



“Support to Council of Europe’s Project on child-friendly justice”: End-of-project assessment

Final Evaluation Report by Ecorys

Warsaw, 30 June 2026

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Disclaimer

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List of abbreviations

CDCJ	European Committee on Legal Co-operation
CDENF	Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child
CEPEJ	European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice
CFJ	Child-friendly justice
CoE	Council of Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DCI Belgium	Defence for Children International
DG JUST	Directorate General for Justice and Consumers
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HELP	Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals Programme
HRA	Human Rights Approach
KII	Key Informant Interview
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Train-the-Trainers
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Executive Summary

a. **This evaluation was commissioned by the Council of Europe and the European Commission to assess the implementation, results and added value of the Joint “Support to the Council of Europe’s Project on Child-friendly Justice”.**

b. This final evaluation concerns the project implemented from January 2024 to June 2026 with joint support from the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The project aimed to contribute to strengthen the protection of the rights of children in contact with the law by promoting child-friendly standards in legislation and practice. The project focused on three countries (Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia) and included three additional partner countries (Greece, Hungary, and Portugal). This evaluation is based on evidence collected up to April 2026 and should be read with the understanding that the project was still under implementation at the time of data collection.

c. Overall, the evaluation found the project to be **highly relevant and broadly effective**, particularly in strengthening professional capacity and promoting a more child-centred approach in justice systems. Stakeholders across focus and partner countries described the project as timely and aligned with European standards and national reform priorities.

d. The evaluation also finds that the project generated **clear added value** by translating Council of Europe child-friendly justice standards into practical tools and providing national-level capacity-building support.

e. Evaluation evidence indicates that the development and piloting of the [Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool](#) were among the project’s most important and widely **valued outputs**. The tool was primarily valued for its role in supporting structured reflection and dialogue at the national level, rather than as a standalone driver of reform.

f. The evaluation also found that the project’s **capacity-building activities** were effective, particularly the multidisciplinary Train-the-Trainers (ToT) sessions based on the [Council of Europe Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals \(HELP\) course](#). Evidence from stakeholder feedback and training-related data suggests that sessions enhanced participants’ knowledge, confidence, and ability to apply child-friendly justice principles in real-life cases. Evidence of changes beyond immediate learning outcomes, such as sustained changes in professional practice, varies across countries and remains emerging.

g. The project also made a visible effort to **engage children and young people**, particularly through awareness-raising activities and creative solutions such as films and comics. Many children described these experiences as meaningful and empowering during consultations conducted as part of the evaluation. In selected cases, stakeholder interviews suggest that children’s contributions were taken into account in subsequent institutional reflections. At the same time, the evaluation revealed that children’s participation could have been stronger if it had been planned more precisely from the outset of the project. Children were not always sure how their input influenced decisions or reforms, which sometimes led to frustration. This finding highlights a broader implementation challenge rather than a shortcoming of participation as a principle.

h. In terms of impact, the project **contributed to ongoing national reform processes**, particularly in Slovenia and Poland, where its recommendations informed legislative and institutional discussions. In Belgium, the impact was stronger at the level of professional practice than at the level of formal reforms. Overall, the project worked as a catalyst and enabler - strengthening existing initiatives, legitimising reforms, and creating conditions for long-term change - rather than as a standalone driver of systemic transformation.

i. The project was managed **with a generally efficient use of available resources**, despite its ambitious scope and limited human resources. Available evidence suggests that most activities were implemented broadly as planned, and stakeholders generally assessed coordination positively. However, tight timelines, administrative delays, and limited availability of some stakeholder groups constrained implementation in certain areas, particularly sustained engagement with parents and caregivers.

j. The **sustainability** of the project's results appears promising but uneven. The tools and training materials developed under the project are likely to remain useful, especially when embedded in institutional structures such as training systems, policy processes, or professional networks. However, sustaining changes in professional practice, inter-agency co-operation, training systems and policy processes will require structured follow-up, continued institutional ownership, dedicated resources and political commitment across countries.

k. Based on these findings, the evaluation identifies **key lessons and formulates recommendations**. Key lessons relate to early planning for meaningful child participation, the effectiveness of multidisciplinary experiential training, and the need for realistic timelines and follow-up. Priority recommendations focus on structured post-project follow-up and tracking of uptake, embedding outputs and the ToT programme into regular systems, strengthening the inclusion of vulnerable groups, developing a dedicated approach for parents/guardians, and improving the dissemination and accessibility of outputs.

1 Introduction

1. This evaluation report was prepared under a contract between the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe and Ecorys for an independent assessment entitled "Support to the Council of Europe's project on child-friendly justice: Baseline and Final Evaluation" (under framework contract No. 2021/FC/01, Lot 1). The overall contract encompasses two linked assignments: a baseline assessment and an end-of-project evaluation. The end-of-project evaluation was initiated in January 2026 and will be finalised in May 2026. This report is the second and final deliverable for the end-of-project evaluation assignment.

1.1 Purpose, scope and intended use and users of the evaluation

2. The main purpose of the final evaluation is to provide an independent assessment of the child-friendly justice project's performance and results upon completion of its implementation. Furthermore, the evaluation aims to identify lessons learnt, good practices and areas for improvement, and to assess the Project's added value and potential for sustainability and follow-up. The findings are intended to support accountability towards the European Commission (DG JUST) and the Council of Europe, by measuring progress through a direct comparison between the final outcomes and the baseline situation captured at the project's inception. The final evaluation was conducted between January and May 2026 and constitutes an independent, external assessment intended to inform accountability, learning and follow-up at both institutional and programme levels.

3. The final evaluation systematically uses the findings of the **Baseline Assessment Report** as the primary reference point against which all observed changes were assessed. The Baseline Assessment was conducted between March and May 2024 and served as an internal diagnostic reference for tracking changes over time.

4. The objectives of the end-of-project evaluation are to examine the project against several evaluation criteria: relevance, added value, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The evaluation applies six criteria that, together, reflect the Project's intervention logic, examining the appropriateness of its design, the delivery and uptake of outputs, and its contribution to longer-term change.

- assess the extent to which the project has achieved its intended objectives and results, based on the indicators and deliverables defined in the project documentation;
- evaluate the efficiency of the Project's management, coordination, monitoring and reporting arrangements;
- assess the sustainability of project outputs and the likelihood that benefits will be maintained beyond the Project's lifetime;
- estimate the extent to which project outputs are likely to generate longer-term impact at national and local levels;
- compare the results and the impact with the findings of the baseline assessment;
- identify good practices, lessons learnt and remaining challenges; and
- formulate evidence-based recommendations to inform future interventions and support improved sustainability and follow-up.

5. The end-of-project evaluation covers the project implementation period from 1 January 2024 to 30 June 2026. As the report was prepared before the formal end of the project, the findings are based on evidence available up to the evaluation cut-off date (May 2026) and should be read in light of this limitation.

6. Geographically, the end-of-project evaluation covers three focus countries - Belgium, Poland and Slovenia - and three partner countries - Greece, Hungary and Portugal - involved in the joint European Union-Council of Europe project.

7. The primary users of the evaluation are the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST), as the co-funder of the Project, and the Council of Europe. The evaluation findings are intended to support evidence-based decision-making, accountability, and learning at the institutional and programme levels. Secondary users include national authorities and other stakeholders in focus and partner countries,

professionals working with and for children in contact with the law, as well as children and young people participating in the child-friendly justice project and their parents or legal guardians.

1.2 Description of the intervention

8. The intervention was jointly developed and implemented by the Council of Europe and the European Union to strengthen the protection of children's rights in contact with the law across Europe. It responds to needs identified in EU- and Council of Europe-level strategies and studies, notably the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice, and evidence produced by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and persistent gaps in legal and policy frameworks, professional capacities, awareness, coordination among actors, and meaningful child participation in justice-related processes.

9. The intervention was designed as a comprehensive, multi-level initiative combining policy development, capacity building, and awareness-raising to address the structural and institutional dimensions of child-friendly justice.

10. The intervention was structured around three interlinked components:

- ▷ Policy and legal reform;
- ▷ Capacity building;
- ▷ Awareness raising and child participation.

11. Together, these components were intended to translate child-friendly justice standards into practical tools and professional practice, thereby strengthening institutional reflection, capacity, and conditions for longer-term systemic change.

1.2.1 Policy and legal reform component

12. The policy and legal reform component centred on the development and implementation of the **Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool**, designed to assess national frameworks, laws and practices against Council of Europe standards. The assessment tool was piloted and applied through self-assessment processes in the three focus countries. These assessments were supported by a baseline analysis and resulted in country-specific findings and recommendations to identify gaps and priority areas for reform. A key added value of the assessment process was the involvement of a wide range of institutions and professional profiles, fostering inter-agency and multidisciplinary dialogue.

13. In addition, assessment findings identified thematic areas that required further attention but could not be fully addressed within the intervention's original scope. As a result, a **feasibility study on diversion, alternatives to detention, restorative justice and prevention** was launched as an additional activity. This study was intended to lay the groundwork for a potential second phase of the intervention and for possible extensions of the assessment tool.

1.2.2 Capacity building component

14. The capacity-building component aimed to strengthen the knowledge, skills and awareness of professionals working with children in contact with the law. It was based on the Council of Europe Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (**HELP**) **course on Child-friendly Justice**, which served as the core training framework, reflecting a shared EU Council of Europe approach.

15. Training activities were organised in the focus countries using a Train-the-Trainers model. Participants included a diverse range of professionals, including legal practitioners, probation officers, social workers, educators, representatives from ministries (Justice, Interior, Social Affairs), and ombudsperson institutions. Training adopted a multidisciplinary approach, bringing together professionals who often had not previously worked collectively on child justice issues.

16. The sessions encouraged debate, peer exchange and reflection on practical challenges, including child participation, inter-agency coordination, gender considerations and complex contexts such as migration.

Participants were expected to act as multipliers by sharing the knowledge and materials they acquired within their institutions, supporting sustainability beyond the end of the project.

1.2.3 Awareness-raising and child participation component

17. Awareness-raising focused primarily on children in contact with the law, including those in particularly vulnerable situations. Activities were implemented in co-operation with specialised Civil Society Organisation (CSOs), notably the worldwide movement [Defence for Children International \(DCI\)](#), which relied on its existing networks to identify local partner organisations already working with vulnerable children and enjoying established relationships of trust. The selection of target groups varied by country, reflecting national contexts (e.g. migrant children in Belgium, children in different vulnerable situations in Poland and Slovenia).

18. **Child participation** was a cross-cutting principle of the intervention and was operationalised through multiple activities. Children contributed to the development of awareness-raising materials, actively participated in sessions, and engaged in a high-level roundtable in Strasbourg in line with the principles and standards described in the CoE Child Safeguarding Standards. With support from DCI, children prepared key messages and questions based on assessment recommendations and engaged in dialogue with representatives of member states and CoE bodies.

19. The intervention also aimed to pilot awareness-raising activities targeting **parents and guardians**. Although foreseen in the original design, this component proved difficult to implement due to challenges in identifying and engaging this group and the limited existing networks. DCI was eventually contracted to conduct pilot awareness raising sessions with parents and guardians in Belgium during an extended implementation period, which limited the scope of its assessment in the final evaluation.

1.2.4 Project implementation arrangements and contextual factors

20. Project implementation relied on close co-operation between the CoE, the EC, national authorities, focal points within ministries, CSOs, and contracted international and national experts engaged to deliver specific tasks and outputs. While changes in national focal points occurred in some countries due to political or administrative shifts, these did not significantly affect implementation.

21. Project governance was supported by a Steering Committee, composed of representatives of the three focus countries (Belgium, Poland and Slovenia), partner countries (Greece, Hungary and Portugal), the Council of Europe, the European Commission (DG JUST) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The Steering Committee provided strategic guidance, monitored overall progress and supported coordination between key institutional stakeholders during project implementation.

1.3 Baseline reference point

22. The May 2024 Baseline Assessment serves as the foundational diagnostic for the child-friendly justice project across Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia. By systematically mapping the pre-intervention landscape against standard evaluation criteria, it established the primary empirical benchmarks necessary for measuring subsequent progress and determining the project's plausible contribution to systemic change.

23. **Relevance and comparative advantage:** The baseline confirmed robust programmatic alignment with acute, documented systemic deficits. Specifically, it highlighted deeply fragmented juridical frameworks, critical shortages of specialised personnel, and significant access barriers for vulnerable demographics (including Roma, migrant, disabled, and LGBTI youth). The intervention's added value was firmly anchored in the Council of Europe's normative leverage and the strategic, innovative nature of the proposed self-assessment tool.

24. **Operational effectiveness and efficiency risks:** While the project architecture was deemed viable, the baseline cautioned that its scope was highly ambitious relative to its constraints. Key operational vulnerabilities included restrictive implementation timelines, limited human resourcing, and localised political sensitivities. Furthermore, early diagnostic data flagged gaps in the practical operationalisation of cross-

cutting themes (namely, direct child participation and gender mainstreaming), suboptimal inter-agency coordination, and a reliance on not well-defined key performance indicators.

25. **Methodological limitations on impact and sustainability:** Stakeholder projections regarding systemic impact were cautiously optimistic. However, the baseline identified a critical methodological constraint: the historical absence of comprehensive national data sets inherently limited rigorous impact attribution during the final evaluation. Furthermore, while initial "soft" enablers were present (e.g., initial political buy-in, knowledge products), the assessment warned that longitudinal sustainability remains highly exposed to institutional volatility. Securing lasting impact requires a deliberate pivot toward institutionalised "hard mechanisms," such as statutory integration, binding protocols, and mandatory training frameworks.

26. **In synthesis, the baseline rigorously mapped the structural constraints and initial operational capabilities, thereby defining the methodological boundaries and setting realistic evaluative expectations for this final assessment.** Recommendations from the baseline assessment are added in the Annex 5.1. The evaluation draws on project documentation, the Baseline Assessment Report, and primary data collected through interviews, surveys and consultations with children and young people.

2 Methodology

27. This section summarises the evaluation's overall approach, evaluation criteria, data collection and analysis methods, and key methodological limitations.

