

DRAFT REPORT

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

**Joint Project of the European Union and the
Council of Europe**

**“Support to the Justice Reform in the Republic
of Moldova”**

December 2025

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This report has been prepared by María Delgado, an independent evaluation consultant under the supervision of Mariana Chicu and Mónica Martínez, project managers. María Goldman from the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO) also provided oversight and guidance throughout the research process. The analysis, views, and opinions expressed in the report are solely those of the consultant and do not necessarily reflect the position, policies, or views of the Council of Europe or of any of the institutions referred to in the report. All errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the evaluator.

The overall evaluation process was informed and enriched by the participation of 30 stakeholders, including project staff, beneficiary institutions and other development partners, who generously made time to share valuable insights, collaboration, and assistance in providing critical data. Without the support and active participation of all these institutions and individuals this report would not have been possible. To all of them, the evaluator would like to express sincere appreciation and gratitude.

List of acronyms

CoE	Council of Europe
CC	Constitutional Court
CCJE	Consultative Council of European Judges
CECC	Congress of the Conference of European Constitutional Courts
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CCPE	Consultative Council of European Prosecutors
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EJTN	European Judicial Training Network
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
GRECO	Group of States against Corruption
IO	Intermediate outcomes
JSRS	Justice Sector Reform Strategy
MoJ	Ministry of Just
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PGO	Prosecutor General's Office
SCM	Superior Council of Magistracy
SCJ	Supreme Court of Justice
SCP	Superior Council of Prosecutors

Project details

Title of the Action:	Support to the Justice Reform in the Republic of Moldova	
Start date and end date:	27 May 2023 – 26 November 2026	Implementation start date: 17 October 2023
Project budget	2 700 000 EUR	Donors: European Union (90%): 2 430 000 EUR Council of Europe (10%): 270 000 EUR
Target groups:	○ Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova ○ Superior Council of Magistracy of the Republic of Moldova ○ Superior Council of Prosecutors of the Republic of Moldova ○ National Institute of Justice of the Republic of Moldova ○ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova	
Evaluation consultant	María Delgado Rodríguez-Caso	
Timeframe of the evaluation	September 2025-December 2025	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the external evaluation of the joint European Union/Council of Europe project “Support to the Justice Reform in the Republic of Moldova,” conducted between September and December 2025 at the start of the project’s third year of implementation. The purpose of the evaluation is to support learning, accountability and decision-making by assessing progress against expected results, the use of resources, sustainability prospects and the integration of cross-cutting issues, and by providing guidance for the final implementation phase and a potential follow-up.

Set against the backdrop of Republic of Moldova’s accelerated EU accession process, the Justice Sector Reform Strategy 2022–2025 and the vetting of key justice institutions, the project aims to operationalise justice reforms in line with European standards by strengthening the legal framework, judicial and prosecutorial governance, judicial training and the Constitutional Court, with the ultimate objective of reinforcing judicial independence, professionalism, transparency and public trust.

The evaluation applied a mixed-methods and participatory approach, combining desk review of project documentation and secondary sources with fourteen (14) semi-structured interviews and five (5) group discussions involving a total of 30 stakeholders (23 women and 7 men), including project staff, beneficiary institutions and external partners. Data were collected through a field mission to Chisinau in November 2025 and triangulated against the project log frame and evaluation matrix to ensure credibility, support learning and inform course correction during the remaining implementation period.

Overall, the main limitations of the evaluation relate less to access or data collection and more to structural and analytical constraints, notably the limited use of a theory of change as a monitoring tool, insufficient granularity in financial reporting to assess cost-effectiveness, weaknesses in the vertical coherence of the M&E system, and the inherent difficulty of attributing results in a complex, multi-donor reform environment.

Findings

Relevance

Strong documentary and interview evidence confirms a clear correspondence of the project design with the Justice Sector Reform Strategy 2022–2025 and, more recently, the Rule of Law Roadmap, reinforcing the project’s strategic positioning within the EU accession context. Stakeholders consistently viewed the project as demand driven and responsive to institutional needs, particularly in the areas of judicial and prosecutorial governance, judicial training and support to the Constitutional Court. The project also showed flexibility in responding to emerging EU rule-of-law benchmarks, enhancing its relevance despite these dynamics not being explicitly anticipated at design stage.

The project’s relevance is further strengthened by the systematic use of Council of Europe standards as substantive guidance for reforms. At the same time, findings show more mixed evidence for the component supporting the Ministry of Justice: while outputs remained strategically aligned with JSRS objectives, data shows that their operational relevance diminished as accession pressures intensified and institutional priorities shifted. However, this reflects timing and absorption constraints rather than a lack of strategic relevance at design.

