COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Document prepared by the Directorate of Programme Co-ordination

Final Evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe Partnership for Good Governance Programme Phase II (PGG II)

Management Response

Name of Evaluation Report:	Final Evaluation of the European Union/Council of Europe Partnership for Good Governance Programme Phase II (PGG II)		
Date of Evaluation Report:	15 February 2023	Dates of the Management Response:	April 2023

Overall management response to the evaluation:

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 PGG II Programme (2019-2023) thus far and agrees with most conclusions and recommendations.

Whenever relevant, the recommendations of the Evaluation were taken into account in the design of the new PGG Phase III (2023-2027) as well as in the process of development and validation of new project proposals. The recommendations will also be taken into consideration in the process of implementation of the PGG programme.

Recommendation 1:

- Council of Europe and the European Union should continue their support for the countries covered by the PGG Programme.

"Further interventions should retain the basic approach that has been adopted under PGG II, i.e. the multi-stakeholder approach to ensure that projects target beneficiary needs in implementing the recommendations of the Council of Europe bodies and maintain the co-ownership model to project design and implementation. Continuity and complementarity between the PGG II and future phases in the themes addressed and partners engaged would be beneficial."

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
 Directorate of Programme Co-ordination Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators Council of Europe Offices in the Eastern Partnership countries Council of Europe Liaison Office to the EU in Brussels 	3
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept Management response	

The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination acknowledges the need to continue the multi-stakeholder approach to ensure that projects target beneficiary needs in implementing the recommendations of the Council of Europe bodies and maintain the co-ownership model to project design and implementation.

The multi-stakeholder approach will continue under the PGG III to ensure an inclusive participation of all PGG stakeholders, including civil society and rightsholders, as promoters of change and in their capacity as 'watchdog' of the reform process. Inclusiveness will also strengthen inter-agency co-operation, thus also contributing to further reinforcing ownership by the national partners involved in the PGG implementation.

Efforts to enhance interactions with the EU and EUD as the main strategic partners of the PGG Programme will therefore continue under the PGG III.

The third phase of the Programme will ensure that projects continue to take into consideration the beneficiaries' needs in implementing the relevant recommendations of Council of Europe monitoring and advisory bodies as well as Council of Europe Action Plans and the EU's regular reports on the countries in the region.

Continuity and complementarity between the PGG II and PGG III will be ensured with regard to the priority areas to be addressed as well as

between the country specific and regional actions. The Council of Europe will continue making use of its unique working method by establishing a link between technical assistance and legally binding standards and monitoring recommendations. Thus, the PGG III is strategically positioned to support Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia in their efforts towards accession to the EU. The PGG III will also continue supporting Armenia and Azerbaijan in implementing Council of Europe standards.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- Efficient interaction with the EU, as well as Programme stakeholders, including civil society and rightsholders to guarantee an inclusive participation, reinforce ownership by national partners and ensure sustainability of the results achieved.		 Directorate of Programme Co-ordination Operational MAEs /
 Active involvement in PGG activities of all main stakeholders to ensure a strong ownership of the national partners, as well as enhanced inclusive approach for cooperation at Programme and project level. 		 Project Coordinators Council of Europe Offices in the Eastern Partnership
 Regular consultations and co-ordination meetings with the EU (EUD) and among project teams working in areas covered by PGG III. 	- Continuous	countries
- Ensure strong links are established between PGG priorities and EU accession reform agendas, where relevant	- Continuous	
- Finetuning of PGG priorities with new monitoring bodies' recommendations	- Continuous	

Recommendations 2:

- Further strengthen the Council of Europe's gender mainstreaming approach and the cross-cutting dimensions of the PGG Programme.

"The gender dimension could be further embedded across PGG projects, for example by including key indicators and targets for individual projects, and by streamlining gender analysis at the start of every project. Expert advice from Council of Europe gender advisers could achieve this given the highly technical nature of the PGG projects. In addition, anti-discrimination efforts could be further embedded across projects, thereby recognising the sensitivity of the topic in some EaP countries while encouraging progress in this area."

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				

The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination acknowledges the need to further reinforce the gender dimension across PGG projects. It will also deploy additional efforts to address the issues of discrimination, while encouraging progress in this area in the EaP countries.

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 Co-ordination acknowledges the importance of gender mainstreaming in co-operation 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 PGG includes 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 projects 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".

Under the PGGII, gender analyses were already conducted in the justice area in Armenia, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.

As regards the PGG III, the gender approach in activities will continue to be strengthened, as a transversal issue and an integral part of the PGG actions.

