

# EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REYKJAVÍK DECLARATION



**Final Report**  
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DIO-EVA(2025)03

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### **Disclaimer**

The evaluation was managed by a senior evaluator under the supervision of the Head of Evaluation and the Director of Internal Oversight and implemented by KEK-CDC. The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team members from KEK-CDC.

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## Abbreviations

<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>CDDEM</b>	Steering Committee on Democracy
<b>CDDH-ENV</b>	Steering Committee on Human Rights - Environment
<b>CGU</b>	Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine
<b>CINGO</b>	Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations
<b>Court (the)</b>	European Court of Human Rights
<b>CURE</b>	Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe
<b>DC</b>	Directorate of Communications
<b>DGI</b>	Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law
<b>DGII</b>	Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity
<b>DIO</b>	Directorate of Internal Oversight
<b>DLAPIL</b>	Directorate of Legal Advice and Public International Law
<b>DPB</b>	Directorate of Programme and Budget
<b>DPC</b>	Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
<b>EDQM</b>	European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and Healthcare
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GME</b>	Ad Hoc Multidisciplinary Group on the Environment
<b>GR-PBA</b>	Rapporteur Group on Programme, Budget and Administration
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>MAE</b>	Major Administrative Entity
<b>OECD-DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>PACE</b>	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

## Executive summary

a. **Introduction:** The Reykjavík Declaration (referred to as “the Declaration”) was adopted at the 4th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe. Following the Declaration’s adoption and the Ministers’ Deputies’ invitation to the Secretary General to assess the degree to which the Reykjavík Declaration has been implemented, this evaluation was included in the Directorate of Internal Oversight’s (DIO) 2024-2027 work programme as a strategic evaluation.

b. **Purpose and scope:** The evaluation aims to assess how the Declaration has been used in designing and putting in place relevant measures to achieve the intended results and – as appropriate – what initial changes resulting from these measures have materialised within the Council of Europe. The evaluation addresses the implementation of the Declaration from its adoption at the Reykjavík Summit on 16-17 May 2023 to December 2024. The evaluation covers all areas of work of the Council of Europe to provide a holistic understanding of the effects of the Declaration on the Organisation. The process leading up to the adoption of the Declaration as well as the Declaration itself is not being analysed in the framework of this evaluation. The results of the evaluation are primarily intended to be used by the Committee of Ministers in their upcoming budgetary discussions for the next biennium and by the Council of Europe’s Secretariat and its institutions to refine the future response to the Declaration in the years to come.

c. **Methodology:** The evaluation was conducted by KEK – CDC between August 2024 and March 2025. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach comprising desk research, semi-structured interviews, workshops, online surveys, a public engagement and sentiment analysis, and an analysis of Programme and Budget data. 116 individuals (Council of Europe Secretariat, chairs of committees, representatives of member states, representatives of partner organisations and donors, and representatives of civil society organisations) were consulted through interviews, 53 Council of Europe staff members participated in workshops and 5% of staff members responded to a staff survey. Findings and conclusions are derived from triangulated data collected through multiple methods and from a range of different stakeholders. The period since the adoption of the Declaration has been short; the evaluation’s conclusions are presented with a recognition of this context and the fact that implementation is ongoing.

d. **Context:** The years leading up to the Summit and the Declaration were characterised by external and internal challenges for the Organisation. The Russian Federation’s full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine and its devastating consequences for one of its member states made it necessary to recommit to the Council of Europe’s values and give direction to the Organisation’s work. The Summit in May 2023 – the first summit in 17 years – provided the framework for this. Overall, reaffirming the core values of the Council of Europe (democracy, human rights and the rule of law), strengthening multilateralism and uniting with a view to supporting Ukraine were shared concerns across the Council of Europe’s member states. The Declaration’s core elements reflect the range of the concerns expressed, with a strong focus given to Ukraine-related content.

## Key findings

e. **Effectiveness:** The response to the Declaration to date is effective in general but there are areas that require further attention. The Declaration’s adoption was followed by systematic reflection and analysis of work across the Organisation to identify links between the Declaration and

existing areas of work, and to identify new opportunities. The process of translating the Declaration into the Programme and Budget led to a restructured Programme and Budget aligned with the Declaration and to an increase in the budget. At the same time, elements of the published Programme and Budget could be clarified further to improve understanding, and staff perceive that the transparency and inclusivity of the budgeting process could be further enhanced. The budget increase is welcomed, however, despite real increases in 2024, inflation-adjusted budgets remain below 2020 levels in some important areas, challenging many areas of work to meet the Declaration's expectations with existing resources. Overall, important steps have been initiated and already taken in the focus and prominently mentioned areas of work (e.g. Register of Damage, Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU), AI Convention, Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDDEM), Ad-hoc Multidisciplinary Group on Environment (GME)). Nevertheless, high expectations remain to be fulfilled (e.g. comprehensive compensation mechanism, strategy for democracy, Reykjavík Committee on Environment). Engagement of civil society and youth participation became more topical after the Declaration and have been addressed to varying degrees. Council of Europe engagement with civil society has improved since the Declaration, but the extent and quality of this engagement need to be further strengthened. Member states' political will, engagement, and financial support need to be maintained to achieve the further outcomes and impact of the Declaration.

f. **Efficiency:** Implementation of the Declaration to date is largely on track and efficient, despite the lack of a clear timeframe on which to base the efficiency assessment. Some activities have been particularly promptly implemented while others are moving at a slower pace. This is partly due to the dialogue that is required in some areas to turn the Declaration into concrete priorities and actions, as well as in finding consensus. Newly established entities and bodies (e.g. CGU) have more flexibility than existing structures and processes to implement innovative approaches that support greater efficiency. Existing structures face more challenges in prioritisation.

g. **Relevance:** The Organisation has given a relevant response to the needs of the geopolitical context expressed in the Declaration. The Organisation took concrete actions on focus and prominently mentioned areas of work and, at the same time, continues its ongoing activities as the Declaration validated its work and "raison d'être". The Organisation paid attention to further integrating civil society engagements and youth participation in its work. The Register of Damage, the establishment of the CDDDEM and the GME, as well as the Secretary General's exploratory discussions on democratic backsliding are examples of direct responses to the Declaration. The Organisation's response to the Declaration on the environment is criticised by civil society actors for its low level of ambition. The Declaration's influence remains primarily confined to institutional and governmental audiences, and it has not yet succeeded in reaching civil society.

h. **Coherence:** The implementation of the Declaration is coherent with previous activities of the Organisation in that it builds on and continues initiatives that were already underway or planned. The Declaration has facilitated more systematic and robust internal discussions and has strengthened co-operation within the Organisation, yet transversal work is not yet a standard practice. Efforts in co-ordinating and collaborating with external actors are contributing to more external coherence. The EU is the main partner, and the already good collaboration has been strengthened by the Declaration and its follow-up, yielding mutually beneficial outcomes. However,

co-operation with other external actors remains in general underdeveloped and outreach would benefit from further attention; this has started to take shape.

## Conclusions

i. Following the Declaration's adoption, the Council of Europe's Secretariat and its institutions have actively engaged in taking relevant steps to implement the Declaration. The process of translating the Declaration into the Programme and Budget was supported by the proposal of different scenarios which created a positive environment for the discussions and decisions and led to an increase in budget.

j. Implementation was more efficient in areas of work defined in concrete terms by the Declaration and benefitting from the united political will of member states. This is particularly the case for the Ukraine-related areas of work. The Declaration greatly facilitated progress in areas facing resistance (e.g. execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights). However, the pace of development has been slower in areas that left more room for interpretation of the Declaration's wording and intention. In such areas there is often a lack of consensus amongst member states on actions to be taken, or a lack of unity at member state level (e.g. environment).

k. With a few exceptions, much of what has happened since the Declaration's adoption is a continuation of activities that were ongoing or already planned prior to the Declaration. The Declaration validated and, thus, strengthened these activities. Continuity of work is important and ensures coherence over time. It is necessary to balance continuation with expectations of change following the Declaration and the increase in budget. In this context, it is important to note that current funding is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the expectations set by the Declaration based on the current functioning and scope of work of the Council of Europe, even taking into consideration (potential) efficiency gains generated by the administrative reform. The Organisation needs to be realistic about what can be achieved with existing levels of funding.

l. Continuation of efforts on accountability mechanisms for Ukraine, democracy and the environment is required to fulfil the Declaration's high expectations. These are mainly related to the establishment of a comprehensive compensation mechanism for Ukraine, a strategy for democracy, and the Reykjavík Committee on Environment. Areas that might not materialise as planned or not at all need to be analysed and results communicated to manage expectations. This will be essential for member state and stakeholder engagement, ownership, and support, operationally, financially and politically.

m. The Declaration sets important goals for the way the Organisation works beyond its member states and with external partners (external dimension) as well as its co-operation work in the field. Moreover, it emphasised the need for broader participation by and inclusion of civil society and youth in its activities. Some progress was made in those areas, however, next steps and achieving its intended objectives – depending on the ambitions pursued – require changes in the paradigms of the Organisation and its functioning.

n. The implementation of the Declaration has had positive effects on the Organisation, but it is too early to assess impact. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that impact is not only dependent of the work of the Organisation but depends largely on member states taking timely and

substantive actions to follow up on their commitments. Thus, potential impact goes far beyond the work of the Council of Europe's Secretariat and other bodies.

o. Taking stock of the role that the Declaration has played in providing guidance, facilitating discussions, and rallying around values, and the work conducted since the Declaration's adoption, provides a timely opportunity for the Council of Europe to ensure (1) continuous engagement around its values and work for the successful continued implementation of the Declaration and achievements, (2) that key issues of the Declaration, partly unsolved at the moment, are addressed in order to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts, and (3) that stakeholders' expectations regarding the Declaration are managed.

p. **Recommendations:** The report makes five main recommendations to the Council of Europe on strengthening future implementation of the Declaration to improve its impact.

**Area 1:** Ensure continuous engagement around the values and work of the Council of Europe for the successful continued implementation of the Declaration.

**Recommendation 1:** The Council of Europe should develop an intentional and strategic approach drawing on existing and new avenues to maintain momentum created by the Declaration and continuous commitment of member states to the work of the Organisation, as well as their engagement in new priorities whenever needed.

**Recommendation 2:** The Council of Europe should foster inclusive internal processes and promote transversality across the Council of Europe institutions as well as within its Secretariat.

**Area 2:** Address key issues of the Declaration that remain partly unsolved.

**Recommendation 3:** The Council of Europe should establish scenarios representing possible levels of ambition, scope of work and required resources, taking into consideration existing framework documents and efforts, with respect to:

- engagement and participation of civil society in the Council of Europe's work;
- engagement and participation of youth in the Council of Europe's work;
- decentralisation of the Organisation to strengthen its co-operation work on the ground;
- engagement of the Council of Europe beyond its member states and with external partners (external dimension).

**Area 3:** Manage expectations by leveraging key deliverables and addressing discrepancies between potential expectations and what can and will be delivered as they arise.

**Recommendation 4:** The Council of Europe should strengthen its management framework (including planning, execution, and continuous monitoring) for initiatives where high expectations have not yet fully materialised, so that that decisions about whether/how to proceed with their implementation are informed by evidence gathered throughout the process. This could be particularly relevant for the following areas:

- A comprehensive compensation mechanism following the establishment of the Register of Damage;
- Democracy through the development of a strategy on democracy;
- The environment with the establishment of the Reykjavik Committee.

**Recommendation 5:** The Council of Europe should leverage the implementation and impact of deliverables following the Declaration to promote its work to various stakeholders, including civil society, using sharpened messaging.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Evaluation rationale, purposes and objectives

1. The Reykjavik Declaration (referred to as “the Declaration” in this report) was adopted at the 4th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, held during Iceland’s presidency of the Committee of Ministers. European leaders “have gathered in Reykjavik on 16 and 17 May 2023 to stand united against Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and to give further priority and direction to the Council of Europe’s work”.<sup>1</sup>

2. Following the Declaration’s adoption, the Ministers’ Deputies held discussions, took relevant decisions and decided to prepare a new Programme and Budget for 2024-2027 anticipating the end of the Programme and Budget 2022-2026. In this context, they “invited the Secretary General to present a mid-term review by mid-June 2025<sup>2</sup> (...) [and] to include an evaluation by the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO) to assess the degree to which the Reykjavik Declaration has been implemented, and which were the key factors influencing the implementation”.<sup>3</sup>

3. The evaluation was included in the DIO’s 2024-27 work programme as a strategic evaluation. The DIO prepared the Terms of Reference (ToR) and established a Reference Group for this evaluation that provided inputs into the draft ToR (final ToR dated 3 July 2024) and accompanied the entire evaluation process. The DIO commissioned the evaluation to the Swiss consulting firm KEK – CDC, which conducted the evaluation between August 2024 and March 2025.

