

EVALUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES



Abridged report
June 2023

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organisation
DIO	Directorate of Internal Oversight
DPC	Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
(I)NGO	(International) non-governmental organisation
IT	Information technology
MAE	Main Administrative Entity
PMM	Project Management Methodology



Executive summary

This document is an abridged version of the “[Evaluation of civil society participation in co-operation activities](#)”.

The evaluation was conducted to contribute to decision making in terms of the Organisation’s efforts to strengthen civil society participation and to inform a specific strategic priority of the Secretary General.

Civil society constitutes an important element of the democratic process, and the Council of Europe encourages civil society involvement in the development and implementation of co-operation programmes, projects and activities. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the current practice, its extensiveness, strengths and weaknesses of civil society participation in co-operation activities, including the extent to which the human rights approach is applied. The lessons learned and good practice examples found in this report should inform key decisions related to civil society participation in the work of the Council of Europe. The evaluation complements the previous evaluations, “[Evaluation of the contribution of NGOs to standard setting and monitoring in the Council of Europe](#)” and the “[Evaluation of the Council of Europe’s Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations](#)”.

Methodology

The evaluation team reviewed 15 strategic papers and 135 project documents, conducted 86 interviews and two focal groups involving a total of 120 representatives of the Council of Europe, donors, authorities and civil society organisations (CSOs). The team also conducted three surveys, inviting 1 825 staff and CSO representatives in total to respond. Some 797 responses were received (44%). Data were analysed through quantitative analysis, qualitative content analysis and comparative analysis, using coding to interpret responses. This analysis was then interpreted according to a theory-based framework using a theory of change and against an evaluation matrix.

Findings

The Council of Europe performs well in terms of how it uses civil society participation in co-operation activities to meet project objectives. CSOs have needs and expectations which can go beyond project objectives, such as funding of their staff and operational costs, and alliances and political support for their positions, which the Council of Europe cannot meet. To address CSOs’ unrealistic expectations, more communication on what civil society participation in co-operation activities means would be useful, with a clear explanation of the role

the Council of Europe plays, particularly where it contrasts with the high level of funding and political support provided by donors and other international organisations. Civil society participation in co-operation activities provides many opportunities to make extensive connections with national authorities and civil society within member states. These are excellent opportunities to contribute at the organisational level and not only within co-operation activities, but these opportunities are not always taken by the Council of Europe through its project teams. At the organisational level, the Council of Europe is strongly encouraged to strengthen civil society participation, most recently expressed in the Reykjavik Declaration.

The evaluation confirmed the findings of previous evaluations in terms of the challenges to sustain relationships with CSOs and to select the most pertinent CSOs to participate. The selection processes of CSOs for co-operation activities are considered to be fair and transparent, but there is room for improvement in engaging more diverse groups of CSOs. There is very limited adaptation of working procedures and processes to CSOs' situations, which effectively prevents some CSOs from participating in co-operation activities. The evaluation found that there is room for broader inclusion of civil society to ensure more diversity. This does not rule out accounting for the risks that civil society participation can sometimes bring in cases of political considerations and requirements of confidentiality.

The time available for project staff to allocate to this work is also a resource issue for civil society participation in co-operation activities. The favourable perspectives and comments revealed in the evaluation data confirm the skill and success with which project staff in the Council of Europe manage high pressure and workload to add transversal aspects of project management into their work. The Council of Europe relies on these individual competencies of project staff. For the integration of civil society participation in project management in more depth and breadth, there needs to be a more systematic approach, with organisational mechanisms in place that support and promote project teams' work to strengthen civil society participation in co-operation activities.

The Organisation is handling the politically sensitive relationships with national authorities very well and manages to connect civil society with governments even in polarised political contexts. As a result, co-operation activities are more attuned to citizens' diverse needs. Civil society's participation is also effective in strengthening project results and CSOs are provided with a good platform to contribute and influence authorities on better fulfilment of Council of Europe standards and conventions. Moreover, civil society participation in co-operation activities adds value to the gender mainstreaming and human rights approach of the Council of Europe because it provides concrete measures to implement these transversal approaches. However, the extent this occurs is limited to sectors where it is easiest to achieve, such as Roma and Traveller¹ rights and children's rights, and it is not systematic, neither in implementation nor in reporting of co-operation activities.

