

# **Mid-Term Evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe Joint Programme “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III”**

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACFCNM	Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
ADR	Alternative Dispute resolution
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CoE	Council of Europe
CPT	European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG ENEST	Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DPC	Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
DoA	Description of Action
DIO	Directorate of Internal Oversight
ECHR	European Convention for Human Rights
ECM	Expertise Co-ordination Mechanism
ECtHR	European Court for Human Rights
ESC	European Social Charter (revised)
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FWC	Framework Contracts
GRECO	Council of Europe Group of States against Corruption
GRETA	Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
HF	Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye
HELP	The European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals
HRA	Human Rights Approach
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
IBAR	Interim Benchmark Assessment Report
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisation
IPMIS	Integrated Prison Management Information System
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
IT	Information Technology
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans-gender, and Intersex Persons
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MHSP	Ministry for Health and Social Protection
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPM	National Preventive Mechanism
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PGG	Partnership for Good Governance
PMM	Project Management Methodology
PWD	Persons With Disabilities
RFCDC	Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture
QAPA	Quadrennial Plans of Action
ROM	Results-Based Monitoring of the EC
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLAPPS	Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
ToR	Terms of Reference
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VAW	Violence against Women
VC	Voluntary contribution
VEPs	Violent Extremist Prisoners
YEA	Young European Ambassadors

# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an external, independent mid-term evaluation (MTE) of Phase III of the [European Union/Council of Europe Joint Programme “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye”](#) (hereinafter: HF III). Commissioned by the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Programme Co-ordination (DPC), the evaluation was conducted by Patrick Twomey and Vera Devine on behalf of PEM A/S between July 2024 and March 2025.

## Horizontal Facility III

As a partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE), HF III seeks, with a budget of €41 million (85% European Union funding and 15% Council of Europe funding), to foster democratic governance, human rights, democracy, and rule of law in the Beneficiaries. Building upon earlier phases since 2016, the HF III portfolio of 43 actions provides legal/policy advice/expertise and a range of technical support to further Beneficiaries’ compliance with European legal standards and best practice.

## Context

The Beneficiaries of HF III (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye) are governed by core legal norms of the Council of Europe<sup>1</sup> and other intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), as well as political commitments to the EU accession standards. The specific content of these obligations varies by Beneficiary, according to their legal relationship with the Council of Europe; specific treaties ratified; as well as their respective EU accession progress. Office presence in all Beneficiaries, HF III technical co-operation is positioned within the Council of Europe’s ‘strategic triangle’ of standard-setting, monitoring, and technical co-operation. HF III addresses priorities and needs of Beneficiary institutions in the context of Council of Europe obligations and EU enlargement negotiations. Support to reform in all Beneficiaries also includes a range of projects and other support by various bi-lateral donors, IGOs and INGOs. HF III is delivered in a context of ongoing reform, legislative/policy and institutional capacity gaps, and restricted civil space.<sup>2</sup> The December 2024 [European Council Conclusions on Enlargement](#) note variable progress in the Beneficiaries in a range of areas addressed by HF III actions, including judicial reform, the adoption of laws on corruption etc. However, concerns are expressed regarding fundamental rights, including freedom of expression/media, minority rights, in all Beneficiaries. During 2023-24, HF III saw implementation challenges linked to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine; the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye; accelerated inflation in the region; presidential and general elections in some Beneficiaries; as well as political tensions between, and within, some Beneficiaries.

## Evaluation Objectives and Methodology

The **purpose** of the mid-term evaluation was to:

- a) provide an independent mid-term assessment and evidence of the results achieved so far in the framework of the HF III; and
- b) provide recommendations for the next programming cycle based on lessons learnt and best practices of the different phases of the HF.

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*\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.*

<sup>1</sup> In the case of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye as members of the Council of Europe and, in the case of non-member Kosovo, through core Council of Europe standards being directly applicable in its domestic law.

<sup>2</sup> Challenges faced by civil society in the Beneficiaries are noted in reports of regional and international human rights monitoring bodies as well as EC progress reports. See, for example, EC, DG NEAR, (2023), *Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region: 2023 Assessment Report*.

The evaluation **objectives** are based on five of the OECD/DAC criteria; **Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency** and **Sustainability**; and the Council of Europe criterion of **Added Value**, with the **Human Rights Approach (HRA)/Gender Mainstreaming** addressed as cross-cutting themes.

The evaluation combined desk-based review; interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) (230 interlocutors); observation of Beneficiary Steering Committee (SC) meetings and two action events; as well as an online questionnaire (154 responses). In addition to two regional actions, twelve bilateral actions were selected as case studies in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia, and which were the Beneficiaries selected for local visits. Meetings included Council of Europe staff in the secretariat in Strasbourg and in Offices in the Beneficiaries; the EU Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR, now DG ENEST); as well as meetings/FGDs with partner institutions and other stakeholders. All discussions were conducted on the basis of non-attribution, with an option for anonymous input via the online questionnaire. The Evaluation Inception Report and preliminary findings were presented in two meetings of the Reference Group, in October and December 2024. With planning for HF IV commencing in 2025, the evaluation focused on soliciting stakeholders' perspectives on priorities and approaches in an expected fourth phase.

### Findings/Conclusions/Recommendations

The formulation process and chosen priorities mean that HF III and actions evidence strong **relevance** to Council of Europe legal norms; to EU accession criteria; and to Beneficiaries' legal and strategic frameworks. Actions' primary focus on capacity-enhancement of duty-bearer institutions is relevant to the needs and priorities of partner institutions, and, by extension, to the needs of rights-holders. The developed rigour of linking action objectives to specific Council of Europe legal norms and best practice and partner needs should be continued. There is scope for this to be complemented by more linkages to other relevant international law norms and more explicit links with the priorities of rights-holders. HF III exhibits good levels of **coherence** between actions, and between actions and other projects of the Council of Europe. This includes good communication and co-ordination, and some joint activities, with some scope to enhance links between regional actions and non-HF Council of Europe projects. Good coherence with projects of other actors, i.e. UN agencies and donors/IGOs is reported, including some sharing of outputs and joint activities. Enhancing coherence should include support to Beneficiaries taking a stronger lead role in co-ordination of international technical co-operation. Despite the challenges of the large portfolio of actions (many involving co-ordination of multiple beneficiary partners, some with low capacity), and a high volume of activities, good levels of **efficiency** have been achieved. Scope to enhance efficiency going forward is dependent upon rationalising and consolidating the volume of actions and activities, and further streamlining of some programming procedures, including reporting and procurement.

There is evidence of some to good, but variable, **effectiveness** by actions in terms of progress towards Intermediate Outcomes. Progress is aided by well-established working relations between action teams and partner institutions, a strong knowledge base from Phases I and II, and the substantive expertise of action teams and experts. Active engagement from many partners, including through well-functioning Action Steering Committees is also evident. Some external and internal programming factors mean effectiveness is not optimal. These challenges variously include gaps in legislative and strategic frameworks; low capacity of partner institutions, including human and other resources challenges; and, in the case of some themes, some opposition to reform. Revisiting the current large volume and breadth of the action portfolio and prioritising more in-depth incremental follow-up on outputs/capacity support should be prioritised in HF IV. Even assuming that cost savings are achievable from revisiting the structure of the HF portfolio, HF IV will still require significant commitment of resources to maintain the momentum of previous phases and to progress from effectiveness to sustainable impact.

The likelihood of **sustainability** of action results is mixed; they are strongest where targeted outputs are developed for future application by partner institutions and where Beneficiaries are most committed to reform. The explicit links between action results and Beneficiaries' Council of Europe obligations and key EU accession criteria, and Beneficiary partners' strong sense of ownership of outputs are key drivers of political will for reform. Outputs, including laws/strategies; working methods/templates; training

curricula; digital platforms etc. being formally adopted by Beneficiaries and key institutions, and the capacity building support being targeted at training and oversight institutions is also a key aspect of likely sustainability. Low institutional capacity and gaps in high-level political will are a challenge to achieving long-term sustainable results. Fundamental challenges significantly curtail civil society organisations (CSOs) particularly those that function as human rights defenders and seek to hold duty-bearers to account, by monitoring, advocacy and strategic litigation. Enhanced focus on sustainability during the remainder of HF III and in the design of HF IV should ensure that ongoing support to duty-bearer institutions' delivery of reform is accompanied by support that enhances CSOs' mandate as watchdogs of that reform.

The application of the shared Council of Europe and EU commitment to a **Human Rights Approach** is evident to varying degrees across actions. It is strongest in the case of participation by CSOs in most actions and the focus on equality/vulnerable groups in some actions. However, there is a need to enhance HRA as a uniform transversal framework, addressing all core principles in programming across all actions. To achieve this, more knowledge, capacity, and time is needed to build HRA awareness and application skills within action teams; contracted experts; and partner institutions. This will require adequate time and resources in HF IV. The visibility and application of **Gender Mainstreaming** has improved with each phase of the HF since 2016, including actions with a specific discrimination focus and a range of regional gender mainstreaming analyses undertaken during HF II and HF III. Low awareness of, and some mind-set opposition to, addressing gender in Beneficiaries means further enhancement should be prioritised. This is needed at all stages of the Project Cycle Management (PCM), particularly in action monitoring. The appointment, in November 2024, of a Council of Europe Regional Gender Advisor presents an opportunity to reactivate the Council of Europe Offices' Gender Focal Point system.

The Council of Europe's status as an IGO is a key aspect of its **added value** as a programme implementer. This comparative advantage is widely acknowledged by stakeholders. This added value stems from its 'strategic triangle' of standard-setting, monitoring, and technical co-operation, the capacity to mobilise relevant qualified experts and the organisation's status and credibility as an IGO. With most HF III actions succeeding actions in earlier HF phases, strong context knowledge of action management teams and established relations with partner institutions also adds value. Continued focus on enhancing programming skills and harmonisation/co-ordination of expert inputs can further strengthen the added value of the Council of Europe's technical support.

## Evaluation Findings/Conclusions and Recommendations

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### RELEVANCE

#### Findings/Conclusions

- ❑ Actions are highly relevant to Council of Europe legal norms and best practice, EU accession criteria, Beneficiary law/policy frameworks, and the needs and priorities of partner institutions.
- ❑ Actions are relevant to other international law norms and the needs of rights-holders, but with scope for these aspects of relevance to be enhanced and made more explicit.

#### Recommendations (to Council of Europe and EU)

- ❑ **1.** The current strong focus on Council of Europe legal norms/best practice and EU acquis standards should be complemented with more explicit focus on other relevant international law obligations and more visible linkages between support to duty-bearers and the priorities of rights-holders.

### COHERENCE

#### Findings/Conclusions

- ❑ Actions are generally well aligned with other projects delivered by the Council of Europe and by others, with good communication and co-ordination between projects (including some joint activities and sharing of outputs) and only minimal duplication.
- ❑ Some overall HF III incoherence arises from the selective substantive and geographic coverage of HF III, some asymmetry between regional actions and Beneficiary-specific actions, and Türkiye not being included in regional actions.

#### Recommendations (to Council of Europe and EU)

- ❑ **2.** Good levels of coherence should be enhanced by EU and Council of Europe encouraging and supporting Beneficiaries to take more leadership of sector/thematic co-ordination of international technical co-operation.

### EFFICIENCY

#### Findings/Conclusions

- ❑ Activities are being delivered cost-efficiently (in the face of high inflation) and generally in line with planned timelines, with external factors and capacity challenges of partners and some internal decision-making resulting in some delays.
- ❑ Efficiency is enhanced by generally good levels of communication/co-ordination (and a strong focus on joint activities) across HF III actions and other Council of Europe projects and, to some extent, with technical co-operation projects implemented by other actors.

#### Recommendations (to Council of Europe and EU)

- ❑ **3.** Planning of HF IV should be taken as an opportunity to revisit the current portfolio of 43 actions and the volume of activities/outputs, to reduce time spent on administration/organising of activities, and to allow more in-depth follow-up on a reduced number of selected priorities.

### EFFECTIVENESS

#### Findings/Conclusions

- ❑ Aided by active partner participation and well-functioning Steering Committees, actions evidence high levels of effectiveness, with legal, policy and methodological support contributing to good progress towards Intermediate Outcomes, including enhanced normative frameworks and partner capacity and practices.
- ❑ Effectiveness is impeded by the wide breadth of the HF action portfolio and the high volume of activities/outputs and need for more in-depth/applied case study-based project management methodology (PMM) training (with particular focus on monitoring and evaluation).

## **Recommendations (to Council of Europe and EU)**

- ❑ **4.** The number of actions and volume of small, 'stand-alone' activities should be consolidated/reduced to facilitate more in-depth, adequately resourced capacity-building and mentored follow-up on awareness raised; capacity built; and laws/policies, curricula, tools developed.
- ❑ **5.** Effectiveness should be enhanced by more focus (time/resources) on monitoring of results and enhancing capacity of action teams and partners to measure progress towards impact, as well as networking of substantive experts.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Findings/Conclusions**

- ❑ The momentum for reform incentivised by EU accession and the Council of Europe, and a sense of ownership of action outputs by partner institutions are the strongest drivers of sustainability.
- ❑ Prospects for sustainability are challenged by low institutional capacity of many partners, as well as some deficit in Beneficiary-level political will and civil society capacity to monitor and advocate for reform.

## **Recommendations (to Council of Europe)**

- ❑ **6.** As part of a visible Council of Europe 'step-back' strategy, more focus, resources and time are required for action teams and partners to make concrete and realistic sustainability plans. This should include more detailed 'sustainability of results' sections in Description of Actions (DoAs), elaborated by all partners and revised as actions progress and more support to the monitoring/accountability role of CSOs.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH (HRA)**

### **Findings/Conclusions**

- ❑ The HF commitment to HRA is evident to varying degrees across actions. CSO participation and focus on equality/vulnerable groups in some actions are the most developed HRA principles in action programming. Actions vary in terms of the level and nature of CSO participation and in the comprehensiveness of their coverage of all HRA principles.
- ❑ Knowledge of the conceptual/methodological framework of HRA is low among many partners and experts, and action teams face time and capacity challenges to optimally apply the core principles in programming.

## **Recommendations (to Council of Europe and EU)**

- ❑ **7.** Partners' knowledge of, and action teams' practical capacity to apply, the full HRA framework needs to be enhanced, (ideally via designated visible responsibility for HRA) including CSO participation in all actions and more specific HF focus on CSOs' role in monitoring the implementation/impact of action results.

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

### **Findings/Conclusions**

- ❑ In a context of knowledge gaps regarding gender and some societal and institutional opposition to prioritising gender issues, gender mainstreaming has been incrementally enhanced over the three phases of the HF. This includes gender analyses of actions and examples of gender results addressed in reports to DG NEAR and in some Steering Committee discussions. However, there remains scope for this to be more in-depth and systematic and, in the case of some actions, to go beyond a focus on numbers of men/women as participants or beneficiaries.
- ❑ The Office Gender Focal Point system is under-developed, and the informal regional network of focal points appears dormant.

### **Recommendations (to Council of Europe and EU)**

- ❑ **8.** Gender mainstreaming should be enhanced, to ensure more in-depth and systematic coverage across all action reporting; Steering Committee discussions; in all expert contracts; and more harmonised gender analyses.
- ❑ **9.** More HF resources should be allocated to help revitalise and make more visible the Office Gender Focal Points via earmarked time on this shared Council of Europe/EU priority, including networking with the new regional gender advisor and the Council of Europe network of *Gender Equality Rapporteurs* etc. T

## **ADDED VALUE**

### **Findings/Conclusions**

- ❑ The Council of Europe's status as an IGO and its 'strategic triangle' and capacity to mobilise relevant qualified experts is widely acknowledged by partners as key to the added value of the Council of Europe's technical co-operation.
- ❑ The Council of Europe's credibility as a reform partner linked to its IGO status, and the HF track record enhances inter-institutional co-operation between Beneficiary partner institutions and ensures prioritisation of some topics (e.g. gender and sexual orientation) and best practice (e.g. engagement by duty-bearer institutions with civil society).

### **Recommendations (to Council of Europe)**

- ❑ **10.** The added value of the Council of Europe as a technical cooperation partner (including its IGO status, its 'strategic triangle') should be enhanced by ongoing efforts to build action teams' programming skills, and more networking and co-ordination of the pool of contracted substantive experts.

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Background and Context

1. The “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye - Phase III” (hereinafter: HF III) seeks to foster democratic governance, human rights, democracy, and rule of law in the Beneficiaries. It is based on a commitment by the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU) to co-ordinate their legal and policy frameworks and policy goals in the region, based on their respective strategic frameworks.<sup>3</sup> The April 2014 [Joint Statement of Intent](#) of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy specified the priority areas to strengthen political and operational co-operation in the enlargement region.<sup>4</sup>

2. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and potential candidate Kosovo have Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA) with the EU,<sup>5</sup> and are at various stages of the accession process. In March 2024, the European Council opened accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro became the first EU candidate country to receive the Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR) in June 2024. The fundamentals cluster<sup>6</sup> was opened with Albania in October 2024. Accession negotiations with Türkiye, which was granted EU candidate status in 1999, are categorised by the EC as “remaining at a standstill”.<sup>7</sup>

3. Six of the HF III Beneficiaries are members of the Council of Europe. In the case of Kosovo, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) voted in favour of Council of Europe membership in April 2024, with a final decision on membership required by the Committee of Ministers.<sup>8</sup> Council of Europe membership obligations include compliance with the principles of a pluralist democracy and the rule of law, as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons placed under its jurisdiction. These norms derive from core Council of Europe treaties; the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter (revised-ESC); and others that address HF III themes.<sup>9</sup> HF III thematic areas are also priorities for technical co-operation projects of a range of other donors/IGO agencies. This support is delivered in a context of ongoing reform; low institutional capacity; legislative/policy and institutional capacity gaps; restricted civil space; and some particularly contested sector/themes. The context of HF III during 2023-2024 also includes challenges linked to the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine; the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye; Beneficiary presidential and general elections; the challenge of high inflation in the Beneficiaries, and political tensions between, and within, some Beneficiaries.

## 1.2 Horizontal Facility Phase III

4. As part of the Council of Europe’s combined ‘strategic triangle’ of standard-setting, monitoring, and technical co-operation, HF III and its portfolio of actions support the implementation of decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR); recommendations of Council of Europe monitoring and

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<sup>3</sup> [Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union of 23 May 2007](#).

<sup>4</sup> Namely, 1. Efficient and independent judiciary; 2. Fight against corruption and economic crime; 3. Anti-discrimination and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups (including the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (LGBTI) and protection of minorities; and 4. Freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

<sup>5</sup> Albania SAA (2009), Bosnia and Herzegovina SAA (2015), Kosovo SAA (2016), Montenegro SAA (2010), North Macedonia SAA (2004), Serbia SAA (2013), Türkiye AA (1964). [Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance](#).

<sup>6</sup> Including key HF III areas of democratic institutions, justice freedom and security and fundamental rights.

<sup>7</sup> EC, (2024), [Enlargement Report: Türkiye](#).

<sup>8</sup> Kosovo is a member of the Venice Commission and the Council of Europe Development Bank and is an observer of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and its committees. The ECHR, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages are directly applicable in Kosovo, with priority over domestic law. A September 2022 amendment to the Constitution gave direct effect to the (Istanbul) *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*.

<sup>9</sup> Some relevant treaties are not ratified by all Beneficiaries (e.g. Albania, North Macedonia and Türkiye have yet to ratify the *Charter on Regional or Minority Languages* and the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women (VAW) was denounced by Türkiye in 2021).

advisory bodies; as well as Beneficiaries' sectoral and thematic strategies and priorities. HF III priority objectives are also chosen in conjunction with the EU according to needs identified in the EU enlargement negotiations.

5. The overall HF III budget is €41 million (85% EU funding and 15% Council of Europe funding). HF III (January 2023 – December 2026) is a successor programme to HF II (2019-2022, €41 million) and HF I (2016 - 2018, €25 million). HF I focused on three areas – justice (including efficient and independent judiciary, implementation of ECtHR judgements, legal aid, and detention); the fight against corruption and economic crime; and anti-discrimination and the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups. HF II added a fourth priority area - freedom of expression/media as well as regional actions, including the “European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals” (HELP) programme, actions in Türkiye<sup>10</sup> and actions in new sectors, including migration, violence against women and women's access to justice. HF III continues HF II themes, with some new substantive issues, including activities on economic crime and efficiency of justice extended to some new Beneficiaries.

6. HF Co-ordination includes the Council of Europe's DPC; Beneficiary Co-ordinators; DG ENEST (replacing, since February 2025, DG NEAR); EU Delegations/Office; HF focal points and Beneficiary and action-level Steering Committees, and a HF Steering Board. HF III is delivered by 100 staff members, 28 at the Council of Europe's Strasbourg secretariat and 72 in Council of Europe Offices, the majority of whom are continuing their roles from HFII (2019-2022) and some since HFI (2016-2018). HF III delivers 43 actions (37 Beneficiary-specific and 6 regional actions) during 2023-2026,<sup>11</sup> managed by a combination of Council of Europe secretariat and Offices in Belgrade, Prishtina, Sarajevo, and Tirana, and Programme Offices in Ankara, Podgorica, and Skopje. With gender mainstreaming and HRA<sup>12</sup> specified cross-cutting HF III priorities, actions are structured across four thematic areas:

- strengthening justice;
- fighting corruption, economic crime, and money laundering;
- promoting anti-discrimination and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups; and
- promoting and protecting freedom of expression and media.

7. The coverage of HF themes and substantive issues addressed by actions varies by Beneficiary. This variation is linked to Beneficiary and donor priorities, available funds and the existence of other projects managed by the Council of Europe and others. For example, only North Macedonia and Serbia have “Trafficking in human beings” (THB) actions (successors to Phase I and II actions). A Phase II action on THB in Bosnia and Herzegovina was succeeded by a voluntary contribution-funded trafficking project 2023-2024, with ambitions expressed by some Council of Europe staff that support to address THB be continued under HF IV. Meanwhile, trafficking is identified in Montenegro as an issue requiring attention, but does not have a specific action on THB.<sup>13</sup> Some interlocutors suggest a need for a regional action on THB, but the large-scale €33 million Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) project, *Prevention and fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the Western Balkans 2023-2027*,<sup>14</sup> is illustrative of the challenges of multiple related interventions, not least given the absorption and capacity challenges of key institutions.

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<sup>10</sup> Türkiye was a Beneficiary in HF I, in that it was included in the Expertise Co-ordination Mechanism (ECM). However, no opinions were requested. HF Actions in Türkiye were introduced as part of HF II.

<sup>11</sup> The majority of actions are of 4 years duration, the exceptions being 3 of the 4 actions in Türkiye, with **HF13** (*Strengthening the human rights protection in the context of migration in Türkiye*) and **HF34** (*Pilot project on digital citizenship education in Türkiye*) from January 2023 to June 2025 and HF33 from January 2023 to June 2026. It is suggested that these shorter timelines were based partially on available funds, and the time deemed necessary given the scale of activities.

<sup>12</sup> Including the core principles of participation and inclusion; equality and non-discrimination; accountability; and transparency and access to information.

<sup>13</sup> Though **HF7** does specifically address legal aid for victims of trafficking as a component.

<sup>14</sup> Jointly funded by the EU; the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the German Federal Ministry for International Cooperation; and the Italian Ministry of Interior.

### 1.3 Evaluation Objectives, Purpose, and Scope

8. In accordance with the Terms of Reference (ToR—Annex 1) and validation during the inception phase, the **purpose** of this mid-term evaluation (MTE) was to:

- a) provide an independent mid-term assessment and evidence of the results achieved so far in the framework of the Horizontal Facility III (hereinafter: HF III);
- b) provide recommendations for the next programming cycle based on lessons learnt and best practices of the different phases of the HF.<sup>15</sup>

9. In accordance with the ToR, the evaluation **objectives** are based on five of the OECD/DAC criteria; **Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency** and **Sustainability**; with **HRA/Gender Mainstreaming** addressed as cross-cutting themes. The Council of Europe criterion of **Added Value** was added as a result of discussions during the inception phase. As an MTE, the ToRs did not propose addressing impact of the HF III. However, with some HF III actions being successor actions to HF I and HF II actions, it was proposed in initial discussions that examples would be solicited and noted.

10. The primary **intended user** of the evaluation is the Council of Europe (Directorate of Programme Co-ordination/DPC; and Directorates General I and II, as well as the Council of Europe Offices in the Beneficiaries). The European Commission and EU Delegations/Office and the national authorities and partners in the Western Balkans and Türkiye are secondary users/audience.

### 1.4 Evaluation Methodology and Limitations

11. The evaluation benefitted greatly from organisational support and active engagement of the HF III Co-ordinator, action teams and the Field Offices in the selected case study Beneficiaries - Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia. The evaluation comprised of **inception phase** mapping of key reform issues in the sectors/themes addressed by HF III; initial review of data/documentation; compilation of interlocutors; finalisation of case study selection; revision of Evaluation Questions and liaison with Council of Europe Offices on visit schedules.

12. The evaluation was conducted in line with the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and the norms set out in the Council of Europe [Evaluation Policy](#) 2019; the [Evaluation Guidelines](#); 2020 and the Council of Europe [Code of Conduct for Evaluation](#)<sup>16</sup> and other standard best practice evaluation principles.<sup>17</sup> Insofar as resources allowed, the evaluation sought to be participatory, in line with a human rights-based evaluation approach.

