

# *STRATEGIC REPORT*

## *FM14-21*

Bulgaria

Reporting period:

01 August 2022 - 28 February 2023

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### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contracted in total were 201 projects under programmes and 4 projects under the Bilateral Fund. Of these, 25 projects were completed, 1 was terminated and 1 is to be downscaled due to forcemajeur. 56 more projects are to be contracted by the end of March or April. The major risk across programmes is the increase of prices, the delay in procurement procedures under projects and the need to downscale activities. The insufficient administrative capacity and delayed verification of expenditures under some programmes deepen the impact of this risk.

All envisaged procedures for evaluation and selection of projects were completed by March 2023. Allocation of additional funds to projects took place under Local development and Justice programmes, respective procedures are prepared and/or considered in Energy and Culture programmes. Under 3 programmes part of the available savings were allocated to projects on the reserve lists.

Bilateral cooperation was strengthened through pre-defined initiatives at national level and the exchange of experience and best practices at programme level. 2 programmes requested additional allocation from BF and 3 more are expected to do so in the coming months.

Monitoring was intensified and coordination in monitoring activities at different level and with the involvement of all stakeholders (POs, NFP, FMO, DPP and promoters) delivered results in tackling problematic issues.

Communication activities very successfully utilized different information channels and tools to create visibility and increase awareness about the grants – telling stories on the Face book page, analyzing the media monitoring results, participation in project level events. A tender procedure was held for the filming of 15 video clips – selected projects for each programme, including those with Roma focus.

The Audit Authority carried out audit of projects for all 6 programmes and 2 funds with declared expenditure for accounting year 01.07.2021 - 30.06.2022, 22 final reports were issued. The Fifth Annual Audit Report and Annual Audit Opinion were submitted to FMO.

The CA certified expenditures amounting cumulatively to 57 434 713 Euro ( 32 439 067 Euro for the period) or 33% of the allocation to programmes and transferred to the PO payments at the amount of 89 912 385 Euro (19 234 519 Euro for the period) or 55% of the allocation to programmes. Three forecasts for likely payments under the Programmes were submitted.

***Key issues for discussion:***

- Flexibility until 30 April 24 (advice, examples)
- Non-completed projects
- Bilateral – use for preparation of future programmes and initiatives

## **2. COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS AND EFFECTS OF THE GRANTS**

For Bulgaria, the year of 2022 was extremely turbulent, marked by political and economic crisis, the latter stemming from a record 2-digit inflation. In October, new snap parliamentary elections were held that did not result in a formation of a regular Government and new snap elections were called for 2 April 2023

The forecast for economic recovery and growth of over 4% did not materialise as a direct consequence of the war in Ukraine. In September 2022, Bulgaria ended up with inflation peak of 18,7% growth, compared to the same period of 2021. The slowdown of the economy continued and the budget deficit reached 2,9%. The Bulgarian banks started to increase the loans rates for the first time of 11 years in order to fight the rapidly rising inflation. At the end of the year, the first tranche under the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) was received.

The annual inflation rate is decreasing since October 2022, standing at 16,9% for the last two months of the year and 15,3% on average annual basis. The economic activity grew by 3.3% at the end of 2022. The positive trend also comes for the balance of the trade account with the exports of Bulgarian goods growing by 40% against 42% imports increase in 2022. According to the World Bank's forecast the economic activity of Bulgaria will grow by 3,3% and the inflation will stand at the rate of 8-10% for the year of 2023. The main challenges will be the

projected “flat recession” and the political instability if a regular Government will not be formed again after the parliamentary elections in April 2023.

The Grants provided tangible support to reducing economic and social disparities as the advanced implementation of projects delivered accumulated results in all areas: continued assistance to elderly people in remote areas – 636 people benefit from telecare services, the model has become part of the adopted National Strategy for long-term care; analysis of the implementation of national health policies at local level was prepared with overview of the main problems in the implementation of the national health mediation policy and 17 recommendations to overcome the difficulties and improve coordination between the central and local authorities.

The data from the Thematic reports on the situation of main vulnerable groups, produced in the framework of the NSI/FRA project will serve for planning adequate social policy measures and development of target indicators for ESIF programmes;

More than 5000 legal consultations were provided, incl. related to domestic and gender-based violence. National policies and coordination mechanism to address domestic and gender based violence were adopted;

A sustainable framework for training of magistrates in the field of human rights was approved. The Human Rights was introduced as an obligatory discipline in the Bulgarian universities.

