GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS IN **BULGARIA**

PROJECT: STRENGTHENING THE STRATEGIC APPROACH AND INNOVATION IN THE CIVIL SERVICE IN **BULGARIA**

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Guiding Principles for Monitoring and Evaluating Strategic Documents

PROJECT: Strengthening the strategic approach and innovation in the civil service in Bulgaria

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Introduction

Monitoring strategic documents is a key priority for the Bulgarian Council of Ministers' Administration (CoMA). As OECD member and accession countries navigate uncertain times amidst fiscal constraints and relatively moderate levels of citizens' trust and satisfaction, delivering results on transversal strategic documents is crucial. Indeed, uncertain times call for strategic documents providing guidance and steering to government organisations to remain aligned with long-term goals despite immediate challenges. First, monitoring helps in adjusting strategies promptly, ensuring adaptability and resilience amid evolving circumstances. Secondly, amid fiscal constraints, monitoring facilitates efficient resource allocation, maximising the impact of limited resources on strategic objectives. Furthermore, robust monitoring mechanisms promote transparency and accountability, fostering trust in government institutions. Through open tracking of progress and outcomes, governments exhibit dedication to delivering results and addressing citizen needs. Centres of Government, like CoMA, can play a crucial role in each of these objectives.

The note is structured around three key areas that are critical for effective monitoring and evaluation: i) roles and responsibilities of the centre of government, ii) tools and processes, and iii) capacity. Clearly defining roles and responsibilities ensures accountability and collaboration throughout the monitoring process. It prevents duplication of efforts and promotes effective co-ordination among lead institutions and other public administrations. Tools and processes refer to the use of suitable policy mechanisms and streamlined procedures to conduct monitoring and evaluation (M&E) exercises, including how to define those processes, and how to integrate IT solutions. Finally, enhancing the capacity of individuals and organisations involved in monitoring is essential. This includes attracting the candidates with the right skills and providing learning and development opportunities to improve upon capacities with existing staff and personnel.

This guidance note lays out guiding principles for organisations in Bulgaria, including CoMA, to support their monitoring of strategic documents. These principles are illustrated by good practices from European Union and OECD member countries. It can be used by all stakeholders with responsibilities for strategic planning monitoring and evaluation.

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1 Strengthening the role of Centres of Government for monitoring and evaluating strategic documents

Strategic documents, whether cross-sectoral or sectoral, require increased co-ordination across governments to achieve and maximise results. Clearly identifying a lead institution able to control, support and co-ordinate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of strategic documents is essential to promote coherence and ensure accountability for actions. Lead institutions should both play a role to develop common standards for M&E of strategic documents (control and support functions) and ensure interinstitutional co-ordination mechanisms. Across OECD member countries, this role is often played by the Centre of Government (CoG). In Bulgaria, institutional atomisation and a high fragmentation of centre of government functions between the Council of Ministers Administration and Ministry of Finance limits the clarity of the role played by CoMA as lead institution in monitoring strategic documents (OECD, 2022[1]). However, CoMA's Strategic Planning Directorate – created at the end of 2022 – has the potential to clarify these core functions and promote co-ordination when it comes to steering, monitoring, and evaluating cross-sectoral strategic documents.

Defining the role of a lead institution in M&E of strategic documents

Monitoring and evaluating strategic documents is key to inform policymakers and decision-makers of their progress. Such process calls for a minimum level of alignment, ensuring that progress is tracked from a strategic document to the other following similar requirements. This minimum level of requirements is needed for cross-sectoral strategic documents, involving several line ministries and administrations, which by the shared nature of their responsibilities and outcomes present a higher risk of fragmentation, cooperation challenges, and incoherence without high-level leadership. It is also needed for sectoral strategic documents, which have to be easily tracked through time following quality-methods and standards. In both cases, countries should rely on a lead institution, structuring and providing guidance related to monitoring and evaluation processes of strategic documents. This role consists in (OECD, 2018[2]):

1. Providing support on how to conduct the monitoring and evaluation processes, i.e. defining monitoring and reporting and evaluation requirements, ensuring their implementation, and providing guidance to stakeholders involved in the process. Lead institutions play an important role in providing support to line ministries and departments on how to conduct M&E exercises. This role is twofold: it helps line ministries and departments to develop appropriate mechanisms and processes and it ensures some minimum requirements for M&E exercises. This can be done both by providing guidelines and establishing common standards (see Developing common standards for M&E of strategic documents), and by building M&E capacity for strategic documents (see Identifying adequate skills and competencies).

2. Participating in the co-ordination and presentation efforts of strategic document M&E, i.e. organising working-level meetings with stakeholders involved in M&E exercises, participating in high-level meetings to communicate evidence to policymakers, and facilitating direct access to policymakers to present monitoring findings and discuss policy options to address shortcomings and performance bottlenecks.

3. In the case of monitoring of cross-sectoral plans, centralising the data collection and analysing the results, i.e. aggregating the metrics received, developing the capacity to understand its results, identifying potential performance bottlenecks limiting the strategic plan's success. This ensures control over the monitoring process, ensuring its integrity, accuracy and relevance. This is done through quality assurance mechanisms to verify the reliability of data when needed, adherence to monitoring standards, and compliance with reporting requirements. This can be greatly facilitated by the development of an integrated IT platform (see Integrating technology to monitoring processes).

To fulfil this role, lead institutions steering monitoring and evaluation processes should be close to the decision-making centre. Therefore, appointing CoGs to be the lead institution can make for more efficient monitoring process, with limited steps, interactions, and stakeholders between the monitoring process *per se* and the decisions taken by decision-makers. Across OECD member countries, 29% see their CoG monitoring the implementation of strategic priorities (OECD, 2021[3]). More importantly, 73% of OECD member countries identified monitoring whole-of-government performance and policies and implementation plans as a top or significant priority function of their CoG (OECD, 2023[4]).

In Bulgaria, this role is mainly played by the Strategic Planning Directorate of CoMA. The Directorate is responsible to monitor the implementation and reporting of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030, documents from the national strategic frameworks, the national implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the objectives in documents of the national strategic framework (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2024[5]). Moreover, it provides methodological assistance to executive authorities and administrations establishing strategic documents (OECD, 2022[1]). In the context of both cross-sectoral and sectoral strategic documents, CoMA therefore has a mandate and a key role to play in the monitoring and evaluation processes of strategic documents.

Setting a co-ordination unit at the centre of government in Latvia

In Latvia, strategic planning plays an important role in defining the line of action of line ministries. The hierarchically superior document is the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030, also referred as Latvia 2030, a long-term strategy with a cross-ministerial vision on Latvia's development. The strategy encompasses 7 key goals, each with 3-4 associated indicators. The framing document determines Latvia's long-term development priorities and the spatial development prospective and provides strategic direction for other strategies. The National Development Plan (NDP) is the country's main medium-term development plan. The direction is further elaborated in sectoral and cross-sectoral policies developed, monitored, and evaluated by ministries. Each ministry also produces an operational plan for management purposes.

To bolster the co-ordination and oversight of strategic documents across various line ministries, the Latvian government established the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre in 2011. Initially functioning as an independent institution, it was integrated into the State Chancellery in 2023 as its Cross-Sectoral Coordination Department. This department fulfils diverse functions and, as of 2024, is structured into the National Planning Division and the State-Owned Enterprise Governance Division.

Every two years, the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Department produces a comprehensive report on behalf of the Prime Minister and presents it to the Parliament. These reports present the progress made towards achieving the goals outlined in the Latvia 2030, the National Development Plan, and the Government Declaration. Employing a variety of techniques, including primary data collection, secondary sources

analysis, and external evaluations, these reports provide a comprehensive overview of the strategy's implementation and its impact on national development.