2.1 Evaluation Criteria and Questions

28. The evaluation assessed the project against six evaluation criteria, as operationalised in the Evaluation Matrix. Each criterion corresponds to a set of evaluation questions that define what the evaluation sought to examine and explain:

- **Relevance** examined the extent to which the project's objectives and design responded to the needs, priorities and lived experiences of children in contact with the law and their parents or guardians, while considering age, gender and specific vulnerabilities. It also assessed the alignment of the project with national and local child-friendly justice priorities and policy frameworks in the focus countries.
- **Added value** was assessed by comparing the project's comparative advantage with other European, national, or local child-friendly justice initiatives. It examined the specific contribution of the Council of Europe's involvement and EU-level co-operation, as well as any shortcomings or missed opportunities compared to other implementers.
- **Effectiveness** was analysed to determine the extent to which the project achieved its intended objectives and results. This included assessing observable changes at individual, institutional, or system levels; differences across countries and stakeholder groups; and the degree to which achieved results could plausibly be attributed to the project. Attention was paid to the contribution of the human rights-based and gender-mainstreaming approaches to project outcomes.
- **Efficiency** examined how well financial, human and time resources were used to deliver results. It assessed whether resources and timelines were adequate, whether activities and outputs were delivered as planned, and whether results were achieved with an appropriate balance between quality, timeliness and cost.
- **Impact** focused on the project's higher-level effects, both intended and unintended. It examined evidence of structural or systemic change, such as policy influence or institutional practice shifts, and identified what worked well, what did not, and why, drawing lessons for future interventions.
- **Sustainability** assessed the likelihood that the project's benefits and results will be maintained beyond the project's duration. It examined institutional ownership, integration into policies and practices, and the conditions and actions required by key stakeholders to sustain results over time.

29. The full Evaluation Matrix, detailing indicators, data sources and analytical methods, is provided in Annex 5.2.

2.2 Evaluation Approach

30. The evaluation adopted a **mixed-methods approach**, with a predominance of qualitative analysis, complemented by available quantitative data. The approach combined:

- **Primary data collection**, notably key informant interviews (KIIs), surveys, and focus group discussions (FGDs);
- **Secondary data collection** through desk research.

31. A **human rights-based and gender-responsive approach** was applied throughout the evaluation. This included:

- ▷ Treating children as rights-holders and states and institutions as duty-bearers;
- ▷ Using international human rights standards as an analytical reference;
- ▷ Assessing participation of rights-holders in project design and implementation;

► Ensuring sensitivity to intersectionality (e.g. age, gender, disability, ethnicity).

32. The detailed methodological design is outlined in the Inception Report.

2.3 Evaluation Process and Data Collection

2.3.1 Desk Research

33. Secondary data collection consisted of a review of project documentation and relevant contextual materials. The list of documents reviewed is provided in **Annex 5.4**.

2.3.2 Key Informant Interviews and Survey

34. Primary qualitative data collection focused on in-depth KIIs with project stakeholders. In total, **22 stakeholders** were interviewed across different stakeholder groups.

35. Most interviewees (excluding professionals participating only in training activities) were also invited to complete a brief online survey (LimeSurvey). **24 survey responses** were received and analysed, including responses from individuals who completed the survey but were unable to participate in interviews.

36. A breakdown of interviewees and survey respondents by stakeholder group is provided in **Annex 5.5**.

2.3.3 Focus Group Discussions with Children

37. FGDs were conducted with children involved in the project, in collaboration with DCI Belgium. In total, **10 children and young people** (aged 12–23) from Poland and Belgium participated, including girls and boys.

38. The FGDs were designed and conducted in line with child-friendly research principles and international child rights standards.

2.4 Data Analysis

39. The evaluation integrated qualitative and quantitative data to ensure systematic triangulation across sources and methods.

2.4.1 Qualitative Analysis

40. Qualitative data from KIIs, FGDs and desk research formed the core of the analysis and were analysed using:

- **Thematic analysis**, to identify recurring patterns and divergent views related to project relevance, effectiveness and outcomes;
- **Comparative analysis**, to assess differences in implementation and results across focus countries (e.g. Poland, Belgium, Slovenia);
- **Basic contribution analysis**, using the project's Theory of Change (ToC) to build a plausible performance story and assess the project's contribution to observed changes, while acknowledging external influencing factors.

41. A gender-sensitive and human rights-based analytical lens was applied, particularly to EQs related to inclusion, safeguarding, and participation. Data were disaggregated where possible.

2.4.2 Quantitative Analysis

42. Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics to complement and contextualise the qualitative findings.

2.4.3 Data Triangulation and Validation

43. To enhance robustness and credibility, findings were triangulated across:

- Data sources (documents, interviews, FGDs, surveys),
- Data collection methods,

■ Perspectives of different stakeholder groups.

44. The evaluation team worked collaboratively to critically review emerging findings and ensure internal consistency and analytical rigour.

2.5 Limitations

45. This evaluation was designed to generate robust, triangulated findings; however, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results.

46. **Timing of the evaluation.** The evaluation was conducted before the formal end of the project and within a relatively short timeframe. As a result, data collection and analysis overlapped, and activities implemented after the evaluation cut-off date could not be fully assessed. This limits the assessment of longer-term outcomes and sustainability.

47. *Mitigation:* The evaluation team combined desk research with primary data collection and applied conservative, contribution-based judgements grounded in available evidence.

48. **Predominantly qualitative methodology.** The evaluation relied primarily on qualitative methods, complemented by a stakeholder survey. While this approach enabled an in-depth understanding of processes, perceptions and contextual factors, it does not allow for causal attribution of observed changes to the project. Findings on impact should therefore be interpreted as evidence of plausible contribution rather than direct causality.

49. *Mitigation:* Systematic triangulation across interviews, survey data, documents, and consultations with children was applied, and claims were cautiously framed.

50. **Children's consultations were uneven across countries.** Consultations with children and young people were conducted in Poland and Belgium, but no comparable consultations were carried out in Slovenia. In addition, some participants were aged 18 or above. As a result, evidence from child consultations reflects the experiences and perspectives of participating children and young people, rather than those of all children involved in the project or across all focus countries.

51. *Mitigation:* To address this gap, the evaluation complemented children's perspectives with interviews with professionals working closely with children. Findings related to children's experiences are therefore interpreted as illustrative rather than representative.

52. **Limited assessment of the parents' and guardians' component.** Activities targeting parents and guardians were delayed, redesigned or only partially implemented during the evaluation period. Consequently, this component could not be fully assessed, and conclusions regarding its effectiveness and sustainability are necessarily limited.

53. *Mitigation:* The evaluation explicitly documents this limitation and focuses on assessing the design intent, implementation challenges, and early indications, rather than outcomes.

54. **Uneven coverage of countries and stakeholder groups.** While the evaluation sought to include perspectives from all focus and partner countries, access to respondents varied. Evidence is stronger for focus countries than for partner countries, and for some stakeholder groups more than others. In particular, no interviews were conducted with Greek stakeholders, despite repeated attempts to schedule them.

55. *Mitigation:* The evaluation team triangulated available evidence and clearly distinguished between findings supported by stronger evidence and those that were more tentative.

56. **Stakeholder availability.** Limited availability of some stakeholders during the data-collection period constrained the depth of evidence in certain areas.

57. *Mitigation:* This was addressed through flexible scheduling, use of a complementary survey, and careful differentiation between documented results, stakeholder perceptions and emerging findings.

3 Findings

58. This chapter presents the findings of the final evaluation, structured around the main evaluation criteria and questions. It examines how the project was designed and implemented, the results achieved, and the factors that influenced performance across different contexts.

59. The findings are organised thematically, moving from an assessment of relevance and added value to effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Each subsection synthesises evidence from multiple sources, including a desk review of project documentation, key informant interviews, survey data, and consultations with children and young people, to provide a balanced and triangulated assessment.

60. Quantitative survey results are used to illustrate overall patterns in stakeholder perceptions and to provide a high-level snapshot of how the project was assessed across key dimensions. These data are not presented as standalone evidence but are interpreted alongside qualitative findings from interviews and document analysis.

61. Throughout this chapter, findings distinguish between outputs, immediate outcomes, and emerging signs of longer-term change, and indicate where the evidence is stronger or more tentative. Differences across countries and stakeholder groups are highlighted where relevant.

62. As an entry point to the findings, the evaluation first presents a consolidated overview of stakeholder perceptions of the Project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. This overview provides contextual orientation for the more detailed qualitative analysis that follows and should be read in conjunction with interview evidence, desk research and consultations with children.

63. In a survey conducted among 24 interviewed stakeholders (excluding specialists who participated solely in the Train-the-trainers (ToT) programme), all four dimensions received ratings significantly above 4, indicating a very positive overall perception of the project.

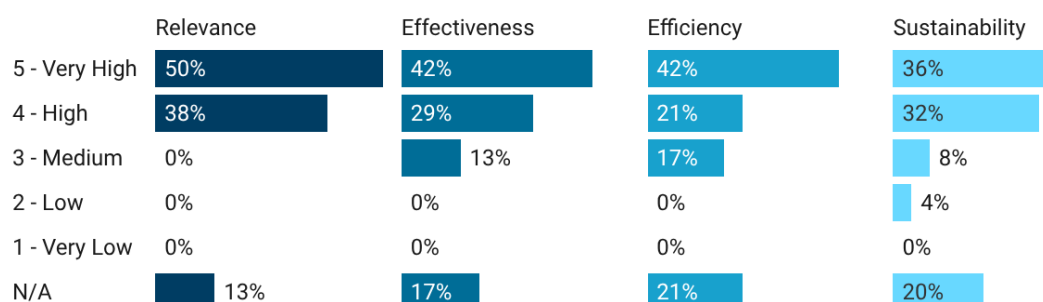
Figure 1. Mean score of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project by stakeholders who submitted the pre-interview survey on a scale from 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Very High, N=24)



Source: Ecorys

64. Stakeholders consistently rated project relevance higher than operational dimensions, a common and reliable pattern in well-designed projects in this area. Efficiency and Effectiveness received a small number of "3 – Medium" responses, indicating more room for improvement. Confidence in sustainability is generally good, but weaker than relevance or effectiveness.

Figure 2. Assessment of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project by stakeholders who submitted the pre-interview survey (N=24)



Source: Ecorys

65. Table 1 summarises **the evaluation team's triangulated judgements across all criteria** and should be read alongside stakeholder perception figures (Figures 1–2). **Overall judgements are strongest for relevance, effectiveness (immediate outcomes) and efficiency, while conclusions on impact are more cautious and reflect emerging, context-dependent change. Sustainability appears promising for tools and training materials but remains conditional for broader changes that require follow-up and institutional ownership.**

Table 1. Summary of evaluation findings by criterion

Evaluation criterion	Overall judgement	Key evidence used (illustrative)	Strength of evidence
Relevance	Very high	Strong stakeholder alignment with needs/reform priorities; consistent survey pattern and qualitative corroboration	High
Added value	High	Clear comparative advantage in translating standards into practical tools; convening power and legitimacy highlighted across evidence	Medium–High
Effectiveness	Moderate to high	Strongest for immediate outcomes (knowledge/confidence); emerging changes in practice vary by country; weaker areas: parents/guardians and some vulnerable groups	High (immediate outcomes) / Medium (emerging practice change)
Efficiency	Generally high, with constraints	Activities delivered broadly as planned; some time/coordination constraints reported; resource–scope pressure acknowledged	Medium–High
Impact	Emerging; contribution is plausible but indirect	Strongest evidence for professional reflection, diagnostic capacity, and inter-agency dialogue; evidence of formal policy/legislative change more limited and emerging	Medium (professional/institutional) / Low–Medium (formal reforms)
Sustainability	Promising but uneven	Tools/materials likely to endure if embedded; broader sustainability conditional on follow-up, ownership, and resources	Medium

Source: Ecorys

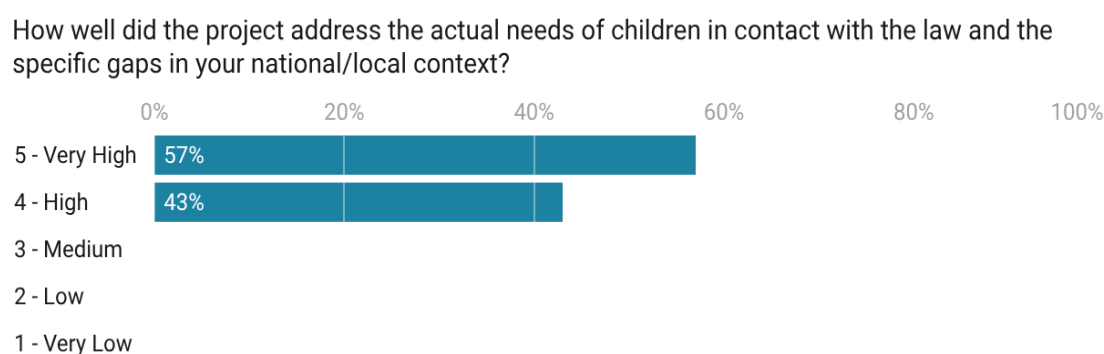
3.1 Relevance

66. This section examines whether the Project's design and objectives were appropriate in light of the needs and priorities identified at baseline and during implementation. The analysis focuses on alignment with children's needs, national child-friendly justice contexts and identified systemic gaps, rather than on achieved results.

3.1.1 Responsiveness of the Project's objectives and design to the needs and priorities of children and their parents / guardians

67. **The survey findings indicate a very strong perceived relevance of the project.** A majority of respondents (57%) rated the project's ability to address the actual needs of children in contact with the law as very high, while the remaining 43% rated it as high. Notably, no respondents selected medium, low, or very low ratings. Overall, this suggests a positive assessment, with stakeholders considering the project highly relevant in addressing identified needs and gaps at national and local levels.

Figure 3. Stakeholders' assessment of the relevance of the project to the needs of children in contact with the law (N=21; N/A responses excluded)



Source: Ecorys

3.1.2 Alignment with children's needs and evidence from consultations

68. **A large majority of stakeholders emphasised that the project was designed and implemented with a clear understanding of children's needs and priorities,** primarily through its holistic and inclusive approach. Rather than targeting a single group, the project accounted for children in different roles within justice systems, including victims, witnesses and suspects. As one stakeholder noted, the child-friendly justice approach "(...) *applies the justice principles universally, independent of their particular vulnerabilities, independent whether we are talking about victims, witnesses, suspects, accused persons, parties, proceedings, and also independent from civil, criminal, administrative proceedings*" (KII08). This universal application was seen as directly addressing the need for all children to receive appropriate and consistent treatment. The same interviewee added that this approach differs from other well-established initiatives, such as the Barnahus model in Slovenia and Poland, which, while effective, tend to focus on specific groups (for example, child victims of sexual abuse).