13. Of the total of 43 actions, 14 were selected as **case studies** for review as illustrative for the overall HF III. Case studies were selected in consultation with the Council of Europe Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO); the DPC; and Council of Europe Offices, based on the selection criteria provided by the ToR. The case study actions comprised four actions in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia, and two regional actions. All actions were addressed in FGDs with Council of Europe secretariat staff and via the online questionnaire, with case study actions addressed *in situ* visits meetings/FGDs and examination of a wider selection of outputs. The extent to which case studies are illustrative of the overall HF III needs to be qualified by some variation in Beneficiary contexts, in particular EU accession momentum.

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<sup>15</sup> A ROM review of selected HF III actions was conducted during Autumn 2024. The selected actions for ROM review were **HF21** (*Action against Economic Crime in the Western Balkans*); **HF15** (*Enhancing Co-operation in the Western Balkans in Managing Violent Extremism in Prisons and Preventing Further Radicalisation after Release*); **HF25** (*Combating Discrimination and Hatred in Kosovo*); **HF19** (*Action against Economic Crime in North Macedonia*); **HF33** (*Fostering Women's Access to Justice in Türkiye*).

<sup>16</sup> Council of Europe [Code of Conduct for Evaluation](#).

<sup>17</sup> Including the UN Evaluation Group, "[Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation –Towards UNEG Guidance](#)" (2011).

14. An **online confidential questionnaire** in English and all Beneficiary languages was disseminated to Council of Europe HF III staff; beneficiaries/stakeholders; some consultants; and other actors active on HF III themes. Council of Europe officers completed this questionnaire in advance of the *in situ* visits, to assist in preparation of FGDs. Of some 650 interlocutors emailed directly by the evaluation team (in addition to others alerted by HF III action teams), 154 responses (24%) were received. The depth in these responses varied: while some responses provided detailed elaboration, others scored Evaluation Questions, without substantive comment.

15. **Council of Europe** Heads of Office of the case study jurisdictions participated in a kick-off meeting in July 2024 and were active in planning of FGDs and meetings in the three case study Beneficiary visits. A translated introduction to the evaluation and key questions were shared with all offices for advance preparation for *in situ* visits. The evaluators had use of Council of Europe Office premises to convene meetings, and the efficiency of the visits benefitted from excellent support by designated Office evaluation focal points.

16. **Data collection** included desk review of a range of action documentation and outputs. Online questionnaire inputs, interviews and FGDs included the Council of Europe secretariat in Strasbourg; Heads of Council of Europe Offices and, in the three case study Beneficiaries, staff (managing HF actions and other projects); partner institutions; CSOs; and other relevant stakeholders. In addition to meetings with relevant EUD personnel in the three case study Beneficiaries, an online meeting was conducted with relevant thematic representatives of DG NEAR (now DG ENEST) in Brussels.

17. **Review of documentation** (see Annex 8) included action proposals/DoAs; relevant annexes; progress reports; gender analyses reports, etc. as well as selected monitoring reports by the relevant Council of Europe conventions/standards monitoring mechanisms and reports by other international organisations, including those of Treaty Bodies/Special Procedures etc.

18. The evaluation team conducted **meetings with action managers, DPC, DIO and other Council of Europe secretariat staff** in October 2024, and ***in situ* meetings with Council of Europe Office staff, action partners and other stakeholders in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia** during October-November 2024. Meetings and FGDs included all available Council of Europe Office staff (HF III and others); beneficiaries/stakeholders of the case study actions – partner institutions, relevant civil society stakeholders (rights-holders); and representatives of other stakeholders (embassies, IGOs, I/NGOs etc.) active in HF III sectors/themes, but not involved in HF III actions. Heads or Deputy Heads of Council of Europe Offices in the other four Beneficiaries were also interviewed. Indicative questions, based on key evaluation questions, were shared with all participants in advance of meetings, which were conducted on the basis of **non-attribution**, with data stored in compliance with GDPR legislation and [Council of Europe Regulations on the Protection of Personal Data](#).<sup>18</sup> Each visit concluded with a de-briefing of the Council of Europe Office. The Inception Report and preliminary findings were presented at two **meetings of the Reference Group**, with feedback noted.

19. **Beneficiary Steering Committee meetings** as well as **two online events** were observed during September - December 2024.<sup>19</sup> In total, some 230 interlocutors provided input into the evaluation in person (55 Strasbourg Council of Europe secretariat/DG NEAR; 175 in the three *in situ* visits) and via online meetings.

## 20. Limitations, Risks and Mitigation

The scale of HF III activities and outputs set against the evaluation budget represented a significant resource limitation. Budget constraints precluded visits outside of capital cities, which meant views of some beneficiary rights-holders were secured indirectly, via NGOs based in the capital cities visited.

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<sup>18</sup> [Council of Europe Regulations on the Protection of Personal Data](#).

<sup>19</sup> Online gender training in Türkiye and the HF III/Partnership for Good Governance (PGG) Regional Conference 'Spaces and services to protect LGBTI communities'.

To optimise *in situ* time, most stakeholders were met in groups, which, with most FGDs done with interpretation, curtailed the utility of discussions to some extent. More time *in situ* would have allowed more individual interviews to complement group discussions and more in-depth assessment and verification of information. While inputs were sought from some 650+ identified interlocutors, there were some gaps in terms of contracted experts, which would benefit from more systematic compilation of experts' details going forward. The possibilities to provide an “*assessment of outcomes*” with “*concrete quantitative and qualitative indications of the effectiveness of the Horizontal Facility III*” in line with the ToR was curtailed by limited action baselines/target values and data collected through HF III monitoring and evaluation. Responses to the online questionnaire need to be read in the context of respondents primarily (subject to some anonymous inputs) comprising individuals engaged in HF III, Council of Europe staff, partner institutions and contracted action experts. However, other contributions included EUD staff and other stakeholders, including IGO/INGO staff and NGOs familiar not directly engaged in the actions, but with the core issues. In addition, substantive survey responses, and field visit FGD discussions identified some gaps in understanding of core concepts, in particular the distinction between effectiveness/impact, as well as HRA and gender mainstreaming.

## 2. Findings and Conclusions

### 2.1 Relevance

#### Evaluation Questions

To what extent are HF III/actions aligned with

- relevant Council of Europe and international norms; domestic law; EU accession criteria, relevant Beneficiaries' strategies/policies, and best practice?
- the priorities and needs of Beneficiaries and other stakeholders (duty-bearers and rights-holders, including vulnerable groups in the relevant sectors)?

To what extent is HF III/actions' design

- appropriate and realistic (in terms of technical, organisational, and financial aspects)?
- sufficiently precise and plausible (in terms of measurable objectives and underlying assumptions)?

To what extent have HF III/actions responded to changes in the environment over time (risks and potentials)?

21. Actions are **explicitly premised on Council of Europe legal and best practice norms**. This is facilitated by detailed and updated Beneficiary Quadrennial Plans of Action (QAPAs). QAPAs address findings of EC annual reports of Beneficiary accession progress; Council of Europe Convention standards; ECtHR decisions and recommendations of advisory and monitoring bodies, including Beneficiary-specific judgments and recommendations.<sup>20</sup> Actions are also guided by other relevant Council of Europe normative frameworks and best practice.<sup>21</sup>

22. The intervention logic of the Horizontal Facility and its design/delivery as an EU—Council of Europe collaborative partnership, means that actions are also **highly relevant to EU norms**, including the *Strategy for the Western Balkans*, the “Copenhagen” political criteria of democracy, rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities and relevant EU acquis. HF III priorities and action objectives are also closely aligned with relevant Beneficiaries' respective SAAs and annual EC assessments of Beneficiaries' EU accession progress. The selection of action priorities and specific content is, in significant part, determined by issues not addressed by other EU-funded projects in the Beneficiaries. Some Council of Europe evaluation interlocutors identify an “*inequality of arms*” between the Council of Europe and EU in terms of substantive HF III choices and the delivery architecture. The current ratio of regional to Beneficiary-specific actions, for example, is reported to be an EU preference.

23. While most action objectives are related to a range of Beneficiary UN legal obligations, Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Treaty body and Special Procedure recommendations and policy commitments (including the UN Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs<sup>22</sup>), **linkages to international law standards are not uniformly explicit**. The programming merit of enhancing this includes potential for these normative standards (and relevant indicators developed by UN bodies and agencies) to be used in developing action indicators at all levels. More generally, linking actions' progress and results to relevant UN norms can complement the current logic of actions being based on Council of Europe

<sup>20</sup> Including opinions and recommendations of treaty standard-setting and monitoring bodies such as CCJE, CDCJ, CEPEJ, ECRI, GRETA, GREVIO, the Venice Commission etc.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Council of Europe, [Education Strategy 2030](#) and [Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#), in Quality Education actions, **HF7** Integrity standards for Higher Education in line with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting vulnerable people in the context of migration and asylum in Europe (2021-2025), Council of Europe *Strategy for the Rights of the Child* (2022-2027).

<sup>22</sup> E.g. SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (inequality), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) etc.

norms and monitoring. Beneficiaries' UN treaty reporting, the UPR and other UN oversight also offer potential impetus to action efforts.

24. There is a strong consensus across partners that **actions are well aligned with priorities and needs of partner institutions**. This derives from the highly participatory and collaborative design of actions as well as various thematic/institutional needs assessments, baseline studies etc. Many actions support the drafting and implementation of key thematic/institutional strategies and action plans. In some cases, these documents were developed with support of previous HF phases. The majority of HF III actions are a continuation or evolution of actions in earlier HF phases, with a significant percentage of HF III action officers in post during past phases and some having also previously worked with partner institutions. This combination of factors ensures that actions are well-tailored to Beneficiary contexts, partner institutions' needs and priorities. Partners also comment favourably on actions' flexibility to address new priorities as they arise, though limited action resources and high inflation mean that not all requests for support can be accommodated.

25. **Actions' relevance to the needs and rights of rights-holders** is a corollary of their relevance to duty-bearer institutions, though some CSO interlocutors highlight a need for more visible relevance to rights-holders' priorities. Some actions address groups of rights-holders more directly (e.g. minorities and vulnerable groups such as detainees, trafficking victims, LGBTI, Roma communities and others). While the primary focus of most actions is on civil and political rights, some actions have a focus on socio-economic rights (e.g. education and health in specific contexts). Poverty, a key issue amongst Beneficiaries' populations, is only addressed indirectly, including contexts such as free legal aid/access to justice, education and Roma workers' rights, etc. Some actions (e.g. **HF22**, *Advancing the Protection from Discrimination in Albania*) and **HF30**, *(Combating Discrimination and Promoting Diversity in Serbia)* also partnered with CSOs on initiatives that are otherwise under-funded. In Albania, for example, **HF22** (*Advancing the Protection from Discrimination in Albania*) is the single biggest supporter of the annual Tirana Pride, also reaching locations outside of the capital city as part of the "Week against Discrimination". Anti-discrimination actions support the work of a network of youth European ambassadors to publicly address discrimination and hatred across the Beneficiaries as well as regionally, with the regional **HF35** (*Promoting Equality and Combating Racism and Intolerance in the Western Balkans*) supporting youth empowerment.

26. In general, **actions' intervention/results-chain logics are appropriate and cogent**. Interventions include a combination of needs/context assessment, expert advice, and capacity-building support to develop/amend key laws and strategic documents, operational tools, training curricula/materials, awareness-raising initiatives. Actions prioritise support, including targeted expertise, to enhance duty-bearers' delivery of their mandated functions. This includes some accompanied/shadowing by action teams and experts of partners' pilot testing and roll-out of enhanced capacity/outputs.

27. **Monitoring and evaluation are identified by action teams and partners as a particular challenge**. Log Frames are central to action design. They vary in their utility as tools to guide and track progress towards impact. The Output-Outcome-Impact logic is mainly coherent, with some examples of relatively SMART indicators and logical sources of verification. However, this is not consistent, with log frames overall being variable in quality, some weaker in terms of specified impact not aligned with the overarching HF III Log frame Impact, risk analyses, and the quality of indicators. Some indicators necessitate onerous data gathering given action budgets or are not optimal for results that are likely to take longer than action timelines. Some specified verification sources are not necessarily in synch with specific priorities of actions. Chosen indicators are a combination of EU and Council of Europe indicators. Gender indicators in some log frames are weak or in some cases absent, and HRA is not adequately reflected as a framework. More specifically, weaknesses in measurement of the *quality* of action processes means that a particular strength of action implementation is not captured.

28. **Actions are generally precise and plausible** (in terms of measurable objectives and underlying assumptions), with some divergence between more precise objectives focused on delivery of concrete

outputs and others focused on awareness-raising. Actions generally set somewhat broad and ambitious objectives, given their limited scale of activity. However, the logic of their prioritised outcomes and coherence between inputs/outputs and objectives means that they represent a contribution towards those objectives. Limitations of monitoring and evaluation and indicators make precise verification of this contribution a challenge.

29. Actions evidence **some flexibility to adjust to changes in circumstances**. Examples include changes made in response to the reform momentum of the Montenegro IBAR and to external circumstances, such as the earthquake in Türkiye, including prioritising some activities in earthquake-affected regions, and the May 2023 Belgrade school shooting (**HF32**, *Quality Education for All* - Serbia), as well as legal developments.<sup>23</sup> While the long HF design phase is cited as limiting flexibility, partners do also highlight examples of actions' responsiveness to some new priorities and specific needs.

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. PRO-FREX actions adjustments following the adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the [Recommendation on Countering the Use of SLAPPs](#) in April 2024.

## 2.2 Coherence

### Evaluation Questions

To what extent are HF III/actions aligned with other Council of Europe actions (bilaterally or otherwise funded)?

To what extent are HF III/actions aligned with relevant interventions funded by the EU-IPA and other bilateral or multilateral donors to achieve synergy and multiplier effect?

30. The portfolio coverage of HF III **involves some degree of internal asymmetry**. Not all regional actions have counterpart Beneficiary-specific actions and Türkiye is not included in regional actions and, unlike other Beneficiaries, has no actions under the HF III, Freedom of Expression and Media thematic area. Some issues are addressed in actions in some Beneficiaries, but not others, even though similar needs are identified, e.g. while North Macedonia and Serbia have anti-human trafficking actions, the issue is also identified as a concern in other Beneficiaries. Some sectors/themes addressed by HF III actions in some Beneficiaries are addressed by other Council of Europe projects with other funding lines (including some with EU funding), e.g. Economic Crime in Kosovo. This lack of symmetry is due to HF III being formulated around EU priorities, the existence in some Beneficiaries of other Joint Projects addressing HF III sectors/themes as well as Beneficiary preferences. For example, Türkiye's difficulties with the Council of Europe's comprehensive approach to discrimination, including LGBTI, precluded an action on that theme, while Türkiye's absence from regional actions was a strategic choice of DG NEAR. Council of Europe Offices in each Beneficiary manage a range of other projects, outside of HF III, with IPA and voluntary contribution funding. HF III actions as a percentage (of activity and budget) of overall Office portfolios varies considerably across Offices, from Montenegro with only one non-HF III project to Kosovo with eight current non-HF III projects.<sup>24</sup>

31. Despite the complex interconnected map of HFIII actions and other Council of Europe projects, action management teams ensure considerable **coherence between HF actions and with other Council of Europe projects**. This includes a focus on joint activities. Opportunities for Field Office staff to attend meetings in Strasbourg and regular communication between Offices and Headquarters are identified as helping ensuring coherence between HF III actions, between Beneficiary-specific actions and regional HF III actions and other projects. Amongst a range of collaboration, **HF7** (*Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro*) and **HF40** (*Protecting freedom of expression and of the media*) collaborated on the formulation of the 2024-2026 *Communication Strategy of the Judicial Council and the Supreme Court in Montenegro*. The **HF7**-led *Regional Human Rights School* on the European Convention for Human Rights (ECHR), facilitated participation by law students from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia in collaboration with **HF9**, **HF11** and **HF38**, as well as Council of Europe JPs in Kosovo and projects funded under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022-2025.

32. Action collaboration and joint activities also extends beyond the HF region, e.g. **HF35** (*Promoting equality and combating racism and intolerance in the Western Balkans*) and Partnership for Good Governance (PGG) sister regional projects were developed in parallel, involving all EU acceding Beneficiaries from Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries on combating hatred and racism. Joint activities include regular co-organised capacity building with equality institutions and joint peer exchanges on law enforcement institutions combating racism, with police and CSOs representatives from both regions.

33. Interlocutors identify a good degree of **alignment between HF III actions and relevant interventions funded by the EU and by other donors**. In some cases, HF III actions are the only specific technical co-operation project of a particular partner institution (e.g. in Serbia where **HF42**

<sup>24</sup> As of December 2024.

(*Protecting freedom of expression and of the media in Serbia*) is the only technical co-operation project of the Regulatory Authority on Electronic Media). However, more commonly HF III actions are delivered in contexts with multiple projects of other actors with action partner institutions commonly engaged in several parallel projects. Alignment with these projects is based on a combination of regular structured and informal communication/reporting between action teams and EUDs/Offices, with only minimal project duplication reported. EUD/Council of Europe Office engagement sees some suggestions of undue expectations on action teams to 'service' EUD needs, as a source of quick access to expertise, partly a misunderstanding of the nature of HF.<sup>25</sup>

34. With IGO agencies effectively competing for donor funding, information sharing is reported as being strongest once project funding is secured, as opposed to the advance planning stage. Examples of co-operation include, **HF7** (*Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro*) activities with the UK-funded, AIRE Centre *Western Balkans Rule of Law* and US-funded Chemonics International projects. **HF24** (*Quality education for all – Bosnia and Herzegovina*) collaborated with the EU, UN and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in developing Education Sector Action Plans for 2025-2035. **HF31** (*Strengthening Anti-trafficking in Serbia*) co-ordinates well with the US and other donors active on THB, as well as with the €33 million EU-funded regional EU4FAST anti-trafficking project (2023-2027); **HF22** (*Advancing the Protection from Discrimination in Albania*) and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities collaborated in organising exchanges in Tallin and in Albania in 2024. **HF1** (*Strengthening the Quality and Efficiency of Justice in Albania*) co-operates effectively with two other larger EU-funded justice projects EU4JUSTICE (€3.4 million) and JUSTAL (2022-2024) (€1.6 million). Regional action **HF35** (*Promoting equality and combating racism and intolerance in the Western Balkans*) and has trained and utilised members of the EU's Western Balkans [Young European Ambassadors Network](#) to deliver counter-narratives on hate speech.

35. The landscape of related projects presents some challenges of co-ordination and collaboration for action teams. For the most part these challenges have been overcome with some inputs highlighting scope to enhance this further. Some examples are identified of Strasbourg-led actions being viewed as insufficiently co-ordinated with Office-led projects (e.g. EU/CoE "CyberSEE" Joint Programme in Albania and Kosovo) and some lack of clarity regarding the connections between regional actions and Council of Europe projects outside of HF III that address similar themes (e.g. projects on economic crime in Serbia and Kosovo).

36. Within the IPA funding, HF III actions address law and policy-related issues in the thematic areas, in line with Beneficiaries' obligations as Council of Europe members. Some EUD managers express a view that HF III actions should be more narrowly confined to formulating law/policy frameworks with actual implementation/roll-out training etc. of these frameworks left to larger scale EU-funded projects by Member States consortia, e.g. EU4FAST on Migrant smuggling/trafficking. Such a division of roles, however, would lose the specific value of action teams and experts involved in developing law/policy frameworks also being engaged on pilot-testing and training on their application etc.

37. Ensuring coherence is to some extent dependent upon action managers' initiative. Donor/international agency co-ordination is most formalised in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with more informal and project-based efforts in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia. In Montenegro, the small scale of the Beneficiary and limited number of donor projects means informal co-ordination is effective, with plans underway by the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office to formalise this. Various factors are identified as underscoring the need for more co-ordination, including the demands of multiple projects on partners with limited absorption capacity and the potential for combined synergies to

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<sup>25</sup> In Albania, **HF16** was requested, by the EUD, to peer review a manual produced as part of another EU-funded Rule of Law project, on the basis that both were funded by the EU and that the manual covered topics related to Council of Europe standards. While the action had no earmarked budget to provide this expertise, inputs were provided. In Montenegro and North Macedonia monthly reports are provided by action teams at the EUD's request, though this is not identified as being burdensome.

address any lack of political will for reform. The relatively small financial envelopes of many actions limit the potential of Council of Europe Offices (particularly Programme Offices<sup>26</sup>) to take a more prominent co-ordinating role. As they progress on EU accession, the expectation is that Beneficiaries take the lead in co-ordinating donors and projects in the service of EU accession agenda. However, this requires some strengthening of Beneficiaries, in terms of both capacity and expectation.

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<sup>26</sup> Ankara, Podgorica, Skopje.

## 2.3 Efficiency

### Evaluation Questions

Have inputs (financial, human, and material resources) been chosen and used economically in relation to the outputs delivered?

Were activities/outputs delivered within planned time frames?

38. While the overall HF III architecture; the large number of actions; and the high volume of (sometimes stand-alone) activities present efficiency challenges, action teams exhibit a high degree of cost-awareness and make considerable efforts in terms of **economic use of financial, human, and material resources**. Survey responses indicate a high degree of satisfaction with efficiency among action teams and partners, but with concerns raised of the challenge and time demands of delivering activities within the available funding. The financial envelopes of actions range from a number of Beneficiary-specific actions with budgets of €230,000 in **HF17, Action against Corruption, Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing in Bosnia and Herzegovina** to the regional action **HF15, Enhancing Co-operation in the Western Balkans in Managing Violent Extremism in Prisons and Preventing Further Radicalisation after Release** with a budget of €1.65 million. HF III was originally planned for delivery over three years, but this was extended by agreement to 48 months, without an adjustment made to budgets. With staff costs representing a significant proportion of the HF III budget, this extended timeline presented a significant budgetary challenge. Inflation (and in the case of Türkiye, Euro exchange rate issues) and related increase in prices has also presented significant challenges, including time demands on action teams in planning cost-efficient activities.<sup>27</sup> These increases are also reported as a contributory factor in actions' budget absorption being in line with planned expenditure. While action teams have been mindful and creative in responding to this, some action teams report having inadequate funding to carry out optimal activities.<sup>28</sup> Budget constraints in **HF27 (Quality Education for All – Montenegro)** linked to high inflation saw cancellation of the online training platform planned as follow-up to the training on digital democratic citizenship.

39. Various steps are taken to ensure efficient budget management and value for money, including combined activities by actions; use of Council of Europe and partners' premises to save on venue hire costs; and more use of online events. However, cost saving measures entail some compromise, e.g. some cases where external venues would have been more suitable for training, and the limitations of online events are also highlighted by interlocutors. In **HF18 (Action against Economic Crime in Montenegro)**, for example, after online consultations had seen only limited adoption of expert recommendations on Montenegro's draft *Corruption Strategy (2024-2028)*, a face-to-face workshop saw experts and the Drafting Working Group accelerating the integration of recommendations in the Strategy to meet the IBAR timeline. Provision of short-term external expertise is a key element of all actions, and this expertise is secured at very competitive rates. Given costs involved, study visits appear to be used judiciously (and with organised structured visit schedules). Some partners express a desire for more study visits, but the cost and time demands involved are problematic. Value-for-money considerations are also evident in the production of documentary outputs with the Handbook for ECtHR case law developed under **HF7 (Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro)** adapted for use in **HF2 (Improving the protection of the right to property and facilitating execution of ECtHR judgments in Albania)** and also actions' use/adaptation of materials developed by the EU/Council of Europe *Partnership for Good Governance* Joint Programme.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> To address budget shortfall, some action activities were funded from the CoE's ordinary budget e.g. the **HF13** conference "Human rights and migration in the context of natural disasters and emergency situations" in Türkiye.

<sup>28</sup> A CoE review of impact of inflation and funding is underway during 2024.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Council of Europe, (2019), *Guide for developing a mentoring programme on women's access to justice for legal professionals*.

40. Some streamlining of **action reporting procedures** has been introduced, including where several Council of Europe Divisions engage in actions. However, while Office staff in Beneficiaries acknowledge progress made, they highlight concerns that reporting obligations remain time-consuming, and that the frequency of reporting detracts from time on substantive work. Action quarterly reports are somewhat repetitive and activity-based, given that outcomes typically take more than three months to materialise. Some EUD sector managers express concerns over the fitness-for-purpose of some progress reports to Delegations, in terms of the balance of reporting of activity and detail on substantive progress. The most commonly raised efficiency challenge concerns current **procurement rules and procedures**. Numerous examples were provided of time-consuming processes, for example, in the context of the organisations of events the need for multiple offers to be solicited for individual elements (instead of more cost-efficient solutions such as more use of a pool of framework contractors to provide integrated services). The demands of these procedures are variable and are less problematic where framework contracts for event organisation are in place.<sup>30</sup>

41. The Council of Europe staff cost of 40% as a percentage of the overall HF III budget is agreed with the EU.<sup>31</sup> Relative to other projects, these high staff costs are a product of the wide portfolio of actions and volume of activities; the administrative procedures; as well as the structure of project managers in the secretariat and action staff in each Council of Europe Office. Some EUD staff question the value of this, relative to other EU-funded projects, and there is some suggestion that action budgets are more determinative of staffing choices than their substantive content. However, staff costs as a percentage of action budgets do need to be viewed in light of action teams providing key substantive inputs, in addition to their management/administrative roles.