Setting-up a Results and Delivery Unit in Canada

Since 2015, the Government of Canada has introduced publicly available ministerial mandate letters, outlining the objectives and pressing challenges for each minister. To support this initiative, the Results and Delivery Unit (RDU) was established within the Privy Council Office. The RDU's primary focus is on four key elements: leveraging data for evidence-based decision-making, measuring progress through performance indicators, defining clear programme and policy objectives, and assisting in policy prioritisation and resource allocation. Its methodology revolves around answering three fundamental questions: what outcomes are sought, how will these goals be achieved, and are the desired results being attained? Through oversight and co-ordination, the RDU ensures a steadfast focus on top government priorities, monitors progress, and adjusts efforts as needed.

Different governance arrangements for evaluation champions: France, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom

Evaluation champions are actors or institutions inside the government that have a cross government mandate related to policy evaluation. Their responsibility and organisation can vary across countries, with some being located within CoGs and others being more decentralised, usually co-ordinating cross-sectoral policy evaluations and sharing best practices rather than conducting evaluations directly. France Stratégie serves as France's primary evaluation champion, located within the Prime Minister's office. Comprising around 40 permanent experts across various fields, it collects and disseminates evaluations from line ministries and other agencies, while also supporting them in conducting policy evaluations through methodological and quality guidelines. Despite lacking hierarchical authority over line ministries, France Stratégie aims to play a growing role in promoting evaluations across government.

In Lithuania, the Government Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA) operates as an independent agency under the Office of Government. It is tasked with enhancing the country's capacities in strategic foresight, monitoring, and evaluation, including fostering the quality and use of ex-post evaluations. STRATA's functions extend beyond co-ordination to include conducting strategic foresight, supporting line ministries in improving evaluation quality and use, and conducting evaluations of the National Progress Plan.

Finally, in the United Kingdom, the Evaluation Task Force operates under both the central cabinet office and His Majesty's Treasury (HMT). Established in 2020 to provide support to HMT spending teams and other departments with their spending decisions, it also received a mandate to help departments design and deliver high-quality impact evaluations. Its main functions include scrutinising evaluation plans and business cases submitted to HMT spending teams, advising departments on evaluations, ensuring the use of evaluation results, and promoting the use of evaluations by making them publicly available.

Developing common standards for M&E of strategic documents

Lead institutions can play a central role in ensuring the integrity and quality of M&E exercises by establishing and enforcing minimum requirements and standards. Achieving this entails striking a delicate balance between a standardised, one-size-fits-all approach and embracing diverse methodologies tailored to the unique needs of different strategic documents. This balance must provide line ministries with the requisite flexibility to customise M&E activities while safeguarding coherence, transparency, and effectiveness.

Such minimum requirements for monitoring and evaluation plans can be outlined within strategic documents themselves or as an annex. They should encompass monitoring and evaluation plans detailing:

1. What policy or programme objectives are being monitored and evaluated, ensuring <u>alignment with specific strategic goals</u> delineated in the strategic document.
2. How are the M&E exercises conducted, including clear specifications for monitoring on <u>indicators</u>, <u>sources</u>, <u>baselines</u>, and <u>targets</u>.
3. When M&E is taking place, involving establishing <u>monitoring frequency</u> to ensure timely and regular assessments, along with a timeline outlining the <u>schedule for conducting evaluations</u> throughout the planning cycle.
4. Who is responsible for the M&E activity and how it is conducted, entailing delineating a governance structure that elucidates <u>monitoring roles and responsibilities</u> for data collection and analysis, as well as identifying <u>evaluation key stakeholders</u> and defining their respective roles.

By delineating such comprehensive minimum requirements, lead institutions enable a structured and robust approach to M&E, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and accountability of strategic planning initiatives. Other elements, such as past performance, stakeholder mapping, means of verification of resources needed, can be included to the M&E sections of strategic documents. Those elements should also account for potential needed flexibility, for instance following a reorganisation of the administration or the reassessment of the relevance of some indicators or targets.

Alongside such minimum requirements, more specific guidance and guidelines can be developed, ranging from data collection methodologies, baseline and target-setting guidance, indicator selection criteria, to reporting protocols or evaluation frameworks. Across OECD member countries, such guidelines tend to be developed by the lead institution, working closely with line ministries and departments to define areas where they are most needed, taking into account international best practices, methodological rigor, and stakeholder expectations.

Across OECD member countries, central monitoring and evaluation units can play a pivotal role to provide such guidance. By providing guidelines, guidance or co-ordination, central evaluation units prove to be essential M&E stakeholders. Across OECD member countries, those central evaluation units are predominantly located in Ministries of Finance (45% of OECD member countries) and in Centres of Government (39%) due to synergies with their policy co-ordination and resourcing roles for the whole of government (OECD, 2023[6]). This further reinforces the role of Centres of Government in M&E efforts of strategic documents.

Developing guidelines and supporting line ministries in Latvia

The State Chancellery is not only responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of cross-sectoral strategic documents but also performs some support to line ministries in the development of sectoral policy plans and the ministry's operational strategy.

To ensure support in policy, the Cross Sectoral Coordination Department has developed a Policy Development Handbook (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, 2016[7]) and consults ministries requesting support during the creation of the policy documents. The Handbook does not focus solely on M&E, but also details basic principles of policymaking, types and hierarchy of planning documents, development of planning documents, determination of goals, results, and performance indicators, amongst others. The Department also supports the overall visibility and impact of the different strategic plans. All planning documents are published in LIKUMI.LV, the legal acts portal of the Republic of Latvia that has an extended search functionality. Policy documents can be found by type, institution, function, name, date, keywords, etc. Procured research, including data and impact assessments for monitoring and evaluation of policy documents are found in the Research and Publication Database.

In 2022, the Chancellery's Department of Public Administration Policy developed guidelines for institution's operational strategies to cover all services, processes, and policies of public administration institutions (Latvian State Chancellery, 2022[8]). The strategies define the institution's mission and stakeholders,

provide information on the main policy goals. They specify key performance indicator targets and areas in which resources will be concentrated (including those defined in policy documents). A form for description of performance indicators recommends highlighting the indicator's name, its owner, purpose, the relationship between this indicator and other indicators, the formula, the approach to ensure data quality, the data source, the frequency, the consequences for achieving or failing to achieve goal, who handles the data, what will be achieved, and potential additional observations. In addition, the Department plays a role in ensuring the quality of these reports by organising meetings to discuss the monitoring of the operational strategies.

Finally, since 2014 the Cross Sectoral Coordination Department convenes policy planners for discussions on significant policy planning issues and is in continual online contact with the group to co-ordinate planning processes. The Department of Public Administration has included initiatives in the State Modernisation Plan 2023-2027 to provide more opportunity for exchange regarding challenges and best practice.

Providing guidelines to support the development of quality indicators in Colombia

In 2018, the Public Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (DSEPP) of the National Planning Department (DNP) in Colombia has developed a guide to support public servants in their construction and analysis of indicators. The Guide to the construction and analysis of indicators is structured around four sections and provides concrete and real examples about indicators used to monitor and evaluation previous policies. This is done to ensure that the users, whom are not experts but practitioners, have the practical tools to develop themselves quality indicators. The first section of the guide provides a definition and explains the importance of developing a logic framework to link indicators to objectives. The section provides concrete examples of good indicators looking at how they should be simple, measurable, and communicable. In addition, by explaining how to construct a theory of change to link inputs to impacts, the guide provides definition of input, output, and outcome indicators together with concrete examples. The second section sets out the steps and elements for the process of constructing indicators. According to the guide indicators should be developed in five steps (National Planning Department, 2018[9]):

1. Identify the objective you want to measure/quantify.
2. Define the typology of the indicator according to the link in the value chain.
3. Write the name of the indicator.
4. Choose the appropriate battery of indicators according to the quality criteria (clear, relevant, economical, measurable, and appropriate).
5. Build the technical sheet of the indicator.