4. The evaluation’s main purpose is to provide information on what has happened at Council of Europe level<sup>4</sup> following the Declaration, namely the process of translating the Declaration into the Programme and Budget, concrete follow-up steps taken, initial achievements and the early effects of the Declaration on the work of the Organisation. This aims to support a better understanding of the work and efforts undertaken in operationalising the Declaration since its adoption to support continuous, relevant – and, where required, improved – engagement of the Organisation in continued implementation of the Declaration in the coming years.

5. The evaluation aims to assess how the Council of Europe has used the Declaration in designing and putting in place actions, measures and initiatives to achieve results at Council of Europe level. The evaluation therefore sheds light on the overall question of what difference the Declaration has made to date – or can be expected to make in the future – for the Council of Europe at large,<sup>5</sup> including its dynamic triangle of standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation, as well as its external dimension.

6. Using the criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), the evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the

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1. Council of Europe (06/2023), “Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values” [4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe 16–17 May 2023] <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cm/reykjavik-summit>.

2. The original Committee of Ministers’ decision requested the evaluation for 15 August but the deadline was later moved to mid-June 2025 CM/Del/Dec(2024)1513/11.2-Part1.

3. Council of Europe (23/11/2023), “1481st (Budget) meeting, 21-23 November 2023” CM/Del/Dec(2023)1481/11.1-Part1 [11.1 COUNCIL OF EUROPE BUDGETS - Financial Years 2024-2027] <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680ad50ad>.

4. Distinguishing from the member states and other partner levels.

5. The Council of Europe refers to the Council of Europe Secretariat and every Council of Europe-related institution and body listed in the Programme and Budget.

steps taken in achieving early results and effects, the relevance of the Organisation's response to the Declaration, the coherence of the response with the work of the Organisation and external actors, and the efficiency of the response. The evaluation questions are presented in Appendix 2.

## 1.2. Evaluation scope

7. The evaluation addresses the **implementation** of the Declaration from its adoption at the Reykjavík Summit on 16–17 May 2023 until December 2024.

8. For this evaluation, implementation is understood as the process of putting in place the relevant measures to achieve the intended results of the Reykjavík Declaration and – as appropriate – the materialisation of the initial changes resulting from these measures at Council of Europe level.<sup>6</sup>

9. The evaluation covers all areas of work of the Council of Europe, to provide a holistic understanding of the effects of the Declaration on the Council of Europe. The evaluation covers activities where the Council of Europe is the main actor. The evaluation assesses actual and potential unintended positive or negative results of the implementation.

10. The scope of this evaluation does not include analysing the process leading up to the adoption of the Declaration, or the Declaration itself. Nevertheless, they are of fundamental importance to the evaluation and as such are considered important background and contextual information. Initiatives where other actors (such as member states and international actors) are principally in charge are not included in this evaluation.

## 1.3. Evaluation stakeholders and intended users

11. The evaluation's primary users are the Committee of Ministers, the Secretariat of the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe's institutions (Parliamentary Assembly, Congress, European Court of Human Rights, and Commissioner for Human Rights).

12. The Committee of Ministers intends to use the results of the evaluation together with the mid-term review of the Programme and Budget, to be completed by June 2025, in the context of its budgetary discussions for the next biennium. This evaluation and the mid-term review will provide complementary information on the work done and its achievements.

13. The Secretariat of the Council of Europe (particularly the Secretary General and senior management of the Organisation) and its institutions are expected to use the results of the evaluation to refine (as required) the future response to the Declaration for the years to come.

14. The evaluation report may also be useful to other stakeholders, namely member states and other states contributing to and benefiting from the work of the Council of Europe, and to other international organisations and civil society. Representatives of these stakeholders and actors' groups have been consulted in the context of the evaluation. The wider public may also find communicated aspects of the evaluation to be of interest.

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6. The working definition of implementation for the purposes of this evaluation is inspired by the ToR.

## 2. Evaluation design and methodology

15. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach comprising desk research and analysis of secondary data, semi-structured interviews, workshops, online surveys, a public sentiment analysis, and analysis of Programme and Budget data. The evaluation design and methodology apply gender-sensitive and human rights approaches. The following paragraphs present an overview of the data collection and analysis conducted in this evaluation.

16. Appendix 3 provides further information on the data collection methods, data sources, and analytical methods and tools. The appendix also discusses the main limitations of the evaluation methodology. The evaluation matrix in Appendix 4 shows that all evaluation questions have been approached through several methods and benefit from the perspectives of various actors and stakeholders, supporting triangulation of data and providing a strong evidence base for drawing conclusions and making recommendations.

17. Relevant documents were reviewed. They primarily include the general documentation of the Council of Europe on its work, strategy and structures, specific documentation on the Summit and the Declaration, key documents on the Programme and Budget,<sup>7</sup> follow-up reporting to the Committee of Ministers (mainly by rapporteur groups<sup>8</sup>), documentation on a range of follow-ups in various areas of work, civil society reports and Directorate of Communications (DC) media reports.<sup>9</sup> The list of references is available in Appendix 9.

18. Consultations (interviews and workshops) were conducted during field missions to Strasbourg, during which face-to-face meetings were held with a range of stakeholders based there. In addition, online consultations were held with actors based elsewhere. A total of 116 individuals were consulted through seven scoping interviews and 84 interviews, and 53 Council of Europe staff participated in four workshops.

19. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather feedback from key staff of the Council of Europe Secretariat, chairs of committees, representatives of member states (mainly representatives of diplomatic missions), representatives from partner organisations and donors, and representatives of civil society organisations. Interviews were based on guides adjusted to address different interviewee groups based on their role in the implementation of the Declaration (Appendix 5). Subsequently, qualitative content analysis was conducted, the interviewees' main statements were coded, and sentiment was assessed (positive, neutral, negative).

20. Interviewees were invited at the end of the interview to complete a short online survey to enable quantitative data to be gathered and to support a comparison of views on the progress made and early effects and impact on the Organisation between the different stakeholder groups interviewed. 65 responses were received, representing a response rate of 62.5% of the interviewees.

21. Workshops were used to gather feedback from key staff engaged in (a) focus areas related to Ukraine (Register of Damage, Children of Ukraine and projects under the Action Plan for Ukraine), (b) areas of work prominently mentioned in the Declaration (execution of judgments, environment,

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7. Used in the budget mapping.

8. GR-C, GR-DEM, GR-H, GR-J, GR-SOC, GR-EXT.

9. Used in the public engagement and sentiment analysis.

Principles for Democracy), (c) transversal themes (gender equality, youth participation, civil society engagement, human rights approaches), (d) areas of work not so prominently mentioned in the Declaration (public health, sport, counter-terrorism). The concept and programme are included in Appendix 5.

22. A Council of Europe staff survey was conducted by posting a link on the Organisation's intranet and 166 responses were received, representing a response rate of 5%. The survey link was posted after the first series of interviews with Council of Europe staff to ensure that the initial feedback informed and refined the survey questions, and the survey was launched before the workshops so that the results could support workshop preparations and discussions. Quantitative analysis was conducted on the data collected through close-ended survey questions, while qualitative content analysis was conducted on responses to open-ended questions. Further details on the methodology and limitations are presented in Appendix 6.

23. A public engagement and sentiment analysis was performed to evaluate reactions to the Declaration and related steps since the Summit. It focused on eight topics related to the Declaration and its appendices, namely the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Register of Damage, Children of Ukraine, the execution of judgments, the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, artificial intelligence, and the environment. It combined social media monitoring using Talkwalker, an AI-driven platform for social and online media analysis, with traditional media coverage. It covered insights from over 150 million sources, including 20 social media platforms and global media outlets, nearly 200 articles in the media, and DC's media coverage of more than 180 articles published in the media and online blogs. Further details on the methodology and limitations of the public engagement and sentiment analysis are presented in Appendix 7.

24. An analysis and mapping of previous Programmes and Budgets to the 2024–2027 structure was conducted highlighting budget evolution. Budget data were extracted for programmes/sub-programmes for 2020–2025 from existing Programme and Budget documents and, where possible compared across the years. The budget analysis is based on the evaluation team's best understanding of the available data. To put recent changes into a broader contextual timeframe, it uses 2020 as the baseline year (it was not feasible to include earlier years due to the impracticability of making the data comparable). 2024 inflation-adjusted budget figures are compared with both 2020 and 2023. Several aspects of the data presented challenges, and the evaluation team acknowledges a potential level of uncertainty due to gaps in the data, lack of comparability of published data for different periods, significant change in accounting practice by one entity and the unclear grouping of some items within and across budget lines. Approved 2025 budget data were provided in January 2025, together with 2023 data mapped to the current budget structure, enabling further analysis, but these data were not comparable with the data used for the 2020-2023-2024 analysis. Nevertheless, despite their limitations, these two analyses still provide a useful high-level overview of developments in recent years and may offer a basis for further discussion around future presentation of budget data. Further details are presented in Appendix 8.

25. Limitations were identified and carefully taken into consideration in the design and methodology of the evaluation, as well as in using data collection methods and their results. On the one hand, the short time that has passed since the adoption of the Declaration as well as the short timeframe for conducting the evaluation raised important concerns which have been reflected in the overall methodology of the evaluation, namely by refining the scope of the evaluation focusing

on the outputs and, to the extent possible, on immediate outcome level and in assuring sufficient and flexible resources for intensive data collection. Moreover, limitations were identified related to data collection methods, primarily related to availability and responsiveness of stakeholders, self-selection bias, low response rate and response bias, data restrictions and comparability. Mitigation measures were implemented to overcome limitations in the data collection phase. During the data analysis, the results were systematically used in triangulation with other sources, thus ensuring robust evidence-based findings.

### 3. The Declaration: Background, context and subsequent action

#### 3.1. Developments leading to the Declaration

26. The years leading up to the Summit and to the Declaration were characterised by external and internal challenges for the Organisation, namely financial crises, the Russian Federation's aggressions against Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, Covid-19, as well as uncertainties related to the erosion of human rights, backsliding of democracy and other conflicts beyond Europe.

27. The Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022 and ongoing – and thus the war of one member state against another – posed fundamental challenges for the Council of Europe. In 2014 the institutions of the Council of Europe reacted differently. The Parliamentary Assembly sanctioned Russia in 2016 and asked for a Summit in 2017; whereas the Committee of Ministers did at that time not impose any sanctions against the Russian Federation. This different approach led to tensions between the two statutory institutions of the Council of Europe.<sup>10</sup>

28. In response to the sanctions by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Russian Federation stopped its contributions to the Council of Europe, which further exacerbated the Organisation's already difficult financial situation. Based on new procedures, the Russian Federation was readmitted to the Parliamentary Assembly in 2019. Following the aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Committee of Ministers having consulted the Parliamentary Assembly, suspended the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe on 25 February and excluded the country from the Organisation on 16 March 2022. At that time, the remaining 46 member states decided to share the shortfall in contributions to ensure the continuous capacity of the Organisation to deliver its mission.

29. This unprecedented situation, with devastating consequences for one of its member states, made it necessary to recommit to the Council of Europe's values and give new direction to the Organisation's work. The Summit in May 2023 – the first summit in 17 years – provided the framework for this. After many years of discussion on holding a fourth Summit, the Reykjavík Summit was triggered and motivated by and ultimately materialised in response to the full-scale war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

30. The Summit was organised in a short timeframe, following a faster process than previous summits, and also had a narrower focus than the previous summits. Preparations for the Summit and Declaration were major endeavours for the Committee of Ministers and notably for its Icelandic Presidency. Targeted consultations took place within the Organisation and with member states.

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10. As particularly mentioned by the Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Other Council of Europe institutions were heavily involved, particularly the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

31. The Declaration is the result of the Committee of Ministers' preparatory work and negotiations. The Declaration was adopted by the Heads of State and Government in May 2023.

### 3.2. The Declaration

32. A range of concerns and needs were highlighted in the statements made at the Summit. Many statements concerned the full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, but other needs were also stressed. These related, among other things, to a Europe with values, living in democratic societies, the importance of the execution of judgments by states, and budgetary concerns of the Council of Europe.<sup>11</sup> Overall, reaffirming the core values of the Council of Europe (democracy, human rights and the rule of law), strengthening multilateralism, setting priorities and uniting in support of Ukraine were shared concerns across the (remaining) member states of the Council of Europe. The Declaration is a political statement, and its core elements reflect the range of the concerns expressed, with a strong focus placed on "Ukraine-related" content. An overview of the core elements of the Declaration is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Overview of the Declaration key components**



Source: Evaluators' own compilation based on the Declaration.