42. By and large, **actions are progressing in line with planned time frames**. However, some actions did experience significant commencement delays, e.g. **HF43** (*Protecting Freedom of Expression and of the Media in the Western Balkans*) had a delayed start of activities of a year.<sup>32</sup> A similar commencement delay in the case of **HF20** (*Action against Money Laundering in Türkiye*) is attributed to the Financial Intelligence Unit being occupied with Global Facility assistance after Türkiye's "Grey Listing" by FATF in 2021 (lifted in 2024). The February 2023 earthquake also impacted on actions in Türkiye, delaying some activities. However, responsive adjustments were made, including moving events online. In several Beneficiaries (Türkiye, North Macedonia, and Montenegro), presidential and general elections are identified as having caused some disruption in terms of partners communication/availability. This saw some delays in delivery of activities and outputs, during the election campaigns and changes or delays in filling posts in partner institutions. Similarly, **HF5** (*Further strengthening the treatment of detained and sentenced persons in line with European standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina*) experienced technical delays before the legislative process adopting a legal framework for digitalisation of prisons was successfully completed. The appointment of a new Minister of Justice saw progress and the launch of the *Integrated Prison Management Information System* in September 2024 came after a seven-year process developing software and a legislative basis. Regional action **HF35** (*Promoting equality and combating racism and intolerance in the Western Balkans*) saw a three-months delay in the completion of planned online workshops, and counter-narrative videos by Young European Ambassadors (YEA) due to Ambassadors' other commitments. Overall, actions' adherence to planned timelines is good given the context of multi-stakeholder involvement, sometimes protracted decision-making processes of partner institutions and some steps (such as legislative procedures) being outside of actions' control.

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<sup>30</sup> In place in Ankara, Tirana, Prishtina, Podgorica, Sarajevo and Skopje.

<sup>31</sup> Year I staff costs (excluding consultants) was €6.4 million out of €12 million spent, representing 53% of the overall annual budget, with the nature of inception phase activities identified by the Council of Europe as a factor in this figure.

<sup>32</sup> Though this period did see preparatory work, including consultant tender selection and discussions with the Beneficiaries, and the Action is now reported as being on track.

## 2.4 Effectiveness

### Evaluation Questions

To what extent have HF III/actions achieved their intended Intermediate Outcomes?

To what extent are action objectives, inputs, and outputs (including ECM expertise) likely to contribute to reforms in the targeted sectors/themes, towards compliance with international standards and the EU *acquis*?

To what extent can unintended positive/ negative direct results be observed?

To what extent does the combination of regional and bilateral actions contribute to achievement of intended Intermediate Outcomes?

What assessment can be made of the quality of steering and implementation of HF III/actions in relation to the achievement of objectives?

What assessment can be made of the quality of participation by the direct beneficiaries and of expert inputs?

43. Most case study actions evidence **good or very good progress towards achieving intended Intermediate Outcomes**, with more limited progress by actions in some sectors affected by contextual tensions, or where they are dependent upon sometimes protracted legislative enactment. No significant **unintended positive/negative direct results** are reported. Over 90% of survey responses score effectiveness as “very good” or “excellent”, with slightly lower (78%) satisfaction rating of action monitoring and evaluation. Coherence between objectives, inputs and outputs is strong, with results contributing, or likely to, **contribute to reform in line with international standards and the EU acquis**. These results encompass:

- Needs and context assessment, baseline, and other research studies;
- Support to formulation/reform of legislative/policy frameworks in compliance with Council of Europe legal norms and EU accession criteria;
- Capacity enhancement of institutions and groups;
- Networking at Beneficiary and regional level, and beyond;
- Awareness-raising and other rights enhancement of selected target groups of rights-holders.

44. The logical sequential steps taken over several HF phases is a key element of actions’ effectiveness. In **HF8** (*Enhancing Human Rights Protection for Detained and Sentenced Persons in Montenegro*), for example, delivery of training includes training on Police Standard Operating Procedures developed in HF II, while the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) detention monitoring developed in Phase II has been updated, with training delivered on its implementation.

45. As a mid-term evaluation, it was not envisaged that the evaluation would address impact. However, with a majority of HF III actions being a continuation of, or follow-on to HF II actions and, in some cases, HF I actions, interlocutors were asked to identify examples of impacts mid-way through HF III. For the most part, responses on this question highlighted adoption of laws<sup>33</sup> and treaties,<sup>34</sup> strategies and changes to institutional capacity and working practices. Examples more accurately characterised as impacts include the removal of Türkiye and Albania from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) ‘grey list’; the expansion in provision of free legal aid in North Macedonia, Türkiye and elsewhere; the provision of mobile gynaecological services to women prisoners in North Macedonia; documented reduction in complaints of excessive force in police arrests in Montenegro following specialised training; the opening of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s first LGBTI shelter; and the resolution of ECtHR decisions

<sup>33</sup> E.g. legislative change on the right to property in Albania in May 2023.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. ratification of Tromsø Convention in North Macedonia in November 2024.

e.g. [Dragan Petrović v. Serbia](#), and support to adoption of a Law on Property Rights in line with ECtHR recommendations in the case of [Beshiri v. Albania](#).

46. Overall, the effectiveness of HF III is curtailed by limited budgets of actions (including time demands of organising activities within available funds) and the onerous administrative/organisational requirements.<sup>35</sup> Reporting and other administrative procedures are a necessity, as a matter of both the Council of Europe and the EU transparency/accountability. Nevertheless, the time and workload involved, in part due to the large number of actions and individual/'one-off' activities, is identified as detracting from deeper engagement and more incremental follow-up substantive activities by action teams. The need for more depth and follow-up is linked to the embedded nature of some root causes and the low capacity of some partners to independently implement and roll-out action results. There is, nevertheless, both logic and merit to Council of Europe engagement in all the sectors addressed by HF III. Even where budgets allow only limited activities, this engagement provides the Council of Europe with a Beneficiary-level input to key institutions and reform initiatives. This informs monitoring and also assists in the formulation of larger-scale technical co-operation interventions. The HF III actions in Türkiye, for example, are identified as providing lessons learned for the design of a forthcoming €4.4million EU-funded Civil Society Facility that will build upon issues covered by current HF III actions (women's access to justice, migration etc). However, within the parameters of HF III, small-scale actions (with sometimes limited activities), are not the most effective means of the Council of Europe adding value to reform efforts. This is particularly the case in sectors where other actors have larger projects, and participation in multiple projects is a challenge for partner institutions given their the limited capacity..

47. Consideration should be given in selected cases to options, such as Office focal points rather than actual projects as a means of Council of Europe tracking of sectors/themes at Beneficiary level.<sup>36</sup> Such focal points could provide Council of Europe inputs into projects of others and serving as a bridge between such projects and Council of Europe advisory/monitoring bodies. Another option may be to rationalise the number of actions and enhance effectiveness (and efficiency) by merging some related actions under some possible broader themes, e.g. "Justice" or "Justice, law and order", with subsidiary priority components on specific priorities e.g. legal aid, trafficking etc. These could be managed by merged action teams. Effectiveness gains can also be generated by revisiting the current balance of stand-alone regional and Beneficiary-specific actions, e.g. on Freedom of Expression/Media. On a case-by-case basis weighing up competing merits, this might include more use of consolidated actions that include both regional activities (networking) *and* Beneficiary-specific activities. There is a strongly expressed desire among stakeholders in the Beneficiaries for regional actions to be based in Beneficiary capitals, with secretariat.

48. A majority of actions are guided by **active Steering Committees**. Bi-annual Steering Committee meetings are reported by all participants as contributing to effective action decision-making, providing a platform for partner institutions to meet and update each other on activities, and are particularly useful where multi-stakeholder co-operation is required. Partners in all case study actions confirm a consistent participatory approach and Steering Committees as fora for sharing of lessons learned and best practices. FGD interlocutors in Montenegro also identify the Council of Europe co-ordination role of committees as mitigating some inter-institutional tensions. Only a minority of Steering Committees have civil society membership, with some others including CSOs as observers. Some reservations are expressed regarding the impact of CSO involvement on the frankness of discussion by duty-bearer institutions as well as the challenge of selecting from a wide pool of civil society actors. However, the importance for greater accountability of CSO involvement means that modalities to address these issues should be explored to ensure some level of CSO participation in the steering of all actions. The resource challenges of CSOs mean that consideration should be given to a participation stipend for CSOs not otherwise in receipt of action grants. The annual **Beneficiary-level Steering Committee meetings**, while important as a matter of transparency and as contributing to high-level political reform

<sup>35</sup> Reporting requirements have been reduced by agreement between DPC and DG NEAR, from bi-monthly to quarterly.

<sup>36</sup> DPC did previously have regional/facility co-ordinators in Council of Europe Offices.

momentum, are less useful in 'steering' the HF. Even with some use of online participation, they represent a significant resource and time commitment. In addition to reporting on progress, Steering Committee discussions can be enhanced by more specific focus on challenges identified, and remedial measures with designated responsibility, including on HF III transversal themes.

49. The quality of **participation by partner institutions in action activities** is very good, not least given the constraints that many face, including issues of capacity, turnover of staff and, in some cases, delays in filling vacant posts. FGDs saw strong evidence of partners' detailed knowledge of the logic, activities, and necessary next steps of actions. Experts report active engagement by partner institutions in ensuring that expertise provided is tailored to the local context and institutional needs, though with some passivity on follow-up initiative.

50. Actions by-and-large have a **strong pool of short-term experts** to draw from and partner institutions and other stakeholders value the expertise and the support of experts. Periodic expert engagement is seen as having advantages over experts being embedded in partner institutions in that it preserves expert's autonomy and facilitates delivery of frank advice. Some challenges are reported in the timely mobilisation of experts, in particular sourcing suitable local experts in sectors with extensive levels of activity by multiple actors. A more limited pool of appropriate experts is reported in some Beneficiaries and some technical areas. Council of Europe expert fee rates are low, compared to projects implemented by IGOs and bi-lateral donors in the region. However, this does not appear to present problems in securing experts. The prestige of working with the Council of Europe, and good working relations with action teams are identified as factors countering the relatively low fee rates. While experts highlight clarity and effectiveness of action manager briefing, they also express some sense of working in isolation from other experts and not being aware of relevant inputs of other experts. Consolidating details of all HF III experts can assist organisational memory and a proposal for more networking of experts has significant merit. Such a network would provide a platform for knowledge sharing and enhance coherence of experts' inputs in line with core Council of Europe standards and developments (e.g. M&E, gender and HRA). Action teams and IGO/donor stakeholders report some cross-referral and sharing of experts in their respective projects, which aids co-ordination.

51. Given the many common reform challenges faced by Beneficiaries, in particular in the Western Balkans, there is a logic to **HF III's combination of regional and bilateral actions**. This has made some contribution to intermediate outcomes, especially where regional actions are mirrored with counterpart Beneficiary-specific actions. Interlocutors highlight the importance of regional actions for networking institutions with a comparable mandate, e.g. equality bodies/NHRIS, as well as lessons learned/experience sharing and regional solidarity, e.g. for LGBTI groups. The LGBTI shelter in Sarajevo launched in 2024 is illustrative of the regional reach of positive results in a Beneficiary. The opening of the shelter is cited as having expedited plans for similar facilities in Belgrade, Prishtina, and Skopje. In addition to events, **HF15** (*Enhancing co-operation in the Western Balkans in Managing Violent Extremism in Prisons and Preventing Further Radicalisation after Release*) has established an online collaboration platform for sharing of documents/tools, and good practice and sustaining engagement between Beneficiaries and relevant institutions. In addition to the core benefit of networking, and exchange of good practice (including through linkages with relevant PGG projects), the contribution at a higher level to fostering trust between Beneficiaries, with facilitated visits of partner institutions to each other's jurisdictions, is highlighted. Verifying substantive change attributable to networking is a challenge.

52. The visibility of regional actions is variable and is strongest among institutions directly participating in activities or where Beneficiaries host regional action events. However, in some cases Council of Europe Office staff, EUDs and some relevant institutions are aware only in general terms of regional activities and outputs. Regional actions also vary in terms of their focus on networking of key institutions and stakeholder groups and the production of more specific concrete outputs. **HF15** (*Enhancing co-operation in the Western Balkans in Managing Violent Extremism in Prisons and Preventing Further*

*Radicalisation after Release*) is notable for its production of a range of specific tools on Violent Extremist Prisoners (VEP) management.

53. In addition to substantive and context knowledge, the commitment of action teams is identified as a key element of effectiveness, with partners and consultants highlighting their industrious work-rate. Office staff highlight the benefits of working for the Council of Europe. Many report good communication with, and support from, headquarters' managers, but there is also some sense of frustration with the balance of decision-making between Offices and the secretariat, which is viewed by some Office staff as resulting in the local context not being optimally reflected in some action decision-making. Apart from workload, a good level of job satisfaction is reported. Training is one specific area identified for improvement by some. Training of action teams is addressed via core Council of Europe budget with teams receiving or can avail of a range of introductory/ongoing training (PMM, communications, procurement, conflict, gender etc.). Informal mentoring and knowledge sharing within, and between, teams are also identified as contributing to effective action management. Nevertheless, some staff still highlight a need for more in-depth/applied case study-based PMM training, with the practical application of gender mainstreaming and HRA and monitoring identified as specific needs. The current level of action activity presents a challenge in availing of training opportunities.

### **Expertise Co-ordination Mechanism (ECM)**

54. The Council of Europe Expertise Co-ordination Mechanism (ECM) is a key element of HF III support to legislative and policy reform, offering HF III Beneficiaries<sup>37</sup> a facility to seek expert opinions on legal and policy reform relating to the four HF III thematic areas, in addition to other issues within the mandate of the Venice Commission. Use of the ECM to date has been limited, with only four Beneficiaries submitting requests, though the mechanism is intended to be supplementary to other support on drafting of laws and policy frameworks in individual actions. Montenegro accounting for seven of the total fifteen opinions to date, followed by five requests from Bosnia and Herzegovina and one from Serbia. As of February 2025, opinions are pending on requests by Bosnia and Herzegovina (one), Kosovo (four) and North Macedonia (one). Needs for rapid legislative momentum on the context of IBAR reform in Montenegro is identified as the key factor in the Montenegro, accounting for half of all opinions sought during 2023-2024. FGDs suggest awareness of the mechanism in general terms and the Venice Commission is recognised as carrying both legal as well as political leverage. There are some suggestions that the level of use of ECM is due to needs being addressed promptly by action experts' inputs on law reform (via Working Groups etc). Despite publicity regarding ECM and opinions issued, including dissemination of a translated information leaflet, press releases, many CSOs are unaware of the mechanism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The mechanism is currently open to HF Beneficiary Ministers, Parliament speakers and committees, Ombudsperson institutions/NHRIs and the EU, as well as a facility for Beneficiary Constitutional Courts to request *amicus curiae* briefs.

<sup>38</sup> While the mechanism is aimed at Beneficiary institutions and EU and Council of Europe organs, there is an accountability gain in CSOs active on the issues concerned being aware of Opinions requested and issued, to monitor follow-up implementation.

## 2.5 Sustainability

### Evaluation Questions

To what extent are HF III/actions results (reform of law, policy, and practices. tools etc) likely to applied/resourced/ updated beyond the HF III implementation period?

What evidence is there of Beneficiaries' political commitment to apply HF III/action results and ECM advice going forward?

What evidence is there of rights-holders/CSOs capacity to demand ongoing delivery of HF III/action results?

To what extent have HF III/actions contributed to enhancing the capacity of Beneficiaries?

What evidence is there that enhanced awareness/capacity will be applied effectively resourced and updated by Beneficiaries?

55. The prospects of actions' **results and outputs continuing beyond their implementation period** are good, with some variation by sector/theme and whether ongoing implementation requires significant future budgetary commitment by Beneficiaries. Among factors that enhance likely sustainability, committed EU accession ambitions of some Beneficiaries represents the strongest single driver of sustainability of HF III results, given the close alignment of actions with relevant EU accession criteria. Thus, interlocutors in Montenegro and Albania (where EU accession negotiations are expected to be completed in 2026 and 2027, respectively) highlight the accession process as ensuring high-level political impetus to deliver and sustain action results. Actions' outputs being linked to the Council of Europe monitoring/advisory mechanisms is also identified as key to sustainability, with enhanced capacity and outputs recognised as critical to Beneficiaries' preparation for future evaluations.<sup>39</sup> In advance of the February 2024 MONEYVAL evaluation, the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina convened an emergency session to pass a new Law on Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing. The planned Committee for the Prevention of Torture monitoring mission to Montenegro in 2025 is also seen by partners as a key test of the **HF8** (*Enhancing Human Rights Protection for Detained and Sentenced Persons in Montenegro*) contribution to improved procedures and knowledge on the treatment of detainees. In addition, Montenegro's forthcoming Presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers 2026-2027<sup>40</sup> is identified as a key contributing factor.

56. Partners' **strong sense of ownership** of action results is identified as key to sustainability, particularly at institutional level. This is linked to outputs being tailored to institutional needs and strategies and being formulated by highly participatory processes (including Steering Committees, working groups etc). Partner institutions acknowledge the expertise of action experts, and the positive experience of working with them is cited as providing a basis for future engagement of these experts by Beneficiary institutions, independent of HF III actions. Sustainability of some outputs is more problematic with recommendations for legislative drafting/amendment dependent on political prioritisation of necessary enactment. Momentum on legislative change is strongest in the case of reform priorities identified in EU accession reports in Beneficiaries where EU membership is most actively being pursued.

57. There is strategic good practice of **integrating training modules and curricula developed by actions** (as well as HELP, CEPEJ modules<sup>41</sup> etc.) within designated training institutions. Examples

<sup>39</sup> Wider application, via translation or adaptation by other actors, of action outputs produced in HF Beneficiary languages would be facilitated by such outputs including a short summary in English, detailing the contents, target audience etc.

<sup>40</sup> North Macedonia is scheduled to assume the Presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in 2027-2028.

<sup>41</sup> As well as the dissemination/translation of an array of relevant Council of Europe normative instruments and tools, e.g. **HF28** published ECRI *General Policy Recommendation No.17 on Intolerance and Discrimination against LGBTI Persons* in

include CEPEJ online training in the Kosovo Justice Academy under **HF6** (*Strengthening the quality and efficiency of justice in Kosovo\**) and other HELP training modules on countering the use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and safety of journalists and media freedom in the Kosovo Judicial Council under **HF39**. **HF7** (*Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro*) grant supported the integration of clinical legal education into universities in Montenegro, introducing future lawyers to the provision of free legal assistance. The **HF23** (*Towards an Equal, Inclusive, and Tolerant Bosnia and Herzegovina*) e-learning course on combatting hate speech developed with the Civil Servants Agency in Bosnia and Herzegovina is now obligatory for all new civil servants. The **HF18** (*Action against Economic Crime in Montenegro*) training programme on money laundering cases has been adopted into the curriculum of the Judicial Training Centre. In Albania, there is a strong track record of co-operation between the Council of Europe through the HF and beyond with the School of Magistrates, and which consistently seeks to embed training curricula and other action outputs into the institution's curriculum. Various examples are identified of partners applying outputs and knowledge gained from actions in their independent delivery of new training activities.<sup>42</sup>

58. Actions prioritise **Training-of-Trainers**, (in particular trainers affiliated with core institutions) as a matter of sustainability. **HF19** (*Action against economic crime in North Macedonia*) trained members of the secretariat of the Commission for Prevention of Corruption to serve as future trainers of its Training Unit. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, **HF5** (*Further strengthening the treatment of detained and sentenced persons in line with European standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina*) supported mentoring and training by Police Academy trainers of police cadets on interviewing and public order policing, as well as training of a core team of prison staff trainers on the Integrated Prison Management Information System (IPMIS) in four pilot prisons. The IPMIS training is to be expanded by the Federal Ministry of Justice to the remaining prisons, while **HF24** (*Quality education for all – Bosnia and Herzegovina*) supported training and certification of trainer-teachers on democratic culture in education. In North Macedonia, **HF29** (*Strengthening anti-trafficking action in North Macedonia*) generated pools of trainers on THB for labour exploitation within the Labour Inspectorate and on health care for victims of trafficking within the Institute of Public Health. While some issues are reported of trained trainers' subsequent unavailability due to being reassigned/promoted, there is also strong evidence of trained trainers being used in the roll-out of action training. E.g. in **HF13**, (*Strengthening the human rights protection in the context of migration in Türkiye*) cascade trainings of local Bar Associations across Türkiye by a pool of UTBA trainers trained under the action and **HF32** (*Quality Education for All - Serbia*), where a network of mentor schools and trainers within these schools act as trainers to others in the roll-out of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). Partners also confirm the ongoing application of lessons learned from action training support, e.g. the Financial Intelligence Unit in Montenegro has independently developed training modules on risk-based supervision in real estate and car dealerships based on experience gained from experts in **HF18** (*Action against Economic Crime in Montenegro*).

59. Given low training capacity among partners and limited duration of action Training-of-Trainers activity, the concept of a “trained” trainer is set somewhat low, with more in-depth, incremental support required. Some interlocutors (e.g. in the case of **HF11**, *Strengthening Human Rights Protection in Serbia*) also report sustainability concerns with regards to generational change of judges, lawyers etc. Specifically, while the staff in key institutions have been trained and exposed to standards over the past two decades, not enough has been done to ensure knowledge is passed to the next generation. Sustainability planning should enhance the depth of training for trainers, and include measures to

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Macedonian, **HF13** translated a range of Council of Europe migration materials, **HF39** translation of the 2024 Council of Europe Committee of Ministers recommendation on SLAPPs translated into Albanian, with Serbian translation provided to the counterpart action **HF42** in Serbia.

<sup>42</sup> The Serbian Ministry of Education is now funding external advisors for Democratic Culture in Schools, recruited from mentor schools involved in **HF30**. The **HF23** output [Mapping responses to hate speech in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A situational analysis and mapping report](#) was adopted by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 2023.

ensure that once trained, trainers continue in that designated role and are prioritised for future methodological and substantive support by the Council of Europe and others.

60. Formal **adoption of action outputs in institutional policy and working practice** also increases likely sustainability. This includes **HF32** (*Quality Education for All - Serbia*) integration of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) into the Education Ministry's *Guidelines for Organisation and Implementation of Educational and Upbringing Process* in the 2023/24 School Year and school Action Plans for democratic culture while *Methodological Guidelines for National CEPEJ correspondents* were adopted via **HF14** (*Towards a Better Evaluation of the Results of Judicial Reform Efforts in the Western Balkans – “Dashboard Western Balkans II”*). New academic integrity standards,<sup>43</sup> developed through **HF27** (*Quality education for all – Montenegro*) are embedded in the higher education re-accreditation process in Montenegro. The sustainability of results embedded in institutions, however, is challenged by human resource issues including changes at senior management level, transfers, retirement, political appointments etc. Montenegro, for example, is reported as lacking some 50 necessary judges and 1,500-1,800 police officers.

61. While infrastructure support is not within the scope of their budgets,<sup>44</sup> various actions have supported the **development of digital data systems** that are likely to be sustainable, albeit in some cases requiring staff training and capacity for data entry and analysis. **HF19** (*Action against economic crime in North Macedonia*) supported the establishment of a gift register as part of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interests, in line with GRECO recommendation. **HF5** (*Further strengthening the treatment of detained and sentenced persons in line with European standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina*) supported the introduction in September 2024 of an Integrated Prison Management Information System (IPMIS) - a specific EU Accession recommendation. The system was launched after a seven-year process developing software and a legislative basis. In Albania, **HF1** (*Strengthening the Quality and Efficiency of Justice in Albania*) is supporting a web-based court user satisfaction system, while **HF16** (*Action against Economic Crime*) supported the Central Election Commission trained monitors, political party officers and election candidates on the campaign financing reporting platform (developed in Phase II). The use of the platform for disclosure of political parties' campaign financing is among progress noted in the EC Accession Report in October 2024. **HF15** (*Enhancing co-operation in the Western Balkans in managing violent extremism in prisons and preventing further radicalisation after release*) created a restricted access web-based platform for sharing of documents/tools, and exchange on practices and working documents on radicalisation and violent extremism in prisons and rehabilitation of VEPs. **HF23** (*Towards an Equal, Inclusive, and Tolerant Bosnia and Herzegovina*) supported the launch by the CSO Sarajevo Open Centre of a [Stop the Hate/Stop mržnji Website](#) for reporting of hate crimes and hate speech against LGBTI individuals in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

62. Express commitment by partners to sustain action results needs to be read in light of ongoing challenges of human and financial resources necessary to maintain, extend and update and monitor application of results. These challenges are identified as deriving in part from concerns regarding **ongoing high-level political will to maintain results**, including legislative enactment and budget allocation etc. Particular concerns are expressed that this cannot be assumed where popular or political EU membership aspirations decline. In all Beneficiaries, some actions are effectively supplementing inadequate budgets of key duty-bearer institutions. **HF30** (*Combatting Discrimination and Promoting Diversity in Serbia*) and **HF22** (*Advancing the Protection from Discrimination in Albania*) support activities of the duty-bearer institutions (Institution of the Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Serbia; and the Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination in Albania). However, some positive developments in resource allocation are also noted, such as the 2024 UPR submission by the Albanian People's Advocate (NHRI) which indicates a budget increase of 29% from 2023 to 2024 and increase in staff from 59 to 66. **HF8**

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<sup>43</sup> Based the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Education, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> With some exceptions, e.g. **HF31** provided IT equipment to partners (State institutions and CSOs) in countering THB.

