

SYNTHESIS OF 2024-2025 EVALUATIONS: KEY RESULTS, LESSONS AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS



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Disclaimer

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Abbreviations

ADI	Anti-discrimination, diversity, and inclusion
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BTPI	Building Trust in Public Institutions
CADIB	Bureaux for International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
DEC	Decentralised
DIO	Directorate of Internal Oversight
EU	European Union
HELP	Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals
HF	Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
ICCM	International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters
INSCHOOL	Inclusive Schools: Making a Difference for Roma Children
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and plus for other identities
MRAP	Management Response and Action Plan
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PECK	Project Against Economic Crime in Kosovo
PMM	Project Management Methodology
RBM	Results-based Management
ROMACTED	Promoting good governance and Roma empowerment at local level
SCoBAL	Strengthening the Capacity of Bar Associations and Lawyers
UN	United Nations
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

a. This synthesis collates evidence and lessons from 25 Council of Europe evaluations published in 2024 and 2025, and analyses how management has responded to their recommendations. The sample includes both independent evaluations led by the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO), and decentralised (DEC) evaluations, which are commissioned by programme teams. The objective of the synthesis is to identify patterns and lessons that may not be evident from individual evaluation reports, including on common enablers and barriers for successful programming, to inform learning and adaptation.

b. The evaluations present a picture of an organisation that is helping its member states to deliver meaningful change, in their path towards integration of European standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Through its standard setting, monitoring and technical co-operation, the Council of Europe has supported policy, legislative and institutional changes across a wide range of thematic areas, while helping promote awareness and understanding of European standards among many thousands of national officials, legal professionals and civil society representatives. The evaluations confirm that the Organisation's technical co-operation work rests on some areas of strong comparative advantage. Its grounding in European and international norms and the findings of Council of Europe monitoring bodies enhances its credibility. The work also benefits from deep technical expertise, longstanding partnerships with member states and an ability to adapt to dynamic national contexts.

Key findings by evaluation criterion

c. **Relevance:** Council of Europe interventions are well aligned with the Organisation's norms and with the needs and priorities of member states. The Organisation's reputation for credible, apolitical technical expertise was identified as a key enabler. While the demand-driven support model generates strong alignment with national policy agendas, some evaluations highlighted the need for more systematic engagement with broader stakeholders, including civil society organisations and rights-holders, during project design.

d. **Effectiveness:** Evaluated projects successfully delivered the majority of their planned outputs, including training, awareness raising and technical inputs into legislative and policy reforms. Training was consistently regarded as of high quality, but with some useful suggestions for more practical training approaches. Evaluations suggest that the most successful initiatives are those that build on a history of past engagement with the partners or issues concerned. These are able to draw on learning from past phases, deeper knowledge of the context and issues, and broader relationships with stakeholders. A key challenge across the sample was sustaining momentum from policy formulation into active implementation. Gaps in outcome-level monitoring limited the evaluations' ability to capture the Organisation's full contribution to longer-term change.

e. **Efficiency:** Projects generally demonstrated sound budget utilisation and operational flexibility. The Organisation's hybrid staffing model, with external offices supported by thematic experts from headquarters, was highlighted as effective in streamlining operations. However, heavy reporting requirements and inflexible budgets at times impeded efficient delivery. Overall, the Organisation lacks methods for tracking its cost-effectiveness.

f. **Coherence and added value:** Interventions were closely aligned with European and other international frameworks, which promoted coherence with other international actors. Many evaluations noted close co-ordination with the European Union (EU), United Nations (UN) agencies

and civil society networks, which helped avoid overlap. However, co-ordination was sometimes found to be informal, rather than institutionalised, and with a tendency to be reactive rather than strategic. The Council of Europe's added value rests on its longstanding country presence, technical expertise and its "strategic triangle" model that links standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation activities.

g. **Cross-cutting priorities:** Gender equality and the human rights-based approach (HRBA) were generally visible across project designs, though the depth of integration varied. Both were identified as explicit priorities in the majority of evaluations. Other cross-cutting themes were less visible.

h. **Impact and sustainability:** Prospects for lasting results were strongest where legislative reforms were accompanied by institutional behavioural change and alignment with European Union accession priorities. Projects building on lengthy engagement over multiple cycles were more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes. Conversely, sustainability was constrained by political instability and other crises, institutional capacity gaps and high staff turnover within counterpart institutions.

Insights from recommendations and management's response

i. The overwhelming majority of evaluation recommendations were accepted by management, with concrete plans for addressing them. In the case of decentralised evaluations, the most common recommendations related to sustainability and handover, capacity building and results-based management. Operational effectiveness, stakeholder engagement and issues related to strategy and programme design were commonly flagged in DIO evaluations as areas for improvement.

Insights on the robustness of evaluation findings

j. Shortcomings in the Organisation's approach to results-based management constrain the ability of its evaluations to reach robust conclusions on its contribution to complex, long-term change processes. Although the Organisation favours theory-based approaches to programming, in many cases theories of change were absent, incomplete or had to be reconstructed for the evaluation. Results-based management is held back by a lack of dedicated expertise across project teams, where thematic knowledge is generally prioritised. Outcome-level indicators tended to be defined at too high a level, making it difficult to evidence change in the short term. More use of "direct" or "intermediate" outcomes would help the Organisation to track progress in real time, to inform learning and adaptation.

Key lessons

k. The synthesis identifies lessons in four areas:

l. **Programme design and delivery:** The synthesis suggest that a) there would be value in the Council of Europe making more consistent use of theories of change, as tools for programme design, monitoring and continuous learning; b) conceptualising technical co-operation projects as phases within a longer-term engagement; c) engaging with a broader range of national stakeholders, to the extent possible in each political context; d) extending the scope of projects to support the implementation of reforms; e) building flexibility into project designs; and f) developing a more diversified training offer.

m. **Partnerships:** Evaluations suggest that partnerships should build upon a clear vision of the Organisation's comparative advantage in each country context, to inform discussions on division of labour and co-ordination.

n. **Integration of cross-cutting issues:** The Organisation has multiple cross-cutting policy commitments. While gender equality and a human rights approach are visible in project designs, they are not consistently pursued during implementation. There may be scope for further articulation of expectations and guiding principles on engagement with core interest groups, such as children, youth and people living with disabilities, while keeping this proportional to the needs and opportunities presented by each project.

o. **Results-based management:** Strengthening results-based management capacity would help the Organisation track emerging results and demonstrate its contribution to long-term change. Given the limited resources available for results-based management, it might benefit from a more standardised approach, such as model theories of change for commonly occurring project components and menus of standard indicators.

Conclusions

p. The synthesis does not offer a full picture of the Organisation's achievement across the 2024-2025 period, as only a subset of interventions was evaluated. Nonetheless, it presents a picture of an Organisation that is helping to support policy, legislative and institutional change across many thematic areas, including equality and non-discrimination, judicial reform, access to justice, human rights in prisons, minority participation in local governance, inclusive education, prevention of violence against women, and prevention of corruption and other economic crimes. The synthesis also offers valuable insights into patterns of results across evaluations, identifying areas of stronger and weaker performance and factors that facilitate or hinder the achievement of intended results.

1. Introduction

1. The Council of Europe is Europe's leading human rights organisation, promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law across its 46 member states. The Council of Europe's mandate is carried out through an integrated model of standard setting, monitoring and co-operation (the "strategic triangle").¹

2. This report presents the results of synthesis of 25 evaluations of the Organisation's work completed in 2024 and 2025. The evaluations include centralised evaluations, managed independently by the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO), and decentralised (DEC) evaluations, which are commissioned by programming entities. The purpose of the synthesis is to bring together findings on the achievements of Council of Europe activities, and identify barriers and enablers to effective programming, to inform continuous learning.

2. Background and methodology

2.1 Purpose, scope and intended use for the synthesis

3. This synthesis brings together evidence from a diverse set of evaluations, to identify patterns and broader lessons that may not be evident from individual evaluations. It provides a succinct summary of evaluation findings and recommendations – and management's response to those recommendations – to inform the Council of Europe's future planning, programming and organisational development. The goals of the exercise were to a) understand how interventions performed against the standard evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact, sustainability and value add, b) identify barriers and enablers to successful programme design and delivery, including institutional capacities and arrangements, and c) surface insights from the evaluation recommendations and their uptake. The synthesis was commissioned by DIO to strengthen its evidence base and inform the development of hypotheses for further investigation.

2.2 Summary of the evidence base

4. The synthesis covered 25 evaluation reports and their respective Management Response Action Plans (MRAPs) (see Appendix 3 for the full list). MRAPs outline management's overall response, its decision to accept, in whole or in part, or reject recommendations, and its plans for addressing them.

5. Seven of the evaluations were strategic in nature.² Of these, two were evaluations of Council of Europe entities³, one examined the implementation of a treaty⁴ one assessed change management within the Organisation's administrative reform process,⁵ one assessed internal

1. Council of Europe [no date] *Who we are*. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/about-us/who-we-are> (Accessed 22 December 2025).

2. Strategic evaluations focus on the design, implementation, results and sustainability of an organisation's specific strategies, policies, processes, and frameworks. In the Council of Europe, they also evaluate Programmes under the Programme and Budget.

3. DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights, see Appendix 4 for full evaluation titles.

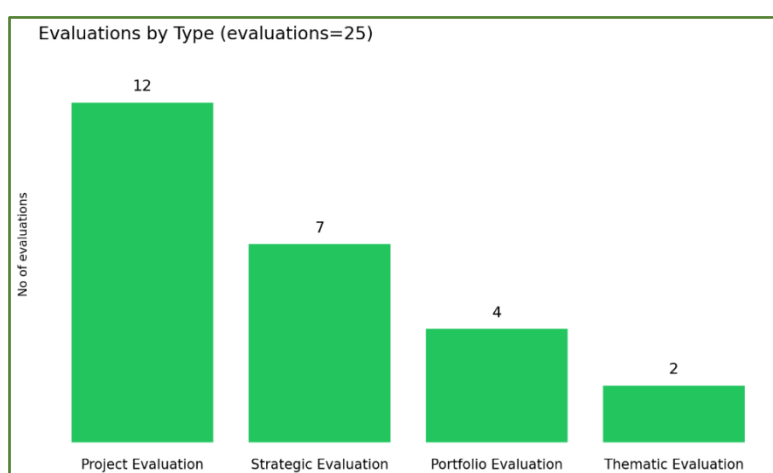
4. DIO-2025-European Social Charter.

