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## Operational Programme Regional Development 2007-2013



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# OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2007–2013



## OVERALL OBJECTIVE:

To improve the quality of living and working environment with better access to basic services and new opportunities for improved regional competitiveness and sustainable development.

**Programme budget:  
BGN 3 131 821 212**

OPRD is financed by the European Regional Development Fund and state budget of the Republic of Bulgaria.



**Priority axis 1:** Sustainable and integrated urban development

**Budget:** BGN 1 875 344 313

**Beneficiaries:** Municipalities on the territory of 86 urban agglomeration areas, European Investment Bank (in the capacity of a JESSICA Holding Fund), Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health, Social Assistance Agency, Employment Agency, Ministry of Interior / Directorate General „Fire Safety and Protection of the Population“, Ministry of Education and Science, „Renovation of Residential Buildings“ - Directorate within the Ministry of Regional Development (MRD), Housing Renovation Fund, non-profit organizations in partnership with municipalities, non-governmental organizations and universities, when acting as non-profit operators for provision of health, social, educational and cultural services.

**Priority axis 2:** Regional and local accessibility

**Budget:** BGN 645 439 513

**Beneficiaries:** Road Infrastructure Agency, 86 municipalities situated within urban agglomeration areas, Ministry of Economy and Energy, Executive Agency „Electronic Communication Networks and Information Systems“.

**Priority axis 3:** Sustainable tourism development

**Budget:** BGN 305 862 595

**Beneficiaries:** Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Economy and Energy, Council of Ministers, 264 municipalities, including in partnership with associations of municipalities, local, regional and national tourism organizations registered in the National Tourism Register, public authorities managing immovable cultural valuables of national and world significance.

**Priority axis 4:** Local development and cooperation

**Budget:** BGN 199 377 316

**Beneficiaries:** District administrations, 178 municipalities outside urban agglomeration areas, non-governmental organizations in partnership with municipalities or district administrations.

**Priority axis 5:** Technical assistance

**Budget:** BGN 105 797 473

**Beneficiaries:** The Managing Authority of OPRD, „Renovation of Residential Buildings“ Directorate and „Internal Audit“ Directorate within MRD and „Technical Rules and Norms“, Directorate within the Ministry of Investment Planning, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Economy and Energy, Ministry of Interior, Road Infrastructure Agency, Social Assistance Agency, Employment Agency, Executive Agency „Electronic Communication Networks and Information Systems“.



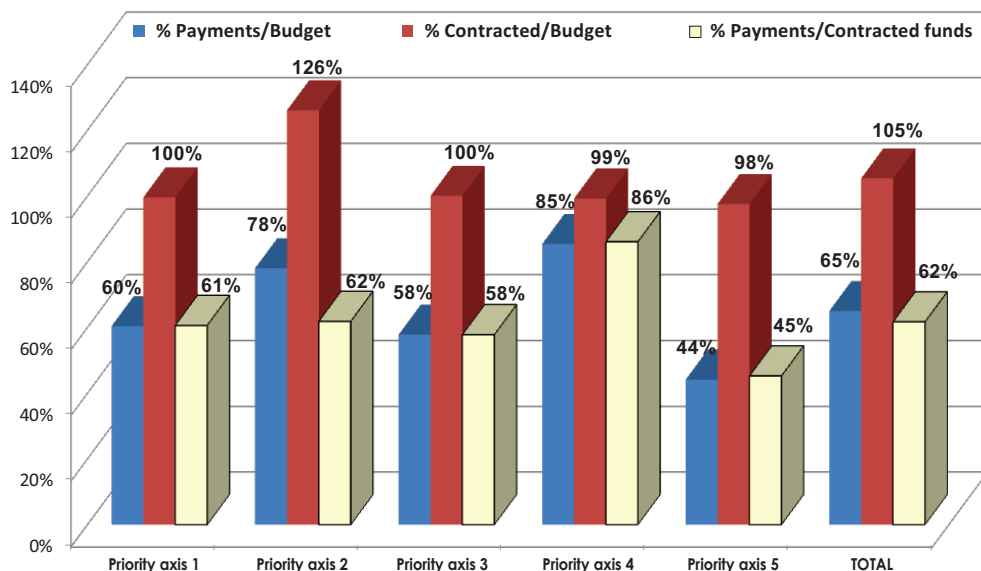
## INDICATORS OF THE OVERALL PROGRESS OF OP „REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT” 2007-2013