69. **The needs and priorities of children were also reflected in the project's outputs.** Stakeholders explained that awareness-raising materials developed with the direct involvement of children ensured that children's perspectives were incorporated into both the content and the presentation. In addition, training sessions for professionals incorporated practical exercises in which participants were asked to assume the role of children in justice processes (KII01, KII11, KII12, KII18, KII22). This approach helped make the training more practical and relatable, **encouraging professionals to view procedures and interactions through a child's eyes and better understand their experiences.** A recurring argument made by respondents was that the project did not apply a "one-size-fits-all" approach but adapted to specific national contexts and groups of children (KII01, KII08, KII11, KII12). For example, in Belgium, the design prioritised migrant children and their

interaction with the justice system, reflecting concerns raised by national authorities about juvenile delinquency among children with a migrant background. On the other hand, in Slovenia, the focus shifted to children involved in civil proceedings, particularly in high-conflict family cases, and in Poland to systemic gaps in juvenile justice legislation (KII03, KII13, KII14, KII15).

70. Although **children were actively involved in producing content, the final format and dissemination of that content did not always match how children expected their contributions to be used** (KII11, KII12). A concrete example of this case was noted in Belgium. Indeed, children invested significant time producing videos based on their experiences with the justice system, but these were ultimately made available only through a relatively inaccessible format on the project website, requiring users to download files rather than view them directly. This created a disconnect between children's expectations (who assumed wide visibility and impact) and the actual reach of their work, leading to disappointment and raising questions about whether the design fully considered how children measure usefulness and impact (KII11, KII12). While children contributed substantively to awareness-raising outputs, in some cases the final format and dissemination pathways limited accessibility and reach (e.g., outputs requiring downloads rather than direct viewing), which reduced perceived visibility and contributed to frustration among participating children. **This finding informs Recommendation 4 on improving dissemination, visibility and accessibility of outputs.**

71. At the same time, several interviewees stressed that **children's needs and priorities were also ensured through the iteration phase during implementation**. A concrete example is the expansion of child participation beyond initial plans (KII01). While early project design did not foresee systematic involvement of children in all components, this was strengthened following baseline recommendations, leading to direct engagement of children in assessment processes and consultations. An activity that involved children was a roundtable session during which they shared experiences of poor treatment in detention. These testimonies prompted a Council of Europe monitoring body to conduct a follow-up and to issue concrete recommendations to national authorities (KII01).

72. However, **responsiveness to the needs of parents and guardians was more limited and emerged as a clear gap in the design and implementation**. Although awareness-raising for this group was planned, interviewees consistently reported that the project struggled to operationalise it (KII01, KII12). In fact, parents of children in contact with the law are often difficult to identify and engage, due to stigma or weak family ties. As a result, activities targeting parents were delayed and eventually reframed as pilot actions during the project extension. Some interviewees also noted that the design underestimated the level of preparation required to involve parents (KII11, KII12).

3.1.3 Inclusion of gender-, disability- and age-sensitive measures

73. Project documentation and interview findings show that **the project was grounded in international and European child rights standards**, which emphasise that all children in contact with the justice system (regardless of their background or status) should benefit from adapted procedures and protections. This includes children in migration situations, those in conflict with the law, victims, witnesses, and children in family or administrative proceedings (Belgium Final Report, DoA).

74. However, evidence suggests that, while these vulnerable groups were recognised in principle, their specific needs were not always differentiated or translated into tailored, concrete, and specific measures. Several interviewees mentioned that some children's vulnerabilities remained underexplored in practice, including children with mental health or psychosocial vulnerabilities (KII09). This finding informs Recommendation 3 on targeted inclusion and tailored 'micro' trainings for specific vulnerable groups. Similarly, survey data and interviews point to gaps in the coverage of certain groups, notably children with disabilities, unaccompanied or newly arrived migrant children, and those in institutional care or detention settings, whose specific needs were not always addressed in a systematic way (Survey). Other groups (such as children from low socio-economic backgrounds, those in care, Roma children and LGBTI children) were also mentioned as receiving less attention (KII08, Survey). As one interviewee noted, although the project attempted to cover the diversity of children's situations, there is a clear need for more targeted approaches, such as *"micro-trainings or capsule trainings"* focusing on specific groups and contexts, for example, children as witnesses or children with cognitive impairments (KII18).

3.1.4 Responsiveness of the project's objectives and design to the needs and priorities of focus countries at the national and local levels

Alignment with national strategies

75. Overall, the project documentation and interview findings suggest **strong alignment between the Council of Europe initiative and the national strategies of the focus countries.**

76. In Poland, the project aligned with an ongoing reform in juvenile justice and the existing legal framework, but its added value lay in exposing concrete gaps between law and practice. The Polish country assessment report shows that the country already has an extensive legal basis for child-friendly justice, including constitutional guarantees (Article 72), the [2022 Act on the Support and Rehabilitation of Minors, and provisions across civil, criminal and migration law](#). However, the Council of Europe project addressed areas where these laws are not effectively implemented. For example, although legislation requires that children receive information in a way they understand, the assessment found that in practice, communication largely depends on the individual professional, with no consistent standards or training in place. The project's training component responded to this by focusing on concrete situations professionals face, such as how to communicate with a child suspect or witness, and by including non-legal actors like social workers and educators, reflecting the multidisciplinary approach already envisaged in Polish law but not fully operationalised (Poland ToT Report, KII06, KII07, KII22).

77. In Slovenia, the project was embedded in an active reform and connected to specific national mechanisms and policy initiatives. Slovenian law (e.g., the [Criminal Procedure Act](#) or the [Family Code](#) strongly emphasises the "best interests of the child" across criminal, civil and administrative proceedings, and this is operationalised in concrete structures such as the Children's House (Barnahus-type model), where children are heard in a protected and adapted environment. The Council of Europe project aligned with this by focusing its assessment on the same three areas in which Slovenian law identifies key points of contact with the justice system: criminal proceedings, family law, and asylum procedures. It also reinforced priorities already present in national policy documents, such as the Programme for Children 2020–2025, which calls for more child-friendly procedures (Slovenia Assessment Report, Survey).

78. In Belgium, the project aligned with a well-developed but fragmented system by focusing on practical implementation issues within an already established legal framework. Belgian law (e.g. the [Youth Protection Act](#) or the [Flemish Delinquency Decree](#)) already reflects child-friendly justice principles, but the project examined how these principles are applied across different linguistic and institutional contexts. A concrete example is the focus on children's right to be heard and to participate meaningfully in proceedings. While this is formally guaranteed, the project identified that professionals do not always engage with children's perspectives in practice (KII12, Survey).

Adaptation to local contexts

79. Concerning the needs and priorities of focus countries, **the project demonstrated strong capacity to adapt to diverse national contexts through its assessment-based approach** (KII01, KII03, KII08). For example, in Slovenia, the assessment identified that proceedings involving children can be lengthy, especially in civil and administrative cases, negatively affecting children's well-being and access to justice (Slovenia final report). The project addressed this problem by explicitly identifying procedural delays as a systemic issue and by promoting measures to improve efficiency. In the same country, the assessment also highlighted the lack of systematic training for professionals working with children, particularly in communication and child-friendly approaches. The project addressed this gap through a strong emphasis on capacity-building activities, including ToT.

80. In Poland, limited access to child-friendly information was identified, with children often receiving complex legal explanations that were not age- or understanding-appropriate (Poland Final Report). The project responded by promoting simplified communication tools, such as child-friendly written materials, visual aids and child-friendly versions of awareness-raising materials.

81. In more complex governance contexts, the project also considered institutional specificities that affect implementation. A clear example is Belgium, where responsibilities for justice, child protection, and social

services are divided across federal, regional, and community levels (Belgium final report, Belgium assessment report, KII11, KII12). This fragmentation leads to differences in how child-friendly justice standards are applied, including variations in procedures, available services, and even the language used in proceedings. The project explicitly recognised these challenges and highlighted the need for stronger coordination mechanisms and more harmonised approaches. In the same vein, an interviewee explained the complexity of “*standardising approaches*” across varying national contexts (KII08). The respondent added that countries like Romania have well-developed legislative frameworks but face difficulties in effective implementation, while others, like Poland, benefit from a longer history of established measures in this area.

82. Those findings underpin Lesson Learnt 5 and inform Recommendations 5 regarding the calendar and implementation planning, and 4 (targeted dissemination).

3.1.5 Relevance in relation to baseline expectations

83. **The project was broadly aligned with the needs and gaps identified at baseline.** It supported countries in identifying and reflecting on legislative and procedural gaps. The project’s assessment-based approach also helped tailor activities to different national contexts, including specific reform priorities and implementation challenges in Belgium, Poland and Slovenia. The strong focus on capacity building was relevant to the identified need to strengthen justice professionals’ ability to apply child-friendly approaches in their daily work. This included training multidisciplinary groups of professionals, which is essential given that child-friendly justice relies on coordination across sectors. In addition, the awareness-raising activities responded to the need for a broader understanding of children’s rights within justice systems.

The Council of Europe project demonstrated a strong alignment with local and national contexts, as it was tailored to reflect the specific legal, institutional, and cultural settings of participating countries. It considered the varying levels of progress made in advancing child-friendly justice, building on existing achievements while also identifying remaining gaps and areas for improvement.

84. **One area where the project design was less fully operationalised is the inclusion of specific groups of children in vulnerable situations.** While some groups were considered, others, such as Roma children, LGBTI children and children with mental or psychosocial impairments, were not addressed in a sufficiently systematic or targeted way. Similarly, the project’s relevance to parents and guardians was clear in principle, but their engagement pathways were less well defined and proved difficult to operationalise during implementation.

3.2 Added Value

85. This section assesses the project’s added value by examining whether and in what ways it contributed beyond existing European, national, or local child-friendly justice initiatives. It focuses on the Project’s comparative advantages linked to the Council of Europe’s mandate, standards-based approach and convening role, as perceived by consulted stakeholders and evidenced through project implementation.

3.2.1 Comparative advantage of the project vis-à-vis other European and national initiatives

86. This section explores the Project’s added value by examining what it contributed beyond existing European, national or local initiatives in the field of child-friendly justice. The analysis focuses on the Project’s comparative advantages, including its standards-based approach, convening power and systemic perspective, as identified through interviews, survey responses and document review.

87. The evaluation found that **stakeholders consulted perceived the project as having clear added value**, particularly compared to initiatives focused primarily on training delivery or legislative analysis. Evidence from interviews and surveys suggests that the project was valued for combining normative standards with practical implementation support, rather than introducing entirely new concepts

88. Based on the analysis, the Project’s added value was mainly associated with four interrelated dimensions:

- (1) translating standards into accessible operational tools;
- (2) applying a system-wide approach;
- (3) fostering multidisciplinary and multi-level collaboration;
- (4) providing institutional legitimacy and convening power that can complement national or CSO-led initiatives.

89. Stakeholders highlighted the project's comparative advantage in **supporting the practical application of the Council of Europe's [Child-friendly Justice Guidelines](#), notably through the development and piloting of the Child-friendly Justice Self-Assessment Tool** (Survey, KII08, KII20). Compared to other European initiatives that focus primarily on legislative analysis or awareness-raising, the project was perceived as bridging the gap between standards and practice by enabling national stakeholders to assess how child-friendly justice principles are applied in real (KII01, KII02, KII03, KII04, KII06, KII08, KII20).

90. A recurrent theme in stakeholder feedback was the Project's **holistic application of child-friendly justice principles across different procedural roles and legal contexts**. Respondents appreciated that the project addressed children as victims, witnesses, suspects or parties across civil, criminal and administrative proceedings (KII08, KII09, K13, KII14, KII15, Survey). This finding underpins Lesson Learnt 3.

91. **This approach was frequently contrasted with more specialised models**, such as Barnahus-type initiatives, **which intentionally focus on specific categories of cases or children**. Stakeholders did not frame this as a weakness of specialised models, but rather **as a difference in scope**, noting that the project complemented such initiatives by addressing systemic dimensions of child-friendly justice beyond individual service models (KII07, KII08). Another element of added value identified by stakeholders was the Project's **ability to convene professionals from multiple sectors and governance levels**. Training and assessment activities brought together judges, prosecutors, lawyers, social workers, psychologists, educators, CSOs and public officials, **often for the first time within a shared child-friendly justice framework**. This multidisciplinary engagement supported mutual understanding of roles and constraints and created professional networks that participants considered likely to persist beyond the Project, although the durability of such networks will depend on follow-up mechanisms (KII01, KII02, KII06, KII07, KII13, KII14, KII15, KII18, KII20).

92. Stakeholders also pointed to the **institutional legitimacy associated with the Council of Europe's involvement** as an important source of added value. The Project's positioning within the Council of Europe framework was perceived as lending authority to discussions on child-friendly justice and as supporting the engagement of national authorities at senior levels. The joint implementation by the Council of Europe and the European Commission was perceived as reinforcing this legitimacy, combining technical expertise with EU-level policy relevance. Interviewees noted that this co-operation enhanced visibility and coherence, although views differed on the extent of operational engagement by EU actors during implementation. This level of concrete, operational co-operation between the two institutions is rare. Stakeholders considered that this level of concrete, operational co-operation between the two institutions is not common across comparable initiatives (KII04, KII08, KII13, KII14, KII15).

93. **The early and systematic involvement of the Ministries of Justice was perceived by stakeholders as strengthening institutional accountability and sustainability**. By implementing coordination and training activities directly within Ministries of Justice or in close collaboration with them, the project provided high-level support and facilitated direct dialogue between national authorities and local actors. This institutional support was considered crucial to the project's credibility (KII18, KII22).

94. **Taken together, the evidence suggests that the Project's comparative advantage lies primarily in its ability to combine standards-based guidance with practical, system-level support and institutional convening power, rather than in the delivery of isolated tools or activities**. This finding underpins Lesson Learnt 4 and 8 and informs Recommendations 1 (embedding ToT and cascade arrangements) and 4 (institutional channels for embedding and dissemination).

3.2.2 Structural and operational constraints in comparative perspective

95. While the project demonstrated a strong comparative advantage in standard-setting and system-level implementation support, stakeholders also identified several shortcomings and missed opportunities compared to other European and international implementers of child-friendly justice initiatives. **These shortcomings were generally linked to mandate-related, structural and resource constraints, rather than to the overall relevance or rationale of the Project.**

96. Compared to some long-term CSO programmes or donor-funded initiatives with sustained in-country presence, the project had **limited capacity for structured follow-up and for institutionalising results**. As the Council of Europe's work is largely donor-funded, this reflects a broader operational constraint rather than a shortcoming specific to the project. Nevertheless, stakeholders highlighted the absence of a robust mechanism to ensure that training outcomes were embedded at the national level and that trained professionals effectively cascaded knowledge further (KII04, KII06, KII18). This was seen as a relative limitation when compared to implementers that combine training delivery with longer-term coaching, supervision or certification models. Within these parameters, greater emphasis on institutionalisation and follow-up mechanisms in project planning, implementation and interaction with key partners could help reinforce sustainability.

