EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S SUPPORT TO MEMBER STATES IN ADDRESSING CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Abridged Report
September 2022
DIO-EVA(2022)38

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Contents

List of acronyms

Congress	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
CPT	European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DGA	Directorate General of Administration
DIO	Directorate of Internal Oversight
DIT	Directorate of Information Technology
DPB	Directorate of Programme and Budget
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IT	Information Technology
ODGP	Office of the Directorate General of Programmes[1]
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
P&B	Programme and Budget of the Council of Europe
PO	Private Office of the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General
RBM	Results-based management
SMT	Security Management Team (day-to-day management of the crisis)
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WFP	World Food Programme

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1. The ODGP – Office of the Directorate General of Programmes is renamed as the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination, with effect from 1 November 2022.

Abridged report

This document is an abridged version of the "Evaluation of the Council of Europe's support to member states in addressing challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic".
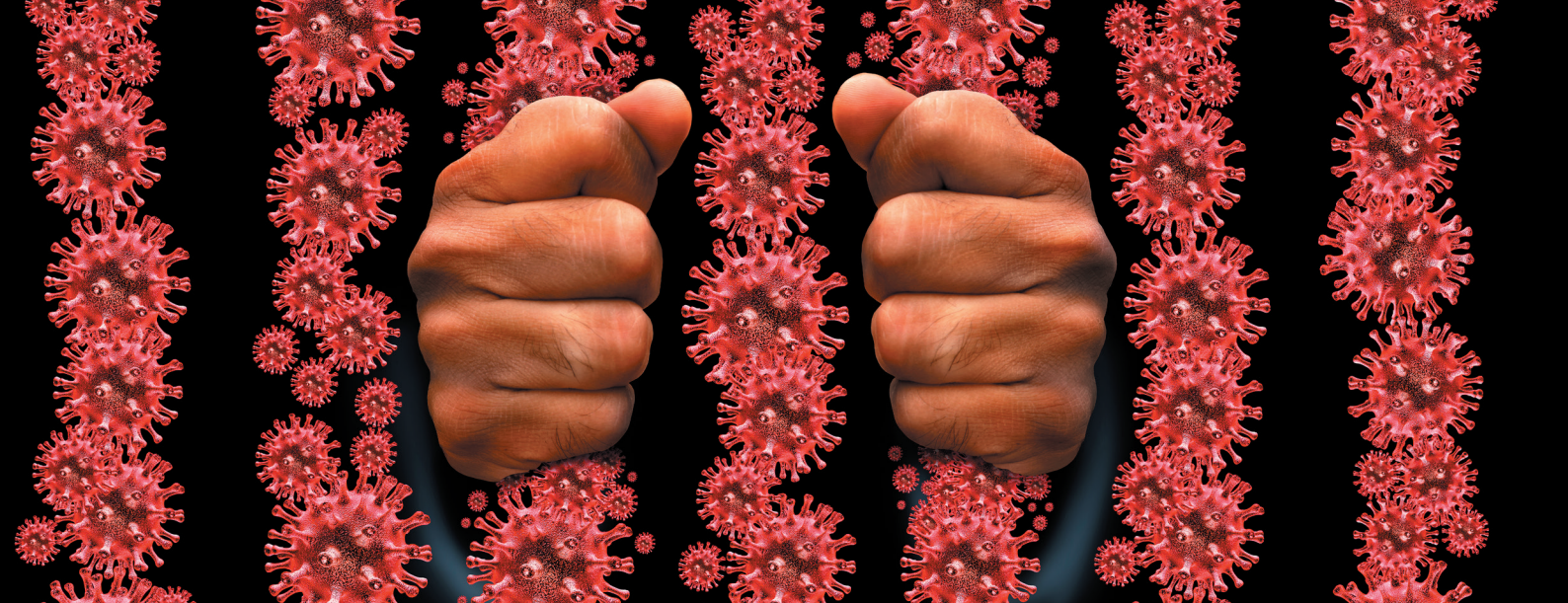
Executive summary

Object of the report

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the Council of Europe's support to member states in addressing challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The evaluation examined the programmatic response of the Organisation to Covid-19 in assisting member states to fulfil their commitments to maintaining human rights, rule of law and democracy. The evaluation analysed the criteria of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency with a series of evaluation questions in order to improve future crises responses and modernise working methods and technology.

Methodology

The evaluation was conducted internally by the Evaluation Division of the Directorate of Internal Oversight. It involved a mapping exercise of outputs, a benchmarking exercise to identify good practice in crisis management in response to Covid-19 and was informed by a qualitative data collection methodology drawing on general data confronted with specific case study data. It took place over one year, from April 2021 to March 2022, including inception, desk / field and reporting phases.