The system for asylum and migration was improved and targeted support was provided to unaccompanied minors.

More than 60 artistic events were held including in small and remote settlements and more than 19000 people have access to theatre performances, concerts, exhibitions, festivals and other events.

Savings of energy costs and CO2 emissions and safer environment were realised in 25 municipalities;

Implementation of environment protection activities at local level as an essential tool for awareness, direct influence and change of attitudes. There is a very good territorial coverage of the projects selected under all programmes.

Bilateral relations were strengthened through a number of activities at programme level. Bilateral initiatives implemented at national level also contributed to diversifying and enriching the fields and forms of cooperation and exchange of knowledge and good models in the field of combatting antisemitism, implementation of labour law, tackling undeclared work, raising the professional qualification of expert staff.

### **3. STATUS OF PROGRAMMES**

#### **GENERAL**

All programmes have completed the outstanding procedures for evaluation and selection of projects. Thus the delays experienced in preparation of calls and evaluation procedures were overcome and funds were committed under all programme components, except for 1 pre-defined project under Energy programme.

Currently a total of 205 projects have been contracted and are under implementation. Contracting is pending for the last 56 projects approved under open calls and Small Grant Schemes.

The POs analysed the available savings and proposed options for distribution of the savings to projects on the reserve list or to provide additional funds to projects that experience problems due to rising prices.

Implementation has also gained speed that could be evidenced from: the certified costs (32 439 067 Euro for the period vs 24 995 646 Euro for the whole preceding period), payments transferred to the PO amount to 89 912 385 Euro (19 234 519 Euro for the period) or 55% of the allocation to programmes, results reported, the increasing number of publications in the media on completed projects or projects under implementation.

While there was a very good overall progress, certain deficiencies and problems with implementation of the management tasks of some POs continued to hinder the performance at programme and project level. The NFP has set up a system of monthly monitoring for the most critical programmes and projects.

## BG-JUSTICE Justice

In total 17 contracts are under implementation – 8 pre-defined projects and 9 projects under the SGS. The amount under the programme was fully contracted (in total 34 799 512 Euro). As of 5 January 2023 a modification of the programme is in force for reallocation of funds (savings from the cancelled PDP 4, the SGS and management costs) to ensure additional financing for the implementation of PDP 2 (Pilot Prison).

Three contracts are under implementation under PA 19. **Under PDP 1** the construction works are on-going for all 5 remaining sites. The main risks are related to the Open Prison hostel in Plovdiv. The main challenges are: increase in the price of construction materials, labour cost and restricted time frame (510 days for implementation). **Under PDP 2 “Pilot prison”** the contract for the construction of pilot prison and training centre was concluded on 06.12.2022. The implementation is divided into two phases - Phase 1 has an implementation period of 465 days and is financed by the NFM 2014-2021. Phase 2 has an indicative implementation period of 365 days and will be financed with national budget. A Contingency Plan was developed by the PP with different scenarios, risks and mitigation measures. The soft measures goes in parallel with the construction works.

The projects under **PA 21 Judicial System** are at advanced stage of implementation and no major risks have been identified. The projects contribute to effective implementation of the European legal framework through introduction of Human Rights Law as compulsory discipline in Bulgarian Universities, secondment of Judges to the ECtHR and the Department for execution of Judgements, sustainable judicial training in the field of fundamental rights and provision of over 5 000 legal consultations to people living below the poverty line, including from Roma community.

All conditions from the PA has been addressed – the maximum level for hard measures will remain below 70%; external verification of costs and monitoring of projects' outputs was commissioned; Use of alternative measures to imprisonment is in the focus of PDP 3; Bulgarian Justice and the Bulgarian Home Affairs programmes are both represented in the Steering committee on a bilateral project "*Working together for a Europe free from violence – ensuring Roma and Traveller women's access to justice*".

The bilateral activities at programme level encompass participation in meetings of the two synergy networks– for the penitentiary system (PA19) and for domestic violence and gender based violence (PA21).

### **BG-HOMEAFFAIRS Home Affairs**

In total 19 projects were under implementation during the reporting period – 12 pre-defined projects and 7 projects selected as a result of two open calls for proposals.