97. In comparison with locally embedded actors or programmes tailored to specific national systems, the project faced **challenges in ensuring consistent implementation across countries**. Differences in administrative structures and data availability across countries influenced the application of the assessment tool and the availability of comparable data (KII04). These challenges were particularly evident in partner countries that were not required to conduct full self-assessments using the project assessment tool, as this approach was not originally envisaged in the project design and was agreed with partner countries. As a result, these countries did not identify specific legislative gaps or reform priorities (KII16, KII17). This limited the depth of analysis and the comparability of findings, rather than the overall relevance of the project (KII08). By contrast, the assessments conducted in the three focus countries provided a stronger analytical basis and enabled cross-country comparison. These countries were deliberately selected to ensure balanced representation across geographical diversity and varying levels of development of child-friendly justice systems (KII01, KII02).

98. Compared to organisations with more flexible administrations, the project was characterised by limited human resources and internal procedural constraints (e.g., in Poland, only two people were working on the project), as well as by smaller or more agile implementing organisations (KII03, KII06). Stakeholders generally viewed these constraints as affecting the pace and sequencing of activities, rather than the overall quality of outputs delivered (KII12, KII13, KII14, KII15, KII20, KII21).

99. Overall, the project appears to have given appropriate visibility to its joint EU-CoE character, in line with the relevant communication guidelines, and it was presented on multiple occasions to EU, CoE and other international stakeholders. Nevertheless, a few interviewees suggested that, in some instances, references to EU legislation and policies could have been more explicit, or that the EU dimension could have been more visible across all activities (KII03, KII04).

100. Cooperation with the EC was generally described as constructive. At the same time, some stakeholders felt that additional EU-level communication or public awareness-raising could further support outreach beyond the immediate project partners. (KII04, KII08). Given the implementation arrangement, under which the EC acted as the main donor and the CoE led day-to-day delivery, this appears to reflect the project set-up rather than a major shortcoming. Looking ahead, future phases could build on this cooperation by identifying further opportunities to strengthen visibility, policy connections and dissemination of results. **Overall, these limitations highlight trade-offs inherent in a time-bound, multi-country initiative operating within an intergovernmental mandate, rather than shortcomings in the Project's strategic intent or comparative relevance.**

3.2.3 Added value in relation to baseline expectations

101. Compared to the anticipated added value identified in the baseline evaluation, **the evaluation finds that the Project largely fulfilled expectations and, in several respects, met or slightly exceeded them.**

102. The main added value anticipated at baseline and confirmed during implementation was the comprehensive self-assessment process based on a bespoke, standards-based tool, the engagement of the CoE with its distinct mandate and capacity to authoritatively guide countries on child-friendly justice, as well as the involvement of the EU, space for engagement with various stakeholders and a visibly practical focus of activities.

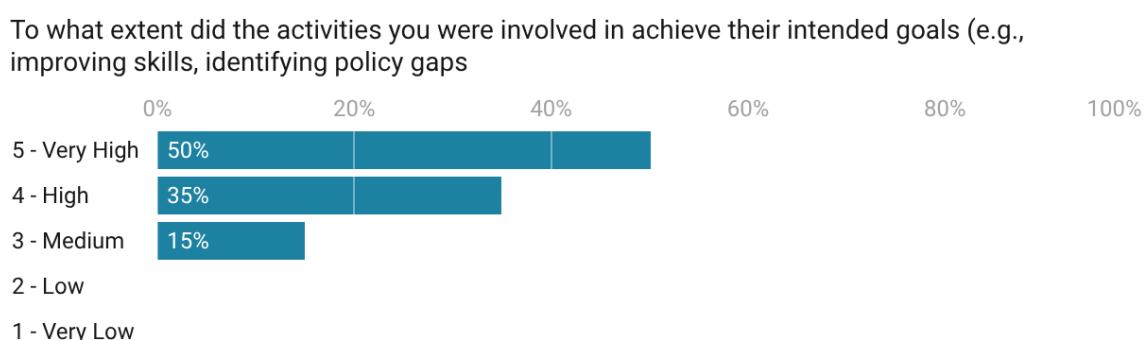
3.3 Effectiveness

103. This section assesses the extent to which the project delivered its intended outputs and immediate outcomes. The analysis focuses on the effectiveness of core activities - such as the self-assessment process, capacity-building and awareness-raising - in translating project inputs into observable changes in knowledge, capacity and professional practice.

104. **The project demonstrated moderate to high effectiveness, especially in strengthening professional capacity and raising awareness of children's rights.**

105. Survey results show that the project's effectiveness was assessed by most stakeholders positively, as high (35%) or **very high** (50%), with only a small group (15%) rating it as medium.

Figure 4. Stakeholders' assessment of the effectiveness of project activities in achieving their intended goals (N=20; N/A responses excluded)



Source: Ecorys

3.3.1 Extent to which the project achieved its objectives and results

106. The project was **most effective in capacity building**. Across focus countries, training (ToT programme and HELP-based modules) led to measurable and perceived improvements in professionals' knowledge, skills, and confidence in applying child-friendly justice standards. Quantitative pre- and post-training data (notably in **Slovenia** and **Poland**) and consistent qualitative feedback confirm this result (KII08, KII14, KII18, KII21, KII22, KII23, ToT Reports).

107. At the level of immediate outcomes, effectiveness was strongest in improving participants' knowledge, confidence and awareness; early indications of changes in professional practice and institutional reflection are more appropriately described as emerging outcomes. In some contexts, particularly **Slovenia** and **Poland**, stakeholders also described emerging links between project outputs and reform discussions (KII06, KII12, KII13, KII14, KII15, KII18). However, these developments are better understood as early signals of potential impact rather than direct effectiveness outcomes.

108. The project produced several key outputs, most notably the **Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool** and accompanying **training materials**. Stakeholders widely perceived these outputs as useful and relevant for supporting institutional reflection and capacity-building activities, although practical usability varied across contexts (KII08, KII18, KII21, KII22, KII23, KII24).

109. There are **marked differences across contexts**. Focus countries that implemented the full assessment and activity package (Slovenia, Belgium, Poland) achieved more tangible results than partner countries (Portugal, Hungary), which mainly reported increased knowledge and awareness without concrete implementation. This was partly because partner countries did not adopt the same systematic approach as focus countries, and some countries faced challenges, such as federal systems or a lack of public funds to transfer practices across regions (KII08, KII09, KII11).

110. Differences were observed in the reach and effectiveness of project activities across groups of children. While the project engaged children in several vulnerable situations, sustained engagement with some groups proved more challenging, and some groups (e.g., children with disabilities) were not adequately covered (KII04, KII16, KII17, Reports on the awareness-raising activities in Belgium, Poland and Slovenia).

111. **Overall, the project was most effective in strengthening professional capacity, producing practical tools and promoting multidisciplinary reflection. Evidence of changes in institutional practice is uneven and should be interpreted as emerging; evidence of policy influence belongs primarily to the impact analysis and remains tentative. The parents' and guardians' component and the systematic inclusion of some groups of children in vulnerable situations remained weaker areas of effectiveness.**

112. Children's participation in the project was evaluated separately as a significant and important element. The section synthesises evidence on the effectiveness of children's participation as an immediate outcome.

3.3.2 Effectiveness of children's participation

113. The project **achieved visible engagement with children and young people**, particularly through creative, experiential activities such as co-creating films, comics, and other awareness-raising materials grounded in personal experiences. Many young people found this process personally meaningful, as it allowed them to express their perspectives, feel useful and contribute to what they understood to be an improved justice system for other children (KII12, Report on Awareness-Raising Activities in Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia, FGI with Children). This finding underpins Lesson Learnt 6 and informs Recommendation 4 (accessibility and dissemination of creative outputs).

114. There was also evidence of **limited immediate changes in the attitudes of some professionals**. Both young participants and facilitators reported that at least one judge who participated in the awareness-raising sessions appeared more open and receptive in subsequent interactions with children. While this evidence is anecdotal and cannot be generalised, it illustrates the potential of children's participation to prompt reflection and short-term behavioural adjustments at the individual level (KII12, FGI with Children). It is worth noting that active facilitation was associated with improved participation. When facilitators intervened to mediate discussions, clarify power dynamics and support young people, children reported feeling more comfortable, better understood and more confident in advocating for themselves (KII12, FGI with children).

115. The roundtable also generated an **unexpected, potential follow-on effect**. According to interview evidence, concerns raised were communicated to relevant Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms and may have informed subsequent follow-up processes; however, the evaluation cannot assess the nature or extent of any resulting change (KII01, KII02).

116. At the same time, feedback from young participants suggests that, in some cases, the purpose and added value of their participation may not have been fully clear to them, particularly during joint sessions with professionals. Some young people described feeling uncomfortable with certain adult responses, which they perceived as insufficiently **receptive to their input**. As a result, a few participants felt that their contributions, including the tools and messages they had developed, were not always fully acknowledged or given the attention they had expected (Report on Awareness-Raising Activities in Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia, FGI with children).

117. Young participants also expressed **uncertainty about whether their participation led to a significant change in professional attitudes or daily practice**. During the discussions, participants were unsure whether the exchanges led to sustained reflection or to questions beyond the session itself, suggesting

that the immediate results of their participation were not always apparent to them (Report on awareness-raising activities in Belgium, FGI with children's participation).

118. **Communication barriers** also affected the quality and perceived effectiveness of participation. Some young participants reported not fully understanding the language or content of the adults' discussions, suggesting that communication was not consistently tailored to the age-diverse audience of children and adults (Report on awareness-raising activities in Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia, FGI with children's participation).

119. Several **structural factors further limited the quality of participation**. Although children's participation became an important element of the project, they were not involved from the outset during the project planning phase. As a result, the main objectives, timelines, and dissemination paths were designed primarily from an adult perspective. This led, among other things, to children's engagement timing not aligning with their school schedules and to misaligned expectations, including scheduling activities during exam periods or delaying feedback processes. It also contributed to differing expectations regarding how children's contributions would be received and used. (Report on awareness-raising activities in Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia, FGI with children's participation). This was particularly evident in the visibility and use of children's work (e.g., limited dissemination of videos and more limited-than-expected use of child-developed tools in schools and professional settings) which contributed to disillusionment among young participants (KII08, KII12).

120. The effectiveness of child participation was constrained by activities and feedback loops that did not align with children's school calendars and by introducing participation after key implementation decisions, resulting in reduced continuity and uncertainty about influence. This finding informs Recommendation 5, which aligns timelines with target groups' availability and incorporates buffer time.

121. Limited dissemination and use of children's creative outputs beyond project channels reduced children's perception of impact and meaningfulness. This finding informs Recommendation 4 on dissemination and accessibility.

122. **Overall, children's participation was an important element of the project and was implemented with high engagement. It enabled young people to share their experiences and, for some, strengthened their confidence and sense of agency. However, it was less effective in ensuring that participation was consistently perceived by young people as influential or meaningful. The effectiveness of participation varied significantly depending on the quality of facilitation, the attitudes of adults during joint sessions, and earlier design decisions. Those findings underpin Lesson Learnt 1 and inform Recommendations 2 and 5.**

3.3.3 Gender Mainstreaming and Human Rights

123. By grounding training and tools in a human rights-based approach, the project enhanced professional uptake and practical applicability, thereby improving immediate outcomes.

124. **The project was strongly grounded in a human rights-based approach, particularly through its reliance** on the Council of Europe Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice. This supported project's relevance and professional uptake (KII01, KII02, KII08, ToT Reports). Especially the trainings focused on how to exercise the children's rights in practice and how professionals might unintentionally jeopardise these rights due to biases. The project's overall goal was to make the system more child-sensitive and ensure children are treated as subjects, not objects, of procedures, which aligns directly with human rights principles (KII18, KII23).

125. **Gender mainstreaming was incorporated into the project design and implementation, although evidence on gender-differentiated outcomes remains limited.** Gender considerations were discussed primarily in relation to different roles and vulnerabilities of children in justice proceedings, particularly child victims, with stakeholders noting that in some contexts girls are more frequently represented among victims. The project also considered other intersectional elements, such as class, and how professionals' biases towards children from different social classes could impact decisions (KII01, KII02, KII18). Stakeholders reported that considerable attention was given to addressing gender in project materials, while recognising the structural

challenge posed by differing attitudes towards gender across participating states. Stakeholders positively assessed the Council of Europe team's approach to addressing these challenges (KII20). The project sought to ensure gender diversity among trainees; however, a higher participation of women reflected the gender composition of the child justice and protection sectors rather than any imbalance arising from project design or implementation. Efforts were also made to achieve gender balance in children's groups, and participants generally reported feeling treated equally and able to express their views freely during activities (KII01, KII02, KII18, KII12).

3.3.4 Effectiveness in relation to baseline expectations

126. **The final evaluation broadly confirms the baseline assessment findings regarding project effectiveness.** The initial intervention design and outcome framework proved appropriate, and most planned outputs and immediate outcomes were either achieved or substantially advanced by the time of the evaluation. However, some areas were only partially achieved, notably the awareness-raising component for parents and guardians, which was not completed within the planned timeframe and the systematic integration of child participation from the outset. The anticipated challenge of ensuring meaningful child participation persisted throughout the project. A comparison of baseline and final findings highlights the need to incorporate child participation more explicitly into project design, resourcing, and implementation strategies from the outset.

3.4 Efficiency

127. This section examines how efficiently the project used its available financial, human and time resources to deliver planned activities and outputs. The analysis focuses on adequacy of resources, timeliness, coordination and administrative arrangements, rather than on cost-effectiveness in a strict economic sense.

3.4.1 Adequacy of resources and time allocation for the child-friendly justice project

128. The assessment of efficiency of the project considered the adequacy of financial and human resources, timeliness of implementation, administrative co-ordination and the extent to which planned outputs were delivered within the available resources. According to the project documents, the initiative was implemented with a total budget of €950,000 over 27 months, with 90% funded by the European Commission and 10% by the Council of Europe (DoA, Project Budget, KII01, KII02, KII04).