Multiple data sources

Surveys
- Staff: 573 respondents (out of 1636)
- External (PACE, Congress, WfD): 43 respondents (out of 1404)

Interviews
- 59 managers interviewed
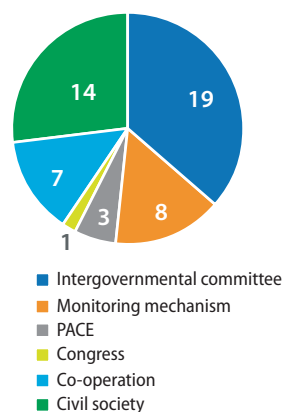- 10 permanent representations

Benchmarking exercise
- 7 international organisations (EC, OSCE, UNESCO, UNODC, OHCHR,

Mapping exercise

Case study
- Georgia, Greece, Germany
- 52 interviewed, 21 women 31 men

- ■ Intergovernmental committee
- ■ Monitoring mechanism
- ■ PACE
- ■ Congress
- ■ Co-operation
- ■ Civil society

Key findings and conclusions

The evaluation revealed the real need for and added value of the Council of Europe's strategic triangle of standard setting, monitoring and co-operation as well as interaction with the PACE, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress) and the Conference of International non-governmental organisations. At the same time, it proved difficult to capture the essential features of Council of Europe work in relation to the pandemic, which meant that this need was sometimes obscured by the immediate health threat. Adjustments to the Organisation's work were made early and on a timely basis, but the strong and clear strategy that was formulated was not always prioritised and operationalised. The global scale and unprecedented impact of Covid-19 called for a strong programmatic response, over and above the equally vital business continuity of the Organisation.

The response was effective in that guidance, support, exchange of good practice, political dialogue, and scrutiny among many other elements were reliable, high standard and highly valued by member states. Resources were often spread thinly and there were limited connections between many interventions, including with other international organisations and member states, which meant that the Council of Europe's response was not perceived as forceful. This led to some disappointment among stakeholders, although the unprecedented nature of the situation should be borne in mind when considering the Organisation's response.

The Council of Europe operated exceptionally well during the pandemic despite the constraints and restrictions linked to it, making the period a highly productive one. The response revealed an automatic, organic resilience in the Organisation, predominantly down to the plethora of instruments and committees that are relatively autonomous in their governing structure. At the same time this automated response contributed to limitations on strategic communication and co-ordination that hampered the effectiveness of the response. The Council of Europe was able to pilot new working methods and technologies, which has increased the strong demand for innovation in the Organisation. This will be a powerful driver for the continuing administrative reform and a catalyst for further improvement. The Organisation has recently created a Task Force on Crisis Management and Business Continuity which findings from the evaluation can feed into.

As a result of the pandemic and the way it reacted the Organisation is now more flexible and adaptable in the delivery of its interventions.

Recommendations

There were two clusters of recommendations resulting from the evaluation findings and conclusions relating to crisis preparedness and crisis response:

Crisis preparedness and checklist	Institutional capacity to manage crisis
1. Develop a checklist of actions to determine most appropriate programmatic responses to crises. (High priority)	2. Develop and provide advice on fast reaction adjustments to programming in crises. (High priority)
4. Prepare a set of steps to facilitate rapid decision making in a crisis and identify crisis response programmes. (High priority)	3. Reinforce RBM and strategic management guidance to improve focus on results in crises. (Medium priority)
5. Include the possibility to carry out "exceptional monitoring" adapted to crises. (High priority)	7. Draft guidance on fundraising to respond to crisis. (Medium priority)
6. Ensure partnership approaches to amplify messages to fully comply with human rights, rule of law and democracy standards in crises. (Medium priority)	9. Continue to make available multiple solutions for online working. (High priority)
8. Support exchange between headquarters, external offices, expert and Civil Society Organisation networks to respond to crises. (High priority)	
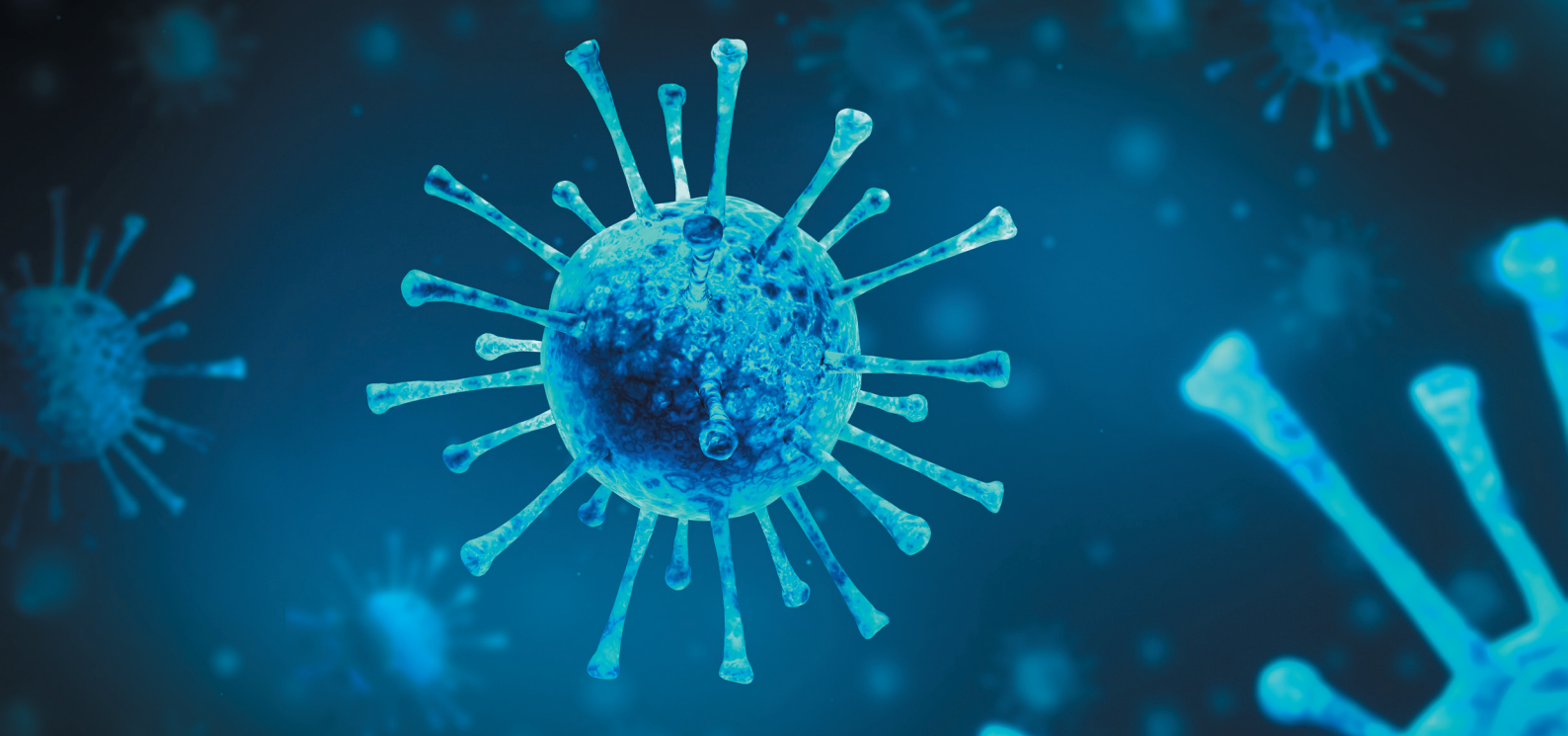
1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1. Promoting democracy and the rule of law as well as safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms form the core of the common values that unite the Council of Europe's 46 member states.

