### **3.2.5. Cross-Border Added Value Evaluation**

The evaluation aims at exploring the notion of CB added value, namely the “*Value resulting from the Community assistance that is additional to that which would have been secured by national and regional authorities and the private sector*”.

#### **Indicative evaluation questions**

- Has the Programme contributed to genuinely cross-border strategies? In which thematic areas? How integrated are these strategies?

- Has the Programme contributed – and to what degree – to the incorporation of vertical and horizontal joint governance forms/schemes in the CB area? In which thematic areas? How effective are these forms of governance?
- Has the Programme promoted knowledge exchange between the two countries and joint knowledge/innovation development? In which thematic areas? Has this resulted in any tangible outcomes?
- What is the territorial added-value of the Programme? Has it incorporated and dealt effectively with territorial specificities of the CB area? Which ones (e.g. remote or mountainous areas, concentrations of underprivileged populations, minorities, etc.)? In which ways has the Programme promoted greater territorial cohesion?
- What is the “net socio-economic effect” in the CB area that could not have been achieved without a cooperation Programme?

### ***3.2.6. Evaluation of the involvement and Programme effects on final recipients (target populations)***

Typically, Programme evaluations are limited to exploring either operational aspects of the Programme, and hence focus on the programming and implementation agents, or issues related to the implementation of projects and hence focus on the beneficiaries. Since, most projects lack an “evaluation function” themselves, and very seldom follow-up on their final recipients to assess their satisfaction or to explore the benefits (and sustainability thereof) received from the project, this evaluation aims at doing just that.

Because it would be really a huge task to perform this type of evaluation on all thematic areas of the Programme, the evaluation will need to concentrate on 2-3 specific objectives at the most, and perhaps on one type of target population per objective. Also, because accurate contact information is needed from the project partners for this type of evaluation, these thematic areas and target populations need to be selected early on in the implementation of projects, so that project partners are notified in-time to keep detailed, and accurate contact records of their final recipients involved in project activities.

#### **Indicative evaluation questions**

- In which ways have target populations been involved/participated in the projects? Has this involvement/participation been decisive for project outcomes? How satisfied are project participants with their level of involvement?
- What are target populations perceptions regarding the benefits they have gained from the implementation of the projects (short-term and long-term)? Are these benefits sustainable? How much are these benefits valued by the target populations (have they changed their lives significantly or not)?

- Have the most important needs of the target population (in the thematic areas dealt by the projects in question) been addressed? Have they been addressed effectively? Are there other – equally important - target population needs that could have been addressed but were not?
- What is the opinion of the project partners on the benefits accrued by the project to the target populations? Does this opinion vary from the opinion of the target populations? Where do project partners base their opinion?
- Are project activities sustainable?