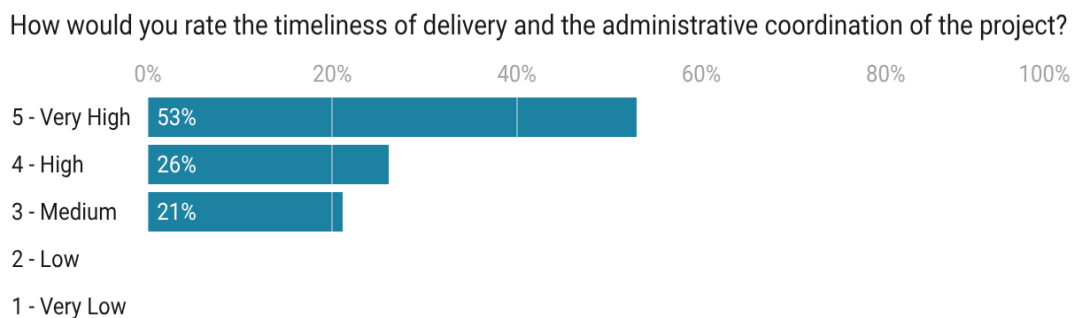
129. The overall project management, supervision, and quality control were ensured by the Children's Rights Division, Directorate of Antidiscrimination, Directorate General II: Democracy, of the Council of Europe. The core implementation team was centrally based (in Strasbourg) and consisted of one part-time Programme Manager responsible for overall coordination and strategic guidance, one full-time Senior Project Officer responsible for quality control and reporting, one Project Assistant supporting logistical, communication, and administrative tasks, and one part-time Financial Assistant responsible for financial procedures and budget follow-up. The team was complemented by external consultants engaged to deliver specific technical outputs (e.g., training sessions for professionals), as well as by national stakeholders and public officials contributing to project activities at country level (DoA).

130. In relation to planned outputs, the project included the development and piloting of a Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool and its implementation guide, as well as the conduct of national assessments in three focus countries. It also involved formulating and presenting recommendations to national authorities, assessing training needs, and delivering capacity-building activities and training programmes for specialised professionals. In addition, the project developed child-friendly and awareness-raising materials for children and their parents/guardians, and organised workshops, roundtables, and a final conference to present results and promote exchange of practices (DoA, Logical Framework, Workplan, KII13).

131. The survey results point to a **generally positive assessment of the project's efficiency, particularly in terms of timeliness of delivery and administrative coordination.** A strong majority of respondents (79%) rated these aspects as high or very high, with 53% indicating very high satisfaction and 26% high satisfaction. A smaller share (21%) rated satisfaction as medium, while no respondents reported low or very low satisfaction.

These findings suggest that, overall, the project was implemented efficiently, with effective coordination and timely delivery of activities. This is further supported by interview findings, which largely mirror the survey results. Interviewees generally noted that most activities were carried out successfully and without major administrative bottlenecks. However, several respondents also highlighted that the scope and number of planned outputs were ambitious given the timeframe and the limited number of staff involved in the project.

Figure 5. Stakeholders' assessment of the efficiency of the project in terms of timeliness of delivery and administrative coordination (N=19; N/A responses excluded)



Source: Ecorys

3.4.2 Timeliness of delivery of expected results in the child-friendly justice project

132. **The operational challenge most cited by interviewees was time constraints**, which occurred during certain phases of the project and affected its efficiency. Several interviewees noted that the project timeline did not always align well with external factors, particularly children's schedules such as school holidays and exam periods. For example, some workshops had to be delayed due to summer holidays, while final sessions held in December coincided with exam periods, limiting children's participation. These constraints contributed to compressed implementation (in certain phases of the project) and reduced continuity of activities (KII08, KII11, KII12). These time constraints were specifically noted by Belgian stakeholders. This finding underpins Lesson Learnt 7 and informs Recommendation 1 (prioritised institutional embedding).

133. Misalignment between activity scheduling and children's fixed calendars (holidays/exams) contributed to delayed sessions, reduced participation and compressed delivery in certain phases. This finding informs Recommendation 5 on calendar-sensitive planning and realistic timelines.

134. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, **the project timeline was delayed by administrative factors**. Interviewees reported that initial procedural delays led to the project starting in January 2024 rather than late 2023, requiring early adaptation in implementation. Despite this shift, the launch phase and the selection of focus and partner countries were described as smooth and well-managed (KII01). Particular attention was given to ensuring diversity in legal systems, geographical representation, and country-specific needs (KII01, KII02). The project was extended by three months (KII01, KII02, KII04, KII08, KII12). According to the interviewees, the extension was mainly linked to the addition of new activities and the use of remaining budget, rather than to major implementation delays. It also provided additional time to accommodate selected activities. The overall scope was considered appropriate and aligned with the project's objectives. However, it was also noted that a relatively modest increase in funding (approximately €5,000–€10,000) could have allowed for the inclusion of additional activities (KII03).

135. **Coordination and communication arrangements were identified as one factor influencing efficiency**. In particular, a small number of interviewees noted that the absence of regular meetings between EC and the CoE limited opportunities for more continuous exchange and follow-up (KII04, KII08). More consistent communication, particularly during key phases such as project kick-off and timeline planning, was

seen as beneficial for improving coordination and clarity. Additionally, the limited opportunity to revisit or revise documentation during implementation was noted as a constraint (KII04, KII21). Respondents noted that the EC may have wished to play a more active role in the project's implementation, beyond its funding function. This points to a possible difference in expectations regarding roles, or an opportunity to further leverage the Commission's operational capacity (KII04, KII08).

136. A few interviewees also noted uneven **implementation across focus countries** and observed that some countries struggle to transfer best practices to other cities due to budget constraints. This suggests that while the project might have provided initial resources, the long-term or broader national implementation often faced financial limitations beyond the project's scope (KII08, KII16, KII17). In the same vein, stakeholders from Belgium noted that the political and administrative landscape can be complex, due to the country's division into multiple regions with distinct governance structures. These regions also operate in different languages, which adds another layer of difficulty. In consequence, ensuring that project results are implemented evenly across all regions may be complicated (KII11, KII12).

137. Overall, **research findings indicated that while financial and human resources were generally adequate for the core delivery of the project, they were stretched in relation to the compressed implementation timeline and the project's scope.** Some activities were delivered under tight time constraints, which may have limited their full potential. The project was implemented efficiently, although time-related constraints, of the limited availability of certain stakeholders' groups and coordination challenges affected certain aspects of delivery (KII04, KII11, KII12, KII20). Those findings underpin Lesson Learnt 7.

3.4.3 Efficiency in relation to baseline expectations

138. Compared to the baseline, the efficiency component of the project remained largely unchanged, with only minor changes related to the adjusted start date, the project extension, and the addition of certain activities that were not initially planned. Regarding the budget and human resources, the project maintained the same configuration as defined during the baseline phase. Indeed, it is important to note that, due to administrative delays, the project began in January 2024 rather than at the end of 2023 as initially planned. The project also expanded beyond its original scope (a three-month extension) through the use of remaining budget and a no-cost extension. However, this extension was methodologically justified, as it enabled the introduction of additional activities, including a feasibility study of alternatives to detention and a child-friendly version of the assessment tool.

3.5 Impact

139. This section explores emerging signs of higher-level change that the project plausibly contributed to beyond its immediate outcomes. Given the Project's duration and context, the analysis focuses on contributions to longer-term institutional, procedural, or policy developments rather than on direct attribution of systemic change. The strongest evidence is for professional reflection, diagnostic capacity, and inter-agency dialogue; evidence of formal policy, procedural, or legislative change is more limited and should be interpreted cautiously as it emerges.

140. Rather than attributing change solely to the project, the evaluation assesses whether the project contributed to the development of policies, procedures, and systemic changes. At the same time, it examines whether there were unintended consequences, both positive and negative.

141. According to the ToC, the project's impact is understood as progress towards systemic and institutional change, including changes in policies, procedures, and professional practices for children in contact with the justice system. This impact analysis examines the project's likely contribution to long-term changes in child-friendly justice systems. However, given the relatively short duration of the project and the early stages of implementation of several reform processes, the evaluation concluded that it is too early to observe full or definitive impacts, particularly in terms of lasting policy changes.

3.5.1 Strengthening child-friendly justice, legal and policy frameworks

142. Project outputs (self-assessment reports, training and awareness-raising materials) supported immediate outcomes (improved knowledge, confidence and reflection), which plausibly contributed to strengthening child-friendly justice systems over time, especially by identifying gaps, informing institutional discussions, and tailoring capacity-building to national needs (KII01, KII02, KII03, KII04, ToT Reports). The project's influence was strongest at the **professional and institutional levels**, contributing to improved inter-agency co-operation and professional networks. Evidence of sustained **national-level policy influence** is clearest in Slovenia and more limited in Poland and Belgium (KII12, KII13, KII14, KII15, KII18).

3.5.2 Contribution to systems and mechanisms

143. The evaluation identified a credible contribution pathway linking the project's core outputs to observed changes in professional practice and emerging systemic effects.

- **The Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool** enabled national stakeholders to identify concrete gaps in legislation, procedures, and inter-institutional coordination, which, in focus countries (Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia), informed institutional discussions, training priorities, and reform recommendations. The Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool is a key output that helps the focus countries assess their systems and identify areas for investment. The reports generated from these assessments have been used by national authorities to inform discussions and planned steps related to legal and procedural frameworks. Another key achievement was the Handbook on Child-friendly Justice. These tools are designed to facilitate a systematic approach to child-friendly justice, covering areas such as awareness, co-operation, and training, and enabling the review of legislation (KII01, KII02, KII03, KII04, KII06, KII07, KII08, KII13, KII14, KII15).
- **Capacity-building activities**, particularly the ToT programme and HELP-based modules, translated Council of Europe standards into practical, context-specific skills. This resulted in improved professional confidence, child-sensitive communication, and strengthened multidisciplinary co-operation, as consistently reported by trained judges, lawyers, social workers, and probation officers (KII08, KII18, KII21, KII22, KII23, KII24, ToT Reports).
- **Awareness-raising activities** further reinforced this contribution by grounding professional reflection in children's lived experiences. These elements supported changes in practice at the individual and team level (reported by stakeholders) and created favourable conditions for longer-term policy influence, particularly where institutional buy-in and parallel reforms were present (KII09, KII11, KII13, KII14, KII15). The intervention also aimed to pilot awareness-raising activities targeting parents and guardians, but it proved difficult to implement due to challenges in identifying and engaging this group and the limited existing networks. Therefore, this aspect was partially redesigned and will be piloted during an extended implementation period, which cannot be included in this evaluation.

144. **Overall, the contribution pathway is clearest where the project's outputs were used to structure diagnosis and inform professional learning and dialogue. Links to higher-level reform processes are more context-dependent and remain emerging. This contribution pathway underpins Lesson Learnt 2 and informs Recommendation 1.**

3.5.3 Evidence of policy or procedural reforms

145. Emerging signs of contribution to policy and procedural reforms were reported in the focus countries: Slovenia, Poland and Belgium.

146. In **Slovenia**, this project, like other projects implemented at the same time, contributed to ongoing national reforms aimed at making the system more child friendly. These included establishing the Barnahus centre, introducing new regulations, and providing extensive training. Stakeholders reported that being a focus country **supported ongoing reform efforts and reinforced reform momentum** (KII13, KII14, KII15).

147. In Slovenia, improvements were also made to the system of guardian ad litem in civil proceedings involving children. This was one of the main topics of the ToT training courses, which aimed to raise professional standards, strengthen inter-agency co-operation, and ensure greater consistency in practice. Participants analysed key systemic challenges and developed recommendations for improving the functioning of the system and the training of special guardians (Survey, Report on ToTs in Slovenia).

148. The project also contributed to the development of national guidelines for professionals in domestic violence cases, particularly regarding court decisions on contact and custody. Stakeholders noted that, until now, Slovenia lacked systematic guidelines in this area. This may indicate an emerging procedural development to which the project plausibly contributed, based on stakeholder accounts (KII23). Additionally, the translation of the HELP course proved very useful in Slovenia and led to its inclusion in the Judges' Training Centre's annual programme (KII13, KII14, KII15).

149. As part of the awareness-raising campaign on child-friendly justice, the project materials were disseminated to approximately 370 email addresses covering all relevant institutions and stakeholders, including centres for social work, courts, child protection institutions, academia, police, and NGOs. The campaign received very positive feedback from several key institutions and stakeholders. The Advocate of the Principle of Equality responded positively and commended the materials produced within the project. A professor from the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana also expressed appreciation and confirmed that the materials will be used in academic teaching and study processes. In addition, the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office in Ljubljana welcomed the materials and further disseminated them to all supreme prosecution offices with a recommendation that they be shared among state prosecutors and professional staff working with children and adolescents. Overall, the response to the campaign and project materials was highly encouraging, demonstrating strong institutional interest and support (KII13, KII14, KII15).

150. **Poland** is currently implementing a comprehensive reform of its juvenile justice system, which has not been significantly amended for decades. Stakeholders reported that the recommendations contained in the project report are being considered within this legislative process, particularly those concerning children's rights and the development of a child-friendly justice system for children in conflict with the law (Survey, KII03).

151. The involvement of individuals within the Ministry of Justice was also a key factor in shaping legal changes in Poland, creating a **potential institutional pathway** for translating the project's recommendations into policy and procedural discussions and, where feasible, subsequent changes (KII07).

152. As part of the capacity-building activities, discussions were initiated on establishing an interdisciplinary task force supported by the Ministry of Justice. Although still in the conceptual phase, it indicates progress towards more coordinated procedures (KII18). Furthermore, the project's ToT programme was clearly aligned with the findings of the analytical tool-based report, demonstrating that procedural reform efforts are grounded in a systematic analysis of gaps in the national system (Report on ToT in Poland).

153. In **Belgium**, the project focused on administrative court proceedings involving migrant children and helped make them more child-friendly (KII03). It supported the development of new tools to better address the specific needs, vulnerabilities, and rights of migrant children in procedures (Survey).

154. In parallel with the project's implementation in Belgium, significant policy and procedural changes were underway. During this period, a significant reform of the regulations on the hearing of children was adopted, and a pilot project on the use of trusted persons in family proceedings continued. At the same time, practitioners increasingly utilised case law and relevant international instruments in their professional practice. It was clearly stated that the project did not initiate these reforms but rather implemented them in parallel within the broader context of ongoing changes. Its role was therefore complementary, fostering awareness and discussion among practitioners, while policy, procedures, and case law developed independently (Survey).

155. Furthermore, the project was implemented with the support of the High Council of Justice, which provided administrative support, facilities for focus groups and training, and published the project reports and recommendations on its website. These activities contributed to reflection and the exchange of professional experiences, particularly in procedures involving children, including migrant children, in administrative proceedings (KII11).

156. Overall, the project **plausibly contributed to and reinforced ongoing reform processes across the three focus countries**, acting as a **catalytic and enabling factor, which leads to Lesson Learnt 2**. However, the impact was also influenced by parallel national justice reforms, other EU-funded initiatives, and broader policy trends on children's rights (KII04). On balance, the project's contribution to policy and procedural reform should be interpreted as emerging and indirect, with stronger evidence for professional and institutional change than for confirmed legislative outcomes.

3.5.4 Use of the Assessment Tool by national public institutions

157. Several national public institutions have used the Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool and the reports based on it as part of their policy reflections or planned reforms. Stakeholders have already noted that reports from the Child-friendly Justice Assessment process in three countries have been used by national authorities to **inform reflections and discussions** on possible updates at various levels of the national legal framework (KII03).

