Document prepared by the Office of the Directorate General of Programmes

**Progress Review and Final Evaluation
of the Council of Europe Action Plan
for the Republic of Moldova 2017-2020**
Management Response

Name of Evaluation Report:	Progress Review and Final Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2017-2020- Final Report		
Date of Evaluation Report:	**February 2021**	**Dates of the Management Response:**	**August 2021**
Overall management response to the evaluation: The Office of the Directorate General of Programmes (ODGP) of the Council of Europe considers that the report is an overall fair assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan thus far and partially agrees with most conclusions and recommendations. ODGP, in co-ordination with Major Administrative Entities (MAEs), strive to ensure that the concepts of the human-rights approach and gender mainstreaming are further streamlined in programming so that projects fully take into account these elements throughout implementation. Efforts are continued so that Council of Europe projects staff are better equipped to report on taking into consideration transversal issues and results-based management. The recommendations of the Evaluation were taken into account in the drafting of the new Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024. They will continue to be considered in the process of development and validation of new project proposals and reports.			

Evaluation recommendations on setting the programming priorities of the Action Plan and its projects:

- CoE to consider an increased focus on working with potential change agents amongst new stakeholders, e.g. amongst newly founded associations of judges, prosecutors, and lawyers. (p.32)
- CoE should reassess whether project goals have been set realistically in light of the political environment and other external factors and, based on this, take the available budgetary resources into consideration. (p. 33)
- In view of the point above, longer project timeframes should also be considered as some of the projects are relatively short with ambitious immediate and intermediate outcomes. (p. 33)

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
- Programme management and co-ordination	3

Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): **Accept**

Management response

As an intergovernmental organisation the primary partners of the Council of Europe in the framework of the Action Plan are the national authorities, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova. The Council of Europe Office in Chisinau maintains good communication with relevant stakeholders. This includes existing ones and the ones that are newly created. Depending on the availability of funding the Council of Europe is ready to implement projects aimed at supporting the activities of relevant national stakeholders, both authorities as well as NGOs and professional associations.
- On the level of individual projects within the Action Plan, the Council of Europe already cooperates with professional associations and civil society. Examples of this include:
  - The National Union of Enforcement Agents of the Republic of Moldova are project partners in the implementation of the project "PGG II: 12. Support to further strengthening the efficiency and quality of the judicial system in the Republic of Moldova".
  - The Moldovan Bar Association is a beneficiary in the project "PGG II: 16. Strengthening the profession of lawyer in line with European standards in the Eastern Partnership countries".
  - Small grants were provided to the NGO's International Centre "La Strada" and the National Centre for Child Abuse Protection order to promote EU Day and Online safe Day, in the framework of the project "Combating violence against children in the Republic of Moldova".
  - Representatives of NGO's GENDERDOC-M and PromoLex gave their feedback on the preliminary map of responses to hate speech in the framework of the project "Mapping study of national responses to address hate speech in the Republic of Moldova".

