

Document prepared by the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination

Final Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2019-2022

Management Response

Name of Evaluation Report:	Progress Review and Final Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2019-2022- Final Report		
Date of Evaluation Report:	September 2022	Dates of the Management Response:	January 2023
Overall management response to the evaluation:			
<p>The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination of the Council of Europe considers that the report is an overall fair assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan thus far and agrees with most conclusions and recommendations.</p> <p>Whenever relevant, the recommendations of the Evaluation were taken into account in the drafting of the new Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026 as well as in the process of development and validation of new project proposals, implementation and reporting.</p>			

Recommendations 1 and 2:

1. Enhance outreach and communication with donors, CSOs, professionals and the wider public about the Council of Europe’s role and the added value of the Action Plan.
2. Enhance and broaden partnerships with CSOs in Armenia. This should start with a mapping of CSOs, their roles and capacities and how to enhance partnerships with them.

Recommendations to:

Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):

- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
- CoE Office in Yerevan

3

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

Management response

The Directorate of Programme Coordination acknowledges the need to reinforce outreach and communication towards the Action Plan direct stakeholders, current and potential donors and Armenian public at large as well as to enhance cooperation and synergies. This aspect continues to be in constant focus, and the evaluation notes the improvement, over the period, of the monitoring, reporting, and communication on the results of the Action Plan. The communication efforts will further focus on the Council of Europe added value and the specific role it plays in upholding human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Armenia, and the results achieved in partnership with the national authorities and civil society organisations within the framework of the implementation of the Action Plan. The actions identified in response to the recommendations will be implemented by the Directorate of Programme Co-Ordination and the management of the Yerevan office, in cooperation with the Council of Europe Major Administrative Entities (MAEs), in a coordinated manner and striving to maximise their impact.

Within the framework of the implementation of the Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026, the Yerevan Office will strive to expand its network of Civil Society Organisations with whom the CoE cooperates with, in line with the Council of Europe Human Rights Approach and subject to CSOs’ expertise and relevance. In particular, the Office will aim at diversifying its CSO network and enhancing its representativity of the Armenian society to the extent possible, in view of its mandate, while respecting the Organisation’s rules and regulations and in line with the CoE “Guidelines on Civil Society Organisations’ participation in Council of Europe’s co-operation activities”. This will notably allow the Council of Europe to include additional perspectives/dimensions in project planning and implementation.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action Plan launching event gathering representatives of the relevant Armenian national authorities as well as potential donors' representatives in Armenia. The event will be followed by bilateral meetings with potential donors. - Action Plan steering committee meetings or thematic roundtables involving representatives of national authorities as well as partner CSOs. Regular bilateral meetings with (potential) donor representatives, both in Yerevan (Head of Yerevan Office) and in Headquarters (Directorate of Programme Coordination). - Development of a communication function staffing policy for field offices, and consideration given, subject to availability of funds, to hiring a full-time communication officer in the Yerevan Office. - A two-day communication training for all the Yerevan Office staff (organised in December 2022). - Thematic discussions on the preparation of the Action Plan 2023-2026 with representatives of project partners, national authorities and Civil Society Organisations. - Follow-up activities with representatives of project partners, national authorities and Civil Society Organisations to capitalise on thematic discussions dynamics. - Further mainstreaming of the Council of Europe Human Rights Approach in project planning and implementation, in line with the "Guidelines on Civil Society Organisations' participation in Council of Europe's co-operation activities", in particular through CSO active inclusion in project planning and implementation (in particular as members of working groups on various topics as well as participation of CSOs in capacity-building activities and campaigns, in arranging visibility activities and in project Steering Committee meetings) as well as monitoring and evaluation. - Mapping of Armenian CSOs, highlighting their sector of expertise and capacities - Engagement with "new" CSOs and further involvement in project implementation in accordance with the Organisation's rules and regulations and in line with the CoE "Guidelines on Civil Society Organisations' participation in Council of Europe's co-operation activities". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mid-February 2023 - 1st quarter 2025, 1st quarter 2026 - Continuous - December 2022 - 18 March 2022 - Continuous - Continuous - 1st Semester 2023 - Continuous - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directorate of Programme Co-ordination - CoE Office in Yerevan