- ❖ **48 grant schemes** were published for a total of **BGN 3,131 billion** or above **100 %** of the OPRD budget.
- ❖ In 2014 the released funds under the programme are reallocated to the grant scheme „Support for rehabilitation and reconstruction of 2-nd and 3-rd class roads” with specific beneficiary Road Infrastructure Agency for funding a major project within the meaning of Article 39 of Regulation (EC) № 1083/2006 - „Construction of North Speed Tangent from km 0+000 to km 16+540” with total amount of **BGN 235 million**.
- ❖ Under the programme as of 30.04.2014 were **submitted a total of 1 897 project proposals** and were signed **1 105 contracts to a total amount** of grant – **BGN 3,300 billion** or **105 %** of the programme’s budget (BGN 3,131 billion);
- ❖ The total amount of payments as of 30.04.2014 adds up to **BGN 2,034 billion** or **62 % of contracted funds** and **65 % of OPRD budget**. The total amount of certified funds is **BGN 1,567 billion**.
- ❖ As a result of the implemented 678 OPRD projects are achieved the following results: enhanced and more attractive urban environment, with more than 3,1 million people using the renovated urban environment, built/rehabilitated parks, green areas, playgrounds (over 3 million sq.m.), hiking areas, cycling routes, sidewalk (over 810 thousand sq. m), secured parking spaces near the nodal transport points of suburban areas – 3 256. Over 2.4 million people are using the renewed 925 buildings of educational, social and cultural infrastructure, with significant energy savings as a result of the investment (over 141 294 megawatt hours/average annual). Landslides are fortified with a total area of over 1.179 million sq. m., with over 624 thousand people benefitting from these investments.

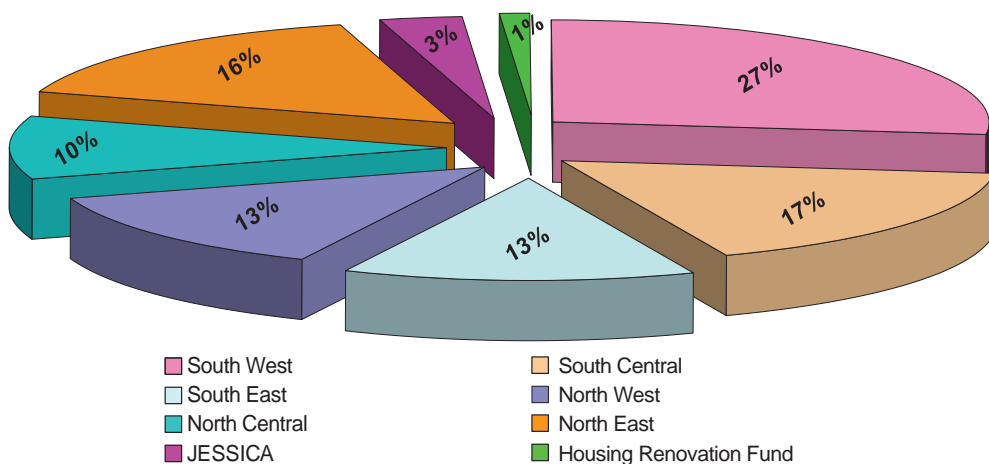


With these indicators OPRD finds its place among the most successful programmes in Bulgaria. Through supported activities the programme reaches every region of the country, demonstrating visible results and contributing for improved quality of living and working environment of each Bulgarian citizen with **better access to basic services and new opportunities for increased regional competitiveness and sustainable development.**

*Financial implementation of OPRD for the 01.01.2007 - 30.04.2014 period*



*Disbursed funds (%) by regions at NUTS 2 level for the 01.01.2007- 30.04.2014 period*





## KEY PROJECTS OF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2007-2013

### 1. Deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of Bulgaria

Within Operation 1.1 „Social infrastructure“ a grant scheme **„Support for deinstitutionalization of social institutions providing services to children at risk“** is in implementation. Specific beneficiaries are 62 municipalities in urban agglomerations. The scheme **supports construction/ reconstruction/ renovation of an adequate infrastructure on the territory of urban agglomerations**, to replace institutional care and provide new opportunities to children with disabilities and their families. So they will get support within the community and in their natural environment. Signed were **61 contracts** to a total amount of **BGN 99 million**. In 2013 the contract with Nova Zagora Municipality was terminated after a request of the beneficiary due to impossibility of completing planned activities with adequate quality within specified deadlines. With the implementation of the projects are **to be established 132 Accommodation Centers of Family Type and 26 Protected Homes**.