2. The 46 member states of the Council of Europe have undertaken to respect their obligations under the Statute of the Council of Europe, the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention) and other conventions/treaties to which they are Parties, as well as to observe a series of principles and standards which have been elaborated since the creation of the Organisation with regard to pluralistic democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

3. In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in urgent new challenges to Europeans' rights under the the Convention, the European Social Charter (ESC), the European Cultural Convention and other instruments. In order to help its member states face these unprecedented challenges and still comply with commitments, the Council of Europe provided a response to meet their rightful expectation of support relating to all areas of the Organisation's mandate.

4. The Council of Europe's action on the effects of the pandemic included work on standards' compliance and intergovernmental co-operation, with the latter performing a legal, policy and practical research and development function in which pooled knowledge, expertise and the content of the Organisation's *acquis* contributed to solutions for ever-changing threats in what was and remains a highly dynamic environment.

5. There was also significant activity by the Committee of Ministers (CM), Commissioner for Human Rights, the Congress, the PACE, the Court and the Council of Europe Development Bank, as well as the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) and the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity (DGII), including the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and Healthcare (EDQM), and others.

6. Several Steering Committees held specific sessions on their Covid-19 response or organised thematic sessions within their regular meetings. The work carried out for and with member states was conducted in and from Strasbourg and in the external and field offices where staff on the ground also reshaped some of their activities.

7. The Security Management Team (SMT), chaired by the Director General of DGA, was the main body of the Council of Europe for the Covid-19 crisis management. The structure of the SMT integrated a complete decision-making process, involving the preparation of decisions for the Secretary General to take on health and safety measures related to the pandemic.

1.2. Purpose and objectives

8.   The evaluation of the Council of Europe's support to member states in addressing challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic was included in the work programme of the Directorate of Internal Oversight for 2021-2022. The evaluation was carried out due to the unprecedented nature and amplitude of the risks and demands the pandemic imposed on the Organisation in terms of adaptability and flexibility of its working methods[2] as well as contents of its work. More broadly, Covid-19 exposed both the existing and escalating challenges facing multilateral institutions and the centrality of these institutions to finding common solutions to common problems.

9.   The Council of Europe's mandate for action in this context was clear. National and other (in particular local) authorities needed to act swiftly and decisively to prevent and to mitigate the impact of Covid-19. The Council has worked and continues working with them, providing the information and support they need and expect, to ensure that the measures that states have taken are both effective and in line with their legal obligations as member states, ensuring that any restrictions on people's activities, ultimately, save lives and secure the right to health and to equitable access to health care – the human rights that the Council of Europe defends.

10.   The purpose of the evaluation was to primarily assess the extent to which the Council of Europe's programmatic response to the crisis through its support to member states assisted them in fulfilling their commitments to maintaining human rights, rule of law and democracy in the context of threats and challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the evaluation assesses the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of key activities and actions taken place between March 2020 and August 2021 and what lessons can be learned at an institutional level. As such the evaluation is predominantly a formative one with some elements of accountability included.