(*Enhancing Human Rights Protection for Detained and Sentenced Persons in Montenegro*) adds critical detention monitoring capacity to the under-funded NPM. And while **HF32** (*Quality Education for All - Serbia*) has to be considered a highly successful project. Nevertheless, the potential impact of its results has to be set against an environment in which hate speech is prevalent and remains largely unsanctioned. The sustainability of action progress on gender equality and sexual orientation is a particular concern, with concerns expressed that duty-bearer institutions do not share the EU/Council of Europe's prioritisation of these issues.

63. Actions also contribute to sustainability indirectly by their focus on transparency of, and communication by, duty-bearers' institutions (e.g. **HF7** *Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro*). While access to information and awareness of rights-holders potentially enhances 'demand' for reform', **rights-holders/CSOs possibilities to hold duty-bearers to account** is weak in all Beneficiaries. While varying by Beneficiary,<sup>45</sup> challenges include limitations of capacity and resources, restrictive registration requirements, inadequate access to information/consultation and in some cases a '*shrinking*' civic space, particularly for human rights defenders. Civil society have freedom to engage in service delivery (e.g. legal aid, vocational training of prisoners, awareness-raising etc.), however, the prevailing environment impedes CSO functioning as advocates for, and monitors of, duty-bearer accountability, and more specifically as human rights defenders.<sup>46</sup> While maintaining a primary focus on support to duty-bearer institutions, going forward HF III and HF IV should also prioritise targeted, practical support to CSOs' in their accountability role, with visible EU/Council of Europe solidarity where freedom to exercise these functions is threatened.

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<sup>45</sup> The October 2024 EC Reports assessment of the environment for civil society vary from "*overall enabling*" in North Macedonia, "*largely enabling*" in Kosovo, "*narrowing*" in Albania, "*constrained*" in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular in Republika Srpska, to "*difficult*" in Serbia and Türkiye.

<sup>46</sup> See among various monitoring reports, DG NEAR, (2023) *Assessment Report of the Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region*, June 2024.

## 2.6 Human Rights Approach

### Evaluation Questions

To what extent do HF III/actions incorporate HRA principles (including civil society participation), in all PCM stages?

To what extent are HRA principles, (including civil society participation), reflected in HF III/actions' M&E (baselines, indicators etc)?

64. A Human Rights Approach (HRA),<sup>47</sup> is a stated HF III transversal theme.<sup>48</sup> It includes a focus on empowering rights-holders to assert rights and hold duty-bearers to account through engagement with representative CSOs. Most, but not all<sup>49</sup> HRA principles outlined in the Council of Europe's [HRA 2020 Guide](#), are specified as impact level key indicators in the HF III Matrix.<sup>50</sup> Action reports and outputs vary in the extent to which they report on, and substantively address, the HRA principles as a unified framework.<sup>51</sup> Evaluation inputs indicate weak levels of understanding among many partner institutions on HRA as a methodological framework (as distinct from human rights), and action staff also indicate a need for more support on context-specific application of the framework in programming.

65. While there is comprehensive coverage of HRA in some action log frames and reporting (e.g. **HF33**, *Women's access to justice in Türkiye*, **HF15**, *Enhancing cooperation in the Western Balkans in managing violent extremism in prisons and preventing further radicalisation after release*), Others only address a selection of the principles, framed variously as ("*Equality and non-discrimination*," and "*Sustainability and stakeholders' ownership*"). HRA is predominantly equated with civil society participation, which in line with core European frameworks,<sup>52</sup> is strong, though not uniform across the action portfolio. Coverage of the full HRA framework in **action monitoring** is also inconsistent, which sees some principles inadequately addressed, and the highly participatory nature of the design and delivery of activities not captured.<sup>53</sup>

66. Civil society participation<sup>54</sup> is significant in many action activities, as formal partners, Steering Committee members/observers, and contributing to needs assessments consultations.<sup>55</sup> This is

<sup>47</sup> The equivalent of Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), as applied by various actors, including HF principle donor. See for example, EC, (2021), [COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Applying the Human Rights Based Approach to international partnerships An updated Toolbox for placing rights-holders at the centre of EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation](#).

<sup>48</sup> In addition to gender mainstreaming, the May 2022 HF III *Action Document* also identifies *Conflict sensitivity, peace and resilience* and *Environmental Protection, Climate Change and Biodiversity* as additional transversal themes. Conflict sensitivity is implicit in some HF III actions, (e.g. in mediation as part of justice sector ADR, in interpersonal relations in education) but not addressed as a transversal HF theme. Similarly, environmental issues feature substantively in some actions, e.g. **HF21** and **HF13**, but not as a transversal theme.

<sup>49</sup> The HF log frame matrix lists a number of HRA principles at impact level: "*rights-holders access to the information, services and supports regarding human rights*", "*equal treatment/non-discrimination*", "*participation of the rights-holders in the processes that affect the enjoyment of the rights*", but other principles (vulnerable groups and accountability) are only addressed in the context of some Outcomes.

<sup>50</sup> The HF III [Communication and Visibility Guidelines](#) state that "*A human rights approach should be applied to all communication and visibility. Communication should aim to be gender-sensitive and use inclusive language.*"

<sup>51</sup> There is also some inaccurate usage of "citizens" instead of "rights-holders" in action reports and some outputs, e.g. Montenegro Judicial strategy 2024-27 and police SOPs speak of "citizens", when the target group is wider than citizens.

<sup>52</sup> Secretary General's [Roadmap on Civil society engagement with the Council of Europe](#) 2024-2027 and Revised [DG NEAR Guidelines for Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region \(2021-2027\)](#).

<sup>53</sup> The consolidated quarterly and annual reports submitted to DG NEAR do address all HRA principles, with illustrative examples from Actions.

<sup>54</sup> Participating civil society organisations include NGOs, think/tanks, research/consultancy organisations, and professional associations in education, health, sport, media, law etc, as well as a range of societal groups, parents, religious leaders, sports clubs etc. A particular focus has been outreach to students at all levels, e.g. university students on legal aid in Montenegro in **HF7**, and post-primary students in Serbia contributing to the Ombudsman's Report on violence in schools, via **HF30**.

<sup>55</sup> While participating civil society organisations are predominantly capital-based, some have Beneficiary-wide outreach.

viewed by CSO interlocutors as a key contribution towards ‘*normalising*’ engagement between CSOs and duty-bearers institutions, in particular justice, law and order institutions. CSO participation also includes action HF III grant assistance (e.g. in **HF31** to anti-trafficking CSOs in Serbia), **HF33** to Turkish Bar Associations for gender-sensitive legal aid provision. Some CSOs view the scale of this funding as inadequate for the level of work involved. CSOs are also engaged as action consultants, albeit with some concerns expressed that contracting of CSO experts reduces already limited capacity of CSOs. In some actions, e.g. economic crime, limited civil society involvement is based on reservations regarding sensitivity of discussions between state institutions. The risk attendant upon this is that legal powers adopted (e.g. measures against terrorist finance) impinge on human rights standards curtail legitimate civil society activity.<sup>56</sup> Other challenges highlighted include the difficulty in selecting CSOs from the array of sometimes competing CSOs. Modalities may need to vary, but the principle of CSO involvement in actions should be the norm.

67. Actions within Theme III (Promoting Anti-Discrimination and Protection of Vulnerable Groups) have specific focus on **vulnerable groups**, with vulnerability also addressed as components in some actions in the other thematic areas, including actions addressing vulnerability of journalists. Actions under the “*Strengthening Justice*” theme have made key progress on the rights of detainees, victims of crime, including those with multiple vulnerabilities (e.g. women detainees, including those with mental health issues, psychiatric forensic patients (**HF3**) or detainees at risk of radicalisation (**HF15**), migrant women and girls, including child-friendly Gendarmerie engagement with migrant children (**HF13**, *Strengthening the human rights protection in the context of migration in Türkiye*).

). PWDs are addressed in a number of actions including in relation to combating hate speech, media reporting, access to justice and the prohibition of discrimination.<sup>57</sup> However, some interlocutors suggest PWDs needs to feature more visibly in HF III actions. Older persons are not a priority group in actions, either in evaluation inputs, or action outputs reviewed, though they represent a significant and increasing percentage (9-23%) of the populations of the Beneficiaries and face specific vulnerabilities in many sectors addressed by HF III.<sup>58</sup> National, ethnic and linguistic minorities feature in a range of actions: **HF30** (*Combating discrimination and promoting diversity in Serbia*) support to drafting of the long-delayed 2024-27 *Action Plan for Exercising the Rights of National Minorities*, **HF32** (*Quality Education for All - Serbia*) translation of RFCDC training curricula into minority languages.<sup>59</sup> The LGBTI community are a particular focus of action activities including support to Pride events and drafting of LGBTI Strategies and Action Plans (e.g. **HF25** and **HF26**). **HF23** (*Towards an Equal, Inclusive, and Tolerant Bosnia and Herzegovina*) grant aids the first LGBTI shelter in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Overall, however, vulnerability is not addressed systematically as an intersectional transversal theme. For actions coverage of **non-discrimination/Gender** see section 2.7 below.

68. HF III is premised on enhancing **accountability** of duty-bearers to rights-holders the majority of action partners are duty-bearer institutions, including judicial and other oversight bodies. Accountability also features in action support to, and awareness raising of, civil society and rights-holders, though this is less explicitly framed as a matter of accountability. HF III **accountability** also includes narrative and financial reporting lines within the Council of Europe and to the EU, as well as Steering Committees.

69. Actions address **transparency and access to information** both as a core activity and objective and as part of HF/action visibility and Council of Europe accountability in line with HF III [Communication and Visibility Guidelines](#) and facilitated by HF Communications Officers. All actions

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<sup>56</sup> In 2024 the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression expressed concern that Serbia’s Law on the Prevention of Money-laundering and Financing of Terrorism is “*used disproportionately against individuals and organizations known for their work on human rights, the investigation of war crimes and other accountability issues*”.

<sup>57</sup> Outputs include a **HF22** glossary of appropriate terminology for Albanian institutions in addressing PWDs/disability.

<sup>58</sup> People over 64 comprise 20+% of some Beneficiaries populations, with the percentage increasing.

<sup>59</sup> An English language summary page or table of contents of outputs produced in local languages would facilitate identification and possible use/adaptation by other actors.

have a dedicated website and action activities, with some variation in posting publicly available outputs. A range of outputs are also published on websites of the Council of Europe Strasbourg (including the dedicated [HF III website](#) and relevant Divisions) and Field Offices. Outputs published are pre-approved with relevant EUDs. In addition to strong engagement with traditional media in all Beneficiaries (in particular via the substantive focus on media freedom), actions use a range of social media platforms<sup>60</sup> for awareness raising of activities and outputs, though the limitations of these media for various disadvantaged groups is noted. Field meetings in Albania and Serbia, saw a cross-section of stakeholders suggest that actions' visibility is low at the level of rights-holders, with scope to enhance communication of the interventions benefit rights-holders. However, a counter view is expressed in the case of Serbia, where action engagement with media was assisted by a contracted PR Company. Stakeholders highlight a need for expanded use of illustrative examples of the circumstances of targeted rights-holders and of progress made through action support.

70. Actions utilise a range of platforms to raise awareness, including music, art, theatre and open-air events, e.g. a **HF29** (*Strengthening anti-trafficking action in North Macedonia*) supported a radio play by secondary school students in North Macedonia on child trafficking for forced marriage), **HF22** (*Advancing the Protection from Discrimination in Albania*) supported the Queer Film Marathon in Albania and **HF34** organised a Podcast competition for students on digital citizenship education. Despite these and other examples, some Field Office staff still suggest that awareness raising would benefit from greater readiness by Headquarters to approve more diverse activities, beyond workshops, conferences etc.

71. A range of actions address transparency and access to information as substantive objectives, e.g. **HF1**, **HF4** and **HF7** (*Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro*) support on drafting and implementation of guidelines and strategies on judicial communication, and related tools and a range of awareness-raising events on action themes (e.g. **HF23** on hate speech, **HF7** on free legal aid for victims of trafficking, and on the benefits of ADR/mediation in local communities and **HF7** and **HF40**-facilitated public debates on Montenegro's judicial reforms.

72. There is a need for clarity and awareness raising across action teams, partners, and consultants of HRA as a transversal framework of interdependent principles. Support to enhance the application of the framework requires more programming time and resources, with merit in some actions being selected as pilot HRA/programming exercises.<sup>61</sup> Collaboration with UN agencies and others applying HRA/HRBA should be explored, as well at least some portion of work time being allocated to a member of staff acting as a HRA/gender focal point in Field Offices.

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<sup>60</sup> As of December 2024, [HF III X account](#) (1000+ followers), [Facebook](#) page (6,300 followers), Horizontal Facility [YouTube channel](#) (63 followers), [Flickr](#) (9 followers), with somewhat limited activity by followers on these platforms.

<sup>61</sup> A seconded regional Human Rights Advisor position was based in Sarajevo during 2019-21.

## 2.7 Gender Mainstreaming

### Evaluation Questions

To what extent do HF III/actions mainstream gender principles in all PCM stages, including objectives, content, and methodologies?

To what extent are gender mainstreaming principles, reflected in HF III/actions' M&E (baselines, indicators etc)?

73. **Gender mainstreaming** is a shared priority goal of the Council of Europe and of the European Union and a specified cross-cutting theme in HF III.<sup>62</sup> The commitment is variously premised on the [Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023](#)<sup>63</sup>, as well as key thematic instruments,<sup>64</sup> and is also in line with the EU's [Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025](#) (GAP III) and the EC [LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#). While HF III addresses gender mainstreaming as a distinct transversal theme, separate from HRA, some Council of Europe documents address gender as a component of HRA. The latter approach offers some gains in terms of coherence and may assist in the face of some resistance to gender mainstreaming, by situating the commitment more clearly as a legal obligation. Some partners highlight the critical role of external actors, such as the Council of Europe, in countering a lack of political will among Beneficiaries to prioritise gender mainstreaming.

74. Actions' focus on gender mainstreaming (including gender equality and identity) has been incrementally enhanced over the three HF phases, including attention to sex-disaggregated data collection, ensuring participation of women in Steering Committees, as contracted experts, trainers etc. There is also emphasis on gender-sensitive language, but with scope for this to be more consistent across all actions and outputs. Women/girls and LGBTI community are addressed as target groups in specific actions. Actions with a central focus on gender equality include **HF33** *Women's access to justice in Türkiye* on legal awareness and literacy among women and legal aid services for women and regional action **HF36** (*Women's access to justice in the Western Balkans*). **HF9** *Towards a consolidated and more efficient Free Legal Aid system in North Macedonia* conducted a Gender capacity assessment of the Ministry of Justice and Regional Offices' legal aid staff, lawyers and NGOs providing legal aid and law clinics in North Macedonia, while **HF10** (*Strengthening the capacities of the penitentiary system in North Macedonia*) did a similar assessment of penitentiary capacity-building activities. Regional action **HF15** (*Enhancing co-operation in the Western Balkans in managing violent extremism in prisons and preventing further radicalisation after release*) included a specific emphasis on women, in a baseline assessment in Bosnia and Herzegovina of the legislative framework on community sanctions and measures on violent extremist offenders. The Judicial Reform Strategy and Judicial Sector Communication Strategies in Montenegro, drafted with support of **HF7** (*Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro*) support, specifically address gender issues and gender is also addressed in a range of other action activities, including the student law clinics (on gender-based violence) and training of lawyers (on victims of trafficking and domestic violence) as well as gender-based case studies (including gender bias and stereotypes, and gender aspects of victims of crime) incorporated into training of judges and prosecutors. **HF2**, **HF7**, **HF9**, **HF11** and **HF23** collaborated in the regional human rights School "Gender and Human Rights" in Republika Srpska,<sup>65</sup> which brought law students from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia together with human rights activists and

<sup>62</sup> HF III defines gender mainstreaming as "ensuring that activities are tailored to the needs, experiences and living conditions of men and women (varying by age, ethnicity, disability, class, economic status, sexual orientation or gender identity etc.),"

<sup>63</sup> And the new [Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029](#) adopted in 2024.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ("Istanbul Convention") and the CoE *Plan of Action on Strengthening Judicial Independence and Impartiality* which, inter alia, address stereotyping in judicial decisions.

<sup>65</sup> Organised by the VC-funded project "Initiative for Legal Certainty and Efficient Judiciary in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Phase III".

lawyers, and included a moot court case simulation on legal recognition of gender identity. A range of actions have also supported engagement on gender-related HELP courses including “Access to justice for women”, “Violence against women and domestic violence”, and “Gender equality and gender mainstreaming”. The **HF33** *Gender analysis in earthquake areas: women’s access to justice and legal aid*, contributed to a new module on gender-sensitive support for disaster victims as part of the HELP Course “Access to Justice for Women”.

75. Regional action **HF36** (*Women’s access to justice in the Western Balkans*) features as a particularly useful model for cross-border networking and capacity-building on gender. Focused on justice system professionals, the action draws upon the HELP online course on *Women’s Equal Access to Justice* and *Guide for Developing A Mentoring Programme On Women’s Access To Justice For Legal Professionals* developed as part of Council of Europe support to Eastern Partnership countries. Judges and prosecutors from all HF III Western Balkan Beneficiaries participate in a mentoring programme on gender sensitive/equal access justice in line with Council of Europe standards, including the Istanbul Convention, and addressing barriers to equal access to justice. This model combining capacity building, mentoring, and networking, has replicability across other sectors.

76. Corruption/economic crime is identified as a specific sector where actions’ focus on gender can be enhanced, but even in some sectors with strong representation of women, more can be done to mainstream gender as an integral element of action design and delivery. Attention to gender is not uniformly stipulated in contractual requirements of action experts and framework contractors, which given the scale of delegated inputs weakens the organisational commitment. While the Council of Europe’s principle gender programming tool, the [Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit for Co-operation Projects](#) (2019) is reported as being used, some action teams flag challenges in operationalising principles in local contexts, including time constraints and some resistance. Designated Office Gender Focal Points are in place, but not always readily identified by partners and stakeholders and the informal network of gender focal points across WB Beneficiaries appears to have dissipated. Currently gender training of action teams is not compulsory.

77. Gender mainstreaming has been advanced by the roll out of **Gender analyses** of actions. Building upon HFII, HF III has seen gender analyses of ten Beneficiary-specific actions (or of selected aspects, e.g. of penitentiary capacity-building in **HF10** (*Strengthening the capacities of the penitentiary system in North Macedonia*) and of detention in **HF5** (*Further strengthening the treatment of detained and sentenced persons in line with European standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina*)) and of one regional action. Phase II analyses informed HF III action design and have enhanced the integration of gender in activities. Reports are written by commissioned experts and vary in format and content, some rather academic in nature, or making only minimal action-specific recommendations. The 2024 *Gender Mainstreaming Analysis* of regional action **HF35** (*Promoting equality and combating racism and intolerance in the Western Balkans*) and the six related beneficiary-specific actions on anti-discrimination identified Beneficiary-specific results and areas for improvement and proposes a series of recommendations of relevance across HF III. These include the need for a common methodology, to develop internal Council of Europe Country Gender Profiles, clear terms of reference for designated Field Office Gender Focal Points, with work time allocation and regular specialised training sessions. In parallel there is a need for encouragement of, and support to, partner institutions in designating their own respective gender focal points.

78. While data collection is disaggregated by gender in most actions, there is a need to build on progress made **to enhance gender in action monitoring and evaluation**. This includes a need for “more robust indicators, specifically focused on tracking gender disparities [that also] address the intersectionality of gender,” including gender in the context of poverty as a barrier to securing rights central to action objectives.<sup>66</sup> The appointment in November 2024 of regional gender advisor in the

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<sup>66</sup> Online Questionnaire response.

Office in Tirana represents a significant advance.<sup>67</sup> However, the low knowledge base and some opposition to addressing gender means that a single designated person, is not an alternative to a strengthened, networked pool of Field Office Gender Focal Points, obligatory gender training for all staff and designated gender focal points in partner institutions.<sup>68</sup> Among action staff aware of it, the 2024 Council of Europe RBM/indicators initiative is regarded as a step towards enhancing gender in M&E, though many Council of Europe staff maintain there is also a “*mindset gap*” that requires a more fundamental shift, beyond training.

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<sup>67</sup> A planned PGG counterpart Regional Gender Advisor in January 2025 can also facilitate cross-regional exchange.

<sup>68</sup> The added value of input by the Council of Europe network of *Gender Equality Rapporteurs* from its Steering Committees, and Monitoring bodies is also identified.

## 2.8 Added Value

### Evaluation Questions

**To what extent has the Council of Europe a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other actors (IGOs, bilateral donors, INGOs) in supporting reform in the sectors/themes?**

79. The Council of Europe's legal status as an IGO and its 'strategic triangle' of standard-setting, monitoring, and technical co-operation are identified by action partners and many other interlocutors as key to its comparative advantage as a project partner. Recognition of this added value is also linked to the implementation track record and strong relations between the Council of Europe and partners established over previous HF Phases since 2016. In the context of EU Accession, and the synergies between Council of Europe norms and the accession criteria, particularly Chapters 10, 23 and 24, the Council of Europe's added value is reinforced by the substantive and financial partnership with the EU. The visibility of this partnership is highlighted by partners as critical to reform momentum.

80. In addition to facilitating access to the ECtHR, Court Registry and advisory/monitoring bodies,<sup>69</sup> partners also highlight the substantive expertise of action teams and the capacity to mobilise appropriate experts (sometimes in technical fields) as a key element of added value. Many experts combine detailed knowledge of Council of Europe standards and other comparable/relevant jurisdictions, as well as practical experience working with Council of Europe Monitoring bodies and counterpart institutions in other EU/Council of Europe jurisdictions.<sup>70</sup> For example, partners in **HF18** (*Action against Economic Crime in Montenegro*) highlighted expert inputs from jurisdictions upgraded from the "Grey List" as particularly useful and a contributing factor to Montenegro's successful MONEYVAL review in 2023. And the status of CEPEJ, CPT, GRETA and GREVIO is highlighted as a key factor where members directly inputted on a range of actions, including on justice strengthening, detention and trafficking in persons.

81. The Council of Europe's IGO status and its credibility as a partner with Beneficiaries also facilitates multi-stakeholder communication and co-ordination<sup>71</sup> and mitigates some inter-institutional tensions between partners. IGO agencies and donors also highlight the critical leverage deriving from of Council of Europe standards and mechanisms. CSOs (action partners and others) also highlight its status as helping protect 'civic space' by facilitating engagement between civil society and state institutions and ensuring due focus on some contentious issues, such as gender and sexual orientation. Some reservations are expressed regarding the sustainability of this prioritisation once actions are completed.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> E.g. **HF1** organised a 2023 mission by CEPEJ experts to Albania to assess the situation in the field of mediation, with training activities organised on foot of their recommendations to develop mediation practice in Albania. **HF7** organised a training of lawyers on support to victims of trafficking in human beings in conjunction with the GRETA Secretariat.

<sup>70</sup> HF facilitation of access to ECtHR judges and the Court Registry, including placements (e.g. **HF2**, **HF11**) in Strasbourg is also highlighted as a specific benefit of Council of Europe project delivery over other actors.

<sup>71</sup> E.g. **HF29** facilitated the adoption of a memorandum for co-operation between the participating ministries to address trafficking for labour exploitation.

<sup>72</sup> Action partnership have also increased the visibility of key institutions, e.g. **HF11** support to the Government Agent before the ECtHR is identified as providing needed visibility of the Agent's role within the judicial architecture.

### 3. Annexes

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#### Annex 1: Terms of Reference



#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE – Mid-term evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye”**

Contracting Authority: Council of Europe

##### **1. CONTEXT**

The document provides the Terms of Reference for the mid-term evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe joint programme “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye” (referred to hereafter as “Horizontal Facility III”). It includes background information, the evaluation purpose, the objectives, the scope, the evaluation criteria, and the methodology as well as the expected profile of the evaluator(s).

##### **1.1 Background**

The Council of Europe is a key organisation in the area of human rights, rule of law and democracy whose work is based on legally binding instruments and convention-based monitoring mechanisms at a pan-European scale. These tools developed into a unique working method which establishes a direct link between legally binding standards, which are monitored by independent mechanisms and bodies and supplemented by technical co-operation and assistance activities where applicable.

The European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (Council of Europe) are committed to building a strategic and programmatic co-operation aiming at establishing law-based resilient democratic society, fostering democratic governance, human rights, democracy and rule of law in the most effective and efficient way, and in accordance with their respective mandate and expertise. To this end, the European Commission (EC) and the Council of Europe have agreed to mobilise their capacities and resources to further co-ordinate the implementation of their policy goals in the neighbourhood and enlargement regions. This co-operation is based on their existing collaboration, their respective strategic frameworks, and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU<sup>73</sup>) between the Council of Europe and the European Union of 23 May 2007, as well as on their long-standing collaboration.

