

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME “BUILDING TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS” (BTPI)

November 2025



INTRODUCTION



This evaluation explores how the BTPI programme helped strengthen public confidence in democratic systems. It focused on Democracy through law-Venice Commission, Independence and Efficiency of justice, and Prison, Police and Deprivation of liberty. Together, these three sub-programmes, operating through the change mechanisms of standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation, aim to support efforts to build genuine democratic institutions, transparent in their functioning, independent and impartial. This, in turn, is expected to ensure equal treatment before the law and the effective enjoyment of rights and freedoms for all.



WHY THIS EVALUATION?

This evaluation, commissioned by the Directorate of Internal Oversight, supports strategic decision-making to sustain – and where needed, enhance the performance of the BTPI programme. Spanning the years 2020 to 2024, the evaluation assessed relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact. Importantly, it surfaced key lessons and best practice which are recommended for continued use and wider adoption.

WHAT DID THE EVALUATION FIND?



1 The evaluation concludes that the programme is **credible** and **responds to the reform needs** of member States in the areas of rule of law, justice and human rights, with growing focus on gender equality and marginalized groups. Its demand-driven model aligns with country-specific reform priorities through a solid Theory of Change (ToC), which is focused on targeted state actors.



3 The BTPI programme made a meaningful contribution to legal and policy changes identified in the 14 cases in 10 member states especially **where political will, institutional capacity, and country-level engagement align**. This significance of the contribution is **amplified** when different parts of the Council of Europe’s programme are applied to a specific reform situation, and when **synergized** with the like-minded efforts of independent national institutions, development partners and CSOs.



2 The evaluation found over **200 examples of change at the member state level** ranging from constitutional and legislative reforms to new regulatory frameworks and improved practice around detention safeguards and probation systems or adopted judicial codes, access to justice and case management improvements.



4 The **politicisation of reforms and resistance to change** among those directly affected hindered the implementation of improved institutional frameworks. This means that evidence of progress towards improved democratic institutional performance remains **uneven**, which constrains deeper impact and public trust but also underlines the continued relevance of the programme.



5 Financially, the BTPI programme operates under strict budgetary discipline and demonstrates full use of available financial resources. Financial reporting is perceived as heavy, which in combination with budgetary pressures from member states, results in **institutionalized cost-awareness and a continuous push to mobilise extra-budgetary resources**.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICE

1

The strongest achievements of the BTPI programme were explained by high-quality **technical assistance** combined with deliberate **inclusive process facilitation, soft diplomacy** and practical logistical **support**, with active involvement of the Council of Europe **external offices**.

2

The coherent application of the **strategic triangle** (standard setting, monitoring and co-operation) in support of specific reform processes amplifies the significance of the BTPI contribution and with that the chance of successful reforms.

3

The **active alignment with external like-minded entities** like independent national human rights mechanisms, CSOs and / or development partners brings about positive change.

4

Systematic learning and adaptation, grounded in the active exchange of good practices both internally and across member states, are critical for continuously improving outputs and tools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

Expand the programme's ToC to reflect pathways of change through non-state actors and clarify the causality from improved institutional capacity and frameworks to improved institutional performance.

Recommendation 2

Introduce a more systematic complex-aware programme monitoring and reporting approach to better capture the programme's effect at member state level, with particular attention for change in non-co-operation countries.

Recommendation 3

Ensure that considerations of behaviour change processes and mechanisms are incorporated into the design and implementation of Council of Europe work and strengthen the capacity of programme staff to advocate and support targeted institutions in their change management challenges

Recommendation 4

Enhance the visibility of the Building Trust in Public Institutions programme beyond those directly involved.

HOW WAS THIS EVALUATION CONDUCTED?

EVALUATION STARTED OCTOBER 2024.....EVALUATION CONDUCTED & FINDINGS VALIDATED.....REPORT FINALISED JULY 2025.....REPORT ISSUED TO SG OCTOBER 2025



Led by the Evaluation Division of DIO & conducted by an external evaluation team (MDF)



Survey responses collected from 38 CoE staff



208 internal and external documents, incl. 65 academic articles reviewed



91 interviews (42 F; 49 M) with CoE staff, members of structures + key informants in member states

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