

# EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE SUB-PROGRAMME ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



**Final report**

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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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 The Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (CSES). The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team members from The Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (CSES).

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## Abbreviations

<b>CDCJ</b>	European Committee on Legal Co-operation
<b>CDENF</b>	Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child
<b>CGU</b>	Consultation Group for the Children of Ukraine
<b>CPAT</b>	Child Participation Assessment Tool
<b>CRD</b>	Children's Rights Division
<b>CSES</b>	Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>ECRI</b>	European Commission against racism and intolerance
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FTEs</b>	Full-time equivalents
<b>GRETA</b>	Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
<b>GREVIO</b>	Group of Experts on Action against Women and Domestic Violence
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology
<b>The Lanzarote Committee</b>	Committee of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PACE</b>	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>The Sub-programme</b>	Council of Europe Sub-programme on Children's Rights
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women

## Executive summary

a. As part of the work programme for 2024-27, the Directorate of Internal Oversight of the Council of Europe appointed the Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (CSES) to carry out an evaluation of the Sub-programme on Children's Rights (the Sub-programme).

### Purpose, objectives and scope

b. This evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which the Sub-programme can provide "effective protection through its strategic triangle". In this context, the **objective** of the study was to conduct a detailed analysis of the implementation state of play, the achievements of the different Sub-programme mechanisms, and the interplay between different elements of the Sub-programme.

c. It covered the Sub-programme as a whole as presented in the Council of Europe's Programme and Budget<sup>1</sup>, including all three aspects of the "strategic triangle": standard-setting, mainly taken on by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), monitoring, mainly conducted by the Lanzarote Committee as the committee of the parties to the Lanzarote Convention<sup>2</sup>, and co-operation work, undertaken mostly through extra-budgetary resources. It also covered work conducted by the Consultation Group for the Children of Ukraine (CGU) as special body created to address issues related to Ukrainian children. In addition, the evaluation also covered the relation between the Sub-programme and the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child. The evaluation covered the time period from 2021 to the end of October 2025. It covered all forms of work conducted through the Sub-programme within that time frame as well as both the end of the third Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)<sup>3</sup> and the core period of the current strategy (2022-2027).<sup>4</sup>

d. The primary **user** of the evaluation is the Children's Rights Division (CRD), which is responsible for implementing the Sub-programme. The evaluation is also of interest to all major administrative entities of the Council of Europe, given their role and involvement in implementing the Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

### Evaluation approach and methodology

e. The evaluation employed a theory-based approach using contribution analysis and outcome harvesting to recognise the complex and changing eco-system in which the Sub-programme operates and assess the Sub-programme's effects.

f. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to conduct the evaluation. This included an extensive documentation review, an interview programme with 94 key stakeholders, an online survey with Council of Europe staff involved in children's rights and an online survey with wider Sub-programme stakeholders resulting in a combined total of 123 responses, six case studies and two

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1. See: <http://rm.coe.int/0900001680adec99>.

2. Formally known as the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS N°201).

3. See: <https://rm.coe.int/090000168066cff8>.

4. See: <https://rm.coe.int/1680a5ef27>.

field trips to support the national level research. In addition, the team conducted two observations, namely one of the Inter-secretariat Task Force on Children's Rights and one of the CGU plenary meetings. The evaluation was supported by a panel of three thematic experts.

g. The assessment incorporated an equity-focus, human rights and gender equality responsive approach and was guided by an evaluation matrix and a set of research questions, exploring four key evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency (see Appendices). The assessment is in line with the Directorate of Internal Oversight's Evaluation Guidelines<sup>5</sup> and takes due account of other relevant guidance (e.g., United Nations (UN), OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and European Union (EU) guidance on evaluation criteria, and equity, gender equality and human rights in evaluation).<sup>6</sup> The evaluation team encountered the following limitations and implemented the respective mitigation measures:

- The difficulty to attribute observed outcomes to the Sub-programme linked to the multi-actor ecosystem was overcome by using contribution analysis, outcome harvesting, and triangulating sources.
- The challenge to capture national specificities across the broad geographic scope of the Council of Europe was addressed through the country case studies, strategically selected to collectively cover the full scope of the Sub-programme.
- The evaluation focused on the Sub-programme as a whole, thereby providing high-level insights into operational aspects of individual mechanisms.
- The potential positive bias linked to the large number of stakeholders interviewed involved in the Council of Europe work, was mitigated by reaching out to national stakeholders not directly involved.
- Despite efforts to disseminate the survey as widely as possible, the low survey response rate (~20%) meant that survey responses are referred to only as supporting evidence.
- Time and resources constraints did not make it possible to consult children directly; instead, the evaluation team reviewed secondary evidence containing children's views.

### Findings, lessons learned and recommendations

h. The Sub-programme on Children's Rights **aims** to ensure the effective protection of the rights of children across its member states and to maximise the individual and collective capacity of its member states to enforce respect towards the rights of all children.

i. The Sub-programme is constructed in line with the strategic triangle of standard-setting (i.e. activities aimed at the elaboration and adoption of norms), monitoring (i.e. activities aimed at assessing compliance with these norms and of best practices), and technical co-operation work (i.e. activities raising awareness and enhancing capacity as well as contributing to aligning national legislation with Council of Europe standards).

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5. See: <https://rm.coe.int/1680a147d1>.

6. For example: OECD (2019). [Better Criteria for Better Evaluation](#); Bamberger, M. & Segone, M. (2011). [How to design and manage Equity-focused evaluations](#) (UNICEF); OECD (2023). [Applying a Human Rights and Gender Equality Lens to the OECD Evaluation Criteria](#); European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2022). [Gender-responsive evaluation](#); and United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) (2014). [Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations](#). New York: UNEG.

j. It covers a range of mechanisms, including the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child, the Committee of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse) (Lanzarote Committee), the Consultation Group for the Children of Ukraine<sup>7</sup> and the work of the Children's Rights co-operation unit. Furthermore, through CDENF, the Sub-programme holds responsibility for developing, launching and overseeing the overarching Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027),<sup>8</sup> and with this a mainstreaming and co-ordination function across the organisation.

k. The Sub-programme has addressed key children's rights issues across Council of Europe and member state priorities, guided by the Strategy for the Rights of the Child. This strategic framework has focused efforts on a number of thematic pillars, while contributing to mainstreaming children's rights across the Organisation. However, as the Strategy scope expanded, the Sub-programme has covered thematic pillars to a different extent, linked to the lack of operational focus and to minimal changes in human and financial resource dedicated to some of its core mechanisms, namely the Lanzarote Committee and CDENF.

l. The Sub-programme mechanisms worked well together, as their dynamic roles helped to partly overcome the differences in thematic scope and address children's rights in various capacities. Co-ordinated by the CRD, the Sub-programme further benefitted from its main mechanisms being located within the same division, which granted operational and management flexibility to redirect resources and create agile mechanisms such as the CGU. Nonetheless, operational challenges affect the Lanzarote Committee in particular, including slow procedures and limited civil society engagement, which reduces the inclusive, multi-stakeholder engagement the Committee aspires to. More formal information exchanges on areas of mutual interest across the Council of Europe would help harmonise interpretations of core principles such as the best interests of the child and enhance internal coherence.

m. Equality and inclusion were promoted mainly through principle-based approaches, with limited targeted action or mainstreaming except in crisis contexts. While equality considerations were embedded at project design, practical implementation was hindered by insufficient resources, political sensitivities, limited data disaggregation, and weak follow-through. Child participation informed selected organisational processes.

n. The Sub-programme effectively contributed to advance children's rights across Europe, meeting most of its 2021–2025 Programme and Budget targets. As a whole, the Council of Europe has contributed to change in various capacities, including as convener, standard-setter, and multiplier. Its influence has contributed to legislative and policy reforms at national level, enhanced awareness of children's rights, and fostered peer learning among member states. The extent of national-level change, however, depended on broader political, economic and institutional environments.

o. The Council of Europe retains a unique leadership role in the children's rights field, complementing international actors such as the UN and EU. Yet, evolving global and EU policy

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7. The CGU is funded as co-operation project, yet functions similarly to an intergovernmental committee. A rapid impact assessment of the CGU is currently underway.

8. See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/strategy-for-the-rights-of-the-child>

landscapes—along with emerging digital challenges—require ongoing strategic reflection. In particular, assessing the continued adequacy of the “tech-neutral” Lanzarote Convention in addressing ICT-facilitated offences will be essential to preserving the Organisation’s leadership and ensuring future relevance.

## Lessons learned

**Lesson learned 1:** CRD has championed initiatives such as child safeguarding and child participation, which have worked well, providing **momentum** and facilitating the means for increasing uptake across the Council of Europe in the last years.

**Lesson learned 2:** The Sub-programme was able to respond to the crisis in Ukraine in a quick and flexible way on the one hand by adapting the co-operation project in Ukraine to the new realities to address the needs of the children within Ukraine and, on the other hand, with the establishment of the CGU to address the rights of Ukrainian children outside of Ukraine. In particular, the CGU’s unique features, namely its informality and set up as a platform providing a closed (confidential) space for open and frank discussions with equally distributed voices rather than a formal bureau and president, and potentially a political agenda, contributed to its responsiveness. Furthermore, the CGU was able to access extra-budgetary resources from the Sub-programme, among others. Overall, the Sub-programme’s **adaptive management** structures and **agile** cross-mechanism co-ordination could be leveraged in similar fashion in future to address emerging needs.

**Lesson learned 3:** The Sub-programme has promoted the **participation** of children, i.e., through child-friendly versions of guidance materials and manuals etc., and involved them directly in strategic ways, such as by consulting them on key documents like the Strategy. Continuing with such practice, as possible through voluntary contributions, would be very valuable.

**Lesson learned 4:** A focus on recognised best practices, such as the Barnahus model,<sup>9</sup> across the Sub-programme’s mechanisms allowed the Council of Europe to approach the issue from various angles, produce relevant material and increase awareness among member states. This facilitated uptake and adoption at national level.

**Lesson learned 5:** The **multi-stakeholder approach** implemented across the Sub-programme’s areas of work contributed to facilitating sustainable change. The transversal nature of children’s rights, the need for cross-sectoral co-ordination, and the multitude of factors contributing to facilitating change (i.e. change in political leadership, limited resources) further highlighted the value of the multi-stakeholder approach.

**Lesson learned 6:** The Council of Europe, and the Sub-programme in particular, have built and expanded on principles of UNCRC, taking on a unique and important role in a complex, multi-actor space, and contributing to and complementing the wider work on children’s rights in Europe. This ability of the CRD and of the Council of Europe more broadly could further be capitalised on in the future to continue **adding value** to the children’s rights field.

## Recommendations

1. The recommendations were created in a participatory way with the main stakeholders following the validation of findings with the reference group. This has ensured that only the most

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9. See: <https://barnahus.eu/barnahus/about-barnahus/>

essential issues are highlighted for action and that the recommendations are specific and feasible to implement.

**Recommendation 1:** Revisit the **scope of the Strategy** to target three to four thematic pillars. Within that, define areas of intervention for the Sub-programme, focused on creating clear links to its three mechanisms (CDENF, Lanzarote Committee and technical co-operation), where possible. The CRD's mainstreaming function of children's rights should be explicitly mentioned, together with the responsibility of implementation across the various parts of the Council of Europe for their respective areas. **Responsible actor:** CRD. **Priority:** High. **Timeline:** Short-term. **Categorisation:** Strategic.

**Recommendation 2:** Focus **children's rights mainstreaming** efforts across the Council of Europe by prioritising specific action areas - enhancing clarity around milestones and targets and leveraging existing strategies, mechanisms, and reporting cycles. This could be formulated to some extent in the next iteration of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child, including defining accountability of the CRD and other Council of Europe bodies. **Responsible actor:** CRD and relevant Council of Europe bodies. **Priority:** High. **Timeline:** Short-term. **Categorisation:** Strategic.

**Recommendation 3:** Enhance communication between the CRD and key Council of Europe entities where overlaps exist to jointly address relevant issues in the most appropriate format. This could be through joint sub-committees, regular bi-annual exchanges or other formats considered suitable by the CRD to facilitate discussion and collaboration in the most fruitful way. **Responsible actor:** CRD. **Priority:** Medium. **Timeline:** Short-term. **Categorisation:** Operational.

**Recommendation 4:** Mainstream the needs of **children in situations of vulnerability** to a greater extent across interventions of the Sub-programme, by making explicit, where relevant, how existing activities consider the specific needs of different groups and where targeted action is justified. Explicit reference to specific needs could be included where appropriate to facilitate these are taken into account by those involved. **Responsible actor:** CRD. **Priority:** Medium. **Timeline:** Long-term. **Categorisation:** Operational.

**Recommendation 5:** Further integrate the **human rights approach** into results-based reporting of co-operation projects within the Sub-programme. This could include building in outcome specific indicators into existing log frames and monitoring frameworks to a greater extent across projects to facilitate the collection of data on outcomes achieved disaggregated by groups of children in situations of vulnerability. **Priority:** Medium. **Responsible actor:** CRD Co-operation Unit. **Timeline:** Long-term. **Categorisation:** Operational.

**Recommendation 6:** Continue strengthening actions to **disseminate Sub-programme outputs**, including recommendations, studies, and reports, at member state level. This could include, for example, routing translations through ongoing projects (using emerging technology to enhance efficiency) and using national authorities', civil society organisations' and partners' established communication networks, thereby leveraging existing channels of communication. **Responsible actor:** CRD, CDENF and Lanzarote Committee Secretariat, Sub-programme co-operation teams. **Priority:** Medium. **Timeline:** Long-term. **Categorisation:** Operational.

**Recommendation 7:** Commission an independent in-depth study on the scope of the **Lanzarote Convention** in light of evolving trends in child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Such a study could include comparative research into selected international norms, such as the proposal for a recast EU Directive on child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), the UN Cybercrime Convention and the EU proposal for a regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse, the Council of Europe Cybercrime Convention second additional protocol, the Council of Europe Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance third additional protocol. Such a study would also require analysing

potential implications for the Lanzarote Convention's monitoring body, namely the Lanzarote Committee. **Responsible actor:** CRD. **Priority:** High. **Timeline:** Short-term. **Categorisation:** Strategic.

## 1. Introduction

1. This report presents the key findings from an evaluation of the Council of Europe Sub-programme on Children's Rights (the Sub-programme). The evaluation is part of the Directorate of Internal Oversight's work programme for 2024-27<sup>10</sup>. The Directorate of Internal Oversight of the Council of Europe appointed the Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (CSES) to carry out the evaluation.

### 1.1. Evaluation objectives and scope

2. This evaluation assesses the extent to which the Sub-programme has provided "effective protection through its strategic triangle". In this context, the study aimed to achieve the following **objectives**:

- Assess the effectiveness, basis for eventual impact, efficiency, relevance and coherence of the Sub-programme through a detailed analysis of the implementation state of play, the achievements of the different Sub-programme mechanisms, and the interplay between different elements of the Sub-programme and with other activities that seek to achieve similar aims.
- Draw lessons and develop actionable recommendations to guide the Council of Europe's future work and strategies on the rights of the child.

3. In terms of **scope**, the evaluation covered all forms of work conducted through the Council of Europe's Children's Rights Sub-programme, which is constructed in line with the strategic triangle of standard-setting (i.e. activities aimed at the elaboration and adoption of norms), monitoring (i.e. activities aimed at assessing compliance with these norms and of best practices), and technical co-operation work (i.e. activities raising awareness and enhancing capacity about standards as well as contributing to aligning national legislation with Council of Europe standards).

4. More specifically, this covers a range of mechanisms, including the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), the Committee of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse) (Lanzarote Committee), the Consultation Group for the Children of Ukraine (CGU)<sup>11</sup> and the work of the Children's Rights co-operation unit. Furthermore, through CDENF, the Sub-programme holds responsibility for developing, launching and overseeing the overarching Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027),<sup>12</sup> and with this a mainstreaming and co-ordination function across the organisation.

5. The time period analysed covered 2021 to 2025, which included the end of the third Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021) and the core period of the current strategy (2022-2027).

6. The primary **user** of the evaluation is the Children's Rights Division (CRD), which is responsible for implementing the Sub-programme. Given the role and involvement of many parts

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10. GR-PBA(2024)5, <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680aea25c>.

11. The CGU is funded as co-operation project, yet functions similarly to an intergovernmental committee. A rapid impact assessment of the CGU is currently underway.

12. See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/strategy-for-the-rights-of-the-child>.

of the Council of Europe in implementing the Strategy for the Rights of the Child, the evaluation is also of interest to all major administrative entities, including the Media Department,<sup>13</sup> and other divisions, including transversal programmes.

## 1.2. Description of the Sub-programme on Children's Rights

7. The Sub-programme on Children's Rights **aims** to ensure the effective protection of the rights of children across the Council of Europe member states and to maximise the individual and collective capacity of its member states to enforce respect towards the rights of all children. In that regard, its main expected intermediate outcome is that member states change their policies, legislation and practices in order to better respect, protect and promote the rights of the child in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and relevant Council of Europe standards.

8. The Sub-programme is implemented by the CRD, who also prepares the Strategy for the Rights of the Child in consultation with member states. The Strategy for the Rights of the Child guides the work on children's rights within the Sub-programme as well as across the Council of Europe, bringing together work from across the Organisation and linking the collective work to the UNCRC and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such, while the CRD has a mainstreaming function whereby children's rights are incorporated into the wider work of the Organisation, the implementation responsibility also falls on the various parts of the Council of Europe for their respective areas. The CRD organises an inter-secretariat Task force on the Rights of the Child with the participation of representatives of these other entities.

9. The Strategy – and the Sub-programme's work - is guided by an assessment of stakeholder needs and prominent challenges in the field of children's rights. As documented in the Council of Europe's Programme and Budget documents covering the evaluation period (2021-2025), the Sub-programme has consistently highlighted needs related to foundational issues of sexual violence against children, discrimination, and access to justice and services. However, in response to emerging challenges and developments in the field, the focus has notably expanded over this period to also integrate – and respond to – the following issues:

- Technological challenges, particularly those related to online safety and artificial intelligence;
- Global crises and geopolitical developments, including the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, the COVID-19 crisis and migration crises;
- Environmental issues, including climate change.

10. This expansion has been reflected in the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child, which has added a new priority area with every subsequent strategy since the first one in 2009, to culminate in six strategic pillars in the current strategy. These are i) freedom from violence for all children, ii) equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children, iii) access and safe use of

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13. Former Directorate of Communications.

technologies for all children, iv) child-friendly justice for all children, v) giving voice to every child, and vi) children's rights in crisis and emergency situations.

11. To address children's rights from different perspectives, the Sub-programme is built around the Council of Europe's "strategic triangle" and its three main intervention mechanisms:

- **Standard-setting:** to develop standards leading to the adoption of treaties that legally bind states after their ratification or to other international instruments of soft law such as recommendations and guidelines. CDENF is the standard-setter in the context of the Sub-programme.
- **Monitoring:** to assess the implementation of standards on Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse as outlined in the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention<sup>14</sup>), identify gaps in the implementation by State Parties and recommend measures to address shortcomings. This role is taken up by the Lanzarote Committee.
- **Technical co-operation:** to provide tailor-made support and assistance to member states in the implementation of standards and actions to address shortcomings identified at national level via technical support: this includes legal and policy support, capacity building and awareness raising. A total of 31 technical co-operation projects were implemented or are ongoing under the Sub-programme in the evaluation period (2021-2025), with variance in terms of member state coverage, funding types and thematic focus.<sup>15</sup> The Lanzarote Committee also delivers capacity building and awareness raising in addition to its monitoring role.
- In addition, the **Consultation Group for the Children of Ukraine** is a special body created to develop a common understanding on important legal and policy issues relating to Ukrainian children residing in Council of Europe member states. While funded as co-operation project, it effectively functions as an intergovernmental committee.

