



Final Evaluation Report

for the external evaluation of the
Council of Europe's

Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	iv
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Context and description of the intervention.....	1
1.2 Purpose and scope of the evaluation	2
1.3 Evaluation methodology	2
2. FINDINGS	5
2.1 Relevance	5
2.2 Effectiveness.....	7
2.2.1 Achievements.....	7
2.2.2 Challenges and Enablers.....	12
2.2.3 Human rights-based approach	14
2.2.4 Gender equality.....	16
2.2.5 Results-based reporting	17
2.3 Efficiency	19
2.4 Coherence	21
3. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED	23
3.1 Conclusions and recommendations.....	23
3.2 Good practice and lessons learned.....	27
ANNEXES	28
Annex 1: Reference to policy documents and results of Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies	28
Annex 2: Effectiveness of sample projects	32
Annex 3: Survey.....	39
Annex 4: Recommendations by Interviewees.....	44
Annex 5: Council of Europe Theory of Change	49
Source: Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2022 - 2025, page 15.	49
Annex 6: List of sample projects and Action Plan projects	50
Annex 7: Terms of Reference.....	54
Annex 8: Evaluation Matrix.....	63
Annex 9: Key documents	66

Tables and Charts

Table 1: Overview interviews and survey	3
Table 2: Overview progress sample projects	8
Chart 1: Action Plan contribution to reform	7
Chart 2: Outcome areas	10
Chart 3: Challenges and Enablers	12
Chart 4: CoE accountability and transparency	15
Chart 5: Results-based reporting	18

List of Acronyms

Action Plan	Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024
CEC	Central Electoral Commission
CoE	Council of Europe
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DPC	Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
EU	European Union
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NGOs	Non-government organisations
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
SU	Soviet Union
VAW/DV	Violence Against Women / Domestic Violence
VET	Vocational Education and Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Context: On 3 March 2022, the Republic of Moldova applied for European Union membership and was granted European Union candidate status in June 2022. In December 2023, the European Council approved the opening of accession negotiations. The Council of Europe cooperation supports the country's reform priorities, including the European Union accession agenda, in areas of expertise of the Council of Europe.

The intervention: The Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 (hereinafter called the Action Plan) was adopted by the Committee of Ministers at its 1359th session in November 2020 and launched by the President of the Republic of Moldova and the Council of Europe Secretary General on 19 April 2021 in Strasbourg. It represents the programming and fundraising framework for the Council of Europe's technical cooperation in the Republic of Moldova. As of 1 April 2024, the Action Plan had received a total funding volume of €23.8 million from 19 donors and from the Council of Europe's Ordinary Budget and included projects in all pillars; human rights, rule of law and democracy.

The evaluation: This evaluation report presents the findings of an external evaluation, commissioned by the Council of Europe on the Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024. It was carried out between November 2023 and April 2024.

The evaluation aimed to assess the relevance, effectiveness and coherence of the Action Plan and its project portfolio. Objectives of the evaluation were (i) to assess the outcomes achieved and their contribution to the Republic of Moldova's alignment to the European standards and EU's accession agenda; (ii) to assess to what extent Action Plan progress has been hindered by the unique challenges and implications of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova and (iii) to draw lessons, identify good practices and provide recommendations related to the management of the Action Plan in view of the upcoming Action Plan.

Specific focus was placed on a sample of seven projects, which reflect all thematic areas under the Council of Europe's three pillars – human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The sample projects were assessed with a view to using the findings to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations for the whole Action Plan. This was complemented by a survey of stakeholders' views on various issues across the Action Plan. A total of 84 stakeholders contributed to the evaluation directly through interviews held in Strasbourg, Chisinau and online. A further 204 stakeholders participated in the evaluation's online survey.

Conclusions and recommendations

Relevance

Relevance and responsiveness: The findings confirm the Action Plan's relevance and responsiveness. The Action Plan and its projects are largely demand-driven and are clearly aligned with the Republic of Moldova's wide range of strategies and policies related to areas of reform. They are therefore relevant to ongoing reform processes. The relevance of the Action Plan has increased following Moldova's EU candidate status and the opening of accession negotiations. The significant increase in the Action Plan budget also indicates a high level of donor commitment. The assessments, opinions and recommendations of the Council of Europe's monitoring and advisory bodies have been thoroughly integrated into the Action Plan and its project portfolio in all pillars of the Action Plan.

Effectiveness

Achievements and challenges: There is solid evidence that the Action Plan as a whole, and the sample projects in particular, have made a clear contribution to a number of areas of reform and to the capacity of partner institutions. All sample projects contribute to the outcomes defined in the Action Plan and make a clear contribution to some part of the EU accession agenda.

External factors contributing to effectiveness include the political will of the Republic of Moldova's authorities and the positive momentum of the EU accession process. Partner institutions and Council of Europe staff alike express that they consider outcomes of the Council of Europe's intervention to be strongest in the area of institutional capacities, followed by improvements of legislation and policies.

There are a number of external challenges over which the Council of Europe had or has very limited control, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the mass arrival of refugees from Ukraine and, in some cases, the limited absorption capacity of partner institutions. In particular, the implementation of the Action Plan was challenged by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. New needs emerged, many of them related to the response to the refugee crisis. At the same time, however, the political circumstances led to an unexpected increase in the political attention and resources devoted to the country.

A challenge in pursuing the intended objectives and reform processes has been the lack of availability and continuity of partners' human resources, which limits the effectiveness of partner institutions.

Recommendation 1: To increase the effectiveness of capacity-building activities, they need to be part of a broader strategy for the overall organisational development of institutions. Scoping of interventions and regular follow-up processes on the practical application of new knowledge and skills acquired are key to contributing to sustainable change in institutions and change of practice.

Recommendation 2: More focus on how new knowledge, skills and competences are subsequently used is needed in monitoring capacity-building. To this end, qualitative indicators can play a productive role.

Recommendation 3: Partners' capacities in terms of human resources should be addressed. Wherever possible, the dialogue with partner institutions should include the topic of securing staff in the medium term and whenever possible, human resource strategies should be an integral part of every partner project.

Recommendation 4: The effectiveness of awareness-raising activities will also benefit from adequate scoping. Greater cooperation should be sought, as joint campaigns involving several Council of Europe projects and/or funders will increase effectiveness.

Human rights-based approach and gender equality: The Action Plan and its implementation clearly demonstrate a human rights-based approach. Strengths include the fact that project objectives are based on principles such as participation, inclusion, equality, non-discrimination and accountability. Cooperation with civil society is also assessed positively. The involvement of vulnerable groups could be further strengthened. This would both benefit these groups and strengthen what can be seen as the hallmark of the Council of Europe in the perception of stakeholders: the human rights-based approach. Gender mainstreaming is also evident in the Action Plan and its projects. However, implementation remains somewhat uneven. The extent and depth of the consideration of gender-specific factors varies considerably from project to project. This can be further stabilised and the quality improved.

Recommendation 5: Continue the good work on mainstreaming human rights principles throughout the programming and implementation of the Action Plan. Examine whether the voices of vulnerable groups can be sought more intensively beyond project and operational levels, in particular during the consultations at Action Plan level. Consider including more projects that go beyond mainstreaming and target specific vulnerable groups in overall programming (dual approach).

Recommendation 6: To address the challenges of gender mainstreaming, ensure that the scope and continuity of the gender adviser(s) position(s) is (are) secured and consider other funding that can have a stabilising effect in addition to the secondment.

Recommendation 7: In addition to existing policies, tools and training, more binding organisational processes can be considered. An additional tool could be the labelling of projects according to one of the internationally recognised gender equality schemes. Labelling through these gender markers can also strengthen the understanding of results orientation, as it does not emphasise mainstreaming as such, but rather the goal of gender mainstreaming.

Results-based reporting: The results-based reporting system is in place and consistently supported institutionally by the Council of Europe, e.g. through training. Staff confirm that they view the system as supporting decision making, increasing accountability and transparency, and improving overall reporting. At the same time, the quality of reporting is still uneven from the evaluators' point of view. Identified weaknesses of the system are time constraints for proper reporting, lack of ownership by partners and conceptual limitations of measurability of results. These should be taken seriously. There is a risk that the analytical potential of the approach cannot be fully exploited.

Recommendation 8: Further develop results-based reporting and training, including: emphasising the overarching links between individual projects, the Action Plan, the Council of Europe's theory of change and the desired overall development of society (the architecture of change); emphasising the link between good reporting and the willingness of donors to support the Action Plan in a more flexible way, in order to create motivation; exploring ways to increase partner ownership of the indicators and thus of data collection. Consider reducing the number of indicators in favour of quality and manageability.

Efficiency

Efficiency: The main challenge that has had a negative impact on the Council of Europe's capacity for efficient implementation has been the lack of availability and continuity of human resources, particularly in the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau. However, despite this shortcoming, the Council of Europe has been able to respond flexibly to changing circumstances. Funding modalities are not always optimal. Partner institutions value the Council of Europe as an actor that maintains a long-term and committed engagement, but envisaged long-term impact often needs to be achieved through time-limited projects.

Recommendation 9: Human resource needs, recruitment and management should remain high on the agenda and be addressed in the framework of a human resource strategy at different levels:

- (i) The Council of Europe's human resources should be realistically assessed at the planning stages of both the Action Plan and the projects. Ambitious programming needs to take into account possible limitations in terms of human resources.
- (ii) The Council of Europe should continue its efforts to address the human resources bottleneck in all aspects. In addition to financial incentives, other factors like workload, motivation and staff satisfaction should be taken into account.

Coherence

Coherence: The coordination mechanisms of the Council of Europe ensure that its projects and those of other donors are complementary. There are a number of good practices, such as participation in or facilitation of regular donor exchanges, joint activities with other donors and good communication. Other enabling factors arise from the specific context of the Republic of Moldova: a small country with EU candidate status, where the Council of Europe not only has a good reputation but is also seen as having a unique role to play in facilitating the accession agenda. The presence of much larger donors sometimes poses a challenge to coordination and coherence.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and description of the intervention

1. **Context:** On 3 March 2022, the Republic of Moldova applied for European Union membership and was granted European Union candidate status in June 2022. In December 2023, the European Council approved the opening of accession negotiations. The European Council will decide on further steps once the European Commission deems the Republic of Moldova to fulfil the conditions outlined in the European Commission's opinion on its European Union membership application. Council of Europe cooperation continues to support the country's reform priorities, including the European Union accession agenda, in areas of expertise of the Council of Europe.
2. The Council of Europe's technical assistance programmes are an integral part of the strategic triangle of standard-setting, monitoring and cooperation: the development of legally binding standards (setting objectives) is combined with their monitoring by independent mechanisms (identifying gaps) and complemented by technical cooperation to facilitate the filling of these gaps. The expected results chain is detailed in the Council of Europe's Theory of Change (Annex 5) and should lead to duty bearers fulfilling their obligations under Council of Europe standards and rights holders enjoying their rights. The Directorate of Programme Coordination ensures strategic programming mainly in the form of country and regional action plans and cooperation documents.
3. **Description of the intervention:** The Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 was adopted by the Committee of Ministers at its 1359th session in November 2020, and launched by the President of the Republic of Moldova, and the Council of Europe Secretary General, on 19 April 2021 in Strasbourg. The Action Plan was prepared following extensive consultation with the authorities of the Republic of Moldova. It aims to bring the country's legislation, institutions and practice further in line with European standards in the areas of human rights, the rule of law and democracy. It was conceived to support the country's efforts to honour its obligations as a Council of Europe member State. Key stakeholders comprise the Government of the Republic of Moldova and its relevant line Ministries, Parliamentary bodies/committees, legislative, judicial and executive/administrative bodies, local authorities, national human rights institutions and civil society organisations such as non-profit organisations, selected professional associations and selected trade unions such as e.g. the Lawyers' Union.
4. The Republic of Moldova has been significantly affected by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. The Republic of Moldova has faced the largest mass arrival of refugees in its history. This situation has created emerging needs and the Council of Europe, within its mandate and in consultation with the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, has adjusted the work plans of the ongoing projects in the framework of the Action Plan and provided immediate support to partners' requests regarding this unprecedented influx of refugees.
5. The initial budget of the Action Plan amounted to €13.65 million and was subsequently revised. As of 1 April 2024, thanks to 19 contributors¹ and support from the Ordinary Budget of the Council of Europe the Action Plan received a total of €23.8 million (97% of the estimated budget). The EU provided €7.87 million to the Action Plan, mainly through the Partnership for Good Governance (PGG). As of September 2023, the Action Plan encompasses 39 projects (in all sectors: human rights, the rule of law and democracy), either ongoing or already completed.

¹ Current donors (in descending order according to the volume of their financial contributions) are European Union, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Netherlands, United States of America, Denmark, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Liechtenstein, Slovak Republic, Cyprus, Romania, Estonia, EVAC.

1.2 Purpose and scope of the evaluation

6. **Evaluation purpose:** The purpose of this evaluation is to draw lessons from the implementation of the Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 and to provide its stakeholders with an objective assessment of the results that have been achieved. The evaluation of the Action Plan is foreseen as part of agreements signed between the Council of Europe and the donors who contributed to the Action Plan. The evaluation is undertaken during the last year of Action Plan implementation. It is planned that results of this evaluation will feed into the preparation of future Council of Europe Action Plans for the Republic of Moldova as well as other countries, with a view to enhancing their relevance and effectiveness. The primary beneficiaries of this evaluation are the Council of Europe's Major Administrative Entities and the DPC, both management and project staff, as the implementers of the Action Plan. Other beneficiaries include the donors to the Action Plan, as well as the relevant national authorities.
7. **Evaluation objectives:** The specific objectives of the evaluation are i) to assess the outcomes achieved by the actions implemented and their contribution to the Republic of Moldova's alignment to the European standards and EU's accession agenda; ii) to assess to what extent Action Plan progress has been hindered by the unique challenges and implications of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova; iii) to draw lessons, identify good practices and provide recommendations related to the management of the Action Plan and project implementation methods, in particular in view of the upcoming Action Plan.
8. The evaluation was based on an evaluation matrix (see Annex 8) that was structured around the evaluation questions specified in the Terms of Reference (see Annex 7) under three OECD/DAC criteria, namely relevance, effectiveness and coherence. The preliminary evaluation questions and sub-questions of the ToR were fine-tuned between the evaluators and the client. Relevant human rights and gender equality aspects are reflected as sub-questions under the evaluation criterion effectiveness. During the course of the evaluation, a number of issues were identified which, in a technical sense, can be dealt with under the OECD/DAC criterion efficiency rather than effectiveness. Although this criterion was not part of the Terms of Reference and therefore not part of the evaluation matrix, it has been included in the report at the request of the Evaluation Division, Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO).
9. **Evaluation scope:** Specific focus was placed on a sample of seven projects, with a view to identifying findings and drawing conclusions and recommendations for the whole Action Plan. The selected sample projects reflect all thematic areas under the Council of Europe's three pillars – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – taking into account as much as possible the diversity of the cooperation sectors of the Action Plan.

1.3 Evaluation methodology

10. **Overall approach:** The overall methodological approach and design for the evaluation were participatory and utilisation-focused. The participatory approach aimed to ensure that stakeholders are fully engaged with and own the evaluation process, findings and recommendations. The evaluation methodology utilised qualitative and quantitative data. Furthermore, it followed the [Council of Europe Evaluation Guidelines](#) and Council of Europe [Code of Conduct for Evaluation](#).
11. **Sampling of projects:** As per Terms of Reference, a specific focus was placed on a sample of projects. The evaluators proposed a draft list of sample projects, considering different thematic areas and related methodology, and discussed it with the DPC Programming Department during the inception phase. At the time of sampling (November 2023), the Action Plan consisted of 39 projects, of which 11 were

regional projects (not meeting the criteria of being country-specific and hence excluded). Of the remaining 28 country-specific projects, 7 have been selected, representing 25% of the overall number of projects. See Annex 6 for the lists of all 39 Action Plan projects and the selected 7 projects. Purposive sampling was applied. No sample limitations were identified.

12. The purposive sampling, as agreed between the evaluators and the client, was based on the following selection criteria: i) A mix of thematic areas under the Council of Europe's three pillars – human rights, democracy and the rule of law; ii) Reflect as much as possible the diversity of the cooperation sectors of the Action Plan; iii) Be country-specific; iv) Ongoing for at least 12 months; v) Exclusion criteria: projects already evaluated or included in assessment (so as to avoid duplication of efforts); vi) Furthermore, qualitative factors were taken into account, such as continuity with the previous Council of Europe support to the country, relevance to priority topics/conditions for EU accession, and specifics in the current political context, in particular challenges in the country caused by the ongoing Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine.
13. **Data collection:** The evaluation team applied a triangulation of data collection methods, incl. i) systematic document review; ii) On-site and online semi-structured stakeholder interviews, incl. interviews with a focus on the sample projects and interviews with a focus on the overall Action Plan; iii) Online participation in the Action Plan Steering Committee Meeting on 23 January 2023; iv) An online survey. All methods of data collection were agreed with the client.
14. Document review: The document review included project-specific documentation, AP-specific documentation and Council of Europe internal and external background documents. Relevant evaluation reports on individual projects and on the Partnership for Good Governance and Results-Based Management programme were also taken into account. A list of key documents is provided in Annex 9.
15. Semi-structured interviews: On-site stakeholder interviews took place in Strasbourg between 15 and 17 January 2024 and in the Republic of Moldova (Chisinau) between 5 and 9 February 2024. Complementary online interviews were carried out throughout February 2024. For total number of interviews see the table 1 below.

Table 1: Overview interviews and survey

Stakeholder	Female	Male	Prefer not to say	Total
Semi-structured interviews				
Council of Europe staff Strasbourg	13	5		18
Council of Europe staff Chisinau	7	2		9
Governmental project partners	34	12		46
Civil society	3	2		5
Local consultants	1	2		3
International actors/donors	2	1		3
Total interviews	60	24		84
Survey participants				
	118	75	11	204

16. **Survey:** A complementary online survey was implemented in February 2024. Potential participants were the partners and stakeholders as well as Council of Europe staff of all projects, i.e. beyond the sample projects. The survey questions were aimed at assessing the relevance, effectiveness and coherence of the Action Plan as a whole. A total of 355 potential participants were invited to take part in the survey. A total of 204 people participated (response rate 57%). See table 1 for survey participant details and Annex 3 for survey content.
17. **Recommendations:** As part of the qualitative interviews, Council of Europe staff and other stakeholders were asked what recommendations they would make to the Council of Europe. The evaluators have compiled these recommendations in Annex 4. The evaluators do not claim that these recommendations and stakeholder perceptions are factually correct. However, the evaluators have critically assessed the selection of issues on which recommendations were made and their content, and compared them with other findings. Some of the content of the stakeholder recommendations has been incorporated into the evaluators' recommendations.
18. **Human rights and gender perspective:** The evaluation included a human rights and gender perspective. It covered the human rights pillar of the Action Plan (three sample projects, incl. a project on the support to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Moldova). Furthermore, cross-cutting human rights and gender related questions were part of the evaluation matrix. The Council of Europe's "Human Rights Approach Practical Guide for Co-operation Projects" and the "Gender mainstreaming toolkit for co-operation projects" was utilised. Interviews and the online survey reflect the diversity of stakeholders including women and men.
19. **Data analysis:** In addition to the above-mentioned guides on the human rights approach and on gender mainstreaming, the analysis and presentation of the aggregated data was informed by the Council of Europe's Theory of Change and the Council of Europe's progress labels as defined in the annual Action Plan reports.
20. **Limitations:** The number of respondents for the qualitative interviews varied between projects. Where the number was particularly low, this was compensated for by an in-depth desk review. The number of Council of Europe staff interviewed for the Action Plan as a whole, i.e. beyond individual projects, is significantly higher than the number of external stakeholders. The latter often preferred to comment 'only' on individual projects. In contrast, the number of external stakeholders in the survey, the questions of which also refer to the Action Plan, is satisfactory. The willingness of other international donors to participate in interviews was rather low.
21. The survey was also based on purposive sampling. A total of 67 Council of Europe staff in Strasbourg involved in the planning or implementation of the Action Plan were invited to participate. In the Republic of Moldova, a further 288 stakeholders (including Council of Europe staff) were invited to participate by the Council of Europe Office in the Republic of Moldova. Due to purposive sampling and non-compulsory participation, the survey does not reflect representative data, but rather the assessments and self-assessments of the stakeholders involved. This usually implies a certain bias, e.g. towards own achievements. In addition, participants holding stronger positive or negative views are more inclined to respond. Survey data can therefore reveal trends and show when the assessments of different stakeholder groups differ significantly. As such, they can enrich stakeholders' reflections on self-assessment and external assessment.
22. **Problems encountered during the evaluation:** As the evaluation report was being drafted, it became clear that the Evaluation Division of the Directorate of Internal Oversight and the Directorate of Programme Coordination had different expectations of the evaluation report. The Evaluation Division fundamentally questioned the methodology chosen. The evaluators had no knowledge of this until the first draft of the report was submitted. The chosen methodology had been communicated in the Terms of Reference and these were respected by the evaluators and their work was guided by this document.

2. FINDINGS

2.1 Relevance

Evaluation question: To what extent is the Action plan addressing the needs of the Republic of Moldova in supporting the alignment with European Union practices of human rights, democracy and rule of law?

Evaluation Sub-questions:

To what extent was the Council of Europe's Action Plan relevant and responsive to the needs and priorities of the Republic of Moldova in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law?

To what extent did the results (recommendations/opinions/reports/judgments) of the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies in respect of the Republic of Moldova inform the Action Plan design to bring reforms closer in line with the European standards?

