

EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE ACTION PLAN FOR AZERBAIJAN 2022-2025

Management Response and Action Plan



February 2026

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Management response and Action Plan

Name of Evaluation Report:	Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan 2022-2025		
Date of Evaluation Report:	03/12/2025	Date of Action Plan:	03/02/2026

Overall management response to the evaluation:

The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination (DPC) of the Council of Europe considers that the report is an overall fair assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan thus far and agrees with most conclusions and recommendations.

Whenever relevant, the recommendations of the Evaluation were taken into account in the process of development and validation of new project proposals, implementation and reporting. The recommendations of the Evaluation will also be considered in the drafting a new Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan.

ACTION PLAN

Management decision ¹	Entity in charge ²	Planned actions ³ (determined by entity)	Justification for non-acceptance ⁴	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
<p>Recommendation 1: Strengthen participatory design processes to enhance national ownership and relevance (High⁵).</p> <p>Ensure that systematic (and well documented) in-country consultations with government institutions, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders inform future Action Plans. Incorporate formal needs assessments and gap analyses into the design process to ensure a comprehensive approach. Consider organising in-person, inclusive design missions and thematic working groups.</p> <p><u>Response:</u> The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination has made the Action Plan preparation process increasingly inclusive. A participatory approach to Action Plan preparation is ensured through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduction of an external evaluation of the Action Plan, thereby collecting views from diverse stakeholders including through in-country interviews with different stakeholders, on the relevance, effectiveness and value added, in order learn from experience and integrate lessons learned in the next cycle; • Organisation of an Action Plan Steering Committee Meeting in the last year of the Action Plan to take stock of outcomes achieved, discuss the possible challenges identified during the implementation period, and start identifying priorities for the next action plan with the Council of Europe co-operation sector, governmental authorities and selected Civil Society Organisations; • Organisation of exchanges with donors “in situ” about past co-operation activities and the prospects for the next programming period; • Organisation of discussions at the technical level with Council of Europe staff, stakeholders and beneficiaries, including representatives of national authorities and Civil Society Organisations to define more “operational” priorities, expected outcomes, main interventions, partners, target groups, beneficiaries, relevant sources of justification, indicators, potential barriers for implementation and some mitigating measures as well as transversal elements (e.g. civil society participation and gender mainstreaming); • Consultation with national partners on the priorities for new Action Plans on the basis of a consolidated AP draft and related discussions channelled through the Permanent Representation. • Organisation of an informal meeting of the CM Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM) -if agreement by the country concerned- to provide an opportunity to the member States to comment on draft Action Plans <p>The Council of Europe consistently applies a participatory and inclusive approach to the Action Plan preparation, which includes extensive stakeholder consultations at the central, entity and local levels, and across sectors. In line with the Council of Europe Human Rights Approach, particular attention is paid to identifying and working with actors who represent diverse perspectives. Throughout the lifecycle of the Action Plan and related projects, consultations are conducted in the broadest possible way,</p>					

¹ The management decision is in relation to the Recommendation (Accepted, Partially accepted, Rejected).

² Initial suggestion – to be defined/updated by management.

³ For implementing accepted recommendations.

⁴ For recommendations that are partially accepted or rejected.

⁵ Recommendations have been classified as either “high” or “medium” in terms of the assessment of their importance following the evaluation.

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including with relevant local institutions, community-based organisations, and other actors. The outcomes of these consultations are systematically fed into the development of new Action Plans.					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Partially accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected	DPC, in consultation with MAEs and project teams (Senior Project Officer, Project Manager)	<p>The Council of Europe will continue ensuring that systematic in-country consultations with government institutions, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders prepare the new Action Plans</p> <p>The Council of Europe will continue fostering an inclusive and co-ordinated approach that encourages active stakeholder participation and reinforces mutual accountability and ownership across all levels of project implementation and Action Plan preparation.</p>		Continuous Target Date: 31 January 2028	Manuel PEREIRA, Country Advisor
<p>Recommendation 2: Ensure usability of the Action Plan logframe and develop a more robust results-based management system focused on outcomes monitoring and reporting (High).</p> <p>Ensure that the best practices outlined in the Results-Based Management (RBM) strategy are adhered to in the design of the new Activity Plan logframe. This includes establishing clear baselines, targets and indicators for outputs and outcomes.</p> <p>Provide project teams with guidance and tools to monitor progress beyond the completion of activities. Encourage the use of the logframe as a monitoring tool across all themes.</p> <p><u>Response:</u> The Action Plans' logical frameworks include thematic expected outcomes and related indicators. The Action Plan-level annual reports systematically refer to the relevant objectives/expected outcomes set out in the logframe of the respective Action Plan for the reporting period. To further strengthen results-based monitoring and reporting across country-specific Action Plans dedicated to technical c0-operation, the Council of Europe further developed the logical frameworks in recent Action Plans. This has included strengthening the intervention logic by improving the quality and specificity of the indicators for each expected outcome and incorporating relevant sources and means of verification. This process will continue to ensure that clear baselines, targets and indicators are established for future Action Plans.</p> <p>The Project Management Methodology (PMM) of the Council of Europe provides standardised approaches to the monitoring of progress and results related data collection, and results-based reporting across the project cycle. In line with this methodology, efforts have been made to further develop and harmonise indicator frameworks at both project and Action Plan level. At project level, consistency of the logframes with the Action Plan-level logframe will be ensured, with project-level indicators feeding into the overall Action Plan-level indicator framework. In this regard, DPC together with operational MAEs has started developing methodological guidelines for each Action Plan linking project and Action Plan level indicators. This facilitates monitoring and reporting at the Action Plan level.</p>					