12. A detailed overview of the mechanisms of intervention by the Sub-programme is included in Appendix A.

13. In order to carry out this work, the Sub-programme has access to both human and financial resources. The human resource available within the CRD secretariat and funded under the Ordinary Budget has remained stable throughout the evaluation period at 10 full-time equivalent jobs (FTEs) in 2020-2021 (5.5A, 4.5B) and 11 FTEs in 2022-2025 (6.5A, 4.5B), in addition to approximately 25 FTEs within the co-operation team (funded through extra-budgetary resources). The total secured financial resource available to the Sub-programme has increased from € 2.23 million in 2021 to € 4.82 million in 2025, peaking at € 6 million in 2024 (as per the Programme and Budget).

14. The Sub-programme contributes to the wider work done on children's right by prominent international organisations as well as international, regional and national civil society organisations (CSOs) and national authorities. In this context, the United Nations (UN) is the primary holder of children's rights standards through the UNCRC. International non-governmental organisations such as Save the Children and Eurochild lead global advocacy efforts for children's rights. As a regional organisation, the Council of Europe has a leading role in combating sexual exploitation and violence

14. See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/lanzarote-convention>.

15. See: <https://www.CouncilofEurope.int/en/web/children/co-operation-projects>.

against children globally as well as in advancing children's rights in hard law through the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

## 2. Evaluation approach, process and methodology

### 2.1. Evaluation criteria and questions

15. This evaluation assesses the achievements of the Children's Rights Sub-programme and its contribution to children's rights against four evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency. A detailed evaluation matrix (see Appendix B) sets out the evaluation questions, sub-questions, indicators, and data sources used to guide this assessment. The main evaluation questions under each evaluation criteria are outlined below:

- **Relevance:** How does the Sub-programme ensure it is prioritising the right things with sufficient urgency?
- **Coherence:** To what extent is there coherence between the Children's Rights Strategy, the work of the Organisation and the work of the UN, the EU and international Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs)?
- **Effectiveness:** To what extent and through which mechanisms has the work of the Sub-programme contributed to changes in legislation, policies, practice and behaviours (i.e. change as per the strategy aspirations)?
- **Efficiency:** Is the Organisation making the best use of its resources to deliver the Sub-programme?

### 2.2 Evaluation process

16. The assignment started at the end of May 2025 and the final report was delivered in December 2025.

17. The Directorate of Internal Oversight Evaluation Division of the Council of Europe oversaw the assignment and provided guidance throughout the evaluation process.

18. A Reference Group, formed by representatives of relevant Council of Europe entities, provided guidance and support throughout the evaluation. It contributed with input to defining the scope of the evaluation, provided documentation to the evaluation team and validated findings through an online meeting. In addition, recommendations were drafted in participatory manner.

### 2.3 Evaluation approach

19. The evaluation took a theory-based approach (see the Sub-programme Theory of change in Appendix C). Mixed methods were employed, combining qualitative and quantitative data. This section provides a summary of the technical research approach to the data collection and analysis methods deployed (see a detailed description in Appendix D – Methodology).

#### **Data collection**

20. The following data sources and collection methods were deployed:

- **Desk research** to review relevant Council of Europe and wider documentation, including internal monitoring data for the Sub-programme and the Strategy for the Rights of the Child;
- **Interview programme:** 94 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders both internal and external to the Council of Europe. Stakeholders internal to the Council of Europe included staff working on the Sub-programme as well as staff involved in children's rights more broadly; external stakeholders comprised member state authorities as well as European and international policymakers and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) involved in the work done by the Council of Europe, and stakeholders involved in children's rights but not involved in Council of Europe work. An additional external perspective was provided by independent experts and academics.
- **Surveys:** two online surveys were conducted; one survey with Council of Europe staff involved in the Sub-programme and in children's rights more broadly ("survey 1"), and one with wider stakeholders of the Sub-programme, targeting all external stakeholder categories including entities and authorities not directly involved in the Sub-programme and disseminated across member states ("survey 2"); in both cases, the survey response rate was ~20%.
- **Thematic and country case studies:** targeted research on six Council of Europe member states<sup>16</sup> was conducted to analyse the Sub-programme's contribution to changes at national level. In each country, two pillars of the Strategy formed the focus of thematic case studies. The data was collected via desk research and interviews, supplemented by field visits in two countries<sup>17</sup>;
- **Direct observation** of a selection of the Sub-programme mechanisms to inform the research, including the Inter-secretariat Task force on the Rights of the Child and the CGU plenary meeting.
- **Children's voices** were integrated through secondary evidence, including reports capturing children's views and opinions on strategic documents, resources and tools, and events<sup>18</sup>.

21. A total of 217 stakeholders were consulted, out of which 94 were involved in the interview programme (including stakeholders interviewed for the case studies), and 123 responded to the surveys. The document review covered 287 documents.

22. The full set of data mapped against evaluation criteria is available in Appendix E – Coverage of evaluation dimensions across key themes and sources. An additional mapping assessing the strength of the evidence is provided in Appendix F.

### Data analysis

23. Quantitative and qualitative data sources were analysed and triangulated against a set of distinct analytical framings (see a detailed approach to triangulation in Appendix D).

24. The approach to assessing the outcomes of the Sub-programme comprised both a contribution analysis to examine achievements against the anticipated outcomes (as per the Theory

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16. These are: Finland, Ireland, Republic of Moldova, Slovenia, Montenegro and Ukraine.

17. Republic of Moldova and Montenegro.

18. An early assessment of the feasibility of involving children directly in the evaluation concluded that resource and time constraints did not make this possible.

of Change) and outcome harvesting to understand what had changed in the context in which the Sub-programme operated before working backwards to assess how and to what extent the Sub-programme had contributed.

25. Special attention was dedicated to assessing the factors contributing to successes, as well as the challenges underpinning immediate and intermediate outcomes. This allowed for an analysis of enablers and constraints of the Council of Europe's response to the needs of children while examining the interlinkages between the Sub-programme's mechanisms of intervention and the Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

26. Where possible, data was disaggregated across analytical activities by different stakeholder groups and/or sub-groups, different thematic areas, and different regions and/or countries.

27. AI tools and software (transcription software, GenAI and Notebook LM) have been used solely to support—not replace—human analytical judgment. Additional detail on the considerations and use made is provided in Appendix G – Use of AI.

#### 2.4. Limitations

28. The evaluation team encountered a set of limitations and implemented the respective measures to mitigate them. Appendix H provides additional details.

- The difficulty to attribute observed outcomes to the Sub-programme linked to the complex and multi-actor ecosystem was overcome by using contribution analysis, outcome harvesting, and triangulating sources to identify plausible links, stressing attribution limitations when presenting the findings.
- The challenge to capture national specificities across the broad geographic scope of the Council of Europe was addressed through the country case studies, which were strategically selected to collectively cover the full scope of the Sub-programme.
- The evaluation focused on the Sub-programme as a whole, thereby providing high-level insights into operational aspects of individual mechanisms. As a result, limitations regarding findings pertinent to individual mechanisms are highlighted.
- The potential positive bias in the consultation process, resulting from the large number of stakeholders interviewed involved in the Sub-programme and in Council of Europe work, was mitigated by reaching out to national stakeholders not directly involved via national contact points and through the wide dissemination of the online survey.
- Despite efforts to disseminate the survey as widely as possible through national networks, the low survey response rate (~20%) meant that survey responses have been included yet are treated with caution throughout the report.
- Time and resources constraints did not make it possible to consult children directly, as concluded through a thorough assessment in the initial stages of the evaluation. To ensure that children's voices were considered, the team reviewed existing secondary evidence at national and international level through desk research.

### 3. Key Findings

29. This chapter presents the findings of the evaluation structured around five key themes, which formed the basis of a presentation of emerging findings to the Reference Group.

30. The five key themes and their relevance to each evaluation dimension are as follows:

- **Appropriateness of the Strategy:** relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency.
- **Functioning of the Sub-programme:** relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency.
- **Equality focus of the Sub-programme:** effectiveness, efficiency.
- **Outcomes achieved at member state level:** relevance, effectiveness.
- **Added value of the Sub-programme:** relevance, coherence.

#### 3.1. Appropriateness of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child

31. This section examines the extent to which the Strategy is an appropriate strategic framework for the Sub-programme. It presents the Strategy model and its role as a mainstreaming tool across the Council of Europe and as a reference framework for member states. In addition, it provides an analysis of the Strategy scope and the Sub-programme mechanisms' coverage across strategic pillars of the Strategy, including considerations on the availability of resources.

**Key finding:** Given the transversal and multidimensional nature of children's rights, the Strategy for the Rights of the Child is an important multi-layered, integrative framework. It has brought prominence to the work of the Sub-programme, bolstered the mainstreaming of children's rights issues across the Council of Europe and effectively steered member state action. The relevance of the Strategy is widely acknowledged.

32. The Strategy aims to raise awareness and guide action on children's rights, drawing attention to a set of thematic pillars, and calling for mainstreaming of children's rights across the Council of Europe's wider work. It is operationalised through the Children's Rights Sub-programme and implemented by the CRD, though it goes beyond the remit of both the Sub-programme and the CRD. Its multi-layered model combines a horizontal mandate to mainstream children's rights with a vertical, intergovernmental mandate to also guide member state actions (see comparative analysis of Council of Europe strategies in Appendix I).

33. The Strategy provides the Sub-programme with a robust operational framework, helping to focus the Sub-programme's interventions through the designated thematic pillars. At the same time, having its own Sub-programme grants the Strategy dedicated delivery capacity. The Sub-programme, for its part, contributes to the achievement of the Strategy as a whole and to the goals of the individual thematic pillars. This mutually reinforcing approach helps to co-ordinate and maximise efforts, especially relevant given the transversal nature of children's rights.

34. Stakeholders consulted confirmed the relevance of the Strategy and its role *vis-à-vis* the Sub-programme. Council of Europe staff interviewed stressed the prominent role of the Strategy and its internal recognition as a "success story": following its implementation, other Council of Europe

programmes started developing their own strategies. Similarly, Council of Europe staff who responded to the survey highlighted the important contribution of the Strategy to the achievement of the Sub-programme and vice-versa: over 70% of respondents considered the Strategy as "somewhat relevant" (25%) or "very relevant" (53.6%) to the achievement of the Sub-programme's objectives<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, more than 80% of respondents perceived the Sub-programme as "somewhat relevant" (28.6%) or "very relevant" (67.9%) to the achievement of the Strategy objectives<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, the close thematic alignment between the Strategy and the Sub-programme, the co-ordination of both by the CRD and their mutually reinforcing objectives positions the Strategy as an appropriate and useful framework to guide the work of the Sub-programme.

**Key finding:** Within the Council of Europe, the Strategy has significantly contributed to granting visibility to children's rights and to mainstreaming children's rights across the work of the Organisation. The CRD's informal approach to mainstreaming, the lack of dedicated resource and the lack of strategic focus on particular areas within the Strategy meant that mainstreaming has happened to varying extents across the six thematic pillars.

35. The Strategy for the Rights of the Child has acted as an important mainstreaming tool for children's rights across the work of the Council of Europe. Without it, children's rights would most likely not feature as prominently in the wider work of the Council of Europe. Indeed, in 2024, 65% of Council of Europe bodies promoted or included the rights of the child in their reports, actions and activities, as reported by the Inter-secretariat Task force of the Rights of the Child.<sup>21,22</sup> As demonstrated in the below box, this included special attention in monitoring rounds, by steering committees and by statutory bodies within their respective areas of competence. The various iterations of the Strategy significantly contributed to raising awareness on children's rights over time and to their mainstreaming across core work streams of the Organisation.

**Box 1: Examples of children's rights mainstreaming across Council of Europe monitoring rounds and Steering Committees**

**Monitoring bodies**

- **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI):** ECRI's country monitoring work has addressed, among others, hate speech and hate crime against children and children's access to education in different member states<sup>23</sup>.
- **Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO):** Throughout its monitoring work in 2022 and 2023, GREVIO addressed early marriages in the context of forced marriages and recommended the incorporation of violence prevention issues in the education curricula.<sup>24</sup>
- **Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA):** Its second monitoring round paid particular attention to the increased vulnerability of children to trafficking.<sup>25</sup>

19. Survey 1 analysis

20. Survey 1 analysis

21. Secretariat units of different Council of Europe bodies and sectors. Second Implementation Report of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2025)

22. Calculation based on a total of 52 Steering Committees and monitoring bodies within the Council of Europe. Second Implementation Report, p.10

23. First Implementation report of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2024); ECRI Country Monitoring

24. First Implementation report of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2024)

25. Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA). General Reports 11-14 on GRETA's Activities 2021- 2025. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/general-reports>.

### Steering Committees

- **Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller issues: the Committee's** 2022 Dialogue with Roma and Traveller civil society focused on "Defending the rights of Roma and Traveller children" and discussed the rights which Roma and Traveller children are entitled to benefit from everywhere. In addition, thematic reports have regularly explored children's rights issues, such as legislation and policies related to begging, with a special focus on children (2022), early childhood education of Roma children (2023), and policies and practices in the field of education for Roma and Traveller children (2024)<sup>26</sup>.

### Statutory bodies

- **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE):** Recent reports have addressed a diverse range of topics, including child poverty (2022)<sup>27</sup>, child labour (2024)<sup>28</sup> and the protection of children against online violence (2024)<sup>29</sup>. PACE has also published its own child safeguarding policy<sup>30</sup> and created the mandate of General Rapporteur on child participation.<sup>31</sup>

36. Mainstreaming of children's rights across Council of Europe bodies has happened despite a lack of dedicated resource, mostly in an informal manner (i.e. without a dedicated workplan). Activities and efforts dedicated to mainstreaming were managed by the CRD staff alongside their regular workloads – in most instances, these efforts were reportedly conducted by the CDENF secretary at their own initiative or at the request of other Council of Europe bodies. This included exchanges to incorporate children's voices in strategies pertaining to other sectors, as was the case for the Council of Europe Strategy for the Environment, as well as participation in wider activities, such as the 2nd Conference on regulating the use of AI systems in education, organised by the Steering Committee for Education. At this event, the Recommendation on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment (CM/Rec(2018)7)<sup>32</sup> were disseminated.

37. Similarly, exchanges of information between relevant bodies related to mainstreaming happened to a large extent outside of institutionalised practices or processes. Mainstreaming was included in some formal agendas and meeting reports. For example, the Lanzarote Committee representatives exchanged information with GRETA on forms of sexual exploitation of children based on their monitoring work, and on cross-cutting issues between child sexual exploitation and child trafficking as addressed by the Lanzarote Committee at GRETA's 52nd plenary meeting in 2022

26. See ADI-ROM website and list of thematic reports on <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/thematic-report>.

27. "Eradicating extreme child poverty in Europe: an international obligation and a moral duty" (2022), available at <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/29892#trace-2>.

28. "Children in the world of work: eradicating harmful child labour" (2024), available at <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33539#trace-2>.

29. "The protection of children against online violence" (2024), available at <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33405/html>.

30. Available at <https://rm.coe.int/committee-on-social-affairs-health-and-sustainable-development-proposals/1680b65a9d>.

31. Second Implementation report of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2025).

32. Promoting Children's Rights (Strategy 2022-27).pdf, Council of Europe, 8th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 6 March 2024, covering the period 3 February 2023 to 15 February 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/8th-activity-report-of-the-lanzarote-committee/1680af288d>.

as well as at the Lanzarote Committee's 44<sup>th</sup> meeting in 2025.<sup>33</sup> However, this was commonly a standalone practice rather than part of a broader, ongoing communication effort. Nevertheless, these examples illustrate the value of such exchanges given the transversal nature of children's rights.

38. The CRD's informal approach to mainstreaming and the lack of strategic focus on particular areas within the Strategy meant that mainstreaming happened to varying extents across the six thematic pillars. Table 1 below provides an overview of the pillars in which selected Council of Europe bodies have conducted children's rights mainstreaming activities.

**Table 1: Overview of children's rights mainstreaming across selected Council of Europe bodies (2022-25)<sup>34</sup>**

Strategy pillar 2022-27	GREVIO	GRETA	PACE	ECRI	Edu Dpt.	Youth Dpt.	Gender Equality Commission	Office of the SRS on Migration and Refugees	Roma & Travellers team
1. Freedom from violence	✓	✓	✓	✓					
2. Equal opportunities and social inclusion			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
3. Access to and safe use of technologies			✓		✓	✓	✓		
4. Child-friendly justice	✓								✓
5. Giving a voice to every child/ child participation			✓	✓		✓ <sup>35</sup>			✓
6. Children's rights in crisis & emergency situations		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	

Legend: ✓ - Work done covering children's rights<sup>36</sup>

Source: CSES analysis based on the First and second implementation report of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights.

39. The Strategy has contributed to work on children's rights across the wider Council of Europe with limited dedicated effort by the CRD over the past years, as Council of Europe bodies embedded children's rights in their own work. However, the lack of dedicated resource within the CRD is likely to have constrained the extent to which mainstreaming was promoted across the Organisation. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this was really the case, stakeholders acknowledged the work done by the Inter-secretariat Task force to monitor mainstreaming efforts across the Organisation and agreed that dedicated resource, as done on gender mainstreaming by

33. 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting of GRETA, Strasbourg, 18-22 November 2022. List of decisions. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/meetings> (Accessed 17 October 2025). Also see GRETA's 14th General Report covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2024 at p. 23.

34. Data available from 2022 onwards as reported in the first and second implementation report of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child. Selected Council of Europe bodies chosen to provide an indicative overview of the extent of mainstreaming done across thematic pillars.

35. The Youth Department regularly involve youth under 18 in their activities.

36. Area marked as covering children's rights when one or more pieces of work by the relevant body were reported to have addressed children's rights, either through mainstreaming or with a targeted approach.

the Gender Division, could further strengthen efforts in future.<sup>37</sup> Along those lines, findings confirm that more could be done to promote and further implement mainstreaming of children's rights across the Council of Europe work, though this would require dedicated human and/or financial resources.

**Key finding:** At national level, the Strategy served as a common reference framework and contributed to children's rights' increased visibility around the six thematic pillars while fostering national ownership around a shared vision.

40. Developed through a consultative process involving a wide range of stakeholders, the Strategy sought to align Council of Europe and member state priorities, thereby ensuring continued relevance of the thematic pillars. Furthermore, the Strategy acted as a shared vision and served as a common reference framework that could guide efforts at national level. In that regard, 80% of member state respondents surveyed as part of the Second Implementation Report of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child reported using the Strategy in their respective countries "to inspire, review or update a national or regional strategy or action plan to protect or promote children's rights" in 2024.<sup>38</sup> Other factors may also have plausibly contributed to the prioritisation of work at the national level on the six thematic pillars: for example, the EU Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2021) focused on similar principles, including keeping children safe from harm, child participation and child-friendly justice<sup>39</sup>. Nevertheless, both stakeholder feedback and survey evidence suggest the Council of Europe Strategy fostered national level work across the thematic pillars. The box below provides specific examples from member states.

