

# Evaluation Plan

Transnational Cooperation Programme Interreg V-B

Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020

CCI 2014TC16M4TN003

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Section I: General Context.....	4
1. Programme Context .....	4
2. Regulatory Context .....	5
Section II: Objectives, Coverage and Coordination.....	6
1. Role and Objectives of the Evaluation Plan .....	6
2. Coverage .....	6
Geographical coverage.....	6
Funds and field coverage .....	6
Time coverage .....	7
3. Coordination .....	7
Section III: Evaluation Framework.....	8
1. Responsible bodies.....	8
2. Evaluation process .....	8
3. Involvement of partners .....	9
4. Evaluation expertise.....	9
5. Training activities .....	10
6. Communication policy .....	10
7. Quality Management Strategy.....	11
Section IV: Planned evaluations .....	12
1. Timeline.....	12
2. Description of the planned evaluations.....	13
2.1 Implementation evaluations.....	13
2.2 Impact evaluations.....	15
3. Data requirements .....	21
4. Methods .....	22
5. Estimated Budget.....	22

## Introduction

The new programming period 2014-2020 framed by the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) represents a radical change for cooperation Programmes and for the corresponding evaluation exercise.

Up to now regulatory requirements focused on early funds' commitment and spending. Evaluations were accordingly focused on implementation and management issues in order to secure EU funds' absorption and avoid decommitment. The new generation of the cooperation Programmes is result-oriented emphasizing on outcomes and achievements rather than on implementation activities. For the evaluation exercise in particular, what changes is the compulsory requirement to produce an evaluation plan early in the programming period (no later than one year after the adoption of the Programme) and conduct at least once during the Programme life-time an evaluation to assess how support from the ESI Funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority [CPR Article 56 (3)].

Therefore, conduct an implementation activities' evaluation is no longer enough. An impact evaluation on the Programme's achievements has been made compulsory and shall be carried out on the basis of an evaluation plan.

Consequently, in the new programming period 2014-2020, the evaluation exercise embeds a qualitative leap both, at content and process levels:

- At content level an impact evaluation shall be conducted alongside with the implementation evaluation and
- At process level, evaluations are no longer an ad hoc activity but shall be carried out according to a proper evaluation plan. The evaluation cycle of the Programme is henceforward tightly anchored to the Programme life cycle.

The present evaluation plan has been drafted according to the new regulatory requirements and comprises four (4) sections following the Guidance Document on Evaluation Plans produced by the European Commission.

## Section I: General Context

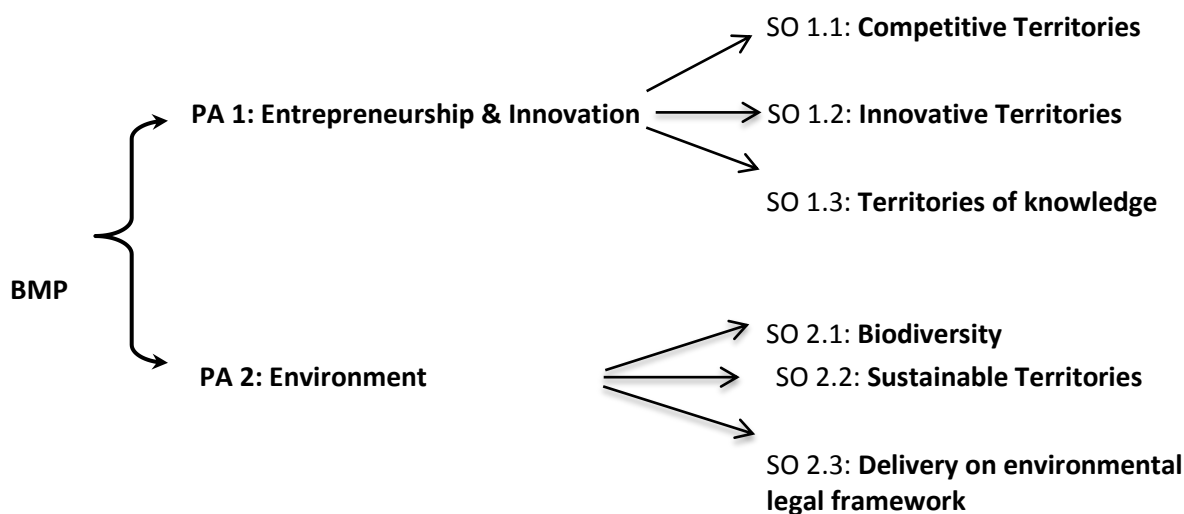
### 1. Programme Context

The INTERREG Balkan–Mediterranean 2014–2020 Programme (BMP) is a newly established transnational cooperation Programme (TNCP) deriving from both, the strong will of the Balkan-Mediterranean participating countries to promote cooperation in the area and the split of the “South East Europe 2007-2013”. The BMP brings together five (5) countries: three (3) EU member states and two (2) candidate countries:

- a) EU member states:
  - ✓ Bulgaria
  - ✓ Cyprus
  - ✓ Greece
- b) Candidate countries:
  - ✓ Albania
  - ✓ The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

It is the first time ever that the European cooperation addresses the Balkan Peninsula and Eastern Mediterranean Sea together, in a joint effort across maritime and terrestrial borders to contribute to the EU 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Therefore, the **overall strategic goal** of the BMP is to contribute to the long-term development of the Balkan-Mediterranean area.