5. DIO-2024-Change Management.

processes for delivering on the Reykjavík Declaration,⁶ one investigated how the youth perspective is integrated across the Organisation.⁷ The last evaluation in this group was the assessment of the Building Trust in Public Institutions (BTPI) programme, a large operational programme that aims to help member states strengthen democratic governance by improving how public institutions function, communicate and are held accountable.⁸

6. Four evaluations included in the synthesis are portfolio evaluations, of which three were Action Plans evaluations – covering Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Republic of Republic of Moldova and one Horizontal Facility evaluation.⁹ Two are thematic evaluations, covering minority rights and children’s rights.¹⁰ The remaining 12 are project evaluations, assessing interventions implemented at country level. Figure 1 shows the distribution of evaluations examined in the synthesis by type.

Figure 1: Evaluations by type



7. The evaluations examined in the synthesis vary significantly in scope. The BTPI evaluation¹¹ assesses the Organisation’s third-largest programme, with €40.5 million allocated in 2024. Action Plans outline portfolios of projects designed to support specific member states in delivering on their commitments. Thematic evaluations are similarly at portfolio level. Project evaluations, by comparison, are more limited in scope, breadth and depth, and often conducted with a limited budget.

6. DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation.

7. DIO-2025-Youth-Report.

8. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions.

9. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DIO-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

10. DEC-2024 ROMACTED II, DIO-2025-Children’s Rights.

11. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions.

2.3 Methodology

8. The synthesis addressed the following questions:

- How do interventions perform in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, added value, sustainability and impact?
- What aspects of design and/or delivery enabled or hindered success?
- What broader lessons emerge on project design and delivery and partnerships?
- Which findings are indicative of positive practices, and which highlight areas for change or innovation?
- What systemic patterns or gaps emerge regarding organisational capacity, governance, or cross-cutting priorities?
- What insights emerge from evaluation recommendations and management's response
- What lessons emerge from, if any, are evident in terms of evaluation quality?
- What are the main implications for programming, strategy, and the evaluation function itself?

9. The evaluation was conducted by a team of external evaluators.¹² The evaluations were coded against a set of themes and topics, selecting both inductively and deductively, using qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA). Evaluation recommendations and management's responses were assessed based on MRAPs. Recommendations and their acceptance status were recorded in a spreadsheet, along with intervention details, for quantitative analysis. The team used artificial intelligence (AI) to refine the classification of recommendations into meaningful categories. More information on the methodology can be found in Appendix 3. The codebook for the thematic analysis is in Appendix 4.

2.4 Limitations

10. The team faced the following constraints. First, as a high-level summary, synthesis methods carry an inherent risk of oversimplifying context-specific findings and nuances. This risk is heightened when the evidence base is both limited in scope and heterogeneous: the evaluations reviewed vary in focus, scope and rigour, with some thematic areas underrepresented relative to others. Second, the synthesis draws on assessments completed over the past two years and relies on documentary evidence. This limited the ability to situate the findings within longer-term trends. The synthesis also encountered some limitations in the Council of Europe's results-based management (RBM) practices, which impacted on the quality of the evidence base. The report draws together some observations on these limitations but is by no means a comprehensive assessment of RBM across the Organisation.

12. Agulhas Applied Knowledge.

11. The team collaborated closely with the DIO's Evaluation Division throughout the exercise, and emerging findings were presented for discussion and validation, and then refined through multiple rounds of feedback.

3. Findings

3.1 Performance including enablers and barriers

12. This section presents findings on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, added value, sustainability, and impact of the interventions, as well as the barriers and enablers to success in project design and delivery. Positive practices and areas for improvement are highlighted where relevant.

3.1.1 Were the evaluated activities and interventions relevant?

13. For the Council of Europe, "relevance" is defined as the extent to which interventions align with the organisation's priorities, the priorities of member states and the needs of target groups and continue to do so as circumstances change.¹³

14. The evaluations indicate that **interventions are well aligned** with Council of Europe norms, priorities and values and, in the case of co-operation projects, with national reform agendas. Where there is political space to work, the Organisation is well placed to provide support to address longstanding rule-of-law and human-rights challenges and emerging needs. The Action Plan for Azerbaijan, through which the Organisation supported legal reforms and strengthened national capacity, exemplifies strong alignment between Council of Europe interventions and national priorities.¹⁴

15. The Organisation's **reputation for credible, apolitical technical expertise** is described in evaluations as a key enabler of relevance, particularly in sensitive domains such as anti-discrimination and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex (LGBTI) rights.¹⁵ Another helpful factor is **European Union (EU) candidacy**. Unsurprisingly, alignment was especially strong in projects designed to address gaps in legislation, policy and implementations for countries preparing to join the EU.¹⁶

16. A number of evaluations find that the relevance of programme design to the needs and priorities of counterpart institutions is **stronger where lessons from previous phases are considered**. The "Promoting good governance and Roma empowerment at local level" (ROMACTED II), "Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo"¹⁷ (PECK III), "Inclusive Schools: Making a Difference for Roma Children" (INSCHOOL 3) and the Democracy Starts in Schools project all incorporated

13. Council of Europe, Evaluation Guidelines, 2021; Evaluation Policy, 2018.

14. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action Plan 2022-2025.

15. DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI.

16. DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

¹⁷ All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

findings from predecessor initiatives or expert assessments into their design.¹⁸ The Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye Phase III (HF III) aligned its actions with strategies developed during earlier phases.¹⁹

17. The evaluations find that the Organisation's **adaptability to external shocks, geopolitical shifts and emerging issues is a key strength**.²⁰ For example, eight evaluations describe how project teams shifted training and other activities online in response to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).²¹ In six evaluations, resilience and adaptability in response to dynamic national contexts were identified as success factors.²²

Signature Achievement: The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights demonstrated a high level of adaptability, following external shocks and changes in Organisational priorities. This involved rapid responses to emerging human rights crises through country visits organised at short notice.²³

Signature Achievement: After the Republic of Moldova faced the largest mass arrival of refugees in its history following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Council of Europe created a dedicated programme to strengthen refugee and migrant rights and protect vulnerable groups.²⁴

18. Various evaluations note that **well designed consultations and targeted needs assessment help ensure that the human rights of the groups concerned are addressed**. In Georgia, participatory assessments involving local experts and civil society identified gaps not previously recognised by municipal stakeholders, improving the relevance of the intervention.²⁵ In the Republic of Moldova, demand-driven consultations with government institutions and civil society were used to explore emerging issues, including labour rights and migration, enabling the Action Plan to better respond to the country's evolving priorities.²⁶

18. DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia.

19. DEC-2025- Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

20. DEC-2024-INCLUDE; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

21. DEC-2024-INCLUDE DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

22. DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia.

23. DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights

24. DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

25. DEC-2024- Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia.

26. DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

19. A more systematic approach to incorporating the perspective of counterparts and rights-holders emerges from the evaluations as a potential area for improvement. Nine evaluations highlighted **challenges in engaging diverse stakeholders during project design and delivery**.²⁷ These challenges took several forms. In Türkiye, independent civil society organisations (CSOs) were reluctant to engage directly with state institutions, limiting their input into discussions on how violence against women can be addressed in family law.²⁸ In Azerbaijan, evaluators found a lack of consultations beyond state institutions, which limited buy-in amongst implementing partners.²⁹ Bringing together diverse stakeholders is not always straightforward, with opportunities necessarily shaped by the political context and culture.

20. Several evaluations also identified **omissions in addressing emerging issues and needs**. The Alternative Dispute Resolution project in Türkiye was not well aligned to the needs of the Istanbul Arbitration Centre and private mediation centres.³⁰ The Youth Report noted that young people's involvement across the Organisation was often reactive and raised concerns about representation and accessibility – although this evaluation did not cover the work of the Organisation's Youth Department.³¹ The European Social Charter report indicated notable gaps in the provision of rights for informal workers, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and plus for other identities (LGBTQIA+) individuals, and youth in transition.³²

21. The evaluation of BTPI³³ found that the project's theory of change, which focused on targeted state actors, did not reflect the programme's engagement with and influence on non-state actors. The resulting recommendation – to extend causal pathways beyond state institutions – is a lesson that could potentially be applied more broadly in co-operation projects.

3.1.2 How effective were the evaluated activities and interventions?

22. Effectiveness is the extent to which interventions achieve their intended objectives. This can be evidenced at the level of outputs – e.g., products and services delivered – or their outcomes (such as changes in laws and policies, or in capacity and organisational performance).

23. Across the evaluations, interventions had a **good record in delivering their intended outputs**. Most evaluated projects successfully delivered the majority of their outputs, in areas such as training and technical inputs into policy and legislative development. Feedback from counterparts collected during the evaluations rated the quality of these outputs as high. Training,

27. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2025-Youth-Report; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia.

28. DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye.

29. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25.

30. DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye.

31. DIO-2025-Youth-Report.

32. DIO-2025-European Social Charter.

33. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions.

in particular, emerges as a strength of the Organisation, with 11 evaluations reporting high levels of attendance and satisfaction rates.³⁴

24. Seven evaluations documented **substantive contributions to legislative and policy reform**.³⁵ The Azerbaijan Action Plan helped address a longstanding legislative gap in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence.³⁶ In Armenia, the Protection of Human Rights in Biomedicine project achieved its primary objective of securing the country's signature of the Oviedo Convention³⁷.