Until November 2022, a gender adviser was seconded by Finland to provide support to projects implemented in the EaP region in gender-

related matters. The gender adviser ensured that gender is mainstreamed in the projects by promoting usage of tools such as gender analysis and gender-impact assessments, and subsequently advised on implementing relevant recommendations to further integrate the gender dimension. The adviser contributed 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 projects. 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 co-operation projects and will further rely on the expertise of a new gender adviser¹, as of September 2023, to concretely support project teams.

In addition, the activities will be conducted with a human rights-based approach based on the principles of inclusion of diversity, equal access and participation of all in society, irrespective of their specific characteristics (e.g. sex/gender, age, ethnicity, disabilities, religious or political belief etc.), ensuring that all these aspects are appropriately taken into consideration both in the planning and in the implementation phases across all components.

As regards the anti-discrimination aspect, the PGG actions will be implemented encompassing all human rights, which is particularly relevant for people in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations. The five working principles below are applied at all stages of implementation: legality, universality and indivisibility of human rights; participation and access to decision-making processes; non-discrimination and equal access; accountability and access to the rule of law; transparency and access to information. The meaningful participation and inclusion of all stakeholders (with a focus on vulnerable persons) as well as equality and non-discrimination with regards to age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, disability, will be ensured.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
 Further implementation of the gender mainstreaming toolkit and guidelines across the PGG III projects, and provision of support to project teams for the implementation of gender-based approach under the PGG projects, using gender sensitive indicators for the monitoring and reporting on the project implementation. Continuation of the gender mainstreaming training programme² for the project staff. 		 Directorate of Programme Co-ordination Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators Gender Advisors
- Progressive implementation of gender analyses for all PGG projects.	- Continuous	
- Further implementation of the Council of Europe Human Rights Approach	- Continuous	

¹ The gender adviser will be seconded to Council of Europe Office in the Republic of Moldova by Finland, with a regional mandate.

² Paid under the Council of Europe ordinary budget.

Recommendation 3:

- Civil society organisations should be included to a greater extent in PGG project implementation activities both as promoters of change as well as in their capacity as 'watchdogs' of the reform process.

"Civil society organisations play an important role in monitoring the effectiveness and transparency of democratic processes and safeguarding the rule of law. They could benefit from PGG projects by, for example, attending workshops and other events or participating in the consultative process to provide their views on shortcomings and potential solutions to the revision and implementation of specific pieces of legislation. In addition, creating channels for civil society organisations to regularly engage with national authorities in the context of the PGG III for example in relation to initiatives and projects they are carrying out in the PGG thematic areas would help to ensure effective programme coordination and contribute to building more inclusive societies."

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
 Directorate of Programme Co-ordination Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators Council of Europe Offices in the Eastern Partnership countries 	2
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept	

Management response

The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination acknowledges the need to reinforce co-operation with the civil society.

The Civil society involvement in the PGG activities and decision-making process is relevant for increasing the inclusiveness, efficiency and transparency of the domestic reforms, reinforcing the ownership of the Programme by the national partners and for increasing the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) as promoters of change under the PGG Programme as well as in their capacity as 'watchdog' of the reform process.

As a leading human rights organisation, the Council of Europe applies a human rights approach (HRA) in its work, including in the PGG. Its overall objective is to further advance human rights for all and achieve better and more sustainable results in projects. The four main principles of the human rights approach, namely participation and inclusion; equality and non-discrimination; accountability; and transparency and access to information, are also taken into consideration throughout the implementation of the PGG. The Council of Europe Human Rights Approach Practical Guide for Co-operation Projects is expected to further contribute to the improved application of a human rights approach in project management and co-operation activities.

The PGG 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. Actions aimed at ensuring a civil society-inclusive approach in the implementation of PGG include, inter alia, the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) project Steering Committee meetings, the participation of CSOs in project activities and their inclusion as the main target group in some projects where relevant.

In May 2022, the Council of Europe published an online resource for civil society that gives easy access to its handbook "Working with the Council of Europe: a practical guide for civil society". The handbook provides in-depth information on the different forms of access, co-operation, input, participation and/or partnerships that are possible and relevant for NGOs.

The civil society is also a strong vector for communication with the citizens and its involvement in the visibility and communication activities is crucial for effective and targeted communication actions.

Within the framework of the implementation of the PGG III, the Council of Europe offices will continue promoting Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)'s participation, in line with the Council of Europe Human Rights Approach. This will notably allow the PGG to include additional perspectives/dimensions in project planning and implementation.