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<p>In parallel, in co-operation with the Directorate of Human Resources, the DPC provides training in PMM and result-based reporting on a regular basis. The DPC enhanced the knowledge of more than 500 staff in various areas including PMM platform training, Project management methodology, results-based reporting, risk management for the staff in HQ and field staff. The regional senior project management officer (PMO) provides support to co-operation projects in terms of project management methodology. The PMO also conducts regular training for the Council of Europe staff in the field of data collection, indicators, and logframe design, with the aim of building the project staff's capacities in data generation and analysis.</p> <p>In addition, DPC started to develop common indicators across the Organisation through workshops. Common indicators were developed by themes of economic crime, efficiency and independence of justice, education, gender equality and trafficking in human beings and resulting indicators are made available on the PMM IT Platform. Standardised, pre-defined indicators are available from the common list while the option of defining a customised indicator is still possible in the above-mentioned areas.</p>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Partially accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected	DPC with technical input from the Council of Europe Office in Baku, supported by MAEs.	<p>The Council of Europe will continue to strengthen the results-based management framework of the Action Plan by ensuring that its logframe is designed and used as a practical monitoring tool. The Action Plan level logframe will be used as a monitoring tool at both Action Plan level and project level Steering Committees to inform partners on the progress.</p> <p>Each Action Plan level logframe will be accompanied from the outset by internal methodological guidelines designed jointly with operational MAEs to ensure clear understanding and adherence of all the projects to indicators at the level of the Action Plan.</p>		Continuous Target date: 31 January 2028	Manuel PEREIRA, Country Advisor
<p>Recommendation 3: Assess mechanisms for proportionate structured coordination and learning to ensure internal coherence (Medium).</p> <p>Assess the level of cross-project coordination. Consider periodic thematic meetings and joint activities across projects. Revisit the format and agenda of Steering Committees.</p> <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>The Council of Europe promotes cross-project co-ordination including through informal exchanges, joint planning exercises, and shared support functions at field office level. Joint activities across projects could be further institutionalised to strengthen coherence, promote synergies, and enable structured peer learning. In this regard, the Council of Europe will include a discussion on cross-cutting themes, shared challenges, and opportunities for collaboration across projects, rather than focusing only individual project reporting at project-level Steering Committee meetings.</p>					

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In addition, the Council of Europe will promote joint activities across projects wherever feasible and introduce shared planning tools, such as a common calendar at office level.					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Partially accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected	DPC in co-operation with the MAEs and Council of Europe Offices	<p>For any new Action Plan, the Council of Europe will apply a more integrated approach focusing on fewer main priorities and linking several projects to these integrated priorities. This will allow for a better demonstration of impact and added value of the Council of Europe.</p> <p>The Council of Europe will integrate the discussion on complementarity and synergies across projects during internal meetings from the drafting stage of the Action Plan via co-creative workshops.</p> <p>This more coherent and integrated approach will increase the strategic role of Action Plan Steering Committees in assessing and reporting on progress in these main priorities.</p> <p>In addition, an increased focus will be put on organising joint activities across projects in the context of the Action Plan, whenever possible, to enhance coherence, generate synergies and extend overall impact. A shared calendar will be created in the relevant offices to ensure a co-ordinated approach.</p> <p>The Council of Europe will revisit the agenda of Project-level Steering Committees to enhance co-ordination across relevant projects.</p>		Target date: 31 January 2028	Manuel PEREIRA, Country Advisor