#### Box 2: Examples of Strategy contribution to national level work

- **Norway:** National representatives replying to the survey with wider Sub-programme stakeholders stated that "The objectives of the strategy also serve as a guiding framework for our efforts."
- **Portugal:** The National Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024 and the Single Strategy on the Rights of Children and Young People 2025-2035 are both aligned with the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027. For example, the text of the Single Strategy explicitly mentions the implementation of the Barnahus model as a line for action in area "6 - Cultura de não-violência" (in English culture of non-violence).
- **Spain:** The State Strategy on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (2022-2030)<sup>40</sup> is aligned with the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) and explicitly refers to the Strategy, to principles such as the Barnahus model and to guidance provided by the Council of Europe on effective child participation.

37. Additional efforts suggested by interviewees, such as attending or organising trainings on mainstreaming of children's rights for staff of other divisions or making informal exchanges more regular often lead back to the need for dedicated human and/ or financial resource. For example, voluntary contributions (project VC 3556) enabled the Gender Equality Rapporteurs of the CDENF to participate in a training on gender equality organized by the Council of Europe Gender Equality Division, which aims to equip them to effectively mainstream gender equality across CDENF's work. See "Promoting Children's Rights (Strategy 2022-27).pdf", Council of Europe, Lanzarote Committee, Protecting Children from Human Rights Violations of All Forms and in All Settings. Final Report, project VC 3018.

38. Second Implementation Report of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child, p.10

39. See EU strategy on the Rights of the Child (COM/2021/142 final) on [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en).

40. "Estrategia Estatal de derechos de la infancia y de la adolescencia" (2023-2030), Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030.

- **France:** Building on the thematic pillars of the Strategy and going beyond its scope, France also addressed emerging issues like “sharenting” to ensure children’s online protection keeps pace with emerging concerns such as children’s right to privacy (FR France Law No. 2024-120 on “sharenting”).

Source: Survey and interview feedback

**Key finding:** The scope of the Strategy has continued to expand over time to accommodate emerging issues, growing from three pillars in its first iteration in 2009 to six pillars in 2022-2027. In parallel, the Sub-programme has sought to continue its coverage of the growing number of thematic pillars, which has created challenges. A lack of operational focus and resource constraints meant that progress has been variable across the pillars.

41. The scope of the Strategy has expanded with each new iteration. The current Strategy provided continuity by partly building on previous priority areas, while including a new action aimed at responding to an emerging area of concern: children in crisis and emergency situations. The broad scope of the current strategy meant that it has remained relevant, including in relation to the evolving international context and other developments affecting children’s rights, such as threats posed by artificial intelligence. Table 2 below shows the thematic expansion of the Strategy scope in recent years.

**Table 2: Overview of thematic coverage across Council of Europe Strategies for the Right of the Child 2009-2027**

2022–2027 Strategic thematic pillar	2009–11	2012–15	2016–21	2022–27
1. Freedom from violence for all children	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children	○	✓	✓	✓
3. Access to and safe use of technologies for all children	—	○	<span style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 2px;">NEW</span> ✓	✓
4. Child-friendly justice for all children	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Giving a voice to every child/participation	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Children’s rights in crisis and emergency situations	—	—	○	<span style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 2px;">NEW</span> ✓

Legend: ✓ = explicitly prioritised; ○ = partially addressed / implicit; NEW = newly introduced or expanded

Source: CSES analysis based on documentation review <sup>41</sup>

42. In line with the expanding scope of the Strategy, the Sub-programme has aimed to address all thematic pillars through its mechanisms, namely the Lanzarote Committee, CDENF and its technical co-operation work. To do so, while growing extrabudgetary resources have meant an increase in co-operation projects, resource dedicated to the core activities of the Lanzarote Committee and CDENF has seen minimal changes over time (see section 3.2. below on Use of resources). As a result, while the CRD has aimed to cover all thematic pillars, the lack of operational focus and resource limitations have stretched the division. Nevertheless, it has managed to address all pillars, albeit to different extents, across mechanisms, as shown in Table 3 below.

43. The Lanzarote Committee has covered various thematic pillars, mostly through its monitoring rounds and thematic reports, statements and declarations, as well as capacity building activities (e.g. thematic sessions organised for the Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual

41. See Council of Europe previous Children’s Rights strategies on <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/children-s-strategy>

Exploitation and Sexual Abuse). For CDENF, the main outputs included recommendations, guidelines and tools addressing the key themes, and thematic studies and reports. Technical co-operation work has addressed thematic pillars via individual projects, which covered one or more thematic areas in their core activities, including through legal and policy reviews, gap analysis, and reports on a specific theme or sector, as well as capacity-building activities. The CGU's core focus meant that it extensively addressed pillar 6 on children's rights in crisis and emergency situations in its plenary meetings and thematic dialogue groups<sup>42</sup>. In the case of pillar 5 on "Child participation", given its cross-cutting nature, the analysis has considered both outputs covering child participation (e.g. Guide to children's participation in decisions about their health with the Steering Committee for Human Rights in the field of Biomedicine and Health, 2024), as well as outputs facilitating their participation or that were produced with their input (e.g., child-friendly guides and consultations with children for the monitoring rounds of the Lanzarote Committee respectively) (see section 3.3.).

**Table 3: Overview of thematic coverage across mechanisms 2021-2025**

2022–2027 Strategic thematic pillar	Lanzarote Committee	CDENF	Technical Co-operation	CGU <sup>43</sup>	Overall coverage 2021-2025
1. Freedom from violence for all children	High	High	High	N.A.	<b>High</b>
2. Equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children	None	Low	None	N.A.	<b>Low</b>
3. Access to and safe use of technologies for all children	Medium	Low	Medium	N.A.	<b>Low</b>
4. Child-friendly justice for all children	Medium	High	High	N.A.	<b>High</b>
5. Giving a voice to every child/participation <sup>44</sup>	Low	Medium	Medium	N.A.	<b>Medium</b>
6. Children's rights in crisis and emergency situations	Low	Low	Medium	High	<b>Medium</b>

*Legend: **High** - covered by >75% of output types per mechanism, as per TOR (where applicable) (incl. studies, recommendations, etc.), over 15 projects; **Medium** – covered by 25-75% output types per mechanism as per TOR (where applicable) and between 5-15 projects; **Low** – covered by <25% of output type per mechanism and <5 projects. **N.A.** – not applicable refers to areas where the CGU's mandate did not foresee it addressing the relevant pillar.*

Source: CSES own analysis based on documentation review <sup>45</sup>

44. Overall, the work done by the three Sub-programme mechanisms was in line with the strategic priorities and addressed key themes outlined in the Strategy, with diverging numbers of outputs across pillars (see Appendix J for a detailed overview of Sub-programme outputs across thematic pillars). As expected, the Lanzarote Committee focused to a large extent on pillar 1 on "Freedom from violence for all children", in line with the focus of the Lanzarote Convention, while CDENF and technical co-operation work covered, in addition to "Freedom from violence", "Child-friendly justice" (pillar 4) to a larger extent than other areas. Conversely, pillar 2 on "Equal

42. CGU's work in the last 2 years mostly covered guardianship, adoption and other private (international) law issues, thus is closely linked to child-friendly justice (pillar 4). The second main pillar was on trauma-informed care, which as a form of (collective) experience of violence is related to pillar 1.

43. The CGU formally targeted pillar 6, as illustrated in the table. However, its work over the last 2 years also addresses aspects related to guardianship, adoption and other private, international law issues closely related to child-friendly justice (pillar 4) as well as trauma-informed care.

44. Cross-cutting nature of child participation means that the analysis has considered both outputs covering child participation as a theme as well as outputs facilitating their participation or that were produced with their input.

45. Note: activities, interventions and co-operation projects are classified under the most relevant theme. Only in instances where the coverage at core addresses more than one theme is this included under both.

opportunities and social inclusion for all children" emerged as a visible gap in the Sub-programme. This can be partly explained by its broad nature, which Council of Europe stakeholders reported made it challenging to agree on specific actions for the Sub-programme to implement. At the same time, the pillar was also seen as falling in the remit of other Council of Europe bodies, such as the European Committee of Social Rights and the European Social Charter.

45. Both the Strategy and the Sub-programme could benefit from a more focused approach on fewer thematic pillars. This would help target efforts and concentrate resources on a few areas, potentially those that have emerged as most prominent pillars to date – understood as those covered to a larger extent (as seen above) and with clear linkages to the scope and mandate of the Sub-programme mechanisms. As such, the focus could be on "Freedom from violence" (pillar 1) given its links to the Lanzarote Convention, on "Child-friendly justice" (pillar 4) due to the extensive coverage, work and expertise developed to date across mechanisms, and on "Child participation" (pillar 5) given its coverage, prominent role and cross-cutting function across the Sub-programme. The highly valued work on "Children's rights in crisis and emergency situations" (pillar 6) could also be considered (see section 3.5. on Added value). Such an approach would contribute to targeting efforts and resources on areas not already covered by other Council of Europe bodies, as is the case with "Equal opportunities and social inclusion" (pillar 2). While a revision of the Strategy scope would benefit from a broad consultation with various stakeholders, potentially including member states and children themselves, and consideration of other potential new or emerging themes, it should also consider the thematic scope of individual Sub-programme mechanisms and those areas in which the Sub-programme as a whole is best placed to act.

### 3.2. Functioning of the Sub-programme

46. This section assesses the internal functioning of the Sub-programme, its use of resources and the extent to which the mechanisms of intervention are coherent and complementary. At the Council of Europe level, it analyses the extent to which the Sub-programme is coherent with the wider work on children's rights.

**Key finding:** Overall, the Sub-programme mechanisms function well together despite differences in thematic scope. They take on dynamic roles and complement each other by addressing children's rights across thematic pillars in various capacities. There is strong internal coherence and co-ordination between the mechanisms.

47. In line with the Council of Europe "strategic triangle" of standard-setting, monitoring, and technical assistance, each of the mechanisms plays its own role: CDENF sets standards across the six thematic pillars of the Strategy, while the Lanzarote Committee monitors the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, thus focusing primarily on "Freedom from violence" (pillar 1). Co-operation projects help national authorities address shortcomings as identified in the monitoring rounds and help implement standards across all six pillars. In theory, this translates into different thematic scopes across mechanisms and would result in a fragmented coverage of thematic pillars across CDENF, the Lanzarote Committee and co-operation work. In practice, however, these roles are dynamic: each mechanism goes beyond its own remit and contributes to different thematic pillars in a variety of ways, as shown in Table 4 below. In fact, the three mechanisms have each covered most thematic pillars and addressed children's rights in various capacities beyond the one initially

envisioned. This helps to partly overcome the differences in scope and strengthens the linkages between mechanisms.

**Table 4: Overview of subprogramme composition and dynamic strategic triangle**

Sub-programme mechanism	Scope		Role	
	Defined thematic scope	Thematic coverage 2021-2025	Assigned role	Executed role 2021-2025
CDENF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy-wide (pillars 1-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coverage of pillars 1-6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standard-setter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standard-setter</li> <li>Monitoring body through implementation reports<sup>46</sup></li> </ul>
Lanzarote Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in line with Lanzarote Convention (pillar 1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coverage of pillars 1, 3-6 from Lanzarote Convention perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring body</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring body</li> <li>Standard-setter through declarations and reports, coverage also of other areas<sup>47</sup></li> <li>Capacity-builder with dedicated activities<sup>48</sup></li> </ul>
Co-operation work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy-wide (pillars 1-6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coverage of pillars 1, 3-6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity builder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity builder linked to Lanzarote Convention and CDENF</li> <li>Promoter and contributor to change in policy and legislation framework</li> </ul>

Source: CSES analysis based on documentation review

48. The dynamic approach of the Sub-programme and the integrated coverage of pillars work well due to the internal coherence across mechanisms. The objectives of the three mechanisms are aligned and mean that children's rights are addressed from different angles and in a complementary way. For example, technical co-operation projects systematically incorporate the recommendations identified by the Lanzarote Committee to target support effectively in specific member states. Similarly, when technical co-operation projects identify effective tools (e.g., Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT), Child Participation for Europe), CDENF picks these up to transform them into wider Council of Europe standards. In that regard, stakeholders highlighted the Barnahus model as a best practice exemplifying the complementary approach of the mechanisms to developing child-friendly justice approaches and supporting member state implementation it in practice. Box 3 provides an overview of the role played by each mechanism in that particular case.

**Box 3: Example of best practice addressed across Sub-programme mechanism**

**The Barnahus model**

Barnahus, from Icelandic "Children's House", represents a child-friendly, interdisciplinary and multiagency service where different professionals work under one roof and investigate suspected child sexual abuse cases and provide appropriate support for child victims. It enables effective collaboration between relevant judicial, social and medical actors in one child friendly space, in order to avoid any secondary victimisation of the child.

46. E.g., implementation review report on the recommendation on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence.

47. E.g., Declaration on protecting children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by emerging technologies (2024), report on "Respecting the rule of law when using automated technology to detect online child sexual exploitation and abuse" and Guidelines for policy makers on engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse – "Nothing About Us Without Us" (2024), Comparative studies on the legal age for sexual activities and on the statute of limitations.

48. E.g. '[Emerging technologies: threats and opportunities for the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](#)' (Vienna, 2024).

The Sub-programme mechanisms played, and continue to play, a key role in its development and implementation:

- **Lanzarote Committee** – identified Barnahus as a promising practice in 2015<sup>49</sup> and further promoted Barnahus structures in the 8th edition of the Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse in 2022<sup>50</sup>.
- **CDENF** – developed Guidelines on child-friendly justice<sup>51</sup>. Its subordinate body, the Committee of Experts on access to child-friendly justice through multidisciplinary and interagency services (ENF-JUS), is preparing a Draft Recommendation on multidisciplinary and interagency services for child-friendly justice, including operational guidelines<sup>52</sup>.
- **Technical co-operation work** – provides technical assistance to national authorities in their implementation through individual co-operation projects, including in countries like Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain.<sup>53</sup>

In regard to successful implementation of a child-friendly justice model, it needs to be noted that, beyond the Council of Europe work, other actors such as the European Commission<sup>54</sup>, the Council of Baltic Sea States and its Promise Network, UNICEF and Save the Children<sup>55</sup> have also contributed. In addition, the success of this model would not be possible without the political will, capacity, and competence of national authorities.

Source: CSES analysis based on documentation review and stakeholder feedback

49. In addition, the dynamic approach is further supported by the good co-ordination between the mechanisms led by the CRD Secretariat. The fact that all mechanisms are part of the same division and communication is centralised and led by the Secretariat further helps strengthen the Sub-programme's internal coherence, fostering strong linkages and synergies. A specific example of integrated co-operation is how the Head of the Co-operation and Capacity Building Unit served as a co-secretary for the CDENF committee drafting the recommendation on the Barnahus model, ensuring practical expertise was incorporated.

**Key finding:** The Lanzarote Committee faces operational challenges, which mostly result from the lack of adaptation of its structures and processes to the growing number of state parties to the Lanzarote Convention. Ongoing efforts undertaken by the Committee in recent years to address these issues illustrate its awareness and willingness to implement change; however, the limited progress made to date continues to constrain the Committee's ability to fulfil its mandate in the most effective and timely manner.

49. Lanzarote Committee (2015): 'First implementation report – Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust', see Chapter III: Best interest of the child and child friendly criminal proceedings, available on <https://rm.coe.int/168058cdfd>.

50. Joint statement on the occasion of the 8th edition of the Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November), available on <https://rm.coe.int/joint-statement-on-the-occasion-of-the-8th-edition-of-the-european-day/1680a90834>.

51. Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 17 November 2010, available on <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016804b2cf3>

52. See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/committee-of-experts-on-access-to-child-friendly-justice-through-multidisciplinary-and-interagency-services-enf-jus>.

53. See Appendix A – Mechanisms of intervention – Children's Rights Sub-programme.

54. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child specifies that the Commission will further support the establishment of Children's Houses in the EU.

55. A Save the Children initiative led Sweden to set a national network of Barnahus in 2008. See <https://liu.se/forskning/barnafriid/natverk/natverkbarnahus>.

50. The Lanzarote Committee has experienced operational challenges in fulfilling its mandate of monitoring compliance with the Lanzarote Convention. Since the Convention's adoption in 2007, the number of state parties has grown to 48 in 2025, substantially expanding the monitoring scope of the Committee. However, the Committee's structures and processes have remained largely unchanged, constraining its overall effectiveness and timeliness. The Committee has reflected on these challenges in recent years, identifying operational bottlenecks and possible remedial issues<sup>56</sup>. As a result, the Lanzarote Committee reviewed its rules of procedure in 2022, implementing some of the proposed measures: the size of the Bureau was expanded from three to five members to strengthen its capacity; states were encouraged to appoint their representatives for at least two years to improve continuity; and the use of videoconference and hybrid meeting formats was enabled, confidentiality permitting. While these changes represent an initial step towards adapting the Committee's working methods to its expanded mandate, more could be done – and is being explored – to further enhance the Committee's ways of working.

51. In the context of this evaluation, two main aspects linked to the Committee's ways of working stood out. On the one hand, procedural delays are partially linked to the limited use of ICTs before and in between in-person sessions, including insufficient use of online platforms for information-sharing and written consultations. Efforts by the Lanzarote Committee to trial online tools for in-between meeting consultations have had mixed results. Greater reliance on adapted ICTs and videoconferencing could streamline decision-making, enhance participation, and reduce financial constraints. On the other hand, CSO and non-state actor engagement has remained limited. While survivor participation, such as through the Brave Movement, has informed key initiatives, including the push for statute of limitations reforms, broader CSO involvement has remained low<sup>57</sup>. This includes in relation to the 'shadow reports', whereby CSOs can provide comments and sources of information to enhance the monitoring process. Resource constraints and unclear observer roles within the Lanzarote Committee (as well as CDENF) could be restricting wider participation. Indeed, documentation analysis and stakeholder feedback suggest that, while inclusion mechanisms exist, they lack consistent funding and strategic integration. Therefore, the intended outcome of inclusive, multi-stakeholder engagement has only partially materialised.

52. Finally, the Committee's monitoring role raises structural considerations. Under Article 41 of the Convention, monitoring is conducted by the Committee of the Parties, composed by state representatives. While some stakeholders – mostly CSOs – viewed this as limiting independence from member states, others – including national representatives – emphasised the benefit of state ownership. The Committee's reflection papers therefore proposed exploring the establishment of

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56. Reflection paper on possible solutions to maintain the effectiveness of the current monitoring mechanism and its monitoring procedure, 2020; Reflection Paper, Suggestions to maintain and strengthen the effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism and procedure in the short or medium term, 2021.

57. Survivor organisations were granted observer status and have been involved in direct participation since 2014, particularly in capacity building work and awareness raising work. As of 2025, the Lanzarote Committee had 12 observers (up from 8 in 2022). See <https://rm.coe.int/list-of-observers-liste-des-observateurs-lanzarote-committee-comite-de/1680a1a235>

an independent Group of Experts (such as GRETA and GREVIO)<sup>58</sup> to complement the current monitoring framework.<sup>59</sup>

53. The complexity of the matter at stake, diverging stakeholder views and legal implications on potential ways forward suggest that there is room for additional attention to be granted to the ways of working of the Lanzarote Committee. As the evaluation focused on the functioning of the Sub-programme as a whole, limited evidence on the specific operational aspects of the Lanzarote Committee makes it challenging to provide greater detail on what would be the most appropriate way forward.