33. The Declaration consists of an introductory section and, in addition, five thematic sections, namely: United for Ukraine and accountability, United around our values, United to meet current and future challenges, United in our vision for the Council of Europe, and the Europe we want. The Declaration is complemented by five appendices dedicated to key areas of work: an Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Register of Damage caused by the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine (Appendix I), the situation of the children of Ukraine (Appendix II), the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy (Appendix III), the Convention system as the cornerstone of the Council of Europe's protection of human rights (Appendix IV), and the Council of Europe and the environment (Appendix V).

34. The Declaration covers almost all existing areas of the Council of Europe's work, as well as some newer dimensions. Some areas of work are not prominently mentioned but were not

11. Council of Europe (27/03/2024), "4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavik, 16–17 May 2023), Minutes of the sittings" SUM(2023)PV.

intentionally excluded. With member states holding different, and sometimes conflicting, positions on the different areas of the Council of Europe's work and due to its political nature, the Declaration's language is intentionally not very precise to ensure that political negotiations could be concluded in a timely manner. The Declaration contains many statements such as "commit to strengthening", "continue strengthening", "continue supporting", "commit to supporting and maintaining", "continue improving the effectiveness of", "reaffirm", "recommit to", "affirm the need for". The variety of terms used leaves room for interpretation. Therefore, discussions continue at various levels to agree on how some aspects of the Declaration will be operationalised, and the level of changes the Declaration envisages. The five appendices are generally more detailed and specific than the main text of the Declaration. Nevertheless, it remains a key challenge to understand how commitments made by heads of state and government about the actions of member states (for example, the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy) are to be translated into prioritised actions by the Council of Europe itself.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to previous declarations, the Reykjavík Declaration is not accompanied by an action plan with specific responsibilities and timelines. Thus, the task of turning the political statements into proposed actions lies with the Council of Europe's Secretariat and institutions.

### 3.3. Following the Declaration's adoption

35. For the purpose of this evaluation, the implementation of the Declaration includes (i) the commitment of funds and the political support and involvement of member states in support of the Declaration (input), (ii) the "translation" of the Declaration, the political support and allocation of funds into the Programme and Budget (output), (iii) the steps taken to align the Council of Europe's areas of work with the Declaration (outputs), and (iv) the (expected) effects of these measures at Council of Europe level (immediate outcomes), as appropriate.<sup>13</sup>

36. Following its adoption, the Committee of Ministers initiated a new budget cycle (Programme and Budget for 2024-2027) based on the Declaration, anticipating the end of the Programme and Budget 2022-2026. The Declaration was subject to internal analysis and discussions by the Council of Europe's Secretariat and its institutions to turn it into concrete actions. The aim was to align the Programme and Budget 2024-2027 to the intentions of the Declaration, the political support of member states and their financial commitments. The Council of Europe's Secretariat worked on the development of concrete proposals to be made to the Committee of Ministers. The Directorate of Programme and Budget (DPB) mapped the Organisation's programmes and sub-programmes to the text of the Declaration and Major Administrative Entities (MAEs) were invited to provide inputs and ideas. The Council of Europe's Secretariat refined concrete proposals and developed possible scenarios for implementing the Declaration. Those options were presented by the Secretary General to the Committee of Ministers and were the subject of a series of discussion rounds at the Rapporteur Group on Programme, Budget and Administration (GR-PBA), requiring adjustments by the Council of Europe's Secretariat between the GR-PBA sessions. The scenarios supported an iterative process which was concluded by the adoption of an increase in budget in line with the additional resources committed by heads of state in Reykjavík and a new remodelled Programme and Budget for 2024-

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12. The text in this paragraph is intended to provide context for the "translation" and operationalisation of the Declaration into the work of the Organisation. It is not a critique of the Declaration.

13. This is inspired by the working definition of implementation provided in the ToR.

2027. The Ordinary Budget increased from €264 258 400 in 2023 to €299 273 900 in 2024,<sup>14</sup> which represents, when adjusted for inflation,<sup>15</sup> a real-terms increase of 11% compared with 2023.<sup>16</sup>

37. While translating the Declaration into the Programme and Budget, the Organisation continued its ongoing work and started taking follow-up steps to implement the Declaration. Those steps related to the focus areas concerning Ukraine (Register of Damage and Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine) as well as to other prominently mentioned areas of work. The initial steps included restructuring (e.g. moving sections between the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) and the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity (DGII)), the creation of new institutional entities and reconsidering some of the Council of Europe's activities. Moreover, the Declaration was used by parts of the Organisation whose areas of work are not so prominently mentioned in the Declaration to support their activities, even if those are only indirectly linked to the Declaration.

38. Initial steps were followed by concrete actions at various paces of development. Rapporteur groups were requested to report on specific areas of work prominently mentioned in the Declaration<sup>17</sup> and provided reports in the first quarter of 2024.<sup>18 19 20 21 22</sup> Those reports were summarised in a comprehensive report of the Ministers' Deputies that was submitted to the 133<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Session held in Strasbourg on 13-14 May 2024<sup>23</sup>. This report and the accompanying more forward-looking decisions provide a good overview on the steps taken as well as the preparations for the next important steps expected by the Declaration. The tension between member states on some topics and the scope of actions required create a challenging environment for the implementation of the Declaration on those areas of work. The Organisation is thus in a position requiring reflecting those divergent views and varying levels of political will in its work.

39. Figure 2 presents a simplified intervention logic (known as a theory of change) created for this evaluation by the evaluation team to show the key contributions and expected effects leading to change.

40. The theory of change highlights the main causal relationships, starting with the commitment of member states and the Reykjavik Summit leading to the Declaration and its implementation. The evaluation focuses on how inputs (the Declaration, additional financial resources and political

14. The 2024 figure is taken from the published Programme and Budget for 2024–2027.

15. The calculation assumes an inflation rate of 2.4% in 2024.

16. The Ordinary Budget increased to €326,027,333 in 2025. This amounts to €310 923 862 in 2023 values, when adjusted for inflation at 2.4% in 2024 and 2025; this represents a real-terms increase of 18% compared with 2023.

17. Council of Europe (05/07/2023), "1471st meeting, 5 July 2023, Follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration: role of rapporteur groups" CM/Del/Dec(2023)1471/1.6-app [Appendix to CM/Del/Dec(2023)1471/1.6]

18. Council of Europe (13/03/2024), "Follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration, Report of the GR-SOC" GR-SOC(2024)2-final.

19. Council of Europe (13/03/2024), "Follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration, Report of the GR-J" GR-J(2024)4-final.

20. Council of Europe (18/03/2024), "Follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration, Report of the GR-DEM" GR-DEM(2024)4-final.

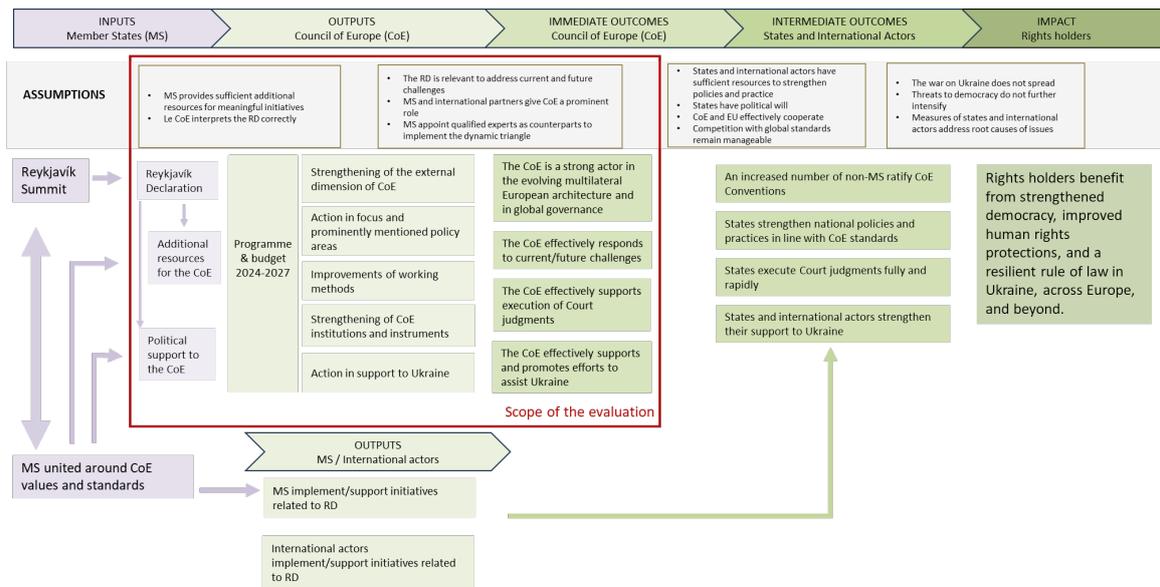
21. Council of Europe (07/02/2024), "4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavik, Iceland, 16–17 May 2023), Follow-up by the GR-C" GR-C(2024)2".

22. Council of Europe (01/02/2024), "Securing the long-term effectiveness of the Convention – enhancing the tools available to the Committee of Ministers in the supervision of the execution of ECtHR judgments, Rapporteur Group Human rights" GR-H(2023)11-final, Council of Europe (14/12/2023), "4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavik, Iceland, 16–17 May 2023), GR-H - Follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration" GR-H(2023)16-rev3 [Item to be considered by the GR-H at its meeting on 16 January 2024], Council of Europe (12/03/2024), "Follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration, Report of the GR-H" GR-H(2024)3-final.

23. Council of Europe (14/05/2024), "Report on follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration – "Reykjavik – one year on" CM(2024)75-final [133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 16-17 May 2024)]

support from member states) have been operationalised and used by the Council of Europe in taking steps (outputs), leading to early changes at organisational level (immediate outcomes). Changes in member states and in other countries (intermediate outcomes) and further impacts not only depend on the work of the Council of Europe, but also on states themselves and on other international actors. They typically involve changes in behaviour, practice and belief, do not always follow a linear path and, overall, require more time to occur and be measurable than the time that has passed since the Declaration’s adoption.

**Figure 2: Theory of change**



Source: compilation by the evaluation team based on an initial theory of change developed by the DIO in the preparation phase of this evaluation and documents reviewed.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Effectiveness

#### 4.1.1. Key findings

41. This section presents key findings responding to evaluation questions on the work done in operationalising the Declaration, and early effects of this work. It also covers transversal issues related to youth engagement, civil society participation, gender equality and human rights approaches. These are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

**To what extent has the Declaration been meaningfully operationalised in the Programme and Budget, programmatically and financially? What were supporting and hindering factors? Are the resources allocated to the specific areas in line with the expected results?**

The Declaration was followed by systematic reflection and analysis of work across the Organisation to identify links between the Declaration and existing areas of work, and to identify new opportunities. The process of translating the Declaration into the Programme and Budget led to a restructured Programme and Budget aligned with the Declaration and an increase in the budget. Elements of the published Programme and Budget could be clarified further to improve

understanding and staff perceive that the transparency and inclusivity of the budgeting process could be further enhanced.

The increase in the budget is welcomed, but it does not allow the Organisation to meet all expectations expressed in the Declaration. Despite real increases in 2024, inflation-adjusted budgets in some important areas remain below 2020 levels. Many areas of work must meet the Declaration's expectations with existing, but often insufficient, resources. Political support is evident around core issues relating to Ukraine but there are divergent levels of support and engagement by member states in other areas of the work. Other challenges relate primarily to the increasingly complicated context, and the Council of Europe's bureaucracy and limited visibility.

**To what extent has the Declaration influenced the Organisation's operations? What has changed, intended and unintended results? What, if any, effects has the Declaration had on Council of Europe areas of work that have not received any additional funding?**

The increase in the budget and posts following the Declaration has reinforced the sense of purpose across the Organisation and, to some extent, its profile has been raised. The Declaration has, for example, raised the profile of environment-related work within the Organisation and accelerated work in this field. The Organisation has leveraged the Declaration to move in new directions using innovative approaches (accountability related to Ukraine) and it has accelerated work in various areas (e.g. AI Framework Convention). Follow-up by the Organisation has already led to important steps that are widely acknowledged within and outside the Organisation. However, there is no significant change in how the Organisation functions and high expectations regarding some aspects of the Declaration are yet to be met (e.g. increased decentralisation in connection with co-operation work). It is interesting to note that areas of work not prominently mentioned in the Declaration also considered their work linked to the Declaration and have used it to leverage their work.

**To what extent have the follow-ups to the Declaration taken gender equality, youth, civil society and human rights aspects into account in their design and implementation? What effects on gender equality can the implementation of the Declaration be expected to have?**

Civil society engagement and, to greater extent, youth participation, became more topical after the Declaration. These issues have been addressed to varying degrees depending on the areas of work. Council of Europe engagement with civil society has improved since the Declaration, but the extent and quality of civil society engagement need to be further strengthened. A meaningful engagement requires commensurate resources to ensure participation and to create the space for civil society contributions to the work of the Organisation and to the impact of its work. Gender equality is considered by staff to have been well integrated in the work of the Organisation for years. Human rights-based approaches are at the heart of the Organisation's work and are also reported by staff to be well integrated. There is little evidence that operationalisation of the Declaration with regards to gender equality and human rights-based approaches to date incorporates new developments in these areas, beyond what was already planned at the time of the Declaration.

