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EVALUATION PLAN FOR

OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME ENVIRONMENT 2014-2020

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List of Abbreviations

DG OPE	Directorate General Operational Programme Environment
CCU	Central Coordination Unit
CF	Cohesion Fund
CM	Council of Ministers
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIFs	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
MA	Managing Authority of Operational Programme Environment
MCS	Management and Control Systems for Operational Programme Environment 2014-2020
MoEW	Ministry of Environment and Water
NSI	National Statistical Institute
OPE	Operational Programme Environment 2014-2020
OPE MC	Operational Programme Environment 2014-2020 Monitoring Committee
PA	Partnership Agreement
PPA	Public Procurement Act
PP Department	Programming and Planning Department
Regulation 1303/2013	REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
UMIS 2020	Unified Monitoring and Information System for 2014-2020 programming period

1 | Introduction

1.1. ESSENCE OF EVALUATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD 2014-2020

The implementation of public interventions co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) in the programming period 2014-2020 aims at improving the social and economic development of the European Union (EU) member states and the prosperity of European citizens. To ensure effective management of operational programmes implemented with the financial support of ESIFs as well as to follow-up the impact of the interventions being implemented for the achievement of the European development under EUROPE 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is safeguarded by constant monitoring and carrying out of evaluation within the framework of each individual operational programme.

An essentially new point in evaluation's role in the programming period 2014-2020 is the serious emphasis laid on the need to ensure, through such evaluation, the follow-up of effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the interventions on social development, citizens' prosperity, social and economic development and the environment. While in the preceding programming period 2007-2013 the evaluation was oriented mostly towards aiding the process of management of operational programmes, in this programming period it aims to serve the new approach of the European Commission (EC), which is oriented towards the follow-up of the results of cohesion policy and accounting of the progress of implementation of the strategic development targets set.

1.2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE EVALUATION IN THE 2014-2020 PROGRAMMING PERIOD

The need of carrying out an evaluation of the implementation of the operational programmes being implemented through ESIFs and, in particular, Operational Programme Environment 2014-2020 (OPE 2014-2020) in Bulgaria, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF) as well as the general rules for that are described in the following documents:

- **Basic European legislation**

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006;

- Regulation (EU) No 1300/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the Cohesion Fund;
- Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal.
- **Basic strategic, programming and legislative documents on national level**
 - Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria;
 - Operational Programme Environment 2014-2020, approved by EC decision of 15 June 2015;
 - Council of Ministers' Decree No. 79 of 10 April 2014 on the establishment of monitoring committees of the Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria and the programmes co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2014-2020 programming period;
 - OPE 2014-2020 Ex-ante Evaluation Report and the recommendations concerning the preparation of an evaluation plan for the programme contained therein.
- **Internal rules and procedures of the Managing Authority of OPE (MA)** in relation to the fulfilment of evaluation responsibilities.
- **Applicable EC Guidance**
 - EC Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation of the Programming Period 2014-2020 of March 2014¹;
 - EC Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans of February 2015².

According to Article 54 of Regulation 1303/2013 the preparation of evaluations is set in the model for application of ESIFs in view of improving the quality of the design and implementation of the programmes as well as to assess their effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The impact of individual operational programmes must be evaluated in the light of each ESI Fund's mission to achieve the targets under the EUROPE 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, and having regard to the size of the respective programme in relation to the gross domestic product and unemployment in the programme area concerned, where appropriate.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf

² http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/evaluation_plan_guidance_en.pdf

Regulation 1303/2013 imposes upon the member states the duty of providing the financial resources necessary for carrying out the evaluations and of ensuring that the effective procedures are in place to collect the data necessary for evaluation, including data related to the common and programme-specific indicators.

1.3. MAIN TYPES OF EVALUATIONS IN THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD 2014-2020

According to Regulation 1303/2013 the cycle of programming, implementation and reporting of the operational programmes being implemented with co-financing by ESIFs is subject to the conducting of **3 main types of evaluations**:

- **Ex-ante evaluation**

According to Article 55 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 the ex-ante evaluation is carried out as an integral part of the process of preparation of each operational programme and contributes to the improvement of the quality of the design of the programme document. By means of this evaluation all key components of the programme strategy are assessed as early as at the programming stage.

OPE 2014-2020 ex-ante evaluation has been carried out during the programming process by Denkstatt Bulgaria LLC on the basis of Contract D-30-33/13 March 2013. The results of the evaluation are presented in OPE 2014-2020 Ex-Ante Evaluation Report³, which reviews and analyses the draft operational programme as of November 2014. According to the requirements of Article 55 of Regulation 1303/2013 a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of the operational programme has also been carried out within the framework of the ex-ante evaluation according to the requirements for strategic environmental assessment set out in Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council taking into account climate change mitigation needs.

- **Ex-post evaluation**

In accordance with Article 57 of Regulation 1303/2013 the ex-post evaluation is carried out by the EC or by the member states in close cooperation with the EC. The ex-post evaluation aims to follow-up the effectiveness and efficiency of the European Structural and Investment Funds and their contribution to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, taking into account the targets established in that Union strategy and in accordance with specific requirements established in the Fund-specific rules. The ex-post evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 must be carried out by 31 December 2024.

³ 2014-2020 OPE Ex-Ante Evaluation Report, November 2014.

<http://ope.moew.government.bg/bg/pages/programirane-2014-2020/18#1>

- **Evaluation during the programming period**

According to Article 56 of Regulation 1303/2013 during the programming period MA of each operational programme must ensure that evaluations, including evaluations to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact, are carried out for each programme as well as to ensure appropriate follow-up of the recommendations in each evaluation. At least once during the programming period an evaluation must be carried out to assess how support from the ESIFs has contributed to the objectives for each priority.

For an effective organization of the evaluation the relevant MA or the member state is obliged to design an evaluation plan, which can cover more than one programme. MA is also responsible for ensuring the capacity necessary for conducting an evaluation during the programming period.

All evaluations carried out during the programming period are presented and examined by the Monitoring Committee of the relevant programme and sent to the EC.

1.4. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PREPARATION OF THE EVALUATION PLAN FOR OPE 2014-2020

The Evaluation Plan for OPE 2014-2020 has been designed on the grounds of Article 56 (1) of Regulation 1303/2013. The document has been elaborated by ESTAT LLC in pursuance of Contract No. Д-34-15/7 April 2016 with subject matter: "Preparation of an Evaluation Plan for Operational Programme Environment 2014-2020". The service under the contract is financed under budget heading BG16M1OP002-6.001-0003 of priority axis 6 "Technical Assistance" of OPE 2014-2020, co-financed by the ERDF and CF.

This document should ensure the effective and efficient performance of the duties of MA in the field of the evaluation during the programming period by presenting the general framework of planned evaluations during the programming period under OPE 2014-2020. In addition to the envisaged evaluations, their thematic scope and the applicable set of methods the document describes in detail the coordination with the remaining partners in the evaluation process, the actions planned to increase the capacity of human resources engaged in the evaluation, the indicative budget and the timeframe of evaluations.

2 | Objectives, Scope and Coordination of the Evaluation Plan

2.1. MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE OPE 2014-2020 EVALUATION PLAN

The main objective of the OPE 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan is to ensure the effective planning and carrying out of quality evaluations during the programming period as well as the effective use of the results of the evaluations carried out by MA to improve the quality of implementation of OPE 2014-2020 and to follow-up the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme for the attainment of the objectives set on national and pan-European level.

The plan determines the indicative number of evaluations during the programming period under OPE 2014-2020, the thematic scope and the main matters of evaluation, the applicable evaluation methods, the internal organization of evaluation at MA and the coordination with the partners and stakeholders under OPE 2014-2020, the timeframe and the available financial and human resources necessary for the evaluation, the measures planned for increasing the capacity of MA's human resources engaged in the evaluation and the actions to ensure publicity and announcement of the results of the evaluation.

In the context of the main objective the OPE 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan sets the following **specific objectives and tasks**⁴:

- to provide a framework to properly plan impact evaluations of OPE 2014-2020 interventions and thus improve the quality of evaluations as a whole;
- to enable informed programme management of OPE 2014-2020 and management decisions on the basis of the conclusions and recommendations of evaluations;
- to ensure that evaluations provide information and data necessary for the purposes of the annual implementation and progress reports as well as for the preparation of the final report concerning the absorption of ESIFs, including for the evaluation of the progress towards the attainment of the objectives of OPE 2014-2020 and its contribution to the attainment of the goals of the EU Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
- to assist the EC in summarizing the main conclusions from evaluations in individual member states and the exchange of the respective information;
- to ensure that sufficient resources for financing and management of evaluations are available, including sufficient budget and human resources of the numbers and capacity necessary for the purposes of the evaluation during the programming period as well as that procedures to create

⁴ The specific objectives and tasks of the OPE 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan are conformed to the EC's Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans of February 2015 by building upon and extending them in view of the specific needs of OPE 2014-2020.

and collect the data necessary for carrying out evaluations are in place, including data related to the common and specific indicators for OPE 2014-2020;

- to conform the conducting of the evaluations and the follow-up of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme to the specifics in the implementation of projects under OPE 2014-2020 and the time to obtain results from the interventions being implemented;
- to ensure that maximum benefits are obtained from evaluations on the basis of carrying them out in the exact period as per the stages of announcement and implementation of individual procedures and of the programme as a whole:
- to identify the thematic scope and the main matters of the evaluation which need to be examined in order to enable, through the evaluation activities, an optimization of the quality of implementation of OPE 2014-2020 and the follow-up of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme in accordance with the requirements of the European law concerning the evaluation and needs of all stakeholders under OPE 2014-2020;
- to ensure timely identification, submission and processing of the full volume of data necessary for the evaluations' high quality;
- to reduce the administrative burden by planning the data collection and monitoring activities as per evaluation needs;
- to ensure appropriate sequence and interrelation between the processes of monitoring, evaluation and reporting as regards the implementation of OPE 2014-2020;
- to ensure the active involvement of the stakeholders in the evaluation process and promote the increase of the awareness and establishment of active dialogue and interaction among all partners in relation to the results of the evaluation;
- to ensure maximum transparency of the OPE 2014-2020 evaluation process during the programming period and to ensure the awareness of the stakeholders, the beneficiaries and the general public regarding the results and the impact of OPE 2014-2020.