In order to give greater political visibility to the EU-Council of Europe collaboration, as mentioned, a joint Statement of Intent<sup>74</sup> was signed on 1 April 2014 by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. The Statement confirms the importance of the co-operation through Joint Programmes (in line with the MoU) and proposes a new result-oriented approach whereby the focus is not on the actions but on the objectives, expected results and targets to achieve in a number of priority areas, in which the Council of Europe has an expertise.

The Statement of Intent focuses on strengthening strategic co-operation in areas of common interest, which include, in particular:

- I. Efficient and independent judiciary;
- II. Fight against corruption, organised crime, and economic crime;

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<sup>73</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union of 23 May 2007.

<sup>74</sup> See footnote above.

- III. Anti-discrimination and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups (including the rights of lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (LGBTI) and protection of minorities, in particular Roma);
- IV. Freedom of expression and media;

To this end, the European Commission and the Council of Europe have jointly developed the Horizontal Facility III aimed at supporting Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye (referred to hereafter as “HF Beneficiaries”<sup>75</sup>). The overall budget of Horizontal Facility III is €41,175 million; 85% funded by the EU under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) and 15% by the Council of Europe.

This programming and co-operation instrument builds upon shared Council of Europe/European Union policy priorities in the Western Balkans region and Türkiye, and on the Council of Europe expertise in standard setting, monitoring, and co-operation methodologies. It also builds on the previous phases of the Horizontal Facility<sup>76</sup>, aiming to further support the HF Beneficiaries in further achieving European standards in the abovementioned areas. Sector interventions to be undertaken in the Western Balkans Beneficiaries and Türkiye were designed based on recommendations emanating from the Council of Europe monitoring and opinion advisory bodies and prioritised according to the needs within the enlargement negotiations of the European Union.

Thus, the first phase of the Horizontal Facility focused on three thematic areas including efficient and independent judiciary; the fight against corruption, organised crime, and economic crime; and anti-discrimination and the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups. In the second phase of the programme, freedom of expression and the media was added as the fourth thematic area and the same approach was taken also in the third phase of the programme. This third phase strives to strengthen the sustainability of results achieved during previous phases, while ensuring ownership by the beneficiary institutions. The Horizontal Facility III also builds on the recommendations stemming from the mid-term evaluation of the Horizontal Facility II<sup>77</sup>.

A total of 43 actions (37 bilateral and six regional) are implemented under the Horizontal Facility III, in the following thematic areas:

- strengthening justice;
- fighting corruption, economic crime, and money laundering;
- promoting anti-discrimination and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups;
- promoting and protecting freedom of expression and media.

The full list of Horizontal Facility III actions is provided in Appendix 1, the number of actions per theme is provided in Appendix 2, and the list of regional actions in Appendix 3.

The Horizontal Facility III follows a complementary two-fold approach in providing support to the Beneficiaries: technical assistance tailored to assist the Beneficiaries in achieving an increased compliance with European standards; and legal/expert advice linked to priority-related reforms through the Council of Europe Expertise Co-ordination Mechanism (ECM).

The main activities include, *inter alia*, the provision of technical assistance, including legal advice on developing domestic policy, legal and regulatory frameworks; technical assistance/advice and tools for consultation on relevant reform initiatives with civil society; tools and guidance to ensure practical applicability of newly devised policies and legislative initiatives; development of training modules and training of trainers building the capacity of domestic training institutions; developing knowledge and skills of legal professionals through problem-oriented training sessions/programmes of diverse format (workshops, study visit, placement, etc.) based on a sound training needs assessment; strengthening capacities of persons whose rights are most violated (including prisoners, Roma, LGBTI persons, women, children and youth) to claim their rights through outreach, legal clinics or other measures and to be visible in the public domain, representing their specific causes and situations, through targeted capacity building on media, communication and advocacy; organisation of public events,

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<sup>75</sup> The term “HF Beneficiaries” is used throughout the document with the meaning of “countries”.

<sup>76</sup> The first phase of the programme was implemented from 2016-2019 and the second from 2019-2022.

<sup>77</sup> [Mid-term evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey – phase II.”](#)

workshops, joint learning or sharing events to disseminate the stories of persons who are most excluded from the public discourse.

The Horizontal Facility aims to prioritise a human rights approach at all levels and stages of its activities, focusing on rights-holders and duty-bearers. In this respect, the programme aims at ensuring meaningful participation and inclusion of all stakeholders, with a focus on vulnerable persons. In addition, the authorities are encouraged to maintain an open and continuing dialogue with the civil society to ensure the implementation of reforms. Equality and non-discrimination, with regards to age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, disability, are also ensured. Gender-sensitive and inclusive language applied following Council of Europe guidelines. The implementation of the Horizontal Facility also aims to follow the principles of transparency, access to information and accountability.

The gender dimension has been considered in the development of Horizontal Facility actions. As a part of the human rights approach, a gender perspective is aimed to be integrated transversally and at all stages and levels of the implementation of the Horizontal Facility. Concretely, taking into consideration the various needs, experiences and living conditions of men and women, which may also differ by age, ethnicity, disability, class, economic status, sexual orientation or gender identity and even by Beneficiary, is a key factor to successful gender mainstreaming. To this end, gender analyses, gender impact assessment and other intersectional tools are applied at the different stages of the programme.

This co-operation framework addresses sectoral interventions identified through the Quadri-Annual Plans of Action (QAPAs). QAPAs link identified sectoral interventions to specific recommendations of the Council of Europe monitoring and opinion advisory bodies and possible related actions to assist HF Beneficiaries to address shortcomings identified through these instruments and through their own priority reform processes. The QAPAs serve as the basis for programmatic interventions under the Horizontal Facility III.

The main partners in the definition and implementation of this programme are the governmental bodies at all levels, notably: ministries of justice, interior, health, labour, social affairs, education, ministries responsible for human rights, for local government and public administration, ministries of foreign affairs; ministries for European integration; National IPA co-ordinators; parliaments and public governance structures with specific responsibilities in the relevant areas such as anti-corruption, anti-money laundering and anti-trafficking in human beings; government agents before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR); ombudspersons; constitutional courts, prosecutorial services, the judiciary, legal professionals and judiciary supervisory bodies, court staff; law enforcement authorities; civil society; academia, press councils, journalists associations; regulatory authorities, public broadcasters, journalists and other media professionals and local and regional authorities. Ministries of Foreign Affairs and/or Ministries of European Integration are key partners for co-ordination of the Horizontal Facility.

## **1.2. Modalities of implementation**

The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination (DPC) co-ordinates and reports on Council of Europe co-operation activities implemented within the framework of the Horizontal Facility III by the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law and the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, respectively. The respective Council of Europe Offices and Programme Offices in the Western Balkans and Türkiye play an active part in co-ordinating the implementation of actions<sup>78</sup>.

In 2016, the then Office of the Directorate General of Programmes (ODGP)<sup>79</sup> launched the new [Council of Europe Project Management Methodology](#) which comprises a handbook, further guidance on a dedicated website, training and a tailor-made IT tool for the management of development co-operation. It has allowed to consolidate competencies and the Council of Europe's position as a significant actor in development co-operation.

## **2. SPECIFICATIONS OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

### **2.1 Beneficiaries and stakeholders**

The primary beneficiary of this evaluation is the Council of Europe (the management and operational staff in DPC, DGI and DGII, as well as in the Council of Europe Offices in the Western Balkans and Türkiye) as the

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<sup>78</sup> Under the Horizontal Facility III, the term "actions" is used with the meaning of "projects".

<sup>79</sup> In November 2022, the former ODGP became DPC.

implementer of the Horizontal Facility III. The evaluation will benefit both categories of staff, albeit in different ways. The management will benefit from the recommendations of the evaluation in a strategic manner, particularly when developing future programmes in these thematic areas, while some evaluation findings could be useful for the operational staff in the implementation of ongoing actions. The European Commission and the EU Delegations and Office in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, in their capacity of major stakeholders of the programme, will also benefit from the evaluation which will document the results in an independent way.

The authorities and stakeholders in the Western Balkans and Türkiye will be the secondary beneficiaries of the evaluation.

## 2.2 Evaluation purpose

This is a mid-term evaluation with a strong forward-looking element and an important input in view of the next programming cycle. It is foreseen and agreed as part of Horizontal Facility III in order to:

provide an independent mid-term assessment and evidence of the results achieved so far in the framework of Horizontal Facility III;

provide recommendations for the next programming cycle based on lessons learnt and best practices of the different phases of the Horizontal Facility.

The scope of the evaluation will cover the Horizontal Facility Phase III and provide recommendations for the next programming cycle. The evaluation should also be co-ordinated with the Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) tentatively scheduled by the European Commission for the second half of 2024.

The evaluation process will be guided by the [Evaluation Policy<sup>80</sup> and Evaluation Guidelines<sup>81</sup> of the Council of Europe, and the Council of Europe Code of Conduct for Evaluation](#), as well as other relevant instruments, such as the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for [2018-2023](#) and [2024-2029](#). Finally, it will take account of previous monitoring or evaluation exercises such as the mid-term evaluation of the Horizontal Facility II<sup>82</sup> as well as the final evaluation of the Horizontal Facility I<sup>83</sup>.

As stipulated in the Council of Europe Evaluation Guidelines, "Evaluation is an integral part of the Results-based Management (RBM) approach of the Council of Europe and assesses whether the topics evaluated have contributed to make the intended change. In an RBM framework, evaluation contributes to learning and accountability of the organisation in terms of "accountability for results", not only for spending resources or implementing activities, but primarily for achieving the set objectives. (...) By making such an assessment, evaluation "feeds [...] information into decision-making processes"<sup>84</sup> by way of independent judgement and provides actionable recommendations for the management."<sup>85</sup> (...)

In accordance with the OECD DAC-UNEG Framework for Peer Review<sup>86</sup>, evaluation functions and their products must be independent/impartial, credible, and useful. These are also among the key principles that are set out in the Council of Europe Evaluation Policy.<sup>87</sup>

## 2.3 Evaluation objectives

**The specific objectives of the evaluation are:**

1. To assess the intermediate outcomes achieved by the Horizontal Facility III so far, and identify to what extent they have helped the HF Beneficiaries in advancing with domestic reforms in line with European standards;
2. To assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the Horizontal Facility III
3. To assess the degree to which human rights-based approach and gender mainstreaming were integrated in the design and implementation of the Horizontal Facility III;
4. To provide conclusions and recommendations on how to further improve methodologies, processes and

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<sup>80</sup> Council of Europe, Evaluation Policy.

<sup>81</sup> Council of Europe Evaluation Guidelines.

<sup>82</sup> Mid-term evaluation report of the "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019 - 2022".

<sup>83</sup> Final report: Final Evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey – Phase I.

<sup>84</sup> Results-Based Management. Approach of the Council of Europe. Practical guide.

<sup>85</sup> Council of Europe Evaluation Guidelines, p.8.

<sup>86</sup> DAC-UNEG Framework for Peer Review, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Council of Europe Evaluation Guidelines, p.9.

practices used by the Council of Europe to achieve better results in view of a potential programming cycle.

## 2.4 Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation scope will cover the Horizontal Facility III level, and a specific focus will be placed on a sample of actions respecting the specificities mentioned in 2.4.1.

The evaluation covers the following HF Beneficiaries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye.

## 2.5 Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions will be based on five of the six OECD-DAC criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation questions should be addressed from the intermediate outcome level, while addressing cross-cutting issues, namely gender, human rights, and civil society organisations perspectives, as well as whether environmental considerations were considered<sup>88</sup>. The indicative list of the questions is provided below. The evaluation questions will be further refined during the inception phase and discussed with the reference group, consisting of representatives of key stakeholders and EC.

### Indicative evaluation questions:

#### **Relevance**

<i>Evaluation questions</i>	<i>Sub-questions</i>
To what extent are the Horizontal Facility III actions in line with the needs and domestic priorities of the HF Beneficiaries?	To what extent the recommendations provided by the evaluation of the second phase of the programme were considered in the implementation of the third phase? To what extent has the Horizontal Facility III addressed issues that are of high priority for the governments of HF Beneficiaries?

#### **Coherence**

<i>Evaluation questions</i>	<i>Sub-questions</i>
To what extent is the Horizontal Facility III aligned with the reform priorities enshrined in domestic strategic documents of the HF Beneficiaries?	To what extent do the regional actions under HF complement the bilateral (Beneficiary-specific) actions?

#### **Efficiency**

<i>Evaluation questions</i>	<i>Sub-questions</i>
To what degree have outputs been produced in a timely manner?  To what degree was cost considered during the selection of the most appropriate methodology for the implementation of the actions?	How did the costs incurred contribute to the achievement of the intermediate outcomes of Horizontal Facility III?

#### **Effectiveness**

<i>Evaluation questions</i>	<i>Sub-questions</i>
To what extent have the intermediate outcomes been achieved?	To what extent regional actions have improved and contributed to regional exchanges of best practices in the thematic areas covered by the programme?

<sup>88</sup> This consists of avoiding or minimising negative environmental impact in the implementation of the programme and maximising positive impact.

<p>Which factors within as well as outside the control of the organization have supported and/or hindered the effectiveness of the Horizontal Facility III actions?</p> <p>How did the Council of Europe demonstrate its added value in providing technical assistance tailored to help Beneficiaries in achieving an increased compliance with European standards?</p> <p>How have the Horizontal Facility III actions contributed to accelerating the realisation of Rule of law and fundamental rights in HF Beneficiaries in compliance with European standards and EU acquis?</p>	<p>To what degree did the HF III Risks and Mitigation measures consider the factors outside the control of the Council effectively? How effective were the mitigating measures used for annual adjustment of the Horizontal Facility III in view of geopolitical, political, and/or operational risks?</p> <p>To what extent was gender mainstreamed in the design and implementation of HF Actions and how were the recommendations from gender analyses integrated in the HF Actions and their implementation? Has the Horizontal Facility had different outcomes for men and women? How has the Horizontal Facility visibility been ensured in the course of its implementation? To what extent have the HF Beneficiaries implemented recommendations of Council of Europe monitoring bodies identified in the Quadri-Annual Plans of Action (QAPAs)? How have the synergies been promoted/achieved between HF Actions and other initiatives funded by the EU and other donors in the thematic areas covered by the actions?</p> <p>To what extent did the ECM respond to the needs of authorities in HF Beneficiaries for legislative expertise and policy advice?</p>
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## ***Sustainability***

<i>Evaluation questions</i>	<i>Sub-questions</i>
To what extent has the Council of Europe contributed to a sustainable implementation of reforms and to capacity development in the HF Beneficiaries?	<p>How advanced is the implementation of the legislative frameworks and policies as well as domestic/sectoral strategies and Action Plans, which were prepared or amended with the support of the Horizontal Facility III?</p> <p>To what extent were the capacity building tools and practices provided under Horizontal Facility III integrated into formal settings of beneficiary institutions?</p>

## **2.6 Methodology, risks, and assumptions**

### **2.6.1 Methodology**

The sampling methodology should include a mix of actions and cover various HF Beneficiaries: from each of the themes of the Horizontal Facility including the ECM;

from at least three HF Beneficiaries;

at least two regional actions (one regional action with a steering committee and one regional action without a specific steering mechanism)<sup>89</sup>.

The evaluators should propose a final list of sample interventions in their methodology (between 15 and 20 of the Horizontal Facility III actions) in the inception report.

Apart from comparing actual outcomes to initially planned ones, to the possible extent looking at relevant indicators set out at the design stage, the assessment of outcomes has to provide concrete quantitative and qualitative indications of the effectiveness of the Horizontal Facility III. The evaluation methodology will include

<sup>89</sup> Please see Appendix 3 for the list of regional Horizontal Facility III actions.

a document review and semi – structured interviews<sup>90</sup> with relevant Council of Europe staff in Strasbourg and in at least three HF Beneficiaries, as well as co-operation partners in the Beneficiaries and the European Union Delegations/Office and DG NEAR in Brussels. The interviews will be held in person to the extent possible. Where the interviews in person are not possible, they will be replaced by online consultations.

Reviews of the HF Actions' documents against domestic strategic documents of the HF Beneficiaries will contribute to assessing the coherence and relevance of the actions. Progress reports of HF Actions and interviews will be main sources to assess the level of achievement of the intermediate outcomes.

The Service Provider should propose an elaborated evaluation methodology, including an evaluation matrix, in their methodological brief.

The evaluation questions and methodology for this assignment may need to be further elaborated by the evaluator in the draft inception report. The Service Provider may suggest additional sub-questions and flag questions and or sub-questions that cannot be answered within the proposed budget. The Service Provider should also indicate success criteria, relevant indicators, and the sources for the indicators / methodology for gathering necessary evidence. The sub-questions break down the overall questions into more manageable issues and allow for a structured and logical response to the higher-level questions.

The evaluation will rely on the information on the Horizontal Facility implementation, available in the Project Management IT tool of the Council of Europe and those provided by the Horizontal Facility Co-ordination team.

### **2.6.2 Risks and assumptions**

Risks and assumptions cannot be listed exhaustively. It is assumed that services within both the Council of Europe and the implementing authorities of the HF Beneficiaries accept the evaluation as an integral part of the project cycle management and are committed to providing the necessary and accurate information, and will subsequently act on recommendations and findings, as well as provide the follow-up information to the Council of Europe.

The following are additional relevant assumptions for the above evaluation:

monitoring data is available on time and provide sufficient and adequate information;

access to requested contacts, documentation and information on the actions is ensured by the Council of Europe and the Beneficiaries in a timely manner;

the Council of Europe staff and implementing parties are regularly informed on objectives and methods of this evaluation, in order to ensure their full co-operation;

In the event that one or several of the above assumptions prove to be untrue, the evaluators should immediately inform the Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator in the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination. The evaluators will also report any limitations to the evaluation due to insufficient collaboration from key stakeholders.

### **2.7 Required outputs**

The evaluator will prepare an inception report including evaluation methodology, evaluation matrix, and a work plan.

A 30-35 pages draft and final versions of the final report (excluding annexes) on the implementation of the Horizontal Facility III will be delivered. A tentative outline of the report should include the following:

✓*Executive Summary (containing lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations)*

✓*Introduction:*

✓*Description of the objectives of the evaluation;*

✓*Purpose of the evaluation;*

✓*Evaluation methodology;*

✓*Limitations encountered during the evaluation.*

✓*Findings:*

✓*Findings related to evaluation criteria and questions including lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations*

✓*Additional relevant findings*

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<sup>90</sup> Approximately 90 interviews should be anticipated.

✓Annexes (including an anonymised list of interviews/online consultations, questionnaires and documents reviewed, such as reports etc.)

The relevant lessons learned, finding statements and recommendations should be made within the section where the relevant topic is discussed.

### 3. ORGANISATION, TIMETABLE AND BUDGET

#### 3.1 Organisation

The contract will be managed by the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination of the Council of Europe (the Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator). The responsibilities of the Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator will include: providing the external evaluator with access to information and contacts of key stakeholders; supporting and monitoring the work of the external evaluator;

assessing the quality of the reports submitted by the external evaluator, while ensuring that the Service Provider's independence is not compromised.

An evaluation Reference Group will be created to facilitate the implementation of the evaluation through advice and guidance and ensure transparency and ownership of the process. The Reference Group will therefore allow to enhance the quality of the evaluation as well as the relevance and actual feasibility to implement its recommendations.

The Reference Group will be composed of key internal Council of Europe stakeholders (DPC – including the management of the Council of Europe Offices in the HF Beneficiaries where sampled actions are implemented - DGI, DGII and DIO) with a good knowledge of the Horizontal Facility III actions evaluated and a sound understanding of the institutional environment. The selection of its members will be co-ordinated by DPC. In addition, the invitation to join the Reference Group will be extended to the EC (DG NEAR).

#### 3.2 Visits and meetings

It is expected that the Service Provider pays two visits to Strasbourg during which (s)he will inter alia participate in two meetings (a kick off meeting and a meeting to present the final report).

A PowerPoint presentation summarising the key issues/findings will be prepared by the Service Provider for the second meeting. Minutes of both meetings shall also be prepared by the Service Provider and agreed among the participants. The final versions of the minutes will be agreed with DPC.

It is expected that the Service Provider conducts three field visits to some of the HF Beneficiaries (to cover at least three HF Beneficiaries) and one to Brussels. Alternatively, visits can be replaced by online or phone interviews and meetings if physical presence is not feasible.

#### 3.3 Timetable and planning

The indicative starting date is 1 July 2024. The contract will start after both parties have signed it. The inception report should be presented by 16 September, and the final report should be presented by 17 March 2025. The following work plan and indicative timetable are envisaged.

#### Evaluation Phases

The evaluation will feature an **inception phase** in which the evaluator will collect initial data and prepare an inception report including evaluation methodology, proposed questions, and a proposed calendar.

During the **data collection phase**, the evaluator will conduct data collection. The preferred option is to collect the data during field visits to Strasbourg, Brussels and at least three HF Beneficiaries, provided that it is possible. Alternatively, data collection will take place through online interviews and consultations or phone interviews.

During the analysis and **reporting phases**, the evaluator will analyse the collected data and produce a draft final report not longer than 35 pages (the tentative outline is provided under point 2.5). The evaluator will ensure the quality of the draft evaluation report by applying the [Quality Assurance Checklist for Evaluation Reports](#).

The Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator and the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO) will have two weeks to quality check and comment on report. The evaluator will then have two weeks to revise the report and submit the final version. The report will then be shared with the Reference Group for comment on the factual accuracy, the relationship between findings, conclusions, and recommendations, as well as the relevance, usefulness,

and feasibility to implement recommendations. The comments of the Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator and the Reference Group members may be integrated into the final version of the report or presented in the report as differing views.

Once the report is declared final, DPC will prepare within two months a management response and action plan. The final report will be published on Council of Europe's website together with the management response and action plan. The final report will also be presented to relevant entities within the Council of Europe and disseminated to the donor.

### Indicative schedule

The estimated **duration of the contract** is from 1 July 2024 to 17 March 2025. The proposed schedule is as follows:

Phase/Activity	Month
<b>Start of evaluation</b> Kick off meeting in Strasbourg (if possible, alternatively via videoconference), scoping interviews, desk review	1 July 2024 9 or 10 July 2024
<b>Inception report</b> - 1 <sup>st</sup> Reference Group meeting in Strasbourg or online - Comments to inception report provided by the Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator	Inception report submitted by 16 September 2024 Before 2 October 2024 14 October 2024
<b>Data Collection and Data Analysis:</b> (including field visits to HF Beneficiaries and Brussels if possible, or alternatively via online interviews/consultation by phone)	From 14 October 2024 to 10 January 2025
<b>Reporting</b> Submission of the draft final report Comments to final draft report provided by the Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator and DIOs Presentation of a draft of the final report and its findings and recommendations in view of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Reference Group meeting at Council of Europe HQ (if possible, alternatively via videoconference) Submission of the final report	10 January 2025 14 February 2025 The week of 3 March 2025 17 March 2025

### 3.4 Location of assignment

The desk research will be home-based. The field research will take place in Strasbourg, Brussels, and some HF Beneficiaries. No travel expenses will be reimbursed in relation to desk work.

### 3.5 Budget

The total estimated cost for the evaluation amounts to EUR 70,000. The allocated evaluation budget will comprise consultancy fees, travel and subsistence allowance for field interviews and data-gathering in Strasbourg (max two missions), in Brussels (one mission) and in the field (three missions). In case of inability to travel, the travel and subsistence costs will be reduced, respectively.

### 3.6 Profile and expertise required

A team of **two to three experts** are requested for this assignment.

The team leader should have the **following qualifications and competencies**:

advanced university degree, preferably in evaluation, social sciences, or a related field;

minimum of ten years of relevant professional experience in evaluation, performance audit and/or monitoring; knowledge and experience in the field of justice and the rule of law and human rights, in particular in the priority areas covered by HF III.

Excellent oral and writing skills in English;

knowledge of the socio-political context in the Western Balkans and Türkiye;

knowledge of gender mainstreaming.

The following would be considered as assets:

experience of Council of Europe working methods;

knowledge of local languages spoken in the Western Balkans and/or Türkiye.

#### **4. REPORTING**

All the reports and expected outputs shall be produced in excellent English, using the appropriate style, and structuring the text in a clear and concise way. All draft reports will be submitted to the Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator in electronic form by e-mail and in a format compatible with MS Office software. The Council of Europe reserves the right to request the necessary additional revisions of the reports in order to reach an appropriate outcome and quality control requirements.

#### **5. SELECTION OF THE SERVICE PROVIDER**

##### **5.1 Tender**

The selection of the Service Provider takes place within the framework of the Council of Europe Contract No. 2021/FC/01 concerning the procurement of evaluation services.<sup>91</sup> Once contacted, the Service Provider shall submit a methodological brief including the proposed evaluation approach, methodology and evaluation matrix, as well as the proposed profiles of the evaluation team members.

The Service Provider shall ensure that expert(s) is/are adequately supported and equipped. In particular, sufficient administrative, secretarial, and interpreting resources, IT equipment, software and tools needed to perform online activities must be available to enable expert(s) to concentrate on the core evaluation tasks.

##### **5.2 Working language**

The main working language of the assignment is English.

##### **5.3 Conflict of interest**

The Service Provider is responsible for conducting an independent evaluation. Evaluator(s) must be strictly neutral and not have a conflict of interest. The expert(s) conducting the evaluation shall have no involvement with the actions and the programme subject of this exercise. More specifically, the expert(s) must fulfil the following criterion:

no previous involvement in programming and/or implementation of Council of Europe assistance which will be evaluated as part of this evaluation.