#### 4.1.2. *Systematic reflections and analysis of the Declaration*

42. The Declaration's adoption was followed by systematic reflection and analysis of work across the Organisation to identify and launch follow-up actions relating both to ongoing work and new opportunities. Even areas of work not prominently mentioned in the Declaration were able to link their work to the Declaration (e.g. European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Pompidou Group, European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and Healthcare (EDQM)), and, in one case, launched a new initiative in response to the Declaration and secured new external funding for it. In some areas, not being prominently mentioned is seen as having positive implications, allowing work to progress away from the attention given to the Declaration's implementation.

43. The Organisation is using the Declaration as a source of strategic guidance to validate its work, and as a framework for dialogue in more challenging areas of work (e.g. environment, social rights). Operationalising the Declaration has been easier in some areas where the text provides a clear basis for initiating activities (e.g. establishment of the Ad-hoc Multidisciplinary Group on Environment (GME) which led to a draft strategy on the environment, leaving the establishment of a steering committee on the environment, the Reykjavik Committee, for a later decision). Other areas have required more dialogue before concrete activities could be initiated (e.g. Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDem)) created in January 2024, first meeting in May 2024). Commensurate financial resources are also essential for ensuring prompt actions.

#### 4.1.3. *Satisfactory process of translating the Declaration into the Programme and Budget, despite a perceived lack of transparency*

44. The translation of the Declaration into the Programme and Budget led – for the first time in many years – to a budget increase.<sup>24</sup>

45. To support the translation exercise, the DPB mapped the Organisation's programmes and sub-programmes to the text of the Declaration. This made it apparent that certain areas of work are not mentioned in the Declaration and are considered by some to be at risk of being downgraded in the future, although this view is generally not shared by stakeholders involved in the relevant areas of work. MAEs were invited to provide ideas and inputs about how to translate the Declaration into plans and actions.

46. Overall, the process was smooth, but some stakeholders (e.g. committee chairs) consider that they could have been consulted more on how to respond to the Declaration, and would have liked their feedback to have been reflected in reports from the respective rapporteur groups to the Committee of Ministers. Budgetary processes may not always require participation of all staff and decisions may need to be made in time-pressured contexts. Following the Declaration's adoption the revision of the Programme and Budget was a large exercise to be conducted in a short timeframe inherently influencing the level of participation. This might partially explain why, interviewees perceived a lack of transparency in the process and decisions made on prioritisation and translating the Declaration into the Programme and Budget. The mapping of the previous budgets to the structure of the current Programme and Budget (see "Limitations" in Appendix 8) also highlighted

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24. Council of Europe (17/11/2023), "Draft Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2024-2027, Rapporteur Group, Programme, Budget and Administration" GR-PBA(2023)24-rev, and Council of Europe (23/11/2023), '1481st (Budget) meeting, 21-23 November 2023' CM/Del/Dec(2023)1481/11.1-Part1.

some challenges with regard to clarity and transparency of published data, while recognising that these challenges are to some extent due to changes in the Programme and Budget structure.

47. The support from the Summit as well as the initial proposals and subsequent scenarios put forward by the Secretary General<sup>25 26</sup> to the Committee of Ministers eased the discussions on the Programme and Budget. Following the Summit and Declaration in 2023, the Rapporteur Group on Programme, Budget and Administration (GR-PBA) welcomed the proposal for a new Programme and Budget structure with cross-cutting programmes to align with the Declaration's priorities. Later on, the GR-PBA indicated its appreciation for the preparatory work, transversal presentation and options put forward, and Deputy Ministers indicated their initial preferences on the scenarios proposed.<sup>27 28</sup> Later in 2023, when there were more concrete discussions on selecting or refining a scenario, discussions appear to have been drawn out, with delegations expressing divergent views; the session was concluded by the Chair stating "that the Reykjavik Declaration had provided an ambitious agenda with the policy direction and mandate to improve efficiency and effectiveness, and that it was for the GR-PBA to discuss the price tag to enable its implementation".<sup>31</sup>

48. The restructured Programme and Budget for 2024-2027 mentions the Declaration throughout, as the basis for its restructuring. The allocations were largely the result of discussions at the GR-PBA and reflect political support and internal discussions. The Committee of Ministers stressed that "at the end of November (2023), the Committee of Ministers united around the values of the Council of Europe, and adopted the Programme and Budget for 2024-2027 by a consensual decision. This is a strong budget which reflects the priorities and direction given by the Summit and Declaration and it provides significant additional means for their implementation. It is the first budget in many years that has been increased in real terms".<sup>32</sup>

#### *4.1.4. Budget increases are welcomed but do not make up for previous reductions, and inflation-adjusted budgets often remain lower than in previous years*

49. The budget increases that emerged from discussions following the Declaration are welcomed by staff and committee chairs. Analysis of the approved Ordinary Budget for 2025, when adjusted for inflation, shows that, for most budget lines, there is a real-terms budget increase in 2025 compared with 2023 (see Figure 48 in Appendix 8). Similarly, there were real increases (Ordinary Budget plus Other Budgets) from 2023 to 2024 (see Figure 47 in Appendix 8). However, inflation-adjusted budgets in 2024 often remain below 2020 levels. Some parts of the Organisation have benefited more than others, and the increases have only partly compensated for reductions in

25. Council of Europe (10/08/2023), "1481st (Budget) meeting, 21–23 November 2023 – 11.1 Draft Programme and Budget 2024–2027 – Scenarios" CM(2023)130-add.

26. Council of Europe (19/10/2023), "1481st meeting, 21-23 November 2023 – 11.1 Programme and Budget 2024–2027, Secretary General's proposal" CM(2023)130-corr.

27. Council of Europe (22/06/2023), "Synopsis, Meeting of 16 June, Rapporteur Group Programme, Budget and Administration" GR-PBA(2023)CB8.

28. Council of Europe (10/07/2023), "Synopsis, Meeting of 4 July 2023, Rapporteur Group Programme, Budget and Administration" GR-PBA(2023)CB9.

29. Council of Europe (19/09/2023), "Synopsis, Meeting of 13 September 2023, Rapporteur Group Programme, Budget and Administration" GR-PBA(2023)CB10.

30. Council of Europe (04/10/2023), "Synopsis, Meeting of 28 September 2023, Rapporteur Group Programme, Budget and Administration" GR-PBA(2023)CB11.

31. Council of Europe (11/10/2023), "Synopsis, Meeting of 5 October 2023, Rapporteur Group Programme, Budget and Administration" GR-PBA(2023)CB12.

32. Council of Europe (10/01/2024), "The Reykjavik Summit of the Council of Europe: United around values in the face of extraordinary challenges, Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2245 (2023)" CM/AS(2024)Rec2245-final.

previous years. Many areas of work are left to meet the Declaration's expectations with existing, yet often insufficient, resources and there are widespread doubts among interviewees about whether the increased budget is sufficient to fully address the Declaration's ambitions. Moreover, despite member states' commitment to the Organisation, demonstrated by additional funding following the Declaration, staff and external stakeholders perceive a high level of uncertainty regarding the future funding for the Organisation, and the extent to which recent increases will be sustained by honouring the commitments made in future Programme and Budgets.

50. Comparison of 2025 with 2023<sup>33</sup>: Figure 48 in Appendix 8 indicates that for 13 budget lines, there are real-terms increases of between 20% and 100% from 2023 to 2025. The sub-programmes/institutions whose budgets increased most significantly are (in descending order): "Protection of the environment and human rights", "Supporting action in the field", "Congress of Local and Regional Authorities", "Health and human rights", "Digital challenges: Data protection – Artificial intelligence – Cybercrime", "Effective implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights at European and national level", and "Gender equality – Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – Human Trafficking".

51. The budget lines that experienced real-terms reductions in 2025 compared with 2023 are (starting with the smallest reductions): "Committee of Ministers", "Anchoring democratic values in European societies", "Education", "Culture and cultural heritage", "Integrity and governance of sport", and "Democratic governance and dialogue – Civil society". For the first four items in this list, the real-terms reduction in 2025 compared with 2023 is small, but it is significant for the last two items. In real terms, the budget for "Democratic governance and dialogue – Civil society" in 2025 is 68% of the budget allocated in 2023.

52. Comparison of 2024 with 2023 and 2020: Figure 47 in Appendix 8 indicates that several programmes/sub-programmes benefited from real budget increases in 2024 compared with 2023 and with 2020<sup>34</sup>. These include "Children's rights", "Effective implementation of the European Social Charter", "Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)", "Effective implementation of the Convention of Human Rights at European and national level", and "Education".

53. Other programmes/sub-programmes benefited from a real budget increase compared with 2023, but inflation-adjusted budgets for 2024 remained below 2020 levels. These include "Field presence", "Prisons – Police – Deprivation of liberty", "Execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights", "Commissioner for Human Rights", "Secretariat of the Council of Europe Development Bank"<sup>35</sup>, "European Court of Human Rights"<sup>36</sup>, "Logistics, Human Resources and other common services", "Protocol, Communication, Political Affairs, Programme and Budget, External relations, Legal Advice, Internal Oversight", and "Youth".

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33. 2025 Ordinary Budget figures were provided by DPB on 30 January 2025. The comparison with 2023 here is based on figures provided by DPB in the same spreadsheet. Figures for earlier years were not provided in this spreadsheet.

34. As presented in Appendix 8, it was not possible to map all 2024–2027 budget lines to previous Programmes and Budgets, due to a change in the structure of the Programme and Budget. Thus, not all budget lines are mentioned here, and it is not possible to provide a complete picture of the Reykjavik Declaration's main beneficiaries. The analysis is also constrained by several limitations that are explained in Appendix 8.

35. The Secretariat of the Council of Europe Development Bank notes that its budget increased as a result of Ukraine's accession to the Bank (on 15 June 2023).

36. While the Court's budget in 2024 was lower, in real terms, than in 2020 it has nevertheless recently been allocated 45 additional staff positions.

54. For several programmes/sub-programmes, the 2024 inflation-adjusted budget was lower than in 2023 and in 2020. These include “Secretary General & Deputy Secretary General”, “Committee of Ministers”, “Independence and efficiency of justice”, and “Integrity and governance of sport”.

55. In some cases, there was a shift from voluntary contributions to the Ordinary Budget, which is a significant development for the areas concerned, as it brings more security and predictability. This mainly relates to co-operation work and to an increase in the Ordinary Budget allocation for the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination (DPC) and presence in the field. The priority given by the Declaration to strengthening field missions and their work is well reflected in the Programme and Budget with a significant increase in staff and activities. However, staff in Strasbourg and in other locations indicated that the Council of Europe’s human resources policy was constraining the recruitment of international staff to field missions<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, field offices staff consider that decision making is still too centralised in Strasbourg. The Court has seen a significant increase in its budget and the creation of additional posts that are funded by the Ordinary Budget.<sup>38</sup> However, in real terms, its 2024 budget remained lower than in 2020.

56. Areas of work prominently mentioned in the Declaration and related to high expectations delivered the planned outputs but are insufficiently resourced to reach the objectives set by the Declaration and often their scope is still being discussed. The areas of work most frequently mentioned in the consultations are the environment, artificial intelligence, and outreach with partners and states beyond the Council of Europe’s member states (external dimension). Regarding the topic of the environment, civil society organisations interviewed indicated a need for additional resources for in-depth research and fact-finding, as well as resources to support participation by civil society actors in a more substantive and effective way.

57. Most committees consulted acknowledge that their financial situation has improved but that delivering their work and taking new activities on board remains challenging after the Declaration. Few indicated a good level of financial resources for delivering their work, and secretariats are often stretched. This is confirmed by staff in some important areas, who claim their workload is heavy and requires them to work long hours on a regular, or even continuous, basis to ensure the necessary support and input for committees in a timely manner.

58. Finding the right level of discussion on the use of resources, between budget increase and efficiency gains, remains a challenge at the Council of Europe, as in most public administrations. Cutting activities is difficult for the Organisation and there are divergent views among member states on the requirements for interrupting activities in the respective areas of work. In this context, representatives of diplomatic missions reiterated that increasing resources is not the only solution available to the Council of Europe to meet the Declaration’s expectations and that considerations for efficiency gains should be pursued.

#### *4.1.5. Political support amid challenges but limited practical follow-up by member states at national level*

59. Political support is evident following the Summit and Declaration, and especially on core issues related to Ukraine, on which member states stand united. However, analysis of media

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37. This is an aspect tackled by the Decentralisation Policy to be presented to the GR-PBA in April 2025.