Effectiveness/results

The findings point to mixed but overall positive effectiveness throughout the project. Under Component 1, the project delivered relevant and technically sound analytical outputs and capacity-building support for the Ministry of Justice. However, shifting EU accession priorities, electoral dynamics and absorption constraints significantly reduced their uptake and influence of project outputs. While a small number of outputs, notably the assessment of Draft Law 423, contributed to concrete legislative changes, other remained underused despite their technical quality and alignment with European standards, highlighting a gap between relevance and practical applicability.

In contrast, Components 2 and 3 show clearer effectiveness. Evidence from multiple sources confirms that project support contributed to more transparent, standardised and accountable governance within the SCM and SCP, strengthened disciplinary frameworks and more open institutional practices in line with GRECO and EU findings. Similarly, the National Institute of Justice made meaningful progress toward modernising curricula, training methodologies and internal processes, although full consolidation depends on sustained leadership and legislative follow-up. Under Component 4, support to the Constitutional Court was well aligned with institutional needs and successfully laid the foundations for greater use of EU law and accessibility of rulings and visibility of the Court, through the establishment of a more accessible database and equipment.

Efficiency

Overall, the project has been implemented with a satisfactory level of efficiency, although minor structural and operational constraints limited optimal performance. Budget execution is broadly aligned with the implementation timeline, yet uneven spending patterns and limited financial disaggregation by component or activity restrict meaningful value-for-money analysis and strategic resource allocation. Timeliness was affected by procurement bottlenecks, shifting institutional priorities linked to EU accession and elections, and periods of limited beneficiary absorption capacity, making delivery reliant on ad hoc adjustments. High staff turnover in the early phase further constrained efficiency, although continuity was largely maintained. While governance arrangements provided a functioning framework for coordination and helped avoid duplication, their potential for strategic steering was not fully leveraged. In parallel, a few technical weaknesses in how the project's design and monitoring system connect activities, outputs and outcomes may have constrained its ability to steer strategically and to demonstrate progress toward justice sector reforms in a more structured and evidence-based manner.

Sustainability

The evaluation found generally positive but uneven sustainability prospects. Many project outputs are systemic and formally embedded, such as revised SCM/SCP procedures, adopted regulations, NIJ curriculum reforms and strategic documents, making them likely to endure, particularly given the strong ownership expressed by beneficiary institutions and the continued pressure generated by the EU accession process. Sustainability is strongest in judicial and prosecutorial governance and judicial training, where reforms are anchored in regulatory frameworks and institutional practices.

However, longer-term sustainability remains dependent on institutional capacity, political continuity and follow-up support. Structural constraints, including limited specialist expertise, staffing gaps and weak internal communication functions, risk undermining gains once external

assistance ends and will require further support. Sustainability is also fragile for analytical and communication outputs, particularly within the MoJ, where uptake depends on evolving political and legislative priorities. Stakeholders emphasised the need for a follow-up phase focused on practice-building and consolidation, while the current project can already strengthen sustainability through hands-on implementation support and targeted capacity reinforcement.

Added value

The evaluation confirmed the Council of Europe's strong and distinctive added value in justice reform. Stakeholders consistently highlighted its normative authority, specialised expertise and ability to anchor reforms in Venice Commission standards, GRECO recommendations and broader European judicial practice. This, combined with long-term engagement and trusted relationships in the Republic of Moldova's justice sector, was seen as difficult to replicate by other actors. While administrative and procurement procedures were sometimes perceived as slower, these constraints did not outweigh the CoE's responsiveness, adaptability and reliability as a reform partner.

Gender equality and human rights

Human rights considerations are consistently and substantively integrated across project outputs, with regular reference to European human rights standards and ECHR case law. Gender mainstreaming was found visible but less consistent. While gender-sensitive language and sex-disaggregated data are systematically applied, many outputs do not go beyond these basics. Some positive examples exist, but opportunities to integrate more substantive gender-responsive elements were occasionally missed. Overall, human rights mainstreaming is strong, while gender mainstreaming would benefit from clearer guidance and more systematic application.

Conclusions

Relevance. The project shows very high strategic relevance and is closely in line with the Justice Sector Reform Strategy, the Rule of Law Roadmap and the Council of Europe's mandate. Overall, relevance has been kept and even strengthened by the project's responsiveness to EU accession dynamics. However, relevance across components is uneven, with shifting ministerial priorities, donor overlap and limited absorption capacity constraining the strategic coherence and uptake of outputs under Component 1.