2.2. SCOPE OF OPE 2014-2020 EVALUATION PLAN

The scope of OPE 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan includes all evaluations during the programming period 2014-2020 that MA plans to carry out in pursuance of its duties to carry out an evaluation during the programming period for the purposes of improvement of the quality of implementation of OPE 2014-2020 and the follow-up of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme. The document contains an indicative list of planned evaluations, which is in accordance with the requirements of the European legislation, also including the requirement

that MA should carry out, at least during the programming period, an evaluation to assess the contribution of the support under ESIFs for the attainment of the objectives under each priority.

If necessary, MA is in a position to carry out additional ad-hoc evaluations in order to meet any current needs of evaluation as may arise. Such opportunity will be used in the event that any material deviations from the pre-planned objectives and a non-performance of the indicators set are found by means of the monitoring data of the implementation of the programme, if any changes to OPE 2014-2020 are needed, or if there arise any material changes to the programme environment: considerable changes to Community priorities, the social and economic environment in Bulgaria, in national and regional priorities, etc.

The document also covers all components of the framework of the evaluation during the programming period of OPE 2014-2020, which ensure the effective planning, organization, carrying out and follow-up of evaluations during the programming period under OPE 2014-2020, including the evaluation process coordination activities with all concerned parties and ensuring the transparency and announcement of the results of the evaluation.

In view of the provision of Article 56 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 the ex-ante evaluation and the ex-post evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 as well as the ex-ante evaluation for the next programming period are not included in the scope of this Evaluation Plan.

The OPE 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan may be amended and/or updated in accordance with the needs under the implementation of the programme and subject to the procedural rules concerning the organization of the evaluation during the programming period, approved by the MA as a part of the Management and Control Systems for the implementation of OPE 2014-2020. Any amendments to the OPE 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan should be approved by the OPE 2014-2020 Monitoring Committee.

2.3. JUSTIFICATION OF THE FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION UNDER OPE

According to EC's recommendations in the Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation of the Programming Period 2014-2020 of March 2014 the evaluations planned in this plan are fully compliant with the needs of OPE 2014-2020 to carry out evaluations on programme level and on the level of individual priorities.

The focus of OPE 2014-2020 evaluation during the programming period is predetermined by the need that the evaluation should serve for the improvement of the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the programme and assess the impact of the interventions. The planned evaluations aim to serve these two main directions in the intended use of the evaluation process within the framework of the programme cycle. Thus an appropriate combination of implementation evaluations, impact evaluations and specific evaluations on priority level has

been set within the framework of the OPE Evaluation Plan. The proposed indicative list of OPE 2014-2020 evaluations, as specified in item 4.2, is in accordance with the mandatory requirements of the European legislation in the field of evaluation of ESIFs, with EC's recommendations in the relevant guidance documents and, last but not least, with the specifics of the interventions under OPE 2014-2020 and the realistic forecast concerning the time necessary for the occurrence of the results of the interventions being implemented.

In accordance with the new approach towards the implementation of ESIFs during the programming period 2014-2020 oriented towards the measurement of the effect and the evaluation of the impact of interventions, MA sets the concentration of the necessary efforts and financial and human resources in order to ensure the quality conducting of the evaluation of the impact and effects of the programme. The envisaged Evaluation of the impact of the implementation of OPE 2014-2020 is in full compliance with the requirement of Article 56 (3) on the carrying out of at least one evaluation of the impact during the programming period to assess the contribution of the programme for the attainment of the objectives under each priority.

In addition, the indicative list of evaluations puts focus also on the evaluation of specific topics on the priority axis level, which are of material importance upon the implementation of the programme, e.g. the pilot inclusion of the new priority axis 5 "Improvement of Ambient Air Quality", the effectiveness and efficiency of the models of financial support of activities under priority axis 3 "NATURA 2000 and Biodiversity", the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the applied financial instruments under the individual priorities of OPE 2014-2020, etc. Specific topics being the subject matter of each of the planned evaluations are examined in item 4.2 "List of planned evaluations of OPE 2014-2020" of this plan.

Last but not least, when determining the focus of the OPE 2014-2020 evaluation MA gives an account of the experience gained from the conducted 2007-2013 OPE evaluations and the lessons learned in view of improving the quality of evaluations in terms of their planning and subsequent effective implementation. Upon the preparation of this Evaluation Plan MA accounts for the following lessons from the performance of the evaluation in the programming period 2007-2013 that are applicable to the implementation of OPE 2014-2020:

- The period of conducting the evaluations needs to be adequately conformed to the time necessary to attain the results from the interventions being carried out. In view of the specifics of the interventions of OPE 2014-2020 in the first couple of years of the application of the programme it is inappropriate to set evaluations due to the longer period needed for the implementation of a great part of the activities and the attainment of actual results;

- It is more appropriate to plan and carry out a smaller number of evaluations but ones of better focused thematic scope as economies of scale and maximization of the results of the evaluation would be achieved;
- Improvement of the programme implementation monitoring system in order to ensure the necessary monitoring data for the purposes of evaluation and taking informed decisions.

2.4. COORDINATION UNDER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OPE EVALUATION PLAN

On national level, MA shall coordinate the preparation and the implementation of the OPE 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan and the evaluations being carried out with all stakeholders engaged in the implementation of OPE 2014-2020, by applying the following *coordination mechanism*:

- **within the OPE 2014-2020 Monitoring Committee (OPE MC) by:**
 - discussing and approving the OPE 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan and its subsequent updates/changes, also including via the informal working groups of the Committee;
 - examining the evaluations carried out of OPE 2014-2020 and making recommendations to MA in relation to the quality of evaluation of the programme and the follow-up of their implementation.
- **within the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020⁵**, coordinated by the Central Coordination Unit (CCU), Directorate “Monitoring of EU Funds” within the Council of Ministers (CM), through:
 - presentation of the OPE Evaluation Plan and the evaluations carried out;
 - exchange of good practices with respect to the evaluation of the programmes co-financed by ESIFs, among the managing authorities, CCU and the National Statistical Institute (NSI);
 - provision of information about the implementation of OPE 2014-2020 for the purposes of the evaluations of the Partnership Agreement being carried out and the contribution of ESIFs to the attainment of the objectives of EU as well as for the purposes of the evaluations carried out under the remaining operational programmes under ESIFs.

The coordination at MA level as regards the preparation and the implementation of the OPE Evaluation Plan and of the evaluations carried out under OPE 2014-2020 shall be carried out

⁵ The Joint Standing Working Group on evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020 was established by Order No. P-111/12 May 2015 of the Deputy Minister in charge of European Funds and Economic Policy on the grounds of Article 11, paragraph 7 of CM’s Organizational Rules and its administration and in relation to Article 1, paragraph 2, item 16 of Ordinance No. 70 of CM on the coordination upon management of EU funds.

based on the procedural rule described in the OPE 2014-2020 Management and Control Systems (MCS) and the Procedure Manual of Directorate General Operational Programme Environment. Detailed information about the internal rules on the organization of the evaluation process at MA is presented in items 3.1 and 3.2.1 of this document.

3 | Framework of the evaluation under OPE 2014-2020

3.1. ENSURING THE FUNCTION ON PLANNING AND CARRYING OUT OPE EVALUATION

According to Article 56 (3) of Regulation 1303/2013 MA shall bear the full responsibility for the evaluation during the programming period as it shall ensure that evaluations, including evaluations to assess effectiveness, efficiency and impact of OPE 2014-2020.

According to Article 56 (1) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 in order to ensure the quality performance of the evaluation responsibilities MA shall be obliged to design an Evaluation Plan and ensure that sufficient evaluation capacity is available. In accordance with Article 114 (1) of Regulation 1303/2013 the Evaluation Plan must be submitted to OPE MC for examination and approval no later than one year after the adoption of the operational programme by EC.

By Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 792/17 December 2013, amended by Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 364/2 June 2014 Directorate General Operational Programme Environment (formerly named “Cohesion Policy for Environment Directorate”⁶) in the structure of the specialized administration of the Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW) was appointed MA of OPE 2014-2020.

The responsibilities of DG OPE in the field of evaluation are laid down in Article 40, paragraph 2, item 16 of the Organizational Rules of MoEW⁷ (adopted by Council of Ministers’ Decree No. 274 of 20 November 2009, promulgated in *State Gazette* No. 94 of 27 November 2009, most recently amended and supplemented in *State Gazette* No. 32 of 5 May 2015, in force as from 5 May 2015), according to which DG OPE carries out the functions of a Managing Authority of Operational Programme Environment for the programming periods 2007 – 2013 and 2014 – 2020 and all duties and responsibilities thus arising according to EU and ESIFs regulations, including to organize and carry out interim and final evaluation of Operational Programme Environment and to carry out the recommendations made by them.

In accordance with the European and national legislation in force while bearing the general responsibility for carrying out the evaluation during the programming period MA shall carry out the following *specific responsibilities*:

⁶ In the period March-April 2014, the Cohesion Policy for Environment Directorate (appointed Managing Authority of OPE 2007-2013 and Managing Authority of OPE 2014-2020) and the European Union Funds for Environment Directorate (Intermediate Body for OPE 2007-2013) were restructured. As from 25 March 2014, the functions of Managing Authority of OPE 2007-2013 and OPE 2014-2020 are carried out by DG OPE as no delegation of tasks to an intermediate body has been envisaged.