**During the end of April 2014 25 grant contracts have been completed, in results of which 35 ACEF and 9 protected homes were built, furnished and equipped and 2 protected homes were renovated and equipped.**



Under implementation is a project of Ministry of Health for total amount of BGN 10 million for the restructuring of **8 pilot Children's Medical and Social Care Homes**. The purpose is to provide innovative and integrated deinstitutionalization services and prevent abandonment of children aged 0-3 years.

## 2. Support for reconstruction, renovation and equipping of state and municipal medical and healthcare institutions



**BGN 147 million** have been provided as a grant to the Ministry of Health for reconstruction and renovation of **16 state medical institutions**. Under the programme are funded reconstruction and renovation of **municipal medical facilities** (2 grant schemes under Priority axis 1 and Priority axis 4). As of 30.04.2014 **34 contracts** with municipalities to a total amount of **BGN 134 million** are under implementation.

**2 grant contracts** for reconstruction and renovation of municipal medical institutions have been completed up

to 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2014, in results of which 2 medical institutions were renovated and more then 36 000 patients has benefited from the renewed health infrastructure.

## 3. Reconstruction and rehabilitation of second- and third-class roads

Main objective of the scheme is to encourage accessibility, interconnectivity and cohesion within regions through improvement and rehabilitation of regional and local roads. Beneficiary is the Road Infrastructure Agency with total amount of the grant scheme **BGN 534 million**. Together with the projects the following indicators will be achieved: 992,716 km reconstructed and rehabilitated 2nd and 3rd class roads and 16,540 km newly constructed 1-st class roads. As of 01.10.2013 **54 contracts** with a total amount of **BGN 723 million** are under implementation and **355 km. road sections** were rehabilitated and put into exploitation. On 18.11.2013 the major project „Construction of Northern Speed Tangent from km 0+000 to km 16+540,“ is defined by the European Commission as admissible. On 30.01.2014 with a decision the Council of Ministers agrees Managing Authority of Operational





Programme „Regional Development” to sign a contract with Road Infrastructure Agency and provide funding for the major project before the final approval by the European Commission. On 17.02.2014 was signed the contract for grant funding of the major project „Construction of Northern Speed Tangent from km 0+000 to km 16+540,, to amount of BGN 234 million.

The total length of the rehabilitated second and third class roads under exploitation is 971 km.

#### 4. Support for urban transport in the big cities

Within Priority axis 1: „Sustainable and integrated urban development”, Operation 1.5 „Sustainable urban transport systems” under Operational Programme Regional Development were provided grants to the amount of **BGN 403 million** for development of integrated urban transport in the 7 big cities of the country – Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Bourgas, Pleven, Russe and Stara Zagora. The focus is mainly on creating more effective and speedy urban transport with less energy consumption, construction of more accessible secondary infrastructure of public transport networks and introduction of environmentally friendly modes of public transport. The **Unit for Management of Projects for Integrated Urban Transport** within the Managing Authority of OPRD is continuing its work.

##### – Integrated urban transport project of Bourgas Municipality

The „Integrated urban transport in Bourgas” project is the first major project within the meaning of Article 39 of Regulation (EC) 1083/2006 under OPRD. The total amount of the project adds up to BGN 131 million, of which the grant amount under OPRD is BGN 101 million, as BGN 30 million is the contribution by Bourgas Municipality. The grant contract was signed on 26 November 2010 and will be implemented for



48 months. The project was approved by the European Commission on 16 August 2011 and provides a set of measures for modernization of public transport and encourages transportation in alternative ways (on foot or by bicycle), as well as studies for further investments to build on the results achieved.