158. In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Justice used the assessment tool as part of its research, resulting in a significant number of recommendations for improvement. These recommendations are intended to support policy development within the Ministry of Justice and contribute to discussions on this topic with other relevant ministries (KII13, KII14, KII15). Furthermore, the Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool's findings have been incorporated into training activities. The first ToT programme was based on the Council of Europe HELP course on child-friendly justice and adapted to the Slovenian context, taking into account the findings of the Child-friendly Justice Assessment Report for Slovenia (Report on Justice Systems in Slovenia).

159. In **Poland**, the Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool was implemented as part of a comprehensive national analysis of the child-friendly justice system and was named by a representative of the Ministry of Justice as a good evaluation instrument that can be used independently and free of charge again. The report prepared by external experts and the assessment tool were identified as the most valuable elements of the project (Report on Justice Systems in Poland, KII06).

160. In **Belgium**, the Assessment Tool was used to identify gaps in existing practices and to promote child-friendly standards, thereby supporting discussions on more coherent and responsive judicial processes for migrant children in administrative courts (Survey). The tool has supported collective reflection within the High Council of the Judiciary through focus groups, helping professionals identify gaps, analyse practices, and discuss relevant indicators in judicial, administrative, and extrajudicial procedures. Its contribution to generating conclusions and recommendations has also provided institutional visibility and informed training and awareness-raising activities, thereby fostering a better understanding of children's rights and long-term professional reflection (KII11).

161. **Public institutions in Slovenia, Poland and Belgium have used the Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool and related reports to support policy reflection and inform discussions on possible legal or procedural updates.** In individual countries, the tool has helped identify gaps, develop specific recommendations and training programmes.

162. **Overall, reported use of the assessment tool indicates its use as a diagnostic and convening resource rather than as a standalone driver of reform. Where it was embedded in institutional processes (e.g. training design or structured inter-agency discussion), the contribution pathway appears stronger. This findings pathway underpins Lesson Learnt 2 and informs Recommendation 1.**

3.5.5 Unintended effects (positive and negative)

163. The project produced significant, unintended **positive effects by strengthening multidisciplinary and inter-agency collaboration**. In several countries, professionals from different sectors met and collaborated for the first time, creating new professional relationships and a shared commitment to maintaining collaboration beyond the project's conclusion (KII01, KII02). In **Poland**, this resulted in the development of an informal, multidisciplinary network that continuously exchanges information, discusses cases, and tracks legal developments, suggesting **potential for sustained collaboration** beyond the project (KII18, KII22, Report on ToT in Poland).

164. Another unintended effect (immediate outcome) was **increased awareness and a reported shift in mindset regarding the needs of children in contact with the law**. Professionals in **Belgium** gained a deeper understanding during the ToT sessions, reflecting a deeper understanding of the principles of child-friendly justice and strengthening their confidence in applying them (KII09, KII11, KII12, Report on ToT in Belgium). These changes suggest an **emerging shift** in professional attitudes and values.

165. The project also contributed to **further development of collaboration and knowledge exchange**. In Belgium, participants created a shared "material bank," ensuring that the training resources developed during the project could remain accessible for future use (KII12, KII24). In Poland, multidisciplinary training sessions also served as unintended peer support. Participants described the sessions as a space for reflection and a supportive peer-reflection space, where they could share professional challenges rarely addressed in daily practice (KII18). Although this was not an explicit goal, it contributed positively to professional solidarity and mutual support (KII08).

166. Participation in the project was reported to have strengthened the **children's sense of empowerment** (immediate outcome). In **Slovenia**, the fact that the children's ideas were directly transformed into a comic book and then shared publicly instilled a sense of pride in them, strengthening their self-confidence and willingness to engage in future participatory processes (Slovenian Awareness-Raising Report). In **Belgium**, some young participants described critical adult feedback as challenging; facilitators noted that structured dialogue and debriefing helped mitigate negative experiences and supported learning about advocacy and communication with adults. (Report of the awareness-raising activities in Belgium). Additionally, during the project, **a need for a child-friendly version of the Assessment Tool was identified**, and work began on developing it as a supplementary (unforeseen) output. (KII01, KII02, KII4, KII12).

167. **In Romania, the children's roundtable created a space for direct testimony on experiences with the justice system**, which appears to have informed subsequent engagement by the CoE's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). This led to an assessment of facilities for juveniles in conflict with the law and to concrete recommendations to improve detention conditions, which stakeholders reported are being followed up by the authorities (KII01, KII02).

168. The project also **generated broader systemic value by developing and disseminating the assessment tool**. Its availability to all EU and CoE member states, as well as its potential relevance for EU accession countries, suggests that the tool may support wider alignment with European standards beyond the project's initial geographical focus. Dissemination through CDENF (Working Group on responses to violence against children) plenaries further strengthened awareness of the tool and other project results across all 46 Council of Europe member states. (KII01, KII03).

169. Some **unintended negative consequences were also observed**. In **Poland**, it was noted that burnout, supervision, and coping strategies were not addressed. Even though training participants clearly discussed emotional stress, the approaching **end of the project** and the lack of follow-up disappointed Polish stakeholders, who were motivated to continue implementation by ongoing support, potentially affecting the project's dynamics (KII07, KII18).

170. **These unintended effects largely reflect immediate or emerging outcomes (attitudes, networks, peer exchange), which may support longer-term change if sustained through follow-up and institutional ownership.**

3.5.6 Alternative contribution stories

171. The analysis of the alternative contribution stories (Annex 5.3) indicates that **the evidence suggests the project made a significant and credible contribution to the development of child-friendly justice systems**, particularly in the focus countries. In selected contexts, the project acted as a catalyst, introducing the first comprehensive self-assessments and revealing systemic gaps. Furthermore, activities such as the development of national guidelines in **Slovenia** and discussions on multidisciplinary co-operation in **Poland** have been planned because of the project. More importantly, the project has strengthened and legitimised ongoing national reforms. At the same time, the project has fostered conditions for long-term impact through improved diagnostic understanding, capacity building, and the creation of professional networks, which are

likely to continue even after the project's end. Although external political and institutional factors strongly influenced the results and differences between countries, they do not account for the changes in professional attitudes and co-operation closely linked to the project activities. Overall, the evidence supports a credible, gradual, and context-dependent contribution to longer-term **change**, consistent with the project's ToC.

172. **Taken together, the evidence supports a credible, gradual, and context-dependent contribution to longer-term change, consistent with the project's ToC.**

3.5.7 Factors supporting (or limiting) the project's contribution to impact

173. The following factors are presented as implementation features that supported (or constrained) the project's contribution to longer-term change, rather than as impacts in themselves.

174. Stakeholders identified several implementation features that supported the project's contribution to longer-term change, including **interactive, practical, and context-sensitive methodologies**. The use of workshop-based and experiential learning approaches - including group work, role-plays, simulations, and peer exercises - was consistently highlighted as a major strength. These methods enabled participants to move beyond theoretical discussions and engage directly with child-friendly justice principles in practice, often by experiencing procedures from a child's perspective. This approach enhanced engagement, facilitated learning across professional backgrounds, and supported skills development (KII07, KII22, ToT Reports). The **multidisciplinary aspect of the training** also worked well. Bringing together professionals from different sectors (judiciary, legal professions, police, social services, psychology, education, and health) created opportunities for mutual learning, clarified roles and responsibilities, and helped address misunderstandings between disciplines. Although some initial scepticism was reported, participants largely viewed this approach as effective and necessary, given the cross-sectoral nature of child-friendly justice (KII09, KII18, KII22, Report on ToT in Belgium). Those findings underpin Lesson Learnt 4.

175. The project also placed visible emphasis on **including children and young people**, notably through their involvement in creative outputs (such as videos, comic books, and educational materials), child-friendly questionnaires, and focus group discussions (Lesson Learnt 6). These activities helped ensure that children's voices were present in project outputs and awareness-raising efforts and were valued for making justice-related content more accessible and compelling for both children and professionals (KII12, KII22, KII23, Reports on child participation in Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia).

176. A key success factor consistently identified during implementation was the **high level of commitment and ownership shown by participating countries**. This facilitated engagement across institutions, supported the uptake of recommendations and increased prospects for sustainability (KII01, KII02).

3.5.8 Factors limiting the project's contribution to impact

177. Despite these strengths, several limitations were identified. While children and young people were involved in multiple activities, stakeholder views differed on the **depth and meaningfulness of child participation**. In some contexts, participation was perceived as limited primarily to consultation or content creation, with little influence over decision-making or project priorities. As a result, some stakeholders, as well as data from FGIs with children, questioned whether participation consistently met the standards of meaningful engagement across all activities and countries (KII08, KII12, Reports on child participation in Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia, FGDs with children).

178. These findings, together with evidence of gaps in the systematic inclusion of certain vulnerable groups, underpin Recommendation 3 on strengthening targeted inclusion and meaningful participation of children in vulnerable situations, including through tailored or 'micro' trainings.

179. These limitations appear to be linked to **time and resource constraints**, varying national capacities, and the absence of a clearly articulated, shared understanding within the project of what level of influence child participation was intended to achieve. Without explicit guidance, participation implementation depended heavily on local interpretation and facilitation capacity, leading to variability in practice (KII06, KII12, Reports on child participation in Belgium, Poland, and Slovenia).

3.5.9 Impact in relation to baseline expectations

180. The Baseline Assessment anticipated that **evidence of systemic impact would be difficult to demonstrate within the project's short timeframe and in a context of limited national datasets for verifying higher-level change**. The end-of-project evaluation confirms this expectation: evidence is strongest for professional reflection, strengthened diagnostic capacity, and inter-agency dialogue, while evidence of formal policy, procedural, or legislative change remains more limited and should be interpreted cautiously as emerging. Within these boundaries, the project plausibly contributed to reform-related discussions in participating countries, primarily by providing a structured basis for identifying gaps and priorities. The Assessment Tool was a key output in this contribution pathway, enabling a more systematic diagnosis of gaps and supporting subsequent recommendations and follow-up discussions.

3.6 Sustainability

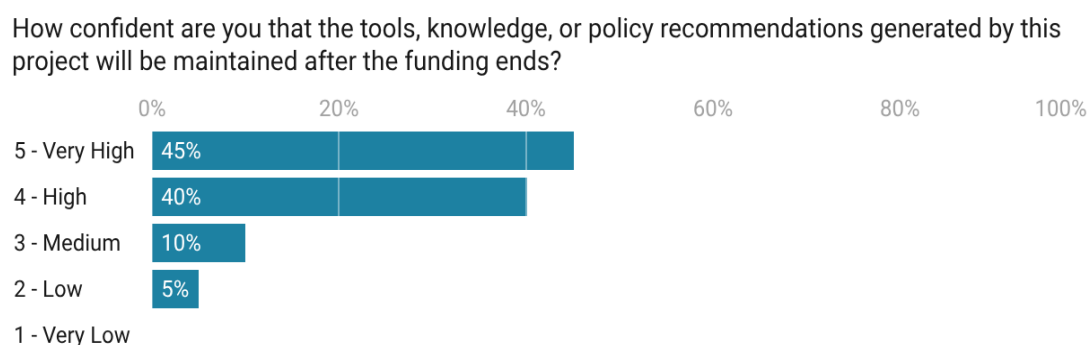
181. This section assesses the likelihood that the Project's results and benefits will be maintained after the end of external support. The analysis distinguishes between the sustainability of outputs, knowledge, and practices, and examines key enabling and constraining factors, such as institutional ownership, follow-up mechanisms, and resource availability.

3.6.1 Likelihood of sustaining the results and benefits of the child-friendly justice project

182. This section assesses the project's sustainability, focusing on the extent to which its results are likely to be sustained over time. The section mostly draws on interview findings and focuses on key factors that support sustainability, such as institutionalisation and capacity-building, as well as on challenges, including limited monitoring and uneven uptake and project ownership across countries. Overall, the **findings highlight both promising practices at the institutional and national levels and underline structural gaps that affect the longevity of results after the project's end**.

183. **The survey results suggest a generally positive outlook on the sustainability of the project's results beyond its completion.** A large majority of respondents (85%) expressed high or very high confidence, with 45% rating it very high and 40% rating it high. Only a small proportion reported moderate (10%) or low (5%) confidence, and no respondents reported very low confidence. These findings suggest that stakeholders perceive the project's tools, knowledge, and policy recommendations as likely to be maintained over time. At the same time, the presence of some moderate and low ratings suggests uncertainties that may be linked to factors such as the need for continued institutional support, follow-up mechanisms, or financial resources to ensure long-term sustainability.

Figure 6. Stakeholders' assessment of the sustainability of the project outputs, including tools, knowledge, and policy recommendations (N=20; N/A responses excluded)



Source: Ecorys

184. First, it is worth noting that both the **focus and partner countries that participated in the project submitted their candidature on a voluntary basis**. This voluntary participation underlines the commitment and willingness of these countries – at least at the project's entry point – to sustain the potential changes it will generate. Furthermore, selected countries (focus and partner) are already involved in several child-friendly justice-related initiatives/actions, which could create synergies with the Council of Europe project, increasing – even if indirectly – the likelihood of the sustainability of project results. For instance, Slovenia has participated in three Council of Europe projects related to child-friendly justice, the most recent of which aims to ensure the best interests of children in civil court proceedings (Council of Europe, 2024). As for Poland, the country has implemented several European Commission-funded projects and instituted legislative and non-legislative measures to promote child-friendly justice (Council of Europe, internal document shared at the baseline and final evaluation stages). Countries' participation in such initiatives could generate synergies, institutional memory, or ongoing reform agendas that, in turn, could strengthen the sustainability of child-friendly justice.

185. Regarding this project, some country-level initiatives were noted, such as the creation of a shared Linktree in Belgium to store and disseminate resources among training participants and other professionals interested in the subject. This clearly demonstrates the continued accessibility of the project's outputs. While several participants reported integrating acquired knowledge into their ongoing professional practices, professionals from Belgium and Poland highlighted that the training promoted strong awareness-raising, particularly during the exercise in which adults assumed the roles of children being interrogated by judges and other stakeholders (KII11, KII22, ToT Reports). This activity allowed professionals to fully step into the situation of children, generating insights that many shared with colleagues and broader networks.

186. Additionally, some participants noted that they continue to draw on the resources and knowledge gained during the training in their daily work and revisit materials when they have doubts or want to recall specific aspects of the training (KII11, KII22). Together, these elements contribute to the sustainability of the training, as the continued use of materials and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing helps embed the training's learnings into routine professional practice.