38. The analysis in Appendix 8 indicates that the Court’s inflation-adjusted budget for 2024 was approximately 6% higher than in 2023, but 4% lower than in 2020.

coverage suggests that the event was perceived by some as leaning towards political posturing, with the focus on Ukraine overshadowing other critical issues. The emphasis on Ukraine is evident from the analysis of public sentiment and engagement.

60. Nevertheless, implementation of the Declaration has been complicated by unclear political support and varying levels of willingness and engagement from member states in different areas of work. This has prevented the Organisation from moving forward on some issues where member states agree on the problem but diverge on the practical solution. In some cases, messaging from individual member states was reported to be inconsistent, induced by the challenges of implementing, in practice, the commitments by heads of states in the Declaration. Such challenges constrain progress and have been observed, for example, in the discussions on environment-related issues and a legally binding instrument on the right to a healthy environment. There is thus a gap between stated aims and practical implementation. Limited knowledge of the Declaration in member states and among experts participating in committees is also problematic.

61. The impact of the Declaration's implementation depends ultimately on the political will of member states to implement and follow up on the goals set by the Declaration, including their willingness to buy into legal solutions and to implement them at national level. Many stakeholders consider that, despite the above-mentioned evident political engagement following the Summit, there is a widespread view that member states have fallen short in honouring their commitments, beyond an increase in the budget. This relates particularly to the execution of judgments and to the promotion of standards and principles.

62. The increasingly complicated context and the eroding trust in multilateralism exacerbate political challenges and therefore it could be difficult for member states to provide continued political support and engagement at the same level. The frequency of summits has an influence on this, and in 2024, the Committee of Ministers "agreed to consider holding Summits of Heads of State and Government with greater regularity".<sup>39</sup> The question of the regularity of Summits was a recurring topic raised and discussed in multiple interviews.

63. The Summit and Declaration have raised the profile of the Council of Europe (see early effects under 4.1.7), including vis-à-vis the European Union (EU). Nevertheless, the continued limited visibility of the Council of Europe is problematic. The Organisation's role and added value vis-à-vis the EU need to be clarified. Clearer messaging for the general public would support more effective operationalisation of the Declaration and strengthen impact.

#### *4.1.6. Significant steps taken but important expectations remain unfulfilled*

64. The Declaration catalysed action and has already led to important steps that are widely acknowledged both within and beyond the Organisation. Some work already underway at the time of the Declaration was accelerated (e.g. AI Framework Convention), some activities have been intensified (e.g. political co-operation between the Council of Europe and the EU), and other work has been recently initiated (Register of Damage<sup>40</sup>). The Declaration has been leveraged to mitigate

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39. Council of Europe (17/05/2024), "133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 17 May 2024), 2. United around our values, Implementation of the Reykjavik Declaration" CM/Del/Dec(2024)133/2b.

40. Register of Damage established on 12 May 2023: Council of Europe (12/05/2023), "Resolution CM/Res(2023)3 establishing the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine" CM/Res(2023)3-consolidated.

resistance to moving forward on certain topics, thus enabling important steps to be taken (e.g. on the environment and on social rights<sup>41</sup>).

65. Council of Europe reports indicate progress after the Summit and Declaration in the areas prominently mentioned in the Declaration.<sup>42 43</sup> In early 2024, the Committee of Ministers considered that “the work to translate the Summit’s political guidance into appropriate implementing measures and administrative reforms is well underway”. The assessment by a network of civil society organisations of the implementation steps taken following the Declaration recognised that there had been progress<sup>44</sup> and presented a list of the main steps taken. Staff are positive about the steps taken (see Appendix 6, Figure 19) and confirmed that some results have been achieved in various areas of the Organisation’s work, including areas prominently mentioned in the Declaration but also – and this is not visible in reports – areas not so prominently mentioned in the Declaration. In focus areas (Ukraine-related) and prominently mentioned areas of work (non-Ukraine-related) steps taken are primarily institutional solutions, including the creation of entities, committees, and tools.

66. The main steps already taken are (a) Ukraine-related: Register of Damage and the Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU);<sup>45</sup> and (b) non-Ukraine-related: AI Framework Convention, CDDEM, GME, execution of judgments, co-operation work and field offices. Those steps are broadly reported and known by the interviewees. Other steps or achievements (mainly mentioned by the staff and committee chairs concerned) relate to specific topics, most of them unknown to interviewees not directly engaged in those areas of work. Civil society actors reported a proliferation of steps, preventing identification of the most needed steps.

67. Documents and stakeholder feedback indicate that, despite the significant steps that have been taken, a range of high expectations following the Declaration have not been met and are to be fulfilled. Expectation management and realistically assessing promises against resources were not widely mentioned in this regard, despite being key for future accountability.

68. Regarding Ukraine, expectations about the establishment of a claims commission and a special tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine remain to be met<sup>46</sup>. Discussion on these began in 2023,<sup>47</sup> and in 2024, the Committee of Ministers “reiterated that the Register is intended to

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41. Conference in Vilnius on social rights: Council of Europe (2024), “Landmark political declaration reaffirms importance of European Social Charter, media release” DC 171(2024).

42. Council of Europe (14/05/2024), “Report on follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration – ‘Reykjavik – one year on’” CM(2024)75-final [133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 16–17 May 2024)].

43. Council of Europe (17/05/2024), “133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 17 May 2024), 2. United around our values, Implementation of the Reykjavik Declaration”, CM/Del/Dec(2024)133/2b.

44. Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe (CURE) (2024), “Civil Society Evaluation of the Progress of Implementation of the Reykjavik Summit Commitments by the Council of Europe and Its Member States”.

45. The group began its consultations in November 2023: Council of Europe (15/01/2024), “Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU), First Meeting, Summary Note, 30 November–1 December 2023” CGU(2023)FirstMeeting/Summary note.

46. It should be noted that important milestones have been achieved after the data collection phase of this evaluation, as illustrated by the following news: [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-and-high-representative-kallas-welcome-major-step-towards-holding-russia-accountable-2025-02-04\\_en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-and-high-representative-kallas-welcome-major-step-towards-holding-russia-accountable-2025-02-04_en), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/special-tribunal-for-ukraine-secretary-general-welcomes-completion-of-technical-discussions>.

47. Discussions and position on the role of the Council of Europe in a Special Tribunal began in 2023: Council of Europe (06/11/2023), “Support for the establishment and operation of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine – A possible role for the Council of Europe” DLAPIL 19\_2023.

constitute the first component of a comprehensive international compensation mechanism".<sup>48</sup> A network of civil society organisations emphasised in 2024 that "the Council of Europe should take a leading role in the creation of a comprehensive international compensation mechanism" and "live up to its promise to participate in and support the creation of a special tribunal for the crime of aggression".<sup>49</sup> On the non-Ukraine-related topics, unmet expectations so far related to further steps to ensure the execution of judgments at national level, further efforts in the external dimension of the Council of Europe (some stakeholders express concerns about resistance to the development of this dimension being high on the list of priorities of the new Secretary General), and the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights (which saw progress but has not yet happened). On the Reykjavik Committee, the establishment of an ad hoc structure, the GME, was mentioned by some staff as an important development paving the way for the Reykjavik Committee; other staff and civil society actors see this as a missed opportunity in the implementation of the Declaration in that the so-called Reykjavik Committee is not yet in place. Noteworthy to recall that the context on the topic of environment, and recognition of the right to a healthy environment, is highly polarised among member states, while the Declaration has raised expectations, mainly among civil society actors, to see ambitious and prompt actions.

#### 4.1.7. *Early effects on the Organisation but little evidence of significant change in the way it functions*

69. The implementation of the Declaration has reinforced the sense of purpose and unity around values for the Organisation and its staff.

70. The steps taken to date following the Declaration have led to the following effects:

- An increased profile of the Council of Europe, leading to improved positioning on some topics, accompanied by an increase in briefing and consultation requests by partner organisations. This was also highlighted by the staff survey (see Appendix 6, Figure 17).
- An increased profile of environmental activities within the Organisation.
- The identification of innovative ideas while moving the work of the Organisation into new conflict-related fields.
- A reinforced sense of the importance of the external dimension, with conventions open to non-member states (the AI Framework Convention in the direct aftermath of the Summit<sup>50</sup>).
- A re-emphasised importance of the work on democracy, giving this pillar the same level of importance as the other two pillars on human rights and rule of law.
- Reinforced linkages between the execution of judgments and co-operation work for greater impact.
- More guidance on priorities for the Organisation after years of discussion on the prioritisation of its areas of work.
- Developments and results, not only in areas of work prominently mentioned in the Declaration, but also in areas of work that are not so prominently mentioned.

48. Council of Europe (17/05/2024), "133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 17 May 2024), 2. United around our values, a. Council of Europe response to the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine" CM/Del/Dec(2024)133/2a.

49. Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe (CURE) (2024), "Civil Society Evaluation of the Progress of Implementation of the Reykjavik Summit Commitments by the Council of Europe and Its Member States".

50. The Council of Europe has several conventions which have always had a global outreach, for example the Cybercrime Convention.

- A sense of recognition by staff of the Organisation's work and their own work, which materialised through the creation or securing of posts with Ordinary Budget funding.

71. In general, staff consider that the Organisation is on its way towards being better positioned than it was before the Summit, particularly to promote and support efforts to assist Ukraine. Feedback is more critical with regards to the Organisation's ability to support the execution of judgments (see Appendix 6, Figure 29).

72. However, overall, there is little evidence to date of significant changes in the functioning of the Organisation following the Declaration, although it should be noted that no expectations regarding such changes were expressed in the Declaration.

#### 4.1.8. *Increasing significance of youth participation and civil society engagement*

73. Youth participation and civil society engagement became more topical after the Declaration and there have been positive developments in their mainstreaming in the Organisation's work. The staff survey highlighted that youth participation and civil society engagement were less mainstreamed than gender and human right approaches before the Declaration. They have been addressed to varying degrees, depending on the areas of work.

74. Concrete steps have been taken following the Declaration to develop a Reference Framework reflecting clear guiding principles for the integration of a **youth** perspective for the wider Organisation (work in progress).<sup>51</sup> Youth participation as part of the approaches is also clearly integrated into the ToR of newly created groups and committees (e.g. GME<sup>52</sup>, CDDEM<sup>53</sup>) and existing committees<sup>54</sup>, and the youth perspective has been integrated through a specific hearing at the GME. Civil society actors acknowledge the Council of Europe's work on youth over the years. They identify good practices for the meaningful engagement of youth that should be transferred to other parts of the Organisation with less experience on this matter. The recent DIO-managed evaluation of the integration of a youth perspective in the Council of Europe's work noted that the Declaration has raised awareness, but that there is a gap between the high-level mandate given by the Declaration and its implementation.<sup>55</sup>

75. Council of Europe engagement with **civil society** has been developing in a positive direction and has been boosted by the Declaration. As an example, several INGOs have an observer status in the GME and a specific hearing was conducted to integrate their view in the strategy on the environment. While extent and quality of civil society engagement have generally improved, both aspects still need to be strengthened. A meaningful engagement with civil society requires resources for systematic participation and creating the space for exchanges and for civil society contribution to the work of the Organisation and its impact. Currently, the measures and resources to support real participation are insufficient, preventing the processes of engaging with civil society

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51. Council of Europe (25/10/2023), "Elements for a Council of Europe reference framework for a youth perspective, Follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration, 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government" CMJ(2023)44\_rev.

52. Council of Europe (10/07/2024), "Ad hoc Multidisciplinary Group on the Environment (GME) Terms of Reference proposed by the Secretary General" GR-H(2024)8-final.

53. Council of Europe (2023), "Terms of reference of the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM)" CM(2023)131-addfinal.

54. "take due account of the following mainstreamed perspectives in the performance of its tasks: gender, youth, rights of persons with disabilities and of Roma and Traveller issues".