Together with these steps, additional key elements highlight context, how communicable the indicator is, and the co-ordination mechanisms in place to ensure that such an indicator is producible. The third section focuses on the relationship between the different elements that make up an indicator to perform an adequate analysis. It provides different ways in which an indicator can be analysed (e.g. stock, flow, capacity, accumulation, etc.). The last section provides information on how to present and use the information retrieved from indicators. The guide discusses in particular two of the most used solutions for the presentation of indicators are: the creation of a reporting platform and dashboards. To describe the different advantages of platforms and dashboards, the guide provides two concrete examples of recent platforms and dashboards that were implemented in Colombia. For example, the Synergy platform, is an online system that allows sectors to regularly report the progress of their respective indicators recorded in the National Development Plans (monthly for qualitative reports and according to the periodicity of the indicator for quantitative reports). An example of a dashboard comes instead from the Colombia Council of Ministers which has implemented a system to monitor the indicators of the National Development Plan through sectoral control panels. Overall, the guide represents an effective way to build capacity on this topic and ensure that some common standards and principles are followed when indicators are developed.

Ensuring interinstitutional co-ordination mechanisms for M&E

Aside from providing support to line ministries and departments, lead institutions play a crucial role in developing and maintaining interinstitutional co-ordination mechanisms for M&E. Considering the variety and number of stakeholders involved in M&E efforts, such mechanisms are crucial to serve as a platform/mechanism to diffuse results, share good practices, and promote co-ordination between stakeholders on any corrective actions to take. They can take many forms – working groups, task forces, committees, communities of practice, councils, etc. as well as have varying levels of formality – i.e. informal working level to high-level leadership membership, or a combination of both layers.

In Bulgaria, such body has been formally designed and gathers high-level members of the government. Indeed, the Development Council, an advisory body of the Council of Ministers, works amongst others on the co-ordination of the reporting and evaluation of strategic documents included in the National Strategic Framework, with some exceptions. Decree No 77 of the Council of Ministers of 16 May 2023 defines the functioning, composition and working methods of the Council (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023[10]). The Council is composed of a President, a Vice-President, members, all part of the government, and an observer from the National Statistical Institute. It also includes a representative from CoMA. In order to reach beyond the sole executive, the President of the Council can invite heads of parliamentary groups of representatives or representatives of other institutions.

When it comes to monitoring and evaluation of those strategic documents, such forum can ensure the regular M&E and the achievement of policy objectives, activities, and targets, notably by:

1. Discussing challenges and resolving non-political, and potentially political, disputes.
2. Ensuring constant information exchange to better identify and address challenges related to the monitoring process or to completion of the plan itself.
3. Building shared ownership, making sure monitoring and evaluation exercises are seen as a learning activity and not just an additional resource-consuming task.
4. Setting a minimum level of common standards, further improving the quality of M&E exercises, and laying the foundations of a common language around M&E.

Those co-ordination bodies play a crucial role in breaking down structural silos within monitoring and evaluation efforts. This is even more needed in the context of monitoring national strategies, which involves intersecting functions prone to overlapping or conflicting responsibilities without clear mandates. For example, co-ordination between lead institutions and line ministries playing a role in the monitoring and evaluation process remains essential to ensure the quality and timeliness of collected indicators. Avoiding duplication of efforts is key; if an indicator is already being collected effectively across multiple administrations, there is little incentive to replicate efforts or request administrations to gather similar data in slightly different ways. Additionally, line ministries, being closer to the subject matter, are best positioned to assist lead institutions in determining the relevance of indicators to specific strategic plan objectives. This collaborative approach ensures streamlined monitoring processes and maximises the effectiveness of the strategic document implementation.

Representation of centres of government in such platforms matters, as they ultimately allow to develop a cross-governmental culture of promotion of co-ordination, delivery, and results, that can help better achieve transversal goals. Ultimately, considering their mandate to steer and co-ordinate monitoring efforts, their representation can foster high goal alignment and trust that can lay solid foundations to renewed and regular cooperation.

Developing a clear framework for performance measurement/strategic planning in the United States: the Modernisation Act

In 2010, the United States considerably reformed their performance management framework with the GPRA Modernisation Act. The Modernisation Act updated some aspects of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) adopted in 1993. The Modernisation Act has established some new requirements to improve the use of evidence and strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the performance management system.

Amongst others, the Modernisation Act has:

- Established the Performance Improvement Council (PIC) with is an interagency council tasked with monitoring the implementation of the priority goals and strategic objectives. It is tasked to assist the Director of the Office of Management and budget to improve the performance of the federal government and achieve federal priority goals. The PIC is led by the Deputy Director for Management at the Office of Management and Budget within the Executive Office of the President. Comprised of Performance Improvement Officers (PIOs) and their respective staff from federal agencies, the PIC convenes regularly to facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange among agencies. Additionally, the Council hosts various government-wide working groups aimed at promoting dialogue and sharing best practices across the federal government.
- Developed specific job categories called the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and the Performance Improvement Officer (PIO).
- Required agencies to develop every two years Agency Priority Goals (APGs) (subject to quarterly performance reviews) and every four years strategic objectives (subject to annual strategic reviews).
- Strengthened cross-agency collaboration by developing federal cross-agency priority goals every four years (assessed via quarterly reviews).
- Established a unique website (performance.gov) where all Agency Priority Goals (APGs) and strategic objectives are collected and monitored.

Setting up a working-level inter-governmental network on strategic planning in Portugal

To enhance collaboration among government entities and standardise planning procedures, the Portuguese government has established the RePLAN (Rede de Serviços de Planeamento e Prospetiva da Administração Pública) network. Co-ordinated by the Director of PlanAPP, the Portuguese evaluation champion located within the CoG, RePLAN facilitates cooperation and knowledge sharing in strategic planning, policy evaluation, and foresight analysis across government. Comprising representatives from planning and foresight bodies of line ministries, who often engage in monitoring and evaluation within their ministries, the network aims to harmonise procedures and promote collaboration. While its primary focus is on planning and foresight, RePLAN also assumes responsibility for monitoring and evaluating strategic plans as part of its remit.

Guidance to strengthen the role of Centres of Government for M&E of strategic documents

Taking into account OECD insights and the good practices identified above, Bulgaria can consider the following elements to further clarify the role of lead institutions:

Define clear institutional leadership or ownership at the Centre of Government for this critical function in government

- Emphasise the role of the Strategic Planning Directorate at the CoMA when it comes to the overall co-ordination, methodological support and control of the M&E processes related to strategic documents.

- Define or describe the mandate for each strategic document in legislation, a policy document and/or in the relevant strategic document itself, as it is done for the Strategic Planning Directorate with the National Development Plan "Bulgaria 2030".

Provide steering, support, and oversight for M&E processes from the centre

- Enable the "Strategic Planning" Directorate at the CoMA to provide minimum requirements related to M&E processes, to be included in strategic documents, in accordance with the existing methodologies and handbooks, i.e. highlighting the objectives to be monitored and evaluated (aligning indicators with specific goals), how (indicators, sources, baselines, targets for monitoring, data sources and methods for evaluation), by whom (monitoring roles and responsibilities, evaluation key stakeholders) and when (monitoring frequency, evaluation schedules).

- Similarly to what has been done in Latvia, provide methodological support by developing standardised frameworks, guidelines and tools for monitoring and evaluating strategic documents.

- Similarly to what has been done in Colombia, provide methodological support to define relevant indicators.

- Offer line ministries constructive feedback and suggestions for improvement of M&E sections of strategic documents.

- Evaluate the potential to develop an indicators' library with key indicators for different sectors, with updates of the indicators being managed by CoMA and modifications to the library being approved by the NSI for quality insurance purposes. Report progress on these key indicators to the government regularly.

- Build quality insurance mechanisms into Monitorstat[1], ensuring specific fields are mandatory.

Enhance collaboration and co-ordination across sectors and institutions

- Reflect on the potential for the development of a working level inter-institutional co-ordination, similar to Portugal's, potentially structured around CoMA.

- Establish mechanisms for intra-ministerial/agency (i.e. within the ministry) co-ordination (i.e. each body representative should establish ways to communicate internally about activities/progress, etc. and collect feedback to convey to the broader group).

- Ensure that the monitoring efforts at the ministerial level are connected to the central monitoring system through informal co-ordination efforts across ministries and departments.