11.   Its findings are to be used by member states and the senior management of the Council of Europe, line managers and interested staff members to better understand the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the results of the Council's work, its performance under these circumstances and opportunities arising from it in view of improving the response to potential future crises. The evaluation findings are also to be used to promote general improvement and innovation in terms of working methods. National, regional and local authorities and staff members involved in the Covid-19 related activities may also be interested in the evaluation results. More widely, the evaluation shall be of interest to other international organisations working in the areas of the Council of Europe's mandate.

12.   The first objective of this evaluation is to provide these stakeholders with evidence-based information on the Council of Europe's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The second objective of the evaluation is to better understand how the Council of Europe adapted and operated during the first 18 months of the pandemic and to help determine whether the pandemic-related developments have the potential to become long-term organisational practice. The evaluation also seeks to understand the extent and effectiveness of co-ordination and strategic programming during crises.

1.3. Scope

13.   From the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in the first quarter of 2020, the Council of Europe has faced numerous and diverse challenges of an internal and external nature, whilst at the same time the organisation was presented with new opportunities. These opportunities included amongst others:

   ► Exploring alternative approaches to delivering Council of Europe outcomes,

   ► Strengthening internal co-ordination through integrated responses.

14.   The challenges faced by the Council of Europe can be grouped in two distinct clusters:

a) internal challenges:

   ► Ensure business continuity,

   ► Adapt decision-making processes,

   ► Approach to, assessment and management of new risks,

   ► Adjustment of working methods,

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2.   Working methods are understood as actions employed to perform a task.

► Adjustment of working arrangements (telework),

► Meeting the need for additional/extraordinary equipment (such as laptop computers, remote meeting solutions).

b) external challenges – meeting needs of member states in an urgent, precise and timely manner, in terms of:

► Continuous advice to authorities on maintaining respect for human rights, rule of law and democracy,

► Support in developing new policies and practice in the different Council of Europe policy areas,

► Material support (delivery of equipment and consumables),

► Enhanced training opportunities in human rights and democracy for professionals and the public at large,

► Raising awareness of democracy and human rights,

► Ensuring pan-European, coherent response to the pandemic.

15.   This evaluation focuses mainly on the Council's efforts to meet the external challenges.[3]

16.   It looks at the initiatives and activities developed by the Council of Europe since the pandemic started impacting the Organisation's business, i.e. from the beginning of March 2020 until the beginning of the data collection phase in August 2021. The dynamic nature of the Covid-19 response necessitates a flexible approach to the time frame so that the evaluation team also paid close attention to the most recent developments up until the data analysis in early 2022 and took these into account to be able to provide the most comprehensive picture.

17.   The evaluation was carried out from April 2021 to March 2022, by a senior evaluator, an evaluator, an evaluation assistant and a consultant who delivered the benchmarking report.

18.   The evaluation did not address the work during the pandemic of the European Court of Human Rights for reasons of limited time and resources available to this evaluation.

Part II of the Secretary General's annual report 'Multilateralism 2020'[4] contains a non-exhaustive list of the Organisation's work aimed at supporting the member states in times of the pandemic, in the fields of (amongst others):

► Prevention of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*

► Social rights*

► The independence and efficiency of justice*

► Media

► Data protection

► Artificial intelligence

► Cybercrime

► Bioethics

► Access to public documents

► Drug abuse

► Corruption*

► Crime*

► Migration and refugees

► Children's rights

► Equality and anti-discrimination*

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3.   From the internal perspective, DIO carried out three assignments related to Covid-19 in 2020: 1) Council of Europe staff survey on lessons learned from lockdown – substantial input in the design of the survey, compilation and analysis of results (over 1600 respondents and over 7000 comments), presentation and publication of summary and full results on the Intranet; 2) survey aimed at diplomatic missions on lessons from the Covid-19 crisis: design of the survey, compilation and analysis of results, analytical report; and 3) an analytical report on DIO's main takeaways from the first lockdown with suggestions for further increasing the Organisation's resilience. Furthermore there was an internal audit of the business continuity and crisis management of the Organisation in 2019, with a series of recommendations awaiting the management response.

4.   Multilateralism 2020; Annual Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, April 2021.

- ► Education*
- ► Youth*
- ► Culture, nature and heritage
- ► Democracy and governance*
- ► Gender equality and violence against women*
- ► Trafficking in human beings*
- ► Quality standards for safe medicines and their safe use.

19. The evaluation examined all of these activities, including in the course of the case study. The sectors of participants that agreed to interviews are indicated by the asterisks. The case study covered the three member states that held the chairmanship of the Committee of Minsters of the Council of Europe during the crisis – Georgia, Germany and Greece – and provide an in-depth understanding of the needs of national partners in those countries emerging in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council's response to those needs and its handling of the challenges and opportunities arising from the context, in relevant areas of work (see more information on case studies below). The decision was taken to only include member states that held the chairmanship because the evaluators considered this would increase the chances of more detailed assessment and focus on the Council of Europe during the pandemic.

1.4. Evaluation questions

20. **Relevance:** To what extent were the Council of Europe's activities and initiatives developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic addressing emerging challenges and in line with the needs of its member states, while taking into account human rights, rule of law and democracy commitments?