⁷ Organizational Rules of MoEW:

http://www3.moew.government.bg/files/file/PNOOP/USTROJSTVEN_PRAVILNIK_na_Ministerstvoto_na_okolnata_sreda_i_vodite.pdf

- to ensure the design, concurrence with OPE MC, implementation and follow-up of the results of the implementation of the OPE Evaluation Plan;
- to update and make amendments to the OPE Evaluation Plan after concurrence with OPE MC in the event of circumstances that necessitate reconsideration of the evaluations set;
- to carry out the evaluations planned in the OPE Evaluation Plan and to ensure their quality;
- to follow-up on a current basis the need of carrying out additional ad hoc evaluations in view of the dynamics of the needs related to the OPE 2014-2020 evaluation;
- to provide financial resources for the quality implementation of the evaluation process during the programming period under Priority axis 6 “Technical Assistance” of OPE 2014-2020;
- to ensure the human resources and administrative capacity necessary for the purposes of evaluation, planning and carrying out of specialized training of the employees engaged in the OPE 2014-2020 within the framework of DG OPE’s Annual Training Plan;
- To ensure the process of collection, reporting, analysis of data necessary for the evaluation. In pursuance of its monitoring function MA must coordinate the data collection and evaluation activities with the information from monitoring/evaluation of the application of different operational programmes financed under ESIFs;
- to submit the results of the evaluations carried out to OPE MC and EC and to follow-up the carrying out of the recommendations in the evaluations, the measures taken to have them reflected and the results achieved;
- to prepare and submit to EC a report summarizing the findings of all evaluations of OPE 2014-2020 carried out during the programming period and the main final products and results of the operational programme, by 31 December 2022;
- to ensure the coordination of evaluation activities under OPE with the ones under PA and the remaining operational programmes through the participation of representatives of MA in the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020 within the CM;
- to take actions to implement recommendations made by OPE MC as regards the process of evaluation and progress reporting on the carrying out of the recommendations;
- to publish and disseminate the results of the evaluations of OPE 2014-2020.

Within the MA the specific functions and responsibilities in relation to the evaluation of the programme during the programming period shall be carried out by the *Programming and Planning Department* (PP Department) at DG OPE. A detailed description of the structure and

functions of PP Department, also including in the field of evaluation, is contained in MCS, version 1 as at 16 March 2016.

According to MCS PP Department is responsible for the activities on preparation, coordination, concurrence with other programming documents and carrying out of evaluations of the operational programme in the sector of Environment for the respective programming period of EU Cohesion Policy (the operational programme), including the Operational Programme Environment 2014-2020, subject to the principle of partnership and it plans the carrying out of procedures under the programme.

In the field of evaluation PP Department has the following specific obligations:

- to organize the designing, approval and, if necessary, the amendment of the Evaluation Plan of the operational programme;
- to nominate representatives to the commissions on acceptance of the performance of contracts for public procurement for carrying out evaluations of the operational programme;
- to analyze the recommendations in the reports on the evaluation of the operational programme and to initiate, if necessary, amendments to the programme.

According to information from the Administrative Register⁸ the total number of staff at the PP Department includes 13 permanent payroll jobs of which currently 12 are expert positions and 1 has been opened for an associate on management of European projects and programmes. The status of such type of associates is set in the structure of DG OPE and aims to ensure that additional human resources are available in view of the effective performance of MA responsibilities. The associates on management of European projects and programmes are appointed under a fixed full-time employment contract until the completion of the programme.

According to the payroll at MoEW the head and a total of 5 experts within the PP Department are directly and permanently engaged with the performance of evaluation responsibilities: 2 state experts, 1 chief expert, 1 senior expert and 1 chief associate on management of European projects and programmes. They carry out their duties in the field of evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 under a head of PP Department. According to the approved job descriptions for these positions the field of operation of the employees include the performance of OPE evaluations.

Within the DG OPE the following departments are also related to the effective performance of MA duties in the field of evaluation:

- **Coordination, Communication and Technical Assistance Department (CCTA)**

⁸ Administrative Register: <http://ar2.government.bg/ras/index.html>

According to MCS CCTA Department coordinates the performance of all administrative functions of the directorate, organizes the management of the human resources, including the carrying out of analysis for the needs of training, preparation of training plans, and assists in the implementation of training programmes, carries out the OPE information and communication activities, organizes the preparation of terms of reference, methodologies for evaluation of tenders and requirements for financial and economic position, technical capacities and/or the qualification of candidates or participants in public procurement procedures of the directorate and draft contracts funded by priority axis 6 “Technical Assistance” of OPE 2014-2020. In view of its responsibilities the CCTA Department interacts with the PP Department in relation to the preparation of terms of reference for awarding the planned evaluations of the OPE Evaluation Plan to an external contractor under the provisions of the Public Procurement Act (PPA). Planning and conducting of specialized training sessions in the field of assessment of PP Department employees engaged in the evaluation of the programme, within DG OPE’s Annual Training Plan should also be coordinated with the CCTA Department as well as the performance of the measures for disclosure of the results of evaluations among the partners, stakeholders and the general public.

- **Monitoring Department**

According to MCS the Monitoring Department carries out the activities related to the monitoring and reporting under OPE 2014-2020, carries out analysis and summarizes the information about the progress on the operational programme level, including follow-up of the performance of indicators on project, priority axis and programme level, and analyses the obtained information on a yearly basis, prepares an annual progress reports and a final report on the implementation of OPE 2014-2020. In view of its competence Monitoring Department carries out constant interaction with the PP Department in relation to obtaining the necessary monitoring data according to the implementation on all levels – project, priority axis and programme. Completeness and quality of collected data is of key importance for the performance of the planned evaluations in this OPE Evaluation Plan.

3.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS UNDER OPE 2014-2020 UNDER THE MA AND FUNCTIONS OF OTHER MAIN PARTICIPANTS

This section of the OPE Evaluation Plan presents a detail description of the main stages in the OPE 2014-2020 evaluation process carried out under the MA in close interaction with the other main participants in the process. Item 3.2.1 provides a description of the procedures in place within the MA as regards the management and coordination of the evaluation process and items 3.2.2-3.2.5 describe the role of each of the other participants in the process of OPE evaluation and the manner of interaction with MA.

3.2.1. Procedural order for management and coordination of OPE evaluation at MA

❖ Design, approval and amendment of OPE Evaluation Plan

PP Department is responsible for the design of a draft OPE Evaluation Plan for the respective programming period within 1 year after the date of adoption of the operational programme by EC or a draft for amendment of the OPE Evaluation Plan if such need arises.

The draft document is submitted for opinion to the other competent departments at DG OPE. If necessary the draft may be submitted for opinion to other stakeholders as well (CCU, the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020, ministries, etc.).

After summarising the received opinions within the process of concurrence and reflecting the necessary changes the document is submitted to the head of MA for concurrence.

The draft Evaluation Plan/draft amendment of the Evaluation Plan is submitted to OPE MC for discussion and approval.

❖ Planning and performance of OPE evaluation

MA initiates the performance of a concrete evaluation in accordance with the envisaged evaluations and schedules described in the OPE Evaluation Plan, and, in the event that additional ad hoc evaluations need to be carried out as per identified needs as instructed in EC Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans.

For the performance of the OPE Evaluation Plan and for carrying out the envisaged evaluations MA envisages that only external expertise by independent evaluators selected under the PPA and the secondary legislation on its implementation will be used (external evaluation).

The procedure of planning and performance of OPE evaluations set in the Evaluation Plan or additional ad hoc evaluations by an external contractor goes through the following **4 main stages**:

1 Planning of external evaluation of OPE, including, if necessary, ad hoc evaluation

In pursuance of the OPE Evaluation Plan and the approved schedule for the evaluations the PP Department initiates the planning of individual evaluations under OPE. Jointly with the other departments at DG OPE it determines the subject matter, the objectives and the rationale of the need of the evaluation, defines the approach, the main questions of evaluation, the methods of performance of the evaluation, the requirements with respect to the necessary data, the duration and the indicative period for carrying out the evaluation, the budget for carrying out the evaluation. The information developed about the parameters of evaluation is concurred with the director general of DG OPE within 10 working days after the submission of the final model.

PP Department provides the information necessary for the planned evaluation to the CCTA Department for preparation of terms of reference in relation to the preparation of documentation for award of public procurement contract for carrying out an OPE evaluation subject to the procedure stipulated in PPA. The public procurement procedure to award a contract for OPE evaluation to an external contractor is carried out as per *MoEW's Internal Rules on the organization, conducting and award of public procurement contracts* and subject to all statutory requirements concerning public procurement contracts in the national and European legislation.

After the procedure under the PPA is conducted a framework agreement/a contract is signed with the selected external contractor/contractors for the performance of the evaluations planned in the OPE Evaluation Plan during the entire programming period. The procedure shall be carried out in full compliance with the requirements of the PPA and the secondary legislation.

If additional needs arise in the course of implementation of OPE 2014-2020 and after carrying out a procedure under the PPA a contract will be assigned for performance of ad hoc evaluation.

2 Carrying out an external evaluation of OPE

During the performance of the public procurement contract with the independent external contractor the CCTA Department manages/administers the contract jointly with the PP Department by:

- ensuring that the information necessary for contractor's evaluation is made available;
- following up the performance of contractor's obligations under the contract;
- controlling the quality of performance of the evaluation during the entire process of its implementation.

3 Acceptance of the result of the external evaluation performed

In the term under the contract the evaluation team submits a report and a summary of the performed evaluation in Bulgarian language and in English language. The contents of the report must be in accordance with EC Guidance Documents and Guidelines in relation to carrying out evaluations of operational programmes as well as with contracting authority's requirements.

As a minimum the report of an evaluation performed must contain the following components:

- Summary in Bulgarian language and in English language containing a brief description of the evaluation methods, data sources and main conclusions for each of the evaluation questions;
- Objectives of evaluation;

- Methodology used: evaluation methods, sources of information, main questions of evaluation, samples and research tools for performance of the necessary studies;
- Analysis and evaluation of collected data and information;
- Conclusions and recommendations.