 Technical project Committee meetings at project level including the participation of CSOs, where appropriate. PGG Local Steering Committee meetings at country level including the participation of CSOs, where relevant. Further mainstreaming of the Council of Europe Human Rights Approach (HRA) along all stages of PGGIII (planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting), in order to advance human rights for all and achieve better and more sustainable results in projects, 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 awareness raising initiatives, in arranging visibility activities and awareness raising initiatives, in arranging visibility activities tanks to the CSOs increasing role and regular participation in. the PGG activities tanks to the CSOs increasing role and regular participation in. the PGG projects. Providing small grants to CSOs in Technical project Committee meetings at Involve the participation of CSOs in Technical project Committee meetings at
project level and at PGG Local Steering Committee meetings at country level where appropriate.

Recommendation 4

- Continue strengthening the results-oriented approach to reporting outcomes across projects and programme level in a systematic way.

"Reporting should focus more on outcomes achieved in relation to targets. Target setting should be improved. Incorporating quantifiable targets across projects, in consultation with national stakeholders would allow to measure progress more easily. In addition, improved self-reporting

tools and follow-ups with beneficiaries, for example in the form of surveys, would increase the understanding of achievements and provide a better picture of factors contributing to successful outcomes."

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination	2
- Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators	
- Council of Europe Offices in the Eastern Partnership countries	
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept	
Management response	

The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination acknowledges the need to strengthen the results-oriented approach to reporting across the programme and projects. The PGG has established a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system for the action. Monitoring progress of implementation will be further ensured on a continuous basis by projects' implementing teams, in particular through the use of the Council of Europe PMM IT tool. Council of Europe Deputy Heads of Offices will monitor the implementation and reporting of the PGG at the country level. Overall, the PGG co-ordination team will monitor implementation at the programme level.

The PGG III regular progress reports (results-oriented reporting) will be prepared against measurable indicators, using the baseline and targets as defined in the logframe matrix. Every report will provide an analysis of the progress made and changes introduced, as well as difficulties encountered. These reports will be sent to both DG NEAR headquarters and to EU delegations in EaP countries.

It is to be noted that 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 recruited³ in the Council of Europe Office in Tbilisi to provide support to cooperation projects in terms of project management methodology. The Officer's duties extend to the Council of Europe 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 Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova Offices through meetings and capacity building activities.

	Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
-	Organisation of regular training sessions on results-oriented reporting for project teams.	- Continuous	- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
-	The Council of Europe has embarked in a pilot project on Enhanced Results- Based Management in the CoE co-operation projects (EaP region) aimed at better delivering on reform by the cooperation sector in the Eastern Partnership region through increased quality of project design, monitoring and reporting in the EaP projects through the CoE's Theory of Change and RBM methods; improved capacity for results monitoring and data collection in the EaP region; advancement of the methodology in the area of Results-Based Management.		 Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators Council of Europe Offices in the Eastern Partnership countries
-	Providing assistance to the project teams by the Council of Europe project officer focusing on strengthening the results-based approach across EaP countries.	- Continuous	

³ Paid outside the PGG.

region, and the project teams in Strasbourg should continue to work closely offices to enable PGG III to react flexibly and quickly to changing circumsta "Conducting a detailed risk assessment at the outset of the PGG projects would that might impact the implementation of the projects and enable mitigation m greater extent on the continuous assessment of the field offices for decision-r	help prepare the project teams for any potential developments easures to be built into interventions. In addition, relying to a making (in consultation with Strasbourg and Brussels) to adapt
the individual projects to developments at national level would further strength potential disruptions to the PGG."	en the ability to respond quickly and effectively, and minimise
the individual projects to developments at national level would further strength	en the ability to respond quickly and effectively, and minimise Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
the individual projects to developments at national level would further strength potential disruptions to the PGG."	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high

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The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination acknowledges the need to conduct a detailed risk assessment for all PGG projects at the start of the action.

A risk management was conducted at the start of the PGG III projects. The risk management component is a PGG III important management dimension, particularly as the EU and the Council of Europe currently operate in complex and unstable environments that expose the operations to significant risks. The risk analysis of PGG actions and possible mitigation strategies are developed on the basis of the Council of Europe Risk <u>Management Policy and risk management guidelines</u> adopted in June 2016. A risk system is established, and political and operational risks will be regularly assessed and reviewed during the PGG III implementation, linking possible mitigating measures to regular (annual) adjustments of the PGG III as needed. It is also foreseen that any particularly significant risks will be brought to the Local Steering Committee (LSC) (established at national level) and PGG Steering Committee (SC) (main decision-making body) meetings, as relevant.