Result orientation and thematic concentration of the 2014-2020 programming period accommodate Programmes’ focus on a few objectives in order to maximise their impact. Accordingly, the BMP is structured upon two (2) Priority Axes (PA) promoting entrepreneurship & innovation and environment respectively. Each PA is *geared to the corresponding EU action plan for entrepreneurship and environment*, thus securing links and policy objectives’ articulation between the transnational and the EU levels. Each PA is further analysed in three (3) Specific Objectives (SO) to better tackle specific challenges. The BMP **policy tree** is presented below:



The BMP is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with 28.330.108,00 Euros and the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) fund with 5.126.138,00 Euros. The BMP **total budget** including national contribution is 39.727.654,00 Euros for the entire 2014-2020 period. The table below displays the BMP funding sources (amounts in Euros):

<b>EU support (ERDF + IPA)</b>	<b>National counterpart</b>	<b>Total BMP funding</b>
33.456.246,00	6.271.408,00	<b>39.727.654,00</b>

## 2. Regulatory Context

The present evaluation plan has been developed in compliance with provisions of the following regulations:

- ✓ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013 (CPR, Articles 50, 54, 56, 57 and 114),
- ✓ Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of 17 December 2013 (ETC Regulation, Article 14(4)(a),
- ✓ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the ESI Funds (Article 16 on the involvement of partners in the evaluation of Programmes) and the
- ✓ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 447/2014 of 2 May 2014 establishing IPA II (Article 41 (3) on evaluation).

Furthermore, the BMP evaluation plan takes into account the guidance documents on monitoring and evaluation<sup>1</sup> and on evaluation plans<sup>2</sup> produced by the European Commission.

<sup>1</sup> Guidance document on monitoring and evaluation: ERDF and Cohesion fund (CF) – Concepts and recommendations, March 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Guidance document on evaluation plans, February 2015.

## Section II: Objectives, Coverage and Coordination

### 1. Role and Objectives of the Evaluation Plan

To support the BMP strategic goal a set of evaluations will be carried out to secure the Programme's effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

The purpose of the evaluation plan is to organise the overall evaluation process that will be conducted by the BMP and provide evidence on the Programme contribution to the EU 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Therefore, the evaluation plan is a strategic document that sets out the BMP evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period, proportionate to its financial allocation.

It also represents a management tool for the BMP implementation and its main role is to facilitate Programme management and policy decisions to secure the BMP objectives. Evaluations' reports, findings and subsequent material will then be available on time to inform the annual reporting exercise of the Managing Authority and support the BMP results' orientation policy.

The tasks (objectives) of the evaluation plan are set by the European Commission<sup>3</sup> and are the following:

- ✓ Improve the quality of evaluations through proper planning;
- ✓ Enable informed Programme management and policy decisions on the basis of the evaluation findings;
- ✓ Provide a framework for impact evaluations;
- ✓ Ensure that evaluations provide inputs for annual implementation and progress reports;
- ✓ Facilitate the findings' synthesis by the European Commission and the exchange of available evidence;
- ✓ Ensure that resources for funding and managing the evaluations are appropriate.

### 2. Coverage

#### Geographical coverage

The geographic area covered by the BMP evaluation plan coincides with the BMP area covering the five (5) participating countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

#### Funds and field coverage

As the BMP is funded by the ERDF and IPA funds the evaluation plan covers both financial instruments.

Furthermore, as stated in the Article 54(1) of the CPR the fields to be covered by the evaluations are the following:

- ✓ Implementation evaluation (on efficiency and effectiveness of the Programme) and
- ✓ Impact evaluations (results achieved by the Programme)

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission – Guidance document on evaluation plans, February 2015, p. 4.

### Time coverage

The BMP evaluation plan ranges from 2016 until 2023 when the final implementation report will be submitted to the European Commission.

## 3. Coordination

In view of widening the overall evaluation perspective and avoiding duplication, the BMP will promote coordination with other EU Programmes and in particular with nationally implemented ESI funds (mainstream Programmes) as well as with other INTERREG and EU funded Programmes covering the same cooperation area.

At national level in Greece, hosting country of the BMP, coordination is foreseen with the Hellenic national authority responsible for strategic planning and coordination on evaluation issues (EYSSA) performed among others, with the "Evaluation Network": a nationwide platform for guidance, coordination and information exchange throughout all phases of the evaluation cycle. Thus, at national level, the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Programmes participates, through 'Unit A', in the coordination process developed within the above mentioned Evaluation Network of NSRF 2014-2020 Programmes in order to ensure smooth communication and dissemination of information, instructions and guidelines and adjust them accordingly to each specific ETC Programme requirements. Moreover, the aforementioned 'Unit A' as competent unit on evaluation issues, participates in the Evaluation Network for INTERREG 2014-2020 Programmes coordinated by INTERACT and the subsequent electronic platform. Within this coordination activity Unit A investigates specific needs and elaborates an annual training plan on evaluation topics and where necessary also coordinates with national competent services and authorities.

Within this framework, the BMP MA will promote exchanges and share information with all BMP bodies and authorities.

Where possible, synergies will be sought with relevant macro-regional strategies to further enrich and streamline the evaluation results.

## Section III: Evaluation Framework

### 1. Responsible bodies

The evaluation function requires clearly defined responsibility for the bodies involved and for every phase of the BMP evaluation cycle.

The **Monitoring Committee (MC)** is responsible for the examination and approval of the evaluation plan and any amendment [CPR, Article 110(2)(c)]. It reviews at least once a year the progress made in implementing the evaluation plan and examines the follow up given to the eventual evaluations' findings [CPR, Article 110(1)(b)].

Through the evaluation plan approval, the MC takes a stand on the expected results and their timing, as well as on any amendments that might arise from evaluation needs. Therefore, the MC has a steering and decisive role with regard to the smooth development of both, the evaluation plan itself and the BMP results sought.

In compliance with the Rules of Procedure (RoP) of the BMP, the **European Commission** has a consultancy role and therefore can advise the MC at all stages of the evaluation process.