Conclusions

The main conclusions are the following:

- ▶ civil society participation in co-operation activities could contribute, in the words of the Reykjavik Declaration, "to further strengthening the work of the Organisation in the field" and to "further reinforcement of the Organisation's outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organisations";
- ▶ better communication is needed with CSOs, with room to empower civil society even more to better support organisational level goals of contributing to the fulfilment of, lobbying and advocating for, and monitoring the fulfilment of standards and conventions;
- ▶ the selection of CSOs is not as inclusive as it could be, nor does it lead to as great a diversity of CSOs as it could do;
- ▶ moreover, the working processes of the Council of Europe for CSOs to participate in co-operation activities act as a barrier to inclusive participation;
- ▶ civil society participation in co-operation activities very successfully brings civil society closer to public authorities and services, which in turn strengthens the focus on citizens as rights holders, on gender mainstreaming and on the human rights approach;

1. The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

- ▶ civil society participation is effective when the broader aims of that participation are targeted, when there is an alliance of diverse CSOs, and when there is a more permanent basis of engagement beyond single projects;
- ▶ impact comes from ensuring civil society participation in co-operation activities is cumulative – over and beyond one project – and creates networks of diverse CSOs;
- ▶ the Council of Europe facilitator role in enabling productive working relationships between civil society and national authorities is unique and brings great added value;
- ▶ finally, civil society participation in co-operation activities naturally combines very well with the existing Project Management Methodology (PMM) and human rights approach and can be further integrated.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Include a section on civil society participation in co-operation activities in the civil society policy being developed. (High priority)

Recommendation 2: Communicate with CSOs on a regular basis on how they can be involved in Council of Europe work beyond projects. (High priority)

Recommendation 3: Develop the stakeholder module of the PMM information technology (IT) tool to track participating CSOs. (High priority)

Recommendation 4: Build project staff capacity to engage CSOs in co-operation activities to connect to the overall work of the Organisation. (High priority)

Recommendation 5: Explore alternative procedures that better enable a wider range of civil society participation, particularly CSOs in precarious situations. (High priority)

Recommendation 6: Include resources for different forms of support to civil society in all country and thematic action plans and programmes. (High priority)

Recommendation 7: Develop concrete measures to increase synergies among CSOs in countries where co-operation activities take place, and prioritise working with CSOs collectively. (High priority)

Recommendation 8: Integrate goals and indicators for civil society participation into individual project and programme design and include a section on civil society in annual reports. (High priority)

Recommendation 9: Meet with other international organisations and donors on a regular basis to exchange good practices on civil society participation. (Medium priority)



1. Introduction and evaluation approach

1. The Council of Europe promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe and beyond. One of its goals is to achieve a greater unity between its members by establishing common standards and carrying out co-operation activities in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms.²
2. Civil society constitutes an important element of the democratic process. Civil society is invited to participate in and/or co-organise activities, projects and events in the national implementation of the European Convention of Human Rights, children's rights, media and data protection, trafficking in human beings, anti-discrimination and inclusion, and violence against women, to name but a few.³
3. The 2023 Reykjavik Summit of the Council of Europe underlines the importance of civil society in its call for a review and further reinforcement of the Organisation's outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organisations and national human rights institutions.⁴
4. The evaluation is expected to contribute to organisational learning in working with civil society, complementing the previous evaluations related to standard setting and monitoring and the Conference of INGOs.⁵

1.1 Rationale and purpose of the evaluation

5. As a thematic evaluation, the purpose of this evaluation is to assess the current practice, its extensiveness, strengths and weaknesses of civil society participation in co-operation activities, including the extent to which the human rights approach is applied. The evaluation is formative, to better understand civil society

2. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe, available at https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016808fd8b9.

3. Follow-up to the Helsinki decisions on civil society, Final Report SG/Inf(2022)13, available at <https://rm.coe.int/follow-up-to-the-helsinki-decisions-on-civil-society-implementation/1680a62b47>.

4. Reykjavik Declaration, May 2023, available at <https://rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1>.

5. Evaluation of the Conference of INGOs, available at <https://rm.coe.int/dio-2021-34-conf-ofingos-report-en/1680a2c2c8>.

participation in co-operation activities and identify the lessons that can be learned from civil society participation in co-operation activities. It involves an assessment of the effectiveness of the contribution of civil society to co-operation activities to enhance the impact of civil society participation in co-operation activities.