### Components of the urban transport projects:

- Renovation of rolling stock and maintenance facilities;
- Building of a central bus station and renovation of bus terminals;
- Introduction of a new optimized and attractive bus route network and a system for prompt bus service;
- Construction of bicycle routes and pedestrian overpasses;
- Introduction of an integrated e-ticket system and real time passenger information system at bus stops and on the buses;
- Integrated center for control and management of the traffic, supported by systems for video surveillance and public transport control;
- Traffic lights systems with priority for the buses of the public transport.

As of 30.04.2014 28 articulated diesel buses and 39 single body CNG buses are delivered and in operation. In process of reconstruction are also bus depot, workshop, diesel and CNG station; prepared technical investment projects for Bus Rapid Transit route (BRT), terminals and a network of cycling routes with issued building permits; launched procedure for construction of a terminal „Meden Rudnik“ and the surrounding area; forthcoming launch of a public procurement for selection of contractor of four pedestrian overpasses and a central bus station.

#### **– Integrated urban transport project of Sofia Municipality**

The „**Support for integrated urban transport in Sofia Municipality**“ project is the **second major project** within the meaning of Article 39 of Regulation (EC) 1083/2006 under OPRD. The total amount of the project adds up to **BGN 122 million**, of which the grant amount under OPRD is **BGN 98 million**, as **BGN 25 million** is the contribution by Sofia Municipality. The grant contract was signed on 23 August 2011 and will be implemented for 36 months. The project was approved by the European Commission on 13 June 2012.



The project envisages **a set of measures for improving the quality of public transport and encourages the use of environmentally friendly urban transport.**

Components of the projects:

- Intelligent traffic management system;
- Electronic information boards;
- Delivery of 50 new trolleybuses;
- Marketing and legal research for public transport sheds;
- Modernization of the tram line on „Bulgaria“ Blvd.;
- New tram line from the Seminary to „Darvenitsa“ district.

As of 30.04.2014 the first 12 of total 50 new low-floor articulated trolleybuses are delivered; started reconstruction of tram line, catenary and cables network on Bulgaria Blvd. Forthcoming delivery of 600 new electronic boards and delivery of a specialized car for contact and tram line repair. Public procurement for delivery and installation of Intelligent system for traffic management and for construction a tram line „Seminaria- Darvenitsa“ will be launched. A contract for public service between the Center for Urban Mobility and Sofia Municipality in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 1370/2009 is signed

– **Integrated urban transport projects in big cities**

For implementation of urban transport modernization projects in other big cities in Bulgaria under OPRD are envisaged funds to the amount of **BGN 204 million** allocated between the big cities based on number of residents, population using public transport and tourist flow. In July and August 2012 were signed contracts with the municipalities of Pleven, Plovdiv, Russe and Stara Zagora. The total amount of the projects adds up to **BGN 125,9 million**, of which the grant amount under OPRD is **BGN 112,5 million**.

Components of the urban transport projects:

- Planning of transport for transition from personal vehicles to public transport, bicycles or walking;
- Intelligent traffic management system;
- E-ticketing system;
- Environmentally friendly rolling stock of buses/trolley buses;
- Improvement and development of the urban transport infrastructure;
- Configuration of routes with the purpose of ensuring special priority lanes.





### – Integrated urban transport project of Varna

The „Integrated urban transport in Varna” project is the **third major project** within the meaning of Article 39 of Regulation (EC) 1083/2006 under OPRD. The total amount of the project adds up to **BGN 114 million**, of which the grant amount under OPRD is **BGN 90 million**, as **BGN 23 million** is the contribution by Varna Municipality. The grant contract was signed on 9 July 2012 and will be implemented for 36 months. The project was approved by the European Commission on 17 December 2012 and envisages the realization of 10 components, in accordance to the main strategic objectives of the OPRD for establishment of proper urban transport.

#### Components of the urban transport projects:

- Automated ticket system;
- Priority of vehicles for the mass urban public transport (MUPT);
- System information to passengers in real time;
- Management Centre MUPT;
- BRT corridor;
- Rolling stock;
- Facilities for cycling;
- Improvement to the three final stops;
- Improvement of the production/technical facilities;
- Measures for accessibility and improvement of the static information at the stops of the public transport.