The **Managing Authority (MA)** assisted by the **Joint Secretariat (JS)** is responsible for designing, delivering and monitoring the evaluation plan. Within this framework the BMP MA/JS is taking care of the following tasks:

- ✓ draw-up the evaluation plan and submit it to the MC for approval no later than a year after the adoption of the operational Programme [CPR, Article 114(1)];
- ✓ design and monitor the tendering procedures for the external evaluations (manage procurements and contracts, supervise the planned external evaluations, track progress and assure appropriate follow-up of the findings, including within the annual implementation reports);
- ✓ quality control of the outsourced evaluation activity;
- ✓ submission of the evaluation reports to the MC;
- ✓ liaising with the bodies responsible for the evaluation process and organise the necessary meetings;
- ✓ coordinate the overall BMP evaluation activity with other INTERREG and mainstream Programmes of the cooperation area; within this framework the MA/JS is the key liaison point with major stakeholders in relation to the evaluation process;
- ✓ transmit the evaluation plan and its annexes, as well as of all evaluations reports to the European Commission through SFC<sup>4</sup>;
- ✓ implement the communication strategy for the evaluation plan and for all relevant evaluation reports.

Shall any additional bodies (working groups, evaluation steering group, etc.) be set-up by the BMP MC, their respective responsibilities will be laid down in due course.

### 2. Evaluation process

According to Article 114(1) of the CPR *an evaluation plan shall be drawn up by the Managing Authority and shall be submitted to the Monitoring Committee no later than a year after the adoption of the operational Programme*. Furthermore, the Managing Authority, as responsible

<sup>4</sup> The Structural Funds Common database.



body for designing and delivering the evaluation plan, also leads the evaluation process. The MA presents the evaluation plan to the Monitoring Committee for approval, while the Monitoring Committee examines and approves it together with any amendment including where either is part of a common evaluation plan pursuant to CPR Article 114(1) of the CPR [CPR, Article 110(2)(c)].

As the evaluation plan is not restrictive<sup>5</sup>, systematic reviews supporting eventual *ad hoc* evaluations may arise. The evaluation plan shall be updated accordingly, to incorporate the newly emerging evaluation needs.

If deemed necessary, the BMP Monitoring Committee could decide to set-up *working groups* or an *evaluation steering group* to deal with the implementation of the evaluation activity.

The follow-up and status of the evaluation plan will be scrutinised at least once a year and where relevant, an updated version will be presented at the Monitoring Committee. The review of the evaluation plan should be combined with the approval of the annual implementation report (AIR) in which progress made in implementing the evaluation plan will be reported. Any follow-up measures of evaluation findings will also be reported to the Monitoring Committee.

Following the Monitoring Committee approval of each version of the evaluation plan, the Managing Authority will submit the plan and related material to the European Commission through the SFC system. Information on the evaluation plan will be published on the BMP website.

### **3. Involvement of partners**

In compliance to the principle of partnership, the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of ESI Funds, the BMP promotes the involvement of relevant partners and stakeholders within the framework of the Monitoring Committee meetings and/or within the framework of specific working groups (if such groups are established by the Monitoring Committee).

Within the aforementioned framework, the involved partners shall dully examine the progress made in the implementation of the evaluation plan and advice accordingly. They shall also be consulted on the report(s) summarising the findings of evaluations due by 31 December 2022.

Involvement of partners at national level shall be ensured by the partner states, according to Article 5(2) of the CPR. Representations of the partners involved shall be balanced at all levels to avoid discrimination and opinion bias.

### **4. Evaluation expertise**

According to Article 54(3) of the CPR, evaluations shall be carried out by internal or external experts that are functionally independent of the authorities responsible for the Programme implementation. Within that framework external experts, selected through tendering procedure, will carry out the planned evaluations in line with the BMP eligible expenditures

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission – Guidance document on evaluation plans, February 2015, p. 6

and public procurement applicable rules. These evaluations will be commissioned, monitored and supervised by the BMP MA/JS.

External evaluations' planning is an integrated part of the BMP evaluation plan. They will be designed during the planning phase of the evaluation cycle, while specific requirements will be set up in the tendering documentation and the Terms of Reference (ToR) in particular. Although there are no specific requirements regarding ToR in the regulations governing the EU Cohesion Policy, guidance provided by the European Commission will be used, together with BMP MA experience on public procurements and evaluations.

However, external expertise will not be the sole evaluation source, as significant experience lies internally, within the involved BMP bodies and authorities. Within this framework the BMP participating countries will be invited to assign at least one person to deal with the evaluation process and provide the MA with observation and comments on the evaluation related documents and reports. Therefore, for an efficient use of all available human and financial resources allocated to the evaluation planning, a mixed approach of both internal and external expertise will be implemented, compared to the full externalization of all evaluation tasks. This mixed approach will also guarantee the BMP ownership of the evaluation activity.

## **5. Training activities**

Training activities organised by INTERACT (working group on Evaluation) will be exploit with a pre-estimated cost of 5.000, Euros for the evaluation responsible bodies' participation. Further training that can support the evaluation process for the MA/JS and Monitoring Committee representatives may be organised if deemed necessary.

## **6. Communication policy**

With regard to the BMP communication policy and transparency, the evaluations' results will be made public, while relevant reports will be communicated to the interested authorities following MC approval. The evaluation plan and all evaluations' reports and related material will be transmitted to the European Commission through the SFC system.

In line with CPR Article 54(4) information on the evaluation plan as well as on the evaluation reports will be published on the BMP website.

Beyond the aforementioned regulatory requirements, the BMP intend to use the evaluation outcomes as a tool to improve implementation proceedings both, at Programme and project level. As accountability on invested funds is not the sole dimension of the evaluation process, emphasis will be placed on the knowledge and learning dimension of the evaluation process.

At Programme level, the evaluation outcomes will be used to improve policy making as well as to inform the next programming period operational Programmes' development.