Signature Achievement: The Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo³⁸ (PECK III) supported the drafting or revision of at least 14 laws on economic crime. Targeted training for financial institutions and public notaries helped them identify more suspicious transactions. Project mentoring on international jurisprudence facilitated the Supreme Court's first standalone money laundering conviction in 2023, setting a precedent that has since yielded four further convictions.³⁹

Signature Achievement: In Türkiye, the Organisation delivered training in family law for judges, prosecutors and legal professionals, addressed critical gaps in divorce and custody procedures, enhanced protection measures for domestic violence victims, promoted children's representation in proceedings, and advanced alternative dispute resolution. These measures contributed to more uniform, rights-based family court procedures.⁴⁰

25. Five evaluations reported the successful **creation of new bodies or mechanisms**, including municipal task groups, human rights centres and specialised offices.⁴¹ In Türkiye, the International Judicial Co-operation in Criminal Matters in Türkiye (ICCM) project supported the establishment of seven Bureaux for International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters (CADIB), to serve as liaison offices between the Central Authority and local prosecution offices. The project contributed to a 65% reduction in rejected mutual legal assistance requests from foreign jurisdictions.⁴²

26. The evaluation of the Commissioner for Human Rights reported noteworthy successes, particularly in **raising awareness on human rights issues** across member states. The Steering

34. DEC-2024-INCLUDE; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024-ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

35. DEC-2024-INCLUDE DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia.

36. DIO-2025-ActionPlan-Azerbaijan.

37. DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia.

38. All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

39. DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III).

40. DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye.

41. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024-ROMACTED II; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia.

42. DIO-2025-European Social Charter.

Committee's efforts on anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion (ADI) was also deemed successful, having helped promote acceptance of the agenda across member states and widespread acceptance of the standards. However, these are long-term change agendas. The evaluators of the European Social Charter concluded that, while the Charter had influenced national policies, its effectiveness had been hindered by its **non-binding status** relative to EU directives and other international standards, such as those by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), structural inefficiencies and limited follow-up mechanisms.

27. Table 1 summarises some of the key outcome and output level results validated across the sampled evaluations. The results data suggests a pattern of meaningful results across a broad range of thematic areas.

Table 1 Selection of key results identified across the evaluation sample

Type of result	Examples of Council of Europe's contribution to change validated in the evaluations
Policies and strategies	• A national strategy on equality and non-discrimination (North Macedonia) • 50 municipal-level action plans on Roma inclusion, with combined budgets of €11.4 million (multiple countries) • A judicial reform strategy (Montenegro) • National programme for preventing and combating violence against women (Republic of Moldova) • School desegregation strategies (Czechia, Romania) • National cybersecurity strategy (Azerbaijan)
Legislative changes	• Wide range of constitutional and legislative changes on detention systems and standards, probation systems and access to justice (multiple countries) • Amendments to laws on domestic violence and the family code (Azerbaijan) • Raising the age of criminal responsibility (Ireland) • Guaranteed legal representation for children (Greece) • Elimination of certain discriminatory salary practices (Belgium) • Legislative changes on freedom of association and the press (Slovenia) • 14 laws and 10 bylaws on economic crime, including a new Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terrorist Finance Law and a Beneficial Ownership Law (Kosovo⁴³) • Ratification of the Istanbul Convention on domestic violence (Republic of Moldova) • New electoral code (Republic of Moldova) • New regulations on healthcare rights for detainees (Republic of Moldova)
Institutional changes	• Increased representation of women in the judiciary (multiple countries) • Inclusion of vulnerable and minority populations in justice processes (multiple countries) • Improved execution of European Court of Human Rights judgements (Azerbaijan) • Establishment of a register of war-damaged property (Ukraine) • Introduction of a specialised conciliator model (Türkiye) • Establishment of bureaux for international judicial cooperation, and a central monitoring system for mutual legal assistance requests (Türkiye) • Introduction of a corruption risk assessment methodology for the central anti-corruption agency (Kosovo⁴⁴)

⁴³ All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

⁴⁴ All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

	• Opening of the first LGBTI shelter (Bosnia and Herzegovina) • Creation of an integrated prison management information system (Bosnia and Herzegovina) • Establishment of the Family Justice Council judicial collaboration mechanism (Türkiye) • Guidelines on democratic school governance development and implemented in 20 schools (Georgia)
Education and training	• 4 university curricula developed on inclusive education, and > 1,000 teachers trained (multiple countries) • 600 officials trained in cybersecurity (Azerbaijan) • 180 journalists and 100 lawyers in media professionalism and freedom of information (Azerbaijan) • 950 judges, prosecutors and lawyers trained on mutual legal assistance requests (Türkiye) • 2,342 Roma community members and 699 municipal officials trained on inclusive local governance (multiple countries) • 120 law enforcement officers training in financial investigation techniques, and 78 in asset recovery (Kosovo⁴⁵) • 156,000 users of the Human Rights for Legal Professionals (HELP) e-learning platform on integration of human rights standards into domestic law (multiple countries) • 50 “young ambassadors” trained in anti-hate narratives (multiple countries) • 8,200 lawyers trained on human rights and the European Convention of Human Rights (Türkiye)

28. While the evaluations contain many examples where the Council of Europe has contributed to legal and policy reforms, **progress is not always carried forward** into the implementation phase. The review of the European Social Charter observed that endorsing social rights is not the same as implementing them in ways that make a real difference to relevant groups.⁴⁶ In the evaluation of the Commissioner for Human Rights, some national officials reported that the promotion of women’s rights was sometimes frustrated by competing political pressures or a lack of concrete guidance on the implementation of Council of Europe standards.⁴⁷ In Azerbaijan, evaluators noted that there was no system in place to monitor whether legal reforms had been effectively implemented.⁴⁸

29. Overall, **gaps in outcome-level monitoring** were a common finding across the evaluations, due to a lack of data availability or lack of capacity in RBM. Nine evaluations cited the absence of systematic outcome monitoring, reliance on output-level data or incomplete documentation as barriers to assessment.⁴⁹ A lack of gender-disaggregated data at the outcome level was another recurring theme.

45 All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation’s Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

46. DIO-2025-European Social Charter.

47. DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights.

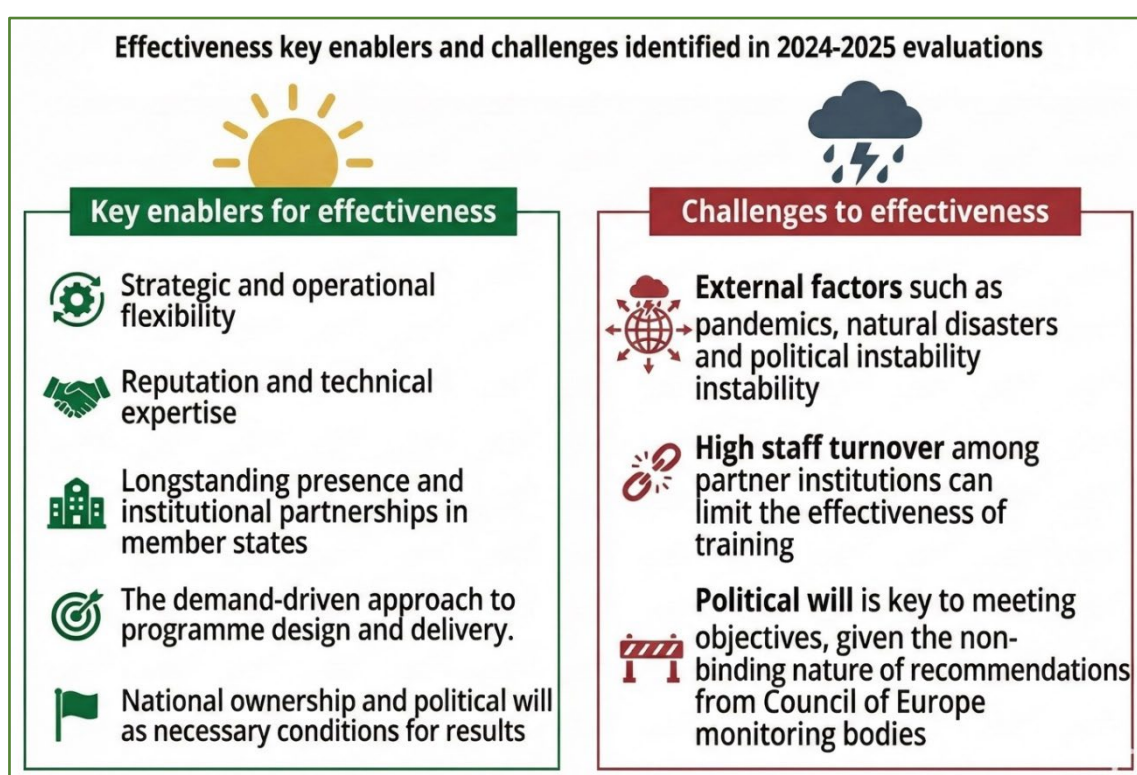
48. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25.

49. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DIO-2024-Change Management; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia.

30. **Key enablers for effectiveness:** Across the evaluations, the findings suggest that effectiveness has been enhanced by a) the Organisation’s strategic and operational flexibility; b) its reputation and technical expertise; c) longstanding presence and institutional partnerships in member states; and d) its demand-driven approach to programme design and delivery. National ownership and political will were consistently identified as necessary conditions for results.