4 Dissemination of information from the external evaluation performed

After the acceptance of the performance of the contract the CCTA Department is responsible for the publication of the results of the external evaluation performed on the web site of OPE. The reports of OPE evaluation will be made available to the members of OPE MC for examination and discussion and will be submitted in summary to various seminars and work meetings related to the evaluation under the operational programmes.

All evaluations carried out are sent by MA to EC.

In accordance with Article 114 (1) of Regulation 1303/2013 MA shall prepare and submit to EC a report summarising the findings of evaluations of OPE carried out during the programming period and the main outputs and results of the operational programme by 31 December 2022.

MA must include in the annual reports of the implementation of the programme information about the progress in the implementation of the Evaluation Plan, the follow-up measures in relation to the findings of the evaluations, the participation of the partners in the evaluation of the operational programme and a summary of the findings of all evaluations of the programme submitted over the preceding financial year as well as the required information in 2017 and 2019 progress reports on the attainment of programme's objectives, including the contribution of ESIFs for the changes to the value of output indicators and the contribution of the programme to the attainment of the goals of the Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the cases where there is evidence from relevant evaluations.

In view of MA's responsibilities within the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020, information about the results from the evaluations of OPE being carried out and the progress of implementation of the OPE Evaluation Plan will be regularly provided to all members of the working group.

The exact and precise performance of the obligations of the respective officials under the aforesaid procedure shall be followed up by filling in checklists which are an integral part of the OPE Procedure Manual.

3.2.2. Functions of OPE 2014-2020 Monitoring Committee in the field of evaluation

OPE MC has been established subject to the principle of partnership laid down in Regulation 1303/2013. The composition of the OPE 2014-2020 MC in principle is stated in Article 12 of

Council of Ministers' Decree No. 79/2014. The composition of OPE 2014-2020 MC by member name is determined by Order No. РД- ОП- 4/14 January 2016 of the Minister of Environment and Water and it includes *representatives of all partners and stakeholders in relation to the implementation of OPE 2014-2020* – representatives of the national representative organizations of workers and employees, of employers, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, the regional development councils in the planning regions, the academic community, the national representative organizations of and for disabled people recognized by CM, NGOs operating in the sector of gender equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities, social inclusion and integration of marginalized groups as well as NGOs related to the financed measures under the programme, environmental organizations and relevant state institutions, including CM administration, the remaining MAs of operational programmes, ministries, agencies, and other institutions.

According to OPE MC's *Internal Operating Rules* in the field of evaluation OPE MC shall:

- examine the implementation of the programme and see to the progress reported by MA in the attainment of the objectives and priorities of OPE 2014-2020 based on the indicators defined therein, including the indicators set in the implementation framework;
- approve and see to the implementation of the OPE Evaluation Plan and examine the information about the results, conclusions and recommendations provided by MA concerning the performed evaluations of programme as well as the actions taken to carry out the recommendations.

In view of Article 49 (4) of Regulation 1303/2013 within the scope of its competence in the field of evaluation OPE MC has the right to make observations/recommendations to MA regarding implementation and quality of the evaluation of the programme and monitor the actions taken as a result of its observations/recommendations.

3.2.3. Role of external independent evaluators in the process of evaluation under OPE

All evaluations envisaged in the OPE Evaluation Plan will be carried out in the form of external services provided by qualified and independent external evaluators. The selection of external evaluators is to be carried out in accordance with the provisions of PPA and the applicable secondary legislation.

Upon the preparation of the relevant terms of reference for the award of contract for the evaluation under OPE the CCTA Department, jointly with PP Department of GD OPE, shall specify in detail the requirements for the evaluation based on the information contained in the OPE Evaluation Plan regarding the focus, thematic scope, main questions of evaluation, evaluation

methods, budget and time schedule of the evaluation and shall clearly define the responsibilities of the contractor.

For the effective organization of independent external evaluator's work on the performance of the contract for evaluation MA must require and stipulate in the respective contract the following obligations for the external evaluator:

- The evaluation must be carried out in compliance with the applicable European and national legislation and the relevant guidance documents of EC in the field of evaluation of the operational programmes;
- The evaluation report must be developed subject to the minimum requirements for the structure of the report stipulated in item 3.2.1 of this document. In the report there must be a summary of the evaluation as well as a section with the main conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation.
- An opportunity must be provided for a discussion of the draft evaluation report with the units within MA engaged in activities on evaluation and all comments made must be appropriately reflected in the report.

3.2.4. Role of the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020 in the process of OPE evaluation

The Joint Standing Working Group to the CM is an important joint formation on national level that brings together the experts of individual MAs and CCU engaged in the evaluation management process on the level of individual operational programmes and PA. The Working Group is engaged with the discussion of the developed OPE Evaluation Plan as well as all future evaluations of OPE 2014-2020. The group ensures a field for exchange of good practices with regard to the evaluation of the programmes co-financed by ESIFs, among the MAs, CCU and NSI.

3.2.5. Role of the European Commission in the process of evaluation of OPE

According to Article 56 (3) of Regulation 1303/2013 the reports of all evaluations of OPE carried out according to the Evaluation Plan shall be submitted by the MA to EC. In accordance with Article 56 (4) of Regulation 1303/2013 EC may carry out, at its own initiative, evaluations of OPE 2014-2020 during the programming period as the Commission must inform MA and sent the results of the evaluation made to MA and to OPE MC. According to Article 57 of Regulation 1303/2013 EC shall prepare an ex post evaluation report for the programme in close cooperation with the member states.

3.3. PARTICIPATION OF PARTNERS IN THE PROCESS OF EVALUATION OF OPE

The active participation of partners and stakeholders in the process of evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 shall be ensured mainly along the lines of inclusion of all relevant partners in the OPE MC as a body embodying the principle of partnership upon the implementation of the operational programmes. Representatives of industry-wide organizations, non-governmental organizations, including the ones in the field of environment, experts from scientific organizations, and representatives of CCU and of other concerned state institutions and a number of social partners take part in OPE MC. Within the scope of their responsibilities as members of OPE MC all partners and stakeholders shall have the opportunity to participate in the discussion and final approval of the OPE Evaluation Plan and in the follow-up of the implementation of the OPE Evaluation Plan, to give their opinions and comments on the reports of evaluations made, to be informed by MA of the performance of the recommendations on the evaluations and to make recommendations to MA regarding the evaluation process.

3.4. EXTERNAL SOURCE OF EXPERTISE FOR CARRYING OUT THE OPE EVALUATION

In accordance with EC's recommendations on the use of external expertise for the performance of the evaluation during the programming period, stated in the Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation for the programming period 2014-2020 of March 2014 MA plans to use independent external evaluators for the performance of all evaluations planned within the OPE Evaluation Plan. MA adopts this approach on the basis of EC's determination that it is a good practice to ensure evaluators' functional independence from the institutions engaged in programming and implementation of the operational programmes according to the requirement of Article 54 of Regulation 1303/2013. Thus, MA will be able to guarantee the quality of evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 by ensuring the necessary level of independence of evaluators so that they can make constructive criticism and carry out expert evaluation of different elements of OPE without interference and influence by the part of MA.

Details concerning the functions of the independent external evaluators are provided in item 3.2.3 of this plan.

3.5. ENSURED INTERNAL CAPACITY OF MA FOR MANAGEMENT OF EVALUATION

Human resources necessary for planning and conducting the process of evaluation under OPE 2014-2020 are clearly identified and planned in the payroll of DG OPE and in MCS. Within the PP Department of DG OPE a total of 5 experts have been appointed to directly carry out, under the head of PP Department, their functions on planning and performance of the OPE Evaluation Plan and on coordination of the process of initiation, award and performance of evaluations by external independent contractors.

It should be noted that as at the date of preparation of this Evaluation Plan the said expert positions, including experts in senior positions at the PP Department are taken by employees/experts in senior positions of long-term experience in the field of programming and evaluation of OPE. The said employees and experts in senior positions are direct participants in the process of evaluation of OPE 2007-2013. The experience in the evaluation from the preceding programming period 2007-2013 is valuable in view of the use of the “lessons learned” in the field of organization and management of the evaluation process for the purposes of the right and effective realization of the evaluation under the current programme.

3.6. TRAINING PLAN FOR HUMAN RESOURCES AT MA ENGAGED IN EVALUATION

MA is responsible for ensuring the development of the administrative capacity and human resources in view of ensuring quality management and implementation of OPE 2014-2020. In this regard MA has developed a *Plan for development of administrative capacity and human resources of DG OPE*, approved in March 2015. Appendix No. 1 to the Plan outlines specific activities aiming at increasing the capacity of employees at DG OPE. Among these activities some specific measures for development of the necessary knowledge and skills, qualification, professional and technical qualities of DG OPE team have been outlined as follows:

- To conduct focused training sessions strengthening the capacity of employees at DG OPE;
- To regularly identify the individual training needs of employees by departments at DG OPE (till the end of January in each calendar year by preparing individual schedules for training of employees);
- To conduct training in EU member states in order to exchange experience and information about the management of programmes co-financed by CF and ERDF (periodically as per the needs and ensured resources).

The total budget for increasing the administrative capacity of employees at DG OPE by conducting regular trainings in the period 2016 – 2023 amounts to BGN 3,936,000 out of which BGN 160,000 have been allocated for trainings of employees responsible for the management of evaluation.

In view of enhancing the competence of the employees at DG OPE an *Annual Training Plan of DG OPE as per Appendix No. 2 to the Plan for Development of Administrative Capacity and Human Resources of DG OPE* is developed every year. It is prepared on the basis of a periodic analysis of the needs of training for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for each position and the developed individual schedules for training of employees. The budget for implementation of each Annual Training Plan of DG OPE is determined on an annual basis taking into account the concrete needs for increasing the competencies of the employees.