1.2 Evaluation scope

6. Co-operation activities in the context of this evaluation are defined as all projects implemented through extra-budgetary resources. The timeframe was set to include the projects that fell within the three most recent Programme and Budget cycles, 2018-19, 2020-21, and 2022-25. To narrow the focus, the evaluation did not attempt to assess the results of projects targeting civil society specifically, rather it included the cross-cutting elements of civil society participation in all types of projects, without focusing on civil society as a target group.

7. Co-operation activities financed by extra-budgetary resources have been implemented or are in planning in the form of over 840 projects⁶ since 2018, in more than 40 countries and regions, by over 60 different divisions/units of the Council of Europe.

1.3 Evaluation objectives, criteria and questions

8. The objective of this evaluation was to inform decision makers about civil society's participation in Council of Europe co-operation activities by:

1. analysing civil society's participation in co-operation activities, with particular emphasis on good practices and existing obstacles;
2. identifying the added value of civil society's participation in co-operation activities;
3. identifying possibilities for optimising this participation.

9. The evaluation assessed civil society participation in co-operation activities against the evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and coherence. The overarching evaluation questions and sub-questions were as follows.

- ▶ **Relevance:** To what extent is civil society participation in co-operation activities relevant to the aims of the Council of Europe?
 - To what extent does civil society participation in co-operation meet the Council of Europe's needs?
 - To what extent does civil society participation in co-operation activities meet civil society's needs and priorities?
- ▶ **Efficiency:** To what extent does civil society contribute and participate efficiently in co-operation activities through Council of Europe processes designed to facilitate that participation?
 - To what extent does the Council of Europe apply inclusiveness, equity and transparency in the selection of civil society?
 - To what extent do the Council of Europe's processes and working arrangements allow for efficient participation of civil society in co-operation activities?
- ▶ **Effectiveness:** To what extent is civil society participation in co-operation activities effective?
 - Under which conditions is civil society participation in co-operation activities most effective?
 - What are the reasons why civil society participation does or does not improve the effectiveness of co-operation activities?
 - In terms of impact, to what extent does civil society's participation in co-operation enable civil society to fulfil its role in strengthening diversity in co-operation activities?
 - In terms of impact, what are the unintended effects of civil society participation in co-operation activities?
- ▶ **Coherence:** To what extent is civil society participation in co-operation activities coherent with Council of Europe aims for civil society?
 - To what extent does civil society participation in co-operation activities complement its participation in other aspects of the Council of Europe and other institutions' approaches?
 - What is the added value of civil society participation in co-operation activities in terms of the Council of Europe's gender mainstreaming and human rights approach?

6. According to data extracted from the PMM IT tool on 6 July 2022.

1.4 Evaluation methodology

10. The evaluation team reviewed 15 strategic papers and 135 project documents, conducted 86 interviews and two focal groups involving a total of 120 representatives of the Council of Europe, donors, authorities and CSOs. The team also conducted three surveys, inviting 1 825 staff and CSO representatives in total to respond. Some 797 responses were received (44%). Data were analysed through quantitative analysis, qualitative content analysis and comparative analysis, using coding to interpret responses. This analysis was then interpreted according to a theory-based framework using a theory of change and against an evaluation matrix.



2. Findings

11. The aims of the Council of Europe for civil society participation were determined from the main strategic documents such as the [Committee of Ministers recommendation to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe](#), the [Reykjavik Declaration](#), the [Helsinki Declaration](#), the [Strategic Framework of the Council of Europe](#), the follow-up to the Helsinki decisions on civil society – [Final Report](#), the [PMM](#) and the Practical Guide for the Human Rights Approach in Co-operation Projects. The aims are to enable civil society to contribute to, lobby and advocate for, and monitor the fulfilment of Council of Europe standards and conventions.

12. Understanding these aims allowed the evaluation team to identify additional opportunities presented to the Organisation through civil society participation in co-operation activities. The findings can be considered on two levels as a result: the Council of Europe’s success in enhancing project results through civil society participation; and the extent co-operation activities enable stronger civil society participation in the Council of Europe.

No.	Findings
Relevance: optimising co-operation activities’ opportunities	
1	The Council of Europe performs well in using civil society participation in co-operation activities to meet organisational needs in terms of project objectives.
2	The Council of Europe’s aims to ensure that civil society effectively contribute to the fulfilment of, lobbying and advocating for, and monitoring of the fulfilment of standards and conventions are only partially achievable in co-operation activities because the Organisation cannot finance these aims to any great extent through extra-budgetary resources.
3	The extent to which civil society participation in co-operation activities contributes to the Council of Europe’s overall aims for civil society participation, mentioned in Finding 2, is limited because, in the majority of cases, only specific project needs are met through this participation, without consideration for broader aims.
4	CSOs are not always aware of the fact that the Council of Europe does not have the capacity to finance civil society in the sense of a donor, nor that such financing is not a priority of the Organisation.