31. **Challenges to effectiveness:** Factors impeding effectiveness included external factors beyond the Organisation’s control, such as pandemics, natural disasters and political instability. High staff turnover among partner institutions can limit the effectiveness of training, as the skills and knowledge gained can dissipate without informing organisational practice. As with relevance, political will is key to meeting objectives, given the non-binding nature of recommendations from Council of Europe monitoring bodies. Enablers and challenges are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Key enablers and challenges to effectiveness



32. The evaluations offer useful insights into **how the effectiveness of training can be enhanced**. One theme was enhancing its practical orientation. In Türkiye, feedback from participants suggested the use of more examples and case studies in training materials, to ensure they were not overly theoretical⁵⁰. A second theme was diversifying training offerings. In the “Strengthening the Capacity of Bar Associations and Lawyers” (SCoBAL) project⁵¹, which trained lawyers on European human rights standards, stakeholders expressed demand for a staged training process, with broad introductions followed at a later stage by in-depth training. On the other hand, there is also a need to balance the demands on participants. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, partners

50. DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye.

51. DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL).

suggested that low attendance rates at training sessions were linked to “saturation in receiving training”.⁵²

3.1.3 What did the 2024-2025 evaluations tell us about efficiency?

33. “Efficiency” is the extent to which interventions deliver, or are likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way. It involves assessing whether interventions use cost-effective methods for achieving their results, whether they are implemented through efficient processes, and whether they deliver on time.

34. In five evaluations, interventions were commended for **high budget utilisation, cost awareness and for delivering results within or below budget**.⁵³ For example, the ROMACTED Phase II⁵⁴ and BTPI⁵⁵ programmes both had high budget absorption rates. Both programmes also made good use of the available funding.

35. Seven evaluations found that projects and their management teams had demonstrated **operational flexibility**, adapting to a changing external context, including crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and natural disasters), while maintaining and, in some cases, improving efficiency.⁵⁶ This included adopting online or hybrid forms of communication. Teams adopted online formats to support training and other activities in response to COVID-19, resulting in significant cost savings, although with potential quality trade-offs.⁵⁷ Where costs were reduced, funds were often reallocated to other activities; for example, the Office for the Commissioner for Human Rights showed “remarkable adaptability” in reallocating resources.⁵⁸

36. Strong staffing arrangements, including experienced teams and well-implemented **hybrid delivery models** (a standard approach in the Council of Europe), were identified as enablers of lean and effective operations in five evaluations.⁵⁹ The combination of in-country staff, who are able to build close relationships with stakeholders, and thematic technical support from the Strasbourg headquarters was generally found to work well. For example, PECK III successfully combined in-country presence with support from the Strasbourg office.⁶⁰ **Close co-operation with national ministries and strong co-ordination across projects helped prevent duplication and enhance**

52. DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25.

53. DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia.

54. DEC-2024 ROMACTED II.

55. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions.

56. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III.

57. This does not mean that online courses deliver better results than in-person training. One evaluation found online training to provide a diminished experience for participants, particularly for networking (DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III). Further research is needed to identify what the optimal balance between online and offline delivery.

58. DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights.

59. DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III, DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia.

60. DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III).

delivery speed, according to five evaluations. For instance, the HF III programme demonstrated strong communication and co-ordination across activities and with other Council of Europe projects, which enhanced efficiency.⁶¹ On the other hand, **gaps in staffing** and high **turnover** rates were identified as barriers to efficient implementation in eight evaluations.

37. Eight evaluations identified **challenges** related to administrative and financial procedures, including rigidity in internal procedures, heavy reporting and strict budget rules as hindering efficient delivery.⁶² Certain organisational constraints on the human resources side were also identified. The evaluation of implementation of the Reykjavík Declaration found that the Organisation's human resources policy is not conducive to rapid recruitment in response to staffing needs for new initiatives.⁶³ Staffing constraints were also a common reason why evaluation recommendations were rejected or only partially accepted.

38. **External contextual factors** and events outside the Organisation's control – such as natural disasters, political instability and inflation – led to **delays and absorption issues**, according to six evaluations.⁶⁴ For example, evaluations covering Türkiye highlighted delays due to the 2023 earthquake and elections, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁵

39. Overall, however, the number and strength of findings on efficiency are limited. In seven evaluations, it was noted that a **lack of metrics makes it difficult to monitor and track efficiency** – for example, the BTPI programme lacked efficiency indicators for reporting and monitoring.⁶⁶ In addition, broad budget categorisation has hindered the ability to conduct detailed assessments of resource allocation by, for instance, activity type.⁶⁷

3.1.4 Coherence and generating added value

40. In Council of Europe evaluations, “coherence” refers to how well the Organisation ensures complementarity and reduces overlap with other actors and processes. Coherence was addressed in 18 of the 25 evaluations.⁶⁸

61. DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

62. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2025-Youth-Report; DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation; DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DIO-2024-Change Management; DEC-2024-ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

63. DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation.

64. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

65. DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye.

66. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2025-Youth-Report; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-ROMACTED II; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU).

67. DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation; DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia; DIO-2025-Youth-Report; DIO-2025-European Social Charter.

68. DEC-2024-INCLUDE; DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2025-Youth-Report; DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation; DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DIO-2024-Change Management; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024-ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal

41. The evaluations found that Council of Europe interventions were closely aligned with EU and other international normative frameworks, which promotes coherence with other international actors in the normative standards applied. Coherence with the EU rated well in seven evaluations and often included co-funding of activities and structured co-ordination around EU accession frameworks.⁶⁹ For example, the HF III developed its activities in partnership with the EU to ensure complementary support for EU accession.⁷⁰ The Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova was also found to complement EU accession priorities, achieved through strategic co-ordination, co-financing and cross-membership of project steering committees. The Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals in the EU (HELP III) was well targeted to complement and build on EU justice support.⁷¹

42. Eight evaluations offer positive examples **of coordination with other multilateral organisations and national civil society networks**.⁷² ROMACTED Phase II was found to have successfully collaborated with UN agencies and the World Bank, as well as civil society organisations.⁷³ Education interventions such as Democracy in Schools Georgia and INCLUDE 3 achieved synergies through co-operation with external partners such as the Zurich University for Teacher Education, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Save the Children and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).⁷⁴ Evaluations of the Action Plans for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Moldova found active participation and co-ordination with international partners through working groups, donor exchanges, steering committees and joint activities.⁷⁵

43. However, **co-ordination was sometimes found to be informal, rather than institutionalised**.⁷⁶ The Action Plan for Azerbaijan and Change Management evaluations found a lack of co-ordination structures, leaving co-ordination reliant on the initiative of individual staff members. As a result, co-ordination was sometimes introduced reactively, in response to challenges that had arisen during implementation, rather than strategically.⁷⁷ The Effectiveness of Family Courts in Türkiye project was found to have had co-ordination gaps with CSOs and bar associations.⁷⁸

Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

69. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25, DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

70. DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

71. DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III.

72. DEC-2024-INCLUDE DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25 DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24, 24 DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

73. DEC-2024 ROMACTED II.

74. DEC-2024-INCLUDE DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

75. DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25.

76. Informal coordination is not inherently problematic and may in some contexts be more efficient than formalised approaches. However, reliance on individual staff initiative can carry continuity risks, particularly when key personnel depart. These findings suggest scope for utilising formal mechanisms and processes to mitigate some of these risks.

77. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2024-Change Management.

78. DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye.

44. In Council of Europe evaluations, “added value” refers to the value or comparative advantage that the Organisation offers, alongside other actors. Several factors emerge from the evaluations as distinctive features of the Council of Europe’s offer to member states.

45. First, its engagements are grounded in **longstanding relationships and knowledge of the country context**, often built up over multiple project cycles. Six evaluations found that this experience had enhanced alignment with other actors and limited unnecessary duplication.⁷⁹ For example, many activities under the HF III were continuations or evolutions from previous phases and benefitted from well-established working relations and a strong knowledge base. Experienced staff sustained institutional memory, and a deep understanding of country contexts were cited as key enablers of coherence for both programmes.

46. A second area of added value is **technical expertise**. Across seven evaluations, the Council of Europe’s technical depth in areas such as human rights education and democratic governance, and its body of tools and frameworks, were identified as success factors.⁸⁰ For example, in the field of education, projects demonstrated value addition by mobilising the Council of Europe’s expertise, methodological tools and policy leverage to reinforce national education systems.⁸¹ Technical expertise was also cited as a success factor in efforts to promote desegregation of schooling in Czechia and Romania.⁸² The Organisation’s expertise and expert networks were also utilised to develop training materials and courses on biometrics, children’s rights and gender equality.⁸³

47. A third area of added value cited frequently in the evaluations is the Council of Europe’s **“strategic triangle” operating model**.⁸⁴ The three elements of standard-setting, monitoring and technical co-operation are recognised as complementary. Grounding technical co-operation activities in the findings of monitoring bodies gives them an objective, apolitical standing that reinforces trust with national authorities. It also enables technical co-operation activities to leverage visits and other activities by monitoring and advisory bodies, such as the Venice Commission and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture.⁸⁵ However, the coverage of co-operation activities was not always fully consistent with the findings of monitoring bodies. For example, the HF III evaluation noted gaps in the geographical coverage of certain themes, such as human trafficking and freedom of expression, even though similar challenges had been identified across other countries.⁸⁶

79. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU).

80. DEC-2024-INCLUDE, DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia; DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia.

81. DEC-2024-INCLUDE DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

82. DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU).

83. DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia.

84. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25.

85. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions.

86. DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

3.1.5 Delivering on cross-cutting priorities

48. The Council of Europe aspires to integrate a range of cross-cutting issues across its activities, including gender equality, human rights, youth and children's rights, rights of persons with disabilities, Roma and Travellers, and AI and digital transformation.⁸⁷ The synthesis found that only gender equality and the HRBA were assessed consistently across the evaluations as mainstreaming issues. For the most part, these issues were incorporated into project design and delivery, but with variations in the depth of integration across interventions.