As of 30.04.2014 are delivered 70 new low-floor buses which are put into operation and contract for public service between Varna Municipality and the internal operator and partner - „Public Transport” is signed. There is a signed contract with consultant to prepare the public procurement papers and to support conducting of the procedures for selection of contractor.

## 5. Support for housing policy

### – Support for energy efficiency in multifamily residential buildings

Operational Programme „Regional Development“ supports implementation of energy efficiency measures through scheme „**Support for energy efficiency in multifamily residential buildings**“ in 36 urban centers. The scheme was launched on 18.07.2011 as an integral part of the National Housing Strategy and will contribute to long-term improvements in the living conditions of the cities. Specific beneficiary is „Renovation of Residential Buildings“ Directorate within the Ministry of Regional Development. The total amount of the project's budget comes up to **BGN 65 million**, of which the grant amount under OPRD is **BGN 50 million**. Up to 75% of the budget for energy renovation for each approved building under the project will be grant. The other 25% will be provided with own or borrowed funds by the condominium. The project envisages implementation of energy efficiency measures in multifamily residential buildings in 36 urban centers, including energy efficiency audits and introduction of energy efficiency measures (insulation, replacement of woodwork, local installations and/or connections to gas and heating systems).

As of 28.04.2014 438 expressions for interest and support from 34 cities are submitted. Only 2 cities have not submitted applications – Lovech and Silistra. 352 residential buildings are approved. 54 requests for financial support and implementation of renovation for energy efficiency are received and 43 agreements for financial support are signed. Technical observation audits, energy audits and



Before



After

detailed design are under preparation depending on the implementation stage of the building renovation. 3 buildings have already approved detailed designs and constructing permission. For 2 of them are signed contracts with contractors to perform construction works selected after conducted procedure under the Public Procurement Law. On 23.04.2014 and 24.04.2014 the construction activities started officially. Two public procurement procedures on framework agreements for design and construction works are launched.

– **Support for establishment of a financial engineering instrument Housing Renovation Fund.** In March 2012, after public procurement procedure was signed a contract with Corporate Commercial Bank for the establishment of a Housing Renovation Fund (HRF) with a budget of **BGN 12,467 million** provided by OPRD and **BGN 1 million** co-financing by CCB. HRF is a financial engineering instrument for provision of loans / bank guarantees to owners of properties in multifamily residential buildings to be used for securing financial participation in the process of housing fund renovation in Bulgaria. Housing Renovation Fund offers special terms in favor of the Bulgarian households that allow loans with interest base rate + 4.5% base rate to 6.5% for the entire contract period. The term of the loans granted by the HRF is up to 20.03.2022, with a grace period of 12 months. In case of partial or full early repayment the HRF does not charge penalties. The Fund considers the documents of applicants for loans without fee, and upon approval and signing of the contract does not charge commissions on credit management. No fees and commissions for opening and closing of the disbursement account are paid and the holder does not pay the monthly service charge on the bill.

## 6. Support for social homes of vulnerable groups

In a process of implementation is a scheme „Support of modern social housing for vulnerable, minority and socially disadvantaged groups as well as other disadvantaged population groups” launched on 30.08.2011 with a budget of **BGN 16 million**. It is aimed at providing modern social housing for disadvantaged groups, through renovation and change of use of existing buildings owned by

public authorities or non-profit purpose. It will contribute to social inclusion of vulnerable people through improving their living standard and overall improvement of the quality of housing in urban communities. Under implementation are three contracts with Vidin, Devnya and Dupnitsa municipalities with total grant amount of **BGN 12 million**. The projects aim to establish pilot models providing contemporary social homes and sustainable solution of problems in this field.







## 7. Joint European Initiative JESSICA

**The JESSICA initiative** aims to support sustainable and integrated urban development. In Bulgaria JESSICA is implemented through OPRD – a Holding Fund managed by the European Investment Bank and two Urban Development Funds (UDF) supporting public-private partnerships and other urban development projects on the territory of Sofia and the six big cities – Plovdiv, Varna, Bourgas, Russe, Stara Zagora and Pleven.