2 Detailing tools and processes for monitoring and evaluating strategic documents

Monitoring and evaluation relate to two different concepts, which require different tools and processes. It is important to ensure some coherence across M&E exercises by clearly defining and communicating around best practices. In order to increase transparency and develop a culture of monitoring and evaluation (M&E), Bulgarian M&E systems related to strategic documents are undergoing a vast transformation. This transformation is partly carried by the establishment of a Strategic Planning Directorate, in charge, amongst others, of monitoring the implementation and reporting and providing independent monitoring achievement of documents from the national strategic framework. The Director of this Directorate also acts as Secretary of the Co-ordination Committee of the Development Council, in charge, amongst others, to monitor, control and report the implementation of the National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030. In addition, the upgrade of the integrated IT system Monitorstat, due in 2025, seeks to better accompany monitoring of strategic documents, which could ultimately further increase the reliability and transparency of M&E processes. These recent efforts will have to be followed closely to ensure their effectiveness on the overall M&E system. For instance, Bulgaria could still benefit from assessing and re-assessing frequently the objectives of strategic documents and their associated indicators to ensure the relevance of the system, as the lack of systematic review of objectives limits the strategic planning efforts undertaken. This section seeks to highlight how structured monitoring processes can help with the implementation and performance of strategic documents.

Monitoring and evaluation as complementary practices

Monitoring and evaluation, although distinct, are complementary practices. Policy monitoring can be defined as *the systematic collection of performance data to assess the progress and achievement of objectives against set targets to identify and lift implementation bottlenecks* (OECD, 2021[11]). As such it is by nature an ongoing activity, which should be conducted regularly enough to allow decision-makers to identify and correct potential arising issues with the implementation of strategic documents. Unlike evaluation, monitoring is driven by routines and ongoing processes of data collection. Thus, it requires resources to be integrated into an organisational infrastructure. Whereas policy evaluation studies the extent to which the observed outcome can be attributed to the policy intervention, monitoring provides descriptive information and does not offer evidence to analyse and understand cause-effect links between a policy initiative and its results. On the other hand, evaluations refer to the structured and objective assessment of the design, implementation and/or results of a future, ongoing or completed public intervention. It assesses the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and/or sustainability of a policy based on its objectives (OECD, 2022[12]). Its primary purpose is to demonstrate or explain issues with the implementation (as well as the design and results) of strategic documents.

Stakeholders involved in M&E should be able to identify whether monitoring or evaluation is required by taking into account different elements, as highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparing policy monitoring and policy evaluation

Policy monitoring	Policy evaluation
Ongoing (leading to operational decision-making)	Episodic (leading to strategic decision-making)
Monitoring systems are generally suitable for the broad issues/questions that were anticipated in the policy design	Issue-specific
Measures are developed and data is usually gathered through routinised processes	Measures are usually customized for each policy evaluation
Attribution is generally assumed	Attribution of observed outcomes is usually a key question
Because it is ongoing, resources are usually a part of the programme or organisational infrastructure	Targeted resources are needed for each policy evaluation
The use of the information can evolve over time to reflect changing information needs and priorities	The intended purposes of a policy evaluation are usually negotiated upfront

Source: Adapted from McDavid, J.C. and Hawthorn, L.R.L. (2016), Programme evaluation and performance measurement, an introduction to practice, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, in (OECD, 2020[13]) .

Monitoring and evaluation therefore serve distinct but complementary goals in the lifecycle of policies and programmes, jointly creating an informed approach to policy and programme management and fostering continuous improvement and learning. In the context of strategic planning, M&E functions should be closely integrated. These mechanisms provide a lens through which organisations can remain accountable for the success of their strategic commitments.

Monitoring, by regularly assessing progress, increases the practical nature of strategic documents, enabling organisations to adapt and learn from past situations and better detect arising challenges. Monitoring evidence applied to strategic documents can pursue three main objectives:

- Contribute to operational decision-making, providing evidence to measure performance and identify potential performance bottlenecks while informing proactive mitigation;
- Strengthen accountability related to the use of resources, the efficiency of internal management processes, or the outputs of a given policy initiative;
- Increase transparency, providing citizens and stakeholders with information on whether the efforts carried out by the government are producing the expected results.

For those reasons, monitoring strategic documents helps organisations to foster an evidence-informed culture of continuous improvement and adjust the nature of indicators, the strategic plan, or the underlying policy causing said effect. On the other hand, evaluations, by looking episodically at specific policies or issues, help strategic documents to not only track evolution through time, but also to identify what works, what does not, for whom and why. In both cases, the data derived from M&E efforts help informing decisions regarding resource allocation, guiding administrations in directing resources towards specific initiatives. Ultimately, it is up to authorities to select, based on the context and intended outcomes, whether monitoring or evaluation is best fit to ensure that overarching strategic goals are closely followed, reached, and achieved in time.

Monitoring and evaluation as two distinct practices in Croatia's strategic planning system

Monitoring and evaluation being different practices calls for different processes and mechanisms. This is well reflected in Croatia where the two practices follow significantly different rules, mechanisms and

reporting timelines. The monitoring of all medium- and long-term strategic plans (both at the regional and national level) is conducted yearly through templates developed by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (MRDEUF). The Ordinance on the procedures for monitoring and reporting clarifies the deadlines, the responsibilities and the frequency of monitoring reports. Annual reports on the implementation of the development plan have to be submitted to the Ministry by 31 March of each year. For the monitoring and reporting, the MRDEUF, as co-ordinating body, provides several materials, both in the form of ordinances and guidelines, to ensure homogenous practices across implementing actors. These materials cover the generic rules for creating strategic plans, the way in which indicators should be selected from the Indicator Library, and finally specific instructions on what to include in the annual implementation report. Together with guidelines, the Ministry also ensures comparability of reports through providing specific Word and Excel templates.

Different procedures apply to the evaluation of the programmes. Indeed, according to the Ordinance on procedures for evaluation, for each medium- and long-term strategic plan there must be an *ex ante* evaluation, a medium-term evaluation and an *ex post* evaluation. In addition, the ordinance provides significant instructions on how the evaluation process should be governed to ensure the independence (describing the role of different actors and their tasks). This is evident from the governance of the evaluation process which, despite involving all essential actors, requires that the evaluation team is not composed of people that were directly responsible for drafting the strategic plan (Art. 21) (Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds, 2023[14]). In addition, the ordinance requires the evaluation team to be composed of at least two professionals with different professions and when external, selected through public procurement.

Developing well-defined monitoring processes

The increasing complexity of policy making and the sustained pressure to demonstrate policy results have elevated the role of CoGs in performance monitoring. Across OECD member countries, 19 out of 26 CoGs identified monitoring whole-of-government performance and/or policies and implementation plans as their top or significant priority function. In Bulgaria, monitoring policies and implementation plans was identified as a significant priority of CoMA. Monitoring policies and strategic documents calls for the development of specific and well-defined processes, even more so when those exercises are as cross-sectorial as strategic documents can be. In order to do so, clear responsibilities and methodologies are often detailed in the form of guidelines. Those guidelines can help ensuring the quality of the data collected, and therefore of the monitoring exercise itself. They can also ensure that responsibilities are well defined and acknowledged by all participating stakeholders. The monitoring process can be broken down into five different steps: defining and adapting strategic objectives linking objectives to indicators, identifying baselines and targets, collecting, and managing data, reporting and analysing data, and adapting and adjusting the overall implementation (Figure 1). This process is therefore iterative.