49. A **human rights-based approach** (HRBA) is grounded in international and European human rights norms and engages with both rights-holders and duty-bearers to promote the realisation of human rights. It should give due consideration to principles such as participation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency.⁸⁸ Such an approach was identified in 15 of the 25 evaluations as explicit in project design and delivery arrangements, suggesting that it is **well mainstreamed** across Council of Europe activities.⁸⁹

50. One example of the application of the HRBA was found in the Action Plan for The Republic of Moldova, which outlined plans to boost the knowledge and skills of the team in this area. All projects under the plan were found to have addressed at least one human rights principle.⁹⁰ The Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan evaluation also confirmed that the approach was present in most project designs, but noted that many project participants lacked a detailed understanding of its implications.⁹¹ The HF III evaluation also reported varied understanding of the approach.⁹² Engaging with CSOs was cited as being the predominant method used to advance the HRBA and integrate the needs of vulnerable groups. Despite some challenges around limited capacity and shrinking civic space, this was found to be an effective approach to incorporating human rights into interventions.⁹³ Awareness raising campaigns, capacity-building activities and the development of legal and policy frameworks were other common project activities that helped support the HRBA.⁹⁴

87. See Council of Europe, Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2024–2027 – United around our values (CM (2024)). Available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680adec99.

88. European Commission, Directorate-General for International Partnerships (2024) Human rights-based approach. [online] Available at: <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/spaces/ExactExternalWiki/pages/50108948/Human+Rights+Based+Approach> (Accessed: 26 December 2025). Council of Europe Guide to applying the human rights approach in co-operation (internal guide undated, accessed December 2025).

89. DEC-2024-INCLUDE; DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DIO-2024-Change Management; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia; DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia.

90. DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

91. DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25.

92. DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

93. DEC-2024-ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

94. DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU).

51. **Gender equality also appears to be well mainstreamed across the portfolio**, having been identified as an explicit priority in 15 evaluations.⁹⁵ Some projects had developed gender mainstreaming strategies and approaches, with commitments to incorporate gender considerations into project design, resource allocation and data collection.⁹⁶ Most projects were able to demonstrate the incorporation of gender-specific activities.⁹⁷ However, gaps and inconsistencies in the integration, prioritisation and resourcing of gender activities was reported in some evaluations.⁹⁸ The Azerbaijan Action Plan evaluation found that gendered approaches had not been integrated into policy work, while the ICCM evaluation reported a lack of gender analysis in project design. Some projects included cross-cutting priorities and gender-disaggregated data within their monitoring frameworks,⁹⁹ but this was not always the case.¹⁰⁰ **Inconsistent tracking** of women's participation in project activities and of gender-related outcomes in logical frameworks were cited as limiting factors for the monitoring of gender transformative results.¹⁰¹

52. The evaluation sample includes evaluations looking specifically at the mainstreaming of **youth and children's rights** across the portfolio. The evaluation of the integration of a youth perspective into Council of Europe work found that the Organisation had a long history of effective youth participation and engagement within the youth sector and was widely seen as a frontrunner on the issue. However, it concluded that the mainstreaming of a youth perspective across other services' activities had evolved in an organic manner and lacked a common set of guiding principles. Despite acknowledgement of the importance of meaningful youth engagement, the evaluation found that it was held back by resource constraints and a lack of buy-in across the Organisation.¹⁰²

53. The evaluation of the Sub-programme on Children's Rights found that it was effective in addressing children's rights across multiple thematic areas. The sub-programme developed the Council of Europe's Strategy for the Rights of Children (2022-2027), which has guided the mainstreaming of children's rights across Council of Europe activities, raised their profile among

95. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2024-Change Management; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye, DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye, DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia; DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

96. DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

97. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

98. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

99. DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

100. DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL).

101. DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye, DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia; DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia.

102. DIO-2025-Youth-Report.

member states, and helped reinforce the Organisation's leading role as a children's rights advocate.¹⁰³

54. Consideration of other cross-cutting issues across the evaluation, such as rights of persons with disabilities, migration and asylum, AI and digital transformation, was not evaluated or reported in sufficient depth to support wider conclusions. However, the youth evaluation makes an interesting observation on the risk of "mainstreaming fatigue" among key stakeholders. A minority of key informants noted the difficulty of sustaining parallel mainstreaming objectives, given capacity, resource and knowledge constraints. The evaluation concluded that this should be approached as a question of proportionality: giving each cross-cutting issue a weight that is appropriate in each context, to avoid overloading the agenda.¹⁰⁴

3.1.6 Delivering on impact and sustainability

55. "Impact" refers to the long-term effects, both intended and unintended, produced by interventions. Impact is assessed in relation to the Council of Europe's core mandate of promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law across Europe. "Sustainability" refers to the potential continuation of benefits after funding ends.¹⁰⁵

56. Across the sample of 25 evaluations, impact was considered in seven evaluation reports¹⁰⁶ and sustainability in 15.¹⁰⁷ Given the long-term nature of the change processes supported by the Council of Europe, some evaluations inevitably concluded that it was too soon to make an assessment.¹⁰⁸

57. There was a clear pattern that **likelihood of impact and sustainability were strongest where legislative reforms, institutional behavioural changes and alignment of national frameworks with European standards were visible in project outcomes**. Other factors identified as conducive to sustainable impact were political will and momentum, organisational commitment from counterparts, integration of project outputs into national processes, local ownership and effective capacity building.¹⁰⁹ In particular, where initiatives are situated with national reform and EU accession priorities, they are more likely to continue progressing after project completion.¹¹⁰

103. DIO-2026-Children's Rights.

104. DIO-2025-Youth-Report.

105. Council of Europe, Evaluation Guidelines, 2021; Evaluation Policy, 2018.

106. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights, DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25, 23.

107. DEC-2024-INCLUDE; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III, DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia; DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia; DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

108. DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye.

109. DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

110. DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

58. Continuing a theme from the relevance and effectiveness sections, **programmatic flexibility** in shifting national policy priorities and political contexts contributes greatly to sustainability. It is also notable that projects that deliver sustainable impact tend to be those that build on **lengthy engagement** over multiple project cycles.¹¹¹ For example, the HF III, which supported the adoption of various laws and treaties, benefited from a flexible mandate and relationship building from the prior two phases.¹¹² It is notable, however, that conclusions from the evaluations on impact and sustainability are subject to the caveat that results remain vulnerable to changes in the national political contexts.

59. Where **capacity building and national ownership** are at the forefront, several evaluations found that sustainability is more likely. For example, the assessment of PECK III noted that the active engagement of national partners, such as the Financial Intelligence Unit and the Agency for Prevention of Corruption, helped promote the institutionalisation of reforms, thereby providing a solid basis for sustainability.¹¹³

60. Conversely, low institutional capacity, gaps in political support, institutional inertia, human resource challenges (e.g., high staff turnover) and financial constraints all hindered sustainability and impact.¹¹⁴ In three evaluations, impact was hindered by external constraints that affected legislative reform, including changes in political leadership, parliamentary gridlock, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine refugee crisis.¹¹⁵

61. A shift in **public and political attitudes towards EU orientation** was found to influence the potential impact and sustainability of some interventions. For example, the rise of far-right movements was identified as contributing to an adverse political culture in the Republic of Moldova, while the war in Ukraine was cited as a risk to the country's EU orientation.¹¹⁶

3.2 Insights from the analysis of evaluation recommendations and management's response

62. One of the objectives of the synthesis was to explore the recommendations arising from the 2024 and 2025 evaluations, the Organisation's management responses and follow-up actions, and to identify any patterns that emerge. Management responses were available for 21 of the 25 evaluations (all but the most recently completed).

63. Across this group, management accepted the majority of evaluation recommendations, often commenting positively on their validity and usefulness. As shown in Figure 3, of 162 unique

111. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25, 19; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU).

112. DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III.

113. DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III).

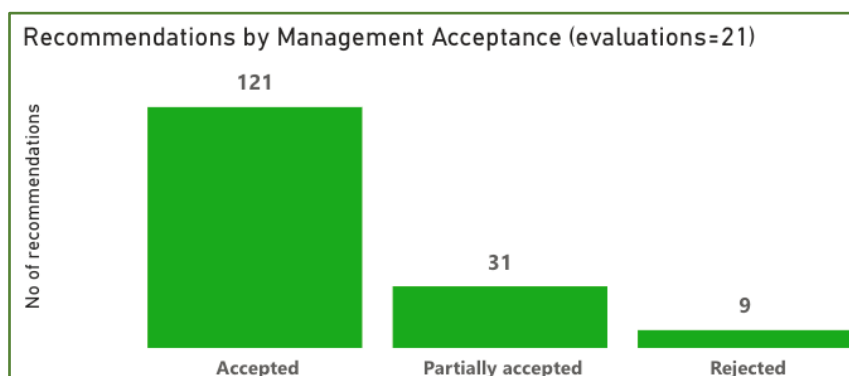
114. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia.

115. DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU).

116. DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

recommendations across 21 evaluations, 75% (121) were accepted, 19% (31) were partially accepted, and just nine recommendations (6%) were rejected. Decentralised (DEC) evaluations account for 121 recommendations (75%), while DIO evaluations account for 40 (25%). DIO evaluation recommendations have a higher acceptance rate than DEC recommendations (97.5% vs. 67.8%).

Figure 3: Recommendations by acceptance status



64. The main reasons offered for partial acceptance or rejection were:

- a) **Outside organisational scope, mandate or agreed approach:** Recommendations that would have required the Organisation to assume responsibilities beyond its mandate, or that should be addressed by national counterparts or other actors. (26 recommendations out of 40)
- b) **Limited human and financial resources, and project cycle constraints:** The management response indicated that, while the recommendation was valid in principle, it could not be implemented due to budget constraints, project closure, or insufficient funding (10 recommendations out of 40)

65. To identify patterns, recommendations were grouped into ten categories, explained in detail in Appendix 4. Table 2 provides an overview of the categories that were used.