No.	Findings
5	Many CSO representatives and project staff do not see very clearly how civil society participation in co-operation activities could enable civil society to contribute to fulfilling human rights, democracy and rule of law.
Efficiency: fairness and transparency towards inclusion and diversity	
6	The Organisation performs well in terms of the selection processes being fair and transparent, and this is universally recognised by all stakeholders.
7	Selection of CSOs to participate in co-operation activities focuses on fairness and transparency and does not take into account inclusion and diversity as much as it could.
8	Civil society participation is not insisted on as much as possible from the perspective of inclusion and diversity, while these would be essential principles for civil society to perform its role foreseen at the organisational level, in co-operation activities. There are limits, at the same time, to how much the Council of Europe can address this.
9	Grants and funding requirements are overly complicated for the majority of CSOs to handle and often represent more work than benefits.
10	Council of Europe working processes, communication and interaction are unsuited for enabling inclusive and diverse participation of CSOs at national, local and grass-roots levels.
Effectiveness: bringing co-operation activities closer to citizens	
11	Civil society participation contributes to the gender mainstreaming and human rights approach of the Council of Europe. This enables the Council of Europe very successfully to bring civil society closer to national authorities and enables CSOs to perform their role.
12	Civil society participation in co-operation activities is most effective when the broader aims of that participation are targeted in terms of assessing the implementation of Council of Europe standards, including rights holders' perspectives and bringing focus on human rights.
13	The alliance of diverse CSOs makes civil society participation in co-operation activities more effective by amplifying the results to wider circles of beneficiaries.
14	Civil society participation in co-operation activities is more effective with a more permanent basis of engagement and a broader scope of participation than individual projects.
15	Civil society participation in co-operation activities is most hampered by confrontational political contexts, as CSO presence is interrogated and advocacy and scrutiny resisted.
16	Civil society participation in co-operation activities has impact when the participation is cumulative and over and beyond one single project and its specific goals.
17	There is a concentration of resources and participation among few CSOs when projects do not focus on alliances of diverse CSOs. This sometimes leads to gatekeeper situations that make benefits exclusive and are counter to the aims of civil society participation.
Coherence: Council of Europe uniqueness with civil society and authorities	
18	There is real added value in the Council of Europe's distinct approach in building meaningful, sustainable relationships between civil society and authorities, that complements other organisations' approaches to civil society participation.
19	Civil society participation in co-operation activities strongly complements gender mainstreaming and the human rights approach in project management and provides concrete measures with which to implement them in projects.
20	The cross-cutting, transversal approaches in the PMM that provide a framework for civil society participation are not fully embraced or reported on for several reasons, including time pressures, inconsistent emphasis on civil society participation, and adjustments needed in approach and focus of existing stakeholders.



3. Lessons learned

13. It proved very difficult to establish an up-to-date list of CSOs because there is no practice to try to organise this information systematically, and the information is contained in different, unrelated documents and files across different entities. This results in an incomplete picture of civil society related to specific thematic areas and in countries where there are field offices. The diversity, varied perspectives, connectedness and collective influence are vital elements of high-functioning civil society, which form the basis of the essential contribution civil society can have to the Council of Europe. Detailed, up-to-date knowledge of broader civil society related to thematic areas of the Council of Europe is therefore fundamental, and only accessible based on a systematic, regularly reviewed database. In this case the benefit of spending time and effort was ad hoc for this evaluation, but stakeholder management should be an integral part of all areas of work in the Council of Europe and therefore the maintenance of the database needs to be as efficient as possible.

14. The distinction is very important between international, regional and local grass-roots levels and between types of CSOs (watchdog, human rights defender, community based, victim support) and this was exemplified in discussions about the interrelation between INGOs and national CSOs on several occasions. National CSOs are not always equipped and competent to address intergovernmental issues like policy and standards and need support to perform such a function. INGOs enable connection to regional and national CSOs to varying degrees of success, while for national issues direct contact with the national CSO is more effective. This proved very similar for the distinction between local CSOs and a national umbrella organisation. Likewise watchdog CSOs need to be connected with authorities in a different way to victim support CSOs whose expertise is more welcomed. In addition, some sectors tend to have more opportunities for civil society participation than others. Projects that can combine different approaches to adapt to these differences enjoy better civil society participation than those that are not able to do so.