23. **Alignment with the Republic of Moldova priorities:** Overall, the document review and stakeholder interviews confirm the relevance and responsiveness of the Action Plan and its projects. The Action Plan and its project portfolio are clearly aligned with the Republic of Moldova's broad spectrum of strategies and action plans and thus relevant to ongoing reform processes. In the area of human rights this includes, e.g. the National Action Plan on Human Rights of the Republic of Moldova (2018-2022); in the area of rule of law, e.g. the 2021-2024 Strategy on ensuring the independence and integrity of the justice sector; and in the area of democracy, e.g. new 2022 Electoral Code and 2023-2030 Public Administration Reform Strategy. The relevance of the Action Plan is also due to its ability to build on previous Action Plans and thus to accompany long-term legislative processes. See Annex 1 for further references to policy papers of the Republic of Moldova.
24. The Action Plan has reinforced its relevance in light of the 2022 EU candidate status and subsequent opening of accession negotiations in December 2023, e.g. the Commission Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for membership of the European Union references the Post-Monitoring Roadmap for Local and Regional Democracy to achieve multi-level governance as part of the political criteria for membership.² Linkages with EU initiatives have also been flagged up, e.g., the project *Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants* supports the alignment to the New Pact on Migration and Asylum of the EU, agreed between the European Parliament and the Council in December 2023.
25. However, the qualitative interviews also reveal reservations about the accession process. Not all stakeholders support this process (in its entirety), without necessarily expressing direct dissatisfaction. Furthermore, gender equality and the concept of open governance are seen as "soft issues", compared to more pressing issues such as the economy or the energy crisis. As a result, perceptions of the relevance of the Action Plan or some of its components may vary from one institution to another.
26. **Donors' commitment:** The considerable growth of the Action Plan budget indicates high donor commitment. Starting with a budget of 13 million EUR a total of 23.8 million EUR have been pledged by now, which constitutes 97% of the Action Plan portfolio.
27. **Needs orientation:** Thorough consultation processes with mainly governmental institutions, but also with civil society, were emphasised by various stakeholders as key to the needs orientation of the Action Plan and its projects. Participatory approaches to carrying out project-based needs assessments were important in exploring new thematic areas such as labour rights and migration and refugees. Although the Action Plan focus is on civil and political rights, a number of projects contain elements of social and economic rights, such as the project *Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions* and the portfolio includes for the first time a

² https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/0e2c1ba2-a821-439a-b697-101014d372c7_en?filename=Republic%20of%20Moldova%20Opinion%20and%20Annex.pdf p.5

specific project on *Enhancing employment rights*. Stakeholders highlight the relevance of this area in light of low standards of living and a rate of 26% of working age population not engaged in education, employment or training. Furthermore, the flexibility of the Action Plan has been key in responding to emerging needs, particularly in light of the mass influx of refugees from Ukraine.

28. Overall, almost 97% of survey respondents say that the Action Plan addresses the Republic of Moldova's needs in supporting alignment with European Union practices in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law to a considerable or to a great extent. However, the perceptions of state authorities and Council of Europe staff members differ, at least to the extent that 83% of Council of Europe respondents chose the answer 'to a great extent', while the figure for state actors was 'only' 50%. Their assessment is somewhat more reserved. This is also reflected in the fact that in the open question on the perception of strengths and weaknesses of the Council of Europe, the comment is made several times that projects are not always fully needs-based. Some participants express the need to improve consultation with the final target groups, to be more sensitive to the specific situation and history of the country, and to address problems with the absorption capacity of the institutions involved.
29. **Consideration of the results of the Council of Europe's monitoring and advisory bodies:** Judgements, opinions and recommendations of Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies provide the core basis of the Action Plan and its projects. Annex 1 details the documents referred to. In the Human Rights pillar of the Action Plan, stakeholders refer in particular to the recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), for example the project *Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention* aims to address digital violence, in line with a respective GREVIO recommendation.
30. In the Rule of Law pillar, project interventions are informed especially by recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT); the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures (MONEYVAL); Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), the Venice Commission, and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Interviews also stress the importance of Action Plan projects to address judgements of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). For example, the project *Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions* addresses a group of cases that concern violations of the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment, poor conditions of detention and lack of access to adequate medical care (including specialised medical treatment).
31. Venice Commission and GRECO recommendations also provided a basis for the Democracy pillar of the Action Plan. Other Council of Europe entities contributed to specific intervention areas, through e.g. a series of election observation reports by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Interviews highlight close cooperation with monitoring and advisory bodies, such as for example the project *Improving Electoral Practice* with the experts and members of the Venice Commission. Annex 1 specifies more details on recommendations, opinions, reports and judgments of the Council of Europe's monitoring and advisory bodies, which informed the Action Plan.
32. Furthermore, opinions and recommendations by Council of Europe advisory and monitoring bodies inform the EU accession negotiations. The Commission Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for membership of the European Union references in recommendations by the Venice Commission, GRECO, and MONEYVAL to assess the capacity of the country to meet the Copenhagen criteria.³

³ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/0e2c1ba2-a821-439a-b697-101014d372c7_en?filename=Republic%20of%20Moldova%20Opinion%20and%20Annex.pdf p.7 (Venice Commission) and p.8 (MONEYVAL, GRECO).

2.2 Effectiveness

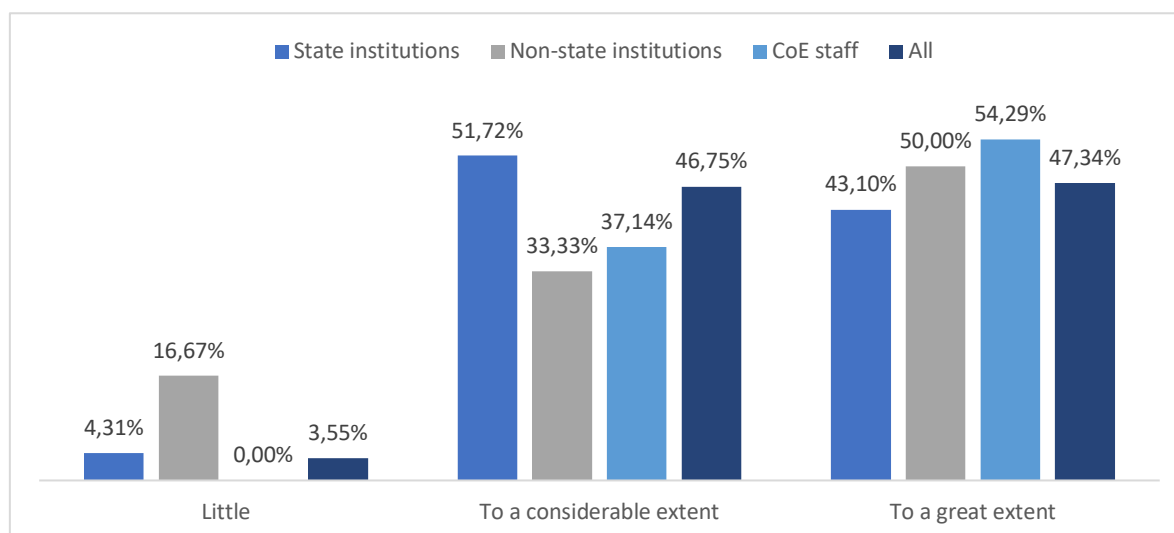
Evaluation question: To what extent has the Action Plan achieved its objectives and outcomes?

Evaluation sub-question: To what extent has the Action Plan contributed to enhancing the quality and efficiency in the targeted sectors of reforms and towards partner institutions?

2.2.1 Achievements

33. **Action Plan achievements:** The interviews, desk review and the survey provide sound evidence that the Action Plan has contributed considerably to the capacity of partner institutions and has made a clear contribution to a number of reform areas. 80% of all survey respondents think that the Council of Europe has contributed either to a considerable or to a great extent. No one answered “not at all”. Council of Europe staff members rate the success of the Council of Europe the highest, as compared to state and non-state institutions of the Republic of Moldova.⁴

Chart 1: Action Plan contribution to reform



34. **Contribution of sample projects to Action Plan outcomes:** The evaluators were able to verify that each sample project contributes to the outcomes defined in the Action Plan. The project *Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants* was initially not planned under this Action Plan, but contributed to the outcomes defined in the Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025). Specific contributions of each sample project are detailed in Annex 2.
35. **Contribution of sample projects to the EU accession agenda:** In addition, all sample projects contributed to some part of the EU accession agenda. The extent of this contribution varies, partly due to the amount of preparatory work on which a project can build. In some cases, the contribution is still rather modest, in others it is more pronounced. A number of projects contributed directly to one of the nine steps recommended in the Commission's Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for membership of the European Union. There are also clear contributions to various policy areas, such as

⁴ Survey participants were asked “Has the CoE Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 contributed to enhancing the quality and efficiency of relevant reforms and/or the performance of partner institutions?” A total of 169 survey participants answered the question.

the EU asylum framework, gender equality and the fight against violence against women, or local democracy.

36. **Progress of sample projects:** The evaluators also assessed the progress of the sample projects.⁵ Almost all of the projects were considered to be making "good progress" in whole or in part. Table 2 below gives a full overview of the progress levels of the sample projects. The overall picture of the progress levels indicates that the project implementation has an appropriate flow of activities and corresponding results. Although an Action Plan is not limited to the sum of its projects, its effectiveness cannot be assumed without effective project implementation.

Table 2: Overview progress sample projects

Pillar and Project	Start	End	Overall progress
Human Rights			
Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants in the Republic of Moldova	01/09/2022	30/06/2024	Good progress 
Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Moldova	01/01/2022	31/12/2024	Good progress 
Enhancing Employment Rights in the Republic of Moldova	15/12/22	31/12/25	Some progress 
Rule of Law			
Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions in the Republic of Moldova	01/03/2021	31/12/2024	Good progress 
Action against Corruption in the Republic of Moldova, Phase 2	01/09/2022	31/08/2024	Some progress 
Democracy			
Improving electoral practice in the Republic of Moldova, Phase 3	01/03/2023	31/12/2024	Good progress and likely contribution to very good progress 
Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova	01/01/2022	31/12/2024	Good progress 

⁵ Projects were labelled according to the CoE label definitions. As most CoE projects are implemented in several phases, results from longer processes or earlier project phases were also taken into account if they have an impact on the current Action Plan phase.

CoE labels to describe progress on the implementation of projects and the Action Plan:

- **Very good progress** indicates that legislative amendments and/or institution building led to changes in the socio-economic situation of the end beneficiaries/target populations. (colour coded green)
- **Good progress** indicates that activities continued at a good pace with concrete results having already been achieved during the reference period. (colour coded green)
- **Some progress** indicates that activities are being implemented as planned and have good prospects of producing concrete results. (colour coded yellow)
- **No progress** indicates that either the project did not progress, and therefore activities were not implemented, or that activities with an expected result are planned to be implemented at a later stage. (colour coded red)

Where “some progress” was labelled, it was due to varying reasons. Delays in the implementation of the project *Action against Corruption, Phase 2* were mostly due to external factors beyond the control of the Council of Europe (e.g. lengthy approval procedures during project revision, lengthy vetting processes for all law enforcement participants of capacity building activities). There was also an internal delay in getting the local team up and running. Therefore, in phase 2, which was sampled for this evaluation, this resulted in partial delivery of outputs, with the majority of activities to be implemented in the upcoming period.⁶

It should also be noted that newly introduced projects and themes (phase 1 and/or short duration so far) necessarily show less progress than long-term projects with several phases.⁷ The project *Strengthening labour rights* is the Council of Europe's first full-fledged effort in the field of social labour rights in the Republic of Moldova. During the first year of implementation, the project focused on laying a solid foundation for the implementation of future project interventions, which is a reasonable sequence of activities.

The project *Improving Electoral Practice* was labelled “likely contribution to very good progress”, as interviewees pointed to long-term improvements in the electoral processes, that have had a positive impact on the situation of citizens. The evaluators assume that the Council of Europe projects are not solely responsible for this success, but that they have contributed to it.

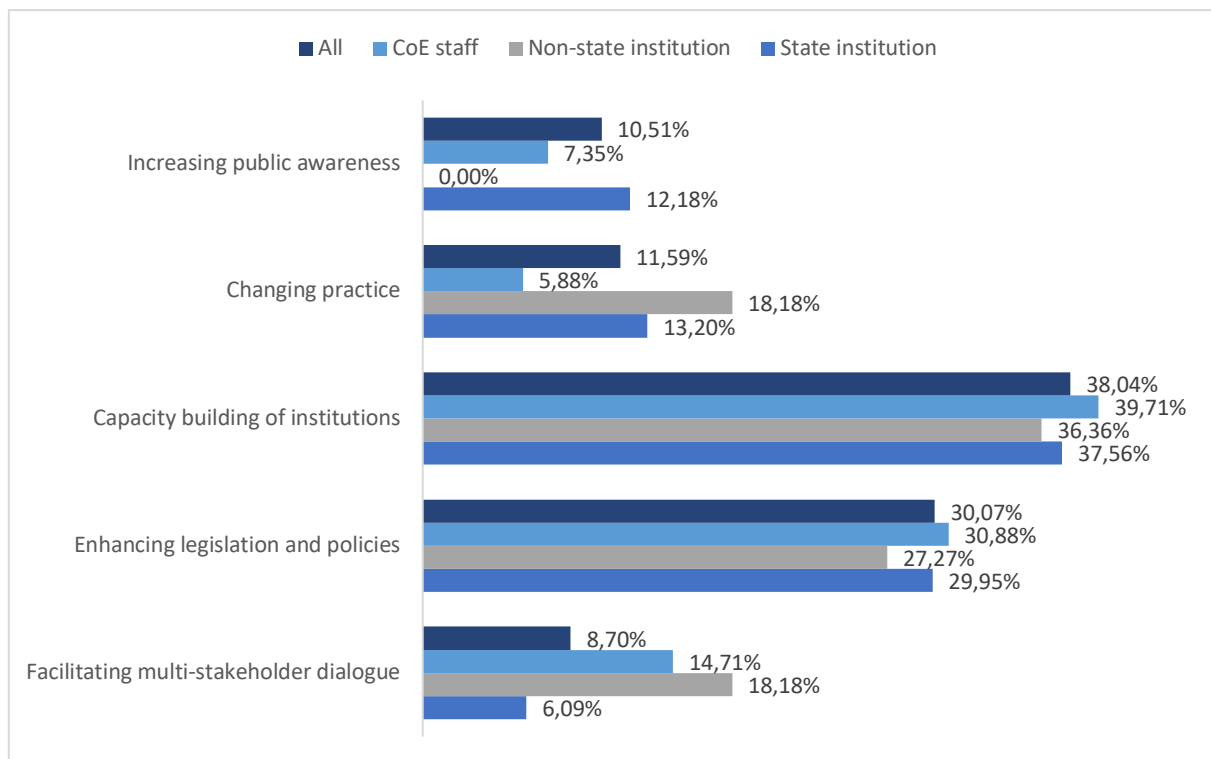
37. **Effectiveness in relation to outcome areas:** Council of Europe projects contribute to outcomes in different areas such as (i) stakeholder dialogue; (ii) legislation/policy; (iii) institutional capacity; (iv) changed practice; and (v) public awareness. Survey respondents could choose two of these outcome areas where, in their opinion, the Council of Europe is most effective or strongest.⁸ Chart 2 below summarizes the results. The area of capacity-building is selected most frequently (just under 60%), followed by legislation and policies (about 45%). Changing practice and raising public awareness accounted for around 18 and 16% of responses respectively. When the responses are disaggregated between Council of Europe staff members and state authorities, it is noticeable that Council of Europe staff members rate the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder dialogue significantly higher than the state authorities. The latter, in turn, rate the effectiveness of changing practices and increasing public awareness higher than the Council of Europe staff members do. Overall, the order of mentions is consistent with the interview results.
38. **Stakeholder Dialogue:** The facilitation of multi-stakeholder dialogue often plays a key role in building trust, particularly when new projects or issues are introduced, as was highlighted in the project *Enhancing employment rights*, for example. It was also pointed out in interviews that these dialogues are particularly important when it comes to sensitive social/political issues such as corruption. However, it is interesting to note that state institutions rated this area the lowest of all. This may indicate that Council of Europe staff might overestimate the need for such dialogues or their effectiveness in promoting reforms. At the same time, there is an activity bias, i.e. the areas of intervention in which one becomes directly active and takes control are also considered more important.

⁶ The first phase of the project, which was not sampled for this evaluation, made a significant contribution to the objectives of the AP.

⁷ The definition of the labels is such that it is not suitable for comparative analysis between projects.

⁸ Survey participants were asked: “In which outcome area, do you believe, is the CoE Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 most effective or strongest? You may choose up to 2 areas.” 170 respondents answered the question and there are 276 answers in total. The chart is calculated on the basis of the total number of answers.

Chart 2: Outcome areas



39. **Institutional capacity:** As the area of capacity-building is rated the most effective overall, the evaluators have placed some additional focus on this area. In particular, in interviews and reports, capacity-building often seems to be seen as quite activity-based. There is much more information on what knowledge or skills have been acquired and still too little on how these have been used. The latter would extend to the area of 'changed practices'. In the area of capacity-building, it is also noticeable that it is seldom considered more comprehensively from an organisational development perspective. There is often a lack of information about the scope of the training courses, which would indicate whether an impact on the institution as a whole seems realistic at all.⁹ In interviews, there was limited reflection on the processes that need to interlock in order to change institutions. Organisational culture and leadership are factors that influence the manner in which institutions change or whether they change at all. Most institutions tend towards system stabilisation, not change, and they often resist capacity-building measures consisting purely of the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Interviewees sometimes refer to this indirectly when they point out that they had good access to institution xyz because certain people there had a clear will to change. They thus identify 'agents of change' who want to drive processes forward and are in a position to do so. What is less visible is an analysis of which institutions have a sufficient number of such change agents working together to represent a real window of opportunity for institutional change (and hence a strategic choice of where to focus efforts).
40. **Legislation / Policy:** Overall, the area of legislation/policy is the best documented, partly because the evidence is clearer. In general, interviewees see new legislation (and to a lesser extent new policy) as a

⁹ In a technical sense, there is a lack of information on percentage share of an institution's staff instead of absolute numbers of participants.

milestone. However, they often express an awareness that a law does not guarantee consistent implementation and should therefore also be seen as part of a longer process.

41. **Public awareness:** In interviews, achievements in the area of awareness-raising were mentioned with caution, as they were not considered quantifiable. Here the evaluators got the impression that the Council of Europe interviewees in particular expected too much measurability (of attitudes, opinions) that could hardly be verified within the usual project duration. The evaluators believe that this also reflects the interviewees' consciousness about the expected results-based reporting. At the same time they wanted to emphasize that less measurable activities have their place in the overall mix of interventions. A number of interviewees expressed the need for more (accompanying) campaigning.
42. **Changed practice:** Changes in practice were rarely mentioned in the interviews. In some cases, however, they are at least hinted at as a result of capacity-building. It is also interesting that government institutions see significantly more effectiveness in this area than Council of Europe staff do. This may suggest that increased exchanges on changes of practice between Council of Europe staff and national stakeholders may be fruitful. This can contribute to a common and coherent understanding of envisioned changes and joint identification of actual changes. Furthermore, interviewees who see merit in increased use of awareness-raising also put this in the context that public awareness is ultimately necessary as a catalyst for improved legislation and increased institutional capacity to have a real impact and lead to changed practice.

2.2.2 Challenges and Enablers

Evaluation question: Which factors have supported and hindered the effectiveness of the projects?

Evaluation sub-questions:

Were there any unique challenges to project implementation caused by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine?

To what extent has the choice of implementation approaches, modalities and their combination been appropriate to pursue the intended objectives and to ensure business continuity?

To what extent has the Action Plan ensured flexibility in the programming process and in implementation?

43. **Overview:** The effectiveness of the Action Plan and its project portfolio has been determined by a number of external factors as well as internal organisational and programmatic strengths and weaknesses. Chart 3 below gives an overview of external and internal factors which have supported and hindered either the effectiveness or the efficiency of the projects. As there are correlations between some of these factors, the overview presents all factors regardless of whether they relate to effectiveness or efficiency. Factors related to effectiveness are discussed below, while others are discussed later in section 2.3 Efficiency.

Chart 3: Challenges and Enablers

Challenges & Weaknesses		Enablers & Strengths
• Covid-19 pandemic • Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine • Shortage of human resources in the public sector • Shortage and high turn-over of human resources in Council of Europe, especially within the Office in Chisinau (efficiency) • Technical programming issues in terms of project duration/timing of AP (efficiency) • Bureaucratic administration/procurement procedures in Council of Europe (efficiency)		• High level of attention to the country, translating also into fundraising opportunities • High political will, both of authorities in the Republic of Moldova and of EU member states • Long-term engagement of Council of Europe supporting trust-building • Council of Europe flexibility and readiness to adjust to emerging needs (efficiency) • Work with national and international experts • Exchange with other Council of Europe member states and exchange of experience

44. **Covid-19 pandemic:** The Covid-19 pandemic was an external factor that posed challenges to project implementation. A number of activities had to be postponed, while other work - which required little or no live events, such as studies - was brought forward. For some formats, no suitable alternatives could be found or, in retrospect, online formats were considered disadvantageous for some processes. However, the pandemic has also led to innovation and greater flexibility in the use of online tools.

45. **Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine:** Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine affected all sample projects and the AP as a whole in a variety of ways. The overall working environment was tense, especially at the beginning of the war, as many people were "mentally or literally sitting on packed suitcases". The state authorities were also challenged or sometimes overwhelmed with refugee crisis management, in particular at local level. In some sectors this led to initiated reform processes

being postponed or delayed (e.g. project *Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance*).