3.6.2 Requirements from key stakeholders to sustain project results and benefits

187. When asked about sustainability, interviewees generally explained that this objective is best achieved when a project's outcomes and results are integrated into institutionalised structures within national systems. As a recurring example, respondents mentioned the Barnahus model, which was implemented as part of other initiatives. Indeed, in Slovenia and Poland, the Barnahus model represents a strong benchmark, as it operates as a formalised service with dedicated staff, established protocols, and embedded training systems, ensuring continuity beyond the project lifecycle (KII13, KII14, KII15).

188. Some respondents identified the assessment tool and handbook as key instruments with the potential to embed child-friendly justice practices, due to their systematic and multi-agency approach, particularly in countries that engaged deeply with these materials (KII08). Nevertheless, uptake remains uneven, with more limited impact observed in countries that did not adopt a systematic approach, underlining disparities in long-term sustainability (KII08). In this context, there may be scope for the CoE to make greater use of its influence and engagement with national stakeholders to support the institutionalisation and longer-term embedding of project results, as reflected in Recommendation 1.

189. Moreover, interviewees mentioned that a condition to enhance sustainability could be the continued co-operation between the European Commission, Council of Europe, and other relevant EU institutions (e.g., FRA) alongside stronger dissemination efforts was seen as essential to ensure broader adoption and long-term sustainability (KII08).

190. A considerable number of respondents explained that **sustainability is constrained by the lack of systematic follow-up mechanisms**. Interviewees consistently pointed out the absence of structured monitoring, evaluation, and feedback loops to track implementation and long-term outcomes (KII04, KII20, KII21, KII22). This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that project results risk becoming underused without active dissemination and institutional ownership (KII20, KII21, KII22). To counter this underuse, respondents suggested the creation of ongoing platforms for exchange, such as communities of practice, which were highlighted as essential for enabling professionals to share experiences and build on project achievements,

with existing Council of Europe events cited as effective models for sustaining stakeholders' engagement (KII04, KII21). This finding informs Recommendation 1 on embedding outputs in regular systems and introducing simple uptake tracking and ToT cascade arrangements. Several respondents stressed that **maintaining sustainability after the project ends requires continued investment and structured post-project financial support**. One concrete recommendation was the introduction of "tapering funding," which would allow for gradual financial support after project completion to facilitate dissemination and maintain results (KII04, KII20, KII21).

Expanding the project's geographical scope was also noted as a factor that could support sustainability. In particular, broader participation across EU countries can foster peer learning, benchmarking, and the exchange of good practices, which in turn may help maintain momentum and encourage continued engagement with the project's results (KII04).

191. Finally, **sustainability challenges are evident in specific national contexts and depend on political commitment**. In Hungary, for example, no formal policy changes or systematic follow-up have been implemented, although the project contributed to knowledge exchange through the creation of expert groups and informal dissemination activities (KII16, KII17). The lack of translation of key project outputs into Hungarian further limits their accessibility and use (KII16, KII17). In some contexts, limited translation and accessibility of key outputs constrained uptake beyond immediate project stakeholders. **This finding informs Recommendation 4 on translation, accessibility and active dissemination.**

3.6.3 Sustainability in relation to baseline expectations

192. **Compared to baseline assumptions concerning sustainability, the final evaluation findings confirm that several assumptions were valid.** In particular, the development of "sustainable" materials, such as the handbook of good practices and the assessment tool has proven relevant, as these resources can be used not only by participating countries but also by a broader range of stakeholders beyond the project.

193. At the baseline stage, interviewees also emphasised that well-designed training activities, including ToT and awareness-raising sessions, **could be replicated and sustained by member states**. This assumption was largely confirmed during the final evaluation since respondents expressed very positive views on both the organisation and the content of the ToT sessions. In addition, some professionals reported sharing the training materials with colleagues, thus extending their reach and further supporting the sustainability of project outcomes.

194. **Several barriers to sustainability identified at the baseline stage persist at the final evaluation.** These include limited dedicated funding, uncertainty related to the political context, and, in some cases, a lack of political will. However, it should be noted that not all these challenges are within the Council of Europe's control, as some fall outside its mandate and limit its ability to directly influence or change them.

4 Conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

195. The project has made a credible and significant contribution to the development of child-friendly justice in Europe. The evaluation finds that the combination of standards-based tools, multidisciplinary learning and child participation was a key strength of the intervention design and delivery.

196. In terms of **relevance** and **added value**, stakeholders consistently viewed the project as well aligned with national reform priorities and as translating Council of Europe standards into practical, usable resources.

197. **Effectiveness** was strongest for immediate outcomes, notably improved professional knowledge and confidence, with emerging signs of changes in practice varying across countries.

198. The project's role in **impact** is best understood as catalytic and enabling; it reinforced ongoing processes and supported reform-related dialogue, while evidence of formal policy or legislative change remains emerging and context-dependent.

199. **Sustainability** appears most promising for tools and training materials, but remains conditional for broader changes in professional practice, inter-agency co-operation, and policy processes, which require follow-up and institutional ownership.

200. The parents' and guardians' component remained the least developed area of the intervention and could not be fully assessed due to delays and partial implementation. The human rights-based approach was consistently applied, while evidence of gender-differentiated results and targeted inclusion of some groups of children in vulnerable situations was more limited.

201. The evaluation highlights the importance of early planning for sustainability, a clearer framework for meaningful child participation, a stronger collaborative commitment across participating countries, and greater involvement of funding and commissioning institutions.

4.2 Assessment of the implementation of baseline recommendations

202. This assessment is summarised in Table 2 below. Recommendations from the Baseline assessment were integrated into the intervention when possible. This included strengthening child participation and increasing exchanges between participating countries. Exchange visits and joint discussions between the focus and partner countries were organised, improving shared understanding of the assessment tool and facilitating peer learning. Although some recommendations could not be fully implemented due to administrative constraints, the majority were partially implemented within the available time and resources.

Table 2. Assessment of the implementation of baseline recommendations

Baseline Recommendation	Level of Implementation	Evidence / Findings	Contribution to Results	Outstanding Gaps
Rec. 1 – Assessment tool design and data collection	Implemented	Tool reviewed and used by countries	Improved feasibility	Uptake and engagement varied across countries
Rec. 2 – Tailored strategies & gender-sensitive language	Implemented	Targeted plans developed; language improved in outputs	Increased inclusiveness of activities	Limited targeting of some vulnerable sub-groups
Rec. 3 – Children's participation & involvement plan	Partially implemented	Children co-designed the project's outputs (awareness-raising materials)	Increased inclusiveness of the target group	Children's perspectives could have been integrated more systematically at the earliest feasible stage of implementation, recognising that direct participation in the design phase was constrained by EU and CoE administrative procedures.

Rec. 4 – Internal Coordination & Communication	Mostly implemented	Regular meetings were held, and communication was generally smooth and clear.	Improved information flow	A few stakeholders indicated that there may be opportunities to further clarify communication arrangements and the respective roles of the CoE and the EC
Rec. 5 – Engagement with external stakeholders and CSOs	Implemented	External stakeholders supported delivery of selected activities (e.g. awareness-raising and child participation)	Expertise and knowledge, as well as a new perspective and objectivity	Time constraints and not sufficient engagement were noted by certain external stakeholders

Source: Ecorys

4.3 Lessons Learnt and Good Practices

1. Meaningful child participation requires an early and clearly defined project (LL1)

203. Child participation is most effective when prepared from the earliest feasible stage of implementation, with clearly defined goals, levels of influence, feedback mechanisms, and appropriate support. As direct participation in the design phase is constrained by EU and CoE administrative procedures, particular attention should be given to integrating children's perspectives early in implementation in order to reduce practical barriers and support meaningful engagement.

2. Standards-based self-assessment as a catalyst for reform (LL2)

204. The Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool proved to be a useful and widely valued instrument for diagnosing systemic gaps, fostering inter-institutional dialogue, and informing reform-related discussions. Its structured, standards-based approach supports both accountability and learning.

3. A holistic framework supports coherence across proceedings (LL3)

205. The project's commitment to a holistic framework, applying child-friendly principles universally across all roles and proceedings, proved to be a coherent and practically applicable approach compared to more fragmented initiatives.

4. Multidisciplinary and experiential training strengthens practical competence and collaboration (LL4)

206. Training that combines multidisciplinary participation with experiential methods (e.g., simulations, role-plays, and perspective-taking exercises) strengthens practical competence in child-friendly justice and supports reported changes in professional attitudes. Bringing together professionals from different sectors also helps clarify roles, reduce institutional barriers and strengthen collaboration.

5. Tailoring activities to national and local contexts (LL5)

207. The project's responsiveness to different legal systems, governance structures, and professional realities enhanced relevance and uptake. Context-specific adaptation is essential in transnational justice initiatives.

6. Creative outputs as awareness-raising and learning tools (LL6)

208. The use of children's creative outputs (e.g. comics, videos) effectively supported awareness-raising, advocacy, and professional reflection, while also empowering participating young people.

7. Objectives must be balanced with prioritisation and realistic timelines (LL7)

209. Highly ambitious, multinational initiatives require sufficient time and resources to ensure depth, follow-up, and consolidation. Without prioritisation, time pressures can limit the transformative potential of otherwise effective interventions.

8. Leveraging institutional legitimacy and convening power (LL8)

210. The Council of Europe's institutional authority, reinforced by co-operation with the European Commission, provided legitimacy and leverage that facilitated engagement, political attention, and professional buy-in at the national level. The project's success in fostering concrete co-operation between the Commission and the Council of Europe illustrates the added value of operational co-operation between the two institutions. This can support joint initiatives in future.

4.4 Recommendations

211. This section outlines recommendations to support the Council of Europe in further strengthening its child-friendly justice-related work. Building on the findings of this assessment, the suggestions focus on consolidating existing achievements, addressing identified gaps, and enhancing the overall effectiveness and sustainability of future efforts.

1. Enhance institutionalisation and uptake of project outputs through embedding in regular systems (R1)

212. The CoE in cooperation with national partners, could further emphasise the importance of institutionalising and using key project outputs through their embedding in regular training and operational systems (e.g. judicial academies, professional training institutes, and relevant ministries). This could be reinforced through project design, implementation, and steering committee processes. It could also include clearer cascading arrangements for ToT programmes (e.g. multiplier plans, access to materials, and responsibilities for onward delivery), alongside simple mechanisms to track and periodically review uptake over time.

2. Strengthen accountability for meaningful child participation from the design and funding stage (R2)

213. In addition to project teams, institutions commissioning and funding child justice initiatives could use project implementation processes to promote greater awareness among donors and partners of meaningful child participation, including how to integrate children's perspectives at the earliest feasible stage. A more explicit and robust strategy for child participation is needed, acknowledging the challenges of consistency and ensuring systematic feedback mechanisms, potentially through different groups or video statements. The effectiveness and perceived legitimacy of child participation depend not only on the quality of implementation but also on early project decisions, which are largely determined by the commissioning framework. If child participation is not sufficiently specified or resourced in project designs and funding, this limits the potential for later implementation and the project's ability to model best practices for national authorities.

3. Strengthening targeted inclusion and meaningful participation of children in vulnerable situations (R3)

214. The project should complement its holistic approach with more targeted measures for specific vulnerable groups. Future activities could include tailored or "micro" trainings focusing on groups such as children with disabilities, Roma and LGBTI children, or those with psychosocial needs.

4. Improve dissemination, visibility, and accessibility of outputs (R4)

215. As the evaluation found that dissemination and accessibility were uneven, greater emphasis should be placed on translations, coordinated communication and active dissemination of outputs, including accessible formats for both professionals and, where relevant, children and young people. Dissemination should explicitly target training institutes, local authorities and professional networks to support wider uptake beyond immediate project partners.

5. Align project timelines with the availability of target groups (R5)

216. The evaluation found that scheduling constraints (notably school calendars, holidays and exam periods) affected children's participation and continuity of activities in some contexts, contributing to compressed delivery in certain phases. Future projects should incorporate more flexible and context-sensitive planning of activities, particularly when working with children and other stakeholders with fixed schedules. This includes systematically accounting for school calendars, exam periods, and holidays during the design phase, as well as integrating buffer time to accommodate potential administrative delays. Such measures would help avoid compressed implementation phases and ensure more consistent participation from all stakeholders and continuity of activities.

6. Build on existing cooperation through post-project dialogue between the Council of Europe and the European Commission (R6)

217. Building on the constructive cooperation established during implementation, the CoE and the EC could, where appropriate, hold a joint reflection after project completion to identify any opportunities for further strengthening cooperation in future initiatives, including in relation to policy linkages, visibility, and dissemination of findings at EU level.

5 Annexes

5.1 Recommendations from baseline assessment

Based on the baseline assessment, five recommendations were issued:

Recommendation #1: The project team ensure appropriate time and expertise for the review and finalisation of the self-assessment tool. Notably, this would ensure feasibility and a design that is inclusive and allows for the collection of all key data. It would also be advisable to ensure that the measures for collecting data on reference indicator values are incorporated into the self-assessment exercise.

Recommendation #2: The project team should pay close attention to developing tailored strategies and more elaborate implementation plans for each activity, showing in greater detail how the needs of children from the most vulnerable groups will be addressed. The project team should also ensure that all language used in the project reflects a nuanced, non-binary understanding of gender.

Recommendation #3: The Steering Committee, the project team and representatives of focus countries design a practical children's involvement plan based on the results of the self-assessment exercise and separate discussions. The children's engagement plan should be clear and practical and specify children's participation in specific activities at the Council of Europe and at the national level.

Recommendation #4: Improve coordination and communication mechanisms within the project. Indeed, despite frequent meetings with focus countries (one per month), the latter are not fully aware of their roles, responsibilities and activities to be launched as part of the project. The same unawareness was noted amongst partner countries. Solutions to improve internal information communication could include continuing to update the project webpage regularly, organising an internal online discussion platform where representatives can ask questions or engage in substantive exchanges on different aspects of child-friendly justice, and holding more frequent meetings with partner countries. In other words, the project team should ensure that the focus and the partner countries' roles in the project are understood, as some are not fully aware of their roles.

Recommendation #5: The project team should continue to build relationships with carefully selected, tailored, and aligned external stakeholders to support the project's agenda (see also Recommendation #4 and the newsletter, which could serve as a tool for implementing this recommendation). In particular, the project team could consider involving other CSOs, especially leading CSOs focused on child-friendly justice in focus countries, as observers in the Steering Committee, and increasing the involvement of CSO Steering Committee observers in implementation, e.g., by seeking their support in improving child participation in the project.