21. **Effectiveness:** To what extent did these activities and initiatives help member states address problems brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic while protecting human rights, rule of law and democracy?

22. **Efficiency:** To what extent an efficient use of available human, material and financial resources was ensured when developing these initiatives and activities to protect human rights, rule of law and democracy?

23. The detailed evaluation matrix sets out evaluation questions, sub-questions, indicators, data sources, data collection and data analysis methods. Some of these elements may be fine-tuned after discussions with the Reference group.

2. Findings

24.   The Covid-19 pandemic revealed that the Council of Europe, like many other national and international organisations was neither prepared nor fully equipped for a global crisis of this nature and the lockdown announced in France on the 17th March 2020. The scale of the crisis was unprecedented, and it quickly became obvious that even the international organisations best suited to manage crises such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, UNHCR, IOM and the World Food Programme displayed similar levels of unpreparedness. What came next provided important lessons ranging from unparalleled testing of risk and crisis management systems to organisational resilience in the form of flexibility, adaptability and creativity. For international organisations and the Council of Europe this was accompanied by the massive transfer of work online and teleworking.

No.	Findings
	Relevance: strategy and focus on crisis
1	The Council of Europe's relevance was emphasised by the Covid-19 pandemic. Council of Europe standards were universally recognised as vitally important to tackle the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis. The Secretary General's toolkit for member states published on 7th April 2020 "Respecting democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the Covid-19 sanitary crisis", the Venice Commission's reports on derogation from the Convention and European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)'s guidelines were particularly praised for the real added value they brought to member states' responses to Covid-19.
2	The Council of Europe's response to Covid-19 focused on the Organisation's existing areas of expertise. Consequently, it benefited from the thorough quality control built into established Council of Europe mechanisms and processes. On the other hand, the response was limited to the existing operating areas of the Council of Europe within the wider, overall scope of human rights, rule of law and democracy and was not based on needs assessment through a thorough consultation of member states.
3	Many changes were adopted throughout the Organisation, leading to services that were active and working hard almost immediately from the beginning of the crisis. Covid-19 was integrated into the thematic work of all entities.
4	The Secretary General's toolkit represented an emergency strategic framework established early on, but it was used more as guidance rather than an operational framework and it was not used to reshape the overall Programme and Budget response.

5	The adjustments made during the Covid-19 pandemic were predominantly changes in details within existing programmes rather than major strategic adjustments. The Council of Europe's overall focus of work in relation to Covid-19 was on observing the situation and analysing the effects of the pandemic on human rights, rule of law and democracy. Good initiatives were delivered but not always pursued actively nor at country level. The Organisation did not have the capacity to provide a multi-dimensional, needs-focused, national-level operational response.
	Effectiveness: championing human rights, rule of law and democracy in crisis
6	The Council of Europe's response to Covid-19 was perceived as useful, concrete and practical, including providing material support to member states to protect human rights, rule of law and democracy faced with the pandemic.
7	There was only a small number of outcomes from the Council of Europe's response to Covid-19. The concrete tangible support given only reached small numbers, or the messages and guidance only reached small and specific audiences that did not have the capacity to use them given other priorities related to the pandemic.
8	There was co-operation and partnership both between the Council of Europe and governments and with other international organisations. At the same time existing relationships built into the Organisation's working methods were relied upon more for business continuity than a specific crisis response. International organisations' co-operation and partnership efforts contributed to the effectiveness of all of their responses.
9	The Council of Europe's response was considered to have had both a direct and indirect influence on some of the member states' measures to tackle Covid-19, in the sense of strengthening the human rights, rule of law and democracy standards of these responses. Stakeholders reported some institutions and policies basing parts of their Covid-19 responses on thematic areas and work of the Council of Europe during the pandemic.
10	Stakeholders in member states occasionally stated that there was not enough scrutiny of the human rights, rule of law and democracy situation during the pandemic. This was mostly linked to not covering all the aspects of human rights, rule of law and democracy and not having enough authority to properly scrutinise human rights.
	Efficiency: use of resources in responding to crisis
11	The Council of Europe was productive during the pandemic period proving its capacity to continue to operate through teleworking and being limited by restrictive travel regimes.
12	The Council of Europe worked entirely within its existing budget, both from the Organisation's regular resource (Ordinary Budget) and donor funding (Extra-budgetary resources). In the current set up and with the constraints of the pandemic situation, the Organisation would not have had sufficient capacity to absorb additional resources. The pandemic demonstrated that there is a possibility to mobilise significantly increased resources to respond to crisis, in turn strengthening and expanding the donor base, should that be called for in a more strategic response. Doing so would be reliant on the implementation of recommendations made in this report.
13	There was good communication and internal co-ordination in terms of health considerations and working arrangements, but this was somewhat limited in relation to the programmatic response to Covid-19. Good practice in other organisations highlighted the importance of strengthened internal co-ordination that enabled multi-sectorial approaches and contributed to the effectiveness of responses. In the case of the Council of Europe crucial links and connections between different stakeholders were missing in terms of a programmatic response. A programme crisis response team modelled on good practice in other organisations would be able to make these links and connections.
14	The external communication flow and feedback was not adequate in terms of the programmatic response. There were excellent instances of significant amounts of information being collected, in the form of good practices by institutions and authorities provided to intergovernmental and monitoring committees for instance. The Council of Europe did not have the systematic processes of communication and feedback flows that are essential to ensure greater effectiveness.