In accordance with the contractual provisions of Horizontal Facility III, civil servants and other staff of the public administrations in each Horizontal Facility beneficiary institution shall not in any circumstance be contracted as consultants in actions where the consultant is from the same Beneficiary institution and/or for identical or similar tasks for which they are remunerated as civil servants in their administration.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> DIO has established a pool consisting of evaluation experts with both thematic and geographic focus which is updated by DIO regularly. DIO can provide advice on suitable consultants, but the final decision on selection remains with the DPC. The principle of impartiality is systematically applied when selecting consultants.

<sup>92</sup> In other cases, civil servants and other staff of the public administrations belonging to the below specifically agreed categories of staff may exceptionally be contracted if the below cumulative conditions are satisfied:

- national/local legislation does not prohibit such persons from undertaking secondary activities;
- consent to undertake such secondary activities has been sought and approved by their employer;
- these secondary activities go beyond the scope of their regular official duties and they have not been involved in the project design or will be beneficiaries thereof;
- consultancy is provided only on a temporary and short-term basis and will be performed outside working hours or when the consultant is on leave of absence;
- the activity is for the direct benefit of beneficiaries, i.e. not relating to project design and reporting; and
- absence of any conflicts of interests.

The following categories of staff have been agreed to fall within the scope of the application of the above rules:

I) Educational staff (including academics, pedagogical institutes, pre-university teachers, schoolteachers, curriculum experts).

II) Judges, prosecutors, staff from the prosecution offices and judicial and prosecutorial bodies.

## **6. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

The Service Provider will be paid in line with provisions stipulated in the order form and on the basis of deliverables: 25% upon reception of the final inception report and 75% upon reception of the final report. For payment, the Service Provider will be required to submit an invoice, in line with the financial rules of the Council of Europe.

### **6.1 Items to foresee under 'Reimbursable'**

In the event that the totals for a particular line in the budget will/could be impacted as a result of any circumstances not foreseen in these terms of reference (inter alia implementing modalities agreed with the Council of Europe), the Service Provider must alert the Council of Europe Horizontal Facility Co-ordinator. In any case, should any modification be required to the budget agreed at contract signature, these will have to be properly justified and will be subject to the ex-ante written approval of an official representative of the Council of Europe, in line with the general conditions of the contract.

### **IMPORTANT REMARKS:**

During all contacts with stakeholders, the Service Provider will clearly identify him/herself as independent consultant and not as an official representative of the Council of Europe.

Attention is drawn to the fact that the Council of Europe reserves the right to have the reports re-drafted as many times as necessary (in case of factual inaccuracies), and that financial penalties will be applied if deadlines indicated for the submission of reports (drafts and final, in hard and electronic copy) are not strictly adhered to.

In addition, the contract can be discontinued whenever the quality of the deliverables is insufficient in light of these terms of reference and the quality assessment criteria presented in Annex II (tender file), and when the Service Provider has not taken the necessary steps to remedy the insufficiencies.

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III) Staff from the ministries for social affairs, ministries of justice, ministries of interior and ministries of health and public institutes.

IV) Law enforcement staff (including staff from the specialised police departments and Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs)),

V) Staff from equality bodies and central electoral commissions.

## Annex 2: Evaluation Questions

<b>OECD DAC Criterion Relevance: Are HF III interventions relevant?</b>						
<b>Assessment dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Bases for assessment /Judgement criteria and indicators</b>	<b>Evaluation design /Methodology</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Data quality and limitations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Alignment with relevant international and national laws/policies</b>	To what extent are HF III/Actions aligned with relevant Council of Europe (CoE) and international norms; national law; EU accession criteria, relevant Beneficiaries' strategies/policies, and best practice?	Evidence (written and oral) that HF III/Actions reflect the relevant international and national norms and the recommendations of oversight/monitoring bodies	Desk review  Online questionnaire  Semi-structured interviews and FGDs  Triangulation	Documentation (primary and secondary—i.e. HF III/Action documentation; EU progress reports; national/international monitoring reports and analyses etc.)  CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, Consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners	Data quality is expected to be good	This dimension is low priority for as relevance on this dimension likely to be confirmed from the HFII/Action documentation and Inception Phase context review.
<b>Alignment with the priorities and needs of Beneficiaries and other stakeholders</b>	To what extent are HF III/Actions aligned with the priorities and needs of Beneficiaries and other stakeholders (duty-bearers and rights-holders, including vulnerable groups in the relevant sectors)?	Evidence that HF III/Actions (objectives, needs assessment, design, and delivery) are aligned with legal, political, social context and stakeholder priorities and needs (such as capacity building, legal/technical expertise etc.)  Evidence (written and oral) confirms effective stakeholder consultation and	Desk review  Online Questionnaire  Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs  Triangulation	Studies and analyses/outputs by Actions which underpin activities such as capacity building, training, delivery of other forms of technical assistance.  CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, Consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners	Data quality is expected to be good	It would be useful to have documentation on the CoE's conceptual frameworks/definition on capacity building and capacity-building M&E.  At inception report stage, contact details on some Action consultants/external experts, and peers

		participation in design, delivery, and M&E of Actions.				(IGOs/INGOs) is awaited.
<b>Appropriateness of the design</b>	<p>To what extent are the HF III/Actions design appropriate and realistic (in terms of technical, organisational, and financial aspects)?</p> <p>To what extent is HF III design sufficiently precise and plausible (in terms of measurable objectives and underlying assumptions)?</p>	<p>HF III/Actions goal is strategic and realistic in view of key objectives, available resources (time, finances, partner commitment/capacities).</p> <p>HF III /Actions design is optimum given the context of the region and addresses possible 'absorption' capacity issues of beneficiary institutions, etc.</p> <p>The intervention logic and ToC of HF III/Actions is sound.</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>HF III/Action log frames and theories of change, risks and assumptions matrices/frameworks, indicators</p> <p>Other HF III/Action documents (including stakeholders/target group analyses; capacity building strategies/approaches)</p> <p>CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, Consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners</p>	Not all stakeholders will have the full overview over all Actions	
<b>Adaptability—response to change</b>	To what extent have HF III/Actions responded to changes in the environment over time (risks and potentials)?	<p>HF III/Actions have responded adequately to changes during the Action period, including wider political developments.</p> <p>The Actions have incorporated recommendations from the evaluation of HFII.</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>HF III/Action documentation, II</p> <p>CoE/EU and Beneficiary personnel, Consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners</p>	Data quality is expected to be good	
<b>OECD DAC Criterion Coherence – Do HF III interventions fit?</b>						
<b>Assessment dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Bases for assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation design/methodology</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Data quality and limitations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Internal Coherence</b>	To what extent are HF III/Actions aligned	HF III Actions have been designed and	Desk review	HFII/Action Progress reports, outputs.	Expected to be good	

	with other CoE Actions (bilaterally or otherwise funded)?	implemented in a complementary manner.  Synergies between different Actions and between Regional and bilateral Actions have been leveraged.	Online questionnaire  Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs  Triangulation	CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, Consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners	<i>*Data availability may be variable and can only be assessed once collection starts. This may mean some adjustment/removal of some Sub-questions</i>	
<b>External Coherence</b>	To what extent are HF III/Actions aligned with relevant interventions funded by the EU-IPA and other bilateral or multilateral donors to achieve synergy and multiplier effect?	Synergies between HF III/Actions and relevant interventions of other actors in the Beneficiaries.  HF III design and implementation is being coordinated with other donors' and development partners' activities.	Desk review  Online questionnaire  Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs  Triangulation	HFII/Action Progress Reports, outputs.  CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, Consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners, including UN agencies, OSCE, bilateral donors' Actions	Expected to be good	
<b>OECD/DAC Criterion Efficiency: How well are HF III resources being used?</b>						
<b>Assessment dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Bases for assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation design/methodology</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Data quality and limitations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Efficiency of Management and Delivery</b>	Have inputs (financial, human, and material resources) been chosen and used economically in relation to the outputs delivered?	Evidence that the selection of HF III/Action methodologies and activities represent value for money.  The resources invested in administering HF	Desk review  Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs  Steering Committee meetings (which	Documentation (Descriptions, progress reports, financial/budget data)  CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant	Expected to be moderate	To fully assess this question, comparative data from other EU-funded Actions in the sector may be useful; some beneficiary institutions may be the recipients of other EU-

		III/Actions are justified by the benefits/results.	evaluators will observe remotely)  Triangulation	experts, stakeholders, and partners		funded TA and could speak to the relative efficiency of HF III compared to Twinning and other support.
	Were activities/outputs delivered within planned time frames?	Evidence that HF III/Actions have broadly delivered according to operational plans.	Desk review  Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs  Triangulation	Documentation (Descriptions, progress reports, operational plans, outputs)  CoE/EU and Beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners.	Expected to be good	

**OECD/DAC Criterion Effectiveness: Is HF III achieving its objectives?**

<b>Assessment dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Bases for assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation design/methodology</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Data quality and limitations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Achievement of the intended intermediate outcomes</b>	<p>To what extent have HF III/Actions achieved their intended Intermediate Outcomes?</p> <p>To what extent are Action objectives, inputs, and outputs (including ECM advice) likely to contribute to reform in the targeted sectors/themes, towards compliance with international standards and the EU acquis?</p> <p>To what extent does the combination of Regional and Bilateral Actions contribute to</p>	<p>HF III/Actions have achieved intermediate outcomes, including laws/policies/practices amended, capacity of duty-bearers and rights-holders enhanced, Action and ECM technical advice provided and acted upon.</p> <p>HF III/Actions' monitoring and evaluation and indicators are effective in measuring intended outcomes.</p> <p>Regional Actions have contributed to enhanced exchanges of information/best practice between Beneficiaries.</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Steering Committee meetings (which evaluators will observe remotely)</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>HF III/Action Progress reports, outputs.</p> <p>CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners</p>	Expected to be good	<p>Note: The MTE is looking at <i>contribution</i> as opposed to <i>attribution</i>.</p> <p>Given that some Actions are 'successors' to Actions in Phase II, and in some cases Phase I, where impact is evident or might reasonably be expected will be noted.</p>

	achievement of intended Intermediate Outcomes?	HF III Actions that succeed HFI and HFII Actions have generated identifiable impact.				
<b>Quality of implementation</b>	<p>What assessment can be made of the quality of steering and implementation of HF III/Actions in relation to the achievement of objectives?</p> <p>What assessment can be made of the quality of participation by the direct Beneficiaries and of expert inputs?</p>	<p>Decisions influencing HF III/Actions results are made in time and are evidence-based.</p> <p>Decision-making processes are participatory and transparent and Steering Committees are functioning effectively.</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Observation of Steering Committee meetings</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>HF III/Action Progress reports</p> <p>CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners</p>	Expected to be good	
<b>Unintended results</b>	To what extent can unintended positive/ negative direct results be observed?	HF III/Action monitoring captures unintended positive and negative results and responds appropriately.	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Outcome harvesting (where any gaps in Monitoring and evaluation)</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>Progress reports.</p> <p>CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts and partners</p>	Expected to be good	
<b>OECD DAC Criterion Sustainability—Will HF III results continue into the future?</b>						
<b>Assessment dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Bases for assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation design/methodology</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Data quality and limitations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Likelihood of results continuing beyond the Framework implementation period</b>	To what extent are HF III/Actions results (reform of law, policy, and practices. tools etc) likely to	Evidence that legislation, policies, best practice guidelines, training materials etc drafted are	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Online questionnaire</p>	HF III/Action Progress reports, EU Annual Progress Reports; reports on implementation of		

	<p>applied/resourced/updated beyond the HF III implementation period?</p> <p>What evidence is there of Beneficiaries' political commitment to apply HF III/Action results and ECM advice going forward?</p> <p>What evidence is there of rights-holders/CSOs capacity to demand ongoing delivery of HF III/Action results?</p>	<p>enacted/adopted and disseminated.</p> <p>Evidence that capacity support to individuals is embedded in relevant institutions (training, oversight etc)</p> <p>Evidence that CSOs are aware of new/revised standards and practices and have capacity to monitor and advocate for their ongoing application.</p>	<p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>international legal obligations and standards</p> <p>CoE/EU and Beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners.</p>		
<b>Enhanced capacities of Beneficiaries</b>	<p>To what extent have HF III/Actions contributed to enhancing the capacity of Beneficiaries?</p> <p>What evidence is there that enhanced awareness/capacity, will be applied effectively resourced and updated by Beneficiaries?</p>	<p>Evidence of enhancement of methodologies/working practices of Beneficiaries.</p> <p>Evidence that capacity building tools, practices, advice etc are integrated into relevant beneficiary institutions, with designated responsibility for their application/updating.</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>Documentation (Action descriptions, progress reports, operational plans, outputs)</p> <p>CoE/EU and Beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners.</p>		
<b>Cross-Cutting Criterion Is a Human Rights Approach (including civil society participation) being applied?</b>						
<b>Assessment dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Bases for assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation design/methodology</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Data quality and limitations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>HRA core principles (including civil society</b>	To what extent do HF III/Actions incorporate	HF III/Actions and stakeholders evidence an	Desk review	Documentation (HF III/Action descriptions,		The scale of the evaluation precludes

<b>participation) are effectively addressed in HF III and Actions</b>	<p>HRA principles (including civil society participation), in all PCM stages?</p> <p>To what extent are HRA principles, (including civil society participation), reflected in HF III/Actions' M&amp;E (baselines, indicators etc).?</p>	<p>understanding of the principles of HRA in PCM.</p> <p>Objectives and methodologies of HF III/Actions apply HRA, principles, including effective participation by rights-holders - direct and indirect (via CSOs).</p> <p>HF III/Action M&amp;E applies HRA principles to measure both the quality of activities and results.</p>	<p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>progress reports, operational plans, outputs)</p> <p>CoE/EU and Beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners.</p>		<p>direct engagement with rights-holders outside of capital cities and online input by rights-holders likely to be confined to CSOs.</p>
<b>Cross-Cutting Criterion: Is Gender being mainstreamed?</b>						
<b>Assessment dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Bases for assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation design/methodology</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Data quality and limitations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Core Principles of gender mainstreaming are effectively addressed in the Actions</b>	<p>To what extent do HF III/Actions mainstream gender principles in all PCM stages, including objectives, content, and methodologies, ?</p> <p>To what extent are gender mainstreaming principles, reflected in HF III/Actions' M&amp;E (baselines, indicators etc)?</p>	<p>HF III/Actions and stakeholders evidence an understanding of gender mainstreaming in PCM.</p> <p>Objectives, and methodologies of HF III/Actions apply gender mainstreaming principles</p> <p>HF III/Actions evidence effective participation (direct and indirect via CSOs) by women/girls and others commonly excluded on the basis of gender.</p> <p>Recommendations from gender analyses of HF Phase I and Phase II Actions are applied.</p>	<p>Desk review</p> <p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs</p> <p>Triangulation</p>	<p>Documentation (Action descriptions, progress reports, operational plans)</p> <p>CoE/EU and Beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners.</p>		

		M&E of HF III/Actions mainstream gender principles to measure both the quality of activities and results.(including gender analyses/impact assessments and other intersectional tools).				
<b>Council of Europe Criterion Added Value - The benefits of HF III Actions being implemented by the Council of Europe</b>						
<b>Assessment dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>	<b>Bases for assessment</b>	<b>Evaluation design/methodology</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Data quality and limitations</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>What are the Council of Europe's advantages as implementer of reform support in the areas covered HF III, by comparison with other actors and reform modalities.</b>	To what extent has the CoE a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other actors (IGOs, bilateral donors, INGOs) in supporting reform in the sectors/themes?	HF III/Actions and ECM provides added value to support Beneficiaries in increased compliance with European standards.	Desk review  Online questionnaire  Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and FGDs  Triangulation	Documentation (Action descriptions, progress reports, operational plans)  CoE/EU and beneficiary personnel, consultants and other relevant experts, stakeholders, and partners.		

## Annex 3: Online Evaluation Questionnaire

### 1. Your Name/Organisation/Position/Email address (optional)

### 2. Your involvement in the Action(s)

Please list the HF III Action(s) you are involved in and give details of your role.

### 3. Your overall impression of the Action(s) success in achieving its objectives

Please score the overall success of the Action to date or likely success in achieving its objectives.

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

**Please comment on your score.** Please give specific examples of the success of the Action, e.g. enhanced awareness/knowledge and capacity of you and your institution; enhanced working practices; reform of law/policy in the sector; impact on the lives of rights-holders; and any suggestions as to how these might be enhanced.

### 4. Relevance: Are HF III Actions relevant to the context?

Please score the relevance of the Action objectives, priorities, activities, and methods etc. including its relevance to:

- National, European, and international legal standards applicable to the sector/themes addressed by the Action;
- Domestic policies, strategies/action plans etc. on the sector/themes addressed by the Action;
- Institutional and other reform needed in the sector addressed by the Action;
- The local context;
- The circumstances and needs of the rights-holders in the sector.

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

**Please comment on your score.** Please give examples of the relevance of the Action and any suggested changes that would enhance this.

### 5. Coherence: Do HF III Actions fit with other relevant activities?

Please score the coherence of the Action(s) including coordination and complementarity with:

- Other relevant HF III Actions (bilateral or regional);
- Other Council of Europe activities/projects on the sector/themes addressed by the action;
- Projects and activities of other actors (EU, UN, OSCE etc.), bilateral donors and INGOs on the sector/themes addressed by the Action.

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

**Please comment on your score.** Please give examples of the Action coherence and any suggested changes that would enhance this.

### 6. Efficiency: How well are HF III resources being used?

Please score the efficiency of the management and delivery of the Action, including:

- Planning and decision-making (including Steering Committees) and responses to requests for assistance;
- Cost-effective delivery of Action activities and outputs:

- Communication between Action Partners; between the Council of Europe Secretariat and Offices//Programme Offices; and between the Council of Europe and EU Delegations/Offices.

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

**Please comment on your score.** Please give examples of the Action's efficiency and suggested changes that would enhance this.

**7. Effectiveness: *Is HF III achieving its intended objectives?***

Please score the effectiveness of the Action in enhancing capacity, reforming law, policy, and practice and safeguarding the rights of people in the sector, including;

- Suitability of the Action's design for the intended results;
- Suitability of activities (training, advice, technical assistance etc.);
- Quality of participation by partners' and external experts;
- Quality of measurement of Action results.

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

**Please comment on your score.** Please give examples of Action effectiveness and suggested changes that would enhance this.

**If relevant to your role**, please comment on the effectiveness of Action management, communication, organisation of activities, partnership between Council of Europe and your institution, coordination/communication between the Council of Europe secretariat in Strasbourg and Offices/Programme Offices.

**8. Sustainability: *Will HF III results continue after the Action has concluded?***

Please score the likely sustainability of the Action results, including, the likelihood that:

- Knowledge/capacity/tools developed in the Action will be applied after HF III concludes;
- Reform of law, policy and practice supported by the Action will continue;
- Improvements to the situation of rights-holders supported by the Action will continue.

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

**Please comment on your score.** Please give examples of Action results that will continue into the future, and any suggested changes that would enhance this.

**9. Human Rights Approach:<sup>93</sup> *Is a Human Rights Approach (including civil society participation) being applied in the Action?***

Please score the application of the core principles of a human rights approach (participation and inclusion; equality and Non-discrimination; accountability; transparency and Access to Information) in methodologies and in results.

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

**Please comment on your score.** Please give examples of the application of the Human Rights Approach principles and any suggested changes that would enhance this.

**10. Gender Mainstreaming:<sup>94</sup> *Is gender being mainstreamed in the Action?***

<sup>93</sup> Participation and Inclusion; Equality and non-discrimination; Accountability; Transparency and access to information - Council of Europe, (2020) [Human Rights Approach: Practical Guide for Co-operation Projects](#).

<sup>94</sup> "Gender mainstreaming" means integrating a gender perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programmes, and projects. Women and men have different needs, experiences and living conditions, including unequal access to and control over power, money, human rights, justice, resources, and decision-making. The needs of women and men also differ by age, ethnicity, disability, class, economic status, sexual orientation, or gender identity and even by country and/or area within a country. It is important to take this intersectionality of factors into account when designing policies, programmes, and projects." - Council of Europe, (2019), [Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit For Co-Operation Projects](#).

Please score the quality of gender mainstreaming in the Action, including how the different needs, experiences, challenges of men and women are addressed in methodologies and in results.

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

**Please comment on your score.** Please give examples of how gender is mainstreamed and any suggested changes that would enhance this.

**11. Added Value: *What are the benefits of HF III Actions being implemented by the Council of Europe?***

Please score the added value of the Council of Europe as implementer of reform activities on the themes addressed in HF III (in comparison with other actors (intergovernmental organisations agencies; bilateral donors; international non-governmental organisations etc.).

1. *Excellent*      2. *Very Good*      3. *Good*      4. *Poor*      5. *Very Poor*

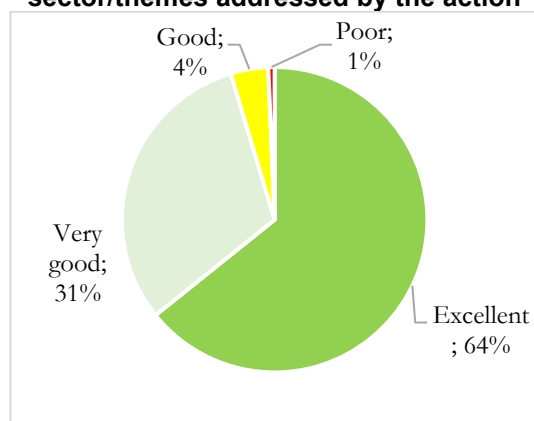
**Please comment on your score.** Please give examples of the added value of the Council of Europe as a partner in delivering support and any suggested changes that would enhance this.