Within the framework of the DG OPE's Annual Training Plans it shall be ensured that the experts from the PP Department in charge of coordination and management of the process of evaluation of OPE should be included in appropriate training, seminars and working groups to increase their knowledge and skills in the field of evaluation.

MA is committed to ensure the necessary training in order to enhance the competence of the employees of PP Department in the field of evaluation in accordance with its responsibilities under Article 56 (2) of Regulation 1303/2013.

The training of the employees of PP Department in charge of the evaluation activities shall be financed under priority axis 6 "Technical Assistance" of the programme within the framework of the envisaged costs for activities that aim to ensure the necessary support for the management and implementation of OPE 2014-2020, including the preparation, organization and conducting of training for MA employees and OPE MC members. The training in the field of evaluation shall include subjects such as planning of evaluations, management, coordination, organization and conducting of evaluations of the operational programmes, approaches and methods for evaluation of the operational programmes, preparation of quality terms of reference for selection of external contractor, etc. As the specific determination of the appropriate training in the field of evaluation is part of the process of current planning of training within the framework of the Annual Training Plans for the entire directorate DG OPE, they are not object to a detailed presentation in this OPE Evaluation Plan.

Specialized training conducted by the European Institute of Public Administration may be used for the purposes of training in the field of evaluation, and participation in international conferences on evaluation of the impact of ESIFs 2014-2020 (including ones organized by the European Evaluation Society) could be arranged as well as seminal initiatives organized in Bulgaria. The constant building of MA capacity in the field of evaluation shall also be ensured by the constant exchange of experience and good practices with other MAs within the work of the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020 as well as by means of the options to conduct peer review of the monitoring and evaluation systems built in these MAs.

3.7. STRATEGY OF USE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE RESULTS OF OPE EVALUATION

Evaluations matter only as a means of properly aiming the efforts of management and implementation of the programme, constant learning in the course of its implementation and attainment of a clear understanding of the impact of the programme. Thus it is exceptionally important that MA should ensure the efficient use of the results of the evaluation. The meaning of evaluations is to gain knowledge, experience and lessons regarding the practice of management and implementation of the programmes.

The use of the results of the evaluation is manifested in providing an actual opportunity for the conclusions and recommendations from the performed evaluations to influence the process of decision making and taking action to ensure the implementation of the operational programme and the proper and objective consideration of the actual contribution of the programme, its effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

The use of conclusions and recommendations from the performed evaluations of OPE is guaranteed by setting the actions necessary within the framework of the procedure for management and coordination of the evaluation at MA as per the MCS of 16 March 2016 in force and DG OPE's Procedure Manual.

The specific measures envisaged by MA in order to ensure the use of the results of the OPE evaluations include:

- inclusion in the terms of reference for selection of external contractor for the performance of the evaluation under OPE of a **mandatory requirement for preparation of explicit, clear and specific recommendations within the framework of the evaluation reports;**
- an explicit obligation in the job descriptions of the employees of PP Department to **prepare an Action Plan under the recommendations from each evaluation report** and to ensure the follow-up of the progress on the performance thereof;
- **presentation of the results from the evaluations, the main conclusions and recommendations before OPE MC** and reporting on the progress of implementation of the action plans under the recommendations from individual evaluations;
- **presentation of the results from the evaluations of OPE within the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020** in view of the exchange of experience and good practices with the other MAs;
- **taking the main results from the evaluations into account in the annual implementation reports** for OPE 2014-2020;
- **ensuring the announcement of the results from the evaluations under OPE to all stakeholders, including the beneficiaries under the programme and the general public** by using appropriate communication channels;
- **presentation of the reports of evaluations carried out to EC via the SFC system**, also including the part of the terms of reference that describes the evaluation budget and methodology in view of supporting the EC in the exchange of good practices and knowledge in the field of evaluation;

- **providing a summary of the findings of all evaluations of the programme to EC** as well as information about follow-up measures in relation to the findings of the evaluations in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 1303/2013.

Some important factors for ensuring the effective use of the results of evaluations, addressed in item 3.9, are ensuring the quality of evaluations and their proper planning in time so that the results (and the recommendations) be in place when they matter for making decisions on the management and implementation of OPE 2014-2020.

The application of the above mechanisms will ensure that **the results of the evaluation are used:**

- to obtain information about the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of OPE 2014-2020, the adequacy of the management mechanisms, identified problems and good practices (*“What works and what does not?”*);
- to obtain information and analysis of the impact on the implementation of OPE 2014-2020;
- to timely establish the need of changes to OPE 2014-2020;
- to ensure reliable information base for subsequent evaluations;
- to draw lessons for the next programming period;
- to develop administrative capacity in the field of evaluation and enhance the debate on the quality of the programmes being implemented with the financial support of ESIFs and their evaluations.

According to Article 54 of Regulation 1303/2013 all evaluations must be made available to the general public. The purpose of the wide dissemination of the results of evaluations is to provide access to the results of evaluations to all stakeholders, and this will substantially increase the general effect of the performance of evaluations, help better understanding of OPE 2014-2020, the results attained and the impact and the promotion and exchange of good practices upon the implementation of OPE 2014-2020, etc.

Wide announcement of the results of OPE evaluations is guaranteed by setting the necessary actions in the framework of the procedure of management and coordination of the evaluation at MA as per MCS of 16 March 2016 in force and the Procedure Manual of DG OPE. An obligation is stipulated in the procedure for CCTA Department to ensure the publication of the results of each external evaluation of OPE’s website (<http://ope.moew.government.bg>).

In order to ensure as wide an announcement of the results of evaluation as possible MA will guarantee the dissemination of the information from the evaluations among a wide range of potential users of information – from representatives of institutions engaged in the

implementation of ESIFs 2014-2020 in Bulgaria, through potential and actual beneficiaries under OPE 2014-2020 and representatives of all partners and stakeholders included in OPE MC, to the general public. To that end MA plans to use various communication channels conforming to the nature of different users of the information.

Main communication channels for dissemination of information

- Dissemination of evaluation reports by **mail or e-mail**;
- **Internet** – MA’s website (<http://ope.moew.government.bg>), the Single Information Web Portal EU Structural Funds (www.eufunds.bg) and other appropriate web pages as identified on a current basis in the course of implementation of the Evaluation Plan;
- **Media** – press releases, publications and newsletters;
- **Seminars, thematic events, work meetings**, etc. on national and international level;
- Publication of the OPE evaluation reports in EC’s **SFC system** for the purposes of their presentation to EC and exchange of experience in the field of evaluation on European level.

The applicability of the aforesaid communication channels with respect to different groups of users of the information about the results of OPE evaluations is described below for each communication channel:

❖ **Sending information by e-mail/mail**

Information with the results from the evaluation report, activities planned to reflect the recommendations from the evaluation and the follow-up of their implementation will be sent by mail and e-mail to the other departments at MA, other relevant units at MoEW structure, the members of OPE 2014-2020 MC, the members of the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020, CCU and other representative of the partners and stakeholders on national level.

❖ **Internet**

In order to ensure the maximum publicity after their final approval by MA the evaluation reports will be published on the website of OPE 2014-2020. MA will ensure an appropriate way to provide information about the actions taken in view of the performance of the recommendations from the evaluation reports on MA’s website so as to ensure as much transparency of the evaluation for the general public as possible.

❖ **Events**

After the approval of the evaluation reports by MA the main conclusions and recommendations from the evaluations may be presented in the form of presentations during thematic events,

seminars, conferences, and other appropriate forums on national and international level. Presentations will be available to the general public on the websites of the organizers of the respective events.

❖ SFC 2014

In accordance with the European requirements and recommendations all OPE evaluation reports together with the adjoining parts of the terms of reference describing the requirements for the evaluation and the planned financial resources for the implementation thereof shall be submitted to EC via the SFC system and must serve for the exchange of experience and good practices in the field of evaluation on European level.

3.8. INDICATIVE BUDGET OF OPE EVALUATION

The indicative total budget for the implementation of OPE Evaluation Plan is BGN 1,100,000.

The financial resources for carrying out the evaluation of OPE is provided by Priority Axis 6 “Technical Assistance”, by means of which the effective implementation of OPE 2014-2020 is being supported. According to the approved OPE 2014-2020 BGN 5,000,000 have been allocated under Intervention field code 122. Evaluation and studies. Following the Strategic Plan for Technical Assistance of OPE 2014-2020 a total budget of BGN 11,504,882 has been allocated under Intervention field code 122. Evaluation and studies. Within this budget it is envisaged to use resources for provision of technical assistance in collecting, compilation and analysis of information and statistical data on the programme implementation related to OPE monitoring and reporting, also in support of programming of EU funds for the period 2021-2027; preparation of opinions, tests, reports, **researches and evaluations and conducting OPE 2014-2020 evaluations in compliance with the programme Evaluation Plan.** In this regard the budget in the Evaluation Plan of OPE is the concrete budget out of the total budget under Intervention field code 122. “Evaluation and studies” that is planned to be used for financing OPE evaluations within the entire programming period.

According to EC’s new approach and requirements for evaluations in the programming period 2014-2020 the carrying out of **studies to collect data** necessary for both the performance of the evaluations and the preparation of the annual reports on the implementation of the programme shall be set as mandatory activity under each evaluation.

The indicative budget of each evaluation includes the estimated costs for:

- Performance of the relevant evaluation;
- Performance of studies and collection of data for the needs of the evaluation and for the preparation of the annual reports on the implementation of the programme;

- Other auxiliary activities necessary for the preparation of the evaluation and directly related to them (on-the-spot visits, online activities, etc.).