15	The Council of Europe demonstrated a natural resilience to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was attributed to the commitment and flexibility of staff and the level of autonomy and independence of different services. It would be important to maintain this strength while seeking to improve more systematic resilience.
16	There were examples in the co-operation field of consultants working for the Council of Europe who were able to provide direct support to vulnerable groups in difficult to access areas. These examples demonstrated the potential for networks of experts, consultants and civil society to engage in more country-specific responses.
17	There were real benefits and real limits to the tools and mechanisms provided to deliver the Council of Europe response to Covid-19 online. The benefits were not fully exploited due to the lack of adjusted strategy, whilst the limits resulted from poor tailoring to different needs and single options of software.
18	On the one hand there was strong enthusiasm for innovation and change in general, whilst on the other hand there was low uptake of the set of virtual office tools such as MiCollab on offer. Staff were not sufficiently aware nor adequately trained to work with new technologies and this created additional pressure both on support and the delivery of activities.
19	The resilience shown by the Council of Europe to the Covid-19 pandemic appears to be more attributable to the nature of the Organisation and the nature of the crisis than to the design of the response. More overall modernisation is needed with the aim of providing swift, lightweight processes that provide resilience by design. There is demand for deeper reflection beyond tools and working methods.
20	There are examples of lessons learned and innovation being used to adapt the response to Covid-19. Such adaptive management was not systematic, nor built into the Council of Europe response. In future crises, there needs to be stronger emphasis on strategic adjustment, strengthening responsiveness and overcoming isolation and distance from member states.

3. Conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations

26.   Overall, the findings reveal that the Council of Europe was able to respond to the crisis despite very little preparedness for a crisis of such global scale. Over the course of the pandemic, the institutional capacity to manage crisis increased. Nonetheless the Organisation can and should further improve its preparedness for a future crisis. With this in mind, recommendations have been made to further strengthen institutional capacity to manage crisis, to optimise the Organisation's crisis preparedness and to reinforce the strong resilience the Organisation demonstrated to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is noted that, following an internal audit report on crisis management and business continuity (issued in June 2020), at an organisational level a task force on crisis management and business continuity was set up and held its first meeting in November 2021 with its first deliverables prepared for a subsequent meeting in March 2022. Many of the conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations below should be considered by and feed into the ongoing work of this group.

Evaluation criteria	Conclusions	Lessons learned	Recommendations
Relevance – findings 1 and 2	Covid-19 underlined the relevance and importance of all aspects of the Council of Europe's work. It served as a reminder of the real need of political dialogue and consensus on human rights, rule of law and democracy, of continuous intergovernmental co-operation and standard setting, on monitoring and scrutiny of the protection of these standards and of co-operation and technical assistance to member states. The pandemic further exposed the conceptual challenge of connecting the Council of Europe's mandate to actual implementation in member states, in such a way that theoretical needs are met in practical terms. See recommendation 1.	I. The Council of Europe needed to have a common understanding of its scope of action and the extent of its implementation in responses to crises, because it was problematic that its mandate can be extended to all aspects of crises due to its inherent relevance in social organisation. II. When the Council of Europe's universal basis for implementation of standards in member states, by member states, is not explained, its response may appear abstract in juxtaposition to the concrete and tangible needs arising from the pandemic.	[PO] in consultation with [all operational entities] Crisis preparedness and checklist: further adapt Level 3 crisis procedures recommended in the crisis management and business continuity audit to the Council of Europe context to address the unprecedented level of global crisis that Covid-19 caused. This should include a checklist of actions to be taken at each level of crisis that integrates both the audit and this evaluation's recommendations, linked to task force roles and responsibilities and working methods for specific scenarios. (High priority.)
Relevance – findings 3, 4 and 5	There were timely and comprehensive adjustments, excellent data collection with a good response from member states and valuable information analysed and integrated into the Council of Europe's work. This was combined with early, hands-on leadership and the Secretary General's toolkit. At the same time, there was no significant strategic adjustment at the Organisational level to respond to Covid-19. This is needed to make crisis response meaningful. The Council of Europe's response needed to be strategised with clear goals and objectives, and targets set, to enable major programmatic adjustment according to the evolution of the crisis. The Council of Europe did not focus and pool resources in response to Covid-19. Different sectors had more relevance than others at different stages of the pandemic but continued to work with the same priority and weighting in accordance with the regular programme defined by the P&B. In several cases related to extra-budgetary funding, projects were re-oriented and different activities were implemented, in consultation with national authorities. The Organisation put the emphasis on business continuity rather than specific crisis response. No matter the crisis this will always be highly relevant because society relies on norms as essential social architecture. See recommendations 2, 3 and 4.	III. Intergovernmental and monitoring committees proved to be very efficient mechanisms for rapid exchanges of information and data collection in relation to the crisis. IV. A theoretical overview of the relationship between Council of Europe standards and the threat posed to them by Covid-19 was only the beginning of a strategy. A fuller strategy would be needed to bring together dispersed actions across the Organisation. V. There are two approaches that run in parallel in the Council of Europe, which affects the extent the Organisation responds to crisis. Some sectors focus on providing the basis and framework for human rights, rule of law and democracy without getting involved in the implementation. Other sectors target a more interventionist approach with implementation at multiple levels of human rights, rule of law and democracy. Covid-19 may have justified a stronger interventionist approach.	2. [DPB] Institutional capacity to manage crisis: develop and provide advice to programme and sub-programme co-ordinators on fast reaction adjustments to programming to adapt to major shifts provoked by any crisis. (High priority). 3. [DPB] Institutional capacity to manage crisis: add sections to existing RBM and strategic management guidance on a process for a RBM and strategic response to crisis where relevant (based on the Covid-19 experience) to increase crisis strategy development capacity including focus on results that are reactive, targeted, fast and measurable. (Medium priority). 4. [PO, DPB] Crisis preparedness and checklist: prepare a set of steps to be taken/considered to facilitate rapid decision making in a crisis, including requests for new resources and rapid re-deployment of them. Such an approach should distinguish between regular programming and crisis response programmes, take into account existing possibilities such as Article 28 of the Financial Regulations, and reflect governance roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. (High priority).