Figure 1. Simplified visualisation of a monitoring process
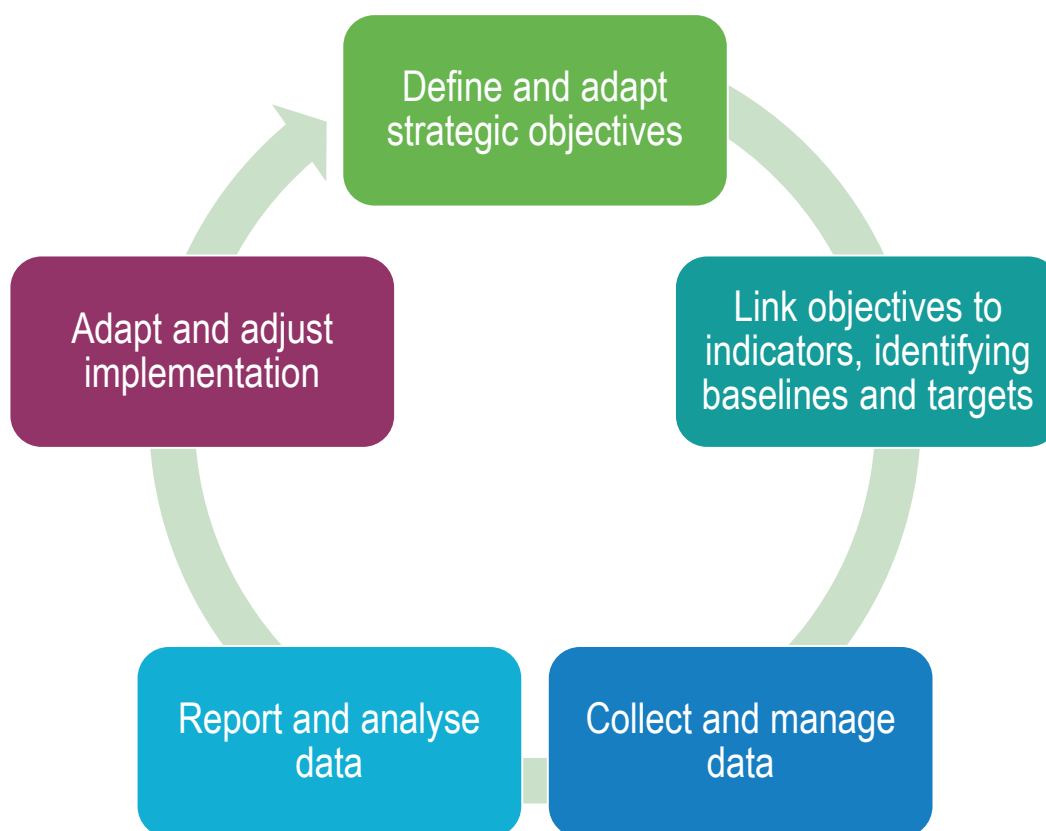
Source: Author's own design.

Defining and adapting strategic objectives and linking objectives to indicators are key steps to ensure that the monitoring process is aligned with the goals of the strategic document monitored. Following those, monitoring processes should detail the practices behind the collection and management of data. Aside from building data collection on sound data collection methods, quality insurance mechanisms are essential for maintaining the integrity of collected data. This can involve data validation checks from the CoG or the statistical agency, verifying the accuracy of data sources when it is collected by line ministries, or ensuring consistency in data collection practices across departments and ministries through guidelines developed by the lead institution. It can also build upon dedicated integrated IT platforms streamlining data collection and management.

Such IT tools can also help with the following step related to data reporting and data analysis. Data reporting relates to presenting the collected data in a clear, concise, and meaningful manner to relevant stakeholders. This can include drafting regular progress reports, dashboards or scorecards highlighting trends and indicators. An integrated IT system can help automating and improving data visualisation of such reports, ensuring timely and clear reporting (see Integrating technology to monitoring processes). Clear reporting is intertwined with data analysis, which derives from collected data insights. Trend analysis is for instance one the key aspects of data analysis when it comes to monitoring strategic documents.

Finally, the last step of the process relates to adapting and adjusting implementation. This step amplifies the exercise's impact and the integration of performance information into decision-making. Indeed, establishing systematic routines for reviewing performance, with regular meetings involving key stakeholders across the delivery chain can help better understanding what worked, what did not, and how

to improve the system accordingly. This matters significantly for the monitoring of strategic documents as it establishes a structured framework for evaluating plan implementation. Regular and purposeful discussions should seek not only enhanced accountability but also to provide learning opportunities. Reflecting on the system during these discussions ensures that successes are identified, shortcomings are addressed, and continuous improvements are made. It keeps line ministries focused on the ultimate results of the strategic plan, fostering a results-oriented mindset. The combination of accountability, learning, and a centralised co-ordinating entity contributes to a more robust and effective monitoring framework, ultimately enhancing the success and impact of strategic documents.

Following this process can allow monitoring to be used as a management tool. Indeed, the monitoring exercise goes beyond the sole tracking of the achievement (or failure) of strategic documents' objectives and should be embedded in a performance dialogue conducted regularly enough to allow practitioners and decision-makers to identify implementation challenges, determine resource constraints and adapt their efforts to achieve strategic documents.

Ultimately, well defined monitoring processes improve the implementation of strategic documents. The multiplicity of stakeholders involved in this exercise calls for a clear definition of the process used for each strategic document. In order to build that shared understanding, and while various strategic documents may require distinct processes, the fundamental principles guiding these processes should remain largely similar for several reasons. Firstly, clear processes help monitoring system ensure consistency. This aspect is even more so essential when several stakeholders contribute to the collection of a single indicator. The lack of a defined process can undermine the quality of the data collected and lead to developing an inaccurate evidence basis. Consistency is also reflected through time, as the monitoring process cannot be amended too often, as it would otherwise limit time comparison and creating biases related to the achievement of pre-defined objectives. Only such consistency could help identify actual performance bottlenecks and make evidence-informed decisions. Secondly, clear processes also ensure transparency and therefore accountability. Clarity enables internal and external stakeholders to understand and verify the methods used to assess progress. Moreover, and as mentioned further below, laid out processes help clearly stating responsibilities, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability towards the achievement of strategic objectives. These responsibilities can be highlighted in an annex to the strategic plan, clearly setting out the overall co-ordination mechanism, identifying the central co-ordinators and the responsibility of each stakeholder involved. It also has the potential to lay-out the overall responsibilities of the monitoring exercise, step by step.

Monitoring principles in Estonia

In Estonia, cross-government objectives with specific targets are outlined in the Estonia 2035 strategy, co-ordinated by the Strategy Unit in the Government Office. To ensure transparency and public accountability, a public website has been established to display the baseline and targets for all cross-government KPIs, with regular updates. Additionally, key KPIs are integrated into the medium-term Government Activity Program, which is compiled by each government and updated annually. The annual report on these KPIs is discussed by the government and made public. The same system is applied to the medium-term budgetary framework, ensuring coherence between policy objectives and budget allocations. Sectoral policy objectives are captured within approximately 20 sectoral strategies, each implemented through specific programs with detailed KPIs. This integrated approach allows for consistent monitoring and evaluation of progress across various sectors, aligning short-term actions with long-term strategic goals.

The monitoring of the delivery of strategic objectives in Estonia seeks to go beyond the sole production of reports at the end of the reporting period. It includes regular co-ordination meetings to understand key reforms and their contributions to KPIs. Monitoring is conducted quarterly to assess progress and identify obstacles, with annual reporting on KPIs. The process involves careful consideration of who collects the data and how it is gathered. Moreover, regular co-ordination tools are essential for effective monitoring.

Key reforms, objectives, and indicators from strategic documents are streamlined wherever possible. Co-ordination meetings are held for policy objectives or priority clusters, and inter-ministerial councils or committees for each key priority meet at least quarterly. Additionally, at the administrative level, co-ordination meetings with high officials from various ministries occur monthly, ensuring continuous oversight and alignment of efforts.

Integrating technology to monitoring processes

The shift in data collection, driven by advanced digital technologies, plays a crucial role in increasing the reliability of monitoring processes, and therefore in improving the oversight of strategic documents. This dimension is rapidly evolving, as emerging IT solutions are developed and adopted by public administrations, with potential application of tools regarding the automation of processes, processing, and presentation of information. Inefficient data collection, stemming from outdated practices like paper records and non-interoperable IT platforms, hinders the comprehensive tracking of strategic plan implementation. The multiplicity of systems increases transactional costs, demands extensive employee training, and elevates the risk of errors in data handling and computation. This lack of uniformity in tools undermines the reliability of monitoring reports and indicators that aggregate data from various sources and administrations. It can even lead, in some cases, to important data gaps and create concerns related to data quality.