**12. Any additional observations/recommendations that you wish to make.**

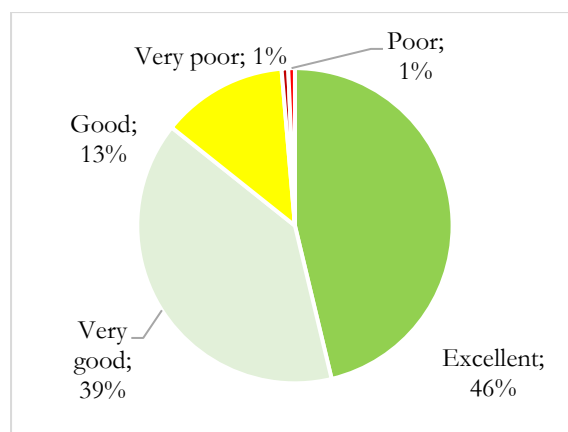
## Annex 4: Online Questionnaire Response Scores

### Relevance

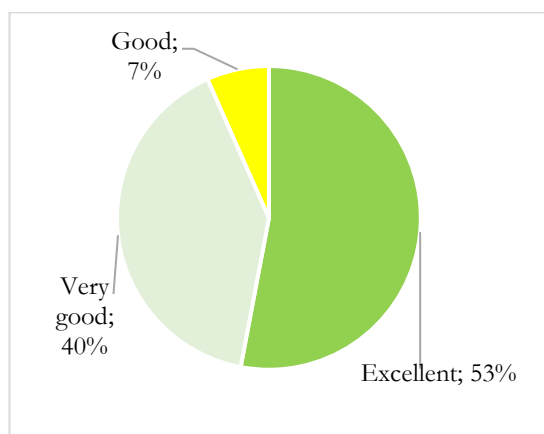
**Relevance to domestic, European, and international legal standards applicable to the sector/themes addressed by the action**



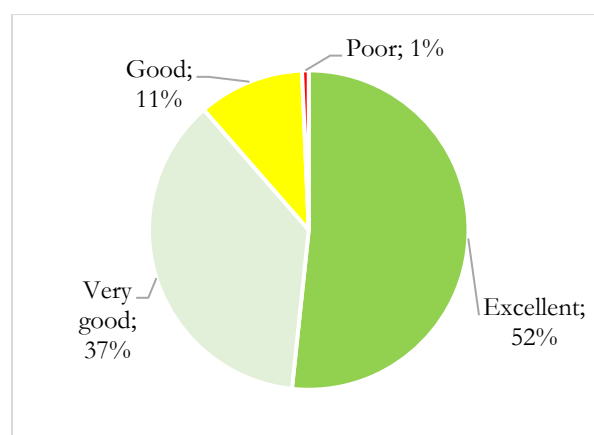
**Relevance to institutional and other reform needed in the sector addressed by the action**



**Relevance to domestic policies, strategies/action plans etc. on the sector/themes addressed by the action**

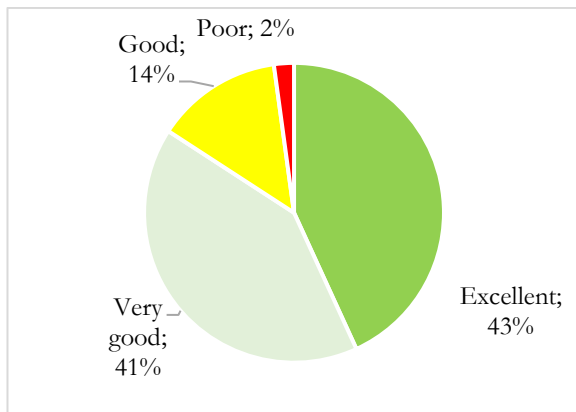


**Relevance to the local context**

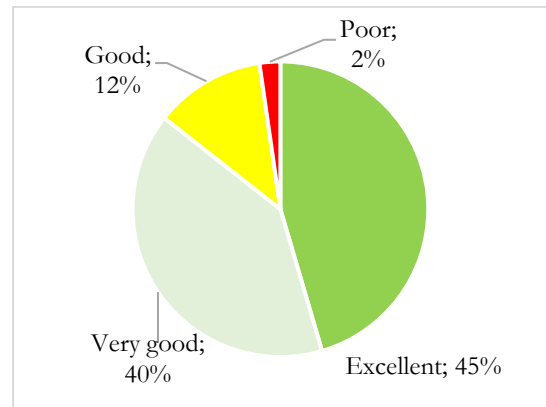


## Coherence

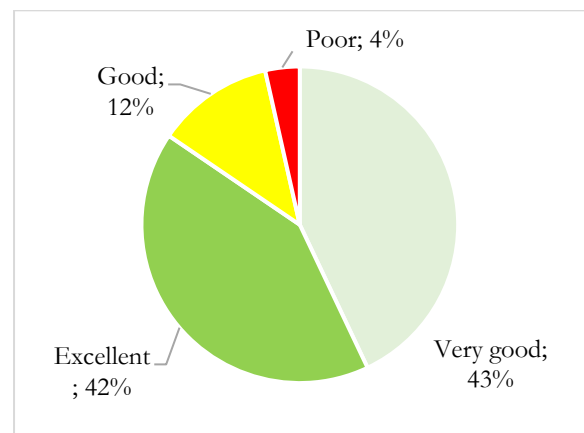
**With other relevant HF III actions (bilateral or regional)**



**With other activities/projects of Council of Europe**

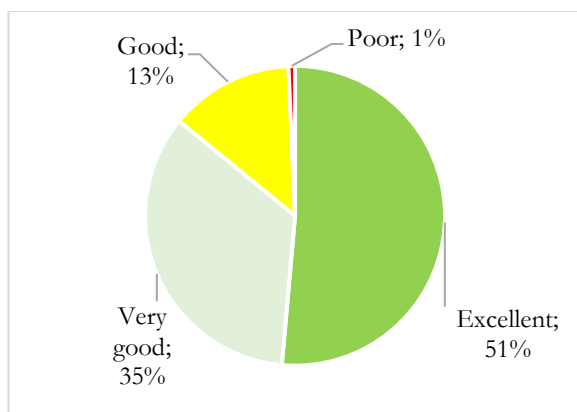


**With projects and activities of other actors  
IGO/ bilateral donors/INGOs**

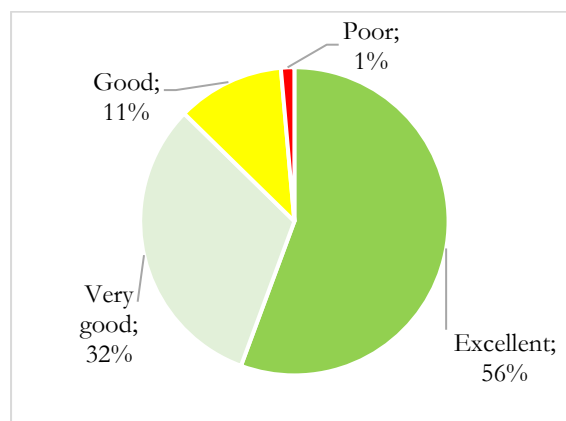


## Efficiency

**Cost-effective delivery of action activities and outputs**

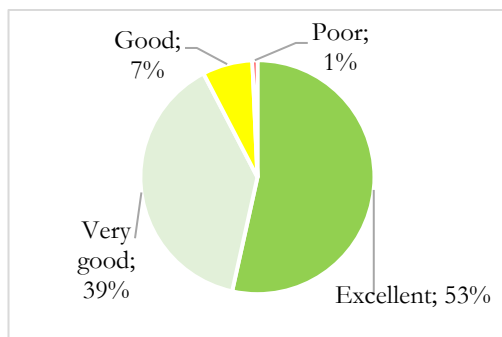


**Communication between action partners; the Council of Europe Secretariat and Offices/Programme Offices; and Council of Europe and EU Delegations/Offices**

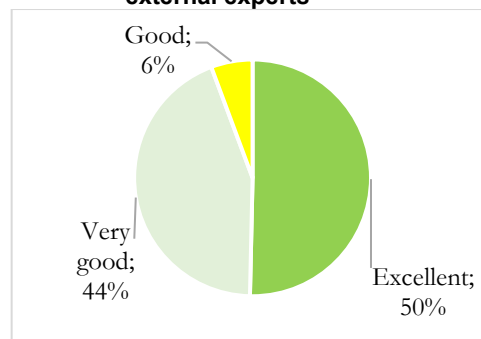


## Effectiveness:

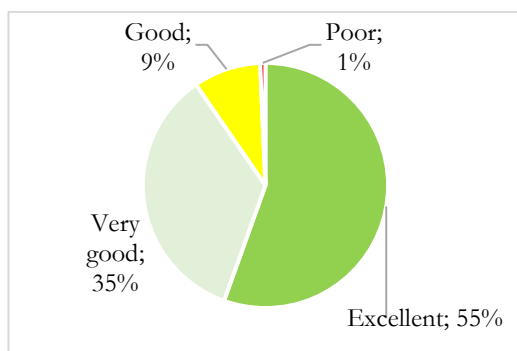
**Suitability of design for intended results**



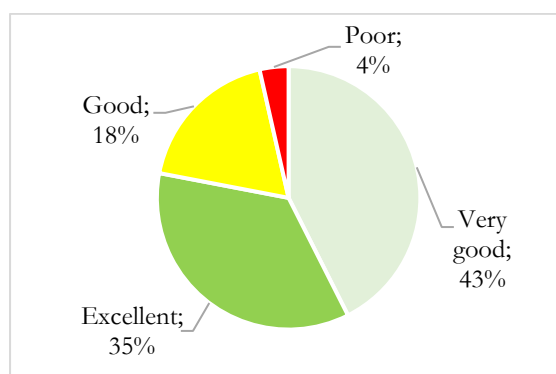
**Quality of participation by partners and external experts**



**Suitability of activities (training, advice, technical assistance etc.)**

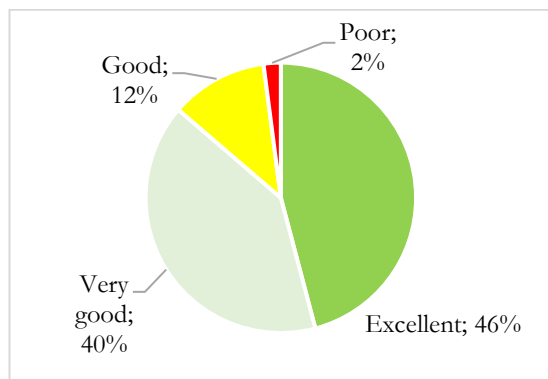


**Quality of measurement of results**

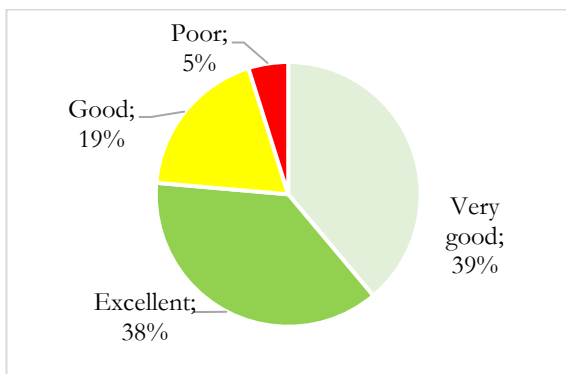


## Sustainability

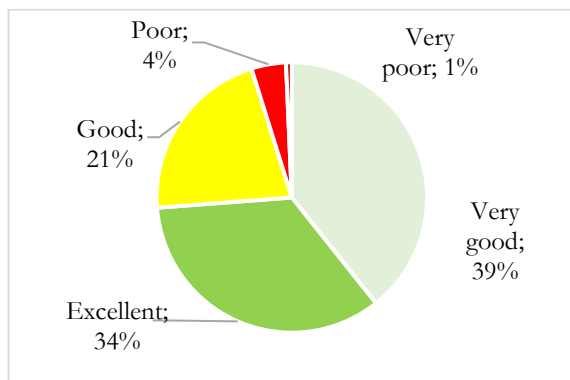
**Knowledge/capacity/tools developed will be applied after HF III concludes**



**Reform of law, policy and practice supported will continue**

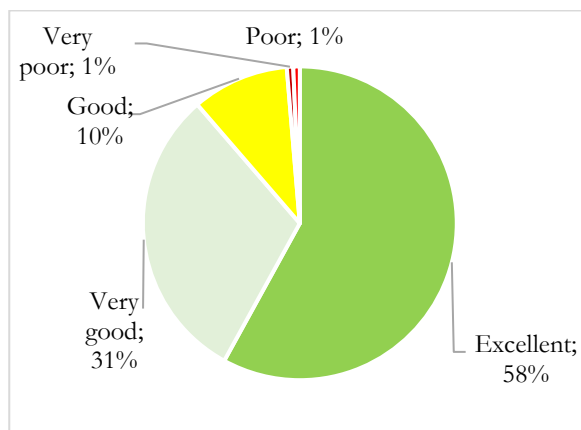


**Improvements to the situation of rights-holders supported will continue**

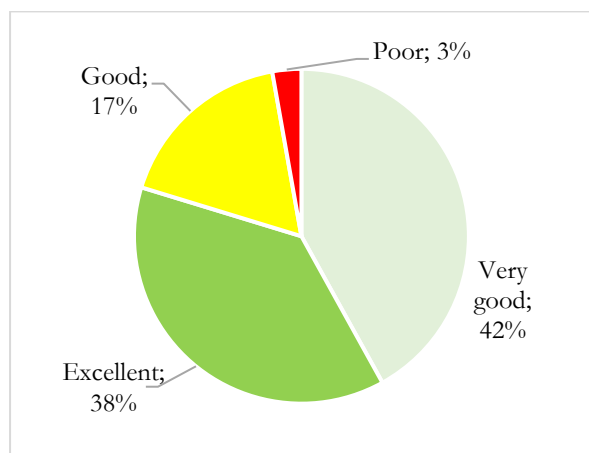


## Human Rights approach and Gender Mainstreaming

The application of the core principles of a human rights approach (Participation and Inclusion; Equality and Non-discrimination; Accountability; Transparency and Access to Information)

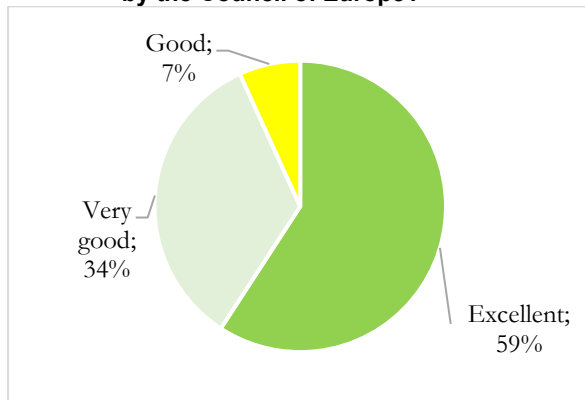


**Quality of gender mainstreaming including how different needs, experiences, challenges of men and women are addressed in methodologies and in results.**



## Added Value

**What is the added value of HF III  
actions being implemented  
by the Council of Europe?**



## Annex 5: List of Actions

Evaluation Case Studies highlighted

HF n°	Name of the action	Beneficiary	Implementation period
<b>Theme I – Strengthening justice</b>			
HF1	<a href="#">Strengthening the quality and efficiency of justice in Albania (SEJ IV)</a>	Albania	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF2	<a href="#">Improving the protection of the right to property and facilitating execution of ECtHR judgments in Albania (D-REX III)</a>	Albania	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF3	<a href="#">Enhancing the protection of human rights of prisoners in Albania</a>	Albania	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF4	<a href="#">Strengthening the efficiency and quality of justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiHSEJ)</a>	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF5	<a href="#">Further strengthening the treatment of detained and sentenced persons in line with European standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina</a>	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF6	<a href="#">Strengthening the quality and efficiency of justice in Kosovo* (KoSEJ III)</a>	Kosovo	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF7	<a href="#">Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro</a>	Montenegro	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF8	<a href="#">Enhancing human rights protection for detained and sentenced persons in Montenegro</a>	Montenegro	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF9	<a href="#">Towards a consolidated and more efficient Free Legal Aid (FLA) system in North Macedonia</a>	North Macedonia	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF10	<a href="#">Strengthening the capacities of the penitentiary system in North Macedonia</a>	North Macedonia	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF11	<a href="#">Strengthening human rights protection in Serbia</a>	Serbia	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF12	<a href="#">Enhancing the human rights protection for detained and sentenced persons in Serbia</a>	Serbia	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF13	<a href="#">Strengthening the human rights protection in the context of migration in Türkiye</a>	Türkiye	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2025
HF14	<a href="#">Towards a better evaluation of the results of judicial reform efforts in the Western Balkans – Phase II “Dashboard Western Balkans II”</a>	Western Balkans	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026
HF15	<a href="#">Enhancing co-operation in the Western Balkans in managing violent extremism in prisons and preventing further radicalisation after release</a>	Western Balkans	1/1/2023 – 31/12/2026

Theme II – Fighting corruption, economic crime, and money laundering				
HF16	<a href="#">Action against economic crime in Albania</a>	Albania	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF17	<a href="#">Action against corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing in Bosnia and Herzegovina</a>	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF18	<a href="#">Action against economic crime in Montenegro</a>	Montenegro	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF19	<a href="#">Action against economic crime in North Macedonia</a>	North Macedonia	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF20	<a href="#">Action against money laundering in Türkiye</a>	Türkiye	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF21	<a href="#">Action against economic crime in the Western Balkans</a>	Western Balkans	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
Theme III - Promoting anti-discrimination and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups				
HF22	<a href="#">Advancing the protection from discrimination in Albania</a>	Albania	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF23	<a href="#">Towards an equal, inclusive, and tolerant Bosnia and Herzegovina</a>	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF24	<a href="#">Quality education for all – Bosnia and Herzegovina</a>	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF25	<a href="#">Combating discrimination and hatred in Kosovo*</a>	Kosovo	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF26	<a href="#">Combating hatred and intolerance in Montenegro</a>	Montenegro	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF27	<a href="#">Quality education for all – Montenegro</a>	Montenegro	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF28	<a href="#">Combating hatred and intolerance in North Macedonia</a>	North Macedonia	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF29	<a href="#">Strengthening anti-trafficking action in North Macedonia</a>	North Macedonia	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF30	<a href="#">Combating discrimination and promoting diversity in Serbia</a>	Serbia	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF31	<a href="#">Strengthening anti-trafficking action in Serbia</a>	Serbia	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF32	<a href="#">Quality education for all – Serbia</a>	Serbia	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF33	<a href="#">Fostering women's access to justice in Türkiye (WA2J Türkiye)</a>	Türkiye	1/1/2023 30/6/2026	–
HF34	<a href="#">Pilot project on digital citizenship education in Türkiye</a>	Türkiye	1/1/2023 30/6/2025	–
HF35	Promoting equality and combating racism and intolerance in the Western Balkans	Western Balkans	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF36	<a href="#">Women's access to justice in the Western Balkans (WAJ)</a>	Western Balkans	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
Theme IV - Promoting and protecting freedom of expression and media				
HF37	<a href="#">Protecting freedom of expression and of the media in Albania (PRO-FREX)</a>	Albania	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF38	<a href="#">Protecting freedom of expression and of the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina (PRO-FREX)</a>	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF39	<a href="#">Protecting freedom of expression and of the media (PRO-FREX)</a>	Kosovo	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF40	<a href="#">Protecting freedom of expression and of the media in Montenegro (PRO-FREX)</a>	Montenegro	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–

HF41	<a href="#">Protecting freedom of expression and of the media in North Macedonia (PRO-FREX)</a>	North Macedonia	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF42	<a href="#">Protecting freedom of expression and of the media in Serbia (PRO-FREX)</a>	Serbia	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–
HF43	Protecting Freedom of Expression and of the Media in the Western Balkans (PRO-FREX)	Western Balkans	1/1/2023 31/12/2026	–

#### Number of Horizontal Facility III actions per theme

	Strengthening justice	Fighting corruption, economic crime, and money laundering	Promoting anti-discrimination and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups	Promoting and protecting freedom of expression and media
Albania	3	1	1	1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	1	2	1
Kosovo	1	0	1	1
Montenegro	2	1	2	1
North Macedonia	2	1	2	1
Serbia	2	0	3	1
Türkiye	1	1	2	0
Regional	2	1	2	1

#### Horizontal Facility III Regional Actions

	Action with a regional steering committee	Action without a specific steering mechanism
Towards a better evaluation of the results of judicial reform efforts in the Western Balkans – Phase II “Dashboard Western Balkans II”	X	
Enhancing co-operation in the Western Balkans in managing violent extremism in prisons and preventing further radicalisation after release	X	
Action against economic crime in the Western Balkans		X
Promoting equality and combating racism and intolerance in the Western Balkans		X
Women's Access to Justice in the Western Balkans	X	
Protecting Freedom of Expression and of the Media in the Western Balkans		X

## Annex 6: Evaluation Case Study Actions

### Albania

**HF1** (*Strengthening the Quality and Efficiency of Justice in Albania*) – At mid-term juncture, the action is on track to achieve three of its four intermediate outcomes, although much depends on the pace and quality of the judicial reform process overall. The action contributed to increasing the capacity of magistrates and judicial inspectors on thematic inspections, as well as the capacities of court management staff in line with CEPEJ standards, specifically on court performance and statistics (Intermediate Outcomes 2 and 3). Remaining bottlenecks (not solely the responsibility of the Council of Europe) in terms of delivering and rolling out piloted IT-solutions (the Online Notification Platform and the Human Resources Management System) are expected to be addressed during the remainder of the action to achieve Intermediate Outcome 1 (Judiciary institutions become more transparent and efficient through improved infrastructure and IT and other tools). The action is consistently collaborating with the Albanian School of Magistrates, seeking to embed action outputs in this key domestic training institution. However, with regard to Intermediate Outcome 4 (the use of alternative dispute resolution is expanded in accordance with CEPEJ standards and tools), while contributing to awareness-raising and prospects for achievement remain modest. Various factors, including the overall pace of justice reform, mean that the issue having achieved little traction so far, despite international technical assistance from various donors over the past two decades. Donor co-ordination is noted as particularly strong in the areas targeted by the action, with EU4JUSTICE stakeholders, in particular, highlighting the importance of Council of Europe's various roles as key to reform momentum. Stakeholders highlight the importance of regional lessons learned and best practices sharing, in particular with reference to activities with counterparts in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of **HF14** (*Towards a better evaluation of the results of judicial reform efforts in the Western Balkans Phase II, Dashboard Western Balkans II*).

**HF16** (*Action against Economic Crime in Albania*) is on track to achieve its Intermediate Outcome 1 (Improved legal and operational framework to effectively target corruption). Notable results have been the contribution to Albania's *National Strategy and Action Plan on Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing 2024-2030*, as well as support provided to complete the fourth *National Risk Assessment*, a key milestone, not least in preparation for the 2025 MONEYVAL evaluation; technical assistance was also provided to contribute to Albania's compliance with FATF recommendations, is highlighted by the Albanian Financial Intelligence Unit as of key importance. The action also contributed to the revision of the *Law on Prevention of Conflict of Interests in the exercise of public function*, as well as assisting in the revision of critical aspects of the functioning of the Albanian State Police (relating to additional services and to post-employment provisions). This is expected to lead to the fulfilment of one of the recommendations from the GRECO 5<sup>th</sup> round of evaluations. The action has also made a key contribution to increasing the transparency of political party financing through the provision of an integrated IT solution to the Central Election Commission of Albania, and in direct follow-up to previous technical assistance provided to the Commission. For Intermediate Outcome 2 (Improved ML/FT prevention and effectiveness of law enforcement and criminal justice sector in the fight against economic crime), some of the indicators against which achievement is to be assessed seem to be overly ambitious for an action of this scale, and given the multitude of actors, measuring the contribution represents a challenge, even if data were available. Overall, there is likely to be increased compliance with MONEYVAL and GRECO (which is also coming up for evaluation), though effective implementation of key aspects addressed by the action, for example on the revised conflict of interest provisions, will hinge on political will and resolve of the Beneficiary and relevant institutions.

**HF22** (*Advancing the Protection from Discrimination in Albania*) is contributing to the achievement of its intermediate outcomes. Under Intermediate Outcome 1 (Institutions in Albania address discrimination and hate speech at legal and policy level further in line with ECRI

standards/recommendations and the findings of the ACFCNM), contributed to the finalisation, by the Albanian Ministry for Health and Social Protection (MHSP) of the medical protocol for transgender people in Albania; the action also facilitated an MSPH high-level dialogue on access to medical services of members of the LGBTI community. By the end of 2024, progress was reported on the implementation of the framework law on minorities where the last three bylaws were adopted with the support of the action's expertise, although the responsible institutions and stakeholders (including the Albanian Committee on National Minorities), as yet lack capacity.

Under Intermediate Outcome 2 (Institutions and CSOs improve responses to discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes notably towards ethnic and sexual minorities, with attention to the local level), the action made a contribution to capacitating the institution of the People's Advocate and the action's awareness-raising component has, in addition to being the key supporter for the annual Pride, also reached locations outside the capital. The action contributed to awareness raising of the police, the prosecution, and the judiciary on hate crime. This action is highlighted as particularly important for the People's Advocate institution that operates with an extremely limited operational budget. Among action target groups, the LGBTI community identifies partnership with the Council of Europe as being of considerable moral value, though EUD interlocutors express need for more focus on PWDs. Specific action focus on that group includes capacity building on addressing complaints to the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, which has contributed to an increased number of complaints on disability grounds, with more than 70% of cases resolved.

The action facilitated the coming together of a No Hate Alliance, bringing together different state institutions and agencies in the anti-discrimination field, to promote and protect diversity and combat hate speech. The alliance brings together the People's Advocate; the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination; the Audio-visual Media Authority and the Albanian Media Council; whether it can maintain momentum independently from the action's support remains to be seen. Intermediate Outcome 3 (General public in Albania becomes more aware and contributes to counter intolerance, hate crimes and racism for a more cohesive society) will be achieved by the end of the action - not least because the outcome statement and indicators have been framed somewhat generally.

## Montenegro

HF III actions in Montenegro have been delivered against a backdrop of some political instability linked to multiple elections with four governments and three presidents since 2016 and some long-standing delays in filling key judicial positions. Overall, the context has seen significant recent momentum towards EU accession. The [October 2024 EU Report](#) noting "*very positive results*" in having met the interim Rule of Law benchmarks, including progress on the judicial system, freedom of expression/media, the fight against corruption and organised crime. However, the US State Department Human Rights Report for 2023 notes "*no significant changes in the human rights situation in Montenegro during the year*".

**HF7** (*Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro*). The combined focus of **HF7** on enhancing judicial processes and victim rights represents a merger of two previous Phase II actions (reflected in its budget of 1.6million being significantly larger than justice actions in other Beneficiaries). The action is on track to deliver its intermediate outcomes and has made a significant contribution to the 2024 IBAR, with the [October 2024 EU Report](#) noting progress on the judicial system among "*very positive results*". However, ongoing challenges of human and other resources, sees Report note that efficiency of justice still needs to be "*significantly improved*".

The action's contribution to key outcomes in legal and policy reform include revision of Laws on Judicial Council and Judges and on the State Prosecution Office in line with Venice Commission recommendations, while support to revision of the Criminal Code has strengthened protection of vulnerable victims, including redefining the offence of rape in line with the Istanbul Convention. Future adoption of key laws, including on Alternative Dispute resolution (ADR) and on Free Legal

Aid remain pending. The action has played a central role in the adoption of the *Judicial Reform Strategy 2024-2027* and *Action Plan* for 2024 – 2025 (including a fiscal analysis of both documents), as working tools such as Judicial and Prosecutorial rules on appraisal of judges and prosecutors. Action capacity building included a training needs analysis of the prosecution service and support (delivered with the ADR Centre) to the development of an Advanced Training Scheme for Mediators and Judges-Mediators in line with CEPEJ standards. This is in line with the domestic *ADR Development Programme 2023-2025* and regarded by partners as a significant contribution to the ongoing expansion of alternative dispute resolution in Montenegro. Action training focussed on applied situation/case-studies (including video analysis of trainees) is highlighted by partners as being particularly useful, though a need for assessment of resulting changed practices is highlighted. Justice transparency and awareness-raising activities across the two components include publicising the Judicial Reform Strategy, awareness-raising around the work of the Administrative Court, updating court communication protocols and the Prosecution's Communication Strategy and training of prosecutors and police spokespersons.