Effectiveness. The project has delivered clear and meaningful results under IO2 and IO3, particularly in strengthening judicial and prosecutorial self-governance and modernising judicial training. Effectiveness under IO1 has been limited by limited uptake of analytical outputs and contextual constraints, while results under IO4 are harder to assess due to misalignment between outcomes, indicators and activities. Overall, early institutional gains are evident, but consolidation remains uneven.

Efficiency. Implementation has been broadly efficient and largely on schedule. Uneven resource use, procurement delays, early staff turnover and limited financial and results disaggregation reduced value-for-money analysis and constrained strategic steering but did not significantly undermine efficiency. Governance arrangements support coordination but are underused for strategic decision-making, risking dilution of coherence despite high responsiveness.

Sustainability. Sustainability prospects are moderate to strong where reforms are embedded in formal regulations and institutional practices, and weaker where they depend on specialised skills, stable staffing and internal systems. A shift from norm-setting to practice-building is needed to consolidate results.

Added value and cross-cutting issues. The Council of Europe brings strong added value through its normative authority and expertise. Human rights are consistently mainstreamed, while gender equality integration remains uneven and would benefit from a more systematic approach.

Recommendations:

1. Refocus Component 1 on a limited set of high-leverage priorities and strengthen mechanisms to ensure uptake and use of analytical outputs. This requires closer strategic dialogue through the Steering Committee to ensure that analytical outputs are realistically scoped, well sequenced, actively disseminated and linked to ongoing reform processes, with follow-up arrangements that support uptake and institutional change.
2. Strengthen results-oriented monitoring to better support strategic steering and learning. This entails maintaining a streamlined M&E system centred on a small number of outcome-level indicators with a clear vertical logic linking activities, outputs and outcomes. When priorities or activities shift in response to contextual changes, indicators and expected outcomes should be reviewed and adjusted transparently to preserve coherence and learning value.
3. Systematise the integration of gender equality considerations across all components and outputs. Introduce simple, consistent tools (e.g. gender prompts in ToRs, brief gender notes in key outputs) would help ensure that gender dimensions are addressed more consistently without increasing administrative burden.
4. Consider a short no-cost extension to consolidate results. Given delays linked to contextual volatility and institutional changes, a limited extension (3–6 months) could help consolidate results, support uptake of key outputs and improve continuity of engagement with beneficiary institutions.
5. Strengthen strategic communication and visibility with earlier dissemination planning and more tailored messaging to increase the visibility, usability and policy influence of project outputs.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the external evaluation of the joint project of the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) “Support to the Justice Reform in the Republic of Moldova. The evaluation was commissioned and managed by the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau between September and December 2025.

The evaluation of the project was conducted at the beginning of the third year of Project implementation and aimed to assess the results achieved, review how resources have been used, explore the sustainability of achievements and examine how cross-cutting issues have been integrated. The evaluation also intended to provide guidance on whether/how the implementation of the project needs to be adapted and recommend any necessary course corrections for the final period of implementation as well as with an outlook for a potential follow-up project.

The report is presented in five chapters:

1. Evaluation context and description of the project
2. Methodology
3. Findings
4. Conclusions and lessons learned
5. Recommendations

II. CONTEXT

The Republic of Moldova’s justice reform is driven both by its long-standing aspiration for closer integration with the European Union and by domestic demands for an independent, accountable, and trustworthy judiciary. Since the 1998 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, successive governments have sought to align legislation and institutions with European standards. This agenda gained renewed momentum after the Republic of Moldova’s application for EU membership in March 2022¹. In response to that application the European Commission (EC) acknowledged progress made but underlined persistent rule of law shortcomings and the need to strengthen judicial independence, integrity, and transparency, in line with longstanding gaps identified by OSCE/ODIHR, GRECO, and the Venice Commission.²

Two milestones have shaped the current phase of reforms. First, the Strategy for Ensuring the Independence and Integrity of the Justice Sector 2022–2025 (JSRS) developed with Council of Europe support sets out a broad agenda to strengthen integrity, accountability and public trust in the judiciary. More recently, the Rule of Law Roadmap was adopted by the government to establish the strategic results that the Republic of Moldova aims to achieve to strengthen the rule of law as a cornerstone of the country’s democratic development³.