46. **Emerging needs:** The influx of refugees from Ukraine seeking protection created new and sometimes increased needs. The project *Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants* was set up as part of the Action Plan in a needs-orientated manner and required a partial re-planning of the Action Plan. Other ongoing projects were affected to varying degrees. For example, in the project *Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention*, women seeking protection represented a new project target group. For the project *Improving Electoral Practice*, IT security emerged as a new priority. As part of what interviewees described as 'hybrid warfare', disinformation increased and posed new challenges for the project, both in terms of the content of election information and the security of the IT systems and websites of the electoral bodies.
47. **Political fragmentation:** The conflict intensified the existing political fragmentation in the country, or at least made it more present again. As a result, it became more difficult to maintain the previously established level of cooperation with the authorities in Gagauzia. Some interviewees express that the country's orientation towards the EU had not yet been finalised or that the government did not want to see that not everyone shared this direction.
48. **Strong political will:** On the other hand, according to a number of interviewees, the conflict has fostered a clear political will to work together. The war against Ukraine has encouraged a turn towards the West and prioritised reforms (e.g. on the fight against corruption). At the same time, in the EU there was no longer the previously visible hesitation to any enlargement. The war against Ukraine and the reception of many Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova has also significantly increased international attention to the country. This in turn has made it easier to finance the Action Plan and some projects have been extended or budgets increased. The EU accession process continues to strengthen the projects politically, which is evident in the project *Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention*, among others. Interviewees from the *Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance* project report that the experience gained from the joint management of the reception of and care for refugees based on a division of labour has strengthened local-central cooperation.
49. **Shortage of human resources in the public sector:** A frequently cited external factor that impacts negatively on project implementation is the shortage of human resources in the public sector. There are several reasons for this. For example, there is a shortage of skilled workers in the medical sector. Overall salaries in the public sector are not competitive with the private sector. In addition, some institutions, such as prisons, have a very poor image. As a result, the implementation capacities for all reform projects, both those already agreed and new projects, are limited. The absorption capacities are limited in view of the broad reform plans. The IT sector in particular suffers from a lack of experts who could ensure that new security requirements are met to a high degree. Brain drain, both to other countries and to the private sector or international organisations within the country, is a key problem. The problem is mirrored as an internal problem of the Council of Europe. This aspect is addressed later on in this report.
50. **Choice of implementation approaches and tools:** In terms of implementation approaches, Council of Europe interviewees often expressed a basic attitude that they support local authorities but do not provide services for them, and that local authority ownership is crucial. However, partners also emphasised that it is part of good advice when experienced Council of Europe staff members suggest plausible tools and solutions, thereby avoiding the partners having to make every mistake themselves. Partners also frequently emphasised the use of external international and national experts as positive. Some expressed that they would like to receive more suggestions and more access to international experts from the Council of Europe environment. Experts who have a good knowledge of the successor states of the Soviet Union are clearly prioritised, as they arrive at more realistic recommendations. In this regard, tandem work of international and national experts also received positive feedback.

Furthermore, exchange opportunities and learning from other Council of Europe member states was valued by partners. The transfer of experience and approaches, e.g. from Georgia and Ukraine plays a positive role. The experiences are considered relevant and easier to replicate.

2.2.3 Human rights-based approach

Evaluation sub-question: To what extent did the Action Plan and its implementation mainstream a human rights-based approach and a gender equality approach?

51. **Action Plan design:** The overall Action Plan methodology prioritises a human rights-based approach. Staff were provided with training opportunities and were aware and knowledgeable about the human rights-based approach. Content-wise all projects address at least one of the Council of Europe's defined human rights principles. Screening of the sample projects shows that the objectives of the two sample projects in the pillar democracy are directly relevant to putting participation and inclusion into practice. All other sample projects aim to make a distinct contribution to the principles of equality and non-discrimination.
52. **Participation and inclusion:** Most sample projects show engagement with CSOs. Feedback on cooperation, as given by civil society representatives in the interviews, was positive. Some CSOs clearly see themselves as watch-dogs and aim to hold duty-bearers accountable, others see their role clearly in empowering rights-holders.
53. **Equality and non-discrimination:** All sample projects address the inclusion of vulnerable persons, making use of different approaches. E.g. the project *Improving Electoral Practice* implements targeted activities with and for women and youth. Other projects ensure that, through the cooperation with civil society, needs of vulnerable groups are well reflected in needs assessments and are hence addressed in project design or they seek the cooperation of civil society organisations who represent vulnerable groups during project implementation. Another approach is to include project activities to the benefit of the most vulnerable groups without directly involving them, e.g. addressing the situation of prisoners in need of mental health care or juvenile detainees. In the project *Action against Corruption* the benefit to the most vulnerable groups is rather indirect as non-corrupt systems may eventually lead to better protection.
54. **Accountability:** All sample projects include aspects of accountability and support duty-bearers in fulfilling their obligations towards rights-holders. The Council of Europe fulfils its accountability by setting up joint steering committees for the Action Plan as well as for the individual projects. Ongoing consultative processes are embedded in the planning and implementation of the Action Plan and the projects.
55. **Transparency and access to information:** Information about projects is available through the Council of Europe website, publications and other means (e.g. social media), information on the Action Plan level is

Council of Europe Human Rights Principles

Participation and inclusion

Empower rights-holders to hold duty-bearers accountable. Engagement with civil society is essential.

Equality and non-discrimination

Counteract discrimination. Vulnerable persons should be included and empowered to claim their rights.

Accountability

Enable duty-bearers to fulfil their responsibilities towards rights-holders. The CoE is accountable for its projects.

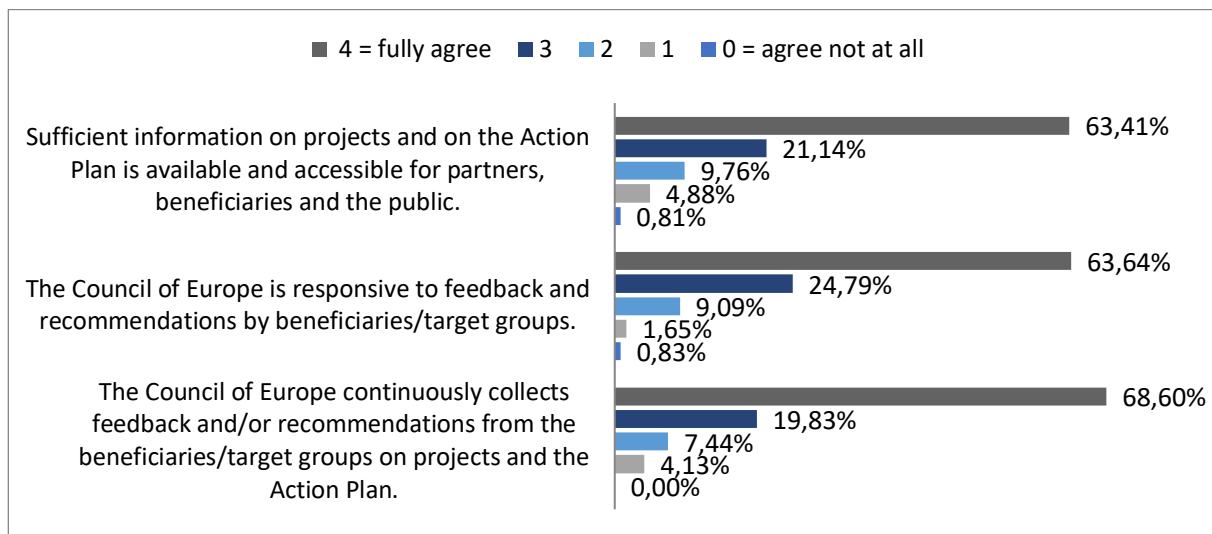
Transparency and access to information

Information about projects is available and accessible and decision-making strives to be transparent.

also shared through the annual Action Plan Steering Committee Meetings and the briefing for the Council of Europe member and observer States. Information for Russian language speakers is more limited than for English or Romanian speakers. Some interviewees believe that the Council of Europe is not sufficiently active in fulfilling its own accountability and that partners and beneficiaries are often not well informed about Council of Europe programmes, activities and successes. It does not always seem clear to partners which part of the activities in their area of responsibility is financed by whom. When personnel changes in the partner organisations, an understanding of the connections between the individual project and the Action Plan is sometimes lost. Questions were also raised as to whether the format of the annual Action Plan Steering Committee creates a real exchange or is more of an outdated exercise. Systematic reporting of Council of Europe activities to national partners was mentioned as a possible additional element to be introduced. This could also include briefings on the relevance of individual projects within the overall Action Plan, in particular when new staff is introduced at the national partner institutions.

56. **Stakeholders' perception on the Council of Europe's accountability:** Survey participants – except the Council of Europe staff members - were asked *“To what degree do you agree with the following statements? Rate from 0 = agree not at all to 4 = fully agree”*. More than two thirds fully agree that the Council of Europe continuously collects feedback or recommendations and almost two thirds fully agree that the Council of Europe is responsive to the feedback received and that sufficient information on projects and on the Action Plan is available and accessible.

Chart 4: Council of Europe accountability and transparency



57. **Reporting:** All projects and the annual Action Plan report address the human rights-based approach. Not all, but most cover all four dimensions systematically. The depth of analysis is heterogenous. While some reports are fairly detailed and analytical, others sound rather copy and paste from the initial project description. However, the evaluators recognise that the number of cross-cutting issues to be reported on might lead staff members to strategise which issues to prioritise. Throughout reporting, the least information is provided on the aspects of the Council of Europe's accountability to its partners, beneficiaries and the public and the transparency of decision making.

2.2.4 Gender equality

58. **Conceptual understanding within the Council of Europe:** In the qualitative interviews Council of Europe staff members were asked where they place the design and implementation of their respective sample project and/or the Action Plan on the OECD gender equality continuum.¹⁰ Most of the staff who answered this question see their project as gender sensitive to gender responsive with a slightly stronger emphasis on gender responsiveness. The project *Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention* also sees the prospect of being able to have a gender transformative effect. Interviewees who reflected on the overall Action Plan share this assessment, stating that large parts of the Action Plan are gender responsive, while specific projects within the Action Plan have potential to be gender transformative.
59. **Action Plan design:** The Action Plan design is in line with the “dual approach” as outlined in the Council of Europe’s gender mainstreaming toolkit, combining work towards specific policies and actions for the advancement of women’s rights with gender mainstreaming. In roughly half of the expected outcomes of the proposed actions for 2021 – 2024 gender specific or gender sensitive outcomes are formulated. Gender mainstreaming is also specified in the Action Plan as part of the Council of Europe’s methodology.
60. **Project design, gender analysis and activities:** Most sample projects provide a certain degree of gender analysis. This is partly set out in the proposal or presented in more detail in the context of needs assessments, inception activities and reports. Overall, the scope and depth of the analyses are heterogeneous. For all but one of the sample projects there is evidence of gender-specific activities in the project design as well as in the implementation. The extent of this varies - from individual activities to broad anchoring in the overall approach, e.g. in the project *Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention* - and depends on the respective project content.
61. **Results:** Specific results of gender mainstreaming can be demonstrated for some projects. This applies in particular to the project *Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention*, but can also be demonstrated in other projects’ individual measures. One example is the consideration of specific health and nutrition needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women in the project *Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions*. The project *Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants* integrates the specific needs of women in accessing asylum procedures into training curricula at national level.
62. **Data collection and reporting:** All projects collect and document gender-disaggregated data on participation in project events. Some include additional disaggregated data, e.g. concerning speakers at events or experts involved in assessments. There is no meta-level data on all Action Plan projects that would reflect the proportion of projects that have e.g. implemented a full gender analysis or used gender-sensitive indicators beyond the output level, etc. The annual Action Plan reports mainly show good practice examples of gender-specific activities. However, they do not analyse the extent to which gender mainstreaming has been implemented in the Action Plan as a whole.
63. **Stakeholders’ perceptions:** In the survey stakeholders were asked “Did the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 and its implementation mainstream a gender equality approach?” The vast majority – over 90% of 164 total respondents to the question - state that this has been achieved¹¹. The state partners and CSOs are even more positive in their assessment than the Council of Europe staff members. The answers show no significant difference between the sexes. Overall, this is consistent with qualitative findings from interviews.

¹⁰ The OECD gender equality continuum allows to label 5 different stages, namely a) gender discriminatory, b) gender blind, c) gender sensitive, d) gender responsive and e) gender transformative.

¹¹ 43.9% to a considerable extent, 46.95% to a great extent.

64. **Challenges for gender mainstreaming:** A number of challenges for gender mainstreaming were identified. While basic training on gender is available, Council of Europe interviewees point out that knowledge and conceptual understanding of gender mainstreaming are rather heterogeneous within the team. This in turn, as well as a lack of resources, contributes to varying implementation levels. Some staff find it easy to engage substantially with the topic, others tend to work through it as a "tick-the-box" exercise. In some projects there is evidence of good practice, which is not necessarily caught well by indicators; in other projects it is the other way around. The further analysis of gender-disaggregated data is also rather weak. Whilst all projects show a good level of disaggregated data collection, the question often remains as to how the data should be interpreted and whether recommendations for action can be derived from it. As mentioned in the chapter on relevance, some of the partner organisations expressed that they consider gender a soft issue with limited priority. This limits the opportunities to integrate gender issues into both project objectives and implementation.

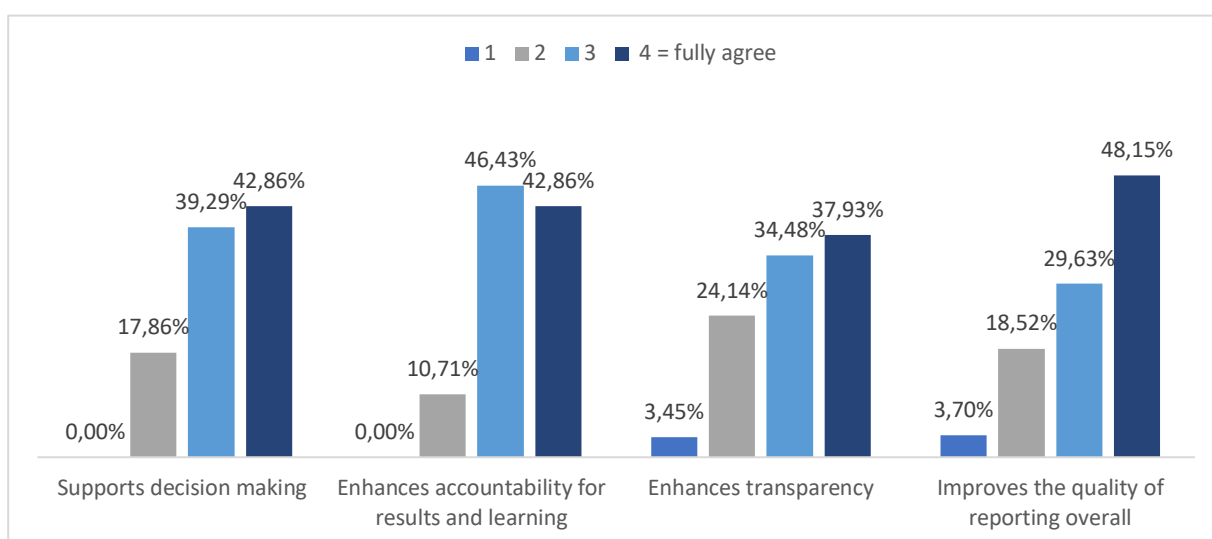
2.2.5 Results-based reporting

Evaluation sub-question: To what extent has the results-based reporting system been applied and has it been productive e.g. in terms of supporting decision making, enhancing accountability for results and learning, transparency and/or improving the quality of reporting overall?

65. **Extent of results-based reporting:** The results-based reporting system has been applied extensively and interviewees confirm that its use is steadily increasing. The quality of the narrative reports varies between the individual projects, in some cases considerably. While some projects succeed well in placing descriptions of activities in a results-oriented context, others find it difficult to contextualise them in terms of results and in a broader frame of reference. Nevertheless, the interviews on the topic show that all staff members aim for results-based reporting and that there is no negative attitude towards the system apparent.
66. **Support / training for results-based reporting:** The Council of Europe team in Chisinau received comprehensive support and training on results-based reporting in 2023. This took place as part of the *Enhanced reporting in Eastern Europe* pilot project, among other things. It is supported both by Strasbourg and by a cross-cutting staff function in Tbilisi. A total of seven staff members from the Council of Europe office in Chisinau were trained as either part of the pilot project or independently of it. The learning atmosphere in the Chisinau office is described in interviews as positive.
67. **Strengths of results-based reporting:** There is an overall rather positive assessment of the results-based reporting system, supported by the findings of the survey. Survey participants were asked "To what degree do you agree with the following statements? Rate from 0 = agree not at all to 4 = fully agree". A majority agrees or fully agrees that results-based reporting supports all four dimensions asked for: support for decision making, enhancing accountability and transparency and improving the quality of reporting.¹²

¹² The survey question on results-based reporting was only asked of survey participants who had previously indicated "CoE staff" under function. Of the 41 participating staff members, 29 answered the question.

Chart 5: Results-based reporting



In addition, respondents identified a number of key strengths of results-based reporting: It increases focus and reporting "really gets to the point of what has been achieved". It also increases the transparency of outputs and outcomes and raises awareness of the need to collect data (related to the indicators). It also supports accountability to donors, some of whom specifically require results-based reporting. At the same time, good results-based reporting helps to convince donors to provide unearmarked funding. This in turn supports greater flexibility in Action Plan planning and a more strategic approach to Action Plan design. In terms of process, it was also mentioned that good results-based reporting starts with good project design and good indicators and therefore cannot be seen as an isolated element. Training in results-based reporting therefore has an indirect positive impact on intervention design. To some extent it also raises awareness of the contribution of projects to the overall Action Plan, although this understanding could be more explicit.

68. **Challenges of results-based reporting:** Some conceptual and operational challenges have been identified and there are conceptual limits to measurability. Some project impacts are not measurable or difficult to measure, and many do not fully unfold over the course of the project. Council of Europe projects generally aim at medium to long-term systemic or social change, but try to capture results within the project life cycle. Time constraints also affect the quality of results-based reporting. Good results-based reporting is time-consuming and requires consultation/dialogue with the partners involved, as well as some follow-up after the completion of activities. Staff feel under additional time pressure due to reporting requirements, especially given the limited availability of partners for data collection activities. This is partly due to a lack of ownership by partners of both the design of indicators and the subsequent results-based reporting. Data collection is usually directly linked to project indicators, but partners are often not involved in defining these indicators.

2.3 Efficiency

This chapter discusses findings relating to the efficiency of the Action Plan and its projects generated under the evaluation questions on effectiveness.

Evaluation question: Which factors have supported and hindered the effectiveness of the projects?

Evaluation sub-questions:

To what extent has the choice of implementation approaches, modalities and their combination been appropriate to pursue the intended objectives and to ensure business continuity?

To what extent has the Action Plan ensured flexibility in the programming process and in implementation?

69. **Shortage and high turn-over of human resources in Council of Europe, especially within the Office in Chisinau:** As mentioned above, similar to the situation in the Republic of Moldova public sector, the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau faced a problem of shortage and high turnover of human resources. Factors at play include a general brain drain from the country, too low a level of remuneration, competition from other international organisations with larger budgets and therefore more room for manoeuvre in terms of remuneration, inflation and slow mechanisms in the Council of Europe for adjusting salaries. Interviewees identify the following consequences for project implementation: Delayed hiring of project teams and the resulting delayed project start led, for example, to a shortened and less in-depth needs assessment. Staff focus on the day-to-day management of project implementation and have less time for more strategic considerations. This ultimately also has a negative impact on the result orientation. In particular, project staff sometimes feel overburdened by the visibility work and point out that they have no PR background for this activity. On the other hand, some project interviews pointed out that the Council of Europe had successfully managed project start-up phases that had to get going without a local team in place. The Council of Europe has recognised the topic of human resources as a challenge and has taken measures to be an attractive employer and increase continuity within the team in Chisinau. However, it remains an issue that requires further attention.
70. **Programming in light of the shortage and high turn-over of human resources:** In the context of human resource issues, interviewees emphasised two aspects in particular that have an impact on programming: (i) the size, diversity and complexity of Council of Europe projects in the Republic of Moldova must reflect their own and their partners' human resources challenges. Implementability of the programmes is important for a positive dynamic of the reform agenda. Therefore, the coherence of staff capacities and project ambitions must be (self-)critically scrutinised time and again; (ii) In the medium term, project funds must not relieve the authorities of the burden of anchoring sufficient competences for the upcoming reforms in their institutions. This is particularly true of security-related IT services, which are not readily available on the consultancy market.
71. **AP and project durations versus long-term commitment:** Interviewees identified as an internal problem of the Council of Europe that the duration of the Action Plan and of projects within the Action Plan is often technical rather than substantive. Many projects are considered to be too short and a project duration that at least covers the entire Action Plan period is preferred. Projects starting towards the end of an Action Plan are particularly limited. Others can only be funded in stages. The shorter the duration of a project, the more negative the impact on staff retention and thus on human resources as a whole. At the same time, Council of Europe partners have stated that they value the work of the Council of Europe in particular because of its visible long-term commitment to reform processes. This goes well beyond the duration of projects or even the concept of projects as technical instruments. The Council of Europe is valued as an actor that, despite complex processes, setbacks and time delays, maintains a long-term and committed dialogue and looks beyond the project horizon.

72. **Flexibility and bureaucratic procedures:** Interestingly, stakeholders perceive the Council of Europe as being both very flexible and very bureaucratic. In response to the question “Has the Action Plan ensured flexibility in the programming process and in implementation?” about 45% of survey participants stated this is the case to a considerable extent, about 42% think this is true to a great extent. Only about 5% think there was little flexibility, nobody opted for “not at all”. Interviewees of all sample projects confirm that the Council of Europe is able to react to emerging needs and to external challenges and delays. The Council of Europe’s fundraising philosophy underlines that one of the goals is to support the country office with as much flexibility as possible. Therefore, the approach is to ask donors for flexibility, then exhibit rigour in internal decision-making (and provide good reporting thereof) and deliver quality to re-enforce donors’ trust. At the same time, there are mentions of "slow and bureaucratic administrative and procurement procedures" both in the interviews and in the survey (qualitative input). Long delays in simple travel cost reimbursements are one of the examples stated.