55. Council of Europe (01/2025), "Evaluation of the integration of youth perspective in Council of Europe work" final report, January 2025, DIO-EVA(2025)01.

from being fully inclusive. Council of Europe staff consider that relations with civil society have intensified since the Declaration. Civil society engagement is integrated into committees' ToR, either as an approach to be considered when appropriate and relevant, or as the main aspect of the work of the respective committee. Civil society organisations interviewed confirmed that there has been an increase in outreach to civil society, which is demonstrated by the following steps:

- the roadmap on the Council of Europe's engagement with civil society;<sup>56</sup>
- more sharing of information and more transparency;
- grants for NGOs to raise awareness about the work and standards of the Council of Europe, including the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy;<sup>57</sup>
- more exchanges by the operational directorates of the Council of Europe with the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (CINGO);
- the launch of the Register of Damage Civil Society Co-ordination Platform in October 2024.<sup>58</sup>

76. Civil society engagement has been integrated into some areas of work from the start (e.g. the North-South Centre), and the Declaration therefore did not change much, although it did lead to increased discussion of the topic and, in some committees, there has been an increase in the number of civil society observer organisations since the Declaration. While engagement with civil society goes beyond participation in meetings, contributions of civil society actors may be limited in some committees due to their mandate and the time allowed for their meetings. Thus, there are some challenges in fully implementing the Declaration. Civil society organisations stress the importance of increasing access to information that is necessary for meaningful participation, opportunities for direct contact with the Committee of Ministers, and opportunities for providing inputs for the development of standards.<sup>59</sup>

77. More transversal work on youth engagement and civil society participation across the Organisation, based on existing good practices, is still required. Some Council of Europe entities, for which youth and civil society engagement is not in their core business, recognise that they need to learn from other parts of the Organisation with extensive experience on these topics (e.g. Youth Department, the PACE, Congress, CINGO). The evaluation of the integration of a youth perspective in the Council of Europe's work described a somewhat compartmentalised approach to youth participation, gender mainstreaming and human rights-based approaches.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4.1.9. *Reiterated importance of human rights approaches and gender equality*

78. Overall, the Declaration raised the importance of gender equality, and it is understood that gender representation at PACE has been influenced by the Declaration. While it is unclear how and to what extent the Declaration has changed, or will change, anything further on gender equality beyond what was already envisaged at the time of the Declaration, references to gender in the Declaration ensure that work will continue to be developed in this area. Gender equality has been

56. Council of Europe (12/09/2023), "Secretary General's Roadmap on the Council of Europe's Engagement with Civil Society, 2024-2027" SG/Inf(2023)28.

57. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/new-grant-launched-for-civil-society-organisations>.

58. <https://rd4u.coe.int/en/-/together-for-justice-register-of-damage-for-ukraine-launches-coordination-platform-to-strengthen-civil-society-cooperation>.

59. Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe (CURE) (2024), "Civil Society Evaluation of the Progress of Implementation of the Reykjavik Summit Commitments by the Council of Europe and Its Member States".

60. Council of Europe (01/2025), "Evaluation of the integration of youth perspective in Council of Europe work" final report, January 2025, DIO-EVA(2025)01.

at the centre of the Organisation's work for years and is one of the Organisation's priorities. The Organisation has a Gender Equality Strategy for 2024–2029, which refers to the Declaration, provides a framework for the Organisation's work and has rapporteurs on gender in various areas of work.<sup>61</sup> Respondents to the staff survey believe that gender is a theme that has seen some intensification, although it was already well integrated into the Council of Europe's work before the Summit (see Appendix 6, Figure 16).

79. Human rights-based approaches are at the heart of the Organisation's work and are reported to be well integrated. The topic generated little feedback during this evaluation.

80. Assessing the appropriate depth of gender mainstreaming and human rights approaches represents a key challenge in evaluations. Going beyond the perceptions of stakeholders (who are generally not thematic experts in those fields) and the main guiding documents on the topics within the Organisation would require further analysis of how gender and human rights approaches have been integrated into processes and reflected in the objectives, funding and reporting of interventions. This goes beyond the scope of this evaluation.

## 4.2. Efficiency

### 4.2.1. Key findings

81. This section presents key findings responding to evaluation questions on the efficiency of the response given by the Organisation. These are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

#### **To what extent have the follow-up steps been timely?**

The implementation of the Declaration to date is generally on track. This assessment is based on how multilateral organisations operate rather than on a clear timeframe for the Declaration (which is lacking). Some activities have been particularly promptly implemented, while others are moving at a slower pace. This is partly due to dialogue being required in some areas to turn the Declaration into concrete priorities and actions, as well as for finding consensus.

#### **To what extent have efficiency gains been taken into account or realised in implementing the Declaration?**

The Organisation has taken efficiency gains into consideration when reflecting on designing institutional restructuring. Newly established entities and bodies have more flexibility than existing structures and processes to propose and implement innovative approaches that support greater efficiency. Existing structures face more challenges in prioritisation and innovation.

### 4.2.2. Implementation on track, varied pace of developments

82. Stakeholders consider that follow-up to the Declaration is moving at a satisfactory pace. However, it is important to note that the Declaration was not accompanied by an action plan or

61. Council of Europe (06/03/2024), "1491st meeting, 6 March 2024, 4 Human rights, 4.3 Gender Equality Commission (GEC), a. Gender Equality Strategy (2024-2029)" CM(2024)17-final.

timeline with clear deadlines for key milestones and there is therefore a lack of clear criteria against which to assess progress.

83. Some activities have been particularly promptly implemented, in particular the Register of Damage<sup>62</sup> and the creation of a new Directorate in DGI and the GME. The Register of Damage was considered by many as a highly significant demonstration of capacities and willingness to overcome the bureaucratic challenges of a large intergovernmental organisation. Many of the developments to date have been made possible due to the commitment of the people involved. Other initiatives have developed at a slower pace – too slow for some stakeholders considering the urgency of the topics – but some processes require time and discussion (e.g. CDDEM). The pace of developments has been slower in areas requiring more dialogue to clarify the Declaration's intentions and wording as well as in areas where member states have different positions on the details but agree on the main principles, for example on the environment (although it should be noted that the GME was promptly established and meetings swiftly held). Newly established taskforces support transversal dialogue but also consume a lot of time. Civil society organisations are more critical of the pace of developments on environment-related work that has taken place since May 2023.

84. The Council of Europe's human resources policy is not conducive to rapid recruitment, which prevented the prompt recruitment of staff to the Register of Damage, for example. Moreover, mobility from Strasbourg to field offices is hindered by a lack of incentives for staff to move and by regulatory aspects, despite mobility being one of the priorities of the 2024–2027 People Strategy. This is therefore constraining efficient operationalisation of the Declaration, among others, in the above-mentioned cases.

#### *4.2.3. Efficiency considered, especially by newly established entities*

85. Efficiency has been part of the reflections and decisions made by the Council of Europe in implementing the Declaration, continuing efforts made in the administrative reform towards greater efficiency. Discussions during the process of restructuring the environment, health and social rights thematic areas under one directorate were driven by financial considerations and efficiency gains. Grouping the areas of work beyond the two Directorates General (on Human Rights and Rule of Law and on Democracy and Human Dignity) to also include EDQM was considered from a financial perspective, but was assessed as not relevant from a substantive perspective and was not therefore done.

86. Newly established entities and bodies demonstrate more flexibility in considering efficiency approaches. For example, the innovative format chosen for the CGU enabled it to be established and operationalised faster than the Council of Europe's intergovernmental committee structure.

87. Existing structures face more challenges in considering efficiency gains. For example, feedback from some committees indicates that activities were reprioritised following the Declaration, but that none were dropped.

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62. See key development in: Council of Europe (03/2024), "Register of Damage caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, Annual Activity Report 2023" DD(2024)123 [French edition: *Rapport annuel d'activités (2023) du Registre des dommages causés par l'agression de la Fédération de Russie contre l'Ukraine*].

### 4.3. Relevance

#### 4.3.1. Key findings

88. This section presents key findings in response to the evaluation questions on the relevance of the response given by the Organisation, including the perception of the response by a range of stakeholders and the general public. Further information on the supporting evidence is presented in the subsequent sections.

#### **To what extent has the implementation of the Declaration responded to the needs and problems expressed in the Declaration and the vision shared?**

The Organisation's response to the Declaration is in line with the needs expressed in the Declaration. The Organisation designed its follow-up on the focus and prominently mentioned areas of work, both Ukraine and non-Ukraine-related. The Declaration gave a clear political mandate to the Organisation to engage in work related to the war of aggression against Ukraine. Thus, the establishment and operationalisation of the Register of Damage and other Ukraine-related work directly addresses the Declaration. The Organisation paid attention to further integrating the civil society engagement and youth participation in its work. The establishment of the CDDEM, the GME and the Secretary General's exploratory discussions on democratic backsliding are additional direct responses to the Declaration. The Organisation's response to the Declaration on the environment is criticised by civil society actors for its low level of ambition. Also important to highlight is the fact that the Organisation continued its work "as usual", as the Declaration validated the Council of Europe's "raison d'être" and its ongoing work without envisaging fundamental changes.

#### **How have the Declaration and its related steps taken been perceived by stakeholders?**

Stakeholders perceive the Declaration and the follow-up steps taken by the Organisation positively. The Declaration achieved substantial media attention during the Summit but struggled to maintain lasting engagement and visibility beyond the Summit. While public sentiment was generally positive, the lack of visibility and engagement on the Council of Europe's core areas of work, especially on less publicised areas, remain challenging and require attention by the Council of Europe. Moreover, the Declaration's influence remains primarily confined to institutional and governmental audiences, leaving the reach to civil society unachieved. Considering the importance placed on civil society engagement in the Declaration, this requires specific attention.

#### 4.3.2. Response by the Council of Europe in line with the Declaration

89. Considering the challenges faced by the Organisation in recent years, reconfirming the relevance of the Council of Europe and the validity of its work today was important, and the Summit and Declaration played an essential role in doing so.

90. Overall, the Organisation's response is in line with the main message that governments wanted to send with the Declaration. The Organisation also took into consideration in its response the Declaration's intention to intensify its work with civil society and youth. Council of Europe staff and representatives of diplomatic missions have positive views on the Organisation's response to the Declaration.

91. The Declaration gave the Organisation a clear political mandate to engage in accountability work related to the war of aggression against Ukraine. Interviewees describe the response as primarily addressing the Ukraine situation, illustrated by the work on the Register of Damage. The Organisation's response regarding Ukraine is also acknowledged by partner organisations.

92. The Organisation's response beyond Ukraine is considered by staff to be in line with the Declaration's prominently mentioned areas of work. Representatives of diplomatic missions have a positive perception of the actions taken by the Organisation, both in the continuation of the Organisation's work, and in the Secretary General's follow-up on developing a strategy on democracy to address democratic backsliding (a process in which ambassadors were heavily involved<sup>63</sup>).

93. The feedback on the Organisation's response to the Declaration is positive overall. It indicates that the Organisation has continued to work on ongoing and already planned activities that were validated by the Declaration, and it has launched new activities stemming from the Declaration. The Organisation has responded by taking advantage of the impetus provided by the Declaration.

94. Civil society actors are more critical of what they perceive as an imbalance between the focus on the Register of Damage and the environment. A network of civil society organisations, in a 2024 evaluation of the progress of implementation of the Reykjavik Summit Commitments by the Council of Europe and its member states, considers that "in general, the scope of the implementation steps taken so far does not really match the scale of the existing challenges and the level of political ambition in addressing them reflected in the Declaration".<sup>64</sup> From the perspective of civil society actors in the environment field, the Council of Europe tends to put a lot of effort into developing solutions that already exist elsewhere, rather than seeking to leverage what is already available. They also perceive a lack of clarity as to the expected outcomes of Council of Europe initiatives in this area. Interviewed civil society organisations all criticised the lack of ambition of the Council of Europe in its response to the Declaration (in developing the strategy on the environment and in proposing actions). The creation of the GME<sup>65</sup> in parallel with the existing Steering Committee on Human Rights – Environment (CDDH-ENV) process led, in their view, to a broader discussion and diluted efforts on options for the recognition of the right to a healthy environment. The strategy on the environment (which goes beyond the right to a healthy environment) has a low level of ambition for the organisations interviewed and is seen as being unlikely to pave the way for challenging discussions and ambitious solutions. This was also highlighted as a recurring concern across the analysed media coverage, which perceived a lack of ambition in addressing issues like environmental challenges, as efforts appeared insufficiently robust. This illustrates the different interpretations of the Declaration depending on the respective perspectives and objectives.

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63. Council of Europe (10/2024), "Action Plan to revitalise democracy: Main ideas from the first consultations with Ambassadors (meetings at the Secretary General's Residence on 21–22 October 2024), Internal Note for the file".

64. Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe (CURE) (2024), "Civil Society Evaluation of the Progress of Implementation of the Reykjavik Summit Commitments by the Council of Europe and Its Member States".

65. Council of Europe (10/07/2024), "Ad hoc Multidisciplinary Group on the Environment (GME), Terms of Reference proposed by the Secretary General" GR-H(2024)8-final.