Since 2022, a central piece of reforms has been the extraordinary integrity evaluations (pre-vetting and vetting) of candidates to the Superior Council of Magistrates (SCM), the Superior Council of Prosecutors (SCP), the Supreme Court of Justice, and senior management positions across the justice and prosecution systems. Conducted by mixed national–international commissions, the vetting process quickly became the dominant reform instrument, absorbing

¹ In June 2022, the Republic of Moldova was officially granted candidate status. Accession negotiations were launched in June 2024

² In its 2022 opinion on The Republic of Moldova’s candidacy (COM(2022) 406 final), the European Commission acknowledged the progress made in strengthening rule of law institutions but also identified persistent challenges that require comprehensive judicial reform.

³ The Rule of Law Roadmap approved by Government Decision No. 275/2025 is a strategic document developed within the framework of the negotiations for the Republic of Moldova’s accession to the European Union.

significant institutional capacity and often determining the sequencing and pace of other reforms, including activities under the EU/CoE project assessed in this evaluation.

In this context the EU/CoE project under evaluation was designed⁴ to support the Republic of Moldova in operationalising this reform agenda and implementing the JSRS in line with Council of Europe standards and relevant CoE bodies' recommendations. In practice, the project sought to equip the newly reconstituted and vetted institutions to fulfil their mandates effectively, with the expectation that this would strengthen the independence, professionalism and transparency of the judiciary⁵ and, ultimately, increase public trust.

Finally, the run-up to the September 2025 national elections introduced typical pre-electoral dynamics (delays, shifting political priorities, and administrative caution) which affected both the pace of reforms and project delivery. Such external factors remain relevant for understanding the overall pace and direction of the justice reform process and the implementation of this project.

II. THE PROJECT

Running from 27 May 2023 to 26 November 2026 (42 months) the project is implemented by the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau and has an overall budget of € 2 700 000 co-funded by the European Union (90%) and the Council of Europe (10%). The Project moved from its inception phase into full execution in October 2023.

Results framework

The project focuses on four main intermediate outcomes (IO)⁶:

1. Improving the legal framework: Supporting the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in the implementation of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy 2022–2025 by aligning the Republic of Moldova's laws and by-laws more closely with European standards and commitments. (Target institution: MoJ)
2. Reforming judicial and prosecutorial governance: Strengthening the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) and the Superior Council of Prosecutors (SCP) so they can carry out their responsibilities, such as appointing, promoting, or disciplining judges and prosecutors, in an independent, effective, transparent, and fair way, in line with the Constitution and European standards. (Target institutions: SCM and SCP)
3. Advancing judicial training: Enhancing the capacity of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to provide high-quality training for judges and prosecutors. This includes modernized curricula, results-based training methodologies (e.g. Train the Trainer), fairer selection processes for new candidates, and stronger institutional capacities. (Target institution: NIJ)
4. Strengthening the Constitutional Court (CC): Building the legal expertise of Court members and staff and making rulings more accessible to the public through the

⁴ Project design initiated in October 2021.

⁵ Unlike in other legal systems (common law) the term "judiciary" here includes both Judges and Prosecutors. The Prosecutor's Office is an autonomous public institution within the Moldovan judiciary.

⁶ The project log frame is provided in Annex I. For consistency and readability, the terms "*Intermediate Outcomes*" and "*Component*" are treated as interchangeable within this report.

development of a new database and video conference equipment. (Target institution: CC)

Project activities focus on enhancing the performance, accountability, and independence of duty bearers, including judicial, prosecutorial, and government institutions, on the assumption that these improvements will ultimately yield indirect benefits for citizens as right holders. The project seeks to help establish systemic conditions for a more independent, impartial, accountable and transparent justice system. More details on the implementation of activities can be found in the log frame provided in Annex I.

Project stakeholders

The project primarily targets key duty bearers within the justice system, with a focus on strengthening the institutional capacities of its main beneficiaries: the Ministry of Justice, the Superior Council of Magistracy, the Superior Council of Prosecutors, the National Institute of Justice, and the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova. It aims to enhance their ability to uphold and advance justice sector reforms in line with European standards.

Other key stakeholders include the European Union as the main donor and other implementing donors and partners such as USAID⁷, GIZ, the OECD, UNDP, and civil society organisations engaged in related initiatives (IPRE, LRCM). While they are not direct beneficiaries, these actors play an important role in complementing, supplementing, or at times overlapping with the project's objectives and approaches.

