

External Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024

Management Response

Name of Evaluation Report:	External Evaluation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic Moldova 2021-2024 – Final Report		
Date of Evaluation Report:	31 May 2024	Dates of the Management Response:	25 July 2024

Overall management response to the evaluation:

The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination (DPC) of the Council of Europe considers the evaluation report to be an overall fair and useful assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan in the period covered by the evaluation and agrees with most conclusions and recommendations.

The findings and recommendations of the evaluation have been widely taken into account in the drafting of the new Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2025-2028, as well as in the process of developing and validating new project proposals, implementation and reporting.

Dissemination plan for the evaluation:

The final evaluation report has been circulated by e-mail to the members of the Reference Group, representing all relevant MAEs. The report will also be sent to all Member and Observer States that contributed to the Action Plan. The report and the Management Response will be published on the dedicated intranet webpage of the Directorate of Internal Oversight.

Management Decision ¹	Entity in Charge	Planned Actions ² (determined by Entity)	Justification ³ for Non-Acceptance	Target Date for Action	Person Responsible for Action
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. Response: Council of Europe technical assistance programmes - including capacity-building activities - are integral part of the unique strategic triangle of standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation. They are developed based on the findings and recommendations of the independent mechanisms monitoring the implementation of the obligations beneficiary States have accepted under Council of Europe conventions. The Organisation's actions are developed and implemented in areas where the Council of Europe has strong expertise and added value. This includes raising the awareness of population and encouraging their involvement ensuring the sustainability of project outcomes, as well as increasing the capacities of the staff of beneficiary institutions to implement the relevant national legal framework aligned with international standards. In order to increase the effectiveness of capacity-building activities and to integrate them into a broader strategy for the overall organisational development of institutions, the Council of Europe consistently co-ordinates with national partners and stakeholders, who are central to successful capacity development and who play an active role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the results achieved. Within the framework of its Action Plans, the Council of Europe provides systemic support to institutions in order to strengthen their institutional capacity. More specifically, the Council of Europe's interventions focus on strengthening the operational effectiveness of the partner institutions, enhancing their organisational knowledge and skills in implementing administrative and institutional reforms, ensuring transfer of knowledge and sharing best practices. The majority of Council of Europe projects include among their objectives the assessments of duty bearers' capacity to promote and protect the ability of rights holders to enforce their rights, the establishment of capacity-related baselines for monitoring and evaluation and for informing the theory of change, the analysis of key competences, and the transfer of new knowledge and skills to beneficiaries. In the duration of a project, beneficiaries not only gain an immediate understanding of new tools and knowledge, as a direct result of a number of trainings, but are also given the skills to use this newly acquired knowledge immediately in their working environments. Once the project activities and results are achieved and finalised, the beneficiaries, in turn, continue the capacity development activities outside of the project framework through the integrated training programmes as part of the national curricula, the institutionalised pool of trainers, the established web platforms etc. The national authorities make capacity building part of their governance structure at all levels and daily practice, thus ensuring the sustainability of the project outcomes. Moreover, the sustainability of capacity building already happens in activities such as train the trainer, since this transfer of skills would already enable the beneficiary to become an expert and acquire the necessary knowledge to transmit these skills further into their department or line of work. To further improve in respect of this recommendation, the Council of Europe will strive to implement, where relevant, a follow-up feedback system for each project where the beneficiaries can assess the					

¹ The management decision is in relation to the Recommendation (Accepted, Partially accepted, Rejected).

² For implementing accepted recommendations.

³ For recommendations that are partially accepted or rejected.