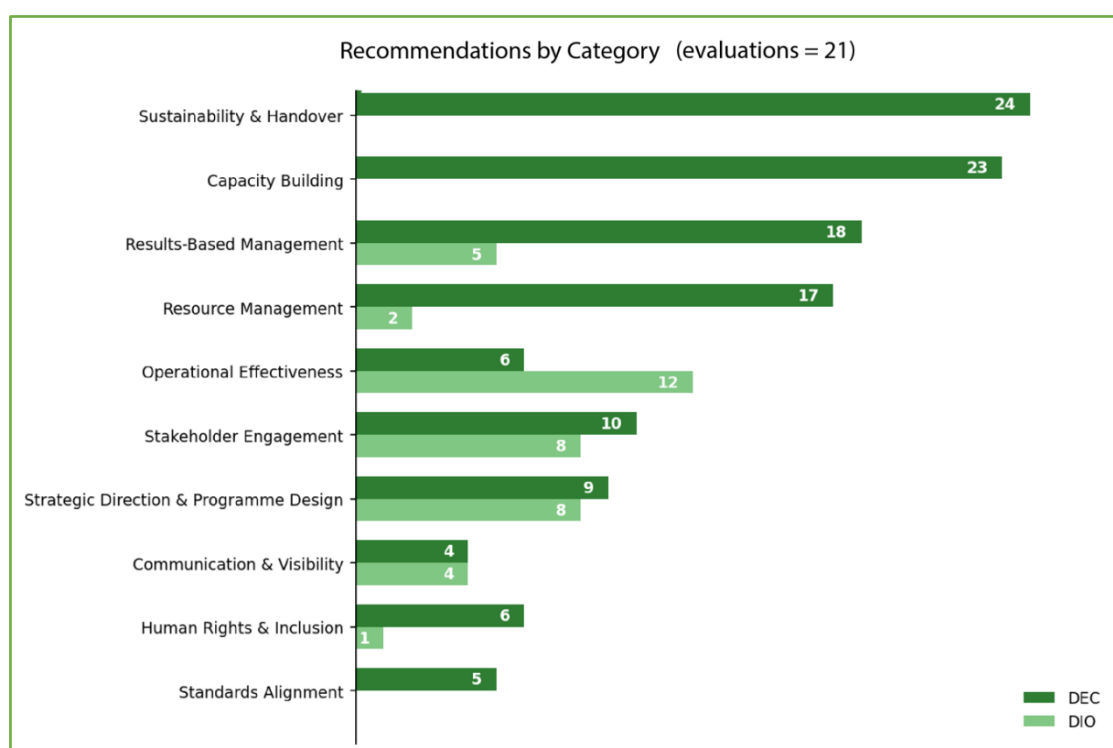
Table 2: Overview of categories

Category	Issues covered
Strategic direction and programme design	<i>What</i> the organisation should do and <i>why to inform strategy and programme design</i>
Operational effectiveness	The internal machinery of delivery. Improvements on <i>how</i> the organisation operates, internally and in relation to partners.
Results-based management	Improvements to results-based management and capacity
Stakeholder engagement	Partnerships, engagement with government, CSOs and other key stakeholders
Capacity building	Training, skills development, and knowledge transfer activities concerning partners and beneficiaries
Communication and visibility	Outreach and awareness raising activities
Sustainability and handover	Ownership transfer, continuity planning, follow-up mechanisms

Human rights and inclusion	Gender mainstreaming, Roma inclusion, vulnerable groups, disability considerations, and human rights-based approaches.
Standards alignment	Strengthening legislative reform, and compliance with international standards.

66. As shown in Figure 4, the most numerous recommendations (24) relate to *Sustainability and handover* (ownership transfer, continuity planning and the viability of outcomes post-implementation). This type of recommendation has the second-lowest acceptance rate (60.9%) and accounts for three of the nine rejections, with management citing factors beyond the Organisation's control, such as political commitment, institutional absorption and funding constraints.

Figure 4: Recommendations by category



67. There were also 23 recommendations on *Capacity Building*. This category included suggestions for improvements to training primarily for project beneficiaries, namely educational professionals and legal experts. This category had no rejections – management readily accepted recommendations to improve training activities, although six were only partially accepted due to resource or scope limitations.

68. The next most common group of recommendations (18) relate to *Results-Based Management*, reflecting a common finding across the evaluations of shortcomings in this area. While the acceptance rate is positive, at 73.9%, this category has the highest number of rejections (4), often because management viewed the recommendations as duplicating existing project management methodology (PMM) frameworks or as requiring resources not budgeted for in project designs.

69. *Communication and Visibility* (8 recommendations, 100% acceptance), *Operational Effectiveness* (18 recommendations, 94.4% acceptance), and *Strategic Direction* (17

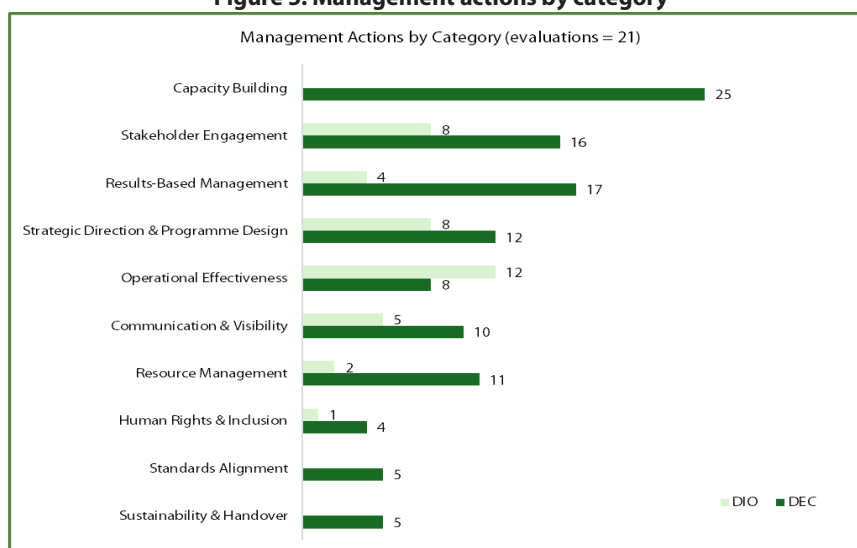
recommendations, 88.2% acceptance) have the highest acceptance rates. *Communication and Visibility* includes recommendations on outreach, awareness campaigns and increasing the visibility of the Council of Europe's work. A perfect acceptance rate suggests that the proposed improvements are perceived as achievable and of high value. The high acceptance rates for *Strategic Direction* and *Operational Effectiveness* indicate a willingness of management to strengthen internal systems and processes and to incorporate evaluation findings into strategic planning.

70. *Resource Management* (19 recommendations, 57.9% acceptance) has the lowest acceptance rate after *Sustainability and Handover*. *Resource management*, which encompasses improvements to budgeting, staffing and financial management, has the highest partial acceptance rate (36.8%). In justifying their decision, management pointed to a range of factors (such as donor earmarking, the availability of extra-budgetary funding and organisational staffing rules) beyond their control.

71. The actions management planned to take to address the evaluation recommendations were grouped in the same way as the recommendations. Figure 5 shows the results of this analysis. Comparisons between types of evaluation recommendations and agreed management action reveal the following. *Sustainability and Handover*, elicited only five actions to 24 recommendations. Management's proposed solutions to this type of recommendation involve *Capacity-Building* and *Stakeholder-Engagement* activities.

72. Eight recommendations on *Communication and Visibility* elicited 14 actions, indicating that enhanced outreach is often considered a practical response to the matters raised by evaluators. By contrast, 19 recommendations on *Resource Management* produced only 13 management actions, perhaps suggesting that the Organisation has only limited scope to address staffing and budget constraints.

Figure 5: Management actions by category



3.3 Insights relating to the robustness of the evaluations' findings

73. The Organisation has well-defined criteria for assessing the quality of evaluation reports, based on the United Nations Evaluation Group's (UNEG) Checklist for Evaluation Reports (2010). While a full appraisal of evaluation quality was beyond the scope of this synthesis, the team analysed two elements with implications for the Organisation's RBM – in particular, the use of theories of change in the evaluation process, and the strength of the evidence base available to support the evaluations, particularly at outcome level.

74. **Programme theories of change** – that is, hypotheses about how activities and outputs will lead to the desired outcomes and eventual real-world impacts, along with the assumptions and risks underlying these causal links – provide a guide for what should be evaluated and how. Theory-based evaluations use such theories of change to formulate evaluation questions and guide data collection and analysis. They draw conclusions on the validity of casual assumptions in light of experience and often make suggestions on how to refine the theory of change, to guide future implementation.

75. Across the sample of 25, 12 evaluations explicitly adopted theory-based approaches, using a theory of change to guide the assessment, or drew on specific theory-based methods such as intervention logic or contribution analysis.¹¹⁷ In four cases, evaluators were able to make use of an existing theory of change,¹¹⁸ while in five cases, theories of change had to be recreated for the evaluation.¹¹⁹ For the evaluation of the Commissioner for Human Rights, DIO prepared an initial theory of change, which evaluators refined, while for the ICCM project, a theory of change was created collaboratively with the project team during the inception phase.¹²⁰

76. Refinements to theories of change were proposed in three evaluations. The BTPI¹²¹ evaluation recommended incorporating causal pathways via non-state actors, to balance the project's work with state institutions. In the evaluation on participatory democracy and human rights in Georgia,¹²² evaluators proposed that the theory of change would benefit from the incorporation of national institutions as a key stakeholder group. In the report on "Democracy Starts in Schools",¹²³ evaluators adjusted the theory of change to account for the influence of state institutions. Overall, the findings suggest that incorporating explicit theories of change into

117. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation; DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DIO-2024-Change Management; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye, DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia.

118. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

119. DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action Plan 2022-25; DIO-2024-Change Management, DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters (ICCM) - Türkiye; DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights.

120. DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters (ICCM) – Türkiye; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights.

121. DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions.

122. DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia.

123. DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia.

programme designs remains a work in progress, and that the evaluations could be doing more to drive learning by testing and refining the causal assumptions underlying programme designs.

77. A recurrent theme across the evaluations was a **lack of outcome-level data**. Many evaluations noted gaps in monitoring data, owing to limited capacity within programme teams. This leaves most evaluations reliant on self-reported feedback from programme participants, collected through interviews, focus groups and surveys.¹²⁴ Few were able to go beyond this and collect additional data on programme outcomes – namely, changes in institutional behaviours and performance and the wider benefits they achieved.