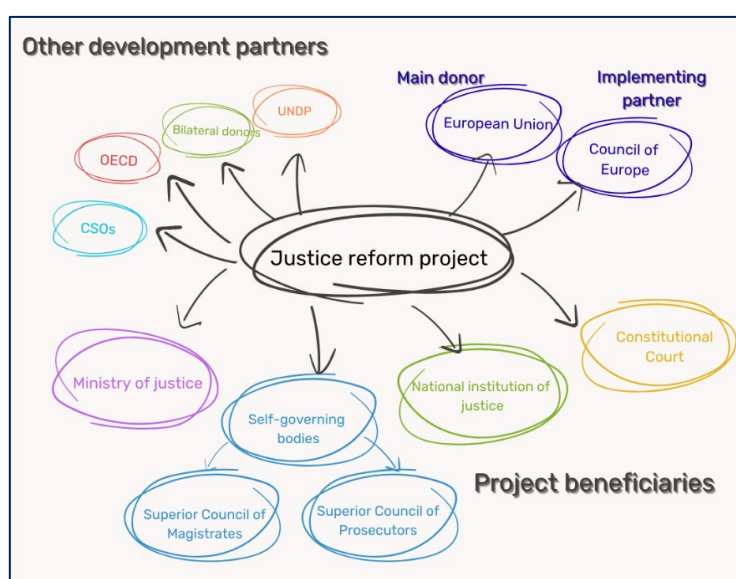


Figure 1: Simplified map of stakeholders (Source: consultant, based on Figure 2: Map of stakeholders)

Human resources and management mechanisms

The project is governed through a two-tiered structure designed to ensure both strategic oversight and effective day-to-day management. At the strategic level, a Steering Committee, co-chaired by representatives of the EU Delegation (EUD) and the Council of Europe includes all beneficiary institutions and oversees progress through biannual meetings.⁸ Civil society organisations and international development stakeholders⁹ are regularly invited as observers, ensuring transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making.

⁷ USAID funded programmes (through DEXIS, Aba Rolil) were key stakeholders supporting justice sector in the Republic of Moldova for the bigger part of the evaluation period before their withdrawal in late 2024-2025

⁸ During the period covered by the evaluation, the Steering Committee has met four times: 17/10/2023; 29/04/2024; 22/11/2024 and 27/05/2025

⁹ Minutes reviewed confirm the presence of IPRE, the OECD, Aba Roli, UNDP, Soros Foundation Moldova, Dexis, the US Embassy/INL Section, CILC and LRCM in different meetings of the Steering Committee.

At the operational level, a dedicated project team of six staff members currently manages implementation. The team combined headquarters-based support (a 50% project manager and a 50% project assistant) with a strong local presence in Chisinau (a full-time international project manager, a senior project officer¹⁰, and two project assistants). Changes to the team's composition will be later discussed under efficiency.

II. METHODOLOGY

To keep this report focused, the full methodology can be found in the inception report (Annex X). This section presents only the key methodological elements.

Evaluation purpose, scope and objectives

This external evaluation is formative in nature and seeks to provide data and insights that can inform decisions and improve the overall implementation of the programme for the remaining period. It serves two main purposes. The first is to promote learning for key stakeholders, including the CoE, the EUD and national beneficiary institutions and to inform the remaining period of implementation of the project. The second purpose is to ensure accountability to these same stakeholders.

The evaluation covers the first 25 months of the project implementation from 27 May 2023 to 30 June 2025. The geographic focus is on activities conducted at national level with the beneficiary institutions. The assessment will cover all four outcomes and involve the CoE office in Chisinau as the primary implementing agency, direct beneficiaries (MoJ, the SCM, the SCP, the NIJ, and the CC of the Republic of Moldova), and other key stakeholders (EUD, international organizations, and other relevant actors).

The primary audience for the results of the evaluation are programme staff, other relevant stakeholders within the CoE (Co-operation Programmes Division of DGI, the Directorate for Programme Co-ordination, the management of the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau) and the EUD. It is also expected that the findings and recommendations of the evaluation may be of interest and use to the beneficiaries of the Project.

According to the Terms of Reference, included in Annex IX, the specific objectives of the evaluation were to understand progress against expected results; evaluate the relevance of the project and the efficiency of the management set-up and monitoring and reporting systems; assess the sustainability of project deliverables and provide recommendations and outline best practices and lessons learnt in the light of the continuation of the project action as well as potential follow-up project.

Evaluation questions

The original list of evaluation questions in the ToR was refined together with the project team during the inception phase. While a few nuances were suggested by the evaluator the final list does not significantly differ from the list in the ToR. Only gender equality and human rights issues were differently framed in the evaluation matrix and elevated to a standalone cross-cutting

¹⁰ A second Senior Project Officer (SPO) position was created in December 2024.

issue. All evaluation questions in the ToR have been broken into sub-questions in the evaluation matrix (Annex III).