Public administrations in OECD member countries seek to address those challenges to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of strategic plan oversight. This is done for example by investing in new systems to allow line ministries and agencies to report data in real time, or increasing the interoperability of systems across government. Such information system tool can help reflecting the specificities of public administrations in their national context. However, they can also represent a non-negligeable cost and require specific competencies to be maintained over time. Therefore, many countries still use more widely accessible tools, such as Microsoft Excel, that despite visualisation and co-ordination limitations, remains a user-friendly tool for monitoring.

In Bulgaria, the National Statistical Institute is currently upgrading the current information system used, Monitorstat, to become a tool for strategic planning, performance monitoring and reporting of national strategic documents. The upgraded system should allow to track progress of indicators in real time, accessing a wide variety of data sources. One of the objectives of the project is to reduce the time and resources allocated by stakeholders monitoring strategic documents to do so. Ultimately, those combined efforts can facilitate informed decision-making, resource allocation, and an overall better understanding of the implementation of strategic documents.

Using such integrated IT system can help with monitoring strategic documents in several ways. First, IT systems can assist with centralised data collection, even more so needed when strategic documents are transversal. Some more advanced IT solutions can even facilitate data analysis and showcase data in "dashboards". Finally, it can also help showcase monitoring information to the public, by being interconnected to a publicly available platform. This helps reinforce the transparency and accountability of public administrations and the actions of the government.

Developing a single information system to monitor National Resilience and Recovery Plan in Italy

Italy has a long history of developing information systems to monitor the implementation of programmes funded by European funds. To monitor the implementation of the National Resilience and Recovery Plan (NRRP) the Ministry of Economy and Finance has developed a single instrument called ReGiS. This information system is the unique tool through which all central and local Administrations report data on the

implementation of their projects (Italia domani, n.d.[15]). The system is composed of three sections: measures, milestones and targets, and projects. Each central administration in charge of a measure is required to validate the data monthly and transmitting them to the central service through ReGiS (Italia domani, n.d.[15]). The information system contains data on different aspects like financial, operational, and managerial to support the different steps of the implementation and monitoring. In addition, the system is also able to link the information reported by different implementors with external databases of the public administration guaranteeing a more complete picture. A good part of the information collected through the ReGiS are presented in data dashboards which inform on the status of implementation of the plan. At the same time, as the system is also connected to additional databases of the public administration, this allow to conduct more in-depth analysis which are then provided in reports.

Norway's approach to sharing data at the municipal and local level

Strategic documents often require the sharing of data coming from different levels. While data at the national level is often less complicated to obtain, disaggregated data from regional or municipal levels is often more challenging. To solve this issue, Norway's KOSTRA (Municipal State Reporting) started up in 1995 as an electronic reporting system for municipalities and counties (OECD, 2017[16]). The goal is to collect data in a co-ordinated way from municipalities to the national level once a year (Statistics Norway, 2023[17]). Since 2001, all municipalities have been included in KOSTRA. The information system connects administrative data from local authorities to population statistics and provides high-quality data for local administrators to monitor their service provisions and socio-economic situation. It includes indicators of production, service coverage, needs, quality, and efficiency. The information is aggregated by the Statistics Norway and made available online to facilitate detailed comparison of the performance of local governments (OECD, 2017[16]). The information is also frequently used by the local government themselves and by the media and researchers.

Developing well-governed evaluation processes

Evaluations take different shapes and forms across the public administration. The independence of evaluations constitutes one of the main challenges regarding evaluation of public policies. Independent evaluations remain essential for their results to be trustworthy. This independence can be both functional and/or behavioural. The first can involve ensuring that internal evaluation units are equipped with appropriate budgets, have control over their evaluation agendas, as well as do not report directly to the units managing the programmes evaluated, and/or by using external evaluators. In practice, 73% of OECD member countries view external evaluation as the main way to ensure functional independence (OECD, 2023[6]). The second often translates into establishing ethical standards for evaluators or for public servants in charge of overseeing evaluations. These mechanisms can be included in guidelines that provide direction on how internal evaluations should be managed or the process for commissioning external evaluations (including how to draft terms of references, or how to provide oversight to external evaluations).

Evaluation externalisation, when it takes place, should follow several steps and pre-defined procedures. Some countries have clearly stated how externalisation procedures should be carried out in order to guarantee both independence but also impact and use from primary users. This is for example the case in Mexico where such procedures are clearly included in regulations (General law for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy) to ensure common rules across the government when externalising evaluations. Outsourcing evaluation generally requires some steps which can be strongly influenced by the capacities of internal teams. First, it is essential for internal teams responsible for monitoring and evaluating strategic documents to designate a lead internally to oversee the evaluation process. This decision should be based on past experiences, knowledge of evaluation methods and communication and leadership skills. Once the internal team is established, the purpose, scope and timing of the evaluation should be precisely

reflected and agreed upon internally. This of course also depends on potential existing laws regulating the frequency and scope of evaluations. This is essential to define the budget that can be allocated to the evaluation and to develop sufficiently detailed request for proposals and consequently terms of references. Ideally, the internal team should also define *ex ante* the rules that will follow to select the best external evaluators. Some criteria to follow should be past experience related to evaluations, absence of potential conflict of interests, or expertise on the topic. However, this is not always possible as different procurement laws could impose different standards and selection criteria. Finally, guiding the evaluator throughout the entire process is key to ensure a successful evaluation. This requires public servants to be able to communicate frequently, monitor progress and support the process.

Moreover, it is worth noting that even though the evaluation can be externalised, internal capacity is needed to precisely define its scope by defining evaluation questions, understanding its methodology, selecting external evaluators, or providing feedback and opinions. For this reason, countries have developed trainings to foster the skills of civil servants in evaluation. These do not relate only to technical skills but also to soft skills such as communication which can play an important role. Overall, there is no one-size-fits-all solution and both internal and external capacities are important to ensure a good evaluation system. M&E units within CoGs can greatly help best defining these procedures to ensure that all line ministries are following the same steps and developing trainings and supporting material to enable internal teams to commission and use these evaluations efficiently.

Another aspect of evaluation governance relates to the involvement of different stakeholders. Among OECD member countries that have at least one central guideline for policy evaluation, 70% include considerations regarding practices for stakeholder involvement (OECD, 2023[6]). The nature of involved stakeholders depends largely on the evaluation itself. Regarding the evaluation of strategic documents, the involvement of implementing actors can help include design and implementation aspects in the evaluation. Experts on the topic can also help better identify the key elements to evaluate. Therefore, a combination of both implementing actors and experts can be an ideal option. This can however come at the expense of faster evaluation processes, as increasing the number of involved stakeholders can lead to lengthier consultations. It is therefore important to define the steps for which stakeholders can be involved, and in which way.

Overall, across OECD member countries, data suggests that stakeholders are mostly engaged with the aim to collect data for the evaluation and are rarely involved in shaping the evaluation question or design. This leaves space for more broadly engaging stakeholders from the early designing phases of the evaluation. In order to ensure that stakeholders are engaged effectively it is important to develop clear rules on how they will be engaged, the frequency of their involvement and also how decisions will be taken in cases of divergent opinions or conflicts. Setting these rules *ex ante* can help maximising their contributions and increase accountability of the results. In Portugal, each evaluation that the Agency for Development and Cohesion (AD&C) commissions to external evaluators is supported by a stakeholder group (Grupo de Acompanhamento) composed of internal and external experts.

Establishing clear processes and rules to commission evaluations of Croatia strategic documents

Croatia's planning system is composed of long-term, medium-term, and short-term strategic documents which are developed at the national, regional and municipal level. The hierarchy between the different documents is well defined in the *Law on strategic planning and development management* with long term national plans being hierarchically superior to medium term national and regional ones (Parliament of Croatia, 2022[18]). Monitoring and evaluation are clearly defined in the Law on Strategic Planning and additional guidance is also provided in dedicated Ordinances developed in 2023 by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds.