78. Evaluations also faced **challenges in collecting feedback from partners and stakeholder groups**, linked to resource constraints, low response rates and selection biases. Surveys have not proved to be an effective data collection approach due to consistently low response rates: for example, just 5% in the Reykjavík Declaration evaluation and 7% in the Change Management evaluation. When it comes to interview and focus groups, evaluations also noted limited representativeness and a risk of selection bias. For example, the SCoBAL evaluation was able to consult only 14 persons,¹²⁵ while the Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova evaluation noted that the purposive sampling approach had created a potential bias towards positive feedback, with respondents tending to highlight their own achievements.¹²⁶

79. It was also notable that **programme logframes tend to define outcome-level change at a very high level** – namely, evidence of substantive changes in key areas of human rights, the rule of law or democracy. While these are of course the impact areas to which the Council of Europe hopes to contribute, they can only be the result of complex and long-term changes processes. With outcomes defined at such a high level, it is perhaps **not surprising to find evaluations struggling to produce robust evidence of the Organisation's contribution**. However, some of the output-level results identified in project logframes – such as changes in institutional capacity and performance, or the adoption of new laws and policies – are substantial achievements that represent meaningful change. Characterising these as intermediate outcomes, rather than outputs, might help the Organisation to capture its evolving contribution within lengthy changes processes, which would contribute continuous learning.

4. Lessons and implications for future work

80. This section draws out lessons from the synthesis for the Council of Europe's delivery of co-operation activities, across four themes: i) programme design and delivery; ii) partnerships; iii) integration of cross-cutting issues; and iv) results-based management.

124. Azerbaijan Action Plan 2022-25, DIO-2024-Change Management, DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters (ICCM) - Türkiye, DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation, DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights.

125. DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL).

126. DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24.

4.1 Programme design and delivery

81. **Theories of change.** The evaluation evidence suggests that there would be value in the Council of Europe making more consistent use of theories of change, as tools for programme design and learning. Theories of change are sometimes included in programme designs, but not systematically, and they are not necessarily used actively for programme management and real-time learning. Projects would benefit from more explicit consideration in the design phase of the causal pathways that the interventions are intended to support. In particular, this would encourage project teams to consider whether to expand the scope of the programme beyond working with state actors and, if so, which non-state actors (e.g., parliamentarians, civil society organisations, academic institutions, the media) offer the greatest potential for constructive engagement. Making the causal pathways more explicit in project designs would help project teams to keep these under review, in light of experience and the evolving country context, and make continuous learning a more explicit part of the annual monitoring and reporting cycle.

82. **Longer-term engagements.** The evaluations suggest that many of the Council of Europe most successful co-operation projects are those that build on a history of past engagement with the partners or issues concerned. These are able to draw on learning from past phases, deeper knowledge of the context and issues, and broader relationships with stakeholders. Dividing co-operation into sequential projects of two or three years' duration – while necessary for administration and fundraising purposes – may obscure these longer-term dynamics. There may be value in more explicitly conceptualising each phase as part of a longer-term engagement.

83. **Consultations during project design.** The evaluations suggests that the quality of engagement with right-holders and stakeholder groups during project design is an important success factor. It enables the project to better reflect their needs and perspectives, and to identify potential change pathways that may not emerge from interaction with the state bodies.

84. **Moving from reform to implementation.** The evaluations note the risk that not all policy and legislative reforms are implemented actively enough to make a real-world difference. The implementation phase often poses additional technical and political challenges. Where possible, the scope of projects should extend beyond securing adoption of new policies and legislation and into active implementation support. Even in short-duration projects, it can be useful to consider options for building up stakeholder engagement processes that will outlast the project cycle and sustain momentum into the implementation phase. This would help to increase the prospects of sustainable results.

85. **Building flexibility into programme designs.** A flexible approach to programme design and implementation emerges from the evaluations as a key success factor. While projects should be built around a clear long-term vision of their intended results, they should retain short-term flexibility in how best to achieve them. The Organisation works in dynamic country contexts where political windows can open and close, and where counterparts' needs and priorities can evolve rapidly. According to the evaluations, one of the Council of Europe's strengths is its ability to react to these changing contexts.

86. **A diversified training offer.** The evaluations suggest that Council of Europe training is well regarded by its counterparts for its technical quality. However, there is also some useful feedback on how it can be approved. One theme is to ensure that training materials are practical in orientation, with case studies and examples to complement theoretical material. Another is to offer both basic and more advanced materials, to cater for a range of needs.

4.2 Partnerships

87. **Partnerships based on comparative advantage.** The evaluations emphasise the value of partnerships in the Council of Europe's co-operation activities. There is strong emphasis on the value of close collaboration with the Europe Union, especially where structured around the accession process. There are also successful examples of collaboration with other international partners across the evaluation sample, including with Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and UN agencies.

88. **Building on the Organisation's comparative advantage.** The evaluations suggests that the Organisation's partnership should build upon a clear vision of its comparative advantage. The core of this comparative advantage is the Organisation's anchoring in European norms and standards, its deep technical expertise, and the credibility and objectivity of its monitoring bodies. Evaluations also mention long-term engagement, quality partnerships with counterpart institutions and deep knowledge of country contexts as areas of comparative advantage. There may be value in more explicit identification of the Organisation's comparative advantage in each country context, to inform discussions with partners on division of labour and co-operation.

4.3 Integration of cross-cutting issues

89. **Clarifying expectations on cross-cutting issues.** The Organisation has an extensive list of cross-cutting policy commitments that should be considered in the design of technical co-operation and other activities. The evaluations find that the gender equality and the HRBA are generally visible across project designs, but the depth of their integration varies. There may be scope for further articulation of guiding principles and expectations regarding the Organisation's engagement with particularly stakeholder groups, such as children, youth and people living with disabilities. However, the evaluations also warn against "mainstreaming fatigue" caused by overloading project teams with too many cross-cutting expectations. Mainstreaming goals should be selective and proportionate to the opportunities available in each project area.

90. **The human rights-based approach.** Some evaluations find gaps in stakeholders' understanding of the HRBA. There might be value in building an introduction to the approach into other, more technical training material.

4.4 Results-based management

91. **Introduce model theories of change, with menus of standard indicators.** The evaluations suggest that RBM within the Council of Europe is held back by a lack of expertise across project teams, as technical expertise is generally prioritised in staff choices. As this constraint is unlikely to be lifted in the short term, there is scope to develop standardised RBM tools for commonly occurring programme components. These could include model theories of change, with

associated menus of standard results indicators, at output, outcome and impact level, that project teams can adapt to national contexts and the specifics of each project. A level of standardisation would help overcome capacity constraints in RBM, promote consistency in response to recurring challenges and provide a basis for focused training of staff. In due course, it might also assist with the aggregation of results across country or thematic portfolios.

92. **Redefining “outcomes”.** In many Councils of Europe results frameworks, “outcomes” are high-level changes that are likely to appear only over long-time frames. While the Council of Europe’s Theory of Change and Results-Based Management approach includes “immediate” and “intermediate” outcome categories, the findings suggest these are also not consistently captured in project logframes. As a result, shorter-term outcomes are not routinely monitored, and evaluations struggle to address them meaningfully. This leaves the Organisation facing challenges with identifying its results beyond the output level. It may therefore be appropriate to review how the Organisation defines an outcome to ensure it captures meaningful, short-term changes, such as improved understanding of policy challenges and solutions among stakeholders, changes in institutional capacity and behaviour, or the adoption of new laws and policies. It may also be advisable for projects to incorporate more consistently “direct” or “intermediate” outcomes into their theories of change and logframes, to better capture the pathway to behavioural change, including political will and influence. Project annual reports can then be reoriented towards identifying key changes in those short-term outcomes, and where appropriate to revisit causal assumptions in the project theory of change.

93. **Incorporating cross-cutting themes.** At present, there is limited inclusion of the Organisation’s cross-cutting policy commitments in project results frameworks, and disaggregation of results data around target groups is inconsistent. There might be a value in setting out clearer expectations and guidance on how to track changes for target groups through project-level monitoring and evaluation.

5. Conclusions

94. This synthesis report collates learning from Council of Europe evaluations completed in 2024 and 2025. The lessons relate principally to the Organisation’s technical co-operation portfolio, but with some wider implications for other activities. The synthesis does not provide an overall picture of the Council of Europe’s results in that period, as only a subset of its interventions is evaluated and there are limitations on what results the evaluations are able to capture. Nonetheless, it does provide valuable insights into patterns of results across the evaluations: which are the Organisation’s areas of stronger and weaker performance, and what factors enable or constrain achievement of the Organisation’s intended results.

95. Overall, the 25 evaluations show that the Council of Europe is helping its member states to deliver meaningful change. They show a broad range of policy, legislative and institutional change across many thematic areas, including equality and non-discrimination, judicial reform, access to justice, human rights in prisons, minority participation in local governance, inclusive education, prevention of violence against women, and anti-corruption and other economic crimes. The Organisation has trained many thousands of national officials, legal professionals, journalists and civil society activists in European human rights standards, with consistently strong feedback on the

quality of its training. These changes are helping to lay the groundwork for the realisation of European standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

96. The evaluations suggest that the Council of Europe's technical co-operation work rests on some clear areas of comparative advantage: its mandate to promote European standards, its technical expertise and the grounding of its support in the findings of its monitoring bodies, which gives the work its objective and apolitical character. Other key strengths include its ability to align with national reform priorities and EU accession processes, its longstanding relationships with key counterparts, and its deep knowledge of country contexts. Adaptability in dynamic settings is repeatedly cited as an area of strength. The Organisation shows a good level of coherence and collaboration with international partners, especially the European Union, although this is not always well institutionalised.

