

Final Evaluation of the Evaluation of the Council of Europe Partnership with Morocco 2018-2021

Management Response

Name of Evaluation Report:	Final Evaluation of the Council of Europe Partnership with Morocco 2018-2021 - Final Report		
Date of Evaluation Report:	June 2021	Dates of the Management Response:	JANUARY 2022
Overall management response to the evaluation:			
<p>The Office of the Directorate General of Programmes (ODGP) of the Council of Europe considers that the evaluation report provides a sound assessment of the implementation of the Neighbourhood Partnership with Morocco 2018-2021 (NP) and agrees with the overall conclusions and with most of the recommendations.</p>			

The report is in overall very positive. The lessons learned identified correspond to our experience in implementing the Neighbourhood Partnership and to a large extent to our self-assessment.

The recommendations of the evaluation have been taken into account already during the process of preparation of the new Neighbourhood Partnership with Morocco 2022-2025 and will feed into its implementation too. They will continue to be considered in the process of development and validation of project proposals, reports and during the monitoring process.

Evaluation recommendation on project design and corresponding resource allocations

- A further finetuning of **project design and corresponding resource allocations** under the NP is recommended. The experience of the NP 2018-2021 suggests possible criteria to consider when designing specific projects, for example, only engaging in cooperation in areas where relevant institutions / normative frameworks are fully operational to allow for cooperation to take place; selecting the most 'sensitive' thematic areas, considering that the CoE has clearly demonstrated its 'competitive edge' to bring about change in these areas; focusing on areas where the country's 'accession' to existing CoE Conventions or cooperation structures is a clear prospect; and building on existing specific CoE thematic expertise in the CoE Office in Rabat. (*para 50*)

Recommendations to

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

- Project and co-ordination management/programming
- Project designers

3

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

Management response

In the framework of the Neighbourhood Partnership 2018-2022, the Organisation's actions have been developed and implemented in areas where the Council of Europe has strong expertise and added value. The strategic, flexible and dynamic nature of this programming instrument have allowed to ensure needs-based co-operation, based on Council of Europe standards and tools, notably relevant Council of Europe conventions and monitoring mechanisms such as Group of States against Corruption (GRECO)

This has also allowed the Council of Europe to focus its action on areas where national counterparts perceived a need that can be addressed, including

sensitive ones, such as fighting against violence against women, trafficking in human beings or economic crime.

This dynamic was reinforced by the availability of unearmarked funding, which is an important factor in making the Neighbourhood partnership flexible to allocate funds where they are most needed over the implementation period. Both the significant level of funding reached and the flexibility of the Neighbourhood partnership to adapt, with regard to content and methods, helped to mitigate the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of expenditure of the projects was monitored on a regular basis, which allowed most optimal use of available funds, facilitated adjustment of the workplans and budgets.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<p>The Neighbourhood Partnership 2022-2025 setting out the new strategic co-operation priorities over the next four years was elaborated in consultation with Moroccan authorities, while taking into account results and lesson learnt from the implementation of the Neighbourhood Partnership 2018-2021.</p> <p>They will continue to be considered in the process of development, validation, allocation of funds and implementation of new projects for the period 2022-2025</p>	<p>Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Neighbourhood partnership with Morocco 2022-2025</p>	<p>Council of Europe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP/MENA Programming - Project teams in MAEs

Evaluation recommendations on coherence:

- There appears to be room for further strengthening the role of the partner institutions in terms of assuming a more leading role on coordination. Capacity development on coordination could focus on existing inter-ministerial / thematic working groups or the new autonomous bodies, including the various National Commissions established under the Constitution in 2011 (*para 54*)

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme management and co-ordination - Project implementation 	<p>2</p>

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

Management response

Coordination aiming at maximising the impact with optimal use of resources including by avoiding unnecessary duplication of efforts is a shared concern of international partners, beneficiaries and stakeholders. Council of Europe, at programme management and co-ordination level as well as at the project implementation level assures that beneficiary institutions understand and accept their role in this regard. Capacity building and overall strengthening of the partner institutions in performing their statutory roles and mandate should increasingly lead to better understanding and assuming of the coordination role. This is a process that is influenced by the shifts in the political and operational environment and as such represents a risk that needs to be mitigated.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council of Europe strives to ensure that project creates a leverage for comprehensive, inclusive, successful and sustainable reforms by engaging other stakeholder such parliaments, civil society, independent governance institutions and local and regional authorities, where relevant - Regular consultations with the equivalent actors on achieving maximum synergies and avoid duplication while striving to achieve the goals set by the Neighbourhood Partnership and individual projects - Raising awareness of the partners of the importance to achieve institutional long-term sustainability also by taking a leading role in the co-ordination of efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Neighbourhood partnership with Morocco 2022-2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP HQ/MENA Programming - Project teams in MAEs