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<p>Recommendation 4: Identify mechanisms and processes that allow for increased resource flexibility to respond to emerging needs and rebalance underfunded areas (High)</p> <p>Advocate with donors for more flexible financial arrangements, including pooled or reserve funds. Build contingency mechanisms to shift resources across sectors based on evolving relevance and political feasibility. Consult DPB on possible proposals to consider a new approach to Action Plan allocations from the pool fund in order to ensure programming and reporting processes at the P&B level are not negatively affected.</p> <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>The flexibility of the Council of Europe Action Plans lies in their broad design and objectives. Action Plans are used as strategic tools for resource mobilisation and adaptive planning. Namely, the implementation of the Action Plans allows for adjustments in response to evolving needs of the beneficiaries. This approach of enhanced flexibility is illustrated by recent examples under other Council of Europe Action Plans. For instance, Action Plans for Armenia and Georgia were adapted on the project level, by introducing new projects or adjusting the existing ones. Where the circumstances so require, it is possible to also stop project implementation.</p> <p>The Council of Europe applies a proactive resource mobilisation strategy and continuously promotes longer-term framework agreements with donors. As a result, the volume and predictability of extra budgetary resources is increasing. In addition, building on the “Reykjavík Declaration – United around our values”, which recognises the importance of the Council of Europe’s co-operation dimension, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe included, for the first time, a dedicated contribution in the Ordinary Budget 2024-2027. Providing a more stable and predictable source of funding for co-operation activities ensures a more effective and efficient implementation of Action Plans.</p> <p>However, it should be noted that the financing of co-operation activities does not fall entirely within the Council of Europe’s control. Despite the contribution from the ordinary budget, Action Plans still depend on average to over two thirds on extra budgetary resources. Consequently, the degree of flexibility in the allocation and disbursement of funds depends on the extent to which donors request particular requirements, earmarking practices, and the timing of contributions. The Council of Europe encourages donors to provide Action Plan Level Funding without earmarking and specific requirements to enable full flexibility. In addition, inflationary pressures and currency fluctuations in recent years have constrained available resources and reduced purchasing power in several contexts. These developments have at times, affected the implementation of planned activities and required mitigation measures, including budgetary adjustments.</p>					
<input type="checkbox"/> Accepted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected	DPC, in coordination with Council of Europe financial and operational units	The Council of Europe will continue to place emphasis on unearmarked contributions in communication with current and potential donors, given that they enable responsiveness to emerging opportunities and changing circumstances.		- Continuous action	Manuel PEREIRA, Country Advisor

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<p>Recommendation 5: Expand communication efforts to improve awareness and strategic positioning of the Action Plan. (Medium)</p> <p>Develop a unified engagement strategy for the Action Plan that integrates all projects under a shared identity. Promote results through accessible messaging and targeted outreach campaigns that engage state and civil society actors and monitor the visibility of the Action Plan.</p> <p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>The Council of Europe applies a participatory and inclusive approach to project design and delivery, based on broad, cross-sectoral stakeholder consultations. In line with its Human Rights Approach, the Organisation actively engages actors representing diverse perspectives, including local institutions, community-based organisations and other key stakeholders, throughout the entire lifecycle of the Action Plan and related projects.</p> <p>The Council of Europe prioritised the communication and visibility of the results of the Action Plan rather than the document itself. While the Action Plan for Azerbaijan is visible among donors and beneficiaries, it is worth noting that for the wide public, the Action Plan is communicated about through concrete results achieved within the projects implemented as a part of the Action Plan. The benefits of the Council of Europe support to the population of Azerbaijan are the focus of external communication. Particular attention is therefore given to highlighting the stories of people who benefited from the Action Plan. Dissemination of messages is mainly done online - including on social media, as well as with direct participation of individuals in project activities.</p> <p>While harmonisation is already ensured at the level of joint programmes and facilities such as Partnership for Good Governance, all projects have their own individual communication plans. Partnership development and visibility are further enhanced through communication and outreach efforts embedded in the implementation of the Action Plan. To this end, a results-oriented and grassroots communication approach is favored to amplify the outreach to different target groups through diverse communication channels.</p> <p>For any future Action Plans, a dedicated communication strategy/roadmap will be developed prior to its official launch to further enhance its visibility and outreach efforts.</p>					
<input type="checkbox"/> Accepted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially accepted <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected	- DPC - MAEs, with facilitation from project staff in the Council of Europe Offices - Council of Europe Offices	The Council of Europe will further ensure partnership development and visibility by developing a dedicated communication Strategy in the context of all new Action Plans.		As regards the development of a dedicated communication strategy for the next Action Plan: 31 March 2027	Manuel PEREIRA, Country Advisor

Abbreviations	
DPB	Directorate of Programme and Budget
DPC	Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
MAE	Major Administrative Entity
P&B	Programme and Budget