**Key finding:** The Sub-programme has used its allocated resources in an efficient manner. While its overall ordinary budget has slightly increased over time, the human and financial resource allocated to the Lanzarote Committee and CDENF has seen minimal changes to cover an ever-growing scope. The increase in extrabudgetary resources is largely reflected in the increasing in number of projects and project staff. Moreover, the CGU has demonstrated excellent operational flexibility.

54. The human resource available within the CRD Secretariat and funded under the Ordinary Budget has remained largely stable: 10 FTEs in 2020-2021 (5.5A, 4.5B) and 11 FTEs in 2022-2025 (6.5A, 4.5B) – the increase of 1A FTE was due to the creation of an additional A post in 2022 to support the Lanzarote Secretariat respond to the increased number of ratifications<sup>60</sup>. This does not include the human resource within the co-operation team, which is funded through extrabudgetary resources (approximately 25 FTEs in 2025, per the CRD)<sup>61</sup>. As illustrated in the below figure, the secured financial resource available to the Sub-programme (as per the Programme and Budget) has increased from € 2.23 million in 2021 to € 4.82million in 2025, peaking at € 6 million in 2024. The amount of secured extrabudgetary resources is a key driver of the changes in these figures over time and reflects the growing number of co-operation projects – and of co-operation staff - in recent years<sup>62</sup>. The changes in funding through the Ordinary Budget relate to increased staff costs; non-staff costs – which mainly covers the CDENF, the Lanzarote Committee and some co-operation work<sup>63,64</sup>. Within that, resource for the Lanzarote Committee saw a slight increase from € 225 thousand in 2021 to € 250 thousand in 2025, while resource for CDENF slightly fluctuated over the years, between € 350 thousand and € 370 thousand (see Appendix K – Efficiency Analysis).

58. The monitoring mechanism of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) is set forth in Articles 36-38 of this Convention whilst the monitoring mechanism of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No.210) is set forth in Articles 66-70 of this Convention.

59. Reflection paper on possible solutions to maintain the effectiveness of the current monitoring mechanism and its monitoring procedure, 2020

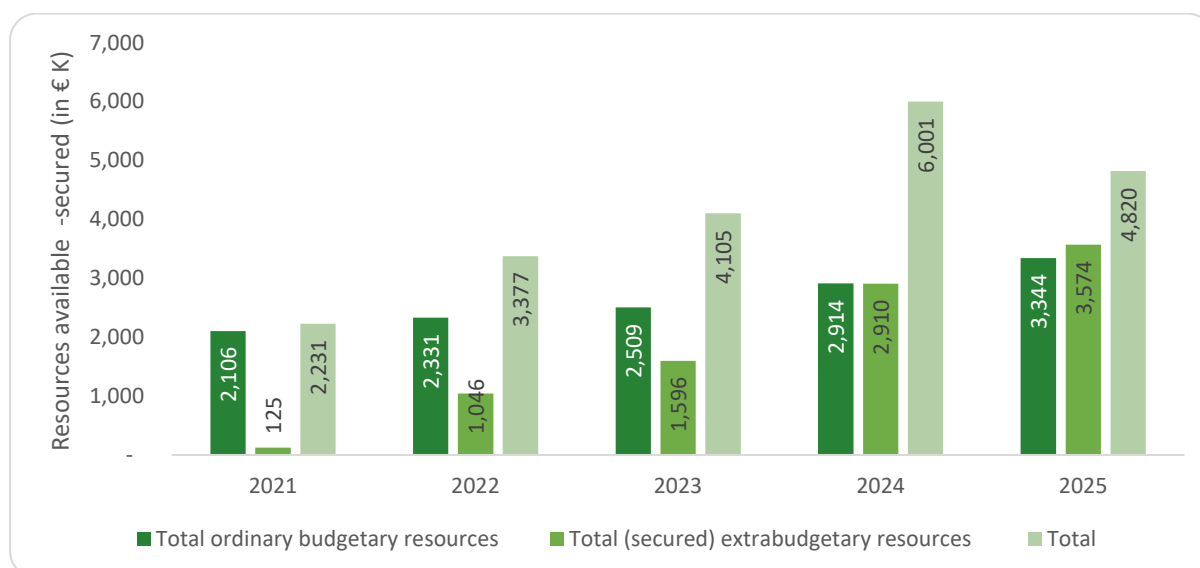
60. Source: written feedback from the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division.

61. As these staff are not reflected in the Programme and Budget, it will be necessary for the evaluation to capture data on the FTEs for the period within scope through other means.

62. For 2025, the final total extrabudgetary resource is likely to increase as funding is secured throughout the last half of the year.

63. Most co-operation work is funded under extrabudgetary resources.

64. Web-focus reporting tool of the Council of Europe Financial Management System (FIMS)

**Figure 1: Budgetary resources available (secured) – Children's Rights Sub-programme 2021-2025**

Source: Programme and Budget 2020-2025

55. The Sub-programme has made an appropriate use of allocated resources over the period 2021-2025: both ordinary as well as extraordinary resources have generally been fully utilised and served to cover the ever-growing Strategy scope (see section 3.1. on Appropriateness of the Strategy). Indeed, the current budget dedicated to the Sub-programme's core mechanisms, namely the Lanzarote Committee and CDENF, is tight: a similar budget size was devoted to cover 48 parties to the Lanzarote Convention in monitoring work in 2024 as opposed to 22 parties in 2012, and for CDENF to conduct work across six thematic pillars, as opposed to the reduced number of pillars within previous strategies. Co-operation projects, funded through extrabudgetary resources, have generally fully utilised their budgets.

56. The CRD has further made use of the flexible and agile structure of the Sub-programme to efficiently channel and redirect resources towards emerging needs. As the three main Sub-programme mechanisms are located within the same division, the CRD Secretariat was able to devote extrabudgetary resource to various areas of the Sub-programme that were either experiencing constraints or could benefit from additional resource. This included, for example, the second monitoring round of the Lanzarote Convention, the development of the Council of Europe child safeguarding policy by the CRD, and the implementation of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child by the CRD and CDENF.<sup>65</sup> This flexible approach to resourcing not only allowed the CRD to minimise challenges resulting from tight budget lines, such as long monitoring rounds by the Lanzarote Committee (see earlier sub-section on the Lanzarote Committee), but further granted the Sub-programme operational flexibility to adapt and address emerging needs.

57. The most notable example of operational flexibility was the establishment of the CGU as an informal and flexible co-ordination platform to support children in Ukraine. Although the CGU was not included in the original Programme and Budget, the Sub-programme was able to reorient

65. See Appendix L for an overview of co-operation projects used to redirect voluntary contributions to specific areas of the Sub-programme.

resources, reacting quickly to political will and emerging needs<sup>66</sup>. In that regard, the CRD's adaptive management structures and cross-mechanism co-ordination plausibly explain its ability to redirect and optimise resources. These features contributed directly to maintaining efficiency and responsiveness during changing contexts.

**Key finding:** The Sub-programme implements core Council of Europe human rights principles in line with the wider work of the Organisation and contributes to its internal coherence by acting as a leading voice on children's rights. Formal and informal collaboration with other Council of Europe bodies has further strengthened coherence by bringing together shared expertise in joint deliverables and by exposing – and helping overcome – divergences.

58. The Sub-programme has, through its various mechanisms and co-ordinated by the CRD, acted as the central driver of children's rights standards and implementation within the Council of Europe. The prominent role of the Lanzarote Convention as a key instrument for the protection of children from violence, and of the Lanzarote Committee and the CDENF setting and monitoring standards, positions the Sub-programme as the leading voice on children's rights within the Organisation. In that context, the Sub-programme plausibly contributed to the overall alignment around core children's rights principles within the Council of Europe as a whole. In addition, the Strategy is the instrument of reference on children's rights at Council of Europe level. The Strategy is explicitly referenced by other strategies, indicating it is taken into consideration beyond the remit of the CRD. For example, the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023<sup>67</sup> and 2024-2029, the Disability Strategy 2017-2023 and the Youth Sector Strategy 2030 all mention the Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

59. Alignment around key principles is observed also in instances where no explicit reference to the Strategy is made. For instance, the Council of Europe Digital Agenda 2022-2025<sup>68</sup> promotes youth participation, aims to fight sexual violence and trafficking facilitated by ICT, and calls for the inclusion of young people with disabilities and of those in situations of vulnerability or marginalisation in the digital transformation. Similarly, the Campaign #EuropeGoesPurple<sup>69</sup> by the Council of Europe Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics Unit promoted equal opportunities and social inclusion, with a specific focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children.

60. Formal collaboration with other Council of Europe bodies has happened most commonly in relation to joint activities and deliverables. In the area of child-friendly justice, this has, in some instances, included the creation of dedicated committees to work on joint outputs. For example, collaboration with the European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ), particularly through the Committee of Experts on the Rights and the best interests of the child in parental separation and in care proceedings (CJ/ENF-ISE), yielded two joint recommendations, namely on parental separation<sup>70</sup>

66. This was achieved by utilising core extra-budgetary funding within the Sub-programme (VC 3753) as well as by tapping into action plan funding.

67 <https://rm.coe.int/prems-073024-gbr-2573-gender-equality-strategy-2024-29-txt-web-a5-2756/1680afc66a>

68 <https://rm.coe.int/coe-digital-agenda-2022-2025-pro-eng-web/1680aa3e1b>

69 <http://www.europegoespurple.org/>

70. CM/Rec(2025)4 - Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of the rights and best interests of the child in parental separation proceedings (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 May 2025 at the 1529th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

and care proceedings<sup>71</sup>. On a separate occasion, CDENF and CDCJ joined forces with the European Committee on Crime Problems to produce the "Review of the Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice". Both formats demonstrated successful co-operation based on shared expertise, strengthening not only the overall quality of the deliverable by integrating their respective perspectives but also contributing to the overall internal coherence within the Council of Europe.

61. In other instances, while some level of formal collaboration has taken place through mutual representation in Committees<sup>72</sup>, exchanges have mostly taken the form of informal discussions linked to deliverables and joint activities. For example, sexuality education has been addressed together with the Education division and the Violence against women (VAW) division; the guide for medical professionals on child participation<sup>73</sup> was drafted together with the Steering Committee for Human Rights in the field of Biomedicine and Health. In addition, GREVIO contributed to the aforementioned draft recommendation on the best interests of the child in parental separation proceedings, while GRETA, the CGU and the Lanzarote Committee held a special hearing on the trafficking of children from Ukraine.<sup>74</sup> This approach granted flexibility to the collaboration, allowing individual teams to take initiative as appropriate and as needs emerged.

62. The joint work between the CRD and the VAW Division on the best interests of the child in parental separation brought to light diverging views in the context of domestic violence. While both divisions prioritised the child's protection, their interpretation of the 'best interests of the child' differed. On the one hand, the CRD focused on the child's right and advocated to maintaining "access to both parents". Conversely, the VAW Division's view, rooted in the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), emphasised the risk of the child being exposed to violence, either as a direct victim or as a witness, and insisted safety must sometimes override presumptions about parental involvement. This divergence highlighted where sectoral approaches, though both related to human rights, could clash. In the relevant recommendations, the factors included in the assessment of the child's best interests finally include the history of the child's upbringing and care and the protection of the child from physical or psychological harm, illustrating the ability to find common ground.<sup>75</sup>

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71. CM/Rec(2025)5 - Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of the rights and best interests of the child in care proceedings (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 May 2025 at the 1529th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).

72. CDENF representatives participate as observers in a number of committees, including the Committee of Experts on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (ADI-SOGIESC), and the European Committee on Legal Co-operation; they further act as reference person for key topics, such as digital technologies, including artificial intelligence.

73. Guide to children's participation in decisions about their health, 2024, see <https://rm.coe.int/pdf-cdbio-2023-3-final-cdenf-2023-14-final-guide-child-participation-i/1680af8172>.

74. Held as part of the third plenary meeting of the CGU, see Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU) Third plenary meeting, list of participants (2 July 2024).

75. [CM/Rec\(2025\)4](#) and [CM/Rec\(2025\)5](#) Section 11 (e) and (f).

**Box 4: Diverging views on the 'best interests of the child' within the Council of Europe****CRD (children's rights focus / participation):**

- **Focus:** Historically looked at the phenomenon through the lens of the children's rights to maintain personal relations and contact with both parents, except if contrary to the child's best interests. This includes careful, individualised determination of best interests in every case and attention to children's views in ways appropriate to age / maturity.
- **Action advocated:** The CRD strongly promotes including the child's voice and using mediation/supported negotiation where appropriate, as well as contact with parents as safe and appropriate.

**VAW/ GREVIO (gendered-violence focus / protection):**

- **Focus:** Safety first for women and child victims of intimate partner violence; recognition that domestic violence is gendered, systemic, and carries ongoing risks after separation (including coercive control, stalking, and post-separation violence).
- **Action advocated:** Advocated that judges determining visitation rights or custody must consider the risk of the child witnessing or being victimised again by normalising contact with a perpetrator, and if necessary, reduce the visitation rights coming from the relevant parent.

Source: CSES analysis based on documentation review and interview feedback

63. Overall, observed collaboration between the CRD and other Council of Europe bodies on areas of mutual interest benefitted the quality of the joint deliverables and activities, leading to higher quality outputs. Moreover, it contributed to strengthening internal coherence across divisions by identify diverging views. Indeed, exchanges served as an opportunity to bring these out into the open, discuss them and ultimately find a common ground accommodating the different perspectives.

### 3.3. Equality focus of the Sub-programme

64. This section examines the extent to which equality considerations are embedded in the Strategy and across the Sub-programme's interventions, including in the form of data collection on children in situations of vulnerability. It further analyses the direct involvement of children through child participation in the Sub-programme and the Council of Europe more broadly.

65. In this context, equality is defined as the enjoyment of human rights, opportunities, and resources by all individuals without discrimination, in law and in practice, and with a commitment to substantive, not just formal, equality.<sup>76</sup> The Council of Europe takes an intersectional approach in this regard, addressing multiple, often overlapping forms of discrimination, including gender, ethnicity and sexuality<sup>77</sup>.

**Key finding:** The Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022–2027) explicitly promotes equality, anti-discrimination, and gender sensitivity as cross-cutting issues to be mainstreamed across all strategy pillars.

76. Council of Europe, Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2029 (Council of Europe, May 2024), <https://isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Council-of-Europe-Gender-Equality-Strategy-2024-2029.pdf>.

77. Council of Europe, Right to Equality and Freedom from Discrimination, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/impact-convention-human-rights/right-to-equality-and-freedom-from-discrimination>.

66. Gender equality and anti-discrimination are explicitly identified as cross-cutting issues<sup>78</sup> in the Strategy<sup>79</sup>. Every strategic objective of the Strategy has a cross-cutting equality focus<sup>80</sup>, albeit to varying extents. Table 5 below outlines the equality focus of each thematic pillar, while Table 6 explains the ratings and related evidence.

**Table 5: Assessment of the strength of the equality focus by strategy pillar (Pillars 1-4 and 6)<sup>81</sup>**

Focus Area	P1 Freedom from Violence	P2 Equal opportunities & social inclusion	P3 Access to and safe use of technologies	P4 Child-Friendly Justice	P6 Children's rights in crisis and emergency
<i>Gender-sensitive approach</i>	High	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate
<i>Anti-discrimination / Inclusion</i>	High	Moderate	High	High	High
<i>Child participation</i>	Moderate	High	High	High	Moderate

Source: CSES own analysis based on documentation review

**Table 6: Overview of key to ratings**

Key to ratings	Meaning	Indicative evidence
<b>High</b>	Equality or inclusion focus is explicitly operationalised within the pillar through specific actions, standards, or monitoring tools.	Concrete commitments (e.g. recommendations, implementation tools, data collection, inclusion of children in situations of vulnerability, gender mainstreaming).
<b>Moderate</b>	Equality or inclusion are referenced and partially operationalised, but not consistently or with limited mechanisms.	Conceptual references or selective actions; no clear indicators or follow-up processes.
<b>Low / Not explicit</b>	Equality or inclusion is implied or absent; limited or no operational steps.	General language of fairness or universality; lacks identifiable actions or accountability structures.

Source: CSES analysis

67. The effectiveness of the Strategy's equality mainstreaming can be seen in the first implementation review of the Strategy: 82% of responding member states (n=17) reported that the Strategy had been effective in promoting equal opportunities and inclusion<sup>82</sup>. A separate survey of

78. Mainstreaming equality in the strategy involves two cross-cutting approaches: i) gender-sensitive measures and ii) anti-discrimination measures. These are applied across all priority areas, reflecting the intention to address them as transversal challenges.

79. Council of Europe, Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016–2021, adopted by the Committee of Ministers, March 2016. <https://rm.coe.int/168066cff8>, Council of Europe, Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022–2027, adopted by the Committee of Ministers, February 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/cdenf-2023-27-final-first-implementation-report-2022-2023-/1680ae0ef3>.

80. Council of Europe, Lanzarote Committee, Protecting Children from Human Rights Violations of All Forms and in All Settings. Final Report, project VC 3018.

81. Pillar 5 of the Council of Europe's Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022–2027) addresses "Giving a voice to every child." Its focus is to ensure that all children can meaningfully participate in decisions affecting their lives at family, institutional, and policy levels, in accordance with international and European standards. Child participation is addressed in detail in Appendix M.

82. Council of Europe, Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022–2027). First Implementation Report 2022–2023, Council of Europe Publishing, 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/cdenf-2023-27-final-first-implementation-report-2022-2023-/1680ae0ef3>.

external stakeholders supports this; most respondents identified displaced and migrant children as the main beneficiaries of the Strategy, followed by children facing discrimination or lacking parental care<sup>83</sup>.

68. However, several factors continue to constrain the full effectiveness of the Strategy's equality focus. Multiple interviewees reported uncertainty about tangible impacts of this mainstreaming, citing implementation challenges and resource limitations. The survey with Sub-programme stakeholders supports this, with a notable share of respondents reporting "don't know" when asked about the effectiveness of the Council of Europe's work on equality and inclusion<sup>84</sup>. An additional contributing factor here is likely the diffuse nature of mainstreaming, which is embedded across mechanisms rather than delivered through standalone projects<sup>85</sup>. As a result, equality achievements are harder to attribute directly to the Sub-programme, blurring the causal link between its activities and observed national changes.

**Key finding:** An equality focus is clearly and explicitly embedded in the mandates and many normative outputs of the Sub-programme, including CDENF guidance and recommendations and Lanzarote Committee monitoring, which provide important vehicles for raising awareness and promoting equality and non-discrimination across member states.

69. The embedding of equality, non-discrimination, and gender sensitivity is formally established through the founding and operational documents of both CDENF and the monitoring mechanisms of the Lanzarote Convention.

70. CDENF operates within the Equality and Human Dignity Programme, positioning its work within the Organisation's broader equality mandate<sup>86</sup>. Its Terms of Reference explicitly require oversight of the 2022-2027 Strategy, mainstreaming of children's rights across all Council of Europe committees, and due attention to transversal perspectives, including gender, disability, and Roma and Traveller issues<sup>87</sup>. Equally, CDENF is specifically tasked with guiding intergovernmental work and advising the Committee of Ministers while 'taking due account of relevant transversal perspectives', which include principles such as equality and non-discrimination. Its Terms of Reference states the following:

- *oversee the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), including through midterm and final evaluation;*
- *ensure that the rights of the child are mainstreamed into all relevant Council of Europe committees and bodies and support member States in mainstreaming children's rights;*
- *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.*<sup>88</sup>

83. Survey 2 analysis.

84. Ibid.

85. Resource limitations have been reported to hinder sustained mainstreaming. Unlike the Gender Equality Division, the Children's Rights Division has no dedicated staff to oversee mainstreaming, relying instead on existing CDENF capacity

86. This alignment is specifically true for the current strategic period under the Council of Europe's "Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022–2027." The committee's mandate and work were repositioned within the Organisation's broader equity focus at the launch of the new strategy, which began after its adoption in 2022 and is planned through 2027.