2.4 Coherence

Evaluation question: To what extent does the Council of Europe ensure coherence and complementarity with other international actors in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law?

Evaluation sub-questions:

To what extent and how has the Council of Europe ensured coordination and complementarity with other donors active in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law at strategic and operational level?

To what extent is the Council of Europe perceived by the Action Plan stakeholders as having a clear comparative advantage over other international actors in the areas covered by the Action Plan? What are the specific strengths and weaknesses of the Council of Europe?

73. **Overall coordination with others:** Interviews and survey data show that the Council of Europe's coordination mechanisms are effective at ensuring complementarity with other donors. In the survey over 90% of respondents to the question state that coherence and complementarity with other international actors has been achieved to a considerable or great extent¹³. Interviewees attest that overall coordination is successful and that overlap with other donors' activities is avoided altogether or kept to a minimum.
74. **Good practice:** This level of coordination is achieved through good practices at both strategic and operational level. It consists of the following elements:
- (i) Exchange between main donors: This exchange takes place both in a formal setting, for example at regular (monthly/bi-monthly) donor-institutions meetings, as well as through the development of an organic culture of informal exchange. In the project *Improving Electoral Practice* a high level of exchange is achieved by giving a Council of Europe member a seat on the UNDP's project *Enhancing democracy in Moldova through inclusive and transparent elections* steering committee and vice versa. Exchange allows for cross-checking for potential overlaps and making adjustments where necessary. The Council of Europe plays an active role in this exchange, an example being the Council of Europe's round table initiative in the project *Enhancing employment rights in the Republic of Moldova*. There was a sole report of the Council of Europe not taking any active role in this exchange in the human rights sector.
 - (ii) Engaging in joint activities with other donors: By engaging in joint activities, a thematic division of labour becomes possible, allowing each actor to focus on what they do well. The result is efficient use of resources and high quality of services provided. This has proven to be of particular importance in sectors where there is an imbalance in the amounts funded by different donors, as in the case of the project *Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention*. Another good example of joint activities is a round table co-organised by three Council of Europe projects and UN Woman under the initiative of the project *Improving electoral practice*.
 - (iii) Good communication: Interviewees report that there is regular and good communication from the Council of Europe. Here, an example is the Council of Europe's good practice of informing member and observer States about the current status of implementation of the Action Plan and its achievements.
75. **External enabling factors:** The small size of the country or the small number of actors in a sector (e.g. prison and probation reform) are enabling factors with a positive effect on coherence. The reasoning is that people know each other personally and levels of complexity are low. The Moldova Support Platform and the positive involvement of the embassies in the international community in Chisinau are additional external enabling factors. In some cases partners take the lead in donor coordination and know what support to ask for and from whom. There are successful and less successful examples of this.

¹³ Participants were asked "Has the Council of Europe ensured coherency and complementarity with other international actors in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law?" In total 165 respondents answered the question. 48.48% chose to a considerable extent, 43.64% chose to a great extent.

76. **Challenges:** There are two factors with a negative effect on coherence. One is an imbalance in funding amounts between donors within the same sector and/or working with identical partners. The other is that, when there are too many different donors, the institutions become overwhelmed. Here, partners appreciate the flexibility of the Council of Europe, which is able and willing to reschedule its own activities if it turns out that the initially planned activities would lead to duplication. Even if this is not the ideal case of successful coordination, this flexibility is highly valued because other donors are often not prepared to concede this.
77. **Comparative Advantage:** Action Plan stakeholders do perceive the Council of Europe as having a comparative advantage over other international actors in the areas covered by the Action Plan. The Council of Europe has (i) “tools” that others do not have: professional expertise (e.g. Venice Commission), and legal frameworks (e.g. European Convention on Human Rights) and monitoring mechanisms (e.g. Committee for the Prevention of Torture), (ii) different nature of relationship than that of typical donors: the beneficiaries are member States, who have signed their obligations and (iii) unique niche: The Council of Europe has a unique role to play in light of the Republic of Moldova’s EU candidate status.
78. **Council of Europe Strengths:** Overall, the Council of Europe enjoys a good reputation in the Republic of Moldova and is perceived to have political clout. This is attributed to the following Council of Europe strengths identified: (i) Ownership of promoted standards in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law; (ii) Professionalism, evident in high level of expertise, experience, transparency, reliability, accountability, ability to adapt to changing external factors and quality of support; (iii) Long-term involvement, which establishes trust and makes reform processes that go beyond single project durations possible; (iv) Constructive attitude, evident in high level of dedication and in inclusivity of approach.
79. **Council of Europe weaknesses:** Identified weaknesses comprise of (i) Limited or insecure financial resources: Though funds for the AP could be secured limited financial resources were found as a weakness when comparing Council of Europe to other (larger) international organisations. Respondents believe that this hinders the scale and reach of project activities, gives the Council of Europe less power to put pressure on authorities than bigger donors and in some cases contributes to the creation of false hopes and expectations; (ii) A lack of enforcement mechanisms which leads to weak control over implementation of measures.
80. **Overall appraisal:** As a standard-setter, the Council of Europe is perceived as unique and enjoys the trust of many stakeholders. At the same time, its implementation capacity is perceived as financially limited. It is thus an organisation perceived by others as both large and small. The need for coordination varies across the Action Plan. Areas of intervention where there are fewer donors (e.g. prison and probation reform) require less coordination. In others, such as the focus on women's rights, coordination is a must. Given the geopolitical circumstances, the US presence in Moldova is expected to increase, and with it the need to monitor which new actors may come into play and to further develop avenues for coordination. Current coordination practices are successful and can be built upon. Even in cooperation with larger donors, the Council of Europe is able to maintain its own profile because of its recognised expertise. The Council of Europe's standing is underpinned by its capital of trust, its pragmatic flexibility in adapting its own activities and its programmatic proximity to the EU accession agenda.

3. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

3.1 Conclusions and recommendations

Relevance

81. **Conclusions on relevance:** Overall, the findings confirm the relevance and responsiveness of the Action Plan. The Action Plan and its project portfolio are clearly aligned with Moldova's wide range of strategies and action plans and are therefore relevant to the ongoing reform processes. The Action Plan has reinforced its relevance following the EU candidate status and opening of accession negotiations in December 2023. Furthermore, the significant increase in the Action Plan budget indicates a high level of donor commitment. The Action Plan and its projects are largely demand-driven. However, given the political context of the EU accession process, perceptions of the relevance and responsiveness of the Action Plan or some of its components may vary from one partner institution to another. The assessments, opinions and recommendations of the Council of Europe's monitoring and advisory bodies have been thoroughly integrated into the Action Plan and its project portfolio across all pillars of the Action Plan. For many projects, Council of Europe conventions and the relevant input from the monitoring bodies form the backbone of the project design.

Effectiveness

82. **Conclusions on achievements and challenges:** The evaluators found sound evidence that the Action Plan as a whole, and the sample projects in particular, have made a clear contribution to a number of areas of reform and to the capacity of partner institutions. The extent of this varies from project to project and depends in part on external factors over which the Council of Europe has very limited control. Council of Europe staff and partner institutions alike believe that project components aimed at capacity-building reach higher effectiveness levels than measures aimed at enhancing legislation, changing practice, increasing public awareness and facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Action Plan implementation met unique challenges caused by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. Unforeseen new needs arose and the Action Plan was adapted to meet these. At the same time, however, the political circumstances resulted in an equally unique and unexpected increase in political attention to the country and resources allocated to it. The Moldovan authorities' political will and the positive dynamic of the EU accession process contribute further to the effectiveness.

A challenge in pursuing the intended objectives and reform processes is the lack of availability and continuity of human resources, which impact negatively on the partners' abilities for effective implementation.

83. **Recommendation 1:** In order to make capacity-building measures even more effective, they should be part of a much wider strategy for overall organisational development of institutions, where this is not yet the case. Interventions need to reach a certain scope in order to contribute to lasting change in institutions. To ensure this meaningful scope, tools may include partners organisational development strategies or as a minimum an overall training plan developed by partners for their institution. Training plans should establish the percentage of employees which will be reached with a particular training measure. This can be complemented by agreed follow-up processes to training within the partner institution.
84. **Recommendation 2:** Monitoring of capacity-building needs to focus more on how new knowledge, skills and competences are subsequently used (which will ultimately provide more information on changed practices). To this end, qualitative indicators can play a productive role.

85. **Recommendation 3:** Partners' capacities in terms of human resources should be addressed systematically. Wherever possible, the dialogue with partner institutions should include the topic of securing staff in the medium term. This can be emphasised as part of strategic planning processes, for example, or as a complementary part of an organisational development approach. If possible, human resource strategies should be an integral part of every partner project.
86. **Recommendation 4:** Awareness-raising activities should also be planned with a scoping aspect in mind, so that they do not remain just a drop in the ocean and fizzle out. Joint campaigns involving several Council of Europe projects and/or funders will increase effectiveness. Plan for one bigger campaign per year rather than a lot of small awareness raising events. Good practices already exist and can be built upon.
87. **Conclusions on the human rights-based approach and gender equality:** The Action Plan and its implementation clearly mainstream a human rights-based approach. Strengths include the fact that project objectives are aimed at principles such as participation, inclusion, equality, non-discrimination and accountability. Cooperation with civil society is also rated positively. The involvement of vulnerable groups could be strengthened further. The evaluators also place this in the context of findings on Council of Europe specific strengths in the chapter on coherence. The human rights focus is possibly the clearest unique feature and somewhat of a trademark of the Council of Europe in the perception of the stakeholders. A clear focus on the rights of the most vulnerable underlines this positively. This would both benefit these groups and serve as another marker of integrity in the Council of Europe's profile.

Gender mainstreaming was realised in the design, both of the Action Plan and of most of the sample projects. In some projects, gender-specific results were also demonstrated. Although gender mainstreaming is evident, it is also quite heterogeneous in terms of implementation. The scope and depth of the examination of gender-specific factors vary considerably and some partners expressed doubts about its relevance. The principle of gender mainstreaming has been anchored throughout the team and the projects. At the same time, it can be further stabilised and the quality increased.

Labelling through gender markers could play a positive role in this as it increases transparency about expectations of project outcomes and allows differentiation between more and less ambitious projects (some may be gender-sensitive, others aim to be gender-transformative). Gender markers can also strengthen the understanding of result-orientation, as not mainstreaming as such, but rather the objective of gender mainstreaming is emphasised. Markers can also contribute to a more consistent understanding of gender mainstreaming across the whole team working on the Action Plan and provide a basis for discussing gender mainstreaming objectives with partner institutions.

88. **Recommendation 5:** Continue the good work on mainstreaming human rights principles throughout the Action Plan programming and its implementation and furthermore review whether the voices of vulnerable groups can be sought more intensively beyond project and operational levels, in particular during the consultations at Action Plan level. This may ensure that their interests are adequately taken into account in designing priorities and the overall course for cooperation. This may also be supported by considering the inclusion of more projects decisively directed towards specific vulnerable groups beyond mainstreaming in the overall programming (dual approach).
89. **Recommendation 6:** In order to tackle challenges related to gender mainstreaming, ensure that the scope and continuity of the gender advisor position(s) are secured and consider using other funding that can have a stabilising effect in addition to the secondment. Expertise and personnel are key foundations for the further development of gender mainstreaming efforts.
90. **Recommendation 7:** In addition to the already existing policies, tools and training, consider more binding organisational processes. E.g an additional tool could be the labelling of projects in line with one of the internationally recognised gender equality schemes.

91. **Conclusions on results-based reporting:** The results-based reporting system is in place and consistently supported institutionally by the Council of Europe, e.g. through training. Nevertheless, there is still heterogeneity in the quality of reporting. Staff members identify a number of strengths of the system and show a positive attitude. At the same time, the weaknesses identified should be taken seriously. There is a risk that the analytical potential of the approach cannot be fully utilised, partly due to time pressure.
92. **Recommendation 8:** The evaluators recommend further developing the results-based reporting system along the following priorities:
- (i) Training should always reiterate the basic conceptual understanding of results-orientation and, for example, emphasise the connections between individual projects, the Action Plan, the Council of Europe's theory of change and the overall development aimed for in society;
 - (ii) The connection between good reporting (as an important factor for donor trust) and the willingness of donors to support the Action Plan in a more flexible and less project-bound manner should be made transparent to Council of Europe staff members to enhance motivation for results-based reporting;
 - (iii) The Council of Europe should explore ways to increase partner ownership of the indicators and thus of data collection. One option is to reduce the number of indicators in favour of fewer but well supported indicators by partners. This may also require prior consultation with the relevant donors;
 - (iv) In the technical set-up of the reporting data-base, it is recommended to limit the number of characters, especially in the activity description, but also in other reporting fields, in order to make reporting more manageable and to support clear focussing.

Efficiency

93. **Conclusions on efficiency:** In terms of increasing the efficiency of the Council of Europe's intervention in the Republic of Moldova, the main internal challenge is the lack of availability and continuity of human resources, which has a negative impact on the Council of Europe's capacity for efficient implementation. Nevertheless, the Council of Europe has been able to respond flexibly to changing circumstances.

Funding modalities are not always optimal, as long-term impacts often have to be achieved with time-limited projects. All interview partners express awareness of this disparity and try to optimise project durations and project flexibility. Partner institutions value the Council of Europe as a player who maintains long-term and committed engagement and looks beyond the project horizon.

94. **Recommendation 9:** Human resources requirements, recruitment and management should remain high on the agenda and be addressed at various levels:
- (i) The human resources of the Council of Europe (and the potential for expansion) should be realistically assessed at the planning stages of both the Action Plan and the projects. Ambitious programming needs to take into account possible limitations in terms of human resources.
 - (ii) The Council of Europe should continue its efforts to counter the human resource bottleneck. In addition to financial incentives, other factors should be considered, e.g. discussing issues of workload and motivation with the staff, analysing staff satisfaction and the reasons not only why people leave but also why they stay (or under what conditions). These factors could not be explored as part of this evaluation. However, they may be important for the further development of the human resources strategy.

Coherence

95. **Conclusion on coherence:** The Council of Europe's coordination mechanisms ensure that Council of Europe projects and those of other donors complement each other. This is achieved through the good practices of engaging in or facilitating regular exchange between donors, running joint activities with other donors and good communication. Further enabling factors result from the specific Moldovan context: a small country with EU candidate status in which the Council of Europe not only enjoys a good reputation but is also seen as having a crucial role to play in facilitating the accession agenda. The Council of Europe's financial limitations and lack of enforcement mechanisms are factors that stakeholders perceive as a hindrance to even more successful involvement.

3.2 Good practice and lessons learned

Good practice

96. **Dynamic and real-time analysis in a challenging environment:** The Council of Europe team carried out thorough analyses and detailed needs assessments, repeating the process as necessary to reflect changing reform priorities and stay on track. Frequent stakeholder meetings were held to ensure participation and appropriate input into the design of the Action Plan and its project portfolio. This is good practice for programming in the context of a turbulent and changing political landscape, particularly for countries in transition or exposed to multiple risk factors, where national priorities or those of individual sectors/institutions can change quite rapidly.
97. **Providing expertise adapted to the local context:** The simultaneous use of local and international expertise and the exchange between countries ensured that inputs and recommendations were realistic and appropriate to the local country context. This culturally mediated new knowledge was appreciated and thus better absorbed by national institutions. Exchange programmes, study visits, regional platforms, input from Council of Europe member states, tandem work of international and national experts all received positive feedback. The experiences are considered relevant and replicable. This is a good practice that helps to avoid reform fatigue.
98. **Using door openers and trusted partners when starting work in a new intervention area:** When starting work in a new thematic area, it was helpful to draw on the experience of another country and to rely on one of the most trusted partners. For example, when responding to the refugee emergency, the team was faced with the challenge of responding to an unforeseen emerging need and entering a completely new thematic area in the country. The Council of Europe team approached this by starting their engagement in the area of psychosocial training, an area that had already been covered (successfully) in Ukraine. They sought to work with their most trusted partner to develop a range of refugee-related activities, even though these were not at the core of that partner's mandate. After entering the sector with a rather untypical but door-opening activity, the Council of Europe then focused on reform-related needs, such as upgrading the asylum policy framework to meet European and international standards.

Lessons learned

99. **The link between Council of Europe standards and the EU accession process:** The link between Council of Europe standards and the EU accession process is not equally clear to all Council of Europe partner institutions. It is helpful to emphasise this connection in terms of content and to break it down into concrete project requirements. This increases the motivation to meet the standards. Many institutions in the Republic of Moldova "look more to Brussels than to Strasbourg".
100. **Evaluation of Council of Europe interventions:** Action Plans usually aim at changes that require a longer time horizon than the duration of the Action Plan itself. In order to adequately assess the work of the Council of Europe, it would be useful to evaluate individual themes or projects that lead to specific reforms and take place in several phases. A horizontal analysis of a limited thematic area, rather than a vertical analysis of an entire Action Plan, may better reflect the long-term nature of the Council of Europe's programmes.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Reference to policy documents and results of Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies

ACTION PLAN PILLARS	Priorities of the Republic of Moldova Reference to policy documents	Results (recommendations/ opinions/ reports/ judgments) of the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies informing the Action Plan	Corresponding sample project
	- Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova (AA), in force since 1 July 2016. - National Development Strategy "Moldova-2030" (approved Nov 2018) National Action Plan for the Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union for 2024-2027		
HUMAN RIGHTS			
Protecting human rights	National Action Plan on Human Rights of the Republic of Moldova (2018-2022).	- ECRI 2018 report (5th cycle) recommendation: Strengthening the institutional capacity of the Ombudsperson and the Equality Council by amending the law and relevant procedural rules to ensure the effective implementation of their mandates. - ECRI 2021 report recommended the amendment of criminal and anti-discrimination legislation, in accordance with ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 7. - Implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case law at national level.	
Promoting human rights and dignity	- Moldova contracting party to several instruments that protect children, incl. the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and the European Social Charter. - Strategy for the protection and promotion of children's rights (2014-2020). - Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)* - National program for child protection for the years 2022-2026 and the Action Plan for its implementation* - Programme on the management of migration flow,	- Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees (SRSG) fact-finding mission to the Republic of Moldova on 13-15 June 2022. - Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights mission to the Republic of Moldova on 6-8 March 2022 - Committee of Ministers Guidelines and recommendations, including the recent Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, adopted in 20 May 2022. - First implementation report of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child*	SAMPLE PROJECT: Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants in the Republic of Moldova.

ACTION PLAN PILLARS	Priorities of the Republic of Moldova Reference to policy documents	Results (recommendations/ opinions/ reports/ judgments) of the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies informing the Action Plan	Corresponding sample project
	asylum and integration of foreigners for the years 2022- 2025. Strategy for the development of the internal affairs for 2022-2030.		
	2017-2021 National Strategy and Action Plan for ensuring Equality between men and women. 2018-2023 National Strategy on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence including 2021-2023 Action Plan. - Ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the Republic of Moldova in October 2021. - National Program on preventing and combating VAW/DV (2023-2027).	- GREVIO General Recommendation No.1 on the digital dimension of violence against women. - T.M and C.M v. Republic of Moldova: authorities had failed to provide women protection from domestic violence (pending implementation; Committee of Ministers’ procedure of enhanced supervision). - Luca v. Republic of Moldova: failure of the Moldovan authorities to protect the applicant from domestic violence and to support her in maintaining contact with her children - GREVIO baseline evaluation report on the implementation, by the Republic of Moldova, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence	SAMPLE PROJECT: Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Moldova.
Ensuring social rights	- Ratified the European Social Charter (ESC) in 2001. - National Human Rights Action Plan 2018-2022 (NHRAP) foresees the acceptance of additional ESC provisions relating to the rights of people with disabilities (Article 15), the rights of elderly people (Article 23) and the eradication of poverty and social exclusion (Article 30). - National Development Strategy “European Moldova 2030” - Education Strategy 2030 of the Republic of Moldova. - Employment Programme for 2022-2026 - Youth Sector Development Strategy "Youth 2030" - Action Plan for supporting the Roma people for 2016-2020. - Strategy for Civil Society Development (2018-2020).	- The European Committee for Social Rights (ECSR) has found on several occasions that the annual reports on the implementation of the ESC submitted by the Republic of Moldova failed to provide the information required. Therefore, while some areas may be in conformity with the ESC, the reports do not provide sufficient details for the Committee to draw positive conclusions and do not include information that may be necessary to issue recommendations. 2021 ECSR report on the non-accepted provisions of the Republic of Moldova. - Conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights on the Republic of Moldova.	SAMPLE PROJECT: Enhancing Employment Rights in the Republic of Moldova.
RULE OF LAW	- Strategy on ensuring the independence and integrity of the justice sector for the years 2021-2025. National Action Plan for the Accession of the	Opinion on the Action Plan of the Republic of Moldova for the implementation of the Strategy for Ensuring the Independence and Integrity of the Justice Sector for 2020-2025 by the Council of Europe’s Justice and Legal Co-operation Department.	