All planned open calls under the Programme were concluded. Under the *second call on asylum and migration capacities* four projects were approved. Under the open call "*Voluntary return*" no project proposals were received due to changed migration situation and impossibility to reach the final indicators. The CC agreed to transfer the savings under the unsuccessful call to the first two projects in the reserve list of the call on *asylum and migration* (reallocation within Outcome 1). The signature of the contracts is expected by March 2023. The third reserve project will be proposed for financing under the Bilateral Fund at national level.

Most of the pre-defined projects are at advanced stage of implementation. The activities under implementation vary from renovation and furnishing premises for training and study activities, storage of evidence in criminal cases, centers for accommodation of migrants, reception rooms for Roma, putting into exploitation of different types of equipment that enhance capacity, increase operability and improve cooperation between stakeholders, mobile forensics laboratories, designing of new Information systems for domestic and gender-based violence, for secured and seized properties, etc. In general promoters have notable success in signing agreements with subcontractors which is a key factor for the completion of the envisaged hard and soft measures.

One of the most significant risks is associated with shortage of funds for renovation and repair activities due to an increase of prices of construction services and materials. In some cases no offers were received or the selected contractors refused to implement the contracts that require additional market consultations. This has led to the need of amendments - to modify the project activities and reduce the scope and the respective project indicators. The PO will also consider the possibility to provide additional funds to some projects (PDP 3 and PDP 8) in line with the flexibility measures.

All conditions from the PA has been addressed related to maximum level of infrastructure, synergy with Justice Programme, external appraisal and verification of pre-defined projects. The NFP will strictly follow the implementation of the conditions related to Roma target.

Four bilateral initiatives was approved under the bilateral fund and one more is under discussion. The PO has requested the additional 100 000 Euro to ensure financing of all planned initiatives.

### **BG-LOCALDEV Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Enhanced Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups**

In total 35 contracts are under implementation – 5 PdPs and 30 selected projects. 1 project is completed (PDP6/NSI). 27 Projects under the Job Creation SGS are to be contracted by the end of March. As of 6 March 2023 a modification of the programme is in force for reallocation of funds (savings from PDP 6 and PDP 1) to ensure additional financing for 3 projects from the SGS reserve list.

The overall progress has accelerated significantly in 2022. No major risks have been identified. The time for implementation of the projects under the SGS projects is 1 year (starting from April 2023) - strict monitoring, and timely and flexible interventions on behalf of the PO are envisaged to mitigate the risk of not meeting the deadlines. Due to delays in public procurement procedures there is a risk of not achieving the indicator 'number of people received health services' under Healthcare for everyone project - new options for selecting the hospitals to provide the services in the 6 municipalities `` have been considered by MoH.

Following the flexibility options a new restricted call for proposals (Outcome 2) was launched in December 2022 with the aim to support partially the construction activities for the 4 new YC's and thus mitigating the risk resulting from the serious rise of the prices. The additional funding was approved by the selection committee in February.

*130 people from Bulgaria and 60 from the donor states (2 organisations from Iceland and 4 from Norway) participated in exchange of experience and best practices in 2022. 5 PPs visited their partners in Norway and 3 PPs visited organizations from Iceland. 27 Project promoters have found suitable donor-partners to assist them and participate in the implementation of the project activities (21 from Norway and 6 from Iceland)*

All conditions from the PA have been addressed – the level of hard measures is below 50 % (currently 34.2 % (contracted and in set in calls). The PO and the NFP have good coordination and seek synergies with other Roma inclusion relevant measures through participation in coordination meetings and regular exchange of information. In October 2022 the PO submitted the baseline for the indicator "Level of acceptance by majority population of Roma" (Outcome 3). The conditions for joint ownership of the process and results among all stakeholders, sustainability of the YC's services and of the constructed and renovated buildings are subject of continuously tracking.

### **BG-ENERGY Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency, Energy Security**

The programme is progressing towards achievement of its objectives through: 1 completed PDP; 46 projects contracted under 3 open calls and 17 projects selected and with on-going contracting under 1 SGS.

The status of the 46 projects contracted under the open procedures is as follows:

- Call 5 *Street lightening* 15 projects were completed and 9 are under implementation (2 contracted in December-February);
- Call 2 *Geothermal energy* and Call 3 *Energy efficiency in buildings* a total of 22 projects are under implementation. According to the analysis of the PO for 2 projects under Geothermal call and 14 projects under the Energy efficiency in buildings there is a high risk for non-completion within the eligibility deadline, and for 2 projects under the Geothermal call the risk is medium. 4 projects show good progress of implementation.
- SGS *Energy efficiency in industry* the evaluation and selection was finalized with the approval of 17 projects at the total amount of 2 978 956 Euro, contracting is on-going. Savings amount to 2 601 879 Euro.