87. Council of Europe, Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), 2020-2021, <https://rm.coe.int/terms-of-reference-of-the-steering-committee-for-the-rights-of-the-child/1680addfdd>.

88. Ibid.

71. In the Lanzarote Committee, equality and non-discrimination are inherent principles protected under the framework of the Lanzarote Convention, meaning all activities undertaken – including promoting accession and implementation – uphold these principles<sup>89</sup>. For example, the monitoring work explicitly addresses equality by strengthening activities related to groups of children in situations of vulnerability, such as calling upon state parties to “take measures to address the specific risk of exposure to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of migrant and refugee children”<sup>90, 91</sup>. However, this is not comprehensive in its approach to addressing equality and non-discrimination, as there is no systematic approach for monitoring and reporting on groups such as Roma and Traveller children or children with disabilities<sup>92</sup>.

72. Collectively, the normative outputs of CDENF and the Lanzarote Convention, including recommendations, implementation reviews, and guidance tools have functioned as vehicles for translating strategic equality commitments into actionable standards. Table 7 below illustrates that, between 2021 and 2025, the Sub-programme produced 15 normative outputs with an explicit equality focus. This suggests that the Council's normative instruments have, in number and nature, promoted equality in national practice and awareness, acting as enabling mechanisms for sustained alignment on equality principles across member states.

**Table 7: CDENF and Lanzarote Convention outputs with an equality focus (2021 -2015)**

Sub-programme mechanism	Normative outputs with equality focus	
	No.	Examples
<b>CDENF</b>	7	Draft Recommendation(s) on the protection of the best interests of the child in parental separation proceedings (with CDCJ)
<b>Lanzarote Convention</b>	8	Urgent Monitoring Compliance (Refugee Crisis) LC declaration on protecting children in out-of-home care from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

Source: CSES analysis of documentation

73. A diverse range of outputs have been created by the Sub-programme mechanisms, which are focused on gender sensitivity, but the commitment to non-discrimination is less systematically applied to groups beyond gender in certain mechanisms. Gender sensitivity is integrated through mechanisms like the presence of a Gender Rapporteur and gender-neutral language<sup>93</sup>. There is a lesser but present focus on status-based vulnerability, including refugees, migrants, and children displaced by war<sup>94</sup>. Projects in Moldova and the CGU exemplify vertical interventions focused on

89. Council of Europe, Lanzarote Convention as a Tool for Global Protection of Children, [PDF document].

90. Council of Europe, Final Narrative Report on the Lanzarote Convention, [PDF document].

91. Council of Europe, 7th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, February 2023, <https://www.marinacastellaneta.it/blog/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Lanzarote-.pdf>.

92. Interviews.

93. Council of Europe, Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), 2020-2021, <https://rm.coe.int/terms-of-reference-of-the-steering-committee-for-the-rights-of-the-child/1680addfdd>, Council of Europe, Combating Violence Against Children in Georgia – Freedom from Violence, Project VC 3583, 2024 Interviews with Council of Europe stakeholders.

94. Survey two analysis, Survey two annex, Council of Europe, Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016–2021, adopted by the Committee of Ministers, March 2016. <https://rm.coe.int/168066cff8>, Council of Europe, Protecting the Rights of Ukrainian Children During and in Post-War Context, Project VC 3424, Council of Europe and Ukrainian partners, Interviews with Council of Europe Stakeholders.

displaced and crisis-affected groups. However, a lack of dedicated resource is considered by internal and external stakeholders in the field of children's rights to affect the extent of mainstreaming<sup>95</sup>.

**Key finding:** While equality and inclusion are systematically considered during the design phase of co-operation projects, their consistent integration through implementation remains limited. The Sub-programme has established strong policy frameworks and intentions, but practical mainstreaming and/or evidence of such, is constrained by resource gaps, political sensitivities, weak data disaggregation, and limited follow-through at national level, resulting in uneven equality outcomes across member states.

74. Equality and inclusion are generally considered within co-operation projects at the design phase; however, only some projects have fully embedded these principles all the way through to the delivery phase. In line with the Strategy for the Rights of the Child and the Technical Co-operation strategy<sup>96</sup>, most projects generally addressing children have considered the specific needs of children in situations of vulnerability at least to some extent in the design phase<sup>97</sup>. While individual project reports may not in all cases explicitly refer to the needs of children in situations of vulnerability<sup>98</sup>, stakeholder feedback suggests that these are indeed considered in project design.

75. In turn, various factors reportedly constrain the extent to which mainstreaming has effectively taken place in the implementation of co-operation work. Limitations influencing the approach include political sensitivities, limited resources and operational shortcomings<sup>99</sup>. For example, a project in Georgia<sup>100</sup> organised several workshops for children and parents to raise awareness on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. A similar training tailored to children with disabilities was planned but ultimately not implemented, as there were no internal Council of Europe safeguarding policies specifically for this group. In Armenia<sup>101</sup>, a co-operation project targeted internally displaced children in post-conflict zones, though was later re-focussed as few children were identified as being in need of support.

76. The absence of disaggregated data (by gender, disability, or other vulnerability factors) at outcome level also constrains the assessment of equality impacts. Most project reports record participation numbers without detailed disaggregation, and few include indicators to track

95. Survey 1 analysis, Survey 2 analysis.

96. The Technical Co-operation Strategy 2022-2027 explicitly mentions a focus on 'children in vulnerable situations, including child victims and witnesses of crimes, children living in alternative care institutions, migrant and refugee children, and children with disabilities'. In addition, it also stresses the need to consider 'the concrete needs of children based on country of origin, ethnic group, race, religion, language, sexual orientation and identity, disabilities, children who are homeless or those placed in homes, Roma or foreign children in need of particular protection'.

97. Children in situations of vulnerability include children without adequate parental care or protection, migrant, displaced, and refugee children, children with disabilities, mental health needs trauma, children who are LGBTQ+ and children affected by drug abuse or those who are carers.

98. Out of the 31 co-operation projects implemented in the time period of 2021-2025, only five reports have been identified as explicitly mentioning to have considered the needs particularly of children in situations of vulnerability in the reporting. This is reported to be linked, in some instances, to donor driven structure of project reports not necessarily integrating gender equality or a human rights approach.

99. Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>, Ecorys, Support to Council of Europe's Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report, Warsaw, May 2024 Survey 1 analysis, Interviews with Council of Europe stakeholders, member state stakeholders

100. Combating violence against children (3583).

101. 'Protecting the rights of Armenian children in post-conflict context (formerly, Preventing and combatting child sexual exploitation and abuse) (VC 2712).

outcomes for children in situations of vulnerability. As a result, outcome evidence on equality indicators remains weak, and it is only possible to attribute observed changes to project interventions to a limited extent. While all projects systematically collect and document gender-disaggregated data on participation in events, for other specific groups, such as children with disabilities, these aspects are not consistently integrated into monitoring frameworks and data are not available<sup>102</sup>. It is worth noting, however, that disaggregated data for child participation is reported to be well collected (see Appendix M – Child participation).

77. The quality of gender-disaggregated data was found to be weak, as there is no mechanism in place to systematically measure the outcomes or impact of co-operation projects in relation to gender<sup>103</sup>. While positive feedback is received informally, systematic evaluation of whether outputs lead to sustained change is often missing<sup>104</sup>. Reporting often focuses on output indicators (e.g., development of strategies, production of recommendations, or completion of training) rather than measurable outcomes like significant, durable changes in children's lives.

78. More broadly, several member states acknowledged that, while policies and frameworks for integrating equality are in place, the actual implementation often lags<sup>105</sup>. Indeed, a persistent gap exists between having sound policies and achieving effective change on the ground<sup>106</sup>. Ireland, for instance, is acknowledged for crafting very good policies but demonstrating less development in implementation planning and follow-through<sup>107</sup>. This is attributed to resource allocation, competing priorities and political will<sup>108</sup>. An External Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova (2021-2024) noted that, while the legal framework and capacity have improved, consistent implementation is the remaining hurdle, especially at the community level<sup>109</sup>. This was perceived to be due to staff turnover, capacity and fragmented cross-agency co-ordination<sup>110</sup>. In Montenegro, although laws and strategies are described as very good, they also report facing an implementation problem where follow-through is hampered by limited political will, requiring external factors, such as EU accession, to drive change<sup>111</sup>.

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102. While recognising that information on participation and diversity is necessary for effective monitoring and follow-up, the Council of Europe should determine, in line with its human rights standards and applicable data protection frameworks, which forms of disaggregated data can be collected, processed and reported in a lawful, proportionate and ethically sound manner, including in relation to sensitive personal data categories such as ethnic origin and sexual orientation.

103. Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>.

104. CSO interviews. Outcome evaluation feedback is frequently communicated to delivery organisations informally, rather than in standardized reports or formal feedback channels.

105. Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>, interviews.

106. Ecorys, Support to Council of Europe's Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report, Warsaw, May 2024.

107. Interviews with member states authorities.

108. Interviews.

109. Interviews, Survey 2 analysis, Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>.

110. Interviews with member states authorities.

111. Interviews.

**Key finding:** Co-operation projects show strong responsiveness to acute vulnerabilities, such as conflict, displacement, and migration, but pay comparatively limited and uneven attention to systemic drivers of inequality, such as poverty, social exclusion, and disability inclusion. This results in gaps in addressing structural aspects of equality across member states.

79. Co-operation projects demonstrate a clear concentration on acute and situational vulnerabilities, particularly those linked to displacement and conflict. The Sub-programme demonstrated strong, specific responsiveness to children affected by the war in Ukraine through the CGU, which is cited as an example of effective response to rapidly emerging vulnerability<sup>112</sup>. Equally, projects have also specifically addressed unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration and those affected by conflict, such as in a project in Armenia focusing on guardianship, foster care, and mental health support<sup>113</sup>.

80. By contrast, the systemic drivers of inequality – poverty, disability inclusion, and socio-economic exclusion – receive more limited and uneven attention by the Sub-programme. Equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children (pillar 2) is notably addressed less through dedicated projects compared to other pillars, such as freedom from violence (pillar 1) or child-friendly justice (pillar 4) (see Appendix J - Detailed Coverage of thematic pillars by the Sub-programme mechanisms)<sup>114</sup>. While concepts related to social inclusion are touched upon, they are not core aspects addressed by technical co-operation projects implemented in the last five years. As noted above, this could be the case, to some extent, because topics like social cohesion and child poverty are largely covered by other areas of the Council of Europe, such as the European Committee for Social Rights and the Social Charter<sup>115</sup>. In addition, as stressed by some stakeholders internal to the Council of Europe and external experts, these themes often require dedicated policies and cross-sectoral funding at national level and are therefore better suited for member state action<sup>116</sup>.

81. Attention to children with disabilities is acknowledged but recognised as limited. In the first implementation review of the Strategy, it was noted that less attention has been paid to the protection of children in alternative care and children with disabilities<sup>117</sup>. Stakeholders have highlighted a need for greater emphasis on children with disabilities, and representatives of the Lanzarote Committee confirmed it has no systematic approach for other groups (e.g., Roma, children with disabilities) beyond gender equality, and its legalistic monitoring risks overlooking disability inclusion<sup>118</sup>. Positive examples include incorporating the needs of specific groups into training materials, such as children with disabilities in the project 'Combating violence against

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112. Interviews.

113. Council of Europe, Protecting the Rights of Armenian Children in Post-Conflict Context, Project VC 2712, Directorate of Programme Coordination, 2024.

114. Interviews.

115. Interviews.

116. Ibid.

117. Council of Europe, Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016–2021, adopted by the Committee of Ministers, March 2016. <https://rm.coe.int/168066cff8>, Survey two, Survey one.

118. Interviews with MS authorities.

children, Phase III' in Ukraine or by distinguishing between ways in which violence affects boys and girls in project material like in the case of EndOCSEA@Europe+. <sup>119</sup>

**Key finding:** Child participation has become progressively mainstreamed across the Council of Europe's children's rights work and related mechanisms, evolving from a guiding principle into a measurable and applied practice through tools like CPAT and the Listen-Act-Change handbook, direct child consultations, and projects such as CP4Europe, though implementation remains uneven across member states and mechanisms.

82. Child participation is anchored in UNCRC Article 12 and Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2, operationalised through tools like the CPAT and the Listen-Act-Change Handbook<sup>120</sup>. Within the context of the Sub-programme, the 2017-2021 Strategy prioritised "Participation of all children", involving children in Council of Europe research, monitoring, tool development, consultations (e.g., child-friendly Strategy version), and events like the Strategy launch<sup>121</sup>. Under the 2022-2027 Strategy, child participation is both a cross-cutting issue and a strategic outcome (pillar 5 "Giving a voice to every child"). The 5th Strategic Objective aims to meaningfully involve all children in decisions affecting them, focusing on inclusion and accessibility so every child can express their views and influence outcomes. Among eight new children's rights standards adopted in 2022-2023, two directly support this objective<sup>122</sup>.

83. The CRD has advanced its own programme's equality and protection objectives and institutionalised child safeguarding as a shared organisational responsibility. Its work exemplifies how specialised expertise within one division can translate into systemic reform, promoting inclusive, accountable, and rights-based participation across the entire Council of Europe. The CRD initially introduced its own Child Safeguarding Policy (CSP) in 2019, which now serves as the internal standard for all activities involving children. It acted as the basis for a broader institutional approach: a comprehensive organisation-wide draft policy, accompanied by an Implementation Toolkit<sup>123</sup><sup>124</sup>. These instruments extend the CRD's approach beyond its division, embedding consistent ethical standards and data protection safeguards across sectors.

119. Council of Europe, Combating Violence against Children in Ukraine, Phase III - Annual Report 2022, project number VC/2987, Council of Europe and Ukrainian partners., Council of Europe, Preventing and Protecting Children from Violence Including in the Digital Environment in Moldova, Project VC/2982, Council of Europe and Moldovan partners., Council of Europe, Lanzarote Committee, Protecting Children from Human Rights Violations of All Forms and in All Settings. Final Report, project VC 3018.

120. The CPAT is a Council of Europe tool designed to assess the state of child participation. The Listen-Act-Change Handbook is a Council of Europe resource on children's participation that has been translated into Ukrainian and disseminated to stakeholders and professionals.

121. Council of Europe, Lanzarote Committee, Protecting Children from Human Rights Violations of All Forms and in All Settings. Final Report, project VC 3018., CoE Strategy for the Rights of the Child - First i.pdf, Council of Europe, 7th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 2 February 2023, covering the period 1 July 2021 to 2 February 2023.

122. Council of Europe. Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma youth participation. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2023. [CM/Rec\(2023\)4](#), Council of Europe. Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)9 on the active political participation of national minority youth. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2023. [CM/Rec\(2023\)9](#).

123. The draft safeguarding policy is in its final stages but has not yet been finalised and signed by the Secretary General. The Secretariat is currently coordinating a final round of comments with the Youth Department through an informal, but efficient and substantively valuable process. No implementation toolkit has yet been prepared.

124. Council of Europe, Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2021, adopted by the Committee of Ministers, March 2016. <https://rm.coe.int/168066cff8>.

84. Child participation outputs have strengthened national capacity to operationalise the right of children to participate, enabling the development of child participation from a guiding principle into a measurable and applied practice across member states. In 2016, the CRD developed the CPAT to provide a Europe-wide set of 10 specific and measurable indicators to facilitate and support the implementation of the child's right to participate pursuant to Recommendation (2012)2.<sup>125</sup> The indicators aim to measure the right to participate, promote awareness of the right to participate and assess the available spaces for child participation. Since it was published, 13 governments have reported assessing their level of compliance with the CPAT tool.<sup>126</sup>

85. Alongside CPAT, the CRD developed the "Listen – Act – Change: Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation", which is targeted at professionals working for and with children.<sup>127</sup> Besides explaining the nine basic requirements for participation and the indicators included in CPAT, the handbook provides practical guidance on how to use the tool in national self-assessments (e.g., methodology for gathering evidence, involving children and civil society, reporting results). This resource was mentioned by an interviewed representative from Ireland as being particularly useful in developing the national methodology for child participation.

86. Child participation has become progressively embedded across CDEF and Lanzarote Committee activities over the last five years. For example, CDEF has consulted children – often with support of external organisations – in the preparation of various reports (these include at least five major standard-setting instruments or reports)<sup>128</sup>. One such example is on 'Children as defenders of human rights: a study on Council of Europe member states' in collaboration with the CSO Child Rights Connect<sup>129</sup>. In addition, two consultations of children have fed into standard-setting processes pertaining to comprehensive sexuality education<sup>130</sup> and guardianship of unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration.<sup>131</sup> As for the Lanzarote Committee, it opened

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125. Council of Europe. Child Participation Assessment Tool. Council of Europe, 2016. [DisplayDCTMContent](#). The Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT), developed by the Council of Europe in 2016, enables countries to assess and improve how they implement children's right to participate, in line with Recommendation (2012)2 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. CPAT consists of 10 measurable indicators designed to evaluate the legal, policy, and practical frameworks that protect, promote, and create spaces for child participation. Governments use CPAT to monitor their progress, identify gaps, and guide reforms. Thirteen European states have formally reported assessing their compliance using CPAT.

126. These are: Finland; Republic of Ireland; Romania; Italy; Bulgaria; Malta; Slovenia; Latvia; Estonia; Portugal; Iceland; Czech Republic; and Germany.

127. Dr Anne Crowley, Prof. Cath Larkins, Luís Manuel Pinto. *Listen – Act – Change: Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation. For professionals working for and with children*. Council of Europe, 2020. [Publication-Handbook-on-childrens-participation\\_ENG.pdf](#).

128. Council of Europe, Lanzarote Committee, Protecting Children from Human Rights Violations of All Forms and in All Settings. Final Report, project VC 3018., Promoting Children's Rights (Strategy 2022-27) (1).pdf, Interviews with Council of Europe internal Stakeholders, MS authorities, External Stakeholders involved in the field of children's rights.

129. The Lanzarote Committee has already opened the most recent monitoring round to child participation and has received input from children in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to limited financial resources, the Secretariat was not in a position to commission or fund additional child participation activities and, owing to constraints in human resources between 2024 and mid-2025, it was also not able to mobilise non-governmental organisation partners to facilitate such participation on a pro bono basis. Dedicated funding has now been secured under a voluntary contribution to support child participation in the context of the next monitoring theme on screening professionals and volunteers.

130. Council of Europe. Child Consultations on Comprehensive Sexuality Education Concept note. ENF-VAE(2024)02 final Strasbourg, 17 December 2024. <https://rm.coe.int/enf-vae-2024-02-rev-e-concept-note-on-child-consultations-on-cse-/1680b10137>.

131. Council of Europe, Implementation Review of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)11 on Effective Guardianship for Unaccompanied and Separated Children in the Context of Migration, Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDEF), December 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/cdenf-2024-06-final-report-implementation-review-guardianship-recommen/1680b48f49>.

the process of its 2nd monitoring round for the first time to the direct participation of a total of 306 children from Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, the Republic of Moldova, Portugal, Serbia, and Ukraine<sup>132</sup>. It is expected to do this again for the 3<sup>rd</sup> monitoring round, launched in 2023.