At project level, communicating evaluations' results is essential for raising awareness on the European cooperation added value. Dissemination of the achieved results among end users and decision makers also increases viability and transferability towards other sectors and/or regions. BMP will actively promote the evaluations' outcomes and findings through different communication and dissemination channels, organising activities such as thematic workshops for beneficiaries, policy makers and other stakeholders. If deemed necessary, the use of

evaluations' outcomes will start during the course of the evaluation exercise, since feed-back from the evaluator to beneficiaries and commissioners can enhance the quality of the evaluation process.

Whenever relevant, the use of social media could be considered. However, targeting a wide audience including future readers, shall request non-technical narratives to convey the main evaluation outcomes more easily. Such narrative may be produced in collaboration with the external evaluator.

## **7. Quality Management Strategy**

Qualitative management lies with optimal resources' management, including time management. To secure quality of the BMP evaluations sufficient time will be foreseen to plan and procure the evaluations. Specific criteria will be drafted in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the selection of the external evaluation experts. They will relate to competencies and expertise in evaluation of Cohesion policy and ETC Programmes, in particular.

The ToR is a key document in the evaluation process as it defines all aspects of the required evaluation. Ensuring a high quality evaluation depends on how accurate and well specified the ToR are since they stand not only for the selection of the external expert on a competitive basis but also for the contract to be signed between the contracting authority and the selected expert. Therefore they will be developed during the planning phase of the evaluation process and will follow the guidance provided by the European Commission.

Within this framework, evaluators will be required to use a sound methodology (EVALSED or equivalent) in the performance of their tasks. They will also be required to produce inception, interim and final reports on the evaluations carried out. MA/JS will be responsible for quality control of the outsourced evaluation activities. The MA/JS will provide the primary data related to both the Programme and the approved projects' implementation as they extracted by the BMP database . The external experts shall complete data collection through desk research, literature reviews, surveys, interviews, case study analysis, benchmarking, etc.

For those cases and for the implementation evaluation in particular, where the MA/JS provide main data sources, the external evaluators shall review and eventually validate the Programme implementation approach and proceedings.

The MC will be regularly informed of progress on evaluation activities and will receive the evaluation reports together with all related material and annexes.

## Section IV: Planned evaluations

### 1. Timeline

Planning of the evaluations requires a time-balance compromise between sufficient data layers and the need for timely evidence on generated results. Thus, timing is a crucial factor for a realistic and pragmatic plan. To capture performance, evaluations shall be shaped according to the Programme implementation phase: they shall be scheduled as late as possible to enable data availability and as early as possible to allow the findings to feed into the policy process.

Bearing in mind the BMP launching date, size and scope as well as the need for sufficient physical progress to secure critical-mass data, no evaluations are planned before 2018. Consequently, the progress reporting exercise on both, the evaluation plan itself and the follow-up given to the evaluations' outcomes and findings will start in 2019. Furthermore, according to the guidance document on the evaluation plans provided by the European Commission, all information related to the evaluations planned beyond a three (3) year period should be regarded as indicative .

Within this framework the time schedule for the BMP planned evaluations goes from the ToR elaboration till the approval and submission of the evaluation reports to the European Commission, according to articles 50 and 52 of the CPR, as presented below:

<b>Evaluation timing (S = semester)</b>	<b>Evaluation type</b>	<b>Annual Reporting</b>
From S2: 2018 to S2: 2019	Mid-term external evaluation on: 1) Implementation and 2) Impact	Annual Implementation Report (AIR) 2019
From S2: 2021 to S2: 2022	Update external evaluation on: 1) Implementation and 2) Impact	Annual Implementation Report (AIR) 2022

For a new Programme, addressing for the first time ever European cooperation between the Balkan Peninsula and Eastern Mediterranean, the mid-term evaluation is a key milestone for the BMP uptake on the ground. Consequently, emphasis will be placed on the mid-term evaluation outcomes to further adjust the Programme's structure and objectives.

According to the proposed timing a full evaluation package will be conducted at mid-term (2018/2019) of the BMP lifecycle to assess both, the Programme implementation proceedings and the results sought by each BMP Specific Objective. The mid-term external evaluation on implementation shall report on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme management system and communication strategy.

On the other hand, the mid-term impact evaluation shall provide sufficient evidence on the BMP results sought by each Specific Objective and assess respective Programme performance

in relation to the intended change and in particular in relation to the EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the cooperation area .

A similar evaluation package will be updated in the final implementation phase (2021/2022) of the BMP Programme. The main goal of both update evaluations is to examine appropriate follow-up of the eventual findings and whether or not mid-term recommendations have been taken into account. Furthermore, they have to conclude on the BMP concrete achievements. For the updated impact evaluation in particular, the challenge will be to assess and distinguish the BMP intervention mechanism from other factors focusing on similar result (such as other EU co-financed Programmes, political or socioeconomic developments, etc.).

The tendering procedure of the two above-mentioned evaluation types will be done jointly, constituting into one single evaluation contract to be performed in a coherent and continuous manner at each phase: one mid-term tendering procedure and one final phase tendering procedure.

As far as the annual reporting activity is concerned results, findings and first lessons learned of the mid-term evaluation activity will feed the Annual Implementation Report (AIR) of 2019, while all final evaluation outcomes will be reported in the Annual Implementation Report (AIR) of 2022.

Therefore, the proposed planning takes into consideration the need to feed the report on the evaluations results due by 31 December 2022. The main purpose of this report is to support the ex post evaluation that is under the responsibility of the European Commission. Furthermore, the proposed planning takes also into consideration the ex-ante evaluation needs for the development of the next programming period transnational cooperation Programme in the area, beyond 2020.