The indicative budget of each evaluation planned is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Indicative budget of the OPE 2014-2020 evaluation

Planned Evaluations		Budget (in BGN)
1	Evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of priority axis 5 “Improvement of Ambient Air Quality” of OPE 2014-2020	100,000
2	Evaluation of the progress of implementation of priority axes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of OPE 2014-2020	300,000
3	Evaluation of the impact of OPE 2014-2020 and the contribution of the support by ESIFs for the attainment of the specific objectives under each priority	600,000
4	Additional ad hoc evaluations	100,000
Total value (exclusive of value-added tax)		1,100,000

3.9. INDICATIVE TIME SCHEDULE FOR OPE EVALUATION

The indicative time schedule of the evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 presented in Table 2 provides an adequate, logical and balanced allocation in time of the planned evaluations of OPE until the completion of the programming period. The schedule conforms to the recommendations in EC’s Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans under which the impact evaluation must usually be planned for the end of the programming period so that the expected results can be available and at the same time so that their conclusions can be useful when making management decisions. Time planning of evaluations also takes into account the need to conform the period for conducting the last planned evaluation of OPE with the requirement that MA must submit to EC a summarizing report on the findings of all evaluations made during the programming period by 31 December 2022 at the latest.

Last but not least the indicative time schedule of OPE evaluation is conformed to the specifics in the implementation of projects under OPE 2014-2020 and the time necessary to obtain results and an actual effect of the interventions being implemented.

As a result of the aforesaid recommendations of EC regarding the planning of evaluations and the fact that the first procedures under OPE 2014-2020 were announced in late autumn of 2015, the first grant contracts under the programme were signed in early spring of 2016 and are

usually bound to long terms for performance, MA does not consider it justified to set an evaluation in the period 2017-2018 because at that stage there will not be sufficient monitoring data to enable the follow-up of the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the programme. Therefore, MA plans to carry out the first two evaluations focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation (the specific evaluation of the implementation of priority axis 5 and the progress evaluation under all other axes of OPE 2014-2020) in the year 2019. The results of them will feed evaluation data to the extended Annual Implementation Report for the year 2019 as per the requirements of Regulation 1303/2013. MA plans to carry out the mandatory evaluation of the impact of OPE 2014-2020 under all priority axes in 2022 as the results of the evaluation will be obtained early enough to be used together with the results from the preceding evaluations for the preparation of the summarizing report on the findings of evaluations carried out during the programming period, which MA must submit to EC by 31 December 2022 at the latest.

Considering the indicative nature of this schedule MA will carry out regular review and will update the time planning of the evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 in order to account for possible amendments to programme environment and new needs that occur in the field of evaluation. The review of the Evaluation Plan will be carried out by the employees at PP Department engaged in the evaluation of OPE, once per year, before the spring meeting of OPE MC. Within the framework of the review the experts of PP Department will use up-to-date information about the development of the programme and the recommendations from evaluations of OPE that have already been carried out. The possible amendments to the Evaluation Plan (adding new evaluations, merging or dropping evaluations having already been set, amendments to the thematic scope or updating the main questions for evaluation) are developed by the experts of PP Department engaged with the evaluation, the same are approved by the management of MA and are subject to mandatory approval by OPE MC further to a proposal made by the Head of MA.

Table 2 Indicative time schedule for performance of the OPE Evaluation Plan

Planned evaluations (including contract award procedure)		Time period by years and quarters																									
		2016		2017				2018				2019				2020				2021				2022			
		III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
	<i>Contract Award Procedure*</i>																										
1	Evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of priority axis 5 “Improvement of Ambient Air Quality” of OPE 2014-2020																										
2	Evaluation of the progress of implementation of priority axes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of OPE 2014-2020																										
3	Evaluation of the impact of OPE 2014-2020 and the contribution of the support by ESIFs for the attainment of the specific objectives under each priority																										
4	<i>Additional ad hoc evaluations**</i>																										

*For greater clarity the indicative time schedule also reflects the indicative period for preparation and conducting of the contract award procedure for the evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 to an external contractor by means of public procurement under the PPA for carrying out of all planned evaluations under the OPE Evaluation Plan during the entire programming period.

** Additional ad hoc evaluations which may be necessitated if additional need of evaluation arises may not be fixed in this time schedule. When conducting of such ad hoc evaluations becomes necessary they shall be awarded by means of public procurement under the PPA.

3.10. STRATEGY TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF OPE EVALUATION

It is MA's responsibility to ensure the quality of evaluation process. In order to obtain a valuable and usable outcome of each evaluation it is essential to establish a clear strategy to assure the quality of OPE 2014-2020 evaluation.

In view of ensuring the high quality of evaluation MA will organize planning and carrying out an evaluation of OPE during the programming period on the basis of the following **evaluation standards**:

- ensuring the necessary capacity for evaluation (sufficient financial and human resources);
- clear identification and allocation of responsibilities in the field of evaluation;
- good planning of the evaluation process;
- ensuring active participation of partners and stakeholders in the evaluation process;
- timeliness of evaluations: the results of evaluation should be available when they matter for making management decisions;
- ensuring transparency of the evaluation process;
- functional independence of evaluators;
- using well-established and appropriate evaluation methods;
- reliability and trustworthiness of evaluation results;
- ensuring wide dissemination of evaluation results;
- mandatory components in the structure of evaluation report: summary, objectives of evaluation, methodology, sources of information, main questions of evaluation, analysis and evaluation of collected information, conclusions and recommendations.

The above standards are mandatory and must be applied by all participants in OPE 2014-2020 evaluation process as per their role and competence within the framework of the activities on OPE evaluation. They have been conformed with EC's recommendations stated in the guidance documents on evaluation of operational programmes.

In order to ensure the quality of OPE evaluation MA will apply an **appropriate combination of internal and external measures for quality control**.

❖ Internal measures to control the quality of OPE evaluation

All **internal measures used by MA to ensure the quality of evaluation** are laid down in the DG OPE's MCS and Procedure Manual:

- **Measures for effective planning and design of evaluations** (including development of documentation for conducting public procurement procedures for selection of external independent evaluators to carry out an evaluation);
- **Measures to ensure the quality of evaluations being performed and the quality of evaluation reports;**
- Measures to ensure the quality of the **monitoring system and the data generated by it.**

The experts from PP Department engaged in the evaluation process will strictly observe the procedures for planning and performance of OPE evaluations described in the DG OPE's Procedure Manual and given in item 3.2.1 of this document. Experts carry out their duties in pursuance of the European and national statutory requirements for evaluation, methodological guidelines of EC in the field of evaluation and the PPA with respect to the organization of the award of contract for evaluation to external contractor.

When planning the design of the future evaluations and development of terms of reference for award of evaluation the experts from PP Department jointly with CCTA Department, are led by the minimum requirements for the contents of such type of documentation specified in EC guidance documents. Terms of reference will contain as a minimum the following information: general information about OPE 2014-2020 and context; intended use and target audience of evaluation; objective and scope of evaluation; main questions of evaluation; methodology of evaluation; schedule and expected results of evaluation; requirements for the number and competences of the team of evaluators; terms and conditions of performance of the procurement; estimated budget and conditions of payment; conditions on preparation of tenders for the evaluation.

Another important moment in order to ensure the quality performance of the evaluation is to include into the conditions of the terms of reference a requirement stating that the external evaluators must present an introductory report, a draft evaluation report and a final evaluation report as results of the performance of the contract. When the complexity of the planned evaluations is taken into account MA envisages also the option to set a requirement for submission of an interim report in the terms of reference being developed. This will increase MA's abilities to ensure effective and timely control on the quality of the external evaluation being carried out.

As a result in the course of performance of the awarded evaluations the public procurement documentation will also serve as a tool to follow-up the performance of the external contractor and to guarantee the quality of the evaluation reports.

The control of the quality of the evaluations being carried out by external contractors and the evaluation reports being submitted is carried out jointly by the evaluation experts from the PP Department and CCTA Department as per an established procedure according to the Procedure Manual of DG OPE.

Special checklist has been developed in the Procedure Manual of DG OPE as an illustration of the results of the control exerted during the phases of planning, performance and approval of the results of the specific evaluations. The checklist is to be used to follow-up and check the performance of the evaluations and the compliance of the contents and scope of the reports with the requirements of MA, the applicable legislation and EC guidance in the field of evaluation.

The measures for quality assurance with respect to the process of collecting and processing of monitoring data which serve to ensure the evaluation are carried out in 2 main directions: ensuring the quality of the computerized system for monitoring and establishing of useful cooperation with NSI.

Recording and storage of data relating to OPE 2014-2020, including monitoring data, which are significant for the proper performance of OPE evaluation and the exchange of information with the beneficiaries of the programme is carried out via the Unified Monitoring and Information System for 2014-2020 programming period (UMIS 2020). UMIS 2020 is built as a centralized data base installed at the Council of Ministers. UMIS 2020 has a module structure covering the implementation, monitoring, financial management and control of the operational programmes. It collects financial and statistical information for the purposes of financial management and certification of costs as well as for the purposes of monitoring, evaluation, audit and control.

In order to ensure the monitoring and evaluation with the necessary monitoring data and regarding the established need to have an adequate system to enter, store and process data, on national level for all operational programmes, as well as concretely in the evaluation reports of OPE 2007-2013, the UMIS has been developed and upgraded substantially in 2014-2020 programming period. At present the system provides the possibility to submit project proposals, interim and final implementation reports, to report baseline and target values of the result indicators, as well as to generate automatically the information necessary for the preparation of the reports on the implementation of the operational programmes, of information under projects for audit purposes, and other information. In accordance with the requirements of

Article 125(2), letters “d” and “e” of Regulation 1303/2013, MA takes the necessary measures in UMIS 2020, where applicable, in computerised form to collect, record and store in the system data on all operations being performed under OPE 2014-2020. For that purpose a “Procedure for administration and management of user accounts in the 2020 Unified Monitoring and Information System” is prepared as part of the Procedure Manual for OPE 2014-2020. At DG OPE the Monitoring department carries out the activities related to monitoring and reporting under OPE 2014-2020 and sees to the performance of the indicators on the project, priority axis and programme levels and carries out an analysis and summarizes the information about the progress on the operational programme level on an annual basis. The introduced procedures for monitoring ensure the quality of the maintained data base with monitoring data of progress.