The PO decided to cancel PDP 2 as no solution to the state aid issue could be found. The released funds amount to 1 235 000 Euro. The total amount of savings for the programme is estimated to be more than 4 mln. Euro.

The risks at project level are related to delays in the public procurement procedures and insufficient funds for the construction and equipment as a result of high inflation. At programme level the main risks are related to the capacity of PO, long decision-taking process, overwhelming dynamics in the energy management system.

The PO prepared a plan to address the risks: provision of additional funds to projects – the procedure is under preparation, monthly monitoring meetings – the 1<sup>st</sup> round took place in March, on-site checks, implemented restructuring of the PO monitoring team. NFP also assisted the PO.

Conditions as per the latest amended PA are being addressed. Joint events are to be held with the PO of BG *Business development* programme. PDP 2 is to be withdrawn - related condition is no longer valid.

Bilateral relations at programme level included CC meeting, consultations with DPPs, planning of joint events (with Environment and Business development) and trainings on capacity building. Bilateral cooperation at project level provides for active exchange of expertise and good practices - from the 24 projects contracted during the past year 23 are with a donor project partner.

## **BG-ENVIRONMENT Environment Protection and Climate Change**

Out of the 33 contracted projects, in the reporting period 5 projects were completed (4 under SGS marine waters and 1 under SGS Circular economy), 1 under SGS Circular economy is to be terminated at the request of the project promoter, 1 project is to be relaunched after down-scaling of activities (PDP 2 SCIRENA Black Sea) and 26 projects are at different stages of implementation.

The most serious challenge to the programme emerged as a result of the impossibility to implement PDP 2 SCIRENA Black Sea project within its approved scope as a result of the war launched by Russia in Ukraine and its implications for the Black Sea basin. The partners Vaptzarov Naval Academy and IFR could no longer sail a ship beyond a very restricted coastal zone. The promoter BSBD and the Norwegian partner IMR, in consultation with the PO, DPP and FMO agreed to downscale and restructure the project into a capacity building one with a smaller budget (500 000 Euro). Currently the revised project concept and budget are at final stage of preparation. All stakeholders coordinated their efforts to ensure the best possible utilisation of the available resources (partnership and funds) in this unpredictable situation.



The PO analysed implementation under outcomes and proposed to reallocate part of the amount released from PDP 2 to fund 4 more projects on the reserve list under open call 3 Climate. With the aim to address as fully as possible all programme outcomes and indicators and taking into account the failure to implement open call 1 (aiming to develop a methodology for difused pollution) the PO and the partners proposed to implement a bilateral initiative at programme level. A respective procedure is under preparation.

All remaining projects are progressing well, the PO monitors closely the implementation and is prepared to take corrective actions if a need arise. Results achieved and popularised include reduced marine litter in adjacent waters in 4 municipalities, educational campaigns to increase awareness and sensitivity on environmental protection, delivered equipment for cleaning of floating marine waste, upgraded waste collection points. Municipal strategies for mitigation and adaptation to climate change were assessed for 8 municipalities most vulnerable to climate change and innovative measures were identified.

Conditions of the PA were fulfilled except for p.6 (the broad sharing experience events are planned for a later stage) and p. 7 . The PO prepared a concept, in cooperation with the DPP and the PO of BG Energy to implement a series of visits and meetings dedicated to carbon capture and storage.

## **BG-CULTURE Cultural Entrepreneurship, Heritage and Cooperation**

All five calls for proposals planned under the programme were successfully closed. The contracting under the Output 1.2 - Digitisation call was completed in May 2022 with 3 contracts signed and the contracting under the Output 1.1 - Museums call was completed in July 2022 with 14 projects signed. By the end of 2022 the PO has contracted a total of 20 projects under Outcome 2 (12 contracts under Output 2.1 and 8 under Output 2.2). 18 projects were approved for financing under Outcome 3 (Roma focus) – 12 contracts were signed by end of February 2023 and the remaining 6 contracts are under preparation. By the end of 2022 the first two projects implemented under Output 2.1 have been finalised and the verification of their final reports performed.