The **Fund for Sustainable Urban Development of Sofia** provides low interest loans and equity for sustainable projects on the territory of Sofia City. The amount of financial resources to be invested in projects by the Fund is **BGN 49,2 million**, including BGN 24,6 million provided by OPRD and 24,6 million provided by the Fund Manager.

The **Regional Urban Development Fund** provides low interest loans and equity for projects on the territory of the six big cities. The amount of financial resources to be invested in urban development projects by the Fund is **BGN 110,7 million**, including BGN 36,9 million provided by OPRD and BGN 73,8 million provided by the Fund Manager.

The Urban Development Funds work on a broad portfolio of potential projects to be financed by low-interest loans under the JESSICA initiative.

As of 30.04.2014 the Urban Development Funds under JESSICA have signed 10 project funding agreements totaling BGN 55 million, including BGN 14,2 million provided by OPRD, for investments in the following projects:

- ✓ Reconstruction and capital refurbishment of the „Women’s Bazaar” in Sofia;
- ✓ Reconstruction of the Vrabnitsa Market in Sofia;
- ✓ Magic Castle „Red Castle,” in Sofia;
- ✓ Reconstruction of the Central Municipal Market in Stara Zagora;
- ✓ Development of a Logistics Center in Stara Zagora;
- ✓ Installation of Energy Efficiency Lightning on a Municipal Football Playground in Stara Zagora;
- ✓ Refurbishment of the former underground facility with defense functions (bomb shelter) in an amusement attraction facility „Underground City” in Bourgas;
- ✓ Development of a permanent exhibition „Flora” in Bourgas;
- ✓ Construction of new production plant in Rousse’s industrial zone.
- ✓ Development of a new parking lot for 160 cars in the city of Varna.



## 8. Development of cultural infrastructure - Key projects of the Ministry of Culture

The Ministry of Culture is implementing **18 contracts** to a grand total of **BGN 48 million** for reconstruction and renovation of cultural sites of national significance as the National Museum Complex, „Sveta Sofia” Basilica, „Aleko Konstantinov” Satirical Theatre-Sofia, etc.



13 projects are completed, and as a result renovated and modernized are: 3 theater buildings: „Adriana Budevskia”- Bourgas „Stefan. Buchvarov”-Varna, Satirical Theatre „Aleko Konstantinov”-Sofia; 3 operas: Rousse Opera, Opera and Philharmonic Society – Rousse, Opera and Philharmonic Society – Bourgas; 4 museums: National Museum of Bulgarian Fine Arts, the National Polytechnical Museum - Sofia, Architectural Museum „St. Sofia”, Reconstruction and socialization of architectural museum „St. Sofia”, 3 schools – National School for Musical and Dancing Art „Dobrin Petkov” – Plovdiv, National High School of Polygraphy and Photography – Sofia, National School of Music and Stage Arts „Prof. Pancho Vladigerov” – Bourgas and 1 Concert Hall - Concert Complex „Bulgaria”.



**BGN 31 million** are provided under **10 contracts** supporting the development of immovable cultural valuables of national and world significance such as Ancient Cultural Communication Complex „Serdika” (so-called Largo), the National Historical and Archaeological Reserve (NHAR) „Pliska”, the Historical Reserve (HR) „Trapezitsa” in Veliko Tarnovo, the Red Church near the town of Perushtitsa.



After completing 6 projects the following tourist attractions are improved - real cultural values and related infrastructure - Eski Mosque and Museum of Religions, Stara Zagora, „Sv. Georgi” (St. George) Church in Arbanassi village, Roman Fortress „Sexaginta Prista” – Ruse and Cruciform Barracks (ethnographic exhibition) in Vidin, National Historical and Archaeological Reserve „Pliska” and Historical and Archaeological Reserve „Nikopolis ad Istrum”.