#### 4.3.3. *Divergent interpretations of the Declaration's ambition and its implication for change*

95. The Declaration is not a programmatic document, nor was it intended to be, and, in many places, the Declaration's language is open to different interpretations, depending on the reader's area of work and role. This complicates the planning and monitoring of the Declaration's implementation, and assessment of outcomes. For example, the Declaration has many statements such as "commit to strengthening", "continue strengthening", "continue supporting", "commit to supporting and maintaining", "continue improving the effectiveness of", "reaffirm", "recommit to", and "affirm the need for". At a GR-PBA meeting in 2023, when discussing the various scenarios proposed, delegations did not all agree on the meaning of the language used in various parts of the Declaration. This made it challenging to justify which of the scenarios was more in accordance with the Declaration.<sup>66</sup>

96. While the Declaration calls to continue reform efforts to ensure an Organisation able to meet current and future challenges, the Declaration's wording does not express a clear ambition to fundamentally change the way the Organisation works, the Declaration's implementation to date also points to continuity rather than significant change. The staff survey highlighted a division in perceptions about changes implied by the Declaration in the way the Organisation works: approximately 50% of respondents consider that the Declaration implies significant changes to the way the Organisation works, while the other half disagrees (see Appendix 6, Figure 17).

97. A change of paradigm may need to be considered if the Declaration means that the Organisation's field presence should be further developed and its work beyond Europe expanded. This would imply a more decentralised organisation with a different composition of field and liaison offices having expanded scope of work and decision-making capacity. This was highlighted by some interviewees.

#### 4.3.4. *Limited public attention beyond main outcomes and engagement restricted to government and other international organisations*

98. The public does not show high engagement with the Council of Europe areas of work, beyond events and tangible outcomes. The analysis found that the Declaration and follow-up achieved substantial media attention during the Summit, with the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine garnering the highest public attention, closely followed by the Declaration itself (see Appendix 7, Figures 30–35). Beyond the Summit, the Declaration and its follow-up struggled to trigger and maintain lasting engagement and visibility.

99. The overall tone of the media coverage ranged from neutral to positive, with most articles providing factual accounts of the Summit's proceedings and outcomes. Notably, there was broad support for the Council of Europe's efforts to assist Ukraine and uphold European values, reflecting favourable sentiment towards its initiatives in these areas. Despite some positive sentiment, the Council of Europe faced challenges in expanding its reach beyond governmental institutional circles. Civil society is not highly engaged with the Council of Europe's work on social media. Interviews and survey results confirmed that the reach to civil society has improved but required further attention, especially because engagement with civil society is an ambition of the Declaration (see 4.1.8).

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66. Council of Europe (11/10/2023), "Synopsis, Meeting of 5 October 2023, Rapporteur Group Programme, Budget and Administration" GR-PBA(2023)CB12.

100. Overall, the Council of Europe attracts markedly different levels of attention and engagement across the different areas of its work. Initiatives leading to tangible outcomes triggered the highest public attention, for example the Register of Damage and the AI Framework Convention. Niche and less tangible topics, such as the execution of judgments and the Principles for Democracy attracted more limited reactions (see Appendix 7, Figure 35). Overall, online discussions focused mainly on Ukraine, with discussions centred around Europe's response to the war (see Appendix 7, Figure 36). Public discourse was driven by emotionally charged or controversial issues (such as the Ukraine crisis and human rights violations), which strongly linked the Declaration to the ongoing conflict (see Appendix 7, Figure 43).

101. While the Declaration and its follow-up attracted considerable attention in political and diplomatic spheres, they fell short of generating widespread public enthusiasm. This is evident from the limited social media traction and the prevalence of specialised perspectives in public discourse.

#### 4.4. Coherence

##### 4.4.1. Key findings

102. This section presents key findings responding to evaluation questions on the coherence of the Organisation's response with other areas of work within the Council of Europe and with actions by external stakeholders. These are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

#### **To what extent have the follow-up steps taken been set up in coherence with other areas of work within the Council of Europe?**

The implementation of the Declaration is mostly a continuation of ongoing work and of planned activities. As indicated previously in the report, the Declaration validates the work of the Organisation. Therefore, a logical consequence is that the implementation of the Declaration is aligned with the core goals of the Council of Europe and builds on existing work and initiatives. Furthermore, the Declaration has facilitated more systematic and robust internal discussions and has strengthened co-operation within the Organisation, yet cross-cutting work is still not a standard practice.

#### **To what extent have the follow-up steps been set up in coherence with what other international actors are doing in those respective areas?**

Efforts in collaborating and co-operating with external actors are contributing to more coherence, but this work remains largely underdeveloped. The EU is a main partner, and the already good collaboration has been strengthened by the Declaration and its follow-up, yielding mutually beneficial outcomes. However, while some efforts have been made to engage other actors, such as the United Nations (UN), this outreach would benefit from further attention. To address this, the Council of Europe needs to better leverage its unique strengths and prioritise deeper, more focused dialogue with external stakeholders.

##### 4.4.2. Ensured coherence over time

103. As implied by the Declaration, its implementation mainly involves the continuation of ongoing and already planned work. Work addressing the Declaration is therefore well integrated with ongoing processes. Even in focus areas of work such as the Register of Damage, the work is a

continuation of previous efforts<sup>67</sup> and is in line with the way the Organisation finds legal solutions to political problems.

104. Areas of work that have been strengthened in recent years (e.g. co-operation and field presence) also show alignment. Indeed, the strategic programming of the DPC<sup>68</sup> is in line with the Declaration and with efforts of the last 10 years. There is also increased co-ordination to ensure that Action Plans are well aligned with the work of the Organisation and the Declaration.

105. While the continuity of work is in line with the Declaration, there is perhaps a risk that, in the future, member states may criticise the Organisation if they consider that the Summit and the Declaration have not led to substantive changes.

#### 4.4.3. *Increased transversal coherence*

106. There has been an increase in, and formalisation of, internal synergies, co-operation and dialogue following the Declaration, as all staff are expected to be inspired by, and follow, the same document, namely the Declaration. Other steps discussed in the following paragraphs have also contributed to more coherence.

107. Restructuring (e.g. the newly established Social Rights, Health and Environment Directorate<sup>69</sup>) and grouping more topics (e.g. under the Directorate of Security, Integrity and Rule of Law) was reported to have led to more synergies and coherence.

108. There was already close co-operation and enhanced internal cohesion in the preparation of the Summit and the Declaration. This continued after the Declaration's adoption. The strengthened internal position and role of Council of Europe institutions supported the PACE and the Congress to actively engage in the implementation of the Declaration,<sup>70 71</sup> including on specific topics (e.g. children of Ukraine<sup>72 73</sup> and the execution of judgments<sup>74</sup>). The Congress has expressed its will to strengthen its contribution to the execution of judgments concerning the activities of local and regional authorities.<sup>75</sup> The role of national parliamentarians and PACE, and potential new activities in the implementation of judgments of the Court, were discussed in November 2023 at a session of the PACE's Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, they are systematically following up their own activities and the implementation of the Declaration itself.

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67. Note that the Register was established immediately before the Summit.

68. The DPC's proposed text was taken up without major changes in the Declaration.

69. Established in January 2024 as a follow-up to the Declaration: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-rule-of-law/social-rights-health-and-environment-directorate>.

70. Council of Europe (2024), "The Council of Europe Development Bank: implementing the Reykjavik Declaration" Resolution 2566(2024).

71. Council of Europe (14/09/2023), "United around our values: the road to Reykjavik and beyond, Parliamentary Assembly follow-up to the Reykjavik Summit of the Council of Europe".

72. Council of Europe (18/10/2023), "Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to Russian Federation or to Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators", Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2253 (2023) CM/AS(2023)Rec2253-final.

73. Council of Europe (27/09/2023), "Reception of women and children refugees in Europe's cities and regions" – Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Recommendation 481 (2022) CM/Cong(2023)Rec481-final.

74. Council of Europe (11/04/2024), "Implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2252 (2023), Draft reply" CM/AS(2024)Rec2252-prov.

75. Council of Europe (27/02/2024), "Supervision of the execution of judgments and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights 2023, 17<sup>th</sup> annual report of the Committee of Ministers" DH-DD(2024)125-rev.

76. Council of Europe (27/02/2024), "Supervision of the execution of judgments and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights 2023, 17<sup>th</sup> annual report of the Committee of Ministers" DH-DD(2024)125-rev.

109. On the execution of judgments, there has been reinforced dialogue between the Court and other parts of the Organisation (i.e. co-operation programmes on the execution of judgments of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law DGI, and the Congress). The Commissioner for Human Rights has stated his intention to engage with member states to sustain or generate the necessary commitment to execute judgments at domestic level and to support the Committee of Ministers in its supervisory role<sup>77</sup>.

110. Increased and more formal internal collaboration and co-operation is exemplified by broad participation by different parts of the Organisation in newly established bodies (e.g. CGU), on reinforced topics (e.g. the environment) and ongoing work (e.g. conference on the smuggling of migrants). However, the proliferation of taskforces and groups is time-consuming and should be carefully balanced. This might explain the increased workload reported by staff who responded to the staff survey (see Appendix 6, Figure 10), although other factors also influence personal workload (e.g. expansion of the scope of work not matched by commensurate additional resources).

111. However, there is still an unexploited potential to establish linkages across the Organisation and to work in a truly cross-cutting manner. Internal co-ordination in the translation of the Declaration and its implementation could be enhanced by early involvement and integration of all parts of the Organisation working on a specific theme. This applies both to the areas of work prominently mentioned in the Declaration and the areas of work not so prominently mentioned. There is scope for more sharing of learning within the Organisation on the integration of transversal themes (e.g. youth). Expectations among staff of intensified collaboration with colleagues in other sectors of the Organisation are not always being met (see Appendix 6, Figure 7 and Figure 17).

112. While the Declaration stressed the importance of co-operation and fostering broader participation in committees, the potential for more synergies between committees has not yet been fully leveraged. For example, external partners expressed concern about their perception of a lack of connection between the CDDH-ENV and the GME<sup>78</sup>.

#### *4.4.4. Enhanced collaboration and co-ordination with external actors, to be further developed*

113. The Declaration has led to an increase in consultations and requests to the Council of Europe by external stakeholders, as well as participation by external partners in Council of Europe activities. Collaboration and co-operation with other international organisations have increased but is tempered by distinct spheres of work and membership bases. The Declaration is reported to have given an unprecedented impetus to the Council of Europe's external dimension, particularly to political dialogue and co-operation with the EU, the UN and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).<sup>79</sup> This is demonstrated by concrete actions at higher levels of the Organisation, namely the reopening of the Council of Europe liaison office in Geneva, the staffing

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77. Address at the 133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/commissioner-s-adresse-at-the-133rd-session-of-the-committee-of-ministers-of-the-council-of-europe>).

78. To note that the CDDH was represented in the four meetings of the GME and that the CDDH-ENV ended its work in spring 2024 while the GME started in July 2024. An exchange of view with the CDDH-ENV chair was organised at the first GME meeting and updates on follow-up to the CDDH-ENV's work have been provided regularly to the GME.

79. Council of Europe (25/03/2024), "4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavik, Iceland, 16-17 May 2023) – Follow-up, Strengthening the role of the Council of Europe in the evolving European multilateral architecture and in global governance by enhancing its external dimension", Draft report of the GR-EXT on follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration – document prepared by the Directorate of Political Affairs and External Relations' GR-EXT(2024)6-final.

reinforcement of this office and of the liaison office in Vienna (in the adjusted 2025 budget), and discussions about a potential office in New York.

114. Concrete examples of inclusive participation by external partners are also visible at committee and working group levels. Relevant illustrations are the CGU and its working groups including a range of actors meeting around the table (e.g. government officials, civil society organisations, academics), and the GME having sessions dedicated to partners such as the UN.

115. Collaboration with partners has in some cases increased and in others remained the same, depending on the partner and area of work concerned. There is increased co-operation with civil society organisations and with government and independent experts (members of committees). Developments in co-operation with other partners (EU, UN and other international organisations) are more varied and external partners indicate that co-operation efforts are still, in some cases, constrained by “work bubbles” within the Organisation.

116. Within the Organisation, there is a perception that external partners have a renewed interest in the Council of Europe, its work and their role in the Organisation’s work following the Declaration. This is demonstrated by an increase in consultations and invitations to participate in events.

117. The willingness and measures taken to strengthen co-operation have been welcomed by UN organisations, although there is room for improvement in tackling sensitive topics and enhancing collaboration overall. On certain topics, there appear to be some tensions between the Council of Europe and the UN, for example on the smuggling of migrants. UN organisations note that the fact that international organisations have different membership bases creates both opportunities and challenges (mainly around the Russian Federation being a UN member state but no longer a member state of the Council of Europe).

#### *4.4.5. Good co-ordination and alignment with the EU*

118. The Declaration delivers a clear message on the importance of the work with the EU, and overall feedback from within the Organisation and from the EU is very positive about this strategic partnership. There have been increased synergies in recent years and in general the Declaration conveys a political message that supports discussion on strategic partnerships and joint programmes with the EU.<sup>80</sup> A concrete positive example of change brought about by the Declaration is the reactivation of meetings between senior Council of Europe officials and their EU counterparts.<sup>81</sup> From the perspective of EU stakeholders, the work on democracy is delivering a mutually beneficial coherence message. The work of the recently established Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM) is also welcome. However, some Council of Europe staff engaged in the work on the Principles for Democracy consider that there is a need for both the Council of Europe and the EU to clarify their respective added value and strategic orientations.