ACTION PLAN PILLARS	Priorities of the Republic of Moldova Reference to policy documents	Results (recommendations/ opinions/ reports/ judgments) of the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies informing the Action Plan	Corresponding sample project
	Republic of Moldova to the European Union for 2024-2027		
Ensuring justice	• 2017 Law on the Prison Administration System • Regulation on the organisation of health care for detainees in prison institutions (approved Dec 2022). • Regulation on the management of medicines within the prison system (approved in March 2021) • Prison Mental Health Strategy and National Programme on Mental Health (approved in December 2023).	• A number of European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) reports. • (CPT/Inf (2018)49) recommended ending reliance on the informal prisoner hierarchy, introducing a system of appropriate distribution and classification of prisoners, implementing an effective recruitment and training system for prison staff and ensuring continuous staff supervision in detention facilities. • Other: CPT/Inf (2020)27 on the visit to the Republic of Moldova carried out from 28 January – 7 February 2020. CPT/Inf (2016) 16 on the visit to the Republic of Moldova carried out from 14 to 25 September 2015. • Judgements of the ECHR: ID v. Moldova: group of cases that concern violations of the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment, poor conditions of detention and lack of access to adequate medical care (including specialised medical treatment).	SAMPLE PROJECT: Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions in the Republic of Moldova.
Strengthening the rule of law	• Audiovisual Media Service Code (2018). • National media development program for 2023-2026	• Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe on the Draft Law on amending and supplementing the Constitution with respect to the Superior Council of Magistracy No.983/2020.	
Countering Threats to the rule of law	• Strategy for ensuring the independence and integrity of justice sector for 2021-2025 • National Integrity and Anticorruption Program 2024-2028	• GRECO first and second Compliance Reports of the 4th Evaluation Round (Dec 18; Sept 20). • Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures (MONEYVAL) 5th Round Mutual Evaluation Report for the Republic of Moldova (MONEYVAL(2019)6). • Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) 3rd evaluation report.	SAMPLE PROJECT: Action against Corruption in the Republic of Moldova – Phase 2.
DEMOCRACY			
Strengthening democratic governance and fostering innovation	• New Electoral Code 2022. • Strategic Plan of the CEC for 2020-2023 • Strategic Plan of the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training for 2020-2023 • Strategic Plan of the Central Electoral Council for 2020-2023.	• Venice Commission opinions, Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR joint opinions on political parties financing and election related issues, e.g. on the new electoral code (2022 and 2023). See Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR Joint Opinion of 24 October 2022 and Joint Follow-up Opinion of 18 December 2023 on the Electoral code. • ECtHR case-law on Article 3 “Right to free elections” of Protocol 1 to the ECHR. • GRECO compliance and evaluation reports on transparency of party	SAMPLE PROJECT: Improving Electoral Practice in the Republic of Moldova, Phase 3.

ACTION PLAN PILLARS	Priorities of the Republic of Moldova Reference to policy documents	Results (recommendations/ opinions/ reports/ judgments) of the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies informing the Action Plan	Corresponding sample project
		funding in the Republic of Moldova; • PACE election observation reports, e.g. 2019, 2021. • Congress of Local and Regional Authorities election observation report on 2023 general local elections.	
	- Roadmap to strengthen local and regional democracy. Action Plan of the Government of the Republic of Moldova 2021-2022. - Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plan (2023-2025). - Administrative Council of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) Strategic Plan for 2021-2027. - Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2023 – 2030.	- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Recommendation 436 (2019) on local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova. - Post-Monitoring Roadmap for Local and Regional Democracy signed between the Congress and the government of the Republic of Moldova in April 2021.	SAMPLE PROJECT: Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova.
Promoting participation and diversity	2018 reform of formal civic education.		

Annex 2: Effectiveness of sample projects

ACTION PLAN FOR THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA (2021-2024)		
Human Rights Thematic outcome: Human rights protection and equality are enhanced through the well-structured and co-ordinated implementation of human rights standards, including those on gender equality, and an improved effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) system. No objectives set in the initial Action Plan as this intervention was not predicted beforehand		
ACTION PLAN ON PROTECTING VULNERABLE PERSONS IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN EUROPE (2021-2025)		
Pillars: Human rights and the rule of law: ensuring access to law and justice / Human rights and democracy: Fostering democratic participation and enhancing inclusion Thematic outcome: - Member states improve access to law and justice, including legal aid and procedures adapted to vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum without discrimination and with the appropriate procedural safeguards, in line with relevant Council of Europe standards - Member states enhance inclusion and foster democratic participation, in line with relevant Council of Europe standards		
SAMPLE PROJECT KEY CONTRIBUTIONS: 3380 - Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants in the Republic of Moldova.		
Summarised contributions to Action Plan outcomes	Contribution to the alignment to the EU's accession agenda	Overall progress
Policies/Legislation: - Study on “the capacity of the national asylum system in the Republic of Moldova” supports the reform of the asylum framework in order to meet European and international standards. - Study on “perceptions of human rights in the Republic of Moldova” supports the Ombudsman’s office and other human rights agencies in defining strategic directions and priorities of work in order to strengthen the protection of human rights at policy level. Institutions’ Capacities: - National authorities responsible for asylum and migration increased their capacities to draft laws and policies aligned to European asylum and migration framework/standards. They comment and provide meaningful opinions on related laws/policies and engage in knowledgeable dialogues on topics never discussed before in the country, such as statelessness. - Human rights institutions responsible for the monitoring and protection of human rights, e.g. the Ombudsman’s Office, strengthened their capacity to deal with refugee cases, monitor detention and reception centres and for the first time learned about human right standards on statelessness. - Capacities of local teachers and psychologists strengthened with psychologists’ trainings, thereby enhancing provisions on protection of children and other vulnerable persons (refugees and migrants). Increased public awareness: - Public and experts’ awareness raised on refugees’ rights and needs for social integration realised through a campaign with involvement of multiple stakeholders. Positive feedback on raised awareness by partners (e.g. NIJ noted changed attitude with judges and prosecutors).	The project supports national alignment to the EU asylum framework and on policies under the EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum; and Commitments defined under the Article 14 - Cooperation on migration, asylum and border management of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova	Good progress

ACTION PLAN

Human Rights/ Promoting Human Rights and Dignity

Thematic outcome: Human rights protection and equality are enhanced through the well-structured and co-ordinated implementation of human rights standards, including those on gender equality, and an improved effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) system.

Expected outcomes

- Relevant staff from target ministries and institutions have substantial knowledge of the Istanbul Convention and implement comprehensive changes to legislative and policy frameworks in line with European standards;
- Relevant professionals have the capacity and skills to effectively implement legislation and policies to counter violence against women and domestic violence;
- Staff from the relevant institutions are well informed about the Istanbul Convention, understand its implications and contribute to the process for domestic approval of ratification.

SAMPLE PROJECT KEY CONTRIBUTIONS: 2810 - Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Moldova.

Summarised contribution to Action Plan outcomes	Contribution to the alignment to the EU's accession agenda	Overall progress
Policies/Legislation: • Ratification of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) by the Republic of Moldova took place in October 2021. • Adoption of the National Programme for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence for 2023-2027 (60% of the Council of Europe expert recommendations incorporated) in May 2023. • Installation of working group to initiate amendments to Law 45 on combating violence against women and domestic violence in order to meet international standards. Institutions' Capacities: • Overall, the Republic of Moldova is in a phase of creating structures in order to implement the Istanbul Convention, which is a work in progress. • New National Agency on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence created. Capacity-building in progress. • HELP course for dealing with cases of VAW/DV was launched for judges, prosecutors, judicial clerks, and lawyers and integrated into national training plan of National Institute of Justice. • Overall, a total of 455 first-line professionals trained through various means (police officers, judges, prosecutors, media professionals, probation police, psychological educators, civil society, social workers); implementation of ToT adapted to changing setting after reform of district level social assistance departments. • Enhanced functioning of the Commission on Monitoring and Analysis of Domestic Violence Cases resulting in Death or Serious Harm ("Femicide Commission"); in particular in the field of data collection. • Various measures to strengthen inter-sectoral cooperation underway. There is positive feedback on the process, but not yet in a state of measurable effects. Increased public awareness and understanding: • Awareness raising activities reached a total of around 59,000 people (incl. public). Results not yet quantifiable.	The project directly contributed to step 9 of the 9 steps to be taken as recommended in the Commission's Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for European Union membership (June 2022). The Republic of Moldova is in the process of anchoring the Istanbul Convention in national legislation. New structures and processes are being implemented to strengthen the commitment to gender equality and to fight violence against women.	Good progress

ACTION PLAN

Human Rights/ Ensuring Social Rights

Thematic outcome: Human rights protection and equality are enhanced through the well-structured and co-ordinated implementation of human rights standards, including those on gender equality, and an improved effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) system.

Expected outcomes

- The national authorities have the capacity to prepare high-quality national reports on the implementation of the ESC;
- CSOs have the capacity to submit alternative reports on the implementation of the ESC;
- Decision makers have increased awareness of additional ESC provisions and the collective complaints procedure, and additional ESC provisions are accepted;
- Targeted professionals have a better understanding of the European Committee of Social Rights' case law and are capable of applying it in practice

SAMPLE PROJECT KEY CONTRIBUTIONS: 3153 - Enhancing employment rights in the Republic of Moldova.

Summarised contributions to Action Plan outcomes

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue:

- Relevant stakeholders included in process and good communication ensured as a pre-requisite for further project activities.
- Groundwork done for establishing a national network for the integration of NEET youth into the vocational education and training system. Too early to assess potential benefits.

Policies/Legislation:

- First steps done to analyse existing legislation concerning ESC article no 9 (the right to vocational guidance) and ESC article no 10 (the right to vocational training) as a pre-requisite for considerations of acceptance of additional ESC-provisions by the Republic of Moldova.

Institutions' Capacities:

- Knowledge and awareness of the European Social Charter's provisions and procedures raised amongst key stakeholders. Overall, 234 men and 230 women took part in the project's activities in 2023.
- State Labour Inspectorate's capacities raised in the reform process on combatting undeclared work. However, too early to tell whether scope of activities is sufficient to achieve further change of practice in the medium-term.
- Positive feedback by training participants on the training on alternative reporting on the implementation of the ESC, yet too early to assess the degree to which civil society's capacities for alternative reporting were raised.

Contribution to the alignment to the EU's accession agenda

The project is designed to contribute to the functioning of the labour market by reducing the large share of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and takes into account discriminatory practice against Roma in the labour market. It is too early to validate actual project contributions in this field of the EU's accession agenda.

The project contributed to measures aimed at reducing the high level of undeclared work in the labour market through capacity-building of relevant actors.

Overall progress

Some progress

ACTION PLAN

Rule of Law/ Ensuring justice

Thematic outcome: Democratic security is strengthened by an enhanced implementation of the existing legislation and European standards, the development of an enabling legal and institutional framework for a democratic society and an improved quality of justice and efficiency in combating corruption.

Expected outcomes

- Prison staff have a better capacity to use tools for individual gender-sensitive sentence planning and to implement a progressive system for enforcing punishments.
- Prison staff and health care professionals have the capacity to provide gender-sensitive health care services to inmates (including mental health care) of the same quality as the public health care system.
- Police capacity to prevent and investigate ill-treatment in its detention facilities is increased.
- Management and staff from the probation service have the capacity and skills to implement reforms for the resocialisation of offenders, including in a gender-sensitive manner.
- Medical and non-medical staff of psychiatric institutions and social care homes have a better understanding of how to apply protocols and procedures through initial and in-service training programmes.

SAMPLE PROJECT KEY CONTRIBUTIONS: 2840 - Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions in the Republic of Moldova.

Summarised contributions to Action Plan outcomes	Contribution to the alignment to the EU's accession agenda	Overall progress
Policies/Legislation: • New regulation on the organisation of health care for detainees in prison institutions approved (Dec. 2022, Ministry of Justice). • New regulation on the management of medicines within the prison system (approved in March 2021). • Concept on the progressive change of regimes approved (MoJ in January 2023). • 4 specific objectives from the draft Mental Health Strategy for the prison system and the Concept for the psychosocial rehabilitation of patients in psychiatric institutions (produced with the support of the project) included into the National Programme on Mental Health for 2023 - 2027 (approved Dec 2023 by the Government). Institutions' Capacities: • 14 out of 17 prison Medical Units accredited as health care providers for inmates, providing health care services equivalent to those provided in the communities. • A high number of trainings provided to staff of National Administration of Penitentiaries, the National Probation Inspectorate and other stakeholders. At least 800 training participants reached. Curricula for induction training and specialised fields developed and adopted by the Training Centre of the National Administration of Penitentiaries, and the National Probation Inspectorate for further use. • Policies and Standards Operational Procedures (SOP) for prisons on (i) dynamic security, (ii) treatment of vulnerable groups of detainees and (iii) preventing and combating inter-prisoner violence developed. • Various follow-up activities to the previous development of the Concept Note on the Reorganisation of Probation Service: e.g. the National Probation Inspectorate used it to start reforms at institution level. • A number of newly developed tools (e.g. risk and needs assessment) and standards piloted in different prisons. • Overall, capacities of all participating stakeholders have been raised. However, feedback from interviews is controversial. Not all stakeholders see that there is evidence that the gained skills, the standard procedures and other input lead to a change of practice. It is not clear to all stakeholders how piloting is followed up either through establishing steady routines or roll-out.	The Moldovan authorities adopted some of the project's deliverables and recommendations under the National Action Plan for the Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union for 2024 – 2027, under Chapter 23 – Justice reform and fundamental rights. The project contributed to an adequate access to medical treatment in the prison system (evidenced by CPT visit Dec. 2022).	Good progress

ACTION PLAN

Rule of Law

Thematic outcome: Democratic security is strengthened by an enhanced implementation of the existing legislation and European standards, the development of an enabling legal and institutional framework for a democratic society and an improved quality of justice and efficiency in combating corruption.

Expected outcomes - 2.2.3 Countering threats to the rule of law - FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION AND MONEY LAUNDERING

- Judges and prosecutors have the necessary capacity to implement the Council of Europe's standards in the field.
- Staff responsible for integrity controls in respect of public officials have the capacity needed to effectively apply the system for verification of assets and declaration of other interests by judges, prosecutors and members of parliament.
- AML/CFT National Risk Assessment is regularly updated;
- Staff from the National Integrity Authority have the capacity to enforce its control and verification mandate.
- Staff from the anti-money laundering reporting and supervisory entities are better able to devise effective control systems and properly react to suspicions.
- Law enforcement agencies and the judiciary have an increased capacity to recover illegal assets by using all available legal instruments and proactively combating money laundering and terrorist financing.
- Increased capacities of judicial and law enforcement authorities and interagency cooperation, towards coherent, sustainable and skills-oriented experience sharing and training framework

SAMPLE PROJECT KEY CONTRIBUTIONS: 3208 - Action against Corruption in the Republic of Moldova, phase II.

Summarised contributions to Action Plan outcomes

(Some outcomes may be attributable to activities of the precursor project, but are directly related in terms of content)

Contribution to the alignment to the EU's accession agenda

Overall progress

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue:

- Dialogue strengthened with all relevant stakeholders and communication channels maintained despite complexities in the political environment causing justifiable delays in implementation of reforms.
- Two roundtables facilitated on the findings of (i) the review of the legislative framework covering ethics and integrity rules applicable to public officials and particularly persons entrusted with top executive functions (PTEFs), and (ii) the review of the current practices on corruption risk assessment and risk management measures of the Ministry of Interior (General Police inspectorate and Border Police), General Prosecutor's Office and Customs Service.

Policies/Legislation:

- Extensive consultation process and development of three technical papers on (i) disciplinary liability of inspector judges, (ii) performance evaluation of inspector judges, (iii) legislative framework covering ethics and integrity rules applicable to public officials and persons entrusted with top executive functions, and (iv) a review of corruption risk assessment tools.
- There is raised awareness and knowledge. These will likely feed into improved legislative and institutional changes, but too early to measure results.

Institutions' Capacities:

- Development of institutional strategic plan to reflect Superior Council of Magistrates institutional needs for effectively carrying out key parts of its mandate is underway in support of an anti-corruption institutional framework.

Modest contribution to steps 1, 3 (anti-corruption) and 4 (de-oligarchisation) of the 9 steps to be taken as recommended in the European Commission's Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for European Union membership (June 2022).

The project contributes to the prevention of corruption (finalise the reform of the anti-corruption institutional framework, build capacity of the institutions concerned, implement pending GRECO recommendations and the ODIHR opinion and guidance on transparency and accountability.) (EU 2023 progress report)

Some Progress

ACTION PLAN

Democracy/ Strengthening Democratic Governance and Fostering Innovation

Thematic outcome: The democratisation of society is fostered through electoral integrity, strengthened local democracy and increased participation of young people in the democratic process.

Expected outcomes

- The relevant authorities enhance their capacity to revise the electoral legislation in conformity with international electoral standards;
- The relevant electoral authorities at all levels increase their capacity to operate in a professional, transparent and inclusive manner;
- The CEC and relevant legal professionals improve their ability to examine electoral complaints, and to oversee and investigate political parties' funding;
- Women, first-time voters, national minorities and citizens living abroad have the necessary knowledge and motivation to make an informed decision to vote.

SAMPLE PROJECT KEY CONTRIBUTIONS: 3006 - Improving electoral practice in the Republic of Moldova, phase III.

Summarised contributions to Action Plan outcomes

(Some outcomes are attributable to activities of the precursor project, but are directly related in terms of content)

Contribution to the alignment to the EU's accession agenda

Overall progress

Policies/Legislation:

- New Electoral Code adopted in December 2022, addressing recommendations by the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR.
- Further amendments to the electoral code adopted in October 2023.
- Further work on by-laws with a focus on political financing and professionalisation of electoral officials underway.

Institutions' Capacities:

- CEC's capacity strengthened by creating a special internal unit to oversee the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns.
- District level institutions strengthened through the introduction of permanent professional staff (replacing ad-hoc nominations).
- Strategic plans developed and reviewed with URSO methodology for CEC, Training Center and CEC of Gagauzia. Development of new strategic plans for 2024 – 2027 completed.
- Official status of CEC of Gagauzia addressed in the new electoral code. CEC of Gagauzia supported through a continuous process of cooperation and dialogue, in which current setbacks and challenges are also addressed.
- Ongoing trainings on various topics implemented, which are likely to be sufficient to create a relevant, broad impact in the institutions. BRIDGE trainings particularly appreciated by participating stakeholders.
- Contribution to the introduction and further development of digital tools that increase the institutions' overall ability to act.

Increased public awareness:

- Campaign on combating hate speech, sexism and other forms of gender-based violence in elections realized with involvement of many different stakeholders; results not yet quantifiable/researched; positive qualitative feedback by stakeholders.

The project directly contributed to step 2 of the 9 steps to be taken as recommended in the Commission's Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for European Union membership (June 2022). The new electoral code was drafted in cooperation with expert support of the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR and adopted by Moldova in December 2022. Electoral reform started.

Further, the electoral code addresses the supervision and control of political party financing; contributing to step 4 (commitment to "de-oligarchisation").

Good progress and likely contribution to very good progress

ACTION PLAN

Democracy

Thematic outcome: The democratization of society is fostered through electoral integrity, strengthened local democracy and increased participation of young people in the democratic process.

Expected outcomes - Good Governance at the Sub-national level

- Improved dialogue and consultation between territorial state representatives, and county/raion and local authorities.
- Local authorities actively engaged in intermunicipal cooperation in line with European standards.
- Introduction of modern, gender responsive human resource management and training systems for public officials at local level.
- Local authorities are better able to identify the vulnerability and resilience of communities to emergency situations and to manage such situations at institutional, administrative and civil society levels.
- CALM members enhance their capacity to support local authorities and strengthen their dialogue with central authorities.
- Local authorities enhance their knowledge and practice in the field of open government, public ethics and corruption prevention, and strengthen their skills in promoting and upholding human rights at local level;
- Authorities responsible for cross-border co-op. in the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine intensify contacts with a view to boosting economic development.

SAMPLE PROJECT KEY CONTRIBUTIONS: 3116 - Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova.

Summarised contributions to Action Plan outcomes

(Some outcomes may be attributable to activities of the precursor project, but are directly related in terms of content)

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue:

- Strengthened multi-level institutional dialogue; central and local authorities confirm qualitative improvements in various consultation processes, e.g. on public administration reform, open government, migration, the inclusion of refugees etc.

Policies/Legislation:

- Legislative amendments drafted to improve the normative framework with the aim to institutionalise dialogue and formalise consultation processes, drafted in an inclusive manner with multi-stakeholder participation.

Institutions' Capacities:

- Dialogue between local and central authorities and quality of consultation process improved; stakeholders' capacities increased to provide meaningful inputs into the development of legislation.
- Raised capacities to take part in the implementation of national strategies/action plans on related reform processes.
- CALM's advocacy and monitoring capacities improved, evident via (i) provided expert opinions and (ii) accepted recommendations by the central authorities, and (iii) representation at the Government's bodies responsible for the reform process and specific actions in the field of decentralisation strategies and public administration reform.
- Central and local authorities improved their knowledge on open government concept, with 6 municipalities receiving additional support to apply for the OGP-Local programmes. Commitments for the local level were included for the first time in the 5th Action Plan on Open Government, which was co-created together with local authorities for the first time.
- Awareness was raised ahead of the 2023 elections among representatives of electoral management bodies, local authorities and civil society via a roundtable on combating hate speech, sexism and other forms of gender-based violence in elections, where the Guide on Preventing and Combatting Sexism in Local Politics for the Republic of Moldova (developed based on the relevant existing Congress guides on the same topic) was presented.
- Raised capacity of CALM to provide adequate support to local authorities in managing emergency response as evidenced by (i) stakeholders; (ii) baseline assessment on challenges and needs of local authorities on migration management/integration (contrib. to a Congress multilateral project, incl. Poland and Romania).