## 9. Support for development of tourist attractions in municipalities

Within the framework of 2 OPRD schemes are supported **60 projects** aiming for improvement of the condition of cultural valuables and natural landmarks on the territory of municipalities through a complex of measures for development of an integrated tourist product – a combination of infrastructure, marketing and conservation activities. The approved projects are to a total grant amount of **BGN 188 million**. Support is provided to some of the key landmarks of the country, and OPRD funding will contribute for improving their attractiveness:







- ✓ the Ancient City of Nessebar – Nessebar Municipality;
- ✓ the Madara Rider and Shumen Fortress – Shumen Municipality;
- ✓ the Archaeological Complex Perperikon – Kardjali Municipality;
- ✓ the Ancient Bulgarian capital Veliki Preslav – Veliki Preslav Municipality;
- ✓ the Belogradchik Fortress – Belogradchik Municipality;
- ✓ the „Assenovata krepost” Fortress – Assenovgrad Municipality;
- ✓ the „Sveta Anastasia” Island – Bourgas Municipality;
- ✓ the Architectural and Ethnographic Complex „Etara” and Architectural and Historical Reserve in Bojentsi village – Gabrovo Municipality;
- ✓ the Sofia Museum with active presence of mineral water – Sofia Municipality;
- ✓ the „Ledenika” Cave – Vratsa Municipality;
- ✓ the Archaeological Reserve of Hissar City – Hissar Municipality.

Until 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2014 20 grant contracts were finished in results of which 59 tourist attractions were supported and 125 people were trained.

## 10. Support for development of the regional tourist product and marketing of destinations

The Operational Programme „Regional Development“ supports development of the regional tourist product and marketing of destinations under 2 schemes within Operation 3.2 „Development of the regional tourist product and marketing of destinations“. Beneficiaries are municipalities on the territory of the country. The activities to be supported are focused on destinations with significant tourist potential, promoting natural, cultural and historical heritage. Under implementation are **38 contracts** to a total amount of **BGN 16,8 million**.

## 11. In support of the next programming period

Within Operation 5.3 „Capacity building of OPRD beneficiaries“ under Priority axis 5 „Technical assistance“ in implementation is a grant scheme „In support of the next programming period“. The application of the scheme was carried out fully electronically through the electronic module of MIS. The scheme is aimed at preparing working investment project so the beneficiaries will be able to apply for funding in the next programming period 2014-2020. Eligible beneficiaries are 36 municipalities – centers of urban agglomerations. In implementation are 35 contracts with total grant amount of **BGN 26 million**.

36 Integrated Urban Development and Regeneration Plans of 36 cities from 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> hierarchical level in accordance with the National Concept for Spatial Development are approved by the OPRD Managing Authority.



## PROGRAMMING PERIOD 2014-2020

The Operational Programme „Regions in growth“ 2014-2020 was the first operational programme in the European Union which was submitted for informal co-ordination procedure within the European Commission, which has significantly supported the process of elaboration and improving the quality of the programming document. The programme was developed by a Thematic Working Group, which includes representatives from the institutions and the socio-economic partners. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2014, during the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Thematic Working Group, the Fourth Version of OPRG 2014-2020 was approved. Prior to the official submission in the European Commission the OP went through 3 rounds of informal negotiations in order to reflect all open issues and bring the positions closer. In the end of 2013 was adopted an ex-ante evaluation of the program and a decision by the Ministry of Environment and Waters for approving its environmental assessment was issued.

The Operational programme is part of the Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria, which outlines the support from the European Structural and Investment Funds for the period 2014-2020. The main objective of the programme is the improvement of the socio-economic and territorial development and generation of growth and employment in the Bulgarian regions and addressing of the demographic problems and the depopulation of middle-sized and smaller cities by applying a model of moderate polycentric development of the network of cities.

The strategic focus of the OPRG is aimed at urban development policy through the implementation of the Integrated Plans for Urban Regeneration and Development in 67 target cities identified in the National Concept for Spatial Development 2013-2025. With regard to the effective implementation and achievement of the objectives of the territorial dimensions of sectoral policies, included in the Partnership Agreement, the scope of the program includes investments in regional educational, health, social and road infrastructure, regional tourism and preventing the risk of landslides.

The draft of Operational programme „Regions in growth“ for the next programming period 2014-2020 provides support for the following priority areas:

*Priority axis 1: Sustainable and integrated urban development*

*Priority axis 2: Regional educational infrastructure*

*Priority axis 3: Regional health infrastructure*



*Priority axis 4: Regional social infrastructure*

*Priority axis 5: Regional tourism*

*Priority axis 6: Regional road infrastructure*

*Priority axis 7: Risk prevention*

*Priority axis 8: Technical assistance*

The operational programme is elaborated in compliance with and in support of the two national documents on Bulgaria's development until 2020 – National Development Programme „Bulgaria 2020“ and National Reform Programme 2012-2020. The programme corresponds to the National Regional Development Strategy and the National Spatial Development Concept.