15. The youth sector and the Schools of Political Studies prove to have impact and renown across civil society throughout the Council of Europe. In many of the interviews, CSO representatives mentioned both when describing the further effects of enabling civil society participation. The work they do with civil society has

more explicit objectives of strengthening civil society than most Council of Europe co-operation activities, but nonetheless they provide examples of how to take into account the nature of civil society by recognising its needs enabling in addition to being invited, the potential of CSOs needs working on as well as the existing services they can already provide, and the collective aspect of civil society needs to be focused on.

16. Procedures can be simplified to engage CSOs, as was reported in certain projects to deal with similar tasks and purposes as other projects. In one case, grants were not used for CSOs; rather, standard contracts were signed with the CSOs in question. This transferred the work of the CSO into simply delivering the terms of reference without going through the planning, monitoring and reporting process required for grants. This demonstrates how different contexts and circumstances may be suitable for simpler arrangements according to the different types of CSO involved in the co-operation activities. The same can apply to simplifying communication procedures to simply keeping civil society informed through contact lists, so that there is more basic awareness of Council of Europe work.

17. In some instances, Council of Europe project staff were revealed to assume the involvement of civil society through the nature of the work. In the examples studied, this proved to be a safe assumption as civil society participation was integral to the working methods of the authorities. In other cases though, there were found to be suggestions that authorities would be willing to target greater civil society participation, but they were not always aware of the possibility or ways in which that could be done. Good practice of sharing guidelines on civil society participation enabled project teams to communicate and influence authorities more concerning greater participation and involvement of CSOs. This could become standard practice in all cases, so that assumptions do not fail and willingness to follow this approach is harnessed.

18. Projects that achieve the greatest level of civil society participation are designed to have different components and different activity types, such as awareness raising, capacity building, research and surveying, and collaborative drafting processes. Within these components, they also have a variety of topics and approaches that attract different types of CSOs and establish different points in common with different CSOs. This provides more opportunities for different CSOs, that can then opt for involvement in areas closer to the work they are already doing. It also creates a need for more coalitions and networking between CSOs, helping to strengthen the civil society fabric in given thematic areas.



4. Conclusions and recommendations

19. The Council of Europe's approach to civil society participation in co-operation activities is suitable to achieve specific project objectives. However, this approach is not very clear in relation to the Organisation's overall aims for civil society participation. From this point of view, civil society participation in co-operation activities is only partial and misses the broader aims of enabling civil society to contribute to the fulfilment of, lobbying and advocating for, and monitoring of the fulfilment of standards and conventions. Different perceptions of civil society participation in co-operation activities could improve with better communication to CSOs. Civil society participation in co-operation activities provides many opportunities to make extensive connections with national authorities and civil society within member states. These are excellent opportunities to contribute at the organisational level and not only within co-operation activities, but these opportunities are not always taken by the Council of Europe through its project teams.

20. Civil society participation in co-operation activities could contribute more, in the words of the Reykjavik Declaration, "to further strengthening the work of the Organisation in the field" and to "further reinforcement of the Organisation's outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organisations". Strengthening the work of the Council of Europe in the field and reinforcing outreach to and engagement with CSOs can be very effectively combined, bringing greater impact to both aspects. This would require strengthening the connection between co-operation activities and the Council of Europe's overall aims for civil society participation, by communicating more with civil society about how CSOs can contribute to fulfilling, lobbying and advocating for and monitoring European standards and conventions through co-operation activities and including a broader range of CSOs in the co-operation activities themselves.

Recommendation 1: The upcoming policy/strategy for civil society participation should include a section on civil society participation in co-operation activities. This should clarify how civil society participation in co-operation activities should contribute to the Organisation's overall policy/strategy for civil society participation and include concrete measures to fully benefit from the opportunities co-operation activities provide to connect with local and national civil society and strengthen civil society's role in contributing to the fulfilment of, lobbying and advocating for, and monitoring of the fulfilment of standards and conventions. (High priority)

Recommendation 2: CSOs should be more informed on a regular basis on how they can be involved in Council of Europe work beyond projects (including making use of the specific section on co-operation activities of the policy/strategy for civil society participation once it is available) through concrete means such as newsletters, group e-mails, communiques, etc. (High priority)