- Political instability and the prevailing polarised political climate are risks present in the Republic of Moldova. This sometimes results in difficulties and the slowing down of national legislative processes accompanied by a high staff turnover in state institutions, detrimental to continuity and institutional memory. Action Plan priorities remain relevant regardless of the political forces in power. The Council of Europe supports the Republic of Moldova, based on monitoring bodies' recommendations, in implementing reforms in its areas of expertise, building on the improved legislative and institutional frameworks established with the support of the previous and current Action Plans. One example of the flexible tool used by the Council of Europe to respond to the needs of the countries in reforming legislation and institutions is the Quick Response Mechanism (QRM) in the framework of the Partnership for Good Governance. It is a tool through which the European Commission for Democracy through Law (better known as the Venice Commission) provides ad-hoc legal advice to respond to requests for legislative analysis and related assistance from the concerned countries, including the Republic of Moldova. Since 2019 to 2021, through the QRM the Republic of Moldova benefited from 10 opinions on various topics, including on the criminal liability of constitutional court judges (CDL-AD(2019)028-e); on the draft law on amending and supplementing the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova pertaining to the appointment and career of judges, the role and composition of the Superior Council of Magistracy (CDL-AD(2020)001-e); on the draft law on amending the Electoral Code and the Code of Audiovisual Media Services (CDL-PI(2020)011-e); on legal questions concerning constitutional review of law-making procedures in Parliament (CDL-AD(2021)016-e).
- See page 8 for the examples of the mechanisms already used to adjust work plans and budgets in response to the changes of the political environment and other factors.
- Steering committees of projects implemented in the framework of the Action Plan and of the Action Plan itself are organised in order to assess project and Action Plan implementation and to revise work plans and budgets of the projects.
- The duration of projects is often conditioned on the availability of funding, but the Council of Europe ensures the continuity of its projects, including by designing projects that are implemented in phases, when funding permits. The four-year duration of the Action Plan ensures the continuity of Council of Europe contribution and permits to avoid gaps in funding of projects.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- During the evaluation of needs and drafting of project proposals, project managers carefully map the stakeholders, focusing both on existing partners and potential new ones. - The new Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova was developed in close consultation with the relevant stakeholders, in particular during the Steering Committee Meeting of 2 October 2020. The meeting focused on the results of the implementation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2017 – 2020 and served as a basis for the development of the new Action Plan for 2021-2024. - An example of the projects adjustment to the context is revision of the workplans	- **Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Action Plan**	- **ODGP** - **MAEs**

to meet the challenges of the health sanitary crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic- all projects revised the workplans and budgets to replace travel and in-person meetings with videoconferencing and desk work. - ODGP will continue to encourage the optimal duration of projects when assessing new project proposals, taking into consideration the pursued outcomes and the availability of funding.		

Evaluation recommendations on co-ordination and synergies:

- CoE to emphasize to donors that project designs and budgets need to allow for a certain level of flexibility to respond changing context or upcoming windows of opportunity. (p. 31)
- CoE to consider whether there is a specific contribution they can make to better coordination within the international community. This could include at project/sector level an assessment of challenges preventing systematic coordination and seeking ways reviving existing processes. (p.31)
- CoE should aim to strengthen the evidence base of reported AP results and achievements, e.g. by supporting partners in assessing the mid- to long-term outcomes of trainings as part of their human resource management. (p. 33)
- Governmental actors of the Republic of Moldova should contribute to the evidence base of AP project results by defining and tracking their mid- to long-term capacity building goals from their respective institutional perspective. (p.33)

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
- Programme management and co-ordination - Project implementation	2
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept	
Management response	
- In the communication with the donors the Council of Europe is always emphasizing the importance of unearmarked contributions that allow for flexibility in relation to the windows of opportunity and changing context. Unearmarked funding is an important factor in making the Action Plan flexible to allocate funds where they are most needed. Both the significant level of funding reached and the flexibility of the Action Plan to adapt, with regard to content and methods, helped to mitigate the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of expenditure of the projects is monitored on a regular basis, which allows to minimise underspending, facilitates adjustment of the workplans and budgets	