Further developing and upgrading the achievements of the previous programming period 2007-2013 and in relation to the reinforced role of urban development for achievement of the Cohesion Policy objectives, main priority in the 2014-2020 period will be the sustainable and integrated urban development. The priority will be implemented within the framework of the Integrated urban regeneration and development plans of 67 cities, beneficiaries under Priority Axis 1, in order to implement a purposeful state policy for urban development. Given the strategic focus of OPRG 2014-2020 aimed at urban development, 59 per cent of the financial resources of the programme are focused in this priority axis where the implementation of five investment priorities including indicative list of activities for realization will be supported. The indicative activities are related to interventions in municipal educational infrastructure, cultural, sports and social infrastructure, improving the urban environment, energy efficiency in administrative and residential buildings and student dormitories, integrated public transport, areas with potential for economic development.

Priority Axis 2 „Regional Educational Infrastructure“ of OPRG 2014-2020 focuses on objects of educational infrastructure of national and regional importance (vocational, special, sport, support, schools of arts and culture), including universities. A clear prioritization of projects is carried out by a Methodology for prioritisation of educational infrastructure in Bulgaria, approved by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Priority Axis 3 „Regional Health Infrastructure“ is aimed at improving the conditions for adequate emergency care and medical institutions for long-term treatment, according to the Concept for development of the emergency medical care and the concept of restructuring of hospital care in the National Health Strategy 2014-2020.

Priority Axis 4 „Regional Social Infrastructure“ continues the process deinstitutionalization of social services in accordance with the National Strategy „Vision for Deinstitutionalization of Children in Bulgaria“. In addition, during the programming

period 2014-2020 in the deinstitutionalization process will be included the services for elderly people in accordance with the National Strategy for long-term care.

Priority Axis 5 will support the development of regional cultural tourism. The main activities to be undertaken are related to the development of cultural and historical attractions and religious sites of national and global significance and the development of regional tourist product associated with the funded sites. The development of regional tourism and the use of local economic potential is an essential tool for the creation of new forms of employment in the region and achievement of sustainable economic growth. To determine the predefined projects for funding, an inter-institutional working group, chaired by the Minister of Regional Development and the Minister of Culture, has developed a Methodology for Prioritization of Cultural Heritage Sites of National and Global Significance.

The regional road infrastructure is considered as a priority of national and regional significance. Investments will be directed to first class, second class (non-TEN-T) and tertiary roads. Road sections of national and regional importance will be funded, based on the Methodology and Criteria for Prioritization of Road Sections developed by the Road Infrastructure Agency.

Priority axis 7 is focused on risk prevention of landslides in accordance with the Methodology for Prioritizing Landslide Sites, developed by the Ministry of Regional Development.

Under Priority axis 8 „Technical Assistance,“ the financial resource is aimed at strengthening and improving the administrative and institutional capacity of the Managing Authority and the beneficiaries for the successful management and implementation of the Operational Program „Regions in Growth,“.

During the next programming period the use of financial instruments will be further developed and upgraded. JESSICA type projects will be applied with regard to urban development and tourism, where it is planned to enlarge the territorial scope up to 67 cities in the country and to increase significantly the funds allocated for repayable investments under OPRG. This will expand greatly the potential opportunities for establishing public-private partnerships and for financing business initiatives with a social and economic impact and contribution to OPRG 2014-2020 objectives.

The results of the OPRG implementation are expected to have a positive impact on the processes of regional development in the country. They represent support for counteraction to the effects of the global financial and economic crisis. In this regard the programme is intended to overcome the lagging behind in the development of the Bulgarian regions, through investments, stimulating the generation of growth and jobs.

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Elaborated under project BG161PO001/5-01/2008/056  
Production and distribution of informational materials for the  
Operational Programme „Regional Development 2007-2013 (OPRD)  
Priority axis 5: „Technical assistance“ OPRD.  
The project is financed by the European Regional Development Fund and  
state budget of the Republic of Bulgaria