Recommendation 3: The DPC should develop the stakeholder module of the PMM IT tool to act as a CSO database to better collect and update information about civil society information in all the geographic areas in which co-operation activities are taking place. (High priority)

Recommendation 4: The DPC should build Council of Europe project staff capacity to engage CSOs in co-operation activities and, in a wider sense than participation in individual projects, to build stronger connections with civil society and contribute to the Organisation's overall policy/strategy for civil society participation. This should include guidance on dealing with national authorities that are restrictive towards civil society. (High priority)

21. The selection of CSOs to participate in co-operation activities is fair and transparent, but it is not as inclusive nor does it lead to as great a diversity of CSOs as it could do. Greater inclusiveness and diversity would increase the contribution of civil society participation in co-operation activities to overall aims of civil society participation in the Council of Europe. In any case, the working processes of the Council of Europe for CSOs to participate in co-operation activities act as a barrier to inclusive participation, while communication and direct interaction with civil society could also be improved in the implementation of co-operation activities.

Recommendation 5: The Private Office of the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General, together with relevant MAEs, should explore alternative procedures that better enable a wider range of civil society participation, particularly those in precarious situations. These more flexible alternatives to existing procedures should encompass invitations, participant registration, translation and interpreting, travel and per diems, consultancy, and grants. (High priority)

22. Civil society participation in co-operation activities very successfully brings civil society closer to public authorities and services, which in turn strengthens the focus on citizens as rights holders, gender mainstreaming and the human rights approach. Civil society participation is effective when the broader aims of that participation are targeted, when there is an alliance of diverse CSOs, and when there is a more permanent basis of engagement beyond single projects. It is least effective when the political context is confrontational rather than co-operative, leading to polarisation and manipulation of civil society.

Recommendation 6: The DPC or MAEs responsible should include resources for support to civil society in all country-level and thematic action plans and programmes whenever possible, either through standalone projects or specific budgetary allocations across programmes. This funding would provide for concrete measures to be implemented in countries where there are external offices, more communication with CSOs, and greater analysis of civil society in countries where there are co-operation activities (see relevant complementary recommendations 2, 4, 7 and 8). (High priority)

23. Impact comes from ensuring that civil society participation in co-operation activities is cumulative, over and beyond one project, and that it creates networks of diverse CSOs. Competition and monopolisation of participation by CSOs that become gatekeepers reduces impact.

Recommendation 7: The DPC, together with MAEs and involving external offices where relevant, should develop concrete measures to increase synergies among CSOs in countries where co-operation activities take place, and prioritise working with CSOs collectively rather than isolated CSOs/civil society experts. Such aims should be explicitly explained in the policy/strategy for civil society participation. (High priority)

Recommendation 8: The DPC, together with MAEs, should integrate goals and indicators for civil society participation into individual project and programme design and include a section on civil society participation in co-operation activities in annual reports, including country action plan progress and final reports and evaluation reports. (High priority)

24. The Council of Europe's facilitator role in enabling to build productive relationships between civil society and national authorities and to work together is unique and brings great added value.

25. Civil society participation in co-operation activities naturally combines very well with the existing PMM and human rights approach. The PMM and frameworks for civil society participation are not fully embraced nor fully reported on. This results in cross-cutting approaches strongly considered to be important not concretely being put into practice, nor being prioritised sufficiently.

Recommendation 9: The DPC, through its external offices, should meet with other international organisations and donors on a regular basis to exchange good practices on civil society participation in co-operation activities. These meetings should be used by the Council of Europe to emphasise its added value and unique approach to complement other approaches and harness support from international organisations and donors. (Medium priority)

Civil society participation in co-operation activities could contribute, in the words of the Reykjavik Declaration, “to further strengthening the work of the Organisation in the field” and to “further reinforcement of the Organisation’s outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organisations.” The evaluation found that the Council of Europe successfully manages politically sensitive relationships such as those between civil society organisations and authorities. Civil society participation in co-operation activities improves project results and reinforces civil society organisations’ influence over authorities regarding human rights. Areas for improvement were identified where more depth and breadth to civil society participation in co-operation activities would be desirable, while greater potential links at organisational level with local civil society organisations are not fully taken advantage of by the Organisation. Recommendations are made to further optimise civil society participation in co-operation activities, including in policy to be developed on civil society participation in the Council of Europe. The evaluation complements the previous evaluations, “Evaluation of the contribution of NGOs to standard setting and monitoring in the Council of Europe” and the “Evaluation of the Council of Europe’s Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations”.

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