Because of the delay in evaluation of the applications under the three outcomes and the deadline of 30 April 2024, the Project Promoters had to shorten the period of implementation under several of the projects and provide revised implementation plans. In some cases the reasons for the delays in implementation is the change of the whole management teams under the project or disagreements with the partners from the Donor States. In order to speed up the implementation, the PO will intensify the on-the-spot monitoring and provide trainings for Project Promoters.

The rise in prices is a risk mainly for the projects from Output 1.1 "Cultural heritage presented in revitalized, restored and renovated spaces". The PO has made an inquiry to all Project Promoters under Output 1.1. on potential difficulties and delays due to the rise in prices in the construction sector and is analyzing on a case-by-case basis. The PO is considering two possible options: to provide additional funds to support the projects' implementation with the savings remaining under the different outcomes or to finance reserve projects under Outcome 2 and Outcome 3.

All conditions from the PA has been addressed. The baseline values were determined by the PO and submitted to the FMO. The programme agreement was amended accordingly in December 2022; 12% of the total eligible costs aimed at improving the

situation of the Roma population – Roma organisations were consulted in the development of the Call for Proposals under Outcome 3; the maximum level of infrastructure will remain within 70%.

There is a delay in identifying bilateral activities under the programme. CC Meeting shall be organised to discuss possible initiatives.

#### 4. STATUS OF BILATERAL FUNDS

Under the **NFP activities, incl. Travel support scheme**, no applications for travel support were submitted during the reporting period.

Under “**Strategic cooperation between Bulgaria and Norway in support of Bulgaria’s international commitments to combating antisemitism and preserving Jewish heritage**” the project digital platform became operational. International Conference on Combating Antisemitism and Preserving Jewish Heritage took place in Sofia with Bulgarian and foreign experts’ participation. Hana Arendt book was translated into Bulgarian and is to be published in Spring’23. The NAP’s team was set up and prepared the first draft of the Plan. It will be presented to the wide public for discussion. Significant research projects on the Bulgarian Jewish heritage produced presentation and cultural materials. Special sections and debates on antisemitism were organized within two cultural festivals. “Ambassadors of the Initiative” seminar took place. Museum exposition on the Bulgarian Jew’s history is under preparation. A budget re-allocation was approved.

Under “**Barnahus project: Promoting multidisciplinary and interagency justice and response for child victims and witnesses of violence**” the NFP prepared Guidelines for applicants and launched the application procedure on 5 November’22. An Evaluation Committee is to be set up since 5 March’23 which is the final deadline for application. The Initiative is envisaged to be implemented by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) as a promoter, together with its long-standing partner - the Bulgarian Social Activities and Practices Institute (SAPI), via activities for capacity building. The proposed budget is EUR 202 406.

Under “**Implementation of innovative combined support measures for supporting innovation and technological development and promotion of the internationalization of SMEs**” project the Innovation Norway testified its readiness to be a partner to the Bulgarian SME Promotion Agency. The NFP initiated a meeting with the stakeholders to discuss further elaboration of the project’s scope and detailed activities. A revised concept note was prepared by the BSMEPA and provided for consideration to IN in early February’23. Once approved by the JCBF, the Initiative is expected to start in the second half of 2023.

The activities under the “**Cooperation for decent work**” project completed in December 2022. The most important outcomes are:

- Strengthen professional and organizational skills of the experts of the “General Labour Inspectorate” Executive Agency (GLI EA) and the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority (NLI), exchange of inspection practices and access to valuable professional skills.

- Promotion of decent work, including tackling undeclared work and achieving equal rights, equal pay and equal treatment of Bulgarian employees in Norway.
- Strengthen relations between the partner Labour inspection authorities.
- Plenty of information tools developed – new GLI EA website, information campaigns, information guidelines and videos, risk assessment tool to help tackling undeclared work (<https://www.gli.government.bg/bg>; <https://www.gli.government.bg/udw/>; <https://www.gli.government.bg/bg/node/11825>).
- Two important studies conducted to identify target group of Bulgarian citizens working abroad and creating “map” of undeclared work in Bulgaria.
- Eighteen trainings performed each lasting 3 days and 400 GLI EA employees trained to increase their professional qualification and their ability to carry out better quality checks.