Community-level awareness raising addressed action themes of mediation and legal aid for victims of human trafficking. In addition to networking justice institutions with each other and with selected CSOs, the action also connected Montenegrin law students with regional counterparts in the Regional Human Rights School, in co-operation with **HF2**, **HF9**, **HF11** and **HF38**. **HF7** saw good levels of CSO involvement in including consultation, inputs via SC and Working Groups and delivery of activities. While *ad hoc* project justice training in Montenegro is reported as a concern, the Judicial Training Centre reports very good communication and alignment between **HF7** training and its core activities and mandate. The financial resource challenge to sustainability is highlighted by interlocutors and evidenced by the termination of CSO vocational training of prisoners with the conclusion of an action grant.

**HF8** (*Enhancing Human Rights Protection For Detained And Sentenced Persons In Montenegro*) builds upon results of two preceding actions in HF I and HF II to improve treatment of people in police custody, enhance healthcare services for detainees, and strengthen the monitoring capacity of the designated National Preventive Mechanism. Results include the development of a methodology for implementing the duties and powers of the National Preventive Mechanism and a monitoring Training Plan and training on monitoring engagement with vulnerable detainees. These outputs are based on the findings and the recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), and ECtHR case law. The action evidences good progress towards all four of its intermediate outcomes, subject to measurement of changes at rights-holders level.<sup>95</sup> The action supported an inter-institutional Working Group of state and civil society actors in developing new police Standard Operating Procedures, with training-of-trainers on a new police treatment curriculum and cascade training delivered by trained trainers accompanied by action experts And a Rulebook defining police duties and application of police powers.

**HF18** (*Action against economic crime in Montenegro*) evidences high-level engagement by partner institutions, with commitment to roll out the various outputs and capacity enhanced by the action. Against a context of a GRECO 2023 visit and assessment of progress as '*limited*',<sup>96</sup> the action contributed significantly to the adoption of the legislative package upon which the 2024 IBAR was conditioned. Key achievements included the adoption, under high time pressure, of legal and policy frameworks required for a positive IBAR, with closure of all Chapters envisaged by the conclusion of HF III in 2026. Achievements include the adoption of the *Strategy for the Fight against Corruption* (2024-2028) and Action Plan (2024-26) in line with GRECO recommendations, following an action needs assessment of the Strategy. Amendment of the Law on Prevention of Corruption, incorporated 1/3 of the recommendations of a Council of Europe

<sup>95</sup> Treatment of persons detained in police custody is improved in line with CoE ill-treatment and impunity standards; Authorities strengthen their capacities to better protect prisoners' human rights; Detained persons in prisons receive improved health care services; Better monitoring of detention facilities through enhanced capacity of the NPM Office.

<sup>96</sup> With only 3 of 22 5<sup>th</sup> Round Recommendations implemented.

expert and amendments to the Law on Seizure and Confiscation of Assets derived from Criminal Activity, is also in line with EU standards. Timely Venice Commission opinions and action expert inputs in June 2024 are identified as having been critical to the successful drafting and adoption of these laws. Support of an action expert from a former “Grey List” country in drafting of the Law on Money Laundering, is highlighted by FIU as illustrative of the expertise received and assisting Montenegro avoiding grey-listing and (with Albania) being among the first Western Balkan states to join the Single Euro Payments Area. Ongoing steps needed include adoption of the new Law on Restrictive Measures and design of an accompanying online reporting platform.

The combination of legal and strategic framework sees the EC October 2024 Report reference a “stable” track record on tackling corruption, contributing to Montenegro meeting the interim Rule of Law benchmarks. Supporting tools assisted by the action include a new ACA pre-appointment employees integrity checklist, a GRECO recommendation. Following the election of the new Council in August 2024, a Code of Ethics and new Rules of Procedure for ACA’s employees were adopted. The EC 2024 report notes a significant increase in 2023 in income/assets declarations to ACA and conflict of opinions issued (227), in context of high turnover of staff post-election. Three training modules on money laundering developed with HF experts are in use by Judicial Training Centre. Special prosecutors are also now conducting stand-alone money laundering investigations in line with the new legislation mechanisms, with court decisions pending.

The replicability of action inputs is highlighted in the case of support on risk-based AML/CFT assessment/supervision of games of chance, with partners independently extending this methodology to supervision of the real estate sector and car dealerships. FGD discussions indicate suggest that gender in the context of corruption and other economic crime is under appreciated, with a need for the different implications for men and women to be integrated into analysis and activities. Action documents and reporting focus on ensuring and documenting participation by men and women participating in activities.

Progress is noteworthy in the face of various challenges. Staff turnover means that none of the current staff engaged in the preparation of the public officials’ assets methodology were involved in earlier phases and the ministry responsible for the Law on NGOs (relevant to action recommendation on corruption), was changed mid-action. The Steering Committee, Working Groups and partner co-operation are reported as functioning smoothly, despite the challenge of co-ordination, e.g. 10 Institutions (State and Civil Society) on the Corruption Strategy Working Group and integrity plans to be drafted for 740 institutions.<sup>97</sup>

**HF27** (*Quality education for all – Montenegro*) addresses a somewhat fractured selection of education topics, digital citizenship education, school resilience for potential emergencies, empowerment of students with disabilities and equality in higher education, and academic integrity. Inputs and outputs to date have made some progress towards the action’s two intermediate outcomes. The action supported the *Inclusive Education Strategy 2019-2025*, including facilitating engagement by parents and communities with school management and teachers on inclusive education principles, as well as training of social services on promoting and monitoring best practices in inclusive education. Learning and participation of students with special educational needs was enhanced through action training of higher education staff on the application of Guidelines<sup>98</sup> (developed under HF II). The limited scale of activities and multiple actors (e.g. on inclusive education) mean this needs to be viewed as a modest contribution.<sup>99</sup>

The action has made sustainable progress in strengthening academic integrity culture through support to the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in amending and piloting the criteria for re-accreditation of higher education academic integrity mechanisms. The balance of

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<sup>97</sup> The good practice of CSO participation on legislative drafting Working Groups in Montenegro was noted in the March 2024 visit by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

<sup>98</sup> [Guideline for adjusting the learning process and participation of students with disabilities](#), 2020.

<sup>99</sup> 1. All educational actors in Montenegro improve ensuring equity and inclusion in education during and post-COVID-19 era and 2. Ethical dimension in higher education is strengthened and consolidated.

action expert accompaniment and partner-led initiative is noted favourably by partners and the new standards are now embedded into Montenegro's higher education re-accreditation process. Key impediments include high staff turnover in key partner institutions including the Ministry of Education, which meant some delays in planned activities. Gender is not addressed in the action log frame and Evaluation FGD discussions indicate that some partners interpret the significant representation of women in education as meaning that gender is not a priority in the sector.

## Serbia

**HF11** (*Strengthening Human Rights Protection in Serbia*) is on track to contribute to the action's Intermediate Outcomes. Under Outcome 1 (Measures to effectively execute the ECtHR judgments against Serbia and to improve the relevant legal framework are taken by the authorities), the action has supported capacity building of Serbian legal professionals, through domestic, regional (Western Balkans) and international platforms. Training included the application of the proportionality and quality of law tests, and training sessions for Serbian prosecutors on the interpretation and effective implementation of ECtHR decisions in prosecutorial acts, and support to the participation of ECtHR judges in annual high-level events of the Serbian judiciary. The action also supported the placement, for a period of six months of the advisor of the Supreme Court of Serbia to the ECtHR, with the aim of the accumulated knowledge and experience feeding into his work at the court. Progress is reported on Outcome 2 (Effective implementation of the ECHR is improved by increased compliance with European human rights standards by representatives of judiciary), in particular with regard to the implementation of [Kačapor v Serbia](#), with indications that the authorities are ready to enact amendments to the relevant law leading to a resolution of the case. The action also facilitated a working group designed to produce an effective payment scheme for the victims of the violation. Some progress has also been reported on advancing the execution of [Zorica Jovanović v. Serbia](#). Under Outcome 3 (Enhanced capacities of future legal professionals for effective and coherent application of European human rights standards), the action supported internships for law students in domestic institutions, including the Government Agent's Office, as well as mainstreaming human rights into law curricula, including through support to the Serbian Judicial Academy, the main provider for initial training of Serbian judicial professionals. The assistance has been highlighted as crucial for the Serbian Government Agent's Office, as contributing to continuous attention to the ECHR and ECtHR judgements. The action is successfully integrating work with duty-bearers and rights-holders, in that relevant domestic CSOs (such as the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights with a track record of representing applicants before the ECtHR) engage in capacity-building events. Stakeholders highlight the need to better communicate the relevance of the action from an HRA perspective.

**HF30** (*Combating discrimination and promoting diversity in Serbia*) is operating in an exceptionally difficult environment, and where progress towards intermediate outcomes is fundamentally hampered by a lack of a conducive environment to advance the anti-discrimination agenda. The Serbian human rights institutions with which the action co-operates acknowledge it as a key support, given that they have almost no operational budgets allowing them to conduct activities relating to their mandates—a reflection of the lack of a political commitment to the anti-discrimination agenda. Under Intermediate Outcome 1 (People in Serbia, especially vulnerable social groups [LGBTI persons, youth, and Roma, etc.] benefit from a comprehensive and inclusive legal and policy framework in accordance with the recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance). Action activities include research and data collection on discrimination-related topics to support evidence-based policy by partners, engaging wider range of stakeholders and local interlocutors (including the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies and Ministry of Interior). Expertise was provided to the Commissioner for Protection of Equality on development of national discrimination surveys, hate speech in media reports etc. The action has also supported the provision of legal expertise on the effectiveness of provisions in the criminal code on hate speech and hate crime (in particular against LGBTI persons) in line with ECRI standards. The action assisted the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in drafting the 2024-2025 Anti-Discrimination Action

Plan; however, as of January 2025, the Action Plan remains unadopted. Other notable outputs include making available important Council of Europe guidance available to Serbian stakeholders, including a Manual on Police Education and Non-Discrimination and Equality; as well as the ECRI policy recommendation on Preventing and Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against LGBTI Persons and Committee of Ministers Recommendations on combating hate speech. The action also supported a report, developed in cooperation with the Protector of citizens, on Violence in Schools, highly relevant in light of the Belgrade school shootings of May 2023. In addition, the action supported the development of an anti-discrimination training package for education workers to better recognise and respond to discrimination and to prevent violence in schools, implemented in cooperation with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality. The action works with both duty-bearers and rights-holders and actively involves domestic civil society organisations in the delivery of activities, as well as the EC-funded regional YEA platform.

Under Intermediate Outcome 2 (National minority groups benefit from a bottom-up approach in developing policies, and improved access to redress mechanisms at both central and local level), the action continues to provide CoE expertise to relevant authorities at central and local level on measures to improve conditions for the protection and promotion of national minority and rights, also coordinating efforts with other international organization active in this field, in alignment with the 2019 Fourth Opinion on Serbia by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The action supports development of the Action Plan for the exercise of the rights of national minorities and developed a data collection methodology on access to rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Intermediate Outcome 3 (Anti-discrimination and anti-hate speech initiatives/mechanisms are introduced at local, central, and regional level, particularly in relation to combating the use of hate speech and raising awareness about its negative effects) is likely to be achieved, as this outcome area focuses on awareness-raising activities across a broad spectrum of issues (diversity, no-hatred, tolerance, anti-racism by the general public)—similar to the mirror action in Albania, the outcome statement and indicators have been framed somewhat too generally. Support delivered under this outcome is consistently reflective of the HRA principle of involving CSOs as representatives of rights-holders in the delivery of the action. The action’s pursuit of and engagement with new partners from among rights-holders’ groups is noteworthy.

**HF32** (*Quality Education for All Serbia*) is fully on track to achieve both its intermediate outcomes.<sup>100</sup> The action’s support builds on the two previous phases under HF I and II and supports the alignment of the Serbian education system at primary and secondary levels with the Council of Europe’s Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). A key result in this phase was the finalisation, by the Serbian State Institute for the Improvement of Education of the RFCDC descriptors with the domestic curricula, expected to lead to a systemic change in the quality of education. The action combines policy-level support with bottom-up anchoring of the RFCDC within a network of so-called “mentor schools”, and which, at school level, implement the new curricula and also serve as trainers/contact points to widen the network of schools that work with the RFCDC principles.

Currently, there is a network of 36 participating mentor schools, and outputs include Guidelines produced by the Institute for Improvement of Education on the implementation of RFCDC in the curriculum across 10 subjects. Mentor school activities project into the communities in which they operate, and thus, contribute to the achievement of Outcome 2 (Democratic culture and intercultural dialogue are promoted as key elements of quality education and public goods by

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<sup>100</sup> 1. Education policy makers in Serbia further improve and align the education practices, policies, methodologies and approaches with EU acquis, European and Council of Europe standards, and 2. Democratic culture and intercultural dialogue are promoted as key elements of quality education and public goods by raising awareness of the society.

raising awareness of the society). Notable, action-supported activities include engagement formats with parents and wider communities, such as cultural events (exhibitions, concerts, theatre) that contribute to community cohesion. The action has an explicit gender focus, and, as a result of activities in 2024, all outputs are reported to be gender mainstreamed. The May 2023 Belgrade school shootings served as an inadvertent accelerator for the inclusion of some action outputs, with a ministerial recommendation to all schools in Serbia to adopt remembrance formats based on the RFCDC. The action enjoys a good degree of visibility in the participating communities and beyond.

## Regional actions

**HF35** (*Promoting equality and combating racism and intolerance in the Western Balkans*) (budget €700,000) complements Beneficiary-specific actions facilitating discussion fora for stakeholders involved on EU accession negotiations in the Western Balkans, notably Government anti-racism institutions and NHRIs, equality bodies, Police. Further, the action engages with CSOs and Youth, notably by rolling activities aimed at increasing awareness of racism and hatred in the public space. The action provides, state and non-state stakeholders, a platform for exchange on good practices & strengthening co-operation between parties, exposing them to EU actors in this domain. Good progress has been made in connecting law enforcement institutions with CSOs and establishing a network of institutions across HF III and PGG Beneficiaries, on law enforcement countering racism and racial discrimination.

The action commissioned and translated a *Manual for Police Education on Equality & Non-discrimination* (combining conceptual information as well as training methodologies/exercises). In conjunction with PGG, it developed online anti-racism training modules based on ECRI/EU standards, titled "*Combating Racism and Racial Discrimination*", in English and local languages. The action trained some 50 Young European Ambassadors whose online anti-hate videos that will be also embedded in the next phase of the "*Block the Hatred. Share the Love*" awareness-raising initiative during 2025-2026. Impact Indicators are primarily numeric e.g. "*Number of decisions related to cases of hatred dealt by equality bodies and judiciary of the 6 Beneficiaries*," "*Number of laws/policies on combating racism taken up by Beneficiaries*" and some others are difficult to apply e.g. "*Public statements by political and sport leaders, as well as CSO and other community leaders, on combating racism*"

**HF36** (*Women's Access to Justice in the Western Balkans*) (budget €1million) seeks to enhance women's access to justice, in particular in the context of violence against women and domestic violence (VAW/DV), in line with the standards of the ECHR, the Istanbul Convention and Objective 3 of Council of Europe *Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023*. Activities aim to enhance legal literacy (in particular victims of violence and women from disadvantaged communities), though with multiple actors and projects addressing rights-holders, the action prioritises engagement with duty-bearer decision-makers and legal professional capacity. Activities include peer mentoring of legal professionals, training of CSOs on engagement with legal professionals and on the 2022 *CSO Methodology and Toolkit on the Istanbul Convention*. The action shows some progress towards widely framed intermediate outcomes,<sup>101</sup> though attribution is problematic given Beneficiary-specific justice actions addressing **HF36** core themes. Some challenges are reported in networking six Beneficiaries. The Mentoring Programme for legal professionals on Women's Access to Justice is a particularly innovative element. Drawing on lessons learned in Sweden and utilising the Mentoring Manual developed in PGG, more experienced judges and prosecutors are trained on mentoring skills and mentor colleagues on the job. Participant interlocutors attest to its benefits, including the peer-to-peer exchanges co-ordinated with PGG programmes on access to justice and VAW/DV. The merits of on-the job capacity-enhancement is highlighted as particularly useful model given the demanding workloads

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<sup>101</sup> 1. Authorities and justice sector professionals introduce measures and apply new competences, to enhance the implementation of the standards on access to justice of the Istanbul Convention, and 2. Women, and in particular victims of violence and women from disadvantaged communities, increase their legal literacy of their human rights and ways of seeking redress within the justice system.

and capacity constraints of judges and prosecutors. However, measurement beyond participant feedback is problematic and there is lack of awareness among key justice institutions, beyond the participating judicial training institutes as well as some EUD sector managers.

## Annex 7: Interlocutors

### Council of Europe

#### Evaluation Reference Group Meeting Participants

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Programming Department, DPC, representative

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Programming Department, DPC, Programme Officer

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Council of Europe Office, Montenegro, Office Assistant

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**EU Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (EU DG NEAR)**

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Programme Manager, Western Balkans Regional Programmes, (regional action on freedom of information and media)  
Human Rights and Civil Society, Focal Point with Council of Europe  
Policy Officer, Western Balkans Policy and Regional Strategy, (Regional Action on Women's Access to Justice)

### **Other Stakeholders**

HF III ROM Evaluator

### **ALBANIA**

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Project Assistant, Improving the Protection of the Right to Property and Facilitating Execution of ECtHR Judgements in Albania

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Project Assistant, Action against Economic Crime

Senior Project Officer, Advancing Protection from Discrimination in Albania

Project Assistant, Advancing Protection from Discrimination in Albania

Senior Project Officer, Protecting Freedom of Expression and of the Media in Albania

Communications Officer

#### **Beneficiary/Partners**

Delegation of the European Union to Albania, HF Focal Point

Delegation of the European Union to Albania, Rule of Law Programme Officer

Delegation of the European Union to Albania, Programme Officer

Delegation of the European Union to Albania, Programme Officer,

Delegation of the European Union to Albania, Programme Officer

High Judicial Council, member

High Judicial Council, member

National Chamber of Mediation

Mr Donald XHELILI, Chancellor, District Court of Tirana

Court of Appeal of General Jurisdiction, judge

Albanian State Police

Albanian State Police, Training Department representative

Financial Intelligence Agency of Albania, representative

Financial Intelligence Agency of Albania, representative

General-Directorate of Anti-Corruption, representative

Ministry of Interior (Public Order, Security Policies and Strategies)

Financial Supervisory Authority, representative

Office of the Prosecutor-General, representative

Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination, representative

Alliance against LGBT Discrimination, representative

Streha LGBTI Shelter, representative

Albanian Media Council, representative

Centre Science, and Innovation for Development, representative

NGO ResPublica, representative

National Minorities Expert for CoE

Action against Economic Crime Expert for CoE

Albanian Bar Association, representative  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Horizontal Facility Coordinator  
Office of the Minister of State for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption, Advisor  
School of Magistrates of Albania, representative  
School of Magistrates of Albania, representative  
Albanian Audiovisual Media Authority, representative  
Albanian Audiovisual Media Authority, representative  
High Inspectorate of Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflicts of Interest, Inspector  
Member of Central Election Commission of Albania, representative

### **Other Stakeholders**

OSCE Higher Commissioner for National Minorities, representative  
OSCE Higher Commissioner for National Minorities, representative  
JUSTAL Project manager  
EU4JUSTICE Project manager  
EU4JUSTICE Project manager

## **MONTENEGRO**

### **Council of Europe**

Head of Council of Europe Office, Montenegro.  
Senior Project Officer, Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro  
Senior Project Officer, Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro  
Project Assistant, Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro  
Project Assistant, Strengthening accountability of the judicial system and enhancing protection of victims' rights in Montenegro  
Senior Project Officer, Enhancing the human rights protection for detained and sentenced persons in Montenegro  
Project Assistant, Enhancing the human rights protection for detained and sentenced persons in Montenegro  
Senior Project Officer, Action against Economic crime in Montenegro  
Project Assistant, Action against Economic crime in Montenegro  
Senior Project Officer, Quality education for all – Montenegro  
Project Assistant, Quality education for all – Montenegro  
Senior Project Officer, Protecting Freedom of Expression and of the Media in Montenegro (PRO-FREX-M)  
National Programme Officer, ROMACTED “Promoting Good Governance and Roma Empowerment at Local Level (phase II)”

### **Beneficiary/Partners**

Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro, HF Focal Point  
Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro, project manager  
Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro, project manager  
Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro, project manager  
Directorate for OSCE and COE, MFA, representative  
Judicial Council Member/Judge  
Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro, representative  
Department of Police Administration, representative  
Inspector of Police, Police Administration, representative  
Ministry of Justice, representative  
Administration for execution of criminal sanctions, representative  
Ombudsman's Office, representative  
NPM/Ombudsman, representative  
Chief State Prosecution, representative

Chief State Prosecution (public relations department)  
 General Directorate for Judiciary Ministry of Justice  
 Ministry of Justice, representative  
 Prosecutorial Council member/NGO representative  
 Constitutional Court, member  
 Supreme Court of Montenegro, Senior Adviser  
 Office for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, representative  
 Bar Association of Montenegro, Representative  
 Centre for Training in Judiciary and State Prosecution, representative  
 Cabinet of the Deputy Prime Minister, advisor  
 General Ministry of Public Administration, representative  
 Police Administration - Financial Intelligence Unit, representative  
 Special Prosecutor Special Prosecutor's Office, representative  
 Supreme Court, representative  
 Agency against Corruption, representative  
 Administration for Inspection Affairs, representative  
 Bureau for Educational Service, advisor  
 Ethics Committee for Higher Education, member  
 University of Montenegro, Vice-Rector  
 Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, representative

### **Other Stakeholders**

UNICEF, project officer  
 OSCE Montenegro, project officer  
 OSCE Montenegro, Project Officer  
 US Embassy, representative  
 Chemonics, project manager,  
 NGO "Djeca Crne Gore", representative  
 CEDEM, representative  
 NGO MANS, representative  
 Former CoE HF action manager

## **SERBIA**

### **Council of Europe**

Head of Council of Europe Office Serbia  
 Deputy Head of Council of Europe Office Serbia  
 Senior Project Officer, Enhancing Human Rights Protection for Detained and Sentenced Persons in Serbia  
 Senior Project Officer, Strengthening Human Rights Protection in Serbia  
 Project Assistant, Strengthening Human Rights Protection in Serbia  
 Senior Project Officer, Support for the Implementation of Judicial Reform in Serbia  
 Senior Project Office, Support for the Implementation of Judicial Reform in Serbia  
 Project Assistant, Support for the Implementation of Judicial Reform in Reform in Serbia  
 Senior Project Officer, Quality Education for All, Serbia  
 Project Assistant, Quality Education for All, Serbia  
 Horizontal Facility Regional Communications Officer  
 Senior Project Officer, Combating discrimination and promoting diversity in Serbia  
 Project Assistant, Combating Discrimination and Promoting Diversity in Serbia  
 Senior Project Officer, Horizontal Facility: Strengthening Anti Trafficking Action in Serbia  
 Senior Project Officer, Protecting Freedom of Expression and of the Media in Serbia (PRO-FREX-S)  
 Project Officer, Prevent Bullying and Peer Violence in Schools  
 Senior Project Officer, HELP in the Western Balkans  
 Project Assistant, HELP in the Western Balkans  
 Programme Manager, Preventing Money-Laundering and Terrorist Financing in Serbia  
 Senior Project Officer, Preventing money laundering and terrorist financing in Serbia

Project Officer, ROMACTED phase II  
Project Officer, Roma Integration Programme

### **Beneficiary/Partners**

Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, HF Focal Point  
Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, project manager  
Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, project manager  
Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, project manager  
Delegation of the European Union to Serbia, project manager  
Government Agent before the ECtHR, State Attorney's Office  
Public Prosecutor, Supreme Public Prosecution Office  
Supreme Court, Legal Advisor  
Institute of Comparative Law, Researcher  
Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Cooperation and EU Integration representative  
Protector of Citizens, Advisor  
Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, Department for Minority Rights  
Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, Department for Anti-Discrimination, representative  
Action Expert/Psychologist  
Ministry of Education, Assistant Minister  
Institute for Education Improvement of the Republic of Serbia, representative  
Mentor School, Teacher, Coordinator and Mentor  
Mentor School, Principal, Coordinator  
Curricular Working Group, Institute for Education Improvement of the Republic of Serbia, Member  
Centre for Education Policy. Researcher/Trainer  
NGO Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, lawyer  
Femplatz NGO, representative  
Media Diversity Institute, NGO, representative  
Commissioner for Access to Information and Data Protection, representative  
Commissioner for Access to Information and Data Protection, Advisor  
Journalists Association of Serbia, Lawyer  
Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media, Legal Advisor,  
Education for 21 Century, NGO, staff member  
University of Belgrade, Education Faculty, Professor  
Atina, NGO, staff member  
Network of Organisations for Post-Penal Support in Serbia, staff member  
A 11 – Initiative for Economic and Social Rights, NGO, representative  
Youth European Ambassador  
Protector of Citizens, Advisor

### **Other Stakeholders**

OSCE Mission to Serbia, National Legal Officer,  
OSCE Mission to Serbia, National Programme Officer,  
OSCE Mission to Serbia, Media Department officer  
UN Country Team Serbia, project officer  
UNICEF Officer  
UNHCR Officer  
UNDP, Regional Project Coordinator  
Centre for Democracy Foundation, NGO, representative  
European Movement, NGO, representative



## Annex 8: Documentary Sources

### Albania

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## **Kosovo**

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## **Montenegro**

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## North Macedonia

### Project documentation:

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