to the situation in the country and gives an opportunity to allocate unearmarked funds where they are most needed.
- The Council of Europe co-ordinates closely with relevant international partners, notably the European Union (EU), and in particular the European Union Delegation (EUD) in the Republic of Moldova. Co-ordination is also ensured with the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Co-operation with international organisations includes UN Women, UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Transparency International and the International Monetary Fund's resident representative office in the Republic of Moldova. To ensure efficiency and avoid the overlapping of activities, the Council of Europe also co-ordinates with member States' development agencies.
- The Project Management Methodology and the Results Based Management encourages an evidence-based approach in all phases of the implementation of projects. This approach is also encouraged for our beneficiaries and other stakeholders. The logframes of the projects are used to report on the progress based on indicators linked to clearly defined objectives. The PMM IT tool is used to collect and analyse information on the projects progress.
- Results-based reporting and project design training sessions have been organised for project managers both in Strasbourg and in the Field Office to ensure developing detailed and logical reasoning chain from activities up to impact, as well as the use of qualitative and quantitative evidence in project design and reporting. The evidence is collected using available resources in the country and in close coordination with national partners, both among authorities and civil society. Staff was encouraged to devise efficient and balanced reports and assessments which include outcomes formulation and key figures. Similarly, training sessions on the Council of Europe PMM have been organised on a regular basis and new staff has been strongly encouraged to attend to improve their skills in developing project proposals and formulating clear outcomes, outputs and the indicators used to assess progress.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- The Council of Europe Office in Chisinau meets with the international partners present in the Republic of Moldova to discuss coordination and cooperation on subjects of interest. - The use of evidence and collection of relevant data is encouraged and reiterated during the validation of project proposal, annual and final reports of projects.	- **Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Action Plan**	- **Council of Europe office in Chisinau** - **ODGP** - **MAE's**

Evaluation recommendations on impact and sustainability of the Action Plan:
- CoE to explore systematically how training can be efficiently combined with complementary forms of support such as coaching or job shadowing. This includes an assessment of the completion rate of online trainings and strengthening of blended learning formats (e.g. combining in-person sessions with on-line and e-learning sessions). (p.32)

- CoE to consider reallocating underspent funds from e.g. travel to equipment in cases when this facilitates synergies with other CoE projects, contributes to projects sustainability prospects (e.g. putting pilot measures in place before implementing at) or strengthens partner institutions operational capacity under COVID-related restrictions, e.g. provision/upgrade of IT. (p.32)
- In addition to legislative reform and institution strengthening the CoE should integrate a distinctive third component of citizens awareness and involvement. This can contribute to support broader societal change, thus ensuring the sustainability of project outcomes. This could be operationalised at project level, for example, including linkages with the Education for democracy project and/or by means of partnerships with other actors with campaigning expertise. (p.34)

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
- Programme management and co-ordination - Project management/implementation - Financial management	3
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept	
Management response	

- The Council of Europe puts a strong emphasis on the best methods of increasing the capacities of beneficiaries. In responding to the emerging needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic projects in the framework of the Action Plan focused on the capacities of the stakeholders to make use and strengthen blended learning formats. This included the development of e-learning platforms making electoral courses more accessible and safer in the current circumstances, for example the one developed with the Central Electoral Commission and the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training and the judicial training courses online. The workplans and budgets were revised accordingly.
- ODGP of the Council of Europe ensures the best use of project funds and, depending on the specific circumstances, can decide reallocating underspent from e.g. travel to other relevant needs of the beneficiaries, in some cases that can mean the acquisition of equipment in cases when this facilitates synergies with other Council of Europe projects, contributes to projects sustainability prospects (e.g. putting pilot measures in place before multiplying practices further) or strengthens partner institutions operational capacity under COVID-related restrictions, e.g. provision/upgrade of IT equipment of the national partners. Projects are providing quarterly financial reports, which are validated by the financial team in the Headquarters. ODGP finance, resource mobilisation and programming meet regularly to identify the risks of underspending by the projects. In the cases where there is a risk of unspent funds, the ODGP initiates a budget forecast exercise and re-allocates the funds. The replacement of one type of expenditure with another is considered only if it is in line with the priorities of the Action Plan and the project in question as well as in line with the contractual arrangements with the donors.

- Council of Europe technical assistance programmes form an integral part of the unique strategic triangle of standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation: the development of legally binding standards is linked to their monitoring by independent mechanisms and supplemented by technical co-operation to facilitate their implementation. The Organisation's actions are developed and implemented in areas where the Council of Europe has strong expertise and added value. This includes raising the awareness of citizens and encouraging their involvement ensuring the sustainability of project outcomes. Citizens' awareness and involvement is an important component of projects implemented in the framework of the Action Plan. Examples include:

  - The project "Awareness-raising activities on the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Moldova" raised the awareness of citizens and the interest of the public officials on the ratification of the Istanbul Convention following the conference celebrating its 10th anniversary. A total of 183 participants joined online and around 3 300 people were reached through social media and live web streaming.
  - In the framework of the project "Combating violence against children in the Republic of Moldova" a broad awareness campaign was organised regarding child sexual exploitation or abuse in the Republic of Moldova. The campaign covered multiple communication channels, including television, social media and advertising.
  - The project "Improving electoral practice in the Republic of Moldova" contributed to raising the awareness of young voters of the importance of voting. Two webinars based on the Council's toolkit for electoral management bodies on Awareness Raising with Young People were organised in cooperation with the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training (CCET) and the Youth Council of Moldova. The CCET training materials were also revised by the Organisation's experts towards members of the public in promoting need of active participation of different groups of population with special needs in election day.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- ODGP will continue promoting modern, relevant and sustainable capacity building methodologies, including the use of the IT technologies, train-the-trainers programmes, coaching and on-the-job development. - ODGP will continue working with the MAE's to ensure budget absorption and reallocation of funds according to circumstances and the needs of the beneficiaries.	**Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Action Plan**	- **Council of Europe office in Chisinau** - **ODGP** - **MAE's**

Evaluation recommendations on the Action Plan and its projects cost management and efficiency:

- CoE should reassess whether project goals have been set realistically in light of the political environment and other external factors and, based on this, take the available budgetary resources into consideration. (p. 33)

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
- Programme management and co-ordination - Project management - Financial management	3

Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept

Management response

- Results-based monitoring and reporting are fundamental aspects of the Council of Europe technical co-operation. They are based on measuring progress in achieving the expected outcomes against indicators and targets, taking into account the context of the project implementation. The internal monitoring and reporting are ensured by ODGP and MAEs and it includes analysis of the external factors which influence implementation of the Action Plans. This is carried out on the basis of the information collected and submitted by project teams. The information is collected in the PMM IT Tool. This information accessible to the staff in both Headquarters and Council of Europe External Office.
- Steering committees of projects implemented in the framework of the Action Plan and of the Action Plan itself are organised in order to assess project and Action Plan implementation and to revise work plans and budgets of the projects.
- ODGP holds country team meetings where various Action Plan related subjects are discussed. Among them are the allocation of funds for new project proposals and reallocation of funds that were not used given circumstances related to the political environment or of other factors that influence the project implementation.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- ODGP will continue working with the MAE's to ensure budget absorption and reallocation of funds according to circumstances and the needs of the beneficiaries. - Country team meetings - Steering committee of the Action Plan	- **Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Action**	- **Council of Europe office in Chisinau** - **ODGP** - **Project teams**

- Steering committees of individual projects in the framework of the Action Plan	**Plan, not less than twice a year**	

Evaluation recommendations on gender mainstreaming:
- CoE should continue its efforts to facilitate gender mainstreaming through the recently established gender focal point in Chisinau Office. This cross-cutting responsibility could e.g. foster the thematic exchange between the project officers; or the presentation of the gender mainstreaming of individual projects within the framework of team meetings e.g. once a month for rotating projects. (p. 35) - CoE should reconsider how contributions to gender equality can be integrated at the level of project objectives in addition to the level of analysis and activities (via mainstreaming). Results of gender mainstreaming activities will be monitored more systematically if they correspond to project objectives and indicators. (p.35)

Recommendations to:	**Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):**
- Programme management and co-ordination - Project implementation/management	3

Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Partially Accept

Management response
Gender equality is one of the priorities of the Council of Europe and gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures is one of the six strategic objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023. The Council of Europe Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit for Co-operation Projects offers practical guidance on the implementation of a gender dimension in co-operation activities within the Organisation as well as by national partners and other stakeholders. Toolkit operationalises the Strategy in a concrete way on how to mainstream gender in co-operation activities and is also supported by training based on the Toolkit offered to the field offices. The staff of the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau improved their skills in mainstreaming gender in December 2020. Action aimed at ensuring a gender-sensitive approach in the implementation of the Action Plan included constant efforts towards: - providing and analysing gender disaggregated data and related information to enable the project teams to see the need for gender mainstreaming - activities, and adjusting the project accordingly by integrating better the gender perspective;