In view of ensuring quality data for carrying out the evaluation of OPE MA also coordinates its work with NSI, where applicable.

❖ External measures to control the quality of OPE evaluation

The external measures to control the quality of OPE evaluation are implemented by controlling several levels on the side of the units, external for MA:

- accountability and control of the quality of evaluations within OPE MC with the participation of all stakeholders and partners and by using the opportunity that OPE MC can address recommendations to MA in terms of the quality of evaluations being carried out and follow up their performance;
- discussion, exchange of experience and good practices in the field of evaluation within the Joint Standing Working Group for evaluation of ESIFs 2014-2020;
- constant contact with EC on evaluation matters.

4 | Indicative list of planned evaluations

This section of the OPE Evaluation Plan presents a list of planned evaluations of OPE 2014-2020.

In view of the complex nature of the evaluation in the programming period 2014-2020, which calls for the performance of both evaluations of the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the programmes (implementation evaluation) and evaluations of the impact (impact evaluation) this section also contains information about the evaluation methods determined by MA as applicable for the purposes of carrying out the mandatory impact evaluation of OPE 2014-2020. The selected methods are presented in item 4.1 and fully conform to the methods recommended in EC's Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation in the programming period 2014-2020.

4.1. BASIC METHODS OF EVALUATION

The evaluation of the impact of OPE 2014-2020 should simultaneously answer two questions of the evaluation:

- *Is there any result of the implementation of the interventions at all? What works and what does not? (questions typical for counterfactual impact evaluation);*
- *Why do interventions have impact and how does it happen? (questions typical for impact evaluations based on theory).*

In view of the need that the impact evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 should cover both types of questions MA will require from external evaluators to use **triangulation of methods of impact evaluation**.

In the triangulation approach at least two methods of evaluation are used in the framework of the evaluation in order to attain a high level of trustworthiness of the conclusions and deductions. In the case of triangulation of the evaluation methods a widest range of sources of quantitative and qualitative information, which can be analysed and compared at the same time so that one can draw valid conclusions for all questions of the evaluation, is used. The necessary information is obtained by means of various methods such as quantitative studies to obtain primary quantitative data, use of secondary statistical data, focus groups, in-depth interviews, etc.

For the purposes of triangulation upon the impact evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 the external evaluators will be required as a minimum to combine the following 2 methods of evaluation while conforming to the specifics of OPE 2014-2020 and the supported interventions:

- **Counterfactual methods of impact evaluation by the “difference-in-differences” evaluation approach**

This type of methods serves to clarify the question to what extent the obtained result is due to the intervention implemented. To that end the method is usually based on the comparative study of two groups (main and control), which have similar characteristics – for example beneficiaries under a certain intervention and a control group of persons with similar characteristics who have not been an object of support. Then the data of the two groups are compared by a given indicator. The “net” effect of the intervention is reached at by calculating the difference in differences between the two groups. The method yields results for impacts which are more trustworthy compared to the ones obtained only by means of comparisons between two groups or between two periods. This type of methods base their conclusions from the evaluation entirely on quantitative data and are therefore more widely applicable in interventions covering a wide range of beneficiaries and make it possible to collect valid data based on a sample from a comparatively big general aggregate.

- **Theory-based evaluation methods**

This type of methods relies on the so-called theory of change and aim to determine whether the intervention has been implemented as planned and whether it has produced the expected effect and impact. They build upon and enrich the impact by going beyond the predominantly quantitative measurement of the “net” effect of investments, which is typical for the counterfactual methods of evaluation. Evaluations based on theory build theoretical models and aim to penetrate deep into the interventions being implemented in order to find the answer of the questions “Why?” and “How?” the interventions being implemented impact the social and economic life. The results of such type of evaluations form a history/narrative of a kind of the impact of the intervention instead of determining by means of quantitative data what the situation would be like had the intervention not been implemented. Usually the information about the application of these methods is gathered not only by means of quantitative studies but also by application of various qualitative methods – desk research, examination of documents, in-depth interviews and focus groups, description of case studies, etc.

4.2. LIST OF PLANNED EVALUATIONS OF OPE 2014-2020

In accordance with EC’s recommendations in the Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans the proposed list describes the following parameters for each evaluation: 1/subject of evaluation; 2/subject matter and rationale, including objectives, context, basic approach (evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation/impact evaluation), main questions of

evaluation; 3/ evaluation methods; 4/ data necessary for the application of the methods and the approaches ensuring their availability; 5/ duration and estimated start date; 6/ indicative budget.

The subjects, activities and schedule of the planned evaluations have been conformed to:

- EC's requirements and guidance on evaluation in the programming period 2014-2020, on the preparation of annual reports for implementation which must be submitted in 2017, 2019 and for submission of a report summarizing the findings of the evaluations carried out during the programming period and the main outputs and results of the operational programme by 31 December 2022.
- The recommendations from OPE 2014-2020 Ex-Ante Evaluation Report;
- The lessons and lessons learned from the 2007-2013 OPE evaluations carried out (time restrictions when conducting public procurement procedures and acceptance of the products of evaluations, planning of too many current evaluations);

Upon the development of the terms of reference for selection of contractor for the evaluation of OPE 2014-2020 the main questions for evaluation under each of the planned evaluations will be adapted and specified in further details in view of the attainment of the objectives of the evaluation.

4.2.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of priority axis 5
 “Improvement of Ambient Air Quality” of OPE 2014-2020

Subject of evaluation	Evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of priority axis 5 “Improvement of Ambient Air Quality” of OPE 2014-2020
Subject matter and rationale of the focus of evaluation	<p>Priority axis 5 of OPE 2014-2020 outlines an essentially new priority in the design of OPE 2014-2020. It aims to reduce pollution of ambient air by decreasing the quantities of PM₁₀/NO_x (specific objective of the axis). It is the only priority axis of OPE 2014-2020 under which it has been agreed that the determination of the baseline value and the target value of the result indicators will be carried out after the approval of OPE by the end of 2016 according to an adopted action plan. The first procedures under priority axis 5 are planned to be announced in the third/fourth quarter of 2016. In view of the said specifics of the axis and its pilot introduction in the design of the programme MA envisages the performance of specific evaluation which will focus entirely on the establishment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the process of implementation of the announced procedures under axis 5 in view of the timely outlining of possible corrective actions for the optimization of the process as well as to follow up the progress in the attainment of the targets set under this priority as at 2019.</p> <p>Evaluation type: implementation evaluation</p>
Main questions of evaluation	<p>The evaluation will investigate but will not be limited to the following main questions of evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the progress in the attainment of the objectives under priority axis 5 of OPE 2014-2020 as at mid-2019? What is the implementation of axis 5 with respect to financial data, general and specific result indicators and the quantities of target values? What are the changes to the values of the result indicators and the milestones as at mid-2019? • To what extent does the strategy under priority axis 5 correspond to the actual situation in the Air sector? Is a change to the strategy necessary and, if yes, what are the grounds for that? Are the existing procedures and interventions being implemented effective for the attainment of the objectives set under axis 5? Are there critical factors which have negative impact on the implementation and the effectiveness of the interventions under axis 5?

- To what extent are the procedures developed and the rules on conducting the procedures under axis 5 sufficiently clear and simplified for potential beneficiaries? How clear and appropriate are the criteria introduced for evaluation of project proposals? Are corrective actions necessary to the procedures and the order for implementation of the interventions under axis 5?
- What are the most common mistakes made by the candidates in the process of applying and in the process of implementation of approved projects under axis 5? Which are the opportunities for optimization of procedures for application, implementation and reporting of projects under axis 5?
- What are the quality and the effectiveness of the evaluation of project proposals under the procedures for provision of grants under axis 5?
- Is the system for collection of data about the indicators under axis 5 effective and functional in view of the regular implementation progress reporting?
- What is the efficiency of the interventions being carried out under axis 5 as at mid-2019?
- What is the level of implementation of the financial instruments under axis 5 as at mid-2019 in case that in the course of implementation of the priority axis the Ex-ante evaluation of financial instruments is updated and financial instruments become applicable for axis 5? Are they adequate compared to the needs within the framework of axis 5? What are the main difficulties in using financial instruments? Any recommendations for improvements?
- What are the conclusions and the recommendations from the examination of the system for provision of grants under axis 5? How do the procedures announced for provision of grants under axis 5 of OPE contribute to the attainment of the objectives of the axis? What is the correspondence of the announced procedures for provision of grants to the attainment of the objectives of the axis? What are the conclusions and the recommendations for optimization of the guidelines for application, the instructions to the beneficiaries and other documents developed by MA?
- What is the financial implementation under axis 5 of OPE? What is the

	absorption level of the funds under axis 5 and what are the needs for improvement of the absorption process? Is any reallocation of funds between the priority axes/by years necessary in relation to the application of axis 5 and, if yes, please identify the reasons for that?
Evaluation methods	<p>The evaluation of the implementation will be carried out by combining the following research methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk research for gathering and analysis of secondary information; • Quantitative studies for gathering primary data by means of inquiries, including online inquiries, among stakeholders (beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries, etc.); • Qualitative studies by means of focus groups, panels of experts, in-depth interviews with MA and others, institutional partners, members of OPE MC, beneficiaries, etc.; • Cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness analysis for the purposes of evaluation of the efficiency of implementation of priority axis 5 of OPE 2014-2020.
Sources of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the implementation of axis 5 of OPE 2014-2020 provided by MA/ MoEW, including data about axis 5 from the annual reports on the implementation of the programme until 2018, also including all other relevant documents; • Information from progress reports under the approved projects under axis 5 of OPE 2014-2020 submitted by the beneficiaries; • Data from UMIS 2020 about priority axis 5 of OPE 2014-2020; • Data from NSI and EUROSTAT in relation to the quality of ambient air on national and European levels; • Primary data from quantitative and qualitative studies.
Time scope of evaluation⁹	June 2015 – June 2019
Duration	6 months
Indicative start date	15 February 2019
Estimated budget	BGN 100,000

⁹ MA binds the start of the planned evaluations with the date of adoption of OPE 2014 – 2020 by the EC - 15 June 2015.