87. Furthermore, some technical co-operation projects under the Sub-programme have consulted children to incorporate their views in the drafting of specific strategies, to inform child-friendly versions of publications and to gather feedback on key issues such as the judicial system<sup>133</sup>. This has taken place in various formats, including roundtables and surveys. Box 5 below provides examples of child consultations carried out across projects.

#### Box 5: Examples of projects incorporating child participation

- **Barnahus:** Co-operation project *Supporting the implementation of Barnahus in Slovenia*: Roundtable for children (report on their views of participation and Barnahus services)<sup>134</sup>. Co-operation project *Ensuring child-friendly justice through the effective operation of the Barnahus-units in Finland*: survey with children/adolescents on quality and child-friendliness of judicial services.<sup>135</sup>
- **Awareness materials:** Children were also consulted during the development of child-friendly awareness materials, such as the Kiko and the Manemies brochure for preventing sexual abuse, which were later deployed in cooperation projects<sup>136</sup>
- **Co-operation projects** funded child consultations to inform legal instruments and reports, including the implementation review of the Recommendation on effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children, a CDENF report on children as human rights defenders, and recommendations on comprehensive sexuality education<sup>137</sup>

Source: CSES own analysis based on First and Second Implementation Report of the Second implementation report of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), review of project documentation

88. Technical assistance and support to strengthen the national child participation frameworks have been provided to five member states, namely the Czechia, Finland, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia. This was done under the joint EU/Council of Europe project "Strengthening National Child Participation Frameworks and Action in Europe (CP4Europe)", which aimed to contribute to the promotion of children's rights to participation at the national level. The project tested CPAT as a model to enhance child participation and supported the participating countries in adapting Council of Europe tools and further developing their own. In that regard, for example, Finland co-designed Digiraati, an online platform where children and young people can be consulted on current issues and engage directly with decision-makers safely. The service was developed with children, organisations working with children, researchers and government ministries, and deliberately included seldom-heard groups (e.g., Roma children, children with disabilities and migrant children).

132. Lanzarote Committee. Compilation of children's contributions to the 2nd monitoring round of the Lanzarote Committee T-ES(2022)03\_en 25. Council of Europe, February 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/compilation-of-children-s-contributions-to-the-2nd-monitoring-round-of/1680a5ab62>.

133. This includes the 'Mid-Term Review Conference for the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)' report, published in April 2025. Children and young people were present in all sessions.

134. Council of Europe, Supporting the implementation of Barnahus in Slovenia – Phase II, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/barnahus-project-in-slovenia>.

135. Council of Europe, Ensuring child-friendly justice through the effective operation of the Barnahus-units in Finland, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/finland-barnahus>.

136. Interviews with Council of Europe staff.

137. Council of Europe and Defence for Children International – Italy, Consultations with Children: Concept Note, 13 April 2021.

It fostered dialogue across ages and backgrounds and treated children's ideas on an equal footing with adults. Adults involved reported that bringing children into decision-making measurably improved the quality of the platform.

89. Overall, child participation has become a defining strength of the Sub-programme, with the Council of Europe establishing solid normative, procedural, and practical foundations to embed children's voices in decision-making. Through initiatives such as CPAT, the Listen-Act-Change handbook, and CP4Europe, participation has evolved from principle to practice, supported by safeguards that ensure safe and ethical engagement. However, full and equitable mainstreaming remains constrained by resource and structural limitations, meaning that, while the Sub-programme has made substantial progress in institutionalising participation, reaching all groups of children in practice continues to depend on sustained investment and cross-sectoral collaboration.

### 3.4. Outcomes at member state level

90. This section assesses the effectiveness of the Sub-programme, understood as the extent to which it has achieved its objectives and contributed to particular changes at member state level. It further identifies factors contributing to successes and challenges.

**Key finding:** The Sub-programme has been effective in achieving immediate outputs, as evidenced by the Council of Europe's Programme and Budget reports, which show that the vast majority of planned targets were met or exceeded between 2021 and 2025. The consistently high rate of achievement across reporting periods demonstrates the Sub-programme's strong performance in delivering outputs and advancing progress toward its strategic objectives, despite contextual challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

91. Overall, the Sub-programme has achieved its targets to a great extent over the period spanning 2021 to 2025, as outlined in the Council of Europe P&B reports. This refers in particular to immediate outputs, such as the number of new standards, tools and reports produced or the number of participants in capacity building activities. Occasional delays were mostly caused by external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (i.e., the latter delayed the adoption of the thematic questionnaire of the third monitoring round of the Lanzarote Committee)<sup>138</sup>. Table 8 below provides an overview of the Sub-programme's performance over the last five years. Appendix N presents a detailed analysis of the Sub-programme's achievement of P&B targets in 2021-2025.

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138. As stated in the Progress Review Report 2023, the delay was caused by the Russian Federation aggression against Ukraine, as the Lanzarote Committee had to postpone its meetings after March 2022 until decisions on the restriction of the modalities of participation of the Russian Federation had been taken. After that, the Lanzarote Committee decided to return to its 1st monitoring round theme (protecting children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust) instead of identifying a new one since more than half of the current Parties had not been monitored on the initial theme.

**Table 7: Programme and Budget targets in relation to achievement<sup>139</sup>**

Immediate outcome	No. Targets set	No. Targets achieved	Percentage of targets achieved
Reporting period 2021	11 <sup>140</sup>	8 <sup>141</sup>	72%
Reporting period 2022-2023	18 <sup>142</sup>	14 <sup>143</sup>	77% <sup>144</sup>
Reporting period 2024-May 2025	10	7 <sup>145</sup>	70%

Sources: Progress Review Report 2021 (2022)<sup>7</sup>, Sources: Programme and Budget 2020-2021, Progress Review Report 2021 (2022)<sup>7</sup>, IPRR 2021, PB Implementation Review 2024 CM(2025)<sup>86</sup>

92. The consistently high proportion of Programme and Budget immediate outcome targets achieved indicates that, where the Sub-programme established clear and measurable objectives, it generally delivered as planned. This points to a solid level of implementation capacity. From a contribution analysis perspective, this pattern points to strong performance against an internal results framework for immediate outcomes but does not in itself demonstrate wider systemic impact or sustained national-level change. Considering intermediate outcomes, across the three periods, the evidence indicates steady system-level progress, even in the absence of predefined benchmarks<sup>146</sup>. Observed advances, such as increased ratifications, legislative alignment, and integration of children's rights into national strategies, suggest that the Sub-programme has played an enabling and reinforcing role within a broader ecosystem of reform. This progress reflects cumulative influence rather than linear causality, where Council of Europe mechanisms help sustain political commitment and normative coherence across states. However, the lack of explicit outcome targets constrains the ability to measure the extent of change attributable to these efforts, meaning the findings in this regard focus on plausible contribution and positive direction of travel rather than on quantifiable achievement.

**Key finding:** The Sub-programme has demonstrated clear effectiveness in achieving targets across member states by operating in several complementary capacities; as a convener, standard-

139. Data coverage and consistency were affected by several factors: (i) information fragmentation across three separate tables covering 2021–May 2025, due to the Programme and Budget shifting to a four-year cycle mid-period; (ii) substantial changes in sub-programme indicators across reporting periods following the launch of the 2022–2027 Strategy for the Rights of the Child, limiting continuity; and (iii) reliance on exception reports, which focus on delays and provide limited information on achieved targets or intermediate outcomes. A summary table at the end of this annex outlines the data sources and coverage years.

140. Total number of indicators was 14 for this period. For one of these, sufficient information to assess the achievement was not provided so this has been excluded from this analysis. For another, no target was set.

141. A further target was achieved but outside of this reporting period.

142. Only 17 of these can be assessed, as the target date for one has not been reached yet. The percentage achieved would have been 82% if we take this into account. No targets were set for three indicators, which are not included in this number. No assessments were possible for a further two indicators, which are also excluded from the analysis.

143. A further target was achieved but outside of the target period.

144. Assessment for two targets was not possible. One, as the target date was not achieved, and another the information was not reported and no assessment was possible.

145. This is assessed against the 2025 milestone, but the target year is 2027. As the assessment was done based on reporting until May 2025, potential progress happening in the second half of 2025 has not been included. This may affect the final overall percentage of targets met by the end of 2025.

146. For intermediate outcomes, progress is tracked through qualitative and quantitative indicators, but no formal targets were set for the period. This means available evidence illustrates contributions, signs of influence and emerging impact, but it does not allow for a systematic assessment of achievement against predefined benchmarks.

setter, multiplier and monitor. It has fulfilled each of these roles to varying degrees of impact, reflecting differences in national contexts and political and socio-economic conditions. Through these distinct yet interconnected functions, the Sub-programme has driven meaningful progress in advancing children's rights across Europe.

93. The Sub-programme has been most effective as a **convener**, catalysing co-operation, dialogue, and legislative reform across member states. The Sub-programme's convening function has been instrumental in aligning government actors and experts around shared standards and action. Through intergovernmental bodies (CDENF, Lanzarote Committee) and crisis co-ordination (CGU), it created platforms for peer exchange and structured co-operation that facilitated tangible reform. Member state authorities in Ireland, for example, described the Council of Europe's role as catalysing co-operation and providing leverage for reforms, embedding rights-based methods<sup>147</sup>. In Finland, member state authorities reported that co-operation between countries helped them take better decisions, noting that co-ordination is strong<sup>148</sup>.

94. The Lanzarote Committee provides a unique platform for regular interactions between countries, observers, civil society, and experts<sup>149</sup>. The Lanzarote Committee has been recognised as uniquely open to survivor voices compared to other bodies, allowing participation of organisations representing survivors<sup>150</sup>. This dialogue enables survivors and civil society to contribute to legislative change. For example, in 2024, the Lanzarote Committee adopted an opinion stressing that limitation periods must not expire before victims reach adulthood, noting that, although not required by Article 33, their abolition is an effective way to ensure sufficient time to initiate proceedings<sup>151</sup>. This Opinion was heavily shaped by survivor advocacy<sup>152</sup>. Following this, there has been a trend in member states taking similar action. Montenegro and Croatia have reformed their criminal laws on sexual offences against children, notably by abolishing or extending limitation periods<sup>153</sup>. Similar legislative progress was reported in Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, and Spain<sup>154</sup>. These outcomes show a clear pattern of diffusion from collective

147. Interviews with member state authorities.

148. Interviews with member state authorities.

149. Council of Europe, Annual Report: Lanzarote Convention Monitoring Mechanism, Project VC 2737, covering 1 January 2020–31 December 2020, project implementation 1 March 2020–29 February 2024, CoE Survey 2 analysis, Council of Europe, 8th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 6 March 2024, covering the period 3 February 2023 to 15 February 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/8th-activity-report-of-the-lanzarote-committee/1680af288d>.

150. As mentioned before, organisations such as the Brave Movement and End Violence Against Children were granted observer status in 2023 and allowed direct participation since 2014. See Council of Europe, 7th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 2 February 2023, covering the period 1 July 2021 to 2 February 2023., interviews.

151. Council of Europe, Programme and Budget 2024–2027: Mid-term Review, CM(2025)86, 6 June 2025, Information document for the 1534th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (Item 11.1). In this context, limitation periods refer to the legally defined time limits within which proceedings can be initiated against an alleged perpetrator after a crime has been committed.

152. Interviews.

153. Council of Europe, 8th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 6 March 2024, covering the period 3 February 2023 to 15 February 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/8th-activity-report-of-the-lanzarote-committee/1680af288d>.

154. Council of Europe, 8th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 6 March 2024, covering

deliberation to national reform, validating the Lanzarote Committee's convening mechanism as a driver of effectiveness.

95. The overall number of CSOs formally involved remains limited. Although this is not an explicit target of the Sub-programme, it is recognised as a significant factor in driving member state outcomes<sup>155</sup>. Despite their limited numbers, CSOs that do participate have contributed effectively in several instances. For example, some organisations have played a key role in ensuring that survivor perspectives are meaningfully reflected in the Lanzarote Committee's outputs. Other concrete examples include CSOs participating in monitoring mechanisms, advocacy campaigns, and consultations that shape policy reforms. These contributions enhance the legitimacy and relevance of the Committee's work by incorporating diverse, often underrepresented voices. CSOs therefore act as important intermediaries, extending the Sub-programme's reach and helping to anchor policy change in lived experience; however, the limited and narrow pool of participating actors constrains both representativeness and the long-term sustainability of such engagement.

96. Member states report that participation in CDENF sessions and utilisation of the outputs have produced tangible outcomes, particularly through constructive dialogue among diverse stakeholders. This engagement has supported the revision of laws and strategies on issues such as child participation, digital protection, guardianship, protection from violence, and equal opportunities<sup>156</sup>. This is largely driven by CDENF's role in collective knowledge production and peer learning, with Finland and Slovenia highlighting how exchanges with government experts, independent consultants and the CRD's academic network have strengthened domestic decision-making and helped embed European standards in national reforms.<sup>157 158 159</sup>

97. Within member states, the Council of Europe's convening and knowledge-brokering role enables officials to access and apply evidence-based practices they might otherwise lack the time or resources to identify independently. This exchange – facilitated through intergovernmental fora and technical co-operation – helps translate comparative experience into practical reform choices, reducing policy fragmentation and duplication<sup>160</sup>. Contribution analysis indicates that this peer learning is a key mechanism through which the Sub-programme influences national reform trajectories, even in the absence of direct enforcement powers. For example, shared insights on implementing sexuality education frameworks and child-friendly justice models prompted adaptation of similar approaches across comparable contexts<sup>161</sup>. Collaboration with NGOs such as La Strada and Juventas further amplifies this effect by embedding international standards in locally

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the period 3 February 2023 to 15 February 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/8th-activity-report-of-the-lanzarote-committee/1680af288d>.

155. Stakeholder interviews, Council of Europe, Final Evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe Partnership for Good Governance Programme Phase II (PGG II) – Management Response, Directorate of Programme Coordination, Council of Europe, External Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024 – Final Report, Directorate of Programme Coordination, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>.

156. Interviews, Council of Europe, Programme and Budget – Progress Review Report 2023.

157. Council of Europe, Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), Draft Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022–2027), CDENF(2021)05rev5, Restricted, 2021, interviews with member state authorities.

158. Interviews.

159. Interviews.

160. Interviews.

161. Ibid.

grounded training and awareness initiatives<sup>162</sup>. Without these structured exchanges, member states would likely progress more unevenly, with weaker diffusion of tested practices and lower consistency in applying child rights standards.

98. The Sub-programme acts as a **multiplier** by scaling effective national innovations into European standards thereby extending their reach and durability beyond individual country contexts. Contribution analysis suggests that this influence operates through a sequenced process – identifying promising models, codifying them through guidance and political endorsement, and facilitating their replication through co-operation projects and monitoring mechanisms. The Barnahus model exemplifies this pathway: first recognised by the Lanzarote Committee as a national innovation, it evolved into a pan-European benchmark for child-friendly justice, informing legal and institutional reforms in at least 28 member states.<sup>163</sup> Another example of the CRD acting as a multiplier is the global reach of the Kiko materials, which have been translated into multiple languages and most recently adapted into Papiamentu for a Kiko-based campaign that has been running in Curaçao for the past 12 months. The “*Kiko and the Hand*” training programme, diffused across Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, further demonstrates this adaptive scaling, where technical tools are embedded into national curricula through sustained ministerial co-operation. These outcomes illustrate how the Sub-programme’s structured multiplier function helps institutionalise good practice within formal systems. Without this framework, promising national initiatives would likely remain fragmented, limiting their potential to influence regional standards and cross-country consistency in protecting children’s rights<sup>164</sup>.

99. However, multiplier action also depends on other contributing factors, such as EU or national funding, political will, CSO engagement and individuals to drive change. The EU often provides the funding possibilities for co-operation projects, which are then implemented by the Council of Europe, leveraging its expertise. For instance, joint projects on child-friendly justice are funded 90% by the EU and 10% by the Council of Europe, but the implementation is handled by the Council of Europe<sup>165</sup>.

100. For Child Participation methodologies, the Council of Europe achieved a multiplier effect through the joint EU/Council of Europe CP4Europe project (2021–2023). The Council of Europe organised direct child consultations with children and experts to prepare documents like the Child-friendly version of the 2022-2027 Strategy<sup>166</sup>. The Council of Europe also supports peer exchange and engagement with other stakeholders, such as NGOs and Finnish experts who consulted children

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162. Ibid.

163. Council of Europe, 7th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 2 February 2023, covering the period 1 July 2021 to 2 February 2023., For more information on the Barnahus model, see Box 3: Example of best practice addressed across Sub-programme mechanism. Council of Europe, 8th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 6 March 2024, covering the period 3 February 2023 to 15 February 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/8th-activity-report-of-the-lanzarote-committee/1680af288d> , Council of Europe, Programme and Budget – Progress Review Report 2021, CM/Inf(2022)7, 1 April 2022, 1435th Meeting, Item 11.2 Survey 2 analysis, interviews.

164. Council of Europe, Combating Violence Against Children in Ukraine, Phase II – Final Report, Project VC/1813, Council of Europe and Ukrainian partners, Interviews.

165. Survey 1, interviews.

166. Council of Europe, Lanzarote Committee, Protecting Children from Human Rights Violations of All Forms and in All Settings. Final Report, project VC 3018.

directly for the drafting of the Lanzarote Convention action plan. Methodologies like CPAT are also applied by the Council of Europe in member states like Slovenia<sup>167</sup>.

101. The Council of Europe's **monitoring role** focuses on assessing national progress in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. The monitoring rounds and resulting recommendations, particularly those urging or considering action, have served as catalysts for national legislative reform across various member states. Contribution analysis shows that the periodic monitoring rounds, and the recommendations they produce, act as catalytic levers – translating soft international obligations into concrete legislative and policy change. Thematic monitoring across all 48 Parties amplifies this effect by fostering comparability and momentum, allowing governments to benchmark progress and respond to visible gaps<sup>168,169</sup>. Implementation reports, which identify precise areas for national action, have been instrumental in prompting reforms such as Finland's 2022–2025 National Action Plan and strengthened judicial safeguards ensuring children's participation in proceedings. In Montenegro, combined pressure from Lanzarote and GREVIO/GRETA assessments spurred stricter sentencing for crimes against children. Without this monitoring architecture, the diffusion of reform would likely be slower and less co-ordinated, with fewer incentives for governments to sustain alignment with international child protection standards.

102. The Sub-programme consistently acts as a **capacity-builder** by delivering targeted training, knowledge, and tools through co-operation projects and awareness-raising events. Technical co-operation projects, including capacity building activities, legal and policy analysis, and studies, are identified as interventions that commonly contribute to positive changes in children's rights by multiple Council of Europe staff<sup>170,171</sup>. A key feature of this sustained capacity-building effort is the "Train the Trainer" methodology developed by the Council of Europe, which creates institutionalised pools of trainers and ensures that training materials are embedded within state curricula. For example, through the EndOCSEA@Europe regional project, specialised training modules on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse have been developed and translated into multiple languages. Examples in specific member states include:

- **Montenegro**, where the Council of Europe supported multisectoral training for judges, prosecutors, and police on child sexual abuse and digital exploitation, embedding child-friendly justice approaches.
- **Republic of Moldova**, where Council of Europe projects delivered specialised training on online sexual exploitation, developed inter-agency co-ordination protocols, and conducted awareness campaigns in partnership with La Strada.

