

SYNTHESIS OF 2024-2025 EVALUATIONS: KEY RESULTS, LESSONS AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS (2026)



..... INTRODUCTION TO THE EVALUATION SYNTHESIS REPORT

The synthesis examined 25 Council of Europe evaluations completed in 2024 and 2025, to explore areas of stronger and weaker performance and factors that facilitate or hinder the achievement of results. The sample

includes both evaluations led by the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO), and decentralised (DEC) evaluations, which are commissioned by programme teams.

WHY THIS SYNTHESIS ?

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.

WHAT DID WE LEARN? 🔍



Relevance

Council of Europe activities are well aligned with European standards and the needs and priorities of member states. The Organisation’s reputation for technical expertise, grounded in the findings of its monitoring bodies, and its demand-driven support model generate strong alignment with national priorities. However, there is scope for engagement with a wider range of stakeholders during project design.



Effectiveness

The interventions evaluated consistently delivered most of their planned outputs, including training, awareness raising and technical advice. Training is regarded as high quality, but with some useful suggestions for a more practical orientation. A common challenge is sustaining momentum from policy change into implementation.



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.

Efficiency



Interventions make good use of their budgets and demonstrate operational flexibility.

The hybrid staffing model – country teams supported by thematic experts at headquarters – is generally efficient. However, heavy reporting requirements and inflexible budgeting can impede agility, and the Organisation lacks methods for tracking its cost-effectiveness.



Coherence and value add

The evaluations describe close coordination with the European Union and other international actors. However, this was sometimes found to be informal, rather than institutionalised, and reactive rather than strategic.



Impact and sustainability

Prospects for sustainable change are strongest where legislative reforms are accompanied by institutional change, and where engagement is sustained over multiple project cycles.



RBM

Shortcomings in the Council of Europe’s capacity for RBM constrain its ability to trace its contribution to complex, long-term change processes. There is a tendency for projects to set outcomes that are too high-level and long-term.



KEY ENABLERS AND BARRIERS ...

Relevance

- ✓ Well aligned with international norms and member State agendas
- 👍 **Enabler:** Reputation for credible, apolitical expertise
- ⚠️ **Barrier:** Need for more systematic engagement with CSOs

Effectiveness

- ✓ Successful delivery of outputs; substantive contributions to policy reforms
- 👍 **Enabler:** Longstanding presence and institutional partnership, national ownership and political will
- ⚠️ **Barrier:** Gaps in outcome level monitoring to capture long term change

Efficiency

- ✓ Sound budget utilisation and operational reliability
- 👍 **Enabler:** Hybrid HQ/in-country staffing models
- ⚠️ **Barrier:** Heavy reporting requirements and strict budget rules

Coherence and added-value

- ✓ Good coordination with international organisations (EU, World Bank, UN). Added-value rests on longstanding country presence and technical expertise
- 👍 **Enabler:** Strong alignment with international standards
- ⚠️ **Barrier:** Lack of institutional coordination

Cross-cutting priorities

- ✓ **Gender equality and human rights**
Well integrated into design and varied in delivery
- 👍 **Enabler:** Mainstreaming integrated across key policies
- ⚠️ **Barrier:** Mainstreaming 'fatigue', inconsistent tracking

Impact and sustainability

- ✓ Strongest when reforms were combined with institutional changes
- ⚠️ **Barrier:** Political instability, capacity constraints, high staff turnover

LESSONS LEARNED ...

- Make more effective use of theories of change in project design, reporting and evaluation.
- Situate technical cooperation projects with longer-term engagements.
- Engage with a broader range of national stakeholders.
- Scope projects to support implementation, as well as policy and legal reform.
- Build flexible delivery into project designs.
- Diversify the training offer.
- Clarify expectations around engagement with core interest groups, such as children, youth and people living with disabilities.
- Build a more standardised approach to results-based management, including model theories of change and menus of standard indicators.



FIND OUT MORE

Report: www.coe.int/evaluation