Recommendations 3:		
- Enhance and broaden partnerships with donors and seek closer synergies.		
Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):	
- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination - CoE Office in Yerevan	3	
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept		
Management response		
<p>The Directorate of Programme Coordination acknowledges the need to reinforce partnerships with donors. Efforts to enhance co-ordination with donors and stakeholders will continue, while clarifying the specificity of the Council of Europe co-operation work and leveraging its unique expertise and added value. This will be pursued both through further active engagement in thematic donor coordination initiatives, as well as enhanced coordination at project level. In a broader perspective, the Council of Europe will strive to contribute to addressing the coordination issue identified by the evaluation, together with the Armenian authorities and other international actors present in Armenia.</p>		
Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- Pro-active engagement in thematic donor coordination initiatives - Coordination meetings among projects working in areas related to each other	- Continuous - Continuous	- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination - CoE Office in Yerevan

Recommendation 4:

- Ensure that all projects include a gender analysis.

Recommendations to:

Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):

- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
- CoE Office in Yerevan

2

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

Management response

Gender equality is one of the priorities of the Council of Europe and gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures is one of the six strategic objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023. The Directorate of Programme Coordination acknowledges the importance of gender mainstreaming in cooperation projects. Important resources have been invested for this purpose since 2018, both for the development of policy documents, tools and guidelines as well as for the training of project teams. The “Gender mainstreaming toolkit for co-operation projects” operationalises the Strategy in a concrete way and offers practical guidance on the implementation of a gender dimension in co-operation activities within the Organisation as well as by national partners and other stakeholders. Action aimed at ensuring a gender-sensitive approach in the implementation of the Action Plan included constant efforts towards:

- **providing and analysing gender disaggregated data and related information to enable the project teams to see the need for gender mainstreaming activities, and adjusting the project accordingly by better integrating the gender perspective;**
- **gender-balanced composition of implementation teams;**
- **gender balance in the selection of participants in project activities;**
- **gender-sensitive communication on projects. In this regard, a Gender sensitive communication checklist was developed to assist project staff;**
- **inclusion of gender issues in reporting. In this regard specific reporting guidelines have been developed.**

As mentioned above, the “Gender mainstreaming toolkit for co-operation projects” includes the Gender Analysis as the first step in the mainstreaming of gender in a project as “it creates better understanding of the situation of women and men as well as the relations between them”. The Directorate of Programme Coordination will provide support to project teams for the development of gender analyses and the introduction of gender equality markers in the methodology for gender mainstreaming in co-operation, with a view to their inclusion in future new projects.

Until November 2022, a gender advisor was seconded by Finland to provide support to projects in gender-related matters, including in Armenia. A gender focal points network has also been created to ensure the provision of ad hoc support to field offices and better gender mainstreaming in projects. The Directorate of Programme Co-Ordination will continue to deploy efforts to mainstream gender in cooperation projects, and will further rely on the availability of seconded officials to concretely support project teams, which has proven so far an important added value. The training programme will be continued, subject to availability of resources within the Human Resources budget of the Organisation.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- Further implementation of the gender mainstreaming toolkit and guidelines, and provision of support to project teams for the development of gender analyses and the introduction of gender equality markers for new projects.	- Continuous	- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
- Continuation of the field offices gender focal points network.	- Continuous	
- Exchanges with the respective Delegation for the possible appointment of a seconded official as gender advisor for the Eastern Partnership countries.	- 1st Semester 2023	
- Discussion with DRH for the continuation of the gender mainstreaming training programme	- Continuous	
- Progressive implementation of gender analyses for all CoE projects	- Continuous	

Recommendation 5		
- Enhance synergies between and across Action Plan sectors and projects.		
Recommendations to:		Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination - CoE Office in Yerevan		3
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept		
Management response		
<p>The Directorate of Programme Coordination will further leverage the Action Plan as a tool both for resource mobilisation and for flexible planning, the implementation of which can be adapted on the basis of changing needs/context/opportunities, to ensure the continuing relevance of the activities implemented, to enhance coordination and to take advantage of possible synergies.</p> <p>In the communication with current and potential donors, the Council of Europe will continue to emphasize the importance of unearmarked contributions that allow for flexibility in relation to the windows of opportunity and changing context. Further efforts will be made to enhance information sharing among the various project teams, the Armenian institutions and relevant CSOs, the donor community and the Directorate of Programme Coordination, in order to avoid overlapping and enhance effectiveness and efficiency.</p>		
Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination and the Head of Office in Yerevan will systematically seek to establish links among Action Plan projects when discussing with national stakeholders, donors and MAEs, both at the planning stage and during implementation. In this respect, the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination will seek to nurture a culture of cooperation across Departments/Divisions and facilitate the process as appropriate. - Improve the visibility of synergies (to be) created among CoE projects as well as with projects funded by other organisations, in Action Plan level planning and reporting documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous - Continuous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directorate of Programme Co-ordination - Council of Europe office in Yerevan