Under the “**Cross border dialogue v.2**” project, an addendum to the Implementation Agreement No2/18.05.2021 was signed on 21.02.2023. It leads to a change in the duration of the project from 24 to 36 months, the project team and the project budget. Terms of Reference have been prepared for launching in April 2023 a tender procedure for elaboration of methodology for data visualization on Cross Border Countries Programmes websites. Public procurement procedure for the supply of part of the communication and IT equipment has been launched. The technical specification for the rest of the equipment has been prepared and the public procurement procedure is foreseen to be launched in April 2023.

Under the “**Completion and equipment of Crisis Management Center at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**” project, a study visit took place to Oslo, Norway, in November 2022. The Bulgarian representatives visited the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and acquainted with the work of their colleagues at the Norwegian Crisis Management Center. Good practises to optimise cooperation in crisis resolution were discussed. Two training seminars were held in December 2022 – „Presentation and communication skills in crises“ and „Communication and cooperation behavioural simulation“.

The cooperation in the JCBF has been operational and constructive, consultations took part both during sessions and through written procedure, the decisions taken contribute to the bilateral objectives and the allow to cover a broad range of topics and end beneficiaries – institutions, business, NGOs and citizens.

## 5. MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

### a. Management and control systems (MCS)

During the period no amendments were made in the Management and Control Systems (MCS) at national level – the last version of the Management and Control Systems is version 7 dated 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020. There are no significant changes in staffing of the national authorities involved in implementation of EEA and Norway Grants.

### b. Complaints

Three signals were received during the period:

- One signal under the Local Development Programme related to the Youth Centre in Pernik (replacement of the initially approved conceptual project). The NFP requested the expert opinion of different institutions and is currently waiting for the opinion of the Public Procurement Agency;
- One signal under the Energy Programme concerning the street lighting project in Tryavna (the infrastructure is not well-maintained). Based on NFP request, the PO performed an on-the-spot and the results were communicated to the complainant and the FMO;
- One signal under the Home Affairs Programme received through the “irregularity button” under a project implemented by the Academy of the Mol – some trainings are performed on-line before the respective project amendment. After consultation with the PO, the NFP officially replied that there is no irregularity but some expenditures will not be verified.

### **c. Irregularities**

During the period three Quarterly Irregularity Reports were submitted. Two irregularities were reported in 3Q 2022: one under Energy Programme (IR-179) and one under Culture Programme (IR-180).

The irregularities are detected by the Audit Authority. All irregularities are under management costs of the programmes - in contracts for provision of airline tickets.

The irregularities are related to infringements/deviations in public procurement procedures: criteria that are not discriminatory but still restrict access for economic operators; selection criteria that are discriminatory on the basis of unjustified national, regional or local preferences; a participant who does not meet the requirements was admitted to the stage of evaluation of the price offers; unlawful methodology for evaluations of offers and unjustified rejection of a tenderer.

The total amount of the irregularities reported through GrACE during the period is EUR 3 141,72 Euro. In total 3 irregularity cases are still open (Ir-95, IR-179 and IR-180).

### **d. Audit**

Within the period, the Audit Authority carried out the following activities: audit of projects for the fifth accounting year under all 6 programmes and 2 funds; finalization of the fifth Annual Audit Report and Annual Audit Opinion; participation in meetings and in online training, organized by the FMO. Additional information on the audit results is provided in Annex D.

Audit of the MCS for programmes Energy, Justice and Home Affairs was commissioned by the FMO with final audit reports issued in January 2023. Follow-up action plans is under preparation and will be uploaded by POs.

## **6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

### **a. Monitoring**

Monitoring activities were carried out at programme and national level in accordance with the progress in projects' implementation and the NFP assessment of risks related to the overall programme implementation. The monitoring activities included:

- **Project visits** – NFP visited the following projects to observe status or to attend events organized by the promoters and partners:
  - project: "Improvement of the capacity of police and forensic activity dealing with material evidence in pre-trial investigation process" – checking use of delivered equipment;
  - project „Cultural diversity in Haskovo“, promoter Haskovo municipality
  - project „Revita“, beneficiary the Regional History Museum, Haskovo;
  - project „Stage at the end of the city“, promoter: Drama – puppet theatre “Ivan Dimov”
  - project “The hidden treasures of the National theater – digitally accessible” – promoter National Theater, Sofia
  - project “International Cultural Cooperation for exhibiting theatre heritage”, promoter National theater
  - project “Unity in Diversity”, promoter National Library
  - project “Support for the Future”, promoter Caritas Bulgaria
  - project “Future for the kids: provision of integrated social support for unaccompanied minors and refugees”, promoter Oborishte District, Sofia Municipality
  - project “Peer Gynt Travels”, promoter Sofia Theatre
  - project “The boys sing”, promoter Sofia Boys Choir
  - project “Raising awareness of local communities in the areas with Roma population on issues related to asylum and migration”, International Migration Office
  - project “Strategic cooperation between Bulgaria and Norway in support of Bulgaria’s international commitments to combating antisemitism and preserving Jewish heritage” promoter Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
  - project “Strengthening the capacity of the competent Bulgarian authorities with regard to recover and manage criminal assets”, promoter Commission for combating corruption and confiscation of illegally acquired property

**Regular status reporting** was requested by the NFP on projects that represent particular concern or for which important decisions have to be taken without delay (reallocation of funds, downscaling, need of additional funds or changes in the project consortium). In the reporting period such information was requested and follow-up communication was held with POs and promoters for the project:

- **BG Justice: PDP 2** “Enhancing the capacity of the prison staff, building a pilot prison facility connected to a training centre and improving the rehabilitation of prisoners” – NFP communicated with the PO and project promoter on a weekly basis to ensure that the contract signed for the construction of the new prison was launched and is executed without problems;
- **Energy:** PDP 2 “System for Forecasts, Control and Management of HPP Generation and Dams Condition” - NFP communicated with the PO on a regular basis and several meetings were held to follow up on the steps taken by PO. As the only option – notification on state aid regime to the EC would go beyond the eligibility deadline, the final decision was to withdraw the project from the programme.
- **Environment:** PDP 2 SCIRENA Black Sea – NFP monitors closely the entire communication and attend the coordination meetings between the project partners and the PO aiming to downscale the project;
- **BG Local Development**

**PDP 1 Growth through activating local potential (GALOP)** – coordination meeting was held with the promoter, PO and NFP to discuss the possibilities for reallocating savings under the project to reserve projects and implementing the full scale of planned bilateral initiatives;

**PDP 4 Healthcare for everyone** – NFP participates in a series of monthly meetings for reporting the project progress. The focus of the monitoring was not only to keep eligibility deadlines but mainly to ensure that the activities will deliver properly the expected results.

- **Technical meetings** – a series of technical meetings took place in January with project promoters of all pre-defined projects under the programmes, Information was provided for the status of all public procurement procedures and for the most risky ones deadlines were set for the outstanding activities. These were followed by meetings with the PO, NFP and FMO to discuss main risks identified and future steps. In accordance with the agreed future steps additional technical meetings with held with some of the POs for follow-up.

## b. Evaluation

No evaluations have taken place in the reporting period.

## Annex E: Communication summary

### 1. Best projects

BG-BI004

The topic of combating antisemitism and preservation of Jewish heritage have been among the priorities for Bulgarian policy. The project provides the opportunity to exchange good practices and experience with Norway. The inclusion of the Cultural Institute and the Diplomatic Institute as project partners provides the promoter with opportunities for additional activities for preserving cultural heritage and telling the stories of the Bulgarian

Jews. The main activity under the project is the elaboration of a National Action Plan to Combat Anti-Semitism of the Republic of Bulgaria that is to be used as a national initiative in line with government priorities.

## BG-CULTURE-0013

The Sofia Boys Choir and the Reykjavik Boys' Choir unite their efforts for the organisation of "The Boys are Singing" international choir festival. The first edition was held in Bulgaria and the second one is expected to be held in Iceland. Joint performances and flash mobs are held during the festivals. Many foreign guest choirs take part in the organisation, including from Mexico and Czech Republic for the first festival. The target groups will include people in small towns, aiming to encourage new audiences.

## 2. Visibility of the Grants and the Donors

A tender procedure has been organized for the filming of 15 video clips – selected projects for each programme, including those with Roma focus. The filming is expected to happen during the summer of 2023. The NFP conducted a virtual training for project promoters for the eelibrary bank. More than 120 beneficiaries joined as we went through the entire process of asset publishing and the importance of doing so. Many questions were raised and the training was recorded and shared afterwards for all those who could not attend. The NFP continues the regular coordination with the PO communicators network and project event participation. A travelling exhibitions of photos is under preparation.

