

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

Management Response

Name of Evaluation Report:	Final Evaluation of the Council of Europe Partnership with Tunisia 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 Tunisia 2018-2021 (NP) and agrees with the overall conclusions and with all 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 Tunisia 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, and / or areas that experience more important political volatility 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 thematic expertise in the CoE Office in Tunis.*(para 45)*

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 2018-2021, 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 such as the Istanbul Convention 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 funds available, 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 the Tunisian authorities considering the 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 Tunisia 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 structures such as those established by some of the Independent Instances.*(para 48)*

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		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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. 		
Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 Tunisia 2022-2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP HQ/ MENA Programming

Evaluation recommendations on effectiveness:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The CoE Office in Tunis was an important factor explaining effectiveness. Whilst there has been progress with decentralisation since earlier NPs, interviewees suggested that there were still issues with decision making by the CoE Office in Tunis. Further decentralisation is likely to imply efficiency benefits. 	
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 	3

Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject):

Management response

In accordance with the Organisation’s decentralised implementation of technical assistance and co-operation, the Council of Europe Office in Tunis ensures project implementation in the field. Permanent daily contact with the beneficiaries and the Tunisian authorities has been crucial in the implementation of the Neighbourhood Partnership and was in particular facilitated by the Organisation’s operational presence in Tunisia which has gradually been stepped up since the beginning of the partnership (from 5 staff members in 2018 to 23 as of 15 October 2021).

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.

Furthermore, with the aim to maximise the benefits of the decentralised project Implementation, project teams gave new emphasis on the importance of the project management methodology tools including by more regularly updating of projects’ work plans and risk registries and the use of the PMM IT tool ultimately leading to increased efficiencies in the project implementation.

Finally, the appointment of the new Deputy Head of Office having financial responsibilities in the decentralised management of the projects as well as the revisiting of objectives of the financial officers, to reflect clearly the financial management responsibilities, led to increased efficiency benefits.

Content-related responsibility of co-operation projects remains with the Council of Europe “major administrative entities” who have the relevant expertise.

Planned Actions	Target Date for Action	Entity Responsible for Action
- Taking steps to maximise the benefits of decentralized project management by full use of the Project Management Methodology, including the tools at the disposal. - Organising a refreshment PMM training for the projects’ staff including on results-based	- Throughout the duration of the implementation of	- ODGP HQ

reporting.	the Neighbourhood partnership with Tunisia 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 47)
- 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 50)

Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
Programme management and co-ordination Project implementation	2

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

Management response

- 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training of CoE project implementation staff on Human Rights based approach, including on gender equality and mainstreaming - Awareness raising within and outside project activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Throughout the duration of the implementation of the Neighbourhood partnership with Tunisia 2022-2025 	Council of Europe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP HQ - Project teams in MAE

Evaluation recommendations on sustainability:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not all partners were able to provide 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 (para 51). 	
Recommendations to:	Priority level (1 (low priority) to 3 (high priority)):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme management and co-ordination - Project management - Financial management 	2

Management Decision (Accept/Partially Accept/Reject): Partially accept		
Management response		
- 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 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raising the question, at the political level, of the need to provide the necessary legal framework and adequate resources to allow instances to fully exercise their mandate in independent and impartial manner in accordance with the law and international commitments including those stemming from CoE conventions to which Tunisia is part of or intends to become state party. - Projects' teams work with the instances and partners in identifying the most adequate needs to optimally exercise their functions 	- Continuous action	Council of Europe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ODGP HQ - Field finances - Project teams in MAEs

Evaluation recommendations on visibility:	
- 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. For example, partners noted the strong visibility of the project <i>Violence against Women / Children</i> in the context of International Women's Day on 8 March. However, there might be room for a more systematic use of popular social media beyond Facebook, particularly for projects targeting the citizens of Tunisia in a more direct way, e.g., <i>Violence against Women / Children (para 49)</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/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 and languages, including by use of the popular social media. Recently, the communication activity on Facebook and Tunis 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 Tunis Office.- Tunis Office Newsletter is distributed on regular basis to partners, stakeholders and international development actors.	-	Council of Europe: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- ODGP HQ- Gender advisor- Project teams in MAEs