Source: Ecorys

5.2 Evaluation Matrix

Criteria	Question	Indicator	Source	Data analysis method
Relevance	1. To what extent the child-friendly justice project objectives and design responded to children's and their parents/guardians' needs and priorities, taking into consideration children's age, gender, vulnerabilities (e.g. disabilities, children on the move, children belonging to national minorities, etc.) and specific situation as children in contact with the law (i.e. as offenders, victims or witnesses in non-judicial, judicial such as civil and criminal, and administrative proceedings)?	- Evidence of needs assessments and child consultations - Alignment between identified needs and objectives - Inclusion of gender-, disability- and age-sensitive measures - Perceived relevance among children and parents	- Project documents - Background Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders - FGDs with children - Interviews with professionals - Baseline Assessment Report	- Qualitative analysis, e.g. - Thematic analysis - Gender-sensitive analysis - Comparative analysis (Endline vs. Baseline findings)
	2. To what extent did the child-friendly justice project objectives and design respond to the focus on countries' needs and priorities in terms of child-friendly justice at both national and local levels?	- Alignment with national strategies - Adaptation to local contexts - Stakeholder perception of relevance	- Project documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders, especially country representatives - Baseline Assessment Report	- Qualitative analysis, e.g. - Thematic analysis - Gender-sensitive analysis - Comparative analysis (Endline vs. Baseline findings)
Added value	3. To what extent did the child-friendly justice project have a clear comparative advantage vis-à-vis other European and national actors implementing similar child-friendly justice initiatives/interventions?	- Stakeholder perception of CoE added value - Comparison of roles and contributions	- Project Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders - Interviews with professionals	- Qualitative analysis, e.g. - Thematic analysis - Comparative analysis
	4. What were the shortcomings compared to other implementers and why?	- Identified weaknesses or missed opportunities - Coverage, innovation or efficiency gaps	- Project Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders	- Qualitative analysis, e.g. - Thematic analysis - Comparative analysis
Effectiveness	5. To what extent did the child-friendly justice project achieve its objectives and results, including any differential results across the different groups of children in contact with the law and their parents/guardians involved in the Project, as well as the focus countries?	- Extent results have led to real change (practice, policy, mechanism etc.) - Plausible contribution to systems/mechanisms - Level of influence of results - Extent assumptions hold for results - Identification of alternative contribution stories	- Project Documents, including data from surveys conducted with trained professionals - Background Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders - Interviews with professionals - FGDs with children - Baseline Assessment Report	- Quantitative analysis - Qualitative, e.g.: - Comparative analysis (Endline vs. Baseline findings) - Thematic analysis - Gender-sensitive analysis - Basic contribution analysis Comparison of alternative contribution stories
	6. To what extent did the Council of Europe's gender mainstreaming and human rights approach contribute to the success of the Project?	- Application of human rights standards - Gender-disaggregated data - Participation and safeguarding mechanisms - Perceived inclusiveness	- Project Documents - Background Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders - FGDs with children - Interviews with professionals	- Qualitative, e.g. - Comparative analysis - Thematic analysis - Gender-sensitive analysis

Efficiency	7. To what extent were the resources and time allocated for the child-friendly justice project adequate?	- Budget allocation vs outputs - Staffing adequacy - Delays and their causes - Stakeholder perceptions	- Project Documents - KIIs all groups of stakeholders, especially representatives of DG JUST and the Council of Europe	- Quantitative analysis - Qualitative, e.g. - Comparative analysis - Thematic analysis
	8. To what extent did the child-friendly justice project deliver expected results in a timely manner with optimum financial resources?	% activities delivered on time - Budget absorption rate - Evidence of administrative bottlenecks	- Project Documents - KIIs all groups of stakeholders, especially with experts involved in the project	- Quantitative analysis - Qualitative, e.g. - Comparative analysis - Thematic analysis
Impact	9. To what extent did the child-friendly justice project generate significant positive and/or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects?	- Evidence of policy or procedural reforms # of national public institutions to use the Self-Assessment Tool as part of the internal procedure - Unintended effects - Identification of alternative contribution stories	- Project Documents - Background Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders - Interviews with professionals - Baseline Assessment Report	- Quantitative analysis, e.g. - Comparative analysis (Endline vs. Baseline findings) - Thematic analysis - Basic contribution analysis Comparison of alternative contribution stories
	10. What worked well and what did not work well, and why, and what were the best practices and lessons learnt?	- Documented innovative approaches - Stakeholder-validated best practices - Stakeholder-validated unsuccessful approaches	- Project Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders - Interviews with professionals	- Quantitative analysis, e.g. - Comparative analysis - Thematic analysis - Comparative analysis
Sustainability	11. What is the likelihood that the benefits from the child-friendly justice project will be maintained?	- Integration into policies/practices - Continued funding or institutional support - Retained capacity among justice actors	- Project Documents - Background Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders - Interviews with professionals - Baseline Assessment Report	- Qualitative analysis, e.g. - Thematic analysis - Comparative analysis (Endline vs. Baseline findings)
	12. What is required from the Council of Europe, DG JUST, focus and partner countries, children and their parents/guardians to ensure that the benefits of the project continue?	- Stakeholder-identified future actions - Remaining capacity and funding gaps - Level of political commitment	- Project documents - Background Documents - KIIs with all groups of stakeholders - Interviews with professionals	- Qualitative analysis, e.g. - Thematic analysis - Comparative analysis - Comparative analysis

Source: Ecorys

5.3 ToC for the “Support to Council of Europe’s Project on child-friendly justice”¹

Structures	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Focus countries: focal points Council of Europe’s Children’s Rights Division Steering Committee of the project Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child Lanzarote Committee Other relevant Council of Europe committees and bodies	► 1.1. The Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool and required implementation resources are finalised and piloted in selected focus countries ► 1.2. Recommendations to address the gaps based on the Child-friendly Justice Assessment Tool are presented to national authorities in focus countries	► 1. Child-friendly legal framework is strengthened in the focus countries	► Improved protection of children in contact with the law across Europe at national and local level by fostering a practical implementation of the Guidelines on child-friendly justice and to ensure the application of the relevant international legal frameworks and standards on child-friendly justice, including at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe
	► 2.1. Training needs of national authorities’ focal points related to child-friendly justice in focus countries are assessed ► 2.2. Specialised staff at the national level in focus countries are trained on child-friendly judicial proceedings	► 2. The capacities of focal points and specialised staff in focus countries were strengthened in child-friendly procedures	
	► 3.1. Awareness of children in contact with the law on their rights before, during and after judicial proceedings in focus countries is strengthened ² ► 3.2. Awareness of parents/guardians on the rights of children in contact with the law before, during and after judicial proceedings in focus countries is raised	► 3. Children in contact with the law and their parents/guardians in focus countries are informed of children’s rights before, during and after judicial proceedings	
	Assumptions		
Structures have sufficient resources	► 1.1. Focus countries are willing to draft and submit their National Evaluation Reports ► 1.2. Focus countries accept to receive recommendations	► 1. Focus countries are adopting and implementing the Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly justice	► Focus countries are politically committed to improving the protection of children in contact with the law ► Focus countries are financially committed to improving the protection of children in contact with the law
	► 2.1. Focus countries collaborate to identify specialised staff and assess their training needs ► 2.2. Specialised staff in focus countries attend and actively participate	► 2. Specialised staff is available in focus countries and attending training sessions organised by the Council of Europe	
	► 3.1. Children in contact with the law in focus countries are interested and actively participate in awareness-raising sessions ► 3.2. Parents in focus countries are interested and actively participate in awareness-raising sessions	► 3. Children in contact with the law actively participate in the awareness-raising sessions	

Source: CoE

¹ Based on the Terms of References for this project and the budget.

² Formulation of Outputs 3.1 and 3.2, as well as the related Outcome 3 would merit some discussion. The table presents these based on project documentation, especially its logical framework; however, it appears that the outputs in the project’s logical framework (and in this recreated ToC) are formulated at a higher level than the related outcome.

5.4 Statement on the use of AI

General statement

In line with Ecorys' policies and the Council of Europe's requirements, the evaluation team may use AI in a controlled and transparent manner, while ensuring full compliance with the GDPR, applicable human rights standards, and other relevant national/international legislation, as well as Ecorys' internal policies and certifications. AI was used, in particular, for large-scale public document analysis and media analysis, in line with the approach described in the inception report.

The approach followed the Council of Europe's AI guidance³ and the UNEG ethical principles for AI use in evaluation⁴, including transparency, accountability, privacy/data protection, fairness and human oversight.

AI tool questionnaire for this report

The use of artificial intelligence in Council of Europe texts

The Council of Europe recognises the utility of artificial intelligence (AI) applications for research, translation, and drafting, while also striving to respect intellectual property rights. In the interest of transparency, and in accordance with publishing industry standards, the use of these tools must be clearly stated by authors, and any passages drafted or translated by generative AI must be indicated, with the name of the tool used.

Please indicate the use of AI in the work for which you have been contracted by the Council of Europe.

Have you used AI tools in the drafting of your document? Yes

If yes, please provide the following information.

Name of the AI tool	How it was used in the drafting process
Grammarly	Grammatical review of several parts of the inception report.
Microsoft Copilot (in-house licence)	Support efficient phrasing of general sentences, under strict evaluators' review.
Microsoft Teams (transcription functionality)	Once participants agreed to the interview being recorded, we enabled recording and transcription in Microsoft Teams. The transcription captured everything said during the interview, simplifying note-taking and supporting the subsequent analysis of responses.
MAXQDA	This tool was not used at the inception stage. However, we used it during the evaluation's implementation stage, particularly to support the analysis of responses from questionnaires and interviews.

Source: Ecorys

³ Council of Europe, [Guidelines on the Use and Risks of Online Available Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools](#) (June 2024).

⁴ United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), [UNEG Ethical Principles for Harnessing AI in United Nations Evaluations: UNEG Reference Document](#) (2025).

5.5 Basic contribution analysis of project Impact

This annex summarises the contribution analysis conducted to understand how the project influenced observed changes. Four contribution stories were examined as alternative, and sometimes overlapping, explanations of impact. Together, they provide a structured way of assessing the project's role within a complex and evolving policy and institutional environment.

Contribution Story 1: The project as a primary catalyst for change

In some contexts, the project appears to have acted as a direct catalyst for change. This was most evident in the child-friendly justice self-assessments, which represented the first of their kind, prompting reflection on previously unexamined gaps and weaknesses within national systems. Stakeholders described the assessments as unprecedented and practically useful, supporting prioritisation and follow-up action. Examples include the preparation of national guidelines in Slovenia and discussions in Poland around establishing a multidisciplinary task force with potential links to policy reform. While this contribution story is plausible and supported in specific settings - particularly where national authorities were actively engaged - it does not adequately explain impact across all participating countries and therefore has limited explanatory power on its own.

Contribution Story 2: The project as a reinforcing and legitimising actor

A stronger and more consistent narrative positions the project as reinforcing and legitimising reforms that were already underway. Across interviews and survey responses, stakeholders frequently characterised the project's impact as contributory rather than causal. In this view, the project added value by aligning national initiatives with child-friendly justice standards, providing evidence and structure, and situating national efforts within broader EU and CoE processes. In Slovenia, for example, legal and institutional reforms were already in progress, with the project supporting coherence and strengthening their alignment with international standards. The association with international organisations was also widely seen as providing leverage, helping sustain political attention and engagement. This contribution story closely reflects the project's ToC.

Contribution Story 3: The project as an enabler of conditions for longer-term impact

A third explanation emphasises the project's role in laying foundations for future change rather than generating immediate systemic effects. Stakeholders consistently noted that the project's two-year timeframe was too short to expect observable justice-system-wide change. Instead, they framed the project's value in terms of improved diagnostic understanding, strengthened professional capacity and the development of networks that could support longer-term change. Evidence from Poland shows that professional connections formed through the project continued beyond its formal end. This story is well supported by the evidence and helps explain why impacts are mainly indirect, incremental, and long-term.

Contribution Story 4: Change driven primarily by external factors

An alternative explanation attributes observed changes largely to external influences, including national reform agendas, EU legislation and wider CoE initiatives, with the project playing only a limited supporting role. Some respondents, particularly in partner countries, were cautious about attributing specific changes directly to the project. In partner countries where key project components, such as the self-assessment, were not implemented, follow-up change was limited. While this story highlights important contextual constraints and helps explain variation across countries, it does not fully account for the stronger effects observed in focus countries or for changes in professional co-operation and attitudes that participants directly associated with project activities.

Comparative assessment and conclusion

In summary, no single contribution story adequately explains the project's impact. A combination of the second and third stories is most likely: the project primarily strengthened existing reform processes while simultaneously creating conditions for long-term impact through diagnostic tools, capacity building, and networking. The first and fourth stories are not sufficient as standalone explanations. Based on these, it can be

reasonably assessed that the project made a significant and credible contribution, consistent with its ToC and stakeholders' own understanding of the change process.

5.6 List of consulted documents

Child Friendly Justice European Network. (2025). *Inception report – Trainings in Belgium*.

Child Friendly Justice European Network. (2025). *Training of trainers (ToT) sessions on child-friendly justice in Belgium: Final report*.

Conseil supérieur de la Justice. (2025). *Rapport d'évaluation du projet « Justice adaptée aux enfants »: Évaluation de la Belgique basée sur l'assessment tool*.

Council of Europe. (2023). *European action to strengthen child-friendly justice (JUST-2023-IM-CCHI/RIGH/12): Budget for all years*.

Council of Europe. (2023). *Support to Council of Europe's project on child-friendly justice: Description of the action*.

Council of Europe. (2025). *Child-friendly justice project: Awareness raising material for children and adults in Belgium, Poland and Slovenia*.

Council of Europe, & Terre des hommes Foundation Lausanne. (2025). *Inception report: Child-friendly justice in Poland*.

Council of Europe. (2026). *Child-friendly justice assessment tool*.

European Commission, & Council of Europe. (2023). *Annex I: Key performance indicators (KPI) – Support to Council of Europe's project on child-friendly justice*.

European Commission, & Council of Europe. (2023). *Proposed logical framework of the action: Support to Council of Europe's project on child-friendly justice*.

Ministry of Justice (Poland). (2025). *Child-friendly justice assessment report: Poland*.

Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia. (2025). *Inception report – Training plan "Child-friendly justice in Slovenia"*.

5.7 List of surveyed and interviewed stakeholders

Table 3. Number of interviewed stakeholders by each category

The type of stakeholder	Number	Female	Male
Project Implementers and Experts	9	-	-
National Authorities and Policy Makers	9	-	-
Professionals (trained staff)	4	-	-
Total	22	18	4

Source: Ecorys

Table 4. List of surveyed stakeholders by each category

Type of stakeholder	Number	Female	Male
Project Implementers and Experts	12	-	-
National Authorities and Policy Makers	10	-	-
Professionals (trained staff)	2	-	-

Total	24	18	6
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Source: Ecorys

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