Contribution to the alignment to the EU's accession agenda

Overall progress

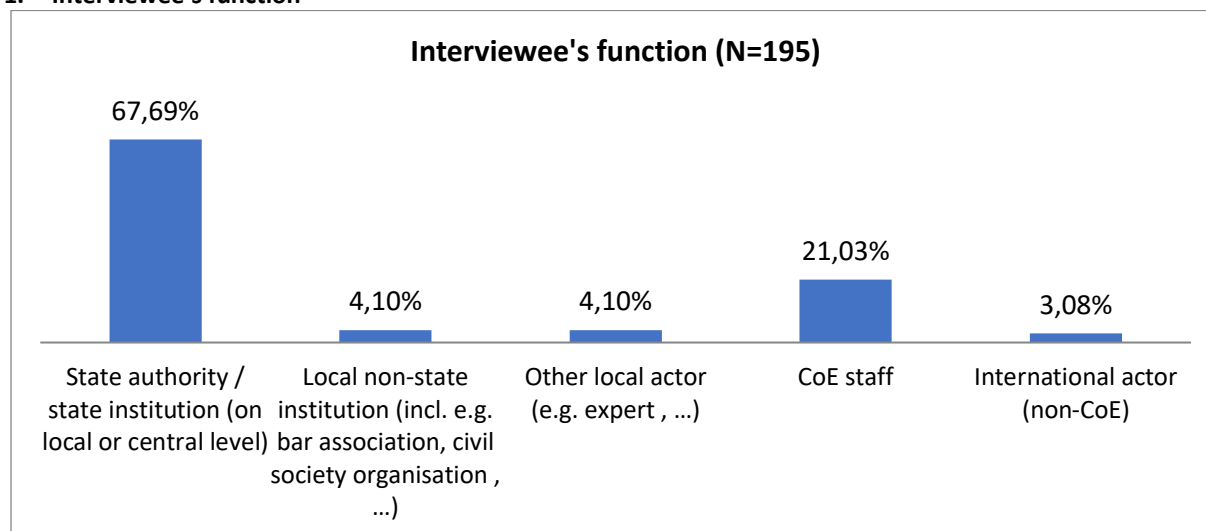
Some contribution to step 6 (increase capacity to step up implementation of public administration reform) of the 9 steps to be taken as recommended in the European Commission's Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for European Union membership (June 2022).

European Commission's Opinion references the Council of Europe Post-Monitoring Roadmap for Local Democracy in the Republic of Moldova, signed in 2021 with the Congress as a follow-up to Recommendation 436 (2019) as one of the political criteriums on reform processes.

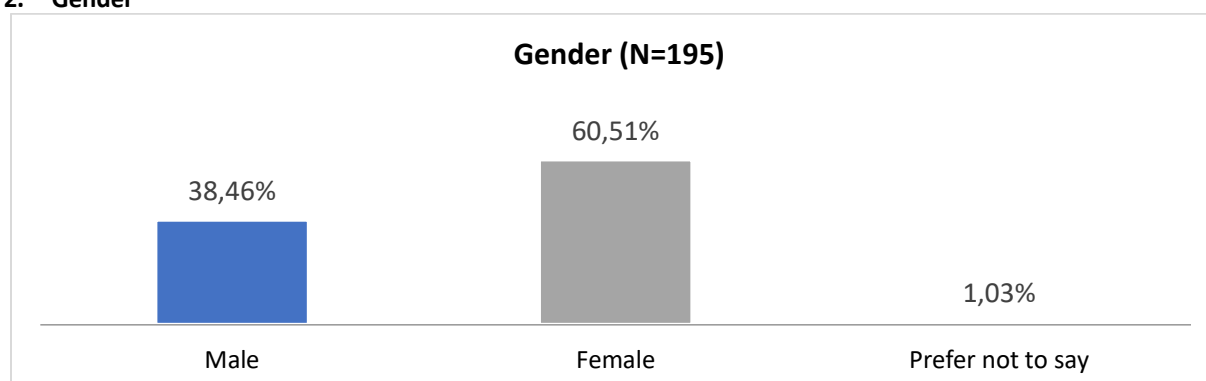
Good progress

Annex 3: Survey

1. Interviewee's function



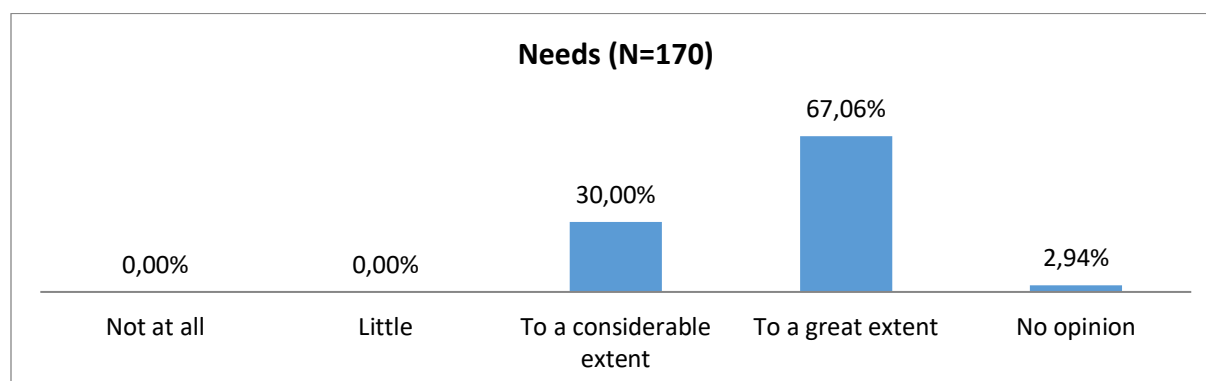
2. Gender



Overall assessment

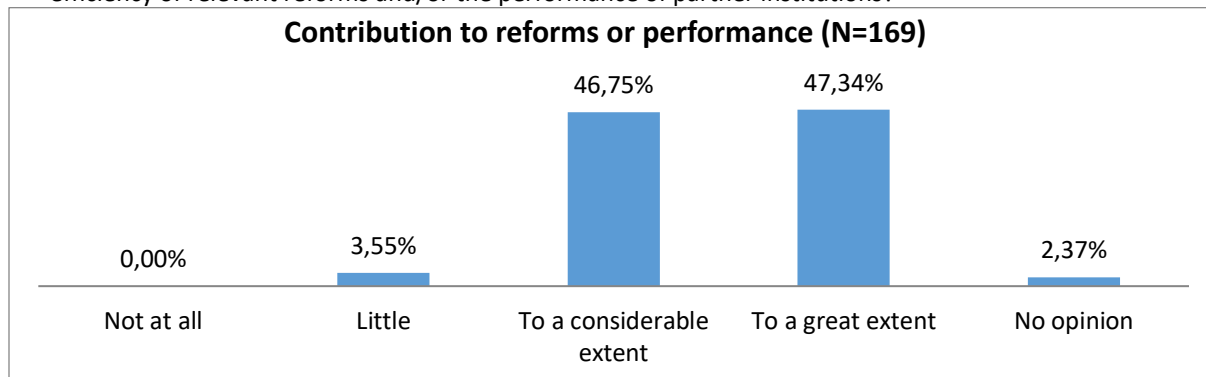
Needs

3. Does the CoE Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 address the needs of the Republic of Moldova in supporting the alignment with European Union practices on human rights, democracy and rule of law?



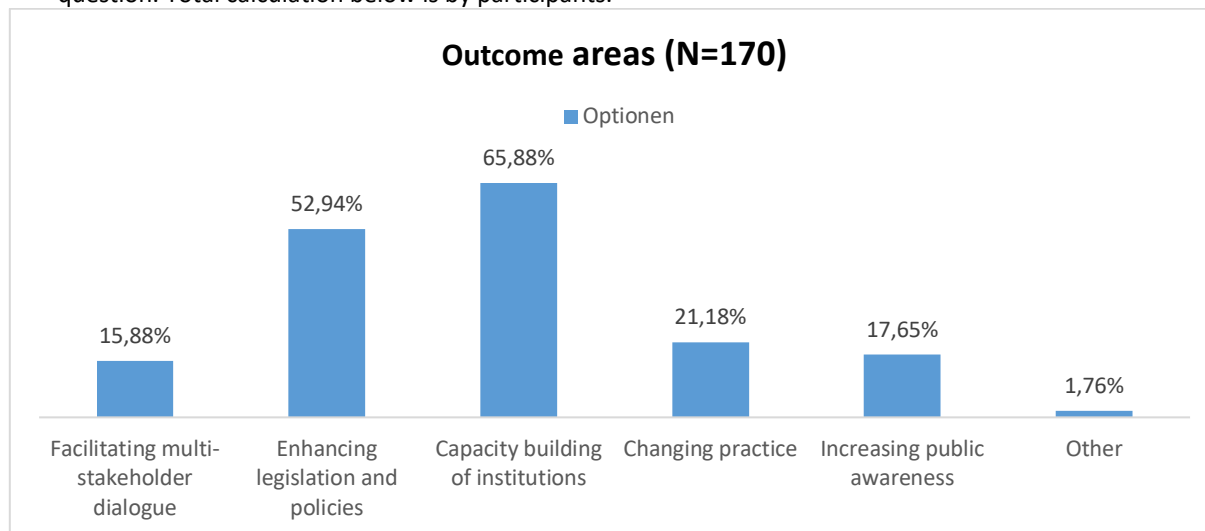
Contribution to reforms or performance

4. Has the CoE Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 contributed to enhancing the quality and efficiency of relevant reforms and/or the performance of partner institutions?



Outcome areas

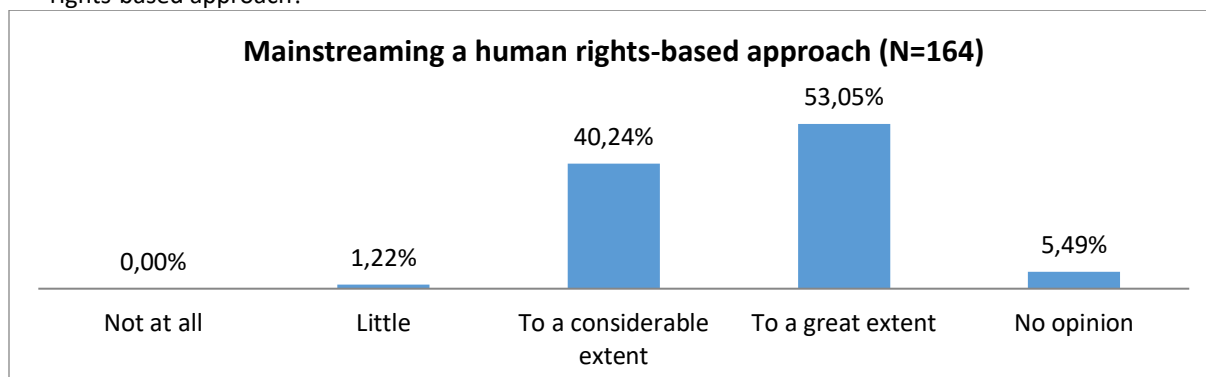
5. In which outcome area, do you believe, is the CoE Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 most effective or strongest? You may choose up to 2 areas. 170 participants to the question, 276 answers to the question. Total calculation below is by participants.



Implementation

Mainstreaming a human rights-based approach

6. Did the CoE Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 and its implementation mainstream a human rights-based approach?

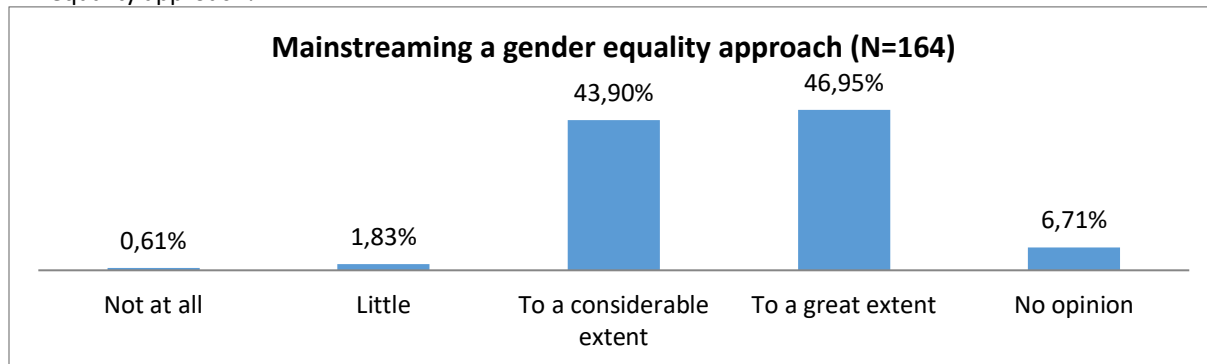


7. Is there an example for mainstreaming a human rights-based approach you would like to highlight?

Qualitative answers

Mainstreaming a gender equality approach

- 8.** Did the CoE Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 and its implementation mainstream a gender equality approach?

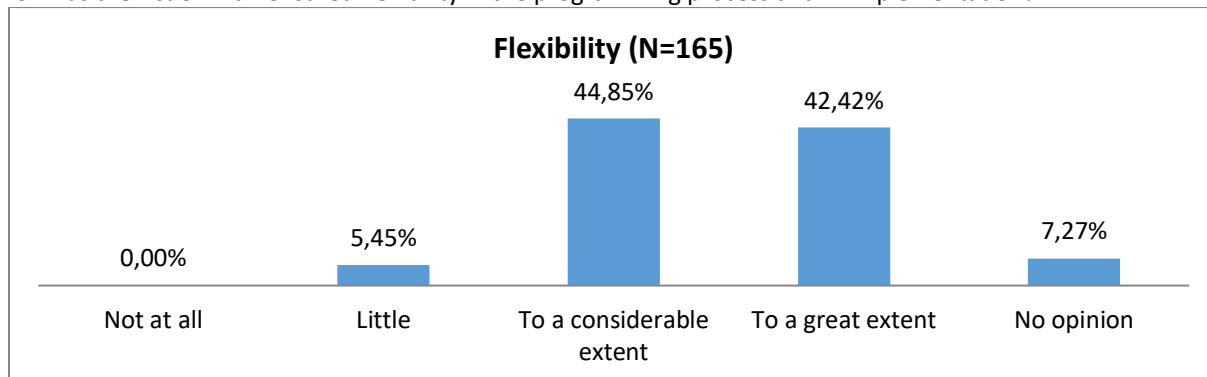


9. Is there an example for mainstreaming a gender equality approach you would like to highlight?

Qualitative answers

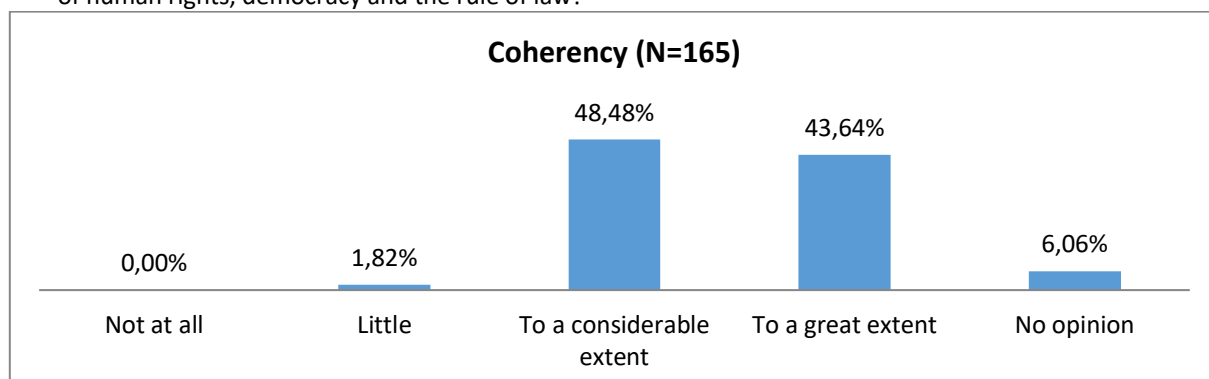
Flexibility

- 10.** Has the Action Plan ensured flexibility in the programming process and in implementation?



Coherence

- 11.** Has the Council of Europe ensured coherency and complementarity with other international actors in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law?



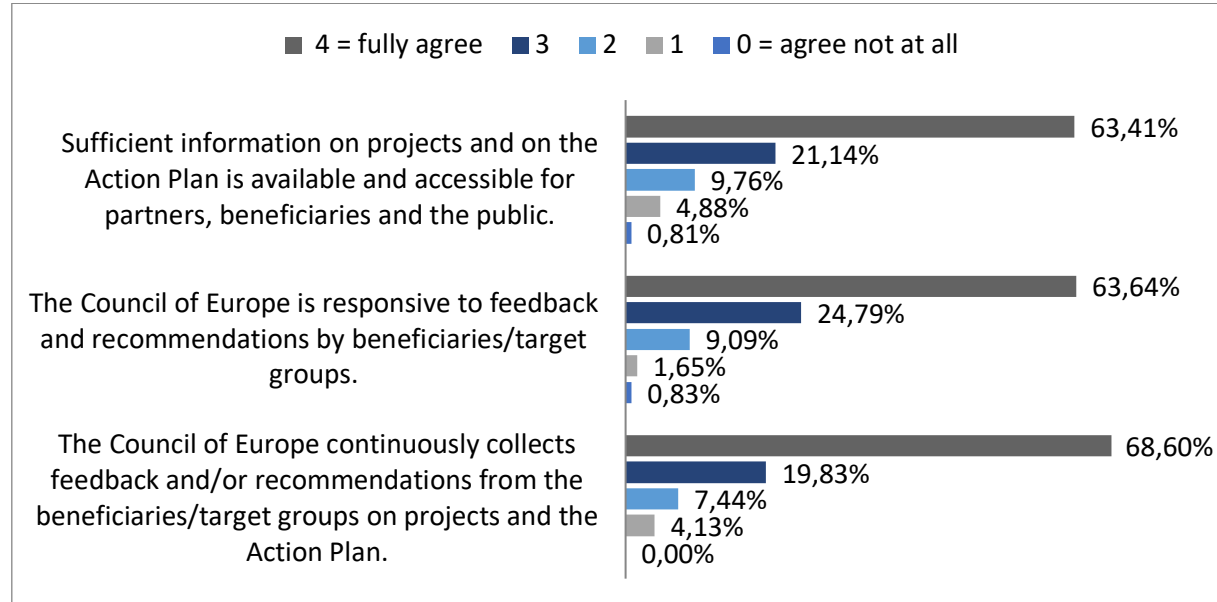
For local respondents only

Accountability and transparency

12. To what degree do you agree with the following statements?

Rate from 0 = agree not at all to 4 = fully agree

N=123



Your perception of the Council of Europe

13. Are there specific strengths and weaknesses of the CoE that you would like to point out?

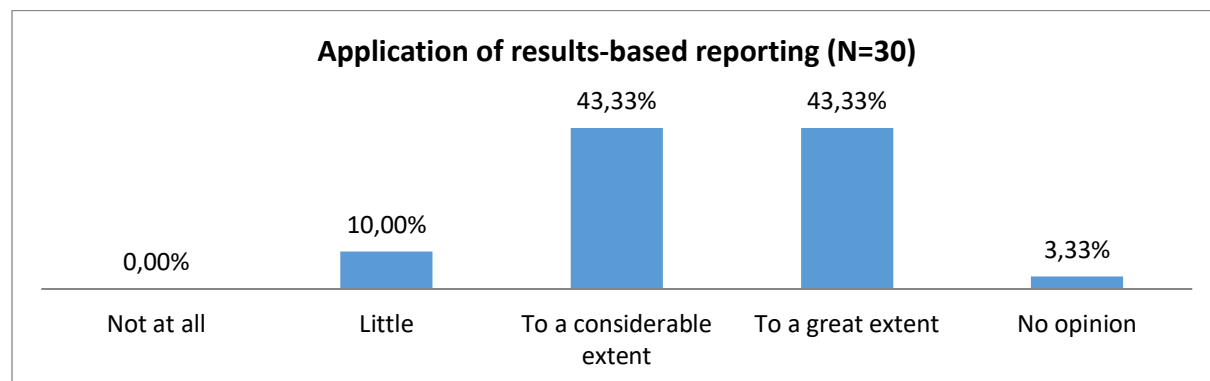
Qualitative answers

For CoE respondents only

Results-based reporting

Application of results-based reporting

14. Have you applied the results-based reporting system in your reporting on the overall CoE Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 or on the implementation of its projects?

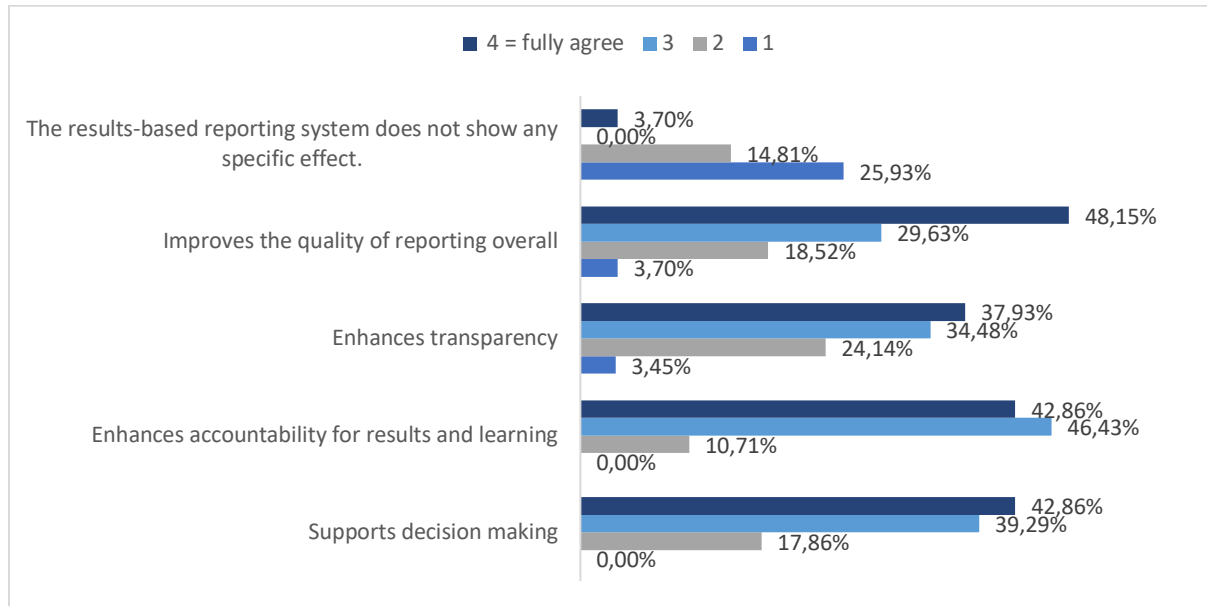


Effects of results-based reporting

15. To what degree do you agree with the following statements?

Rate from 0 = agree not at all to 4 = fully agree

N= 29



Annex 4: Recommendations by Interviewees

The recommendations collected below were expressed by interview partners. They reflect the opinions of the interview partners and are not necessarily shared by the evaluators. Evaluators do not claim that stakeholder's perceptions are factually correct.