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167. Interviews. CPAT is discussed in more detail in section 99.

168. Council of Europe, Reflection Paper on Current Monitoring under the Lanzarote Committee, Working Document T-ES(2020)04\_en, 10 March 2020, Interviews with Council of Europe Staff.

169. Council of Europe, Annual Report: Lanzarote Convention Monitoring Mechanism, Project VC 2737, covering 1 January 2020–31 December 2020, project implementation 1 March 2020–29 February 2024.

170. Survey two analysis.

171. Ecorys, Support to Council of Europe's Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report, Warsaw, May 2024.

- **Finland**, where the Council of Europe's CP4Europe project trained professionals on the CPAT, improving cross-sector co-ordination.
- **Ireland**, where Council of Europe-supported child participation consultations in the Barnahus project built capacity among professionals to facilitate child-inclusive processes.

103. These examples demonstrate how the Sub-programme converts technical expertise into durable institutional practices, bridging the gap between international standards and frontline service delivery. However, as the outcome harvesting suggests, the extent to which these gains are maintained depends on national ownership, resource allocation, and continuity of trained staff.

104. Overall, each role – convening, standard-setting, multiplying, monitoring, and capacity-building—addresses distinct but interconnected facets of advancing children's rights. This diversity allows the Sub-programme to operate flexibly and effectively across different contexts, tailoring approaches to specific national political, social, and economic environments. For example, convening fosters essential dialogue and peer learning, while standard-setting provides clear frameworks and benchmarks that guide reform efforts. The interplay between these roles is generally positive and mutually reinforcing: convening facilitates knowledge sharing that informs standard-setting and multiplication of innovations such as the Barnahus model. However, the dual responsibility of monitoring and influencing member states does present a potential tension regarding objectivity. Ensuring independent oversight alongside facilitated co-operation requires transparency and clear accountability mechanisms to avoid compromising impartial assessment. Overall, this multifaceted approach supports incremental yet substantive reforms while emphasising collaboration, capacity-building, and inclusive policymaking to effectively uphold children's rights.

**Key finding:** The Sub-programme's effectiveness depends heavily on the strength of national governance, political commitment, and institutional capacity, with stable coordination leading to better outcomes and fragmented structures risking sustainability. While it significantly contributes to advancing children's rights, broader factors like EU accession and socio-economic conditions also play crucial roles in shaping national progress.

105. A wide range of factors at national level affect engagement of authorities and effectiveness of the Sub-programme, including structural and institutional maturity, political situation (including EU alignment), will and capacity of authorities, socio-economic factors, national need, and the extent of Sub-programme relevance. The effectiveness of the Sub-programme is strongly influenced by the strength and maturity of national governance systems and institutional frameworks<sup>172</sup>. Countries with well-established co-ordination mechanisms, clear mandates across ministries, and sustained institutional continuity demonstrate higher levels of engagement and implementation of children's rights standards<sup>173</sup>. Where structures are weak or fragmented, progress depends heavily on a small number of committed individuals who act as champions of reform<sup>174</sup>. While such initiative

172. Survey one analysis, Interview with member state authorities.

173. Interviews with member state authorities.

174. Interviews with member state authorities, Sub-programme stakeholders, member state stakeholders.

has accelerated the uptake of child-rights standards in several member states, reliance on personal commitment rather than institutionalised processes limits sustainability once personnel change<sup>175</sup>.

106. Embedding capacity-building into governance structures through national curricula, institutionalised training, and continuous professional development is key to maintaining results. The Sub-programme contributes to this process through Action Plans that strengthen institutional capacity and embed learning into partner institutions. In Slovenia, for example, Sub-programme guidance and training modules helped transform the Barnahus pilot into a permanent national institution. In the Republic of Moldova, ministerial approval of a guide on intersectoral co-operation for child protection has integrated multidisciplinary procedures into everyday practice. Sub-programme stakeholders, in their survey responses, reinforced these qualitative findings when identifying national-level constraints – notably a lack of political commitment, insufficient human and financial resources, and limited capacity of national authorities – as the main factors hindering effectiveness<sup>176</sup>. Nearly one-third of participants rated these obstacles as affecting the Sub-programme's impact to a large extent. Socio-economic conditions, co-ordination gaps, and entrenched cultural norms were also cited as significant barriers. These patterns confirm that the effectiveness of the Council of Europe's work on children's rights is highly dependent on the governance strength, institutional capability, and contextual realities of each member state.

107. Table 9 below further illustrates how national context directly shapes engagement with, and the effectiveness of, the Sub-programme. Countries with mature democratic systems and stable co-ordination frameworks, such as Finland and Slovenia, were able to embed Council of Europe standards rapidly into law and practice, achieving structural and legislative change. In contrast, contexts marked by institutional fragility or reliance on individual champions, as in the Republic of Moldova and Montenegro, saw slower progress and weaker sustainability. These cases also highlight how external drivers – notably EU accession and crisis conditions – can accelerate reform or necessitate adaptive responses, underscoring the Sub-programme's ability to tailor support to diverse governance environments.

**Table 8: Overview of institutional features influencing effectiveness in case study countries**

Member State	Institutional features influencing effectiveness	Reported Sub-programme outcomes in this context
<b>Finland</b>	Stable democratic institutions, independent Ombudsperson, and cross-ministerial co-ordination frameworks. <sup>177</sup>	These features contributed to efficient uptake of CDENF standards - such as the Child Rights Impact Assessment and Child-Friendly Justice Guidelines - into national law and practice <sup>178</sup>
<b>Ireland</b>	Strong national infrastructure for child participation (Hub na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg), but persistent implementation gaps in workforce planning (e.g. social workers, nurses) <sup>179</sup>	Council of Europe technical assistance provided legitimacy and convening power to secure interdepartmental commitment (Justice, Health, Children) and national resourcing for the Barnahus model <sup>180</sup> . This support led to specific policy change on data sharing to facilitate multi-agency working <sup>181</sup>
<b>Slovenia</b>	High political commitment and	Collaboration with the Council of Europe led to the

175. Interviews with member state authorities, member state stakeholders, International stakeholders.

176. Survey two analysis.

177. Interviews with member state authorities.

178. Interviews.

179. Interviews.

180. Interviews.

181. Survey two annex.

Member State	Institutional features influencing effectiveness	Reported Sub-programme outcomes in this context
	alignment between ministries; clear legal and administrative mandates supporting reform <sup>182</sup>	unanimous adoption of a comprehensive Barnahus law – the first in Europe – and an amendment to administrative law designating “child-friendly justice” as a core competence of the Ministry of Justice
<b>Republic of Moldova</b>	High political will and EU accession momentum, but fragmented institutional co-ordination, limited data systems, and high staff turnover. <sup>183</sup>	The Council of Europe’s catalytic support strengthened intersectoral co-operation and produced a ministerially approved Guide on Child Protection, used daily by multidisciplinary teams. Embedding training into national curricula was identified as key to sustaining gains <sup>184</sup>
<b>Montenegro</b>	Commitment to reform constrained by weak institutional co-ordination, limited enforcement, and dependency on individual champions <sup>185</sup>	Council of Europe co-operation helped advance child-friendly justice practices and capacity-building, but sustainability remains limited due to lack of systemic embedding and workforce continuity <sup>186</sup> .
<b>Ukraine</b>	Structural fragility and crisis conditions following the Russian Federation’s armed aggression. <sup>187</sup>	The Council of Europe demonstrated agility and responsiveness to these crises conditions by establishing the CGU – a recognised co-ordination platform relied on by the EU and Ukrainian authorities to ensure equal participation and rapid response in child-rights protection <sup>188</sup> .

Source: CSES analysis based on case study research

108. Political commitment consistently emerges as a significant factor influencing engagement and effectiveness. For instance:

- In **Finland**, sustained political consensus and the presence of permanent public officials dedicated to children’s rights underpin steady progress<sup>189</sup>.
- **Slovenia’s** high-level political commitment was a precondition for the successful legislative adoption of Barnahus<sup>190</sup>.
- In **Croatia**, a government change and new ministerial appointments required project teams to re-explain the *Barnahus* model, causing delays and efficiency losses<sup>191</sup>.

109. The majority of Council of Europe staff surveyed supported this finding (80%, n=30), citing political will as the primary determinant of success, followed by the capacity and competence of

182. Ecorys, Support to Council of Europe’s Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report, Warsaw, May 2024.

183. Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe’s Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>.

184. Council of Europe, External Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024 – Final Report, Directorate of Programme Coordination, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>, Council of Europe staff interview.

185. Interviews with member state authorities and member state stakeholders.

186. Interviews with member state authorities and member state stakeholders.

187. Council of Europe, 8th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 6 March 2024, covering the period 3 February 2023 to 15 February 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/8th-activity-report-of-the-lanzarote-committee/1680af288d>.

188. Survey 1 analysis.

189. Interviews with member state authorities and Council of Europe staff.

190. Interviews with member state authorities and Council of Europe staff.

191. Interviews with Council of Europe staff.

national authorities. Strong political endorsement by high-level officials or parliaments gives legitimacy and momentum to Council of Europe initiatives; conversely, frequent government turnover or shifting priorities can slow or fragment implementation.<sup>192</sup>

110. External drivers, such as the EU-accession process, often reinforce political will by creating alignment between national priorities and Council of Europe standards<sup>193</sup>. In Moldova, for example, EU conditionality has accelerated reforms, including full implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, while in Montenegro, the establishment of a sex-offender register inspired by the Lanzarote Committee was expedited by EU benchmark requirements<sup>194</sup>. The interplay between Council of Europe "soft law" and EU "hard law" instruments often provides a dual incentive: Council of Europe standards offer the normative foundation, and EU processes provide enforcement leverage<sup>195</sup>.

111. Constructive multi-stakeholder partnerships further strengthen engagement. Collaboration between ministries, the judiciary, civil society, and international organisations reinforces ownership and coherence<sup>196</sup>. The Council of Europe's credibility as a neutral convener facilitates such co-ordination, yet long-term success depends on national authorities assuming leadership and integrating follow-up actions within domestic accountability frameworks<sup>197</sup>. Engagement is highest where member states view the Sub-programme as complementing their obligations under both Council of Europe and UN conventions<sup>198</sup>.

112. Socio-economic realities and broader geopolitical conditions also shape both the relevance and the effectiveness of the Sub-programme<sup>199</sup>. Indeed, limited resources were reported to restrict the translation, dissemination, and local adaptation of Council of Europe standards, especially in rural or decentralised systems<sup>200</sup>. In the Republic of Moldova, public sector staff shortages delay implementation and erode institutional memory; in Finland, dissemination gaps leave remote professionals unaware of standards; while in Montenegro, socio-cultural tolerance of violence diminishes urgency, and in Slovenia, judicial reluctance to hear children directly hampers child-friendly justice principles<sup>201</sup>. This is supported by survey data, where a majority of Sub-programme

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192. Survey 1 analysis.

193. Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>, Interviews.

194. Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>, Interviews.

195. Ecorys, Support to Council of Europe's Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report, Warsaw, May 2024.

196. Council of Europe, Preventing and Protecting Children from Violence Including in the Digital Environment in Moldova, Project VC/2982, Council of Europe and Moldovan partners. Interviews.

197. Survey two analysis, Interviews, Council of Europe, Final Evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe Partnership for Good Governance Programme Phase II (PGG II) – Management Response, Directorate of Programme Coordination.

198. Survey one annex, Interviews, Council of Europe, Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), 2020–2021, CM(2019)131-addfinal 1, <https://rm.coe.int/cdenf-2020-2021-en/1680992cdb>.

199. Council of Europe, Programme and Budget 2024-2027: Mid-term Review, Ministers' Deputies CM(2025)86, 6 June 2025.

200. Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>, Interviews.

201. Interviews.

stakeholders cited insufficient financial and human resources as a major constraint, with many also highlighting that national socio-economic conditions hinder effectiveness.<sup>202</sup>

113. Broader cultural and ideological factors also affect change. Deep-seated norms around gender, family, and discipline can slow behavioural transformation, despite policy alignment<sup>203</sup>. In some contexts, anti-rights movements promote conservative narratives that view children as objects of family policy rather than as rights-holders, complicating the implementation and measurement of long-term attitudinal shifts<sup>204</sup>.

114. The Sub-programme demonstrates a conscious and strategic approach to addressing politically and culturally sensitive issues – such as sexuality education, gender equality, and child justice – by deliberately choosing to engage with “difficult” topics rather than avoiding them<sup>205</sup>. This approach reflects a recognition that meaningful progress on children’s rights requires tackling areas where resistance is highest<sup>206</sup>. The Sub-programme effectively leverages CDENF as a trusted intergovernmental platform where working-level government representatives can build consensus and translate shared standards into national action. Expert exchanges in this setting are instrumental in gradually shifting norms, fostering cultural change, and embedding human rights standards within domestic institutions. At the implementation level, co-operation activities – particularly training for judges, prosecutors, and social workers – play a role in transforming attitudes and bridging the persistent gap between legal commitments and everyday practice<sup>207</sup>. However, while this measured, consensus-driven approach has enabled steady progress in politically sensitive environments, some stakeholders caution that it can also encourage an emphasis on politically “safe” or incremental measures at the expense of deeper, more contentious reforms, such as comprehensive child justice reform. This trade-off means that the Sub-programme is often successful in securing gradual, feasible advances across diverse contexts, but that its scope to drive more far-reaching structural change on the most contested issues remains constrained.

**Key finding:** Progress in advancing children’s rights across member states reflects a collective effort among multiple international actors, with the Council of Europe contributing alongside the EU, UNICEF, and others. While the Sub-programme plays a distinctive and complementary role – particularly through standard setting and technical expertise – its outcomes are closely intertwined with broader reform processes driven by EU funding, political leverage, and UNICEF’s sustained in-country presence, making attribution of specific results to the Council of Europe alone difficult.

115. Observed changes and progress in advancing children’s rights across member states cannot be attributed only to the Council of Europe and result from the combined efforts of several

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202. Survey 1 analysis.

203. Ecorys, Support to Council of Europe’s Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report, Warsaw, May 2024. Interviews with member state authorities, member state civil society organisations.

204. Ecorys, Support to Council of Europe’s Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report, Warsaw, May 2024., Interviews.

205. Ecorys, Support to Council of Europe’s Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report, Warsaw, May 2024, Interviews.

206. Ibid.

207. Ibid.

international actors<sup>208</sup>. Alongside the Sub-programme, UN agencies (particularly UNICEF), the EU and other regional and national stakeholders play complementary roles through policy guidance, funding, and technical assistance<sup>209</sup>. These overlapping interventions collectively reinforce reform momentum but make attribution of specific outcomes to a single actor difficult<sup>210</sup>.

116. The EU is a major player, primarily through funding and political leverage<sup>211</sup>. The EU provides funding to organisations including the Council of Europe, UNICEF, and civil society to execute projects<sup>212</sup>. In both Slovenia and Ireland, the Barnahus projects were co-funded by the European Commission under the Technical Support Instrument and by the Council of Europe, with the Council of Europe responsible for full implementation<sup>213</sup>. At the legal level, the EU accession process is a major driver of reforms in countries like Moldova, where Council of Europe standards on children's rights are seen as a prerequisite for meeting accession conditions<sup>214</sup>.

117. UN agencies, particularly UNICEF, often maintain a strong, long-term presence at the country level, sometimes acting as the dominant organisation in the field of children's rights<sup>215</sup>. In Montenegro, for instance, UNICEF is perceived as the dominant organisation, proactively initiating discussions and providing support at the local level, focusing on education and training for health workers and social workers<sup>216</sup>. They operate comprehensive programs, in contrast to the Council of Europe's traditionally project-based approach in that country<sup>217</sup>. In Moldova, UNICEF pushed for the 2024 social protection reform and financed newly hired child protection specialists to centralise and equalise services nationwide, complementing contributions from the Council of Europe and Plan International<sup>218</sup>. Joint work between UNICEF and the Council of Europe in Moldova has led to legal reforms, such as recognising children with "destructive behaviour" as "at risk" and integrating them into the child protection system. In Ukraine, the Council of Europe and UNICEF collaborate nationally on the Juvenile Justice National Reform Strategy, and the Council of Europe has sought synergies with UNICEF and the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine<sup>219</sup>.

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208. OECD (2021), *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/543e84ed-en>, Interviews with Sub-programme staff, International stakeholders.

209. Survey 2 analysis, Interviews member state authorities, member state civil Society organisations.

210. Ecorys, *Support to Council of Europe's Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report*, Warsaw, May 2024 Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>.

211. Ecorys, *Support to Council of Europe's Project on Child-Friendly Justice: Baseline Assessment Report*, Warsaw, May 2024.

212. Survey 1 analysis, interviews.

213. Council of Europe, 7th Activity Report of the Lanzarote Committee, Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted 2 February 2023, covering the period 1 July 2021 to 2 February 2023., Interviews with member state authorities.

214. Final Evaluation Report for the External Evaluation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021–2024, Council of Europe, 31 May 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/dio-eva-dec-final-moldova-ap-evaluation-report-310524/1680b1c064>. Interviews.

215. Survey 2 analysis, Interviews with Sub-programme staff, member state authorities, member state civil society organisations.

216. Interviews with member state authorities, member state civil society organisations.

217. Interviews with member state civil society organisation.

218. Interviews with member state civil society organisation, member state authority.

219. Council of Europe, *Combating Violence against Children in Ukraine, Phase III - Annual Report 2022*, project number VC/2987, Council of Europe and Ukrainian partners.

118. Additionally, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNHCR, IOM, ICRC and UNODC<sup>220</sup> contribute normative guidance and specialised support on issues such as children on the move, children in crisis, and justice and security<sup>221</sup>. International NGOs and alliances – including Terre des Hommes, La Strada and survivor-led initiatives such as the Brave Movement – add advocacy, expertise and lived experience, ensuring that reforms remain grounded in realities on the ground. Within the Council of Europe architecture, actors such as the European Committee of Social Rights and GREVIO help drive legal and policy reforms that directly affect children's lives.

119. Taken together, these findings suggest that progress on children's rights across member states reflects a complex web of contributions rather than the isolated impact of any single actor. From a contribution analysis perspective, the Council of Europe's role appears both catalytic and complementary – providing standards, monitoring, and legal expertise that reinforce, and are reinforced by, the EU's political leverage and financial mechanisms and UNICEF's long-term in-country operations. It is unlikely that comparable legal coherence or cross-national standard-setting would have emerged in the absence of the Council of Europe's input; however, sustained implementation on the ground would also have been improbable without EU incentives and UNICEF's programmatic continuity. The interplay among these actors therefore represents a mutually dependent system of influence, in which the Council of Europe contributes essential normative direction but relies on the operational and financial capacities of others to translate standards into practice.

### 3.5. Added value of the Sub-programme

120. This section examines the added value of the Sub-programme and of the Council of Europe as a whole in the children's rights field. It does so by presenting the Sub-programme's coherence with the work of other prominent actors and the ways in which the Council of Europe provides tangible unique value and explores potential implications of ongoing policy developments.

**Key finding:** The Sub-programme is consistent with the wider normative base of the UN and the EU. It has proven successful in further expanding and complementing work done on children's rights at a global level. Overall, the Council of Europe has generated tangible added value to the protection and promotion of children's rights, linked to its unique position as a leading human-rights based institution, its technical expertise, and its ability to address sensitive issues and to bring stakeholders together. With the CGU, it was able to establish a novel platform to effectively co-ordinate international support for the children of Ukraine.