Recommendation 6

- Strengthen the evidence basis of reported Action Plan outcomes related to training/capacity building and new practices in the partner institutions, through more analytical and evidence-based project reports.

Recommendations to:

Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):

- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
- Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators

3

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

Management response

Considerable progress has already been made in applying RBM methods in project planning, monitoring and reporting, notably since the introduction of the Project Management Methodology (PMM) in 2017. Since that time the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination has been taking measures to address shortcomings observed in the staff capacity to design, monitor and report on projects, such as the definition of outcomes which may be too generic to measure change in specific target groups, insufficient indicator dimensions with modest data collection methods, in particular when it comes to the development of capacities.

Since 2019, the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination has designed hands-on workshops on results-based reporting targeting project staff. The curriculum underlines the importance of a solid logframe and indicators, strongly linked to relevant country stakeholders, as the basis for evidence-based and outcome-based reporting.

In March 2022 a regional Project Management Officer (PMO) was recruited in the Council of Europe Office in Tbilisi to provide support to co-operation projects in terms of project management methodology. The Officer's duties extend to the CoE Offices in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Focus on results-based approach, data collection methods and evidence-based reporting is at the core of the Officer's responsibilities. Based on the initial needs assessment, the PMO supports co-operation projects through a) supporting the project staff on data collection and analysis related issues at various stages; b) participating in developing research instruments and drafting project related documents and c) organising activities (targeted trainings) aimed at building the project staff's capacities in data generation and analysis. The PMO has brought more attention to the issues of formulating the results and indicators in the logframe, as well as to several methods of data collection in the Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova Offices through meetings and capacity building activities.

In order to have the most adequate indicators possible, given the CoE acquis and working methods, and in order not to be driven by the common indicators of partners, it was decided in spring 2022 that the CoE should develop its own Common Indicators for the key sectors of technical cooperation. The CoE RBM will therefore be reinforced by common sectoral indicators, which will contribute to comparability of results and the ability to measure progress over time.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Launch of a specific project aimed at producing recommendations for enhanced results-based management and reporting on results. The project will focus on a finite number of actions in Georgia and Armenia, either at planning or inception stages. - Development of “common indicators” for thematic capacity building/training activities. - Further enhancement of the application of RBM concepts, with a specific focus on outcome level information, including through the support of the regional PMO. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1st semester 2023 - 1st semester 2023 - Continuous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directorate of Programme Co-ordination

Recommendation 7		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commission strong, lesson learned-oriented independent end-evaluations of the Biomedicine project and of the Human Rights in Armed Forces project. These evaluations should include an analysis of the potential benefits of these projects for other countries. 		
Recommendations to:		Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directorate of Programme Co-Ordination - Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators 		3
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept		
Management response		
<p>Following discussions with the evaluators on the basis of the draft evaluation report, both project teams had the intention to conduct the evaluations of their respective projects by the end of 2022. Nevertheless, due to the current context in Armenia which would have put considerable constraints on the data collection for the evaluations, the decision was taken to postpone them. These evaluations are intended to be conducted within the framework of the follow-up projects that will start on 1 January 2023, should the conditions for an evidence-based evaluation present themselves. The timeframe of the evaluations will be decided upon taking into account the context in Armenia, the resources available within the respective projects and the need for information for the programming of projects in other countries.</p>		
Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submission to the Directorate of Internal Oversight of draft TORs for both evaluations. - Conduct of both evaluations, following discussions and agreement between project managers, Directorate of Programme Co-ordination and Directorate of Internal Oversight. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To be concluded before 31/12/2024 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevant project managers