Recommendations on challenges and weaknesses

Shortage of human resources in the public sector

- Each partner institution to have designated focal point for Council of Europe project – to have clear line of responsibility to carry internal activities and accelerate communications.

Shortage and high turn-over of human resources in Council of Europe

- More communication staff will raise the communication and visibility quality as well, also we could cover some minority languages, e.g. Romani with additional staff.
- Keep project staff, make sure proper salaries are supporting staff to stay for longer time with the project.
- Keep stable Council of Europe office, without stable staff and office management we cannot implement projects or reforms.
- Enlarge project team, more staff is needed, increase salaries
- The setting as it is right now is cost-efficient. We cannot have international staff in the field (at least for many smaller offices). International staff is expensive, then you need to respect the staff/activity ratio, which then artificially blows up the budget. There is constant talk of decentralization, but you cannot have it for financial reason
- More training for local staff
- There is a tendency to design extra trainings for the local staff. Better to have joint trainings for all
- Motivation of staff is important. They should feel appreciated. Office staff in the field needs better conditions at the duty station.
- Take staffs time constraints into account. Not always there is a need for a full-fledged analysis. Could be done as well as a structured reflection with the gender advisor

Technical programming issues in terms of project duration/timing of AP

- Have projects for the full duration of the AP.
- Small and short projects are generally not good as all our goals (as an organization) are long-term goals. Rather go for a limited no. of longer-term projects than trying to cover many different areas of intervention.
- Continue dialogue with partner institutions to emphasize quality of project results. Do not waste resources, avoid overloading institutions with result expectations, focus on quality products.
- Timeframe too short to change mindsets. A follow-up project should not only target the judicial system but work with the general population.

Outcomes and Reporting

- The Steering Committee should also look at how activities contribute to change, how change gets measured. We never have any discussions concerning the outcomes of the project.
- Rather than producing a larger number of outputs (e.g. operational procedures on a number of different topics) and roll out to all institutions immediately it would be better to apply a specific operational procedure to one topic
- Need to have a “mandatory” or at least standardized reporting system with indicators in place. Need for an institutionalized system

- Stressing even more how different projects contribute to the overall AP. Explicit links should be created how project indicators contribute to the AP level objectives to strengthen the AP.
- Offices to have dedicated meetings on results-based-reporting. These could facilitate moments to look beyond individual projects at the larger picture

Visibility and Communication

- Increase visibility, accordingly increase the budget for it. There is a low visibility budget on AP-level, sufficient on project level only. Communication officer is needed on the projects level, not only for the Council of Europe Office.
- Improve communication overall in the organization. At the end we all work for one and the same objective, we need more exchange.
- Put more events on AP level in place like conferences, increases visibility on AP level. SC meetings happen only once a year. It is not enough visibility.
- We need to improve our way of working digitally. We do use the PM and DMS but for the most part we are at email level (sending documents back and forth).
- The Council of Europe needs more visibility. So much going on and this is not visible in the media. The Council of Europe should report the positive results they are achieving. UN Agencies seem to be better at this branding/presenting themselves.

Bureaucratic administration/procurement procedures in Council of Europe

- Financial decentralization was talked about a lot, but it never happened. E.g. 15.000 EUR threshold for local decision was never put in place.

Recommendations on enablers and strengths

High level of attention for the country, translating also into fundraising opportunities

- Fund larger and longer projects. In general, and in this specific case. There is an imminent political momentum for the topic right now. We should use it.
- Project and country level: US-funded organizations are back to Moldova and start playing a bigger role. We need more personal contacts there, which can then facilitate institutional contact and cooperation as well. We need to be more flexible to find ways to work jointly with them.
- We have so many different donors. Go for a division of labour.

High political will both of authorities in the Republic of Moldova and of EU member states

- Monitoring the Council of Europe standards actually has to do with meeting EU conditions as well. This connection is not strong enough. We have to make clearer how meeting these standards paves the way towards EU membership, towards Brussels.
- To increase local capacities and information on EU reforms, to train mayors on EU standards and funds, and how to write EU projects, especially as majority of local staff and mayors do not speak English.
- Trainings on EU legal framework and standards, on temporary protection, etc. including development of modules, guides, manuals, study visits, new themes and modules for child protection for example.
- Trainings on EU funds and proposal writing.
- Support for twinning projects.
- International experts to provide more trainings on EU standards, also needed for the coming screening process.
- The EU accessing process will require a lot of work and adaptation from our end, there will be a need for expert support on EU standards, ECHR expertise, expertise and trainings for local courts across the country, a lot of capacity-building on reaching the European standards

- Until now we have not had a dedicated project on Roma although now there is respective project in the pipeline (one regional project; one country level) by Strasbourg. New AP should specifically have a chapter on Roma. This is also important enlargement criteria and to fulfil conditionalities. We were in the same place in Romania when we wanted to enter the EU to fulfil criteria.

Long-term engagement of Council of Europe supporting trust-building

- Build trust and confidence with institutions in the country – most important in pursuing (transition) reform objectives.
- Include more NGO and CSO staff and stakeholders – there is a need to make connection mayors-NGOs much stronger, this will be important for the new project
- Come back to practice like before COVID: have one annual in person joint event
- Council of Europe to provide much more political support and lobbying on higher political grounds, on the level of Strasbourg – Government.

Council of Europe Flexibility and readiness to adjust to upcoming needs

- Keep going the same way. All the activities match our needs. Keep your flexibility to pick up new activities when necessary.
- Keep the flexibility. Very important in the field work

Approaches: Experts – national/international

- Involve more local experts from Moldova. Authorities feel sometimes that local expert understand better their needs.
- Trainings on ECHR cases and human rights are very important, police must understand broader and specific impact of their work and their procedures – provided by ECHR judges or specific ECHR experts.

Approaches: Exchange/experience other countries

- Study trip to Strasbourg and to other countries.
- More peer-to-peer capacity-building from the Council of Europe member states to learn from practical examples and actual local solutions on decentralization related reforms.
- Council of Europe experts to assist public administration reform process, we need more capacities, knowledge, information from other member states, support in reforming legal framework
- The reform process in this sector just started and there is a need to learn much more – more trainings, more practice exchange, study visits for example to Central European countries to see how they have organized work in this sector, and more trainings on UN Conventions and international standards

Recommendations on intervention areas

Capacity-building

- More trainings to improve management capacities of mayors and more projects in general that support local capacity-building
- Provide more tools, good practices, strengthening of local-central government dialogue and reform of public administration.
- Would be good to include a “hard component” (data management at national level) to ensure results and sustainability.
- Digitalization of services is needed, more accessibility of online services
- What we should strengthen further: judgements implementation, more trainings for the governmental bodies to respond to findings of monitoring bodies
- Results from technical cooperation could be better referred into the work of the monitoring bodies and processes

Awareness Raising

- More awareness raising needs to be done on central level on importance of the local government participation, project had some success but much more need to be done
- More information sharing on local level on the EU accession process, local units and citizens must be informed on the EU agenda and reform processes.
- The European Social Charter and its shadow reporting mechanism needs to be more promoted. NGOs not too familiar with the mechanism
- More awareness raising campaigns on human and electoral rights.
- More awareness raising activities and activities that support information dissemination among refugees – on their rights but also on what will be happening with them or what the institutions are planning to do.

Project specific recommendations

Improving Electoral Practice

- We need to focus on actions dedicated to the voters: counter fake news risk, corruption of voters buying, education of voters, we need to develop further, such activities towards the Youth are also useful, broad voter's campaigns for awareness on all the risks.
- Monitor well how the new CEC strategic plan is implemented. We often find their plans a bit too big and ambitious. We recommend to have a plan which is somehow smaller, but with very good and concrete indicators, so there is really progress. We recommend to the Council of Europe to keep an eye on this measurability for further good development in the electoral field.
- Continue supporting in a balanced way governmental institutions and civil society. This kind of project should always have both components. Civil society needs this support to keep its watch-dog role going.
- It would be helpful to have a study visit to similar autonomous electoral entities in other countries. To see examples for this specific situation and how they organize electoral processes.

Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention

- Constant monitoring would be important, not only of the strategy but also how well legislation is implemented and institutional responses.
- HELP courses could be very well expanded to law students. The online concept would appeal to them.
- A follow-up project should keep a component of exchange with those partnership countries who are more experienced in the implementation of the IC (such as e.g. Georgia).
- Work on improvement of legislation of self-defense (a lot of women convicted of murder). Not considered in many cases, cases are not analyzed on motivation and background (there is a respective GREVIO recommendation 256 to conduct respective research)

Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions

- VET training for prisoners would be needed so they gain a profession. We have something in place but it's not working well. We are currently conducting an assessment to identify gaps and problems. There is a lack of motivation of prisoners as some training modules are outdated. We need something they can already apply in prison and not only once they get released. Here we would not only need respective training modules but also the equipment etc.
- There are big infrastructure needs in the sector. This needs to be tackled. A lot of the sub-culture in prison is due to the way of building. The big barracks promote sexual abuse, a lack of hygiene, strong people have more goods and powers, the barracks are a living condition without any safe space.
- Training of psychologist for prisoners who are alcoholic
- More tools for referral system

- We have requested already support to MoH in the field of forced treatment, starting with review of legislation (e.g. criminal code, etc.) which are still from Soviet period. No definition on what this kind of treatment means is available. We did not have this form of treatment during SU times; when SU collapsed Moldovan citizens were sent home and Moldova copied criminal code from Soviet times. Now we need to review status of these people and separate this from hospital-based treatment. We need to establish clear criteria to determine treatment criteria which are a challenge for current health care system. This is a challenge with constant going back and forth between MoH and MoJ.

Enhancing Employment Rights

- The project is very much focused on VET. Maybe in this or another project, have a specific focus on employment rights of national minorities including awareness raising to reduce prejudice, in particular against the Roma.
- This should include an advocacy component for pro-active measures to help Roma to be hired, e.g. the Employment Agency has pro-active measures for people with disabilities such as percentage of salary covered by the State, this could be done for Roma.
- Focus on the right to education for children with disabilities. For example, boarding schools specialized for children with hearing impairment closed and those children were put into mainstream schools, but inclusive education is not available.

Annex 5: Council of Europe Theory of Change



Source: Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2022 - 2025, page 15.

Annex 6: List of sample projects and Action Plan projects

a) List of sample projects:

	Pillar and Project	Status	Start	End	No. of months
Human Rights					
3380	Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/09 /2022	30/06 /2024	22
2810	Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/01 /2022	31/12 /2024	36
3153	Enhancing Employment Rights in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	15/12 /22	31/12 /25	36
Rule of Law					
2840	Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/03 /2021	31/12 /2024	36
3208	Action against Corruption in the Republic of Moldova – Phase 2	Ongoing	01/09 /2022	31/08 /2024	24
Democracy					
3006	Improving Electoral Practice in the Republic of Moldova - Phase III.	Ongoing	01/03 /2023	31/12 /2024	22
3116	Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/01 /2022	31/12 /2024	36

b) List of all projects Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 as of September 2023

Pillar	PMM ID	Sector/ Project	Status	Start	End	Duration (months)
I	Human Rights					
I-1	Protecting Human Rights					
I-2	Equality and Human dignity					
	<u>2617</u>	Combating violence against children in the Republic of Moldova	Completed	01/04/2020	31/12/2021	21

	<u>2982</u>	Preventing and protecting children from violence including in the digital environment in the Republic of Moldova; ensuring their well-being	Ongoing	01/01/2022	31/12/2024	36
	<u>2692</u>	Awareness-raising activities on the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Moldova	Completed	13/01/2020	30/06/2021	17
	<u>2641</u>	Mapping study of national responses to address hate speech in Republic of Moldova	Completed	01/11/2019	31/03/2021	17
	<u>2925</u>	Enhancing diversity and equality in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	15/09/2021	14/09/2024	36
	<u>3380</u>	Strengthening the human rights protection of refugees and migrants in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/09/2022	30/06/2024	22
	<u>2810</u>	Supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/01/2022	31/12/2024	36
	<u>3442</u>	PGG III: Combating discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/03/2023	28/02/2026	36
I-3	Ensuring Social Rights					
	<u>3153</u>	Enhancing Employment Rights in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	15/12/2022	31/12/2025	36
I-4	Regional projects					
	<u>1840</u>	End online child sexual exploitation and abuse@Europe	Completed	01/07/2018	30/06/2021	36
	<u>3438</u>	PGG III: Promoting equality and non-discrimination: towards more resilient and inclusive societies	Ongoing	01/03/2023	28/02/2026	36
	<u>2914</u>	PGG III: Women's Access to Justice: implementing Council of Europe's gender equality and violence against women standards	Ongoing	01/03/2023	28/02/2026	36
	<u>2354</u>	PGG II REGIONAL: Strengthening the access to justice through non-judiciary redress mechanisms for victims of discrimination, hate crime and hate speech in Eastern Partnership countries	Completed	01/01/2019	28/02/2023	50
	<u>2073</u>	PGG II REGIONAL: Women's Access to Justice: delivering on the Istanbul Convention and other European gender equality standards in the Eastern Partnership countries	Completed	01/01/2019	28/02/2023	50
II	Rule of law					
II-1	Ensuring Justice					
	<u>2349</u>	PGG II: Support to further strengthening the efficiency and quality of the judicial system in the Republic of Moldova	Completed	01/11/2019	28/02/2023	40
	<u>2350</u>	PGGII: Strengthening the capacities of the justice sector actors to deliver justice in line with	Completed	15/05/2019	28/02/2023	45

		European standards, in particular to fight discrimination, in the Republic of Moldova				
	<u>3430</u>	PGG III: Support to further modernisation of court management in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/03/2023	28/02/2026	36
	<u>1346</u>	Promoting human rights compliant criminal justice system in the Republic of Moldova (Component 1)	Completed	01/01/2018	28/02/2021	38
	<u>1976</u>	Promoting human rights compliant criminal justice system in the Republic of Moldova (Component 2)	Completed	01/01/2018	28/02/2021	38
	<u>2846</u>	Strengthening the human rights compliant criminal justice system	Ongoing	01/03/2021	31/12/2024	46
	<u>2840</u>	Strengthening the prison and probation reforms, provision of health care and the treatment of patients in closed institutions in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/03/2021	31/12/2024	46
II-2	Strengthening the rule of law					
	<u>2814</u>	Support to the justice reform in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	27/05/2023	27/11/2026	42
	<u>2727</u>	Promoting European standards in the audio-visual regulation of the Republic of Moldova	Completed	01/03/2020	31/12/2021	22
	<u>3170</u>	Support for Media Pluralism and Freedom of Expression in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/01/2022	30/06/2024	30
II-3	Countering threats to the rule of law					
	<u>2744</u>	Action against Corruption in the Republic of Moldova	Completed	01/06/2020	30/11/2021	18
	<u>3208</u>	Action against Corruption in the Republic of Moldova – Phase 2	Ongoing	01/09/2022	31/08/2024	24
	<u>3434</u>	PGG III: Enhancing the anti-money laundering and asset recovery regime in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/03/2023	28/02/2026	36
II-4	Regional projects					
	<u>2352</u>	PGG II REGIONAL: Strengthening measures to prevent and combat economic crime in the Eastern Partnership countries	Ongoing	01/01/2019	28/02/2023	50
	<u>2353</u>	PGG II REGIONAL: Strengthening the profession of lawyer in line with European standards	Ongoing	01/07/2019	28/02/2023	44
	<u>2088</u>	CyberEast - Action on Cybercrime for Cyber Resilience in the Eastern Partnership region	Ongoing	20/06/2019	19/12/2023	54
	<u>2523</u>	Strengthening human-rights based responses to substance use disorders in prisons	Completed	01/05/2019	31/07/2021	27
	<u>2857</u>	Support for a better evaluation of the result of judicial reform efforts in the Eastern Partnership 'Justice Dashboard EaP'	Ongoing	15/01/2021	14/01/2024	36
III	Democracy					
III.1	Strengthening democratic governance and fostering innovation					

	<u>1784</u>	Improving electoral practice in the Republic of Moldova	Completed	01/11/2019	28/02/2021	16
	<u>3006</u>	Improving electoral practice in the Republic of Moldova, Phase III	Ongoing	01/03/2023	31/12/2024	22
	<u>2871</u>	Improving electoral practice in the Republic of Moldova (IEPRM), Phase II	Completed	01/03/2021	28/02/2023	24
	<u>2742</u>	Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and consultation of local authorities in the Republic of Moldova – Phase I	Completed	01/06/2020	30/06/2021	13
	<u>3116</u>	Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova	Ongoing	01/01/2022	31/12/2024	24
III.2	Promoting participation and diversity					
	<u>1794</u>	Education for Democracy in the Republic of Moldova	Completed	01/01/2019	31/12/2022	48
	<u>3085</u>	Education for Democracy in the Republic of Moldova - II	Ongoing	01/01/2023	31/12/2026	48

Annex 7: Terms of Reference

APPENDIX to the Act of Engagement

TERMS OF REFERENCE – Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024

Contracting Authority: Council of Europe

(Contract No. 2021/FC/01)

1. CONTEXT

The present document provides the terms of reference for an evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 (the Action Plan). The Terms of Reference provide background information about the Action Plan before describing the evaluation purpose, objectives and scope, evaluation criteria and questions, evaluation methodology as well as the expected profile of the evaluator in accordance with the evaluation policy and guidelines of the Council of Europe Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO).

1.1 Background

Council of Europe technical assistance programmes form an integral part of the unique strategic triangle of standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation: the development of legally binding standards is linked with their monitoring by independent mechanisms and supplemented by technical co-operation to facilitate their implementation. The Directorate of Programme Coordination ensures strategic programming mainly in the form of country and regional action plans and co-operation documents.

The Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 was adopted by the Committee of Ministers at its 1359th session in November 2020, and launched by the President of the Republic of Moldova, and the Council of Europe Secretary General, on 19 April 2021 in Strasbourg. The Action Plan was prepared following extensive consultation with the authorities of the Republic of Moldova. It aims to bring the country's legislation, institutions and practice further in line with European standards in the areas of human rights, the rule of law and democracy. It was conceived to support the country's efforts to honour its obligations as a Council of Europe member State.

The Action Plan was developed taking into account decisions, resolutions, recommendations, conclusions of reports and opinions provided by the Council of Europe's monitoring bodies, the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (the Congress), the Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as judgments by the European Court of Human Rights. It also drew on the country's reform priorities in areas of expertise of the Council of Europe and it builds on the results of the previous Action Plans for the Republic of Moldova 2013-2016 and 2017-2020.

The Republic of Moldova has been significantly affected by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. The Republic of Moldova has faced the largest refugee inflow in its history. This situation has created emerging needs and the Council of Europe, within its mandate and in consultation with the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, has adjusted the work plans of the ongoing projects in the framework of the Action Plan and provided immediate support to partners' requests regarding this unprecedented influx of refugees.

On 3 March 2022, the Republic of Moldova applied for the European Union membership and was granted European Union candidate status in June 2022. The European Council will decide on further steps once the Republic of Moldova fulfils the conditions outlined in the European Commission's opinion on its European Union membership application. Council of Europe co-operation continues supporting the country's reform priorities, including the European Union accession agenda, in areas of expertise of the Council of Europe.

The initial budget of the Action Plan amounted to €13.65 million and was subsequently revised up to €23 million. As of 18 September 2023, the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 had secured a total funding volume of €20,7 million from 15 donors.

1.2 Objectives of the Action Plan

Through the Action Plan, the Council of Europe aims at supporting national reforms with a view to further align the Moldovan legislation, institutions and practices with European standards in the areas of human rights, the rule of law and democracy, therefore supporting the country's efforts to honour its obligations as a Council of Europe member State.

The Action Plan areas of co-operation include, notably:

- protecting human rights;
- promoting human rights and dignity;
- ensuring social rights;
- ensuring justice;
- strengthening the rule of law;
- countering threats to the rule of law;
- strengthening democratic governance and fostering innovation;
- promoting participation and diversity.

1.3 Modalities of implementation

The Directorate of Programme Coordination (DPC) co-ordinates and reports on Council of Europe co-operation activities implemented by the Major Administrative Entities of the Council of Europe within the framework of the Action Plans: the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DG1), the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity (DG2), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (the Congress). The Council of Europe Office in the Republic of Moldova plays an active part in co-ordinating the implementation of the projects and raising funds for their implementation in the field.

Council of Europe co-operation projects are designed and managed according to the Council of Europe Project Management Methodology (PMM). It is based on the Organisation's theory of change, as presented in the Programme and Budget document, and puts particular emphasis on traceability and sustainability of results.

Risk analyses and related mitigation strategies are developed according to the Council of Europe Risk Management Policy adopted in June 2016. As a rule, all co-operation projects have their own risk assessment and mitigation modalities.