Evaluation criteria	Conclusions	Lessons learned	Recommendations
Effectiveness – Findings 6 and 7	Covid-19 forced prioritisation because it affected different segments of the societal structure in different ways. The resources of the Council of Europe were spread thinly and the P&B does not capture this prioritisation. The lack of clear focus meant that it was impossible to ensure the optimal use of the Council of Europe's instruments. As a result the Council of Europe's response to Covid-19 only had limited effect and connections were not frequently made between the theoretical basis provided and social consequences. This led to a failure to amplify results and to have mass effect. See recommendations 1, 2 and 5.	VI. The Council of Europe's work is perceived as essentially theoretical and the link to people's realities is not clearly communicated. The connection between the two needs to be more obvious in crisis in order to contribute most effectively to the response, by emphasising more the importance of Council of Europe standards. VII. If the Council of Europe is to fulfil a role in crises responses then it needs to have wider and stronger effect according to the specific nature of each crisis. VIII. The small scale of Council of Europe outcomes in a crisis response could become a threat to the Organisation since it may lead to a wider dismissal of the utility of its work and mandate.	5. [PO] Crisis preparedness and checklist: Include the possibility to carry out "exceptional monitoring" that deviates from the strict procedure of monitoring bodies to overcome obstacles exclusively posed by crises so that crises responses can be adapted in an agile and flexible way as the crises evolve, see recommendation 1. (High priority).
Effectiveness – Finding 8	The Council of Europe did not exploit partnerships and international co-operation very much to enhance results. It is noticed, however when the Organisation does. Often the external coherence is clear as Council of Europe Standards are used, but not through formal partnership or co-operation and this compromises the Organisation's visibility as its work is more behind the scenes. There are many benefits demonstrated in the benchmarking to working in partnerships as it enables more learning and greater access to information. Organisations look outwards and gain in strength and resources in crisis. See recommendations 1 and 6.	IX. Combined international effort was striking and had strong visibility among stakeholders. This was demonstrated by the complementarity of CEDAW and GREVIO in combating domestic violence during the pandemic. X. Partnerships were more accessible through co-operation development, leading to more concrete results as the partnership generated stronger influence and enabled the joining of forces.	6. [PO] Crisis preparedness and checklist: Ensure that consideration is given on how to use partnerships to raise visibility, amplify the messages to fully comply with human rights, rule of law and democracy standards. (Medium priority).
Effectiveness – Finding 9	Intergovernmental, monitoring and co-operation in the Council of Europe dynamic triangle have been effective in delivering outcomes from targeted, concrete actions aligned to specific needs that are urgent due to crisis. Influence can be achieved on this basis, which can then be reinforced by targeted communication explaining the focus and priority of the crisis response. See recommendation 6.	XI. The work of CPT demonstrated good practice in a monitoring mechanism by highlighting a specific target area of its mandate. This gave clarity and priority to reducing risks of contracting the virus in places of detention which member states were quick to implement. XII. PACE had influence on national parliamentary procedures by leading by example at its supranational level. Adopted parliamentary procedures at PACE encouraged innovation in national parliaments contributing to better functioning during the pandemic.	