Constant risk assessment will be conducted given the developments in the EaP region linked to the consequences of the Russian Federation's

aggression against Ukraine, the refugee crisis in the Republic of Moldova and the tensions in the region which can potentially affect the implementation of PGG activities. The situation in Belarus also needs to be closely monitored in view of possible support to be provided to the Belarusian civil society and democratic forces. Mitigation strategies and measures related to political and operational risks will be regularly communicated to the European Union (DG NEAR and EUDs in the EaP countries).

The risk management system outlines the mitigating actions to be undertaken to respond to external as well as Programme-internal risks. The Council of Europe has significant experience in dealing with political and operational challenges in this geographical area, and also has an adequate supply of expertise and staff availability. This, together with a reasonable degree of flexibility in the implementation of PGG, will help keep risks within acceptable levels.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
 A risk register at Programme is set up at the start of the PGGIII. The risks at the Programme level will be assessed by the PGG Co-ordination team and reported to the PGG stakeholders and to the Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) for endorsement of the mitigation measures. The risk assessment at the project level will be conducted by the project teams and reported to the PGG stakeholders including national stakeholders in the EaP countries, as well as to the project Technical Project Committee (TPC) meeting for endorsement of the mitigation measures. Risks and obstacles will be reported through the Quarterly Information Note and Six-month Report as the main PGG monitoring tools providing an update on the PGG implementation, for the effective implementation of the PGG activities. The identified risks will be assessed, recorded and appropriate measures applied to mitigate these risks. The risk assessment and mitigations measures will be recorded in the reports to keep traces of the measures applied in order to evaluate their efficiency; the risk registers at programme and project level will be updated as necessary. 	 March 2023 1st semester 2023 Yearly or six- monthly Quarterly/six- monthly 	 Directorate of Programme Co-ordination Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators Council of Europe Offices in the Eastern Partnership countries

Recommendation 6

- Greater engagement with Council of Europe bodies through the QRM should be encouraged in the PGG beneficiary countries.

"Making greater use of the QRM also in relation to reforms in the areas of expertise of Council of Europe beyond those of the Venice Commission would allow the EaP countries to maximise their access to ad hoc expert legal advice. By doing so, the added value of the PGG Programme would be further enhanced and project beneficiaries could get a better insight to the extent of their reform progress towards the European standards."

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
- Directorate of Programme Co-ordination	1
- Operational MAEs / Project Coordinators	
- Council of Europe Offices in the Eastern Partnership countries	
Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Accept	
Management response	

The Directorate of Programme Co-ordination acknowledges the need for greater engagement with Council of Europe bodies through the QRM in the PGG beneficiary countries.

Under the PGG Programme, the Quick Response Mechanism (QRM) proved to be an efficient instrument by which the Venice Commission and other Council of Europe bodies could provide assessments and recommendations to EaP countries to bring their constitutional and legislative frameworks closer to the European standards. Under the PGG II, 41 Opinions were delivered through the QRM.

One legal opinion in the field of media for Armenia was provided by experts beyond the Venice Commission interventions.

In addition to QRM, legal and policy advice is provided upon request by the Council of Europe in the framework of the respective PGG projects.

The QRM will be further available under the PGG III to provide needs-based legal advice to beneficiary countries to bring their legal framework in the PGG priority areas in line with European and international standards. Legal and policy advise will continue to be delivered upon request under the respective PGG projects.

The QRM expertise and legal support will aid the beneficiary countries to meet their commitments as Council of Europe member states, but will also offer important assistance in the context of the EU accession perspective. Expertise can be requested in areas linked to constitutional matters to be potentially dealt with by the Venice Commission and in areas covered by PGG III to be potentially dealt with by other Council of Europe bodies, while preserving the full independence and functioning specificities of the Council of Europe mechanisms in this exercise.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- The information on the Quick Response Mechanism (QRM) will be advertised among the PGG stakeholders including CSOs so as to raise awareness of national authorities on the interest of activating the QRM (in particular in the context of the EU accession agenda)	- Continuous	 Directorate of Programme Co-ordination/DG NEAR Venice Commission Other Council of Europe
 Numerous Venice Commission options delivered under QRM were already translated into local languages although it is not obligatory according to the QRM modalities. 	- Continuous	expert advisory bodies
- Efforts were also made to share the information on QRM (leaflet, factsheets) in the local languages, not only with the national authorities, but also with the participants of the PGG activities, including CSOs and the media, thus continuing to raise awareness of the QRM.	- Continuous	
- The Council of Europe Directorate of Communication systematically prepares and disseminates press releases on the decisions/outcomes of the Venice Commission Plenary sessions where the opinions delivered under QRM were considered.	- Continuous	
 More visibility will also be given to the important number of legal expertise delivered in the framework of the PGG projects to give a global picture of the amount of expertise delivered. 	- Continuous	