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usefulness of the skills gained in the long-term. This will be done in the form of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, or round tables organized at several long-term intervals.					
☒ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPC MAEs			Continuously	
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. Response: This recommendation will be taken into account in the design and implementation of the new Action Plan for 2025-2028 through the introduction of practical mechanisms and tools for monitoring the use of knowledge and skills acquired by beneficiaries, as described in the response to the previous recommendation. In addition, greater emphasis will be placed on the development of the logical framework of the new Action Plan and in the development and validation of project proposals under the new Action Plan. Relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators, as well as baselines and targets will be defined for all levels of results included in the logical frameworks. Furthermore, a number of thematic trainings on data collection and monitoring will be delivered by DPC to the project staff in the field office and in HQ in order to increase knowledge and strengthen the skills and competences.					
☒ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPC MAEs	PMM trainings, planning sessions, the Action Plan-level and project level steering committee meetings		Continuously	
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. Response:					

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Partners' capacity in terms of human resources is undoubtedly an important issue that has an overarching effect on the overall effectiveness of a project and its long-term impact. Adequate human resources ensure the ability of partner institutions to appropriately participate in the designing, planning and implementation of the project objectives. Thorough recruitment processes will help partner institutions to select the best possible candidates with relevant knowledge and experience. A comprehensive human resource strategy is also essential to ensure continuity and sustainability of results after the project is finalised. Experienced and trained staff will transfer knowledge and capacity building activities can continue beyond the project period. The Council of Europe already provides support in human resources and budgeting skills to CSOs, professional associations, training institutions, mostly in the form of grants. In addition, the Council of Europe provides training to grantees on budgeting, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the grant. All these contribute to strengthening the budgeting skills of CSOs and other grantees. The legal and policy framework in the Republic of Moldova provides a sufficient basis for a professional civil service and human resource management in the public administration, but attracting and retaining qualified staff remains a serious challenge. The remuneration system does not ensure internal and external fairness of salaries, despite the 2018 public administration reform in the country and recent legislative amendments. While the creation of a Directorate for Public Service Management in the State Chancellery in 2022 was an important step to improve central coordination of the civil service and human resources management, the lack of a functioning human resources management information system is an obstacle. Nevertheless, centralised training for civil servants is well regulated and implemented by the Directorate, and civil servants' perceptions of merit-based career opportunities in the public sector are positive. The Council of Europe cannot be directly involved in the recruitment process and cannot influence the human resources strategies of the partner institutions. However, the Council of Europe provides sufficient capacity building activities (trainings, experience sharing platforms, knowledge labs, IT tools etc) for national partners and beneficiaries, who can benefit from the acquired knowledge and best practices and integrate them into their human resources strategies.					
☒ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPC MAEs	Council of Europe will continue close co-operation with partners to ensure the implementation of the Action Plan goes smoothly, frequent staff changes and issues with human resource strategies can disrupt the priorities and objectives set out in the Action Plan.		Continuously	
Recommendation 4: The effectiveness of awareness-raising activities will also benefit from adequate scoping. Greater co-operation should be sought, as joint campaigns involving several Council of Europe projects and/or funders will increase effectiveness.					

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Response: When a project is initiated, the project team carefully defines the scope of each activity, assessing the needs and capacities, taking into account the objectives set out in the project proposal. Activities have a clear objective, with defined methods, objectives, modalities, and timelines for implementation. Awareness of activities among stakeholders and general public is high, as resources are foreseen to disseminate relevant information in an effective manner. The Council of Europe already takes into account the co-operation activities with other partners, including international partners, and identifies relevant links and potential synergies with other ongoing projects at the preparatory stage. Coherence and complementarity with a number of different projects is always taken into consideration, which increases the visibility of the Council of Europe across projects. Projects often work in tandem, where the objectives of projects complement each other through their activities and common approaches. In addition, the Council of Europe implements comprehensive communication strategies, making specific and significant results of projects visible to stakeholders and the public throughout the implementation of different parts of the Action Plans. The Council of Europe regularly co-operates with donors and international partners, notably the EU, where the added value of such joint projects is significant and has a major long-term impact in the country. Effectiveness is enhanced by result-based monitoring, that ensures sustainability by measuring progress in achieved results.					
☒ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPC MAEs	PMM trainings for project teams, stakeholders mappings, country team meetings, the AP level and project level steering committee meetings		Continuously	
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).					
Response: The Council of Europe applies a human rights approach at all levels and stages of its activities, integrating human rights principles into its policies and programmes, and empowering rights holders to exercise their rights and strengthening duty bearers to fulfil their human rights obligations and duties in all thematic areas of intervention. Its <i>acquis</i>, including Council of Europe legal instruments and institutions, combined with the principles of participation and inclusion; equality and non-discrimination; accountability; and transparency and access to information, brings further added value to the Council of Europe activities. Together with its governmental and non-governmental partners, the Council of Europe integrates human rights principles into the design, preparation, implementation and monitoring of its programmes and projects. The Council of Europe Human Rights Approach – Practical Guide for Co-operation Projects aims to enhance the understanding of the realisation of human rights as the ultimate objective of the Council of Europe’s co-operation activities and to apply the core principles to all interventions of the Council of Europe as part of project cycle management and strategic orientation.					