The Council of Europe applies a [human rights approach](#) (HRA) in its work and incorporates human rights standards and principles into all levels of project management. In particular, the principles of participation and inclusion, equality and non-discrimination, accountability and transparency and access to information are incorporated in the project management approach throughout the project cycle in order to advance human rights for all and achieve better and more sustainable results.

Gender considerations are mainstreamed throughout Council of Europe co-operation projects, in line with the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023. The development of the Council of Europe [Gender mainstreaming toolkit](#) for co-operation projects has led to an increased understanding and knowledge on gender mainstreaming and gender equality throughout the project cycle.

The implementation of the Council of Europe Action Plans and other strategic co-operation documents, based on the intrinsic links between sustainable development and the protection of human rights, supports the countries' efforts in achieving their commitments towards the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) of the United Nations.

The Council of Europe promotes an active participation of civil society in project activities. Inclusiveness is approached in accordance with the [Guidelines on civil society organisations' participation](#) in Council of Europe's co-operation activities.

2. SPECIFICATIONS OF THE ASSIGNMENT

2.1 Beneficiaries and stakeholders

The primary beneficiaries of this evaluation are the Council of Europe's Major Administrative Entities¹⁴ and the DPC, both management and project staff, as the implementers of the Action Plan. Other beneficiaries include the donors¹⁵ of the Action Plan, as well as the relevant national authorities.

2.2 Purpose and Objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to draw lessons from implementation of the Action Plan and to provide its stakeholders with an objective assessment of the results that have been achieved through the Organisation's support and partnerships with other key actors. The evaluation of the Action Plan is foreseen as part of agreements signed between the Council of Europe and the donors who contributed to the Action Plan. The evaluation will be undertaken at the last year of the Action Plan implementation. It is planned that results of this evaluation will feed into the preparation of the future Council of Europe Action Plans for the Republic of Moldova as well as other countries, with a view to enhance their relevance and effectiveness.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are:

- to assess the outcomes achieved by the actions implemented and their contribution to the Republic of Moldova's alignment to the European standards and EU's accession agenda;
- to assess to what extent the Action Plan progress has been hindered by unique challenges and implications of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine on the Republic of Moldova;
- to draw lessons, identify good practices and provide recommendations related to the management of the Action Plan and project implementation methods, in particular in view of upcoming Action Plan.

2.4 Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation scope will cover the Country Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021 – 2024. As of September 2023, the Action Plan includes 39 projects, either ongoing or already completed, for a total amount of approximately €20,7 million of funding secured. The full list of projects and related timeframes is provided in Appendix 1.

Specific focus will be placed on a sample of projects, with a view to identify findings and draw conclusions and recommendations for the whole Action Plan. The selected projects will include a mix of thematic areas, under the three pillars of the Council of Europe – human rights, democracy and the rule of law, taking into account as much as possible the diversity of the co-operation sectors of the Action Plan. As a general rule, sampled projects will have to be country-specific and ongoing for at least 12 months. Any projects already evaluated (individually or as part of a facility) as well as projects included in assessments should be excluded from the sampling so as to avoid a duplication of efforts. However, the results of these assessments will be taken into account for the overall evaluation.

The evaluators shall propose a draft list of sample projects, considering different thematic areas, and related methodology (between five and eight among the Action Plan projects), to be discussed with the DPC Programming Department during the inception phase. The finalised list of sampled projects and methodology will be included in the inception report.

2.5 Evaluation criteria and indicative evaluation questions

The evaluation will focus on three evaluation criteria¹⁶, namely: **relevance** - the extent to which the projects implemented are suited to the priorities, the reform agenda of the Republic of Moldova and the specific needs of the relevant beneficiaries; **effectiveness** - the extent to which the projects reached their objectives, based on the

¹⁴ Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DG1), Directorate General of Democracy (DG2), the Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (the Congress),

¹⁵ Major donors include the European Union, Norway, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Sweden.

¹⁶ See Appendix 1 of the [CoE Evaluation Policy](#)

specific approach, composition and working methods applied by the Council of Europe; **coherence** - the extent to which the support/actions of the Council of Europe were compatible with other interventions in the country and in thematic sectors.

Indicative evaluation questions include (to be fine-tuned during the evaluation inception phase):

Evaluation questions	Sub-questions
Relevance	
To what extent is the Action plan addressing the needs of the Republic of Moldova in supporting the alignment with European Union practices of human rights, democracy and rule of law?	To what extent has the Council of Europe's Action Plan was relevant and responsive to the needs and priorities of the Republic of Moldova in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law?
	To what extent the results (recommendations/opinions/reports/judgments) of the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies in respect of the Republic of Moldova were used in the Action Plan design to bring reforms closer in line with the European standards?
Effectiveness	
To which extent has the Action Plan achieved its objectives and outcomes?	To what extent has the Action Plan contributed to enhancing the quality and efficiency in the targeted sectors of reforms and towards partner institutions?
	To what extent is the Council of Europe perceived by the Action Plan stakeholders as having a clear comparative advantage compared to other international actors in the areas covered by the Action Plan?
	Which factors have supported and hindered the effectiveness of the projects?
	To what extent has the choice of implementation approaches, modalities and their combination been appropriate to pursue the intended objectives and to ensure business continuity?
	To what extent did the Action Plan and its implementation mainstream a human rights-based approach and a gender equality approach?
	To what extent has the Action Plan ensured flexibility in the programming process and in implementation?
	To what extent has the results-based reporting system been integrated and applied at the level of individual projects and the Action Plan overall?
Coherence	
	To what extent and how has the Council of Europe ensured coordination and complementarity with other donors active in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law at strategic and operational level?
	What are the specific strengths and weaknesses of the Council of Europe in comparison with other international actors in the areas covered by the Action Plan?

The evaluation process will be guided by the [Evaluation Policy¹⁷](#) and [Evaluation Guidelines¹⁸](#) of the Council of Europe and other relevant instruments, such as the [Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023](#).¹⁹ The evaluators will comply with the [Council of Europe Code of Conduct for Evaluation](#).

¹⁷ [Council of Europe, Evaluation Policy](#)

¹⁸ [Council of Europe Evaluation Guidelines](#)

¹⁹ Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023*, available at <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093618-gbr-gender-equality-strategy-2023-web-a5/16808b47e1>.

2.6 Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation methodology will include a mix of methods: desk review, semi-structured interviews, surveys, case studies and/or focus group discussions. A detailed methodology will be proposed by the evaluation team as part of the inception report. Care will have to be taken to make sure the quality and quantity of the data collected are sufficiently reliable to come up with credible conclusions at the Action Plan level. Particular attention will be paid to the diversity of stakeholders and their participation in the evaluation process.

The evaluation questions and sub-questions will be further refined by the evaluation team during the inception phase after discussion with DPC staff and other stakeholders. An [evaluation matrix](#) will present the evaluation questions and specify proposed related sub-questions and indicators for the evaluation questions. The matrix will also provide details on the data collection methods intended to be used to answer to the evaluation questions, as well as the methods for analysis of data collected. The evaluation matrix will be submitted to DPC and the evaluation reference group for approval as part of the draft inception report.

This proposed methodology will also be gender-sensitive and be reflected during the evaluation.

DPC will provide the evaluation team with the relevant information to conduct the assignment. In particular, the evaluation team will have access to the information on projects implementation available in the Project Management IT tool of the Council of Europe, to the Action Plan progress reports prepared by DPC and to any relevant evaluation reports that might have already been conducted.

2.7 Assumptions and risks

It is assumed that services within both the Council of Europe and the implementing authorities of the beneficiaries accept the evaluation as an integral part of the project management cycle and are committed to provide the necessary information, and will subsequently act on recommendations and findings, as well as provide follow-up information to the Council of Europe.

The following are additional relevant assumptions for the evaluation:

- project progress/final reports are available on time and provide sufficient and adequate information;
- access to requested documentation and information on the projects is ensured by the Council of Europe and the project beneficiaries;
- the Council of Europe staff and implementing parties are regularly informed on objectives and methods of this evaluation, in order to ensure their full co-operation;

In the event that one or several of the above assumptions do not hold true, the evaluators should immediately inform the Task Manager in the DPC Programming Department. The evaluators will also report any limitations to the evaluation due to the lack of data availability, insufficient collaboration from key stakeholders or any internal or external attempts to compromise the independence of the evaluation process.

3. EXPERT PROFILE

3.1 Profile and expertise required

One or two experts are requested for this assignment.

The consultant(s) should have the **following qualifications and competencies**:

- advanced university degree, preferably in evaluation, social sciences or a related field;
- a minimum of 10 years of relevant professional experience in performance evaluation, internal audit, monitoring and reporting, data science;
- knowledge and experience in the field of justice and the rule of law and human rights, in particular in the fields of the eight components of the Action Plan²⁰.
- Excellent oral and writing skills in English;

²⁰ Protecting human rights; promoting human rights and dignity, ensuring social rights; ensuring justice; strengthening the rule of law; countering threats to the rule of law; strengthening democratic governance and fostering innovation; promoting participation and diversity.

- knowledge of the countries of the EU Eastern Neighbourhood area;
- knowledge of gender mainstreaming.

The following would be considered as assets:

- experience of Council of Europe working methods;
- knowledge of Romanian.

The evaluators will have to ensure to be adequately supported and equipped. In particular, sufficient administrative, secretarial, translation and interpreting resources must be available to them in order to enable them to concentrate on the core evaluation tasks. The expenses related to such support shall be budgeted and paid from the evaluation budget.

3.2 Working language

The main working language of the assignment while interacting with CoE representatives (meetings and reporting) is English. Interactions with local stakeholders will mainly take place in Romanian. If needed, translation and interpretation services will be provided by the consultant who will have to ensure that they comply with Council of Europe quality standards.

3.3 Conflict of interest

The evaluators are responsible for carrying out an independent evaluation and must follow the [Council of Europe Code of Conduct for Evaluation](#). They must be strictly neutral and not have any conflict of interest or any previous involvement in programming and/or implementation of Council of Europe assistance which will be evaluated as part of this assignment.

4. Organisation, timetable and budget

4.1 Organisation

The contract will be managed by the DPC Programming Department of the Council of Europe (the Task Manager). The responsibilities of the Task Manager will include:

- providing the external evaluator with access to information;
- supporting and monitoring the work of the external evaluator;
- co-ordinating the contribution of the evaluation reference group
- assessing the quality of and providing comments on the reports submitted by the external evaluator, before submission to the DIO for quality assurance and the evaluation reference group, while ensuring that the Evaluator's independence is not compromised.

4.2 Evaluation Reference Group

Lessons learned from prior Action Plan evaluation experiences have shown the importance of being able to refer to an evaluation reference group throughout the evaluation process.

An evaluation reference group will be created to facilitate the implementation of the evaluation through advice and guidance and ensure transparency and ownership of the process. The evaluation reference group will therefore allow to enhance the quality of the evaluation as well as the relevance and actual feasibility to implement its recommendations.

The Reference Group will be composed of key internal CoE stakeholders with a good knowledge of the projects evaluated and a sound understanding of the institutional environment. The selection of its members will be coordinated by DPC. Invitations will be extended to the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Moldova to the Council of Europe

4.3 Timetable and planning

The evaluation exercise should tentatively start in October 2023. The contract will enter into force after both parties have signed it. The Inception report should be presented by mid-December 2023 and the final report should be delivered by end of March – beginning of April 2024 at the latest.

The following work plan and indicative timetable are envisaged.

4.3.1 Deliverables

The evaluation will feature an **inception phase** in which the evaluator will collect initial data and prepare an inception report (**Deliverable 1**) including refined evaluation methodology, refined evaluation questions, evaluation matrix and a proposed calendar. The evaluator will ensure the quality of the inception report by applying the [Quality Assurance Check List for Evaluation Inception Reports](#). The draft inception report will be presented to the evaluation reference group and finalised after integration of relevant comments.

During the **data collection phase**, the evaluator will carry out data collection in Strasbourg and during a field visit to the Republic of Moldova, as well as through phone interviews, if needed.

During the **analysis and reporting phases**, the evaluator will analyse the collected data and produce a draft final report (**Deliverable 2**) not longer than 25 pages comprising:

- ✓ *Executive Summary;*
- ✓ *Introduction:*
 - ✓ Description of the objectives of the evaluation;
 - ✓ Purpose of the evaluation;
 - ✓ Evaluation methodology;
 - ✓ Limitations/Difficulties encountered during the evaluation.
- ✓ *Findings:*
 - ✓ Findings related to evaluation questions;
 - ✓ Additional relevant findings.
- ✓ *Conclusions;*
- ✓ *Recommendations;*
- ✓ *Lessons learned;*
- ✓ *Annexes (including list of interviews, questionnaires and documents reviewed, such as reports etc.).*

The draft final report will first be revised on the basis of comments by the DPC task manager and the DIO; it will then be presented to the evaluation reference group and finalised after integration of relevant comments to be made during the meeting and/or made available in writing within a week after the meeting. The evaluation reference group will comment, in particular, on the factual accuracy, the relationship between findings, conclusions and recommendations, as well as the relevance, usefulness and the possible implementation of recommendations. The evaluator will then have two weeks to submit the final version of the evaluation report (**Deliverable 3**). The evaluator will ensure the quality of the inception report by applying the [Quality Assurance Checklist for Evaluation Reports](#).

The comments of the evaluation reference group may be integrated into the final version of the report or presented in the report as differing views. The report will then be shared with the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO) for quality assurance. Once the report is declared final, DPC will prepare within two months a management response and action plan to be sent to the Secretary General. The final report will be published on the Council of Europe's website together with the management response and action plan. The final report will also be disseminated to the donors.

The deliverables will be written in English.

4.3.2 Indicative timetable

The estimated **duration of the contract** is from 23 October 2023 to 23 April 2024. The tentative schedule is as follows:

- October 2023: start of the evaluation and preparatory meetings with evaluators and DPC representatives;
- Early-December 2023: submission to DPC and DIO of a draft inception report including evaluation methodology, evaluation matrix and a proposed calendar, in line with the [Quality Assurance Check List for Evaluation Inception Reports](#);
- Mid-December 2023: draft inception report integrating DPC and DIO comments presented to the evaluation reference group;
- Mid-January 2024: inception report revised taking into account comments by the evaluation reference group;
- mid-March 2024: draft final report submitted to DPC and DIO, in line with the [Quality Assurance Checklist for Evaluation Reports](#);
- End-March 2024: draft final report integrating DPC and DIO comments presented to the evaluation reference group;
- Mid-April 2024: final evaluation report revised taking into account comments by the evaluation reference group.

4.4 Location of assignment

The desk research will be homebased. The field research will take place in Strasbourg or Chisinau.

4.5 Budget

The maximum budget envisaged for this assignment is 45 000 euro. The allocated evaluation budget will comprise consultancy fees, travel and subsistence for field interviews and data-gathering in Strasbourg (max. three missions) and Chisinau (one mission) as well as all costs incurred during the implementation of the assignment, including translation and interpretation services, as required.

5. REPORTING

All the reports and expected outputs shall be produced in English in line with the [Council of Europe style guide](#), using the appropriate style and structure so texts are clear and concise. All draft reports will be submitted to the DPC Task Manager in electronic form by e-mail and in a format compatible with MS Office software. The Council of Europe reserves the right to request the necessary additional revisions of the reports in order to reach an appropriate outcome and quality control requirements. The draft final report will also be a subject to a quality check by the DIO. Therefore, the deadline for the delivery of the final report as well as its presentation could be postponed.

6. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Once a proposal has been approved for funding, an Order Form will be prepared by the Council of Europe and sent to the consultant for signature, in accordance with the Contract No 2021/FC/01. The Applicant will be paid on the basis of deliverables, as follows: 25% upon reception of the final inception report and 75% upon reception of the final report and the delivery of a presentation to CoE internal stakeholders.

6.1. Items to foresee under 'Reimbursable'

In the event that the totals for a particular line in the budget will/could be impacted as a result of any circumstances not foreseen in these terms of reference (inter alia implementing modalities agreed with the

Council of Europe), the evaluator must alert the Council of Europe Task Manager. In any case, should any modifications be required to the budget agreed at contract signature, these will have to be properly justified and will be subject to the *ex-ante* written approval in line with the general conditions of the contract.

IMPORTANT REMARKS:

During all contacts with stakeholders, the consultant will clearly identify him/herself as an independent consultant and not as an official representative of the Council of Europe.

Attention is drawn to the fact that the Council of Europe reserves the right to have the reports redrafted as many times as necessary, and that financial penalties (5% of the invoice for the deliverable) will be applied if deadlines indicated for the submission of reports (drafts and final, in hard and electronic copy) are not strictly adhered to. The delay of five working days is tolerated if the evaluator informs the Task Manager before the deadline.

In addition, the contract can be discontinued whenever the quality of the deliverables is insufficient in light of these Terms of Reference and the CoE quality assessment criteria ([Quality Assurance Check List for Evaluation Inception Reports](#) and [Quality Assurance Checklist for Evaluation Reports](#)), and when the evaluators have not taken the necessary steps to remedy the insufficiencies.

Annex 8: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation question	Evaluation sub-question	Measures/Indicators	Data collection tools	Sources
RELEVANCE				
1. To what extent is the Action plan addressing the needs of the Republic of Moldova in supporting the alignment with European Union practices of human rights, democracy and rule of law?	1.1 To what extent was the Council of Europe's Action Plan relevant and responsive to the needs and priorities of the Republic of Moldova in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law?	No. of relevant strategies, policies and priorities of the Republic of Moldova addressed (in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law). Stakeholders' perception of evaluation question 1	- Desk study - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff, relevant national authorities, repr. of civil society
	1.2 To what extent did the results (recommendations/opinions/reports/judgments) of the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies in respect of the Republic of Moldova inform the Action Plan design to bring reforms closer in line with the European standards?	Evidence of recommendations, opinions, reports and judgements of the Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies in respect of the Republic of Moldova reflected in the Action Plan design.	- Desk study - Semi-structured interviews	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff
EFFECTIVENESS				
2. To what extent has the Action Plan achieved its objectives and outcomes?	2.1 To what extent has the Action Plan contributed to enhancing the quality and efficiency in the targeted sectors of reforms and towards partner institutions?	Evidence of sample projects contribution to the Action Plan's goal, expected outcomes and indicators as defined per pillar. Evidence of strengths, weaknesses, internal and external challenges identified by stakeholders on Action Plan level.	- Desk review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff, relevant national authorities, repr. of civil society
3. Which factors have supported and hindered the effectiveness of the	3.1 Were there any unique challenges to project implementation caused by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine? If so, how did these challenges affect the project	Extent to which any unique challenges are identified by stakeholders	- Desk review - Semi-structured interviews	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff, relevant national authorities, repr. of

Evaluation question	Evaluation sub-question	Measures/Indicators	Data collection tools	Sources
projects?	implementation process?			civil society
	3.2 To what extent did the Action Plan and its implementation mainstream a human rights-based approach and a gender equality approach?	Evidence of mainstreaming of human rights-based and gender equality approaches in design, implementation and results of the sample projects. Stakeholders perception on the extent of mainstreaming a human rights-based and a gender equality approach.	- Desk review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff, relevant national authorities and civil society representatives
	3.3 To what extent has the choice of implementation approaches, modalities and their combination been appropriate to pursue the intended objectives and to ensure business continuity?	Evidence of strengths and weaknesses identified by stakeholders.	- Desk review - Semi-structured interviews	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff, relevant national authorities, repr. of civil society
	3.4 To what extent has the Action Plan ensured flexibility in the programming process and in implementation?	Evidence of appropriate adaptations in Action Plan and project-based management.	- Desk review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff, relevant national authorities, repr. of civil society
	3.5 To what extent has the results-based reporting system been applied and has it been productive e.g. in terms of supporting decision making, enhancing accountability for results and learning, transparency and/or improving the quality of reporting overall?	Evidence of strengths and weaknesses identified by stakeholders.	- Desk review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff

COHERENCE

4. To what extent does the Council of Europe ensure coherency and complementarity with other international actors in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law?	4.1 To what extent and how has the Council of Europe ensured coordination and complementarity with other donors active in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law at strategic and operational level?	The extent to which stakeholders can identify specific contributions of Council of Europe to effective coordination and complementarity with other donors. Stakeholders' perception on evaluation question 4.	- Desk review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff, relevant national authorities, repr. of civil society
	4.2 To what extent is the Council of Europe perceived by the Action Plan stakeholders as having a clear comparative advantage over other international actors in the areas covered by the Action Plan? What are the specific strengths and weaknesses of the Council of Europe?	The extent to which stakeholders can identify specific contributions and strengths of Council of Europe.	- Desk review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Project documentation - Council of Europe staff, relevant national authorities, repr. of civil society

Annex 9: Key documents

Council of Europe

- Council of Europe Action Plan Republic of Moldova 2021 - 2024
- Council of Europe. Programme and Budget 2022 – 2025
- Council of Europe Human Rights Approach
- Council of Europe Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit
- Republic of Moldova AP level report 2021
- Republic of Moldova AP level report 2022
- Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025)
- 7 Sample projects: assessment reports, project proposals, inception reports, annual reports 2021, 2022 and 2023, and additional project specific documents, such are national strategies, action plans, Council of Europe project - specific documents such are recommendations/roadmaps
- RBM pilot project and training excerpts from Power Point Presentations
- Council of Europe Evaluation of results-based management in the Council of Europe

External documents

- European Union: Association agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part
- European Commission: Commission Opinion on the Republic of Moldova application for membership of the European Union
- European Commission: Analytical Report following the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council Commission Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for membership of the European Union
- European Commission: Republic of Moldova 2023 Report
- European Committee of Regions: The role and place of local democracy and decentralisation in the modernisation and consolidation of democratic processes in the Eastern Partnership countries European Union, 2022
- Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services: Final Evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe Partnership for Good Governance Programme Phase II (PGG II)
- Strategicus: Evaluation of the Council of Europe project: "Education for Democracy in the Republic of Moldova"