97. The evaluations also point to some constraints on the Organisation's effectiveness. While the Organisation partners closely with state institutions, more systematic engagement with a wider range of stakeholder would enable it to tailor its interventions to their needs and priorities. The impact of its training activities on institutional performance is often held back by high staff turnover within counterpart institutions. The Organisation has a good record in supporting policy and legal reforms but often struggles to sustain momentum into the implementation phase. It is widely commended for the skills of its staff, combining thematic expertise from its Strasbourg centre with in-country teams, who offer deep contextual knowledge and relationships. However, its efficiency is at times constrained by heavy administrative, financial management and reporting processes. The Organisation has set itself an ambitious range of cross-cutting policy commitments, but the depth of integration across projects is variable.

98. The synthesis analysis also reveals some shortcomings in the Council of Europe's capacity for RBM, which constrain its ability to trace its contribution to complex, long-term change processes. Project designs would benefit from more systematic use of theories of change, outlining the causal pathways through which activities lead to their intended results. Such theories of change can help guide monitoring and reporting, to inform real-time adaptation in response to lessons learned. There is a tendency for projects to set outcomes that are too high-level and long-term. Introducing more immediate and intermediate outcomes into results frameworks would help focus monitoring efforts on information that can inform real-time learning. Explicit theories of change and more realistic outcome measures would also help the Organisation focus its limited evaluation resources more effectively. These are useful learning points for the future. For the time being, they mean that the evaluations reviewed here capture only a subset of the Council of Europe's results.

Appendix 1: Synthesis Sub-questions

Synthesis Sub-Question	Insights Section
Lessons from recommendations and follow-up management actions	
What insights emerge from recommendations, and how can they best be classified?	3.2
What is the management's overall response to the evaluation?	3.1
Which recommendations are most commonly occurring? Is there a pattern for partially accepted or rejected recommendations?	3.1, 3.2
What patterns emerge with respect to recommendation follow-up (e.g., the extent to which recommendations are being addressed, by whom and how quickly, and which types of recommendations remain unaddressed)?	3.1
What changes have the evaluations led to, as defined by follow-up taken to evaluation recommendations?	3.2
What is the level of risk attached to unaddressed or delayed actions?	3.1
Insights on the robustness of evaluation findings	
Were efforts made to involve the main stakeholders of the intervention early in the process and in validating findings?	In Synthesis Report
Is the methodology appropriate given the evaluations objectives and scope? Are methodological limitations identified and reflected upon?	3.2, 3.3
Are recommendations appropriate, clear and feasible given the scope and objectives for the evaluation and findings?	3.2
Is the evidence base clearly described? Can evaluators draw on secondary programme data and/or monitoring data? Does the body of evidence support conclusions, lesson, and recommendations? If not, do evaluators reflect on the limitations of their evidence base, how it has shaped their approach, and implications for their findings?	3.2, 3.3, 4

Appendix 2: Breakdown of synthesised evaluations with available data sources

#	Evaluation Function	Year	Abbreviated Report Title	TeamMate+?	MRAP?	Evaluation Type	Evaluation Sub-type	DG
1	DEC	2024	INCLUDE	No	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity
2	DIO	2025	Building Trust in Public Institutions	No	No	Strategic Evaluation	Operational Programme	
3	DIO	2025	Azerbaijan Action Plan 2022-25	No	No	Portfolio Evaluation	Action Plan	DPC-Programme Co-ordination
4	DIO	2025	Youth Report	Yes	Yes	Strategic Evaluation	Transversal	DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity
5	DIO	2025	Reykjavík Implementation	Yes	Yes	Strategic Evaluation	Strategy	PO-Private Office
6	DIO	2025	European Social Charter	Yes	Yes	Strategic Evaluation	Treaty	DGI-Human Rights and Rule of Law
7	DIO	2024	Steering Committee on ADI	Yes	Yes	Strategic Evaluation	Entity	DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity
8	DIO	2024	Commissioner Human Rights	Yes	Yes	Strategic Evaluation	Entity	Commissioner for Human Rights
9	DIO	2024	Change Management	Yes	Yes	Strategic Evaluation	Mechanism	DGA-Administration
10	DEC	2024	Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye	Yes	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGI-Human Rights and Rule of Law
11	DEC	2025	International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye	Yes	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGI-Human Rights and Rule of Law
12	DEC	2025	ROMACTED II	Yes	Yes	Thematic Evaluation	Transversal	DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity
13	DEC	2025	Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III)	No	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGI-Human Rights and Rule of Law
14	DEC	2025	Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III	Yes	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGI-Human Rights and Rule of Law

15	DEC	2025	Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III	Yes	Yes	Portfolio Evaluation	Funding Facility	DPC-Programme Co-ordination
16	DEC	2025	Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25	No	Yes	Portfolio Evaluation	Action Plan	DPC-Programme Co-ordination
17	DEC	2024	Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye	Yes	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGI-Human Rights and Rule of Law
18	DEC	2024	Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL)	No	No	Project Evaluation		DGI-Human Rights and Rule of Law
19	DEC	2024	Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24	Yes	Yes	Portfolio Evaluation	Action Plan	DPC-Programme Co-ordination
20	DEC	2024	INSCHOOL 3 (with EU)	Yes	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity
21	DEC	2024	Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia	Yes	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGI-Human Rights and Rule of Law
22	DEC	2024	Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia	No	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity
23	DEC	2024	Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia	No	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity
24	DEC	2023	Democracy in Schools-Georgia	Yes	Yes	Project Evaluation		DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity
25	DEC	2025	Children's Rights	No	No	Thematic Evaluation	Transversal	DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity

Appendix 3: Abbreviated and full evaluation report titles

#	Abbreviated Report Title	Full Report Title
1	DEC-2024-INCLUDE	Joint European Union and Council of Europe Programme “Building Capacity for Inclusion in Education – INCLUDE” External evaluation
2	DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions	Evaluation of The Council of Europe Programme “Building Trust in Public Institutions”
3	DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25	Evaluation of The Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan 2022-2025
4	DIO-2025-Youth-Report	Evaluation of the Integration of a Youth Perspective in Council of Europe’s work
5	DIO-2025-Reykjavík Implementation	Evaluation of the Implementation of the Reykjavík Declaration
6	DIO-2025-European Social Charter	Evaluation of the European Social Charter
7	DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI	Evaluation of the steering committee on anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion
8	DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights	Evaluation of the Institution of the Commissioner for Human Rights
9	DIO-2024-Change Management	Evaluation of the Change Management in the Administrative reform of the Council of Europe
10	DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye	Final Evaluation of the project ‘Promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Turkey’
11	DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters- ICCM-Türkiye	Final Evaluation of the project ‘Improving International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters in Türkiye’
12	DEC-2024 ROMACTED II	Evaluation of ROMACTED Phase II Programme
13	DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III)	Evaluation of the “Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo”
14	DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III	Evaluation of the project: EU-COE “Human rights education for legal professionals in the European union III”
15	DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III	Mid-Term Evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe Joint Programme “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III”
16	DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25	Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022-2025

17	DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye	External evaluation of the project: “Improving the Effectiveness of Family Courts: Better Protection of the Rights of Family Members” in Türkiye
18	DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL)	External evaluation of the project “Strengthening the Capacity of Bar Associations and Lawyers on European Human Rights Standards” (SCoBAL) (2018 – 2022)
19	DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24	Final Evaluation Report for the external evaluation of the Council of Europe’s Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024
20	DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU)	Evaluation of the INSCHOOL 3 Joint Project of the European Union and Council of Europe
21	DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia	Evaluation of the project “Protection of Human Rights in Biomedicine”
22	DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia	Final external evaluation of the project “Strengthening Participatory Democracy and Human Rights at Local Level in Georgia”
23	DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia	External evaluation of The Council of Europe project “Promoting the Effective Protection of Equality and Non-Discrimination in Georgia”
24	DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia	Evaluation of the Council of Europe project “Democracy Starts in Schools - Engaging School Children in Decision Making Processes in Schools and Communities in Georgia
25	DIO-2025-Children’s Rights-	Evaluation of The Council of Europe’s Sub-programme on Children’s Rights from 2021 to the end of October 2025

Appendix 4: Primary data collection methods in evaluations

Primary Data Collection Method	Reports Using This Method	Total Reports
Interviews (Key Informant, Semi-structured, Individual)	DEC-2024-Alternative Dispute Resolution-Türkiye; DEC-2024-International Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters-ICCM-Türkiye; DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK III); DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia; DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia; DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia; DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2025-Youth-Report; DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation; DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DIO-2024-Change Management; DIO-2025-Children's Rights; DEC-2024-INCLUDE	25
Surveys / Questionnaires (Online/Offline)	DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2025-Bosnia and Herzegovina Action Plan 2022-25; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia; DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia; DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Youth-Report; DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DIO-2024-Change Management; DIO-2025-Children's Rights; DEC-2024-INCLUDE	16
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DEC-2025-Human Rights Education for Legal Prof. in the EU-HELP III; DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Effectiveness of Family Courts-Türkiye; DEC-2024-Strengthening Lawyers Capacity on European Human Rights Standards (SCoBAL); DEC-2024-INSCHOOL 3 (with EU); DEC-2024-Participatory Democracy & Human Rights-Georgia; DEC-2024-Protection of equality and non-discrimination-Georgia; DEC-2024-Democracy in Schools-Georgia; DIO-2025-Azerbaijan Action-Plan 2022-25; DIO-2025-Youth-Report; DIO-2024-Change Management	12
Case Studies	DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Human Rights in Biomedicine-Armenia; DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Youth-Report;	7

	DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights; DIO-2024-Change Management	
Observations (Direct, Field Visits, or Meeting Observation)	DEC-2025-Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans & Türkiye – Phase III; DEC-2024-Republic of Moldova Action Plan 2021-24; DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DIO-2024-Steering Committee on ADI; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights	5
Workshops	DIO-2025-Building Trust in Public Institutions; DIO-2025-Reykjavik Implementation; DIO-2024-Change Management	3
Field Visits (Specific Mention)	DEC-2024 ROMACTED II; DIO-2025-European Social Charter; DIO-2024-Commissioner Human Rights	3

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