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Through the steering committee meetings of individual projects and of the Action Plan, the Council of Europe ensures the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, notably representatives of vulnerable groups (minority groups, women's rights CSOs, Roma, LGBTI etc.) in the assessment of the progress of our projects, seeking their input for changes that are required and for future actions. Greater emphasis will be placed on further developing the visibility and quality of the application of the human rights-based approach, building on good experiences and practices, targeting the most vulnerable groups, ensuring that human rights gaps, progress and impact are measured against human rights standards, identifying duty bearers and rights holders, and that relevant targets and indicators are well defined. Regular engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in project activities remains vital to strengthen the human rights protection of vulnerable groups, as CSOs continue to play a key role in prevention, provision of basic services and protection. The Council of Europe, through its co-operation projects, will continue facilitating co-operation and co-ordination between authorities in the Republic of Moldova and international and local CSOs to strengthen the response in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable.					
☒ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPC	PMM trainings Guidance provided by country advisors to field offices/project teams	N/A	Continuously	
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. Response: Gender equality is one of the priorities of the Council of Europe and gender mainstreaming in all policies and actions is one of the six strategic objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029. The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination recognises the importance of gender mainstreaming in co-operation projects. Since 2018, significant resources have been invested for this purpose, both for the development of policy documents, tools and guidelines, and for the training of project teams. The Council of Europe Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit for Co-operation Projects provides practical guidance on how to implement a gender dimension in co-operation activities within the Organisation as well as by national partners and other stakeholders. It aims to assist the Council of Europe in identifying the priorities, key objectives and actions of the Action Plan, and to support the national authorities of the in mainstreaming gender into reforms in order to maximise efforts to achieve both gender equality and poverty reduction. The implementation of the toolkit will be accompanied by gender mainstreaming training provided by the Organisation to all staff working on co-operation activities, notably to the local staff in field offices, as well as to national partners and stakeholders. The staff of the Council of Europe Office in Chişinău is continuously improving their skills in mainstreaming gender. Gender-balanced participation will be ensured subject to limitations in terms of sectoral knowledge and experience. For example, gender equality and women's rights standards					

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will be taken into account when revising the various national laws and frameworks in the light of European standards. Gender equality will also be included in training activities and programmes. Gender impacts will be analysed in the design, implementation, reporting and evaluation of projects. In addition to gender mainstreaming, specific actions to promote gender equality will be considered. Prior to and during the implementation of the Action Plans, project teams rely on the expertise of a gender mainstreaming advisor (GMA) covering the Eastern Europe and South Caucasus region. The GMA will ensure that gender is mainstreamed in the projects and the Action Plan level by promoting usage of tools such as gender analysis and gender impact assessments, and subsequently advise on implementing relevant recommendations to further integrate the gender dimension. The advisor will contribute to developing tools and mechanisms aimed at this purpose and to building the capacities of Council of Europe project staff in the region to facilitate a gender-sensitive approach in the projects of the Action Plan. Following the recent departure of GMA, the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination is in active consultation and communication with the international partners to secure a secondment to fill in this position as soon as possible and will continue to explore more stable funding options for this position.					
☒ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPC MAEs	Gender mainstreaming trainings and information sessions GMA guidance provided to the project teams	N/A	Continuously	
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. Response: The feasibility and concept of introducing clear gender equality markers in the Council of Europe's co-operation activities, the definition of common approaches and standards for the design, implementation of projects (with a focus on quality assurance) and the reporting of data on gender equality markers require further discussion. The recent experiences of the OECD-DAC and the UN system on this issue will be studied and taken into account in these discussions. The Regional Advisor on Gender Mainstreaming and the Council of Europe's Network of Focal Points on Gender Equality, launched in 2021, will play a key role in such discussions. Taking into account the good practice introduced by the UN system, the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination will strive to use gender markers in project budgets. Gender markers should be streamlined from the planning stage of a project, and adequately implemented into the budget and the expenditures. Regular reporting structures will provide a clear picture on how these gender markers are implemented and how meaningfully they are reflected in the reporting and auditing phases.					