Evaluation recommendations on effectiveness:

- The CoE Office in Rabat was an important factor explaining **effectiveness**. Whilst there has been progress with decentralisation since earlier NPs, there are still limitations to ‘independent’ decision making by the CoE Office in Rabat, e.g., with regard to financial issues. Moreover, 47% of survey respondents saw CoE administrative procedures as a constraint. Further decentralisation is likely to imply efficiency benefits (*para. 51*)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There appears to be room for further strengthening the role of the partner institutions in terms of assuming a more leading role on coordination. Capacity development on coordination could focus on existing inter-ministerial / thematic working groups or the new autonomous bodies, including the various National Commissions established under the Constitution in 2011 (<i>para 54</i>) 		
Recommendations to:		Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme management and co-ordination - Project implementation - Financial management 		1
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Not accepted		
Management response		
<p>In accordance with the Organisation’s decentralised implementation of technical assistance and co-operation, the Council of Europe Office in Rabat ensures project implementation in the field. As long as the office is not a fully-fledged one, no financial decentralisation will be foreseen.</p> <p>The overall co-ordination of technical co-operation carried out by the Council of Europe in the Southern Neighbourhood falls within the remit of the Office of the Directorate General of Programmes (ODGP), which steers programming of and fund-raising for co-operation actions whilst ensuring the proper functioning of Council of Europe Offices in the field. In addition, as of July 2021, a CoE coordinator of co-operation in the Southern neighbourhood has been deployed in Tunis which resulted in a more efficient and effective coordination of the field activities and enhanced interaction with the authorities, partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>Content-related responsibility of co-operation projects remains with the Council of Europe “major administrative entities” who have the relevant expertise.</p>		
Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
-	- Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Neighbourhood	- ODGP HQ

	partnership with Morocco 2022-2025	
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Evaluation recommendations on human rights-based approach and gender equality

- Interviews with partners suggested room for further strengthening the understanding of partners of **the concept of the human rights-based approach**. Partners often conflated the concept with contributions to strengthening specific human rights as an outcome of project implementation. A better understanding of the concept can be expected to generate stronger commitment to important horizontal considerations such as the involvement of CSOs, gender equality and mainstreaming etc. (para 52)
- Similarly, interviews suggested potential for further exploring the benefits of **involving CSOs** with the partners. Indeed, whilst most partners welcomed the involvement of CSOs, some partners did not answer questions on the involvement of CSOs in projects, including for projects where CSOs were involved as partners or direct beneficiaries or where there were plans to involve CSOs in the future. Involving CSOs in CoE projects is all the more important as CoE projects are often the only forum for relevant stakeholders, including CSOs, to meet and exchange between each other. (Para 53)
- Partner feedback suggested room for further enhancing awareness of the need to ensure contributions to **gender equality** in all project activities and gender mainstreaming. Project design might also benefit from making systematic use of CoE-internal gender expertise (e.g., Gender Equality Division) at the stage of project design. (para 56)

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

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

Management response

The Council of Europe applies a human rights approach at all levels and stages of its activities. Its acquis, including Council of Europe legal instruments and institutions, combined with the principles of participation and inclusion (including gender balanced participation and engagement with civil society), equality and non discrimination, accountability, and transparency and access to information, brings further added value to the Council of Europe activities. The Council of Europe's Human Rights Approach Practical Guide for Co-operation Projects is expected to contribute to improved application of a human rights approach in project management and co-operation activities.

As a component of this human rights approach, the Council of Europe emphasises gender mainstreaming throughout its project activities in line with its Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023. Moroccan representatives have participated in the work of the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) and in regional events organised by the Council of Europe, in particular on women's participation in public life. The Council of Europe's Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit for Co-operation Projects should help to strengthen the implementation of gender mainstreaming in co-operation activities within the Organisation and also by national partners and other stakeholders. This approach to gender mainstreaming will be set out in detail when the Neighbourhood Partnership activities are developed. At this stage, the approach will be applied to activities irrespective of the area of co-operation. For example, standards relating to gender equality and women's rights will be taken into account when various national laws and regulations are revised in the light of European standards. The issue of gender equality will also be included in training activities and programmes and the gender impact will be analysed when designing and implementing projects. In this regard, Rabat Office staff members in 2021 have received a training on gender mainstreaming in the cooperation activities. In addition to gender mainstreaming, specific measures will be envisaged to promote gender equality.

Similarly, the Council of Europe promotes the active participation of civil society in project activities in accordance with the Guidelines on civil society organisations' participation in Council of Europe's co-operation activities.