- gender-balanced composition of implementation teams;
- gender balance in the selection of participants in project activities;
- integrating gender perspective into the content of project outputs and activities, such research and training;
- gender-sensitive communication on projects. In this regard, a Gender sensitive communication checklist was developed to assist project staff and gender-sensitive communication guidance has been translated into Romanian;
- inclusion of gender issues in reporting. In this regard specific reporting guidelines has been developed to enhance the reporting. This includes guiding questions and check-lists for both short-term and annual reporting as well as a step-by-step guide on how to improve reporting on gender balance.

Prior to and during project implementation, project teams can rely on the expertise of the gender mainstreaming advisor based in the Council of Europe Office in Kyiv covering the Eastern Partnership region. The Advisor ensures that gender is mainstreamed in the project not only by consistently reviewing project proposals, descriptions of actions as well as logframes and reports (inception, progress and final reports), but also by promoting usage of tools such as gender analysis and gender impact assessments, and subsequently advises on implementing relevant recommendations to further integrate the gender dimension. The GMT advisor contributes to further developing tools and mechanisms aimed at this purpose and to further build the capacities of Council of Europe project staff in the region to further facilitate a gender-sensitive approach in projects.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- The Gender Mainstreaming Advisor will provide ad hoc training, workshops or other support for the project teams on specific aspects or themes in gender mainstreaming. - ODGP will continue monitoring of the consistent application of gender mainstreaming at all stages of AP and project implementation; - Achievements in gender mainstreaming to be better evidenced, guidelines for reporting will continue to be provided in order to further highlight the need to report on the initiatives mainstreaming gender; - Based on the guidelines, project teams to better report on how they mainstream gender in their activities; - The Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 includes a section on gender mainstreaming in technical co-operation, that will also be reflected in all projects implemented in the framework of the Action Plan.	- **Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Action Plan,**	- **Council of Europe office in Chisinau** - **The Gender Mainstreaming Advisor** - **ODGP** - **MAE's**

Evaluation recommendation on the human rights approach:
- CoE to continue standard practice of following a participatory approach to keep the sound and trustful working relationship the CoE Office has established with all relevant stakeholders. (p. 31)

Recommendation to:	**Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):**
- Programme management and co-ordination - Project implementation/management	2

Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept

Management response
The Council of Europe will continue to apply a human rights approach at all levels and stages of its activities based on four principles participation and inclusion, including engagement with civil society; equality and non-discrimination; accountability; transparency; and access to information. Council of Europe, through the steering committee meetings of individual projects and of the Action Plan ensures the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the assessment of the progress of our projects, of the changes that are required and of future actions.

Planned Actions	**Target Date for Action**	**Entity Responsible for Action**
- ODGP will continue promoting the Human Rights Approach throughout the implementation period of projects, during the validation of project proposals and reports.	- **Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Action Plan,**	- **Council of Europe office in Chisinau**

Evaluation recommendations on visibility:
- CoE should continue its efforts to develop and strengthen the AP and project communications strategies in order to focus on more strategic messaging in addition to promoting its visibility. To this end, a form of standardised reporting could be introduced that compiles some key figures on users of the various communication tools as well as highlights and opportunities. The reporting should be designed as a practical working tool to promote the further development of visibility. (p. 35)

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
- Programme management and co-ordination - Project management	2

Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept

Management response
- The reporting template already includes a component on the visibility of the project and of the Council of Europe. Project managers are encouraged to describe the ways in which the visibility of the actions, of the Organisation and of the donor was insured. During the reporting period project managers receive feedback on the application of the guidelines on the visibility of the projects and make changes when the information on communication is insufficient.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- Continued support and feedback to project managers on applying the Communication Plan Guidelines.	- **Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Action Plan**	- **ODGP** - **Project managers**