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☐ Accepted ☒ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPC, Gender Equality Division and other relevant MAEs, Gender Mainstreaming Adviser	Consultations and thematic discussions on potential development/introduction of a system of gender equality markers to be organised with participation of key stakeholders		By end of 2025	
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. Response: Results-based management and results monitoring are promoted by the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination, which performs this function in cooperation with its field offices, in particular their core teams, and the staff at headquarters. In order to manage this large volume of cooperation activities in a coherent manner, the Council of Europe has developed its Project Management Methodology (PMM), which strengthens the ownership of national stakeholders and enables the sustainability of results. Staff involved in the programming, monitoring and implementation of projects and action plans are regularly trained by the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination in the various aspects of the PMM methodology, including results-based reporting. The PMM methodology is expressed and promoted through a manual with templates, regular training, an IT tool and a guidance website.					

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It outlines five main phases, from initiation to final evaluation, and seven key management processes that are applied throughout the phases. Key elements include human rights and results-based approaches, field presence, communication and visibility, and an emphasis on evaluation. The PMM systematises best practices that embody the Council of Europe and its strategy and values. The Council of Europe applies a Theory of Change: Towards human rights, democracy and the rule of law for all. It is set out in the Organisation's Programme and Budget, see document CM(2023)130 (Draft Programme and Budget 2024-27): The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination will continue to support project teams in planning, monitoring and reporting through the PMM and results-based reporting training activities. Particular attention will be given to identifying valid indicators and further developing an effective monitoring system.					
☒ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPC, MAEs	In co-operation with the Directorate of Human Resources, the Directorate of Programme Coordination will aim to ensure that all staff working in cooperation, especially in field offices, are trained in RBR. A training plan for 2024 foresees a number of dedicated trainings. This work will continue in 2025.		Continuously	
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. Response: The Directorate for Programme Co-ordination (DPC), in accordance with internal procedures, carefully analyses all project proposals and their budgets at the planning stages of the Action Plan and individual project(s), paying particular attention to human resource costs and the ratio of human resource costs to other operational costs					

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(i.e. activities, procurement etc). Prior to validation of a project budget, the DPC, in close co-ordination with the MAEs, will ensure that staff costs are planned and budgeted at the most cost-effective level to achieve the objectives of the individual project(s) and the Action Plan as a whole. The Council of Europe places a strong emphasis on training and development for our staff members, at all levels. Successful implementation of the People Strategy 2024-2027 will be key to the ongoing administrative reform of the Organisation. Building on the achievements of the People Strategy 2021-2023, the new strategy will focus on mobility, flexibility and professional development of human resources. In the context of the reform of the Staff Regulations and its secondary legislation, the DHR has launched a review of the conditions of employment of field staff. As part of the ongoing reflection on the Council of Europe's human resources policy, a joint working group has been set up to review Rule No. 1234 laying down the conditions of recruitment and employment of locally recruited staff working in Council of Europe duty stations outside France. This revision is being carried out by the DHR in consultation with the DPC, the staff of the field offices and directorates concerned and the Organisation's Staff Committee. The conclusions and recommendations of the review will be used as a basis for the working conditions of field staff.					
☒ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DHR DPC MAEs	Updated Rule No. 1234 and follow up actions by respective MAEs		By end of 2024	