At the programme management and co-ordination level Council of Europe ensures that benefits of human rights approach in the project design and implementation are yielded both for right-holders and duty-bearers. While efforts are made this approach to be understood and assimilated by the partners in all stages of the project cycle additional awareness raising activities should lead to stronger commitment of the stakeholders.

In this regard activities at the project implementation level have paramount importance in better explaining the human rights-based approach leading ultimately in its acceptance by the stakeholders as an outcome of the project.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP, in co-ordination with Major Administrative Entities (MAEs), will strive to ensure that the concepts of the human-rights approach and gender mainstreaming are further streamlined in programming so that projects fully take into account these elements throughout implementation. - Efforts will be pursued continued so that Council of Europe projects staff are better equipped to report on taking into consideration transversal issues and results-based management. - Awareness raising within and outside project activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Neighbourhood partnership with Morocco 2022-2025 	<p>Council of Europe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP HQ - Project teams in MAEs
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Evaluation recommendations on sustainability:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was limited evidence of sustainability being supported by partners allocating resources to sustain and / or develop existing outputs and outcomes or having explicit 'exit strategies' in place. Whilst the CoE cannot address partner-internal resource constraints, partner awareness of the concept of sustainability can be strengthened by systematically including project activities focusing on 'exit strategies' to cooperation. <i>(para 57)</i> 		
Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme management and co-ordination - Project management 	2	
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject):		
Management response		
<p>The importance of ensuring the sustainability and consolidation of the projects' results, as well as the establishment of "exit strategies" that will allow partners to be</p>		

fully operational and independent in the long term is frequently underlined to partners. This requires political will and change of attitudes over longer period of time.		
Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<p>Raising the question, at the political level, of the need to provide the necessary legal framework and adequate resources to allow institutions to fully exercise their mandate in independent and impartial manner in accordance with the law and international commitments.</p> <p>Projects' teams work with partners in identifying the most adequate needs to optimally exercise their functions</p>	- Continuous action	<p>Council of Europe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP HQ - Project teams in MAEs

Evaluation recommendations on visibility:	
<p>- Effectiveness benefited from systematic attention to communication and visibility, including project webpages, a presence on Facebook and other targeted communication activities such as video spots. However, there might be room for a more systematic use of popular social media beyond Facebook, particularly for projects targeting the citizens of Morocco in a more direct way, e.g., Violence against Women / Children, Combating Discrimination. Projects with a less direct 'relationship' with citizens, e.g., Functioning and Efficiency of Justice or Rule of Law/ Democracy could explore the use of social media targeting specific professional groups such as legal professionals. (<i>para 55</i>)</p>	
Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme management and co-ordination - Project implementation/management 	3
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject) : Partially accept	
Management response	

At both programme management and co-ordination and project Implementation level efforts are made for effective communication of projects' outcomes, one that ensures better awareness and understanding of the issues at stake and the values, commitments and principles underpinning the Organisation. In this regard, communication teams are being established both at HQ and field level, close coordination between them and the projects' teams is established, and the achievement of coherent communication goals is facilitated with appropriate communication expertise and tools, including by use of the popular social media. Recently, the communication activity on Facebook and Morocco Office website is complemented by similar use of Twitter channels.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent and coherent communication policy that fully recognize the operational environment is in place and put in action by adequate communication activities across social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. - Timely communication on the projects' activities and general activities of the Council of Europe via the website of the ODGP and Morocco Office. - Morocco Office Newsletter is distributed on regular basis to partners, stakeholders and international development actors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous action 	Council of Europe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP HQ - Project teams in MAEs

Evaluation recommendation on the evaluation process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The evaluation experienced a series of minor constraints. The collection of contact details of partner representatives proved more time consuming than expected and so did the organisation and conduct of interviews. Future evaluations might benefit from ensuring that all relevant project documentation and interviewee contact details are readily available from the start of the evaluation and from organising additional inception meetings, e.g., a joint introductory meeting with all CoE project teams (para 58). 	
Recommendation to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme management and co-ordination - Project implementation/management 	1
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Partially accepted	
Management response	

<p>While the most appropriate attention and priority is assigned to all the aspects of the evaluation preparatory phase, involvement of the authorities in certain aspects of preparation such as the final list of contacts might give raise to some delays. With an aim to increase the efficiency in the future, this risk has to be better mitigated. In addition, the evaluation process will benefit from proposed inception meetings.</p>		
Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timely submission of all the necessary documentation - Risk mitigation in case of involvement of stakeholders in the preparatory phase - Inception and debriefing session with the CoE project teams in the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous action 	<p>Council of Europe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP HQ - Project teams in MAEs