119. More generally, the EU’s reliance on the Organisation is likely to evolve over time, and it was suggested from within the Council of Europe that the role of the Organisation should be reassessed

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80. Note that the role of the Declaration in supporting dialogue is not only true for discussions with the EU, but also with other partner organisations and with member states, e.g. in execution of judgments.

81. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/council-europe/eu-and-council-europe-senior-officials-meet-discuss-strategic-partnership\\_en?s=51](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/council-europe/eu-and-council-europe-senior-officials-meet-discuss-strategic-partnership_en?s=51).

in light of its evolving relationship with the EU, and the latter's growing involvement in Council of Europe work (e.g. drafting of the AI Framework Convention, which was boosted by the Declaration), as well as the EU's future enlargement and the increasing attention paid by the EU to the rule of law and democratic resilience, some of the Council of Europe core pillar of work and extensive standards set.

#### 4.4.6. *Renewed Council of Europe's outreach beyond its member states*

120. The Council of Europe, through a range of instruments and steps taken following the Declaration, benefits from reaching out beyond Europe. Following the Declaration, outreach efforts towards non-European states are reported to have focused on support to Ukraine and the promotion of relevant Council of Europe instruments, particularly the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Register of Damage.<sup>82</sup> Beyond Ukraine, the Council of Europe has several instruments and conventions that are open to non-member states of the Council of Europe (e.g. Budapest Convention on cybercrime), and these were reported to have led to an outreach to such states after the Summit and Declaration. The AI Framework Convention has brought further opportunities for co-operation beyond its member states and beyond Europe. A tangible example is the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (known as the North-South Centre – NSC),<sup>83</sup> which is described as a decisive instrument for supporting the efforts of the Council of Europe member states in their commitment to enhance the Organisation's external dimension.<sup>84</sup> The Court maintains external dialogue and good outreach with other courts also through its Superior Courts Network, which includes as observers the inter-American and African human rights courts.

121. Although the external dimension still tends to receive limited attention within the Organisation, this is changing thanks to the vision and engagement of the new Secretary General for the enhancement of the Organisation's external dimension, including the strengthening of the linkages between the Neighbourhood Policy and existing programmes.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the Declaration is described as having facilitated discussions with actors beyond Europe to increase the Council of Europe's outreach.

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82. Council of Europe (25/03/2024), "4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavik, Iceland, 16-17 May 2023) – Follow-up , Strengthening the role of the Council of Europe in the evolving European multilateral architecture and in global governance by enhancing its external dimension, Draft report of the GR-EXT on follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration – document prepared by the Directorate of Political Affairs and External Relations" GR-EXT(2024)6-final.

83. The North-South Centre is an Enlarged Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe that serves as an important instrument of its external dimension.

84. Council of Europe (14/11/2023), "Enhancing the Council of Europe's external dimension: the North-South Centre's medium-term strategy (2024-2027)" NSC/EC(2023)10.

85. Council of Europe (14/11/2023), "Enhancing the Council of Europe's external dimension: the North-South Centre's medium-term strategy (2024-2027)" NSC/EC(2023)10.

## 5. Conclusions

122. The Council of Europe has been evolving in a challenging context in recent years, and the Reykjavik Summit and Declaration have been important in recommitting the Organisation and its member states around values and in validating the work of the Organisation.

123. The period since the adoption of the Declaration has been short; the evaluation's conclusions are presented with a recognition of this context and the fact that implementation is ongoing. The Council of Europe's Secretariat and its institutions have actively engaged in taking relevant steps to implement the Declaration. The Secretariat has translated the Declaration into the Programme and Budget, a process that was supported by the Declaration and through the proposal of different scenarios, creating a positive environment for discussions and decisions.

124. Based on the findings, the evaluation team presents the following comprehensive assessment of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and coherence:

- The Organisation's response to the Declaration to date is effective in general but shows areas requiring further attention. There has been an effective process of translating the Declaration into the Programme and Budget. Moreover, important steps have been initiated and already taken in focus areas and prominently mentioned areas of work (e.g. the Register of Damage, CGU, AI Framework Convention, CDDEM, GME). Nevertheless, high expectations are yet to be met (e.g. comprehensive compensation mechanism, strategy for democracy, Reykjavik Committee on the environment), and member states' political will, engagement and financial support need to be maintained to achieve further outcomes and impact.
- The implementation of the Declaration to date is largely on track and efficient, despite the lack of a clear timeframe to ground the efficiency assessment.
- The Organisation has given a relevant response to the needs of the geopolitical context expressed in the Declaration. The Organisation took concrete actions on focus areas and prominently mentioned areas of work, and at the same time continues its ongoing activities; the Declaration having validated its work and "raison d'être".
- The implementation of the Declaration is coherent with previous activities of the Organisation, building on and continuing initiatives that were already underway or planned. Efforts in co-ordinating and collaborating with external actors are contributing to more external coherence, but co-operation in general could be further developed.

125. Implementation was more efficient in areas of work defined in concrete terms in the Declaration and benefiting from a united political will of member states. This is particularly the case for the Ukraine-related areas of work. The Declaration greatly facilitated progress in areas facing resistance. However, the pace of development has been slower in areas that left more room for interpretation in the Declaration's wording and intention, which are often areas experiencing a lack of consensus among member states on actions to be taken, or lack of unity at member state level. In particular, the disagreements among member states on some topics, e.g. the environment and the right to a healthy environment, is a key contextual factor in interpreting the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

126. With a few exceptions, much of what has happened since the Declaration's adoption is a continuation of activities that were ongoing before the Declaration, or already planned. These activities were validated and thus strengthened by the Declaration, and in some cases also by the

increase in budget. Continuity of work is important and ensures coherence over time, but it is also necessary to balance continuation with expectations of change following the Declaration and the budget increase. Despite the commitment of additional funds by member states and the reforms' efforts and their outcomes, the current funding is unlikely to be sufficient to meet expectations set by the Declaration based on the current functioning and scope of work of the Council of Europe. The Organisation needs to be realistic about what can be achieved with existing levels of funding.

127. It is important to highlight that the continuation of ongoing efforts on accountability mechanisms for Ukraine, on democracy and on the environment is required to fulfil some of the high expectations set by the Declaration that have not yet fully materialised. The Council of Europe needs to prepare further implementation steps that explicitly recognise funding constraints, as well as an ongoing monitoring and prompt communication about developments and achievements relating to the Declaration. Areas that might not materialise as planned or not at all need to be analysed and results communicated to manage expectations. These will be essential for member state and stakeholder engagement, ownership and support, operationally, financially and politically.

128. The Declaration sets important goals for the way the Organisation works beyond its member states and with external partners (external dimension), as well as its co-operation work in the field. The direction and depth of the work of the Organisation in these dimensions may vary significantly depending on decisions to be made by the Organisation. Some paths may indeed require more fundamental changes in the way the Organisation operates, while others may follow a status quo approach, with all options in between. Reflections on the way forward by the Council of Europe's Secretariat and institutions need to be based on inclusive dialogue, strategies and budget considerations leading to the development of realistic targets.

129. The implementation of the Declaration has had positive effects on the Organisation, but it is too early to assess impact. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that impact goes far beyond the work of the Council of Europe's Secretariat and other bodies. Indeed, impact is not only dependent of the work of the Organisation but depends largely on member states taking timely and substantive actions to follow up on their commitments. However, the continuity of political support and engagement, in a rapidly changing environment, is not ensured. The frequency of summits has an influence on this and was acknowledged as an important factor for consideration.

130. The Declaration emphasised the need for broader participation in its activities, to include civil society and youth. These require a continuing commitment from the Organisation and the resources to be made available to create the required space and ensure meaningful participation. As for the external dimension and co-operation and field work mentioned above, it may – depending on the ambitions followed – require changes in the paradigms of the Organisation to reach its intended objectives.

131. The Council of Europe would benefit from refining its strategies for communication about important areas of work to strengthen its impact. This would enhance perceptions of relevance. By doing so, the Organisation could foster greater public understanding and engagement, bridging the gap between institutional objectives and grassroots concerns. This approach would amplify the Organisation's message and demonstrate its work's practical significance to a wider audience, including youth and civil society, potentially increasing public participation and broadening public understanding of the Council of Europe's pivotal role in shaping Europe's future.

132. Taking stock of the role that the Declaration has played in providing guidance, facilitating discussions and rallying around values, and the work in the almost two years that have passed since the Declaration's adoption by the heads of state, provides a timely opportunity for the Council of Europe to ensure (1) continuous engagement around values and its work, for a successful continuation of implementation of the Declaration and achievements, (2) that key issues of the Declaration, partly unsolved at the moment, are addressed to achieve the expected outcomes and impacts, and (3) that stakeholders' expectations regarding the Declaration are managed.

## 6. Recommendations

133. Emerging recommendations were presented and discussed with the Reference Group at the end of the data collection phase in December 2024. The Reference Group's feedback on and in-depth analysis of data collected were taken into consideration in the finalisation of this report and its recommendations, which are presented below.

134. This report makes five main recommendations to the Council of Europe on strengthening future implementation of the Declaration to improve its impact.

**Area 1: Ensure continuous engagement around the values and work of the Council of Europe** for a successful continued implementation of the Declaration.

**Recommendation 1: The Council of Europe should develop an intentional and strategic approach drawing on existing and new avenues and engagement mechanisms to maintain momentum created by the Declaration and continuous commitment of member states to the work of the Organisation, as well as their engagement in new priorities whenever needed.** The question of an eventual regularity of Summits has been discussed throughout this evaluation. However, convening a Summit will ultimately always represent a political decision in a specific situation. It seems therefore worth considering what other instruments could be used to re-confirm the shared responsibility of all stakeholders. We recommend assigning this forward-looking task and the related communication to the Secretary General of the Organisation.

**Recommendation 2: The Council of Europe should foster inclusive internal processes and promote transversality across the Council of Europe institutions as well as within its Secretariat.** Transparent and inclusive processes should be implemented to foster understanding and ownership of programmatic and budgetary decisions. Transversality is important for inclusive participation, for creating synergies, avoiding duplication of efforts, and mutual learning between the Organisation's various entities. This also supports the unity of an organisation that comprises several institutions. In practical terms, transversality means ensuring communication channels and space and time for exchanges, while carefully managing time and resources.

**Area 2: Address key issues of the Declaration that remain partly unsolved.**

**Recommendation 3: The Council of Europe should establish scenarios representing possible levels of ambition, scope of work and required resources, taking into consideration existing framework documents and efforts, with regard to:**

- engagement and participation of civil society in the Council of Europe's work;
- engagement and participation of youth in the Council of Europe's work;
- decentralisation of the Organisation to strengthen its co-operation work on the ground;
- engagement of the Council of Europe beyond its member states and with external partners (external dimension).

Scenarios should be developed in each of the areas mentioned above. Making progress in these areas may require a shift in the way the Organisation operates. This needs to be carefully analysed, and decisions regarding changes must be supported by evidence. Requirements (i.e. processes, mechanisms, funding, political support) and the consequences of changes must also be assessed. The commitment, support and engagement of member states are essential aspects, and need to be commensurate with ambitions and honoured throughout.

**Area 3: Manage expectations**, by leveraging key deliverables and addressing discrepancies as they arise between potential expectations and what can and will be delivered.

**Recommendation 4: The Council of Europe should strengthen its management framework (including planning, execution, and continuous monitoring) for initiatives where high expectations have not yet fully materialised, so that decisions about whether/how to proceed with their implementation are informed by evidence gathered throughout the process.** This would support effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the Declaration and prompt decision making. This could be particularly relevant for the following areas:

- **a comprehensive compensation mechanism** following the establishment of the Register of Damage;
- **democracy through the development of a strategy on democracy;**
- **the environment with the establishment of the Reykjavik Committee.**

At a more detailed level, steps taken should follow a consolidated approach, enabling processes to be monitored, discrepancies between plans and results to be identified, and decisions to be taken when required to move on.

**Recommendation 5: The Council of Europe should leverage the implementation and impact of deliverables following the Declaration to promote its work to various stakeholders, including civil society, using sharpened messaging.** This comprises communicating its work at important stages of implementation with messages targeted to a range of audiences, including beyond institutional and government circles. Messaging should also address challenges and reflections and, overall, align expectations of stakeholders with ongoing and future work.

## Appendices

Link to the volume II – Appendices: <https://rm.coe.int/1680b5f5c0>

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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.