## 2. Description of the planned evaluations

As planned above, two (2) main types of external evaluations will be carried out, at mid-term and final implementation phase of the BMP:

- ✓ implementation evaluations and
- ✓ impact evaluations.

However, the evaluation plan is not restrictive: additional evaluation needs may occur during the Programme lifetime and the BMP MA may suggest conducting *ad hoc* evaluations, if deemed necessary.

### 2.1 Implementation evaluations

The implementation evaluation covers three (3) interconnected strands related to the Programme implementation proceedings and in particular:

- ✓ the BMP management system;
- ✓ the BMP physical and financial implementation;
- ✓ the BMP communication strategy.

### **Rationale**

The main goal of the planned mid-term evaluation is to assess effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the Programme management and implementation strategy.

Within this framework, the overall Programme management settings as well as the decision making process, will be assessed, including the project generation tools and procedures (from the call for proposals to contracting and projects' monitoring). Mid-term assessment of the operational and day-to-day functioning mechanisms is important in order to improve the Programme delivery. Milestones set in the Programme performance framework for 2018 shall be assessed accordingly.

The communication strategy it will be also subject to the mid-term evaluation appraisal in order to assess the BMP awareness among potential beneficiaries. Furthermore, the local actors' motivation and involvement is an important element to measure the BMP momentum and ownership level in the cooperation area.

An update of all three (3) strands of the implementation evaluation will be undertaken at the final phase of the Programme lifecycle (S2: 2021 to S1: 2022) as described in the timeline paragraph.

### **Guiding Evaluation Questions**

Bearing in mind the scope of the aforementioned implementation evaluation, a set of guiding questions is presented below in relation to the overall Programme implementation effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. Therefore, the focus placed covers the following evaluation criteria:

- ▶▶ The criterion of *effectiveness* refers to the Programme implementation pace: is the Programme on track to reach its objectives and targets set?
- ▶▶ The criterion of *efficiency* refers to the optimal use of the Programme allocated resources (human and financial) in relation to the outputs and results sought: how proportionate and realistic is the "inputs – outputs" balance?
- ▶▶ The criterion of *relevance* refers to the Programme structure and topics targeted: are the selected intervention fields pertinent (relevant) in relation to the current territorial needs?

However, the questions listed below are indicative and not exhaustive. They will be further developed and specified during the tendering procedure for the selection of the external experts to be assigned with the evaluation exercise.

### **Effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme management system**

- ✓ Is the overall management and control system effective and efficient? Are there any bottlenecks or factors hindering smooth Programme implementation?
- ✓ Are the project generation proceedings efficient? And in particular:
  - Does the call for proposal tools (Programme manual, application guide) enable potential beneficiaries to prepare well written applications? Are they sufficiently supported in their attempt to set up cooperation schemes?
  - Are the projects' assessment, selection and contracting mechanisms efficient? What can be improved and/or accelerated?
  - Is the projects' monitoring system effective and efficient? What are the major difficulties faced by the beneficiaries? And what measures should be taken to overcome these difficulties?
  - Are the actions taken to reduce the administrative burden enough? Did the use of simplified cost option proved to be efficient?

- ✓ Is the mid-term implementation progress in line with the Programme performance indicators' milestone for 2018? Is there any decommitment risk to be expected?
- ✓ Are the available management resources (human and financial) adequate and efficient? Is the Technical Assistance (TA) budget effectively and efficiency used? Is the volume of the TA budget sufficient to ensure effective and efficient Programme management?

#### ***Effectiveness of the Programme stakeholders***

- ✓ Did the Programme succeeded to effectively involve its stakeholders and policy relevant actors, in particular?
- ✓ Did the Programme succeeded to involve accurate and relevant stakeholders with regard to the objectives set?
- ✓ Is the right representation balance of relevant stakeholders involved in the Programme decision making process and bodies?

#### ***Programme relevance***

- ✓ How efficient is the Programme design and overall structure in relation to the territorial needs?
- ✓ Does the Programme effectively address untapped cooperation potential?
- ✓ Are there more stringent and uncovered needs that could be tackled?

#### ***Communication strategy***

- ✓ Is there sufficient awareness from targeted beneficiaries on the BMP cooperation opportunities?
- ✓ How is the Programme perceived by target groups and the general public?
- ✓ Have the Programme bodies been efficient in ensuring a well-functioning communication flow in the Programme cooperation area?
- ✓ Have the Programme communication measures reached the relevant target groups efficiently?
- ✓ How transparent and clear are the Programme proceedings?
- ✓ Has the Programme raised awareness about its activities and achievements?
- ✓ Are the resources allocated to the communication strategy efficient?

## **2.2 Impact evaluations**

Results are at the core of the ESIF Programmes. They are routed in the intervention logic and their measurable dimension is captured by the Programme results' indicators. The contribution of the Programme to these results must be assessed by impact evaluations covering each priority axis . Within this framework, the Programme impacts shall also be assessed in relation to the targets set by the EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth [CPR Article 54(1)].

### ***Rationale***

Bearing in mind the aforementioned regulatory requirements the main goals of the impact evaluations is twofold:

- 1) To asses the impact itself, at both, the Programme cooperation area and at EU level (contribution to the EU 2020 strategy)

## 2) To assess the mechanisms producing the impact.

Furthermore, the impact evaluation serves both evaluation dimensions: lessons-learning and accountability.

Accordingly, the impact evaluation shall not only capture the BMP results, but also to distinguish them from other results generated/produced by other interventions, external and irrelevant to the BMP. To do so, the impact evaluation shall describe, analyse and assess the BMP mechanisms leading to the BMP expected results. For a newly established cooperation Programme this information is of major importance as to understand how interventions funded by the BMP function. Without this knowledge on the BMP specific causal mechanism, it will be impossible to improve the interventions.