Evaluation criteria	Conclusions	Lessons learned	Recommendations
Effectiveness – Finding 10	The Council of Europe's distance was felt during the pandemic in spite of the Organisation's primary objectives to monitor and scrutinise human rights, rule of law and democracy. This must be countered and explained to populations in order for the Council of Europe to be considered useful and capable to fulfil its role. The Organisation needs to find ways to demonstrate its presence in the protection and fulfilment of human rights, rule of law and democracy within member states. This needs to be publicised in such ways that make the links and associations between the enjoyment of human rights and the prevention of violations. See recommendations 4, 5 and 8.	XIII. When the work of the Council of Europe was intangible and inconspicuous in relation to the pandemic its presence in member states was questioned and this was amplified by crisis.	
Efficiency – Findings 11 and 12	Covid-19 specific outputs were delivered across the entire spectrum of the Council of Europe's programme. The Organisation's performance reporting does not allow for the monitoring of this exceptional response. This resulted in the work being carried out in a grey zone, where objective, evidence-based assessment within the Organisation was not possible. The budget was not absorbed across both ordinary and extrabudgetary sources. This is in contrast to humanitarian organisations that considerably increased their budgets and simultaneously expanded their donor bases. This evaluation has identified many needs for deeper, more extensive Council of Europe actions, which would require additional resources. See recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8.	XIV. The Council of Europe combined its regular programme with Covid-19 specific activities across the entire programme. This was quite an achievement and indicated good use of resources for exceptional work in place of prevented actions. XV. ODGP put Covid-19 specific monitoring in place to fulfil donor reporting requirements. There was a similar need internally across the whole Organisation.	See recommendations 2, 3 and 4 7. [ODGP] Institutional capacity to manage crisis: Draft specific resource mobilisation guidance based on donor funding patterns to identify potential additional funding for support to Council of Europe crisis responses. (Medium priority).
Efficiency – Findings 13 and 14	Communication and co-ordination at the programmatic level relating to a specific Covid-19 response could have been more evident. PACE and Congress committees' staff, consultants in the field and CSOs provide potential models for better communication and co-ordination. Communication was also enabled by responsive mechanisms such as request processes that exist in the Venice Commission for example. The task force model around priority thematic areas under way as part of the crisis management and business continuity response should provide a more structured approach to communication and co-ordination. See recommendation 1.	XVI. Good practice in co-ordination was evident in the co-ordination and referencing of counterpart committees and services in PACE and Congress reports on Covid-19. This was based on thematic, priority-based exchange such as may be constituted by task forces. XVII. Field offices and external presence can strongly contribute to solutions to crises situations, but they need to be enabled to do so by greater flexibility and autonomy with respect to rules and restrictions designed for the headquarters.	

Evaluation criteria	Conclusions	Lessons learned	Recommendations
Efficiency – Findings 15 and 16	There was a natural resilience demonstrated by the Council of Europe during the pandemic. This can be attributed to the dedication and expertise of the staff and the autonomy of different organs, committees, bodies and services. Together they enabled an organic response which has both pros and cons. This natural resilience should be maintained to the extent possible whilst framing the Organisation's work better through stronger communication and co-ordination. See recommendations 1 and 8.	XVIII. The Venice Commission carried out a very good follow-up assessment of its statement and guidance on announcing states of emergency in response to the pandemic. XIX. Request mechanisms such as the one used by the Venice Commission enabled immediate needs assessment tools which could be useful in crisis situations where resources are thin. XX. Facilitators in the field can provide a direct link between citizens and the Council of Europe as was the case in a specific co-operation project during the pandemic. A consultant collected reports on human rights violations in communities and shared these with the Council of Europe.	8. [PO] Crisis preparedness and checklist: Support exchange of good practice amongst headquarters, external offices, expert and CSO networks to support monitoring of human rights, rule of law and democracy during crises and contribute to greater resilience, see recommendation 1. (High priority).
Efficiency – Findings 17 and 18	There are both benefits and limits to all the aspects of the new working methods and tools used during the crisis. Ideally a perfect blend would be achieved that maximises the benefits and avoids the limitation. Choice and flexible option are crucial to an optimised response in crisis. Preparedness would involve a plan and protocol to immediately put into action different series of tools and working methods, such as emergency decision-making processes by reduced groups of key stakeholders when prevented from carrying out regular processes that need to be more extensive. See recommendations 1 and 9. There is demand for innovation and beyond that wider reform. It would be strongly supported by staff and managers. The new tools and working methods are widely appreciated and greeted with enthusiasm. The main focus of innovation should be on creating agility and flexibility; in essence, adaptive management capacity to make direct contact with the external world. The process of administrative reform needs to continue, advancing further by building on this high level of support.	XXI. Remote hearings enabled access for PACE into national parliaments, allowing for more direct connections and contact with stakeholders at the parliamentary level. XXII. The pandemic gave a unique opportunity for broad testing and experimenting of different working methods and online tools. This has developed a much better understanding of the benefits and challenges each method and tool brings. The spirit of testing and experimenting could serve the Organisation well for reform and innovation. XXIII. Surveys carried out by the administration DIO and DGA, as well as decentralised evaluations, gave essential information to confirm and adjust the crisis response tools and working methods.	9. [DGA, DIT] Institutional capacity to manage crisis: Prioritise the work to make available multiple solutions for online working, including training, based on the ongoing analyses by DGA. Continue to apply rigorous testing and consultation to ensure that all user groups' business requirements are met to the maximum extent possible. (High priority).

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the Council of Europe's support to member states in addressing challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the Council of Europe's programmatic response to the crisis through its support to member states assisted them in fulfilling their commitments to maintaining human rights, rule of law and democracy in the context of threats and challenges posed by the pandemic. Overall, the findings reveal that the Council of Europe was able to respond despite little preparedness for a crisis of such magnitude. The evaluation provides recommendations to further strengthen institutional capacity to manage crisis, to optimise the Organisation's crisis preparedness and to reinforce the strong resilience the Organisation demonstrated during the pandemic.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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