While the overall system presents some remaining challenges preventing M&E to have the desired effects, Croatia achieved important objectives related to the institutionalisation of monitoring and evaluation of strategic documents. In particular, evaluation is compulsory for all long-term and medium-term strategic documents, but not for short-term ones. Each long-term and medium-term strategic plan must be evaluated *ex ante*, *in itinere* and *ex post* (Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds, 2019[19]). This is done to enable evaluations to contribute to the amelioration of the plan before it is actual implementation, during the implementation and afterward to ensure that these results can support the development of future plans. In addition to establishing the temporality and the nature of documents evaluation, one of the Ordinance provides clear instructions on how to ensure the independence of evaluations and how to commission it to external actors (Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds, 2019[19]). To this end, the Ordinance highlights that the different strategic documents should be evaluated by internal or external actors that were not directly involved in the development and implementation of the plan. At the same time, the Ordinance requires establishing an evaluation committee composed of different stakeholders which can contribute and support the evaluators in their work. To ensure the respect of some minimum quality, the Ordinance sets some professional requirements for the evaluators (e.g. years of professional experience, previous work on evaluation, etc.). Finally, results must be presented to the evaluation committee and the recommendations that are included in the evaluations need to be monitored. The evaluation procedures have been recently amended, and time will give more information on their actual implementation. However, the presence of clear and simple rules guiding the evaluation process represents a good practice which will help making evaluations systematic and comparable across different national and local actors.

Developing guidelines to ensure engagement of stakeholders in Costa Rica

To support line ministries in engaging with stakeholders and citizens during the evaluation of certain policies, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN) in Costa Rica, has developed specific guidelines on stakeholder engagement and participatory evaluations. The construction of the guide itself was done in a participatory manner, with inputs from 128 people from the six planning regions of the country through a qualitative approach – applying literature review techniques, focus groups and expert consultations. The guide provides tips on how to map potential actors, how to involve them in the evaluation process or which elements to ensure to make this participation effective.

Guidance to develop well-defined monitoring processes

Taking into account OECD insights and the good practices identified above, Bulgaria can consider the following elements to further define its monitoring processes for strategic documents:

Map out the monitoring process for each indicator within the strategic document.

- Clearly specify each step of the monitoring process and highlight responsibilities for each stakeholder (i.e. indicate who gathers data, etc.)
- Ensure that objectives are linked to indicators associated to targets and baselines.
- Control the quality of the data collected, for instance through data validation checks from the National Statistical Institute.
- Highlight the monitoring process in the strategic document itself or in another reference document.

Develop clear guidelines and protocols to ensure unified practices across the administration.

- Ensuring consistency in data collection practices across departments and ministries through guidelines adopted by CoM.

- Ensure monitoring processes are available to all internal stakeholders.
- To strengthen transparency, make those processes accessible to external stakeholders.

Ensure Monitorstat becomes the main tool for strategic planning, performance monitoring and reporting of national strategic documents.

- Use Monitorstat as the main tool structuring the monitoring process.
- Ensure Monitorstat is used and understood by its main users.
- Ensure a gradual process for inclusion of sub-national strategic documents in Monitorstat.

Guidance to develop well-governed evaluation processes

Taking into account OECD insights and the good practices identified above, Bulgaria can consider the following elements to further develop well-governed evaluation processes:

Provide clear guidance on how to commission and externalise evaluation of strategic documents.

- Building on Croatia's example, consider evaluating strategic documents at least twice throughout their lifespan.
- Develop and communicate from the centre clear policies and procedures for commissioning and externalising evaluations of strategic documents, which should include guidelines on when and how evaluations should be conducted, the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in the evaluation process, and the criteria for selecting external evaluators.
- Provide oversight and support from the centre throughout the evaluation process to ensure that it is conducted in accordance with established policies and procedures.

Include instructions on how to engage with stakeholders in guidelines for evaluating strategic documents.

- Similarly to Costa Rica, include clear instructions on how to engage with stakeholders that could be included in official guidelines on monitoring and evaluation.
- Engage with line ministries, in particular with the units that will be responsible for the implementation of parts of the strategic document, for instance through workshops, Q&A sessions, or on an ad-hoc basis.

3 Develop organisational capacities across government for M&E

Organisational capacity is cornerstone to an efficient monitoring and evaluation system. It however also represents one of the main challenges OECD member countries face when it comes to monitoring or evaluating public policies. In Bulgaria, the unequal distribution of capacity for monitoring and evaluation of strategic documents across government administrations limits the efficiency of the system. While some line ministries use dedicated units to collect data and subsequently analyse it, overall capacity gaps remain across the administration. For instance, skills gaps related to digital or planning and project implementation skills exist across the administration. This can lead to challenges when crosscutting indicators are not collected in the same way or timeframe. Addressing these capacity gaps demand targeted initiatives, including training programs and better resource allocations.

Identifying adequate skills and competencies

The core of government's ability to carry out monitoring exercises and evaluations lies in the competencies of its monitoring and evaluation specialists. To ensure the quality of monitoring exercises and evaluations, governments need to ensure public servants have the right skills. Those skills vary greatly based on the responsibilities associated to different units. For instance, governments seek to strike a balance between greater centralisation efforts related to M&E, through a cross government institution co-ordinating efforts, and decentralisation efforts, giving line ministries more capacities closer to the policy area. This balance reflects the types of skills needed by specialists, which will differ in central monitoring units, lead institutions and line ministries.

Overall, despite those differences, public servants require four types of skills to promote the supply and use of quality evidence, relating greatly to skills for a high-performing civil service (OECD, 2017[20]). Applied to monitoring for strategic documents, those types of skills relate to:

- The **analytical** skills to conduct and use monitoring and evaluation exercises, notably by selecting and collecting the right indicators, or identifying the right methodologies and tools to be used.
- The skills to **foster networks**, ensuring that monitoring exercises can take place across agencies and better identifying already existing evidence.
- The skills to **engage with stakeholders**, including government stakeholders, to best include them in monitoring exercises and communicate and disseminate results.
- In some specific cases, the skills to **commission** part of the data collection, ensuring it is done following strict guidelines and a precise scope, and avoiding additional gaming effects.

Other competency frameworks can apply to monitoring and evaluation specialists. For instance, the Joint Research Centre of the European Union and the OECD developed a competency framework for a good use of evidence from decision-makers in government. The framework looks as six complimentary skills: understanding evidence-informed policymaking, obtaining evidence, interrogating and assessing

evidence, using and applying evidence in policymaking, engaging with stakeholders, and evaluating the success of evidence-informed policymaking (OECD, 2020[21]).

Greater individual skills contribute to organisational capacity, while a robust organisational capacity can contribute to fostering needed skills. Indeed, having public servants possessing advanced skills in M&E elevates the overall proficiency and effectiveness of M&E processes. Simultaneously, a strong organisational M&E capacity creates an environment conducive to the ongoing development of individual skills. This reciprocal relationship ensures that the collective expertise of individuals contributes significantly to the organisation's broader capacity for M&E, enabling it to better navigate the demands and challenges associated with monitoring and evaluation activities.

Developing and retaining the adequate skills and competencies for monitoring and evaluation is a challenge faced by many public administrations across OECD member countries. In 2023, 57% and 23% of OECD member countries respectively identified the lack of resources to conduct evaluations (including staffing) and the lack of relevant staff knowledge or technical expertise as two of the main challenges related to policy evaluation (OECD, 2023[22]). This calls for concrete policies to be implemented to attract candidates with the skills needed, encourage, and offer opportunities to develop new M&E-related skills for staff, and retain highly skilled public servants.