Starting from the intervention logic of the Programme the impact evaluation shall map out the causal chain of anticipated effects (from inputs to outcomes and results) and test the underlying assumptions. The intervention logic is an important starting point as it states what the Programme want to change (theory of change) and articulate the theory leading to this change. Therefore, the rationale behind the impact evaluation is to assess if the Programme theory of change as conveyed by the intervention logic, actually works and leads to the anticipated change as measured by the result indicators. To be relevant, these indicators need to be embedded into a clear and well-articulated Programme theory. On the other hand, looking at the continuing relevance of the Programme objectives against a changing context it is also important.

Within this framework the impact evaluation shall establish a link between the observed changes (measured through projects' monitoring) and the anticipated ones, based on the aforementioned chain of effects (measured by target and milestone values set).

### *Approach and methodology*

Although there are different approaches linking interventions with outcomes, BMP promotes the *theory based impact evaluation* following the European Commission guidance.

Theory based evaluations are viewed as particularly relevant for policy makers since they explain *why* an intervention works -or not- in a given context and in an evolving regional policy context in particular. They consider the theory behind the Programme (the theory of change expressed by the intervention logic) and assess whether it has been implemented according to that theory, evaluating also the Programme contribution to observed effects. Consequently, the theory-based approach follows each step of the intervention logic identifying causal links and mechanism of change in order to answer the questions *why* and *how* an intervention works. This approach mainly produces a qualitative estimate of the impacts<sup>6</sup>.

The *counterfactual* approach is not considered suitable for the BMP context, as it does not *per se* explain why a given intervention makes a difference. The core element of a counterfactual impact evaluation is to compare two (2) groups/areas and to assess the changes in the group/area with the intervention and in the group/area without the intervention. However, the establishment of randomized and statistically significant comparison groups goes far beyond the BMP scope, timeframe and budget.

Furthermore, using the theory-based approach avoids the so-called '*black box*' impact evaluations that report on a finding, but with no indication as to why the intervention generates or not this finding. While answering the *why* question requires looking along the results chain.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission – Guidance document on evaluation plans, February 2015, p. 9.



### *Necessary data*

Apart from the general data requirements (see paragraph 3 below) and whatever the methodological approach followed, evaluations capturing the impacts of priorities will require micro-data on supported entities and individual participants. Such data will indeed be established by the BMP database and in compliance with CPR Article 125(2) (d) and Annex XII to record and store in computerized form data on each operation including data on individual participants. Therefore the primary source for the impact evaluations will be provided by the approved projects through their regular reporting exercise (progress reports and final reports). In this respect, the reports' templates will be designed as far as possible to support the BMP objectives and subsequent evaluations' requirements. Beneficiaries will be accordingly instructed to regularly collect and report data concerning both the output and result indicators of the BMP. Within this framework the project beneficiaries will keep detailed lists of all end-users. Furthermore, the projects' reports may include additional indicators related to the each project specific content allowing for additional qualitative information and evidence above the one requested by the BMP indicators. Further micro-data can be gathered at project-partner level by combining, whenever possible, geography and sector related data. All information shall be available in agreed predefined forms and templates securing not only aggregation and homogeneity but also consistency of the methodology used.

While some types of impact evaluations may need additional data coming from external sources, the BMP funded projects will provide the main source of information the result indicators' monitoring as well as for a more in-depth understanding of the achieved changes.

### *Guiding Evaluation Questions*

The impact evaluation covers two (2) priority axes of the BMP and their respective specific objectives (SO):

- ▶▶ Priority Axis 1: Entrepreneurship & Innovation and
- ▶▶ Priority Axis 2: Environment

According to the above described rationale, the following principles shall be considered to guide the impact evaluation of each priority axis:

- ✓ *Identifying changes*: what are the observed changes in relation to the BMP results sought?
- ✓ *Evaluating impacts*: to what extent the observed changes can be attributed to the BMP interventions?
- ✓ *Understanding the impact mechanisms*: which are the mechanisms established by the BMP and how they operate in order to deliver the observed results and impact?

Within this framework a set of indicative evaluation questions are presented below covering both, the overall Programme structure and the specific objectives of the two (2) abovementioned priority axes. Detailed evaluation question and the exact topics to be tackled will be further developed in the respective ToR.

### **Overall Programme structure**

- ✓ How pertinent is the intervention logic of the Programme?
- ✓ Is the chain of anticipated effects (inputs – outputs – results) realistically set in order for the results to be effectively generated?
- ✓ What is the progress achieved so far with respect to the results targeted by each specific objective?
- ✓ Are there any gaps between what has been achieved and the target values set by the Programme?

- ✓ To what extent the achieved progress can be attributed to the BMP intervention?
- ✓ Did the Programme contributed to wider European policy objectives and to the EU 2020 strategy in particular?

***Compliance with the horizontal principles<sup>7</sup> and the strategic environmental assessment***

- ✓ Are the horizontal principles sufficiently taken into account during the applications' assessment process?
- ✓ Do the funded projects comply with the horizontal principles and with the criteria of the strategic environmental assessment?
- ✓ Do the climate change mitigation and adaptation issues have been taken into account?
- ✓ Have the indicative amounts for climate change interventions been used as scheduled?
- ✓ The climate change related interventions, have produced the expected results?
- ✓ How much of the observed change in relation to the EU horizontal principles can be attributed to the BMP intervention?
- ✓ Is there a need for additional and/or different environmental indicators?

**Priority Axis 1: Entrepreneurship & Innovation**

***Specific Objective 1.1: Competitive Territories:*** *stimulating business performance and extroversion through transnational linkages, clusters and networks.* The SO deals with traditional business activity aiming to improve competitiveness and traditional business standards through networking and openness. Bearing in mind that the BMP does not directly fund SMEs, the evaluation exercise shall focus on the result of the specific services and support delivered through the approved projects. Lists on the end-user businesses shall be exploited together with the approved projects' deliverables, outputs and results to assess the BMP contribution with regard to SMEs competitiveness.