121. The language and the structure of the Council of Europe guidelines, including the use of concepts such as "child-friendly justice" and "best interests of the child", echo UNCRC provisions and General Comments. Similarly, shared principles such as child protection, child participation, justice

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220. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

221. Council of Europe, Lanzarote Committee, Protecting Children from Human Rights Violations of All Forms and in All Settings. Final Report, project VC 3018., Interviews, Council of Europe, Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022–2027, adopted by the Committee of Ministers, February 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/cdenf-2023-27-final-first-implementation-report-2022-2023-/1680ae0ef3>

reform, and anti-violence across the Council of Europe, the UN and the EU result in mutually reinforcing frameworks.

122. This alignment across normative bases enabled the Sub-programme to further expand and complement the work done on children's rights at a global level. For example, on child protection against violence, the Sub-programme built on the work initiated by UNESCO and the World Health Organization on sexuality education<sup>222</sup>. In the field of child-friendly justice, including work done on the Barnahus model, the Council of Europe's work has been taken up by the UN and is now subject to ISO standards<sup>223</sup>. Activities in the field of technology and AI were developed in light of EU regulations and directives, given the active role of the EU in this area. Sub-programme stakeholders responding to the survey largely (70.5%) viewed the Council of Europe's work as being complementary to the work done by international and multilateral actors.

123. In its role as guardian of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe gives children enforceable rights through the European Court of Human Rights. The case law of the Court is legally binding on the concerned state and sets precedents and provides legal interpretations at the broader European level.

124. In addition, the Council of Europe's technical expertise and ample knowledge base, as well as its targeted support to national authorities in implementing standards and addressing shortcomings through co-operation work, are seen consistently by different types of stakeholders consulted as truly unique. Indeed, the Sub-programme – and the Organisation more widely – is able to collect a wealth of information across its member states, conduct extensive research and analysis and disseminate this through state-of-the-art reports, often informed by highly qualified international experts. Stakeholders consistently recognised the quality, rigour, and usefulness of the Sub-programme's analytical and standard-setting outputs. For example, member state authorities and CSOs in Finland, Ireland, and Slovenia described Council of Europe instruments (e.g., child-friendly justice guidelines and Child Rights Impact Assessment) as practical and operational, providing a European benchmark for drafting national laws and action plans<sup>224</sup>. In addition, the Council of Europe supports member states with very specific legal and policy reforms through technical co-operation projects, accompanying them towards improved laws and policies for children in a targeted manner.

125. Moreover, the Council of Europe's unique added value lies in its ability to convene governments and diverse stakeholders in an intergovernmental, multi-stakeholder setting. It provides a trusted platform to exchange views and experiences, learn from each other, set common norms and standards, and ensure collective commitment to children's rights. This also facilitates shared work and collaboration across member states (see section 3.4. on outcomes at member state level). A survey respondent described it in the following words: *"By fostering dialogue and co-*

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222. See for example, UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (2018), available on <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770>.

223. In 2025, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) published a framework that formalizes requirements and recommendations for child-friendly multidisciplinary and interagency (MDIA) services, drawing inspiration from the Barnahus model. See:

<https://www.iso.org/standard/89302.html#:~:text=What%20are%20the%20ISO%20Requirements,friendly%2C%20collaborative%2C%20and%20efficient>.

224. Interviews with member state authorities, Civil Society organisations.

*operation, the Council of Europe helps translate principles into practice and contributes to strengthening the protection of children across Europe.”<sup>225</sup>*

126. The Council of Europe's pioneering role in addressing sensitive issues and establishing them on the global agenda has meant it was able to push boundaries and contribute to advancing the conversation on children's rights globally. The Council of Europe approach through “soft law” offers a low-politics entry point as it builds consensus on emerging and sensitive issues. This was the case on sexual violence in the early days of the Lanzarote Convention, at a time when the topic was not spoken about in many countries. More recently, prominent examples include the need for digital protection of children, and sexuality education as a means of preventing sexual violence. The latter is a sensitive issue especially in some of the most conservative member states, which consider it a topic to be discussed only at home and not as part of the formal curriculum.

127. Finally, the CGU served as an effective platform for enhanced international co-operation for Ukraine in an agile, informal and effective way. The CGU acted as the only regional co-ordinator across stakeholders, bringing together the EU, international donors<sup>226</sup> and civil society<sup>227</sup>. Its horizontal structure<sup>228</sup> allowed for discussions among equally distributed voices, as opposed to having a formal bureau and president, whereas its confidentiality translated into open and frank discussions behind closed doors, contributing to its responsiveness. Since its launch in 2023, it revealed its value as both a rapid response mechanism and as a peer-review platform, thereby filling an existing gap in the international support to Ukraine.<sup>229</sup> In addition, the extension of its mandate for another 24 months, as agreed by the stakeholders, further demonstrated its value added as perceived by those involved.

128. Overall, there was consensus among stakeholders consulted on the added value of the Sub-programme and on its contribution to the wider field of children's rights. Both national authorities and CSOs interviewed stressed the prestige of the Council of Europe, underpinned by its rigour and timely work. In addition, CSOs valued the Council of Europe's openness to listen to their concerns and its ability to act as a bridge to translate these into state-endorsed standards. This is supported by the survey responses: among the external Sub-programme stakeholders surveyed, a large majority (76.9%) perceived the Council of Europe as adding value “to some extent” or “to a large extent”<sup>230</sup>. Within the Council of Europe, over 90% of staff surveyed were of the view that the Sub-programme added value to the work done on children's rights by international institutions, including the EU, the UN, and prominent CSOs.<sup>231</sup>

129. In its unique role as a leading human-rights based institution, the Council of Europe has continued to identify gaps and operationalise efforts to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. While continuing to provide valuable support to member states, the Council

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225. Anonymous contribution to the survey with Sub-programme stakeholders.

226. UNICEF and individual countries such as Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania, Croatia.

227. Incl. Partnership for Every Child, Hope and Homes.

228. The deliberate decision not to nominate a CGU president/chairperson has allowed for a ‘balanced’ peer-to-peer exchange on the most pressing issues without one national system ‘leading’ the process.

229. See The Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU): Turning Commitment into Action, available on <https://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-consultation-group-on-the-children-of-ukraine-cgu-le/488027e520>.

230. See analysis of survey 2.

231. See analysis of survey 1.

of Europe has also remained open and ready to tap into emerging needs. Its ability to identify and pick up sensitive issues or to develop novel mechanisms to support children in need, most notably in Ukraine through the CGU, highlight the position the Council of Europe as key actor in the children's rights field.

**Key finding:** Ongoing EU policy developments in the field of children's rights, particularly the recast of Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, could have implications for the work of the Council of Europe in this field. The recast proposal codifies the opinions of the Lanzarote Committee and thereby validates the progressive approach taken by Lanzarote Committee over the years. However, it could also end up going beyond the provisions included in the Lanzarote Convention. This presents both risks and opportunities.

130. The Lanzarote Convention and the EU Acquis to date are fully complementary and compatible<sup>232</sup>, and both institutions are trusted partners<sup>233</sup>. Nevertheless, recent policy and legislative developments at the EU level have implications for children's rights in Europe, namely in relation to child sexual exploitation and abuse. This is particularly the case of the ongoing recast of Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography.

131. The EU recast, as proposed by the European Commission in February 2024, aims to update and expand the 2011 Directive in light of evolving digital realities, explicitly criminalising tech-enabled forms of child sexual abuse. It would introduce "tech-neutral" definitions and be future-proofed for AI by addressing for instance live-streaming, deep-fakes and avatars, while introducing stronger provisions for online protection, investigative tools, victim assistance, and cross-border co-operation. Although the Lanzarote Convention is considered to be "tech-neutral" and criminalises offenses through the use of ICT, despite the text itself not specifically mentioning ICTs<sup>234</sup>, the EU recast Directive may include provisions beyond the scope of the Lanzarote Convention. This would risk the Lanzarote Convention being perceived as out of date and position the Directive as the leading binding legal framework for combating child sexual abuse and exploitation within the EU. At the same time, the fact that the current recast proposal aligns with and codifies the interpretations and opinions adopted by the Lanzarote Committee in recent years illustrates the authoritative nature of the Lanzarote Committee. If the recast proposal is adopted, it would effectively translate Lanzarote Committee opinions into legally binding principles across EU member states, thereby reinforcing the leading role of the Council of Europe in this field.

132. The recast could further create a dual system in which the EU member states would be held to a higher standard by the EU Recast Directive than the Lanzarote Convention<sup>235</sup>. This, in turn, could

232. The European Commission is an observer to the Lanzarote Committee and participates in its meetings.

233. For example, the EU recently created a Prevention Network on Child Sexual Abuse, of which the Council of Europe is an Observer.

234. In its [2017 interpretative opinion](#), the Lanzarote Committee confirmed that the 'existing offences in the Lanzarote Convention remain criminalised by national law in the same way, whatever the means used by sexual offenders to commit them, be it through the use of ICTs or not, even when the text of the Lanzarote Convention does not specifically mention ICTs.' In addition, in 2024, the Committee adopted a [declaration](#) on protecting children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by emerging technologies. Other opinions have addressed tech-enabled sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, such as the LC opinion on Article 23 (grooming) and the LC opinion on Article 33 (limitation periods).

235. It is worth noting that this is not uncommon in CoE/EU relations and the case also in other policy fields.

provide an opening to advance children's rights standards more broadly; the recast could present an opportunity for the Council of Europe to capitalise on the momentum of progress agreed at EU level to expand that to the larger membership of the Lanzarote Convention (48 State Parties as opposed to the 27 EU countries) and States globally that are interested in accession. In that sense, the Council of Europe could reaffirm its role as convener and standard-setter, drawing on its inclusive membership and multidisciplinary expertise to ensure coherence across Europe's child protection systems.

133. At the Council of Europe level, some initiatives are steering important internal reflections on the potential implications of these policy developments. A reflection paper has been issued on the scope and possible evolution of the Lanzarote Convention<sup>236</sup>, while an in-depth analysis has also been commissioned to explore whether the tech-neutral wording of the Lanzarote Convention is sufficient to also cover ICT-facilitated offences - i.e. through Opinions drafted to date<sup>237</sup>. Such initiatives indicate awareness of the need for proactive dialogue and alignment, and the need for the Council of Europe to strategically position itself - not only as the guardian of a pan-European legal framework, but as the platform capable of fostering consensus across EU and non-EU perspectives.

## 4. Conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned

134. This section presents the conclusions derived from the key findings of the evaluation, together with the lessons learned and recommendations.

### 4.1. Conclusions

135. The Sub-programme has addressed key issues related to children's rights and has generally operated in a well-coordinated and efficient manner. By aligning Council of Europe and member state priorities, the Strategy ensured continued relevance of the thematic pillars identified and acted as a shared reference framework for the Sub-programme, the Council of Europe and member states.

136. Over time, the Strategy's expansion and the Sub-programme's wide thematic coverage, combined with minimal changes in human and financial resource levels dedicated to the core mechanisms, namely the Lanzarote Committee and CDENF, have placed considerable strain on the CRD. This has resulted in varying levels of engagement across thematic areas and has highlighted the need for greater operational focus. While the Strategy has been instrumental in embedding children's rights across some Council of Europe areas, the extent of mainstreaming has been influenced both by resource constraints and by the willingness and capacity of other Organisation to incorporate children's rights into their work.

137. The Sub-programme's mechanisms worked well together thanks to their dynamic roles within the Council of Europe "strategic triangle" and benefited from effective co-ordination, supported by the flexible management structures within the CRD. This enabled the development of agile mechanisms such as the Consultation Group for the Children of Ukraine. Nonetheless, some

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236. Confidential.

237. Currently underway, confidential.

mechanisms, notably the Lanzarote Committee, have made only partial progress in addressing operational challenges, including procedural slowness and limited engagement with civil society organisations. Collaboration on areas of mutual interest across the Council of Europe has generally been positive but would benefit from more formal information exchanges to reconcile differing interpretations of key principles, such as the best interests of the child. This would, in turn, help further strengthen internal coherence.

138. Equality and inclusion, cross-cutting aspects explicitly mentioned in the Strategy, have been promoted largely through principle-based initiatives, with more limited targeted action for specific groups of children in situations of vulnerability, except in crisis contexts. Within co-operation work, equality considerations are included in the project design phase, though practical mainstreaming is constrained by resource gaps, political sensitivities, weak data collection and disaggregation at outcome level, and limited follow-through. Child participation has occurred in selected areas and has contributed to shaping organisational practice.

139. The Sub-programme has been largely effective in contributing to meaningful change for the protection and promotion of children's rights across Europe, as evidenced through the achievement of most of its Programme and Budget targets over 2021 to 2025. As a whole, the Council of Europe has meaningfully contributed to change mostly through its roles as convener, standard-setter, and multiplier. Its influence, including through high-quality recommendations, studies, and reports, has contributed to legislative and policy reforms at national level, enhanced awareness of children's rights, and fostered peer learning among member states. The extent of national-level change, however, is shaped by contextual political, economic, and institutional factors.

140. Overall, the Council of Europe occupies a unique and influential position in the field of children's rights, grounded in its human rights mandate, technical expertise, and convening power. The Sub-programme aligns closely with international frameworks and complements the work of prominent international actors, such as the UN and the EU. Nevertheless, evolving international and EU policy developments, including the proposed Recast Directive, may affect the Organisation's leadership role in the children's rights field, underscoring the need for continued strategic reflection and adaptation. Indeed, while the Lanzarote Convention is interpreted as being 'tech-neutral', the ever-changing digital environment warrants additional analysis into the extent to which it continues to be well placed to cover ICT-facilitated offenses. This would further help the Council of Europe understand the possible evolution of the Lanzarote Convention to continue being at the forefront of protecting and promoting children's rights in future.

## 4.2. Lessons learned and recommendations

### Lessons learned

**Lesson learned 1:** CRD has championed initiatives such as child safeguarding and child participation, which have worked well, providing momentum and facilitating the means for increasing uptake across the Council of Europe in the last years.

**Lesson learned 2:** The Sub-programme was able to respond to the crisis in Ukraine in a quick and flexible way on the one hand by adapting the co-operation project in Ukraine to the new realities

to address the needs of the children within Ukraine and, on the other hand, with the establishment of the CGU to address the rights of Ukrainian children outside of Ukraine. In particular, the CGU's unique features, namely its informality and set up as a platform providing a closed (confidential) space for open and frank discussions with equally distributed voices rather than a formal bureau and president, and potentially a political agenda, contributed to its responsiveness. Furthermore, the CGU was able to access extra-budgetary resources from the Sub-programme, among others. Overall, the Sub-programme's adaptive management structures and agile cross-mechanism co-ordination could be leveraged in similar fashion in future to address emerging needs.

**Lesson learned 3:** The Sub-programme has promoted the participation of children, i.e., through child-friendly versions of guidance materials and manuals etc., and involved them directly in strategic ways, such as by consulting them on key documents like the Strategy. Continuing with such practice, as possible through voluntary contributions, would be very valuable.

**Lesson learned 4:** A focus on recognised best practices, such as the Barnahus model, across the Sub-programme's mechanisms allowed the Council of Europe to approach the issue from various angles, produce relevant material and increase awareness among member states. This facilitated uptake and adoption at national level.

**Lesson learned 5:** The multi-stakeholder approach implemented across the Sub-programme's areas of work contributed to facilitating sustainable change. The transversal nature of children's rights, the need for cross-sectoral co-ordination, and the multitude of factors contributing to facilitating change (i.e. change in political leadership, limited resources) further highlighted the value of the multi-stakeholder approach.

**Lesson learned 6:** The Council of Europe, and the Sub-programme in particular, have built and expanded on principles of UNCRC, taking on a unique and important role in a complex, multi-actor space, and contributing to and complementing the wider work on children's rights in Europe. This ability of the CRD and of the Council of Europe more broadly could further be capitalised on in the future to continue adding value to the children's rights field.

141. The recommendations were created in a participatory way with the main stakeholders following the validation of findings with the reference group. This has ensured that only the most essential issues are highlighted for action and that the recommendations are specific and feasible to implement.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** Revisit the **scope of the Strategy** to target three to four thematic pillars. Within that, define areas of intervention for the Sub-programme, focused on creating clear links to its three mechanisms (CDENF, Lanzarote Committee and technical co-operation), where possible. The CRD's mainstreaming function of children's rights should be explicitly mentioned, together with the responsibility of implementation across the various parts of the Council of Europe for their respective areas. **Responsible actor:** CRD. **Priority:** High. **Timeline:** Short-term. **Categorisation:** Strategic.

**Recommendation 2:** Focus **children's rights mainstreaming** efforts across the Council of Europe by prioritising specific action areas - enhancing clarity around milestones and targets and leveraging existing strategies, mechanisms, and reporting cycles. This could be formulated to some extent in the next iteration of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child, including defining accountability of the CRD and other Council of Europe bodies. **Responsible actor:** CRD and

relevant Council of Europe bodies. **Priority:** High. **Timeline:** Short-term. **Categorisation:** Strategic.

**Recommendation 3:** Enhance communication between the CRD and key Council of Europe entities where overlaps exist to jointly address relevant issues in the most appropriate format. This could be through joint sub-committees, regular bi-annual exchanges or other formats considered suitable by the CRD to facilitate discussion and collaboration in the most fruitful way. **Responsible actor:** CRD. **Priority:** Medium. **Timeline:** Short-term. **Categorisation:** Operational.

**Recommendation 4:** Mainstream the needs of **children in situations of vulnerability** to a greater extent across interventions of the Sub-programme, by making explicit, where relevant, how existing activities consider the specific needs of different groups and where targeted action is justified. Explicit reference to specific needs could be included where appropriate to facilitate these are taken into account by those involved. **Responsible actor:** CRD. **Priority:** Medium. **Timeline:** Long-term. **Categorisation:** Operational.

**Recommendation 5:** Further integrate the **human rights approach** into results-based reporting of co-operation projects within the Sub-programme. This could include building in outcome specific indicators into existing log frames and monitoring frameworks to a greater extent across projects to facilitate the collection of data on outcomes achieved disaggregated by groups of children in situations of vulnerability. **Priority:** Medium. **Responsible actor:** CRD Co-operation Unit. **Timeline:** Long-term. **Categorisation:** Operational.

**Recommendation 6:** Continue strengthening actions to **disseminate Sub-programme outputs**, including recommendations, studies, and reports, at member state level. This could include, for example, routing translations through ongoing projects (using emerging technology to enhance efficiency) and using national authorities', civil society organisations' and partners' established communication networks, thereby leveraging existing channels of communication. **Responsible actor:** CRD, CDENF and Lanzarote Committee Secretariat, Sub-programme co-operation teams. **Priority:** Medium. **Timeline:** Long-term. **Categorisation:** Operational.

**Recommendation 7:** Commission an independent in-depth study on the scope of the **Lanzarote Convention** in light of evolving trends in child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Such a study could include comparative research into selected international norms, such as the proposal for a recast EU Directive on child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), the UN Cybercrime Convention and the EU proposal for a regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse, the Council of Europe Cybercrime Convention second additional protocol, the Council of Europe Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance third additional protocol. Such a study would also require analysing potential implications for the Lanzarote Convention's monitoring body, namely the Lanzarote Committee. **Responsible actor:** CRD. **Priority:** High. **Timeline:** Short-term. **Categorisation:** Strategic.

## Appendices

Link to the volume II – Appendices: <https://rm.coe.int/48802a502d>

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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.