4.2.2. Evaluation of the progress of implementation of priority axes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of OPE 2014-2020

Subject of evaluation	Evaluation of the progress of implementation of priority axes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of OPE 2014-2020
Subject matter and rationale of the focus of evaluation	<p>The subject matter of evaluation focuses on the performance of overall evaluation of the progress in the implementation of the programme under all priority axes save for axis 5 (covered by the specific evaluation under item 4.2.1 of the Evaluation Plan). The evaluation will analyse and assess the period from the start of the programme to the mid-2019 by examining the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions under OPE 2014-2020, the compliance of the achieved interim results of the implementation under all covered priority axes with the objectives and priorities of the programme, will make an evaluation of the progress towards the attainment of the expected impact, an evaluation of the functionality and adequacy of the Management and Control Systems – programming, assessment of project proposals, financial management and control, monitoring, evaluation and reporting/accounting, implementation of communication plan, application of horizontal policies. The evaluation must also assess the level of implementation of the programme, including the financial implementation and make proposals/recommendations for improvement of MA procedures and systems.</p> <p>Evaluation type: implementation evaluation</p>
Main questions of evaluation	<p>The evaluation will investigate but will not be limited to the following main questions of evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the progress in the attainment of the objectives and priorities of the programme as at mid-2019? What is the implementation of the programme and of its priorities with respect to the financial data, general and specific result indicators and the quantities of target values? What are the changes to the values of the result indicators and the milestones as at mid-2019? • To what extent does the strategy of OPE 2014-2020 correspond to the actual situation in the sectors supported by the programme? Is a change to the strategy necessary and, if yes, what are the grounds for that? Are the existing priorities and interventions effective for implementation of the objectives set by OPE? Are there critical factors which have negative

impact on the implementation and the effectiveness of OPE?

- Are the forms of support applied under the individual priority axes of OPE relevant to the specific needs of the supported sectors and beneficiaries? Special focus of the evaluation on the forms of support applied under priority axis 3, their adequacy and effectiveness? Deducing proposals for improvement.
- Which are the procedures the potential beneficiaries are most interested in? Are there changes to the needs of the beneficiaries and what are they?
- How effectively do the Management and Control Systems under OPE 2014-2020 function?
- What are the quality and the effectiveness of the evaluation of project proposals under the procedures for provision of grants?
- What are the most common mistakes in applying for provision of grants as well as upon the implementation of projects? What are the most common risk factors for the implementation of types of operation?
- Is the system for collection of data about the OPE indicators effective and functional in view of the regular implementation progress reporting?
- What is the efficiency of the interventions being carried out under OPE as at mid-2019?
- What is the implementation of the financial instruments under priority axes 1 and 2 of OPE 2014-2020 as at mid-2019 and are they adequate compared to the needs within the framework of the individual priority axes of OPE 2014-2020? What are the main difficulties in using financial instruments? Any recommendations for improvements?
- What are the conclusions and the recommendations from the examination of the system for provision of grants? How do the procedures announced for provision of grants contribute to the attainment of the objectives of the programme? What is the correspondence of the announced procedures for provision of grants to the attainment of the objectives of the programme? What are the conclusions and the recommendations for optimization of the guidelines for application, the instructions to the beneficiaries and other documents developed by MA?
- What is the financial implementation of OPE as at mid-2019? What is the absorption level of the funds under OPE and what are the needs for improvement of the absorption process? Is any reallocation of funds

	between the priority axes/by years necessary and, if yes, please identify the reasons for that?
Evaluation methods	<p>The evaluation of the implementation will be carried out by combining the following research methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk research for gathering and analysis of secondary information; • Quantitative studies for gathering primary data by means of inquiries, including online inquiries, among stakeholders (beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries, control groups not covered by the interventions under OPE for the purposes of counterfactual evaluation, etc.); • Qualitative studies by means of focus groups, panels of experts, in-depth interviews with MA and others, institutional partners, members of OPE MC, beneficiaries, etc.; • Cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness analysis for the purposes of evaluation of the efficiency of interventions under axes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of OPE 2014-2020.
Sources of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the implementation of OPE 2014-2020 provided by MA, including the annual reports on the implementation of the programme and all other relevant documents; • Information from progress reports under the approved projects under axes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 submitted by the beneficiaries; • Data from UMIS 2020 about implementation of projects under axes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of OPE 2014-2020; • Data from NSI and EUROSTAT; • Primary data from quantitative and qualitative studies.
Time scope of evaluation	June 2015 – September 2019
Duration	8 months
Indicative start date	15 February 2019
Estimated budget	BGN 300,000

4.2.3. Evaluation of the impact of OPE 2014-2020 and the contribution of the support by ESIFs to the attainment of the specific objectives under each priority of the programme

Subject of evaluation	Evaluation of the impact of OPE 2014-2020 and the contribution of the support by ESIFs to the attainment of the specific objectives under each priority
Subject matter and rationale of the focus of evaluation	<p>The evaluation aims to establish the contribution of OPE 2014-2020 to the attainment of specific objectives of each investment priority under each priority axis of the programme as well as the impact of OPE as a whole for the environmental protection and conservation and enhancement of the effective use of resources. The evaluation will cover all priority axes and will focus on the evaluation of all specific objectives of OPE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Protection and improvement of water resources status; ● Improvement of the water bodies status assessment; ● Reducing the amount of waste going to landfills; ● Improving the conservation status of species and habitats within NATURA 2000 network; ● Increasing the flood protection and the preparedness of the population for an adequate response to floods; ● Increase the protection of the population from landslides; ● Reducing ambient air pollution by lowering the quantities of PM₁₀/NO_x; ● Strengthening the administrative capacity of the responsible structures in order to effectively and efficiently implement the activities related to programming, management, monitoring, evaluation and control of OPE; ● Raising the public awareness about the programme and the ESIFs contribution and ensuring publicity and information for all identified target groups; ● Strengthening the capacity of OPE beneficiaries for the successful implementation of projects under the programme. <p>Evaluation type: impact evaluation.</p>
Main questions of evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the effectiveness of interventions under OPE 2014-2020 considered as a ratio of set objectives and results achieved? What is the difference between the expected and achieved actual results? To what extent have the planned values of the result indicators under OPE been achieved? ● What is the efficiency of the interventions under OPE 2014-2020 seen as

a proportion of invested resources and results achieved?

- What is the sustainability of the interventions under OPE 2014-2020 seen as a proportion of identified needs and results achieved?
- What is the contribution of the support of ESIFs for the attainment of the objectives under each priority of OPE? To what extent have the objectives set for each priority been achieved? What are the reasons for the failure to fulfil the goals, if identified? Are there any external factors influencing the performance, which are they and how do they influence (positively/negatively)? What measures are necessary to limit the negative influence of external factors? Were the objectives set realistic? In case that they were not realistic – what would the objectives be (lower or higher)?
- What is the impact of the implementation of OPE on the protection and conservation of the environment and the enhancement of the effective use of the resources in Bulgaria under each priority of the programme?
- What is the contribution of the support by ESIFs through OPE to the attainment of the objectives of Europe 2020 Strategy, of PA and other relevant national and European strategic documents in the field of improvement, protection and recovery of the environment?
- What is the contribution of the support by ESIFs through OPE to the attainment of the objectives of horizontal principles, which are addressed in the programme – sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, gender equality?
- What are the main lessons in terms of design of interventions and the Management and Control Systems? What improvements are needed in view of the improvement of OPE implementation process and reducing the administrative burden for the beneficiaries?
- What is the impact of the implementation of the financial instruments under OPE 2014-2020? What are the external factors influencing the implementation of financial instruments under OPE 2014-2020? What is the influence (positive/negative) and to what extent?
- Which are the identified unplanned effects (positive and negative) of the interventions of OPE? What is the achieved integrated net effect of OPE 2014-2020 implementation?
- Which are the examples for good or poor practices which can be deduced as a result of the implementation of OPE 2014-2020? Which are

	<p>the successful projects implemented with the financial support of OPE 2014-2020?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations for the following programming period.
Evaluation methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation approach by combining at least the following impact evaluation methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory-based evaluation; • Counterfactual evaluation by using control groups (only where applicable as per the specifics of interventions under OPE 2014-2020); • Methods for gathering information for the purposes of evaluation; • Desk research for gathering and analysis of secondary information; • Quantitative studies for gathering primary data by means of inquiries, including online inquiries, among stakeholders (beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries, control groups not covered by the interventions under OPE for the purposes of counterfactual evaluation, etc.); • Qualitative studies by means of focus groups, panels of experts, in-depth interviews with MA and others, institutional partners, members of OPE MC, beneficiaries, etc.; • Case studies; • On-the-spot visits during project implementation; • Cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness analysis for the purposes of evaluation of the efficiency of OPE 2014-2020.
Sources of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the implementation of OPE 2014-2020 provided by MA, including the annual reports on the implementation of the programme and all other relevant documents; • Information from technical reports on the implementation of individual projects prepared by the beneficiaries of OPE 2014-2020; • Data from UMIS 2020; • Data from NSI and EUROSTAT; • Primary data from quantitative and qualitative studies.
Time scope of evaluation	June 2015 – 2020
Duration	8 months
Indicative start date	10 January 2022
Estimated budget	BGN 600,000