The main evaluation method and tools to be used are described in paragraph 4 below. However additional evaluation methodology and tools can be used to better tackle the BMP performances. Specific data on SMEs performances can be found on the "SBA Fact Sheet" established annually by the European Commission for EU member states and candidate countries.

A set of indicative evaluation questions related to "Competitive Territories" (SO 1.1) is listed below:

- ✓ Is there any improvement observed in SMEs competitiveness?
- ✓ To what extent the Programme has contributed to scale-up business cooperation and networking?
- ✓ How much of the observed change in SMEs networking and competitiveness can be attributed to the BMP intervention?
- ✓ Which are the dynamics introduced by the Programme that contributed to improve SMEs competitiveness?
- ✓ Is the result indicator target value achieved? Are there any gaps, bottlenecks or unintended effects observed?

***Specific Objective 1.2: Innovative Territories:*** *unleashing territorial potential to improve the transnational innovation capacity of the business sector.* The SO supports a market driven

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<sup>7</sup> As set in Section 8 in the approved CP Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020, the horizontal principles cover the issues of sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as equality between men and women.

innovation in order to scale-up business performances. Bearing in mind that the BMP territory is lagging behind with respect to innovation the evaluation exercise shall assess how many (%) of the supported SMEs have adopted technological, organizational and/or managerial or other procedural changes aiming to improve the BMP innovation capacity. In this respect the SO 1.2 offers cooperation opportunity between SMEs and research institutions while the support and services to the SMEs for engaging product and/or process innovation expected result to be subject to evaluation is whether or not the BMP intervention helps SMEs to move closer to the technological frontier and innovation average.

The main evaluation method and tools to be used are described in paragraph 4 below. However additional evaluation methodology and tools can be used to better tackle the BMP performances. Specific data on SMEs innovation performances can be found on the "SBA Fact Sheet" established annually by the European Commission for EU member states and candidate countries.

A set of indicative evaluation questions related to "Innovative Territories" (SO 1.2) is listed below:

- ✓ Is there any change observed in the innovation performances of the BMP cooperation area?
- ✓ To what extent supported SMEs adopted and introduced product or process innovation?
- ✓ How much of the observed change in innovation transfer and/or in innovation performances can be attributed to the BMP intervention?
- ✓ What types of innovative patterns have been established as a result/impact of the BMP support?
- ✓ Which are the BMP related mechanisms that triggered innovation?
- ✓ Is the result indicator target value achieved? Are there any gaps, bottlenecks or unintended effects observed?

**Specific Objective 1.3: Territories of knowledge:** *entrepreneurial learning and knowledge transfer for more competitive SMEs.* The aim of the SO is to unlock the entrepreneurial spirit by bringing in tailored entrepreneurial learning, consulting and external advice. As productivity improvements are strongly related to skills' improvements the evaluation exercise will be invited to assess whether or not the supported SMEs have indeed improve their entrepreneurial performances by learning from others. The training and learning cooperation schemes shall be evaluated with respect to their sustainability and their accuracy concerning the SMEs expressed needs.

The main evaluation method and tools to be used are described in paragraph 4 below. However additional evaluation methodology and tools can be used to better tackle the BMP performances.

A set of indicative evaluation questions related to the "Territories of Knowledge" (SO 1.3) is listed below:

- ✓ Are the supported training schemes for SMEs relevant to their actual needs?
- ✓ Are there any entrepreneurial learning cooperation schemes and/or structures established to address SMEs' training needs beyond the BMP life-cycle?
- ✓ How many of these schemes / structures can be attributed to the BMP intervention?
- ✓ Is the result indicator target value achieved? Are there any gaps, bottlenecks or unintended effects observed?

## **Priority Axis 2: Environment**

**Specific Objective 2.1: Biodiversity:** *taking on the transnational challenge by promoting ecological connectivity and transnational ecosystems' integration.* The aim of the SO is to develop the natural and cultural capital of the transnational cooperation territory. The BMP participating countries largely share natural ecosystems. In this respect the evaluation exercise shall assess whether or not the transnational cooperation offered by the BMP contributed to share and secure conservation standards and further prevent biodiversity losses.

The main evaluation method and tools to be used are described in paragraph 4 below. However additional evaluation methodology and tools can be used to better tackle the BMP performances. Specific biodiversity data are made available annually by the European Environmental Agency (EEA) reports and analysis.

A set of indicative evaluation questions related to "Biodiversity" (SO 2.1) is listed below:

- ✓ What change can be observed in the natural and cultural conservation status of the designated areas throughout the Balkan – Mediterranean territory?
- ✓ Did the Programme contributed to the designated areas connectivity?
- ✓ What types of connectivity links and/or channels have been created with the BMP support? Are these links/channels sustainable and able to deliver ecological connectivity services?
- ✓ How much of the improved conservation status and the designated areas connectivity can be attributed to the BMP support?
- ✓ By which mechanisms the BMP contributed to improve the natural and cultural capital of the cooperation area?
- ✓ Is the result indicator target value achieved? Are there any gaps, bottlenecks or unintended effects observed?

**Specific Objective 2.2: Sustainable territories:** *fostering transnational cooperation for resource efficiency and climate change resilience.* As the BMP territory is particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of global warming and climate change, the SO tackles environmental protection by promoting better resources' management. The evaluation exercise shall assess the adaptation level of the territories (surface) targeted by the approved projects to the extreme weather events and climate related hazards. Water availability, waste management and energy demand are particularly targeted in order to improve resources' management. Accordingly, the evaluators shall assess the results of the BMP contribution for climate change resilience practices and tested models/ tools.