Developing dedicated careers for evaluators in Ireland: IGEES

Analytical skills, which include monitoring and evaluation ones, are increasingly demanded in the job-market and, for this reason, public administrations are often unable to attract them in-house. To mitigate this issue, Ireland has developed a specific cross-government service composed of economists and policy analysts that rotate across departments and support the departments with analytical work. The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) was established in 2012 and represents an interesting organisational structure to ensure analytical skills in the public administration (OECD, 2020[23]). The network is now composed of 200 civil servants working across the Civil Service (Department of Public Exenditure, 2022[24]). By creating this distinct track, Ireland has been able to develop some competitive positions, with interesting career opportunities and advancements and possibility of mobility across different departments. In addition, the rotational aspect plays an interesting role in ensuring cross-departmental knowledge exchange and reducing silos. Even if these figures are not exclusively dedicated to monitoring and evaluation of strategic documents, the Irish example offer an interesting solution on how to foster analytical skills inside departments to conduct a series of analytical activities.

Establishing standards to ensure professionalisation of evaluators: Switzerland and Czechia's approaches

Evaluations are often outsourced to external actors for different reasons. This is often a way for countries to deal with the limited capacities and skills. At the same time, it is also often considered a good practice to ensure the independence of evaluation results and guarantee some distance between implementors and evaluators. However, external evaluators might be difficult to select across a considerably large market of external evaluators. To ensure that external evaluators are following some quality standards and principles, evaluation societies across different OECD countries have played an essential role by developing ethical and professional standards.

In Czechia for example, the Czech Evaluation society has developed in 2011 the Evaluator's Code of Ethics which are often used by the government as a requirement for external evaluators. The Code is structured around three main areas: Expertise, Integrity and Responsibility and collects 21 moral rules for evaluators (Czech Evaluation Society, 2011[25]).

In Switzerland, the Swiss Evaluation Society has developed in 2016 the Swiss Evaluation Society's standards which define the key principles that serve to strengthen the credibility and quality of evaluations

(SEVAL, 2016[26]). The standards are divided in three main sections: General Principles, Practical aspects, Communication of results. Overall, developing ethical and professional standards for evaluators represents a good practice to ensure that, when evaluations are outsourced, some quality standards are guaranteed.

Providing learning and development opportunities

Learning and development strategies are increasingly invested by administrations to maintain a skilled a flexible public service (OECD, 2023[27]). 43% of OECD member countries regular professional updates and training opportunities are the most used measure to acquire and retain the skills they need for public policy evaluation (OECD, 2023[22]). Learning and development opportunities are not just limited to training, but also include more informal knowledge exchange through networks, seminars or events that can all contribute to capacity building. Those efforts also apply to monitoring professionals, who should regularly update their skills and competencies to adapt to the latest processes and methodologies used in the monitoring system.

In contexts where attracting new profiles with the right skills can be difficult – because of limited financial capacity or public sector attractiveness challenges – the role of training and internal capacity development becomes essential. Different learning and development opportunities ensure monitoring professionals remain on top of the latest practices, but also help creating a network where new approaches, methodologies and challenges can be discussed.

Finally, learning and development opportunities matter not only for M&E specialists, but also for programme managers and senior level public servants. Such skills enable them to interpret M&E results accurately and make informed decisions to enhance the effectiveness of policies and programmes. Providing learning and development opportunities to this demographic can greatly help with setting a profound culture of monitoring and evaluation.

Fostering education, training, and research on planning in Ireland: the role of the OPR

To strengthen the quality of its planning system, Ireland has established in 2019 the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) (OPR, 2024[28]). The OPR has three main functions (OPR, 2019[29]): (1) evaluate Statutory Plans, (2) review the planning procedures of local authorities; and (3) conduct research on planning, develop trainings and raise public awareness on planning system. Looking at this last function, the OPR delivers education and training programmes both for elected members and staff of local and regional authorities. The trainings cover a wide range of topics which also include monitoring and evaluation.

Together with specific trainings, the OPR provides also different tools to build capacity and learn about planning (OPR, n.d.[30]). Indeed, through their website a series of online resources are available including an "Introduction to planning" page which offers a wide variety of material to explain how the planning system works in Ireland. In addition, through the page 'Becoming a Planner', users can find interview series with planners and a list of planning courses in Ireland. Finally, there is also a planning library with a broad range of planning policy guidelines. Even if the OPR focuses more on planning at the regional and local level, the Office provides an interesting example of institution focused on developing trainings and materials to build capacity on planning.

Fostering skills for evaluation in the United Kingdom: The Evaluation and Trial Advice Panel and the Evaluation Academy

In the United Kingdom, the Evaluation Task Force (hereafter ETF) in the Cabinet Office plays an important role in fostering the skills on policy evaluation across the departments. Indeed, the ETF often supports the departments through different activities.

It does so firstly by connecting evaluators in the departments with a panel of experts, the Evaluation and Trial Advice Panel, that provides advice on technical and methodological questions of civil servants (Evaluation Task Force, 2022[31]). The Evaluation and Trial Advice Panel is composed of 65 members that provide free advice on evaluations to government departments (Evaluation Task Force, 2023[32]). The experts come from academia, research industry, government and so-called "what works centres". They mainly support departments in the design phase of evaluation but can also advice at any other stage of the process. The members have a broad range of expertise. Since 2015 the Panel has advised 170 process and only in 2022 and 2021, 43 projects and engaged with 11 departments (Evaluation Task Force, 2023[32]).

The ETF has also developed in 2023 a 5-days training called "Evaluation Academy". The 5 days course was divided in 9 modules covering different aspects: from more managerial aspects like how to manage and plan an evaluation to more methodological ones (e.g. how to conduct experimental evaluations, theory-based evaluations, etc.). The training was attended by 40 future evaluation trainers. The Evaluation Academy uses a "train the trainer" model, which means departmental analysts are empowered to own the training and use it in their departments. Participants to the training came from 14 UK departments (Evaluation Task Force, 2023[33]). The objective is to upskill participants in both technical evaluation methods and soft skills, such as evaluation advocacy influencing the policy cycle and communicating evidence. The nine modules are also supported by department-specific case and teaching studies to connect the course theory with real-life evaluation challenges.

Guidance to ensure adequate skills and competencies

Taking into account OECD insights and the good practices identified above, Bulgaria can consider the following elements to further ensure adequate skills and competencies:

Conduct a skills gap analysis across the public administration to acquire skills and competencies accordingly.

- Define monitoring and evaluation job profiles and roles.
- Conduct a skills gap analysis according to selected competency framework(s).
- According to gap analysis, determine the strategy for which skills/competencies will be (1) developed internally, (2) recruited, and (3) outsourced.
- According to the strategy above, develop tailored recruitment policies to attract the required skillsets.
- In case of outsourcing, develop clear criteria for selection and procurement/contracting of the desired capacities.

Explore innovative practices to attract and retain skills and competencies.

- Estimate the interest to develop a specific career for monitoring and evaluation specialists, as it is done in Ireland.
- Develop standards to ensure the professionalisation of monitoring and evaluation specialists, as in Switzerland or in Czechia.

Guidance to develop learning and development opportunities

Taking into account OECD insights and the good practices identified above, Bulgaria can consider the following elements to further develop learning and development opportunities:

Develop learning and development plan according to skills gap analysis.

- Identify which skills and competencies can be developed internally through learning and development.
- Decide whether training should be provided internally or by external experts.
- Similarly to what is done in Ireland and in the United Kingdom, develop learning and development plan according to skills gap analysis for new or current staff; decide on whether training will be provided internally or by external experts.

Assign learning and development missions to dedicated stakeholders.

- Evaluate whether learning and development opportunities should be carried out by line ministries, by a single agency, or by a combination of both.
- Similarly to the Evaluation and Trial Advice Panel, develop a stakeholder able to give free advice on technical and methodological aspects linked to monitoring and evaluation.

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Note

[1] The National Statistical Institute (NSI), supported by the Strategic Planning Directorate, is implementing a project "Technological tool for better strategic planning and management of the implementation of national strategic documents" as an investment (No. C10.I10) financed under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Bulgaria. The main objective of the project is to upgrade the Monitorstat Information System to become a tool for strategic planning, performance monitoring and reporting on the national strategic documents by upgrading the existing functionalities of the system and implementing new ones. The deadline for the implementation of the Project is 31 October 2025. More information is available on it in the following section.