5 project stories have been created by the NFP for the reporting period and published in the dedicated section on our website:

<https://www.eeagrants.bg/en/stories/per-gynt-mystery>

<https://www.eeagrants.bg/en/stories/%E2%80%9Elvt-spi-tazi-noshh%E2%80%9C-redom-do-%E2%80%9Eganinata-majka%E2%80%9C,-ili-koe-sbitie-mozhe-da-sbere-na-edno-myasto-momcheshki-xorove-ot-islandiya,-meksiko,-chexiya-i-blgariya>

<https://www.eeagrants.bg/en/stories/kogato-se-razhdat-mechti,-ili-kak-mladezhi-migranti-posetixa-ofisa-na-ibm-v-sofiya>

<https://www.eeagrants.bg/en/stories/da-rabotish-bezopasno-v-chuzhbina>

## 3. Media coverage

<https://trud.bg/%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%86%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D1%8F%D1%85%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%8A%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%88%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B8-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%B2-%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B6%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%>



[D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B9/](https://banker.bg/%d1%83%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%bb%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%b8%d0%b5-%d0%b8-%d0%b1%d0%b8%d0%b7%d0%bd%d0%b5%d1%81/read/s-evrofinansirane-izgrajdame-sgradi-s-nulevoto-energiino-potreblenie/)

<https://banker.bg/%d1%83%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%bb%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%b8%d0%b5-%d0%b8-%d0%b1%d0%b8%d0%b7%d0%bd%d0%b5%d1%81/read/s-evrofinansirane-izgrajdame-sgradi-s-nulevoto-energiino-potreblenie/>

<https://perniknews.com/pernik/mladezhi-ot-oblast-pernik-byaha-na-uchebno-poseshtenie-vav-vrancha-rumania/>

<https://bnr.bg/plovdiv/post/101687820/plovdiv-moje-da-pesti-blizo-70-ot-parite-za-osvetlenie>

<https://www.plovdiv-press.bg/2022/08/09/%D0%B2%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%82-%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BE-800-%D1%85%D0%B8%D0%BB-%D0%BB%D0%B2-%D0%B2-%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%B4/281953/>

#### 4. Website and social media

Link to the National Focal Point's (EEA and Norway Grants) webpage	Total number of page views in the reporting year
<a href="https://www.eegrants.bg/en/">https://www.eegrants.bg/en/</a>	98836

	Link or account handle	Number of posts published in the reporting year	Number of followers
Facebook	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/EEANGBulgaria">https://www.facebook.com/EEANGBulgaria</a>	76	1818

#### 5. Visuals

<https://www.eealibrary.org/asset/25769/Sports%20in%20the%20Recovery%20Center%20for%20children%20with%20oncohematological%20diseases?returnTo=%2F%3FCountry%3D105%26page%3D1%26count%3D200&breadcrumbType=menu>



<https://www.eealibrary.org/asset/25588/Meeting%20the%20Roma%20community%20at%20the%20town%20of%20Harmanli?returnTo=%2F%3FCountry%3D105%26page%3D1%26count%3D200&breadcrumbType=menu>

<https://www.eealibrary.org/asset/20797/%20%20Youth%20center%20Gabrovo,%20Bulgaria,%20awarding%20the%20favorite%20teachers?returnTo=%2F%3FCountry%3D105%26page%3D3%26count%3D200&breadcrumbType=menu>

<https://www.eealibrary.org/asset/20779/Vratsa%20Game%20Night?returnTo=%2F%3FCountry%3D105%26page%3D3%26count%3D200&breadcrumbType=menu>

<https://www.eealibrary.org/asset/19857/The%20Boys%20are%20singing%20-%20international%20choir%20festival%20in%20Bulgaria?returnTo=%2F%3FCountry%3D105%26page%3D3%26count%3D200&breadcrumbType=menu>

<https://www.eealibrary.org/asset/19857/The%20Boys%20are%20singing%20-%20international%20choir%20festival%20in%20Bulgaria?returnTo=%2F%3FCountry%3D105%26page%3D3%26count%3D200&breadcrumbType=menu>

<https://www.eealibrary.org/asset/19356/Visit%20to%20the%20IBM%20Office%20in%20Sofia%20for%20unaccompanied%20minors%20refugees?returnTo=%2F%3FCountry%3D105%26page%3D4%26count%3D200&breadcrumbType=menu>