The main evaluation method and tools to be used are described in paragraph 4 below. Additional evaluation methodology and tools can be used to better tackle the BMP performances while the European Environmental Agency (EEA) displays further climate change adaptation and mitigation data.

A set of indicative evaluation questions related to "Sustainable Territories" (SO 2.2) is listed below:

- ✓ Is there any change observed with respect to the promotion of EU normative package on resources' efficiency (Waste Directive, Water Framework Directive, etc.)?
- ✓ What types of action plans, measures and policy tools on resources' efficiency and climate change have been set up with the BMP support? Do they effectively address respective needs on environmental protection, climate change and better resources management?
- ✓ How much of the observed change in better resources management can be attributed to the BMP intervention?
- ✓ What are the factors that facilitated the BMP contribution?
- ✓ Is the result indicator target value achieved? Are there any gaps, bottlenecks or unintended effects observed?

**Specific Objective 2.3: Delivery on environmental legal framework:** *improving transnational governance capacities.* The aim of the SO is to strengthen technical and institutional skills through learning and capacity building. The evaluation exercise shall assess to what extent the governance capacity on environmental issues has been improved thanks to the BMP intervention. Less legal infringement reported and better environmental monitoring methods in relation to the persons trained (status) and their respected skills' improvement shall be analysed and contrasted in order to evaluate accuracy of the BMP intervention. The systems of environmental governance shared between the BMP project beneficiaries and the mechanisms used to implement the EU environmental legislation could also be evaluated with respect to their success on steering the society away from undesirable behaviors and towards desirable and environmental friendly behaviors.

The main evaluation method and tools to be used are described in paragraph 4 below. Additional evaluation methodology and tools can be used to better tackle the BMP performances.

A set of indicative evaluation questions related to "Sustainable Territories" (SO 2.2) is listed below:

- ✓ What change can be observed in the governance capacity to deliver EU environmental legislation?
- ✓ Which public authorities' departments participated to the training schemes supported by the Programme?
- ✓ Did the provided training cover crucial needs on missing skills to better deal with the EU environmental legislation monitoring?
- ✓ How much of the enhanced governance capacity on EU environmental legislation enforcement can be attributed to the BMP intervention?
- ✓ Which are the mechanisms that allowed the BPM contribution?
- ✓ Is the result indicator target value achieved? Are there any gaps, bottlenecks or unintended effects observed?

### 3. Data requirements

The BMP is a newly established TNCP in the Balkan-Mediterranean area and the early set-up of a well-functioning monitoring system was crucial to overcome lack of historic data series. Accurate and systematic data collection is now guaranteed by the BMP database representing the primary data source for the evaluation exercise.

Projects' reports and projects' deliverables shall also be used to feed the main evaluation needs with regard to the Programme's indicators and milestone values. Comparative analysis with respect to the baseline, 2018 milestone and final target values will provide evidence of change at both, quantitative and qualitative levels.

Public data registers and statistics shall be duly exploited, while additional sources shall be provided by the evaluators, together with secondary data development.

A review of existing knowledge and evidence from relevant evaluation sources shall be taken into account and mainly:

- The South East Europe (SEE) evaluation related documents of which the "South East Europe end-of-Programme evaluation" (December 2015) in particular
- The BMP ex-ante evaluation and
- The BMP Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Bearing also in mind that quality evaluations rely on quality data, new data may be collected (through questionnaires and surveys) to properly address any specific evaluation need.

## 4. Methods

The classical evaluation methods shall apply to all evaluations' types, while the evaluation experts can come-up with additional and more relevant evaluation tools and methodology. In any case the following methods shall be exploited:

- *Desk research and primary data analysis:* all information related to the BMP is well documented and can serve as a solid basis for desk research and data analysis, both primary and secondary (dual methodology).
- *Statistical and SWOT analysis:* available statistics provided by official and recognized sources shall be taken into consideration and further analysed (i.e. by disaggregating the data by topics).
- *Literature review:* streamline and analysis of previous evaluations (as the *ex post* evaluation of the South East Europe Programme) as well as of the BMP *ex ante* evaluation can serve as a referee to better assess the BMP impact in the area.
- *Interviews and surveys:* targeted communication (through feedback questionnaires) with the Programme bodies, authorities and stakeholders, applicants and projects' beneficiaries, target groups, etc.
- *Case studies:* streamline on selected topics, focus groups, types of beneficiaries, etc.
- *Field visits:* on-the-spot observation can provide with important evaluation elements, as field exposure can complement desk research.
- *Experts panel:* where possible additional evaluation skills may be consulted to cover different policy fields and specific evaluation topics.

Depending on the type and topic of the evaluation, the relevant method and data requirements shall be selected. For the "implementation evaluation" in particular, a targeted stakeholders' analysis will be necessary in order to assess the management system performances.

Additional elements will be provided in the ToR for the selection of the evaluation experts, whereas it will be up to the bidders to propose the most suitable evaluation method and respective data requirements.

## 5. Estimated Budget

According to the BMP Technical Assistance (TA) budget breakdown, EUR 90,000 have been reserved for the overall evaluation exercise (mid-term and final) and for the whole programming period 2014-2020, including the *ex ante* evaluation of the successor Programme. Bearing in mind the BMP late approval and implementation pace, a preliminary breakdown is provided below:

- Mid-term evaluation: 25.000, Euros for both evaluation strands (implementation and impact evaluations)
- Up-date evaluation: 45.000, Euros for both evaluation strands (implementation and impact evaluations)
- Ex ante evaluation of the BMP successor Programme: 15.000, Euros
- Training activities: 5.000, Euros

Bearing in mind that the TA budget is updated and approved by the MC on an annual basis, the aforementioned reserved funds are subject to modification, if deemed necessary.