Relevance

- To what extent has the interventions been relevant to the mandate of the Council of Europe, and to the priority areas for the national reform agenda in the area of justice in the country?
- To what extent have the interventions addressed identified needs of the beneficiaries in the specific sectors?
- To what extent has the project gained relevance in view of emerging new needs emanating from the EU accession process?

Effectiveness/Results

- To what extent are immediate and intermediate outcomes being achieved?
- What factors have enabled or hindered the achievement of results?

Efficiency

- To what extent has the project management/human resources structure contributed to an efficient delivery of results?
- To what extent the Project management and decision-making process are efficient? How could it be improved (if needed)?

Sustainability

- To what extent are the positive outcomes and changes from the project likely to last beyond the project's completion?
- What could be approaches for a potential follow-up project action to build on and strengthen the sustainability of the achieved results? Which outcomes and outputs would be still relevant for the potential follow-up project action?
- What steps would need to be taken to increase the sustainability of the results during the remainder of the project implementation period?

Added value

- To what extent does the Council of Europe have a clear comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors in the implementation of the interventions in the Project's remit? What, if any, are the shortcomings compared to other implementers?

Gender Equality and Human rights

- To what extent has the project mainstreamed the gender and human rights approach in its design and implementation, finally contributing to gender equality and promoted the principles of human rights approach?

Methodological approach

The evaluation applied a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to capture the project's multiple dimensions. Consistent with utilisation-focused and people-centred evaluation approaches, the process was highly participatory and designed to generate findings that are practical, relevant, and responsive to stakeholder perspectives. Measures were taken to ensure full adherence to **organizational requirements, norms and standards on human rights, inclusiveness and gender equality**, as well as to the **Council of Europe Evaluation Policy**, Evaluation Guidelines and ethical guidelines. A gender and human rights lens has been integrated throughout the evaluation, including efforts to ensure balanced stakeholder representation and to assess how effectively these principles are embedded in

project implementation. The project's log frame and the evaluation matrix form the main analytical framework of the evaluation, guiding data collection and analysis.

Data collection strategy, analysis and triangulation

The sequencing of data collection was designed specifically to allow incremental learning and tailoring of subsequent data collection to extend, build on and verify initial findings. Evaluation findings build upon two main data collection streams: document review (analysed project documentation, progress reports, and secondary sources) and fourteen (14) semi-structured interviews and five (5) group discussions with 30 stakeholders (23 women; 7 men) including implementing staff, representatives of beneficiary institutions and external partners. A field visit to Chisinau took place between November 5th-14th.

The evaluation established credibility through the triangulation of multiple data sources, drawing conclusions where evidence from different methods aligned. Relevant initial findings from interviews were followed up with other stakeholders in subsequent interviews. This process of triangulation revealed a number of highly consistent themes regarding the project which are presented in this report. Interview data underwent systematic coding using the evaluation questions and criteria, while project monitoring data was analysed against targets in the project log frame. The evaluation matrix connected data collection methods to specific evaluation questions (Annex III).

A first draft of this report was submitted to the project manager. Feedback on these draft report and presentations has provided invaluable clarification, information, and perspective on the project's strengths and shortcomings; this has been an important additional source of information.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations in this report are the product of an independent evaluation and are based on data gathered from the following sources:

Document review began during the inception phase of the evaluation and has been ongoing, providing background, complementary and supplementary information. The documents reviewed are listed in Annex VII and cited in the report where relevant.

Interviews to 30 stakeholders were conducted between mid-October mid-November 2025. Before the field visit the evaluator was able to interview a few international stakeholders remotely¹¹. All other interviews were conducted onsite during the field visit. Interview protocols are provided in annex VIII.

Interviewees were purposefully identified from a list developed together with the project team and include:

Type of Stakeholder	Male	Female	Total
Project Team	1	7	8
Donor (EU)	1	2	3
Other international development partners	2	4	6
Ministry of Justice		1	1
SCM and SCP		5	5
National Justice Institute	1	1	2
Constitutional Court		2	2

¹¹ A total of 10 interviews with project staff in Strasbourg, key EUD stakeholders, and international development partners were conducted via Zoom or Webex, depending on the interviewee's preference.

Civil Society Organizations	2	1	3
TOTAL	7	23	30

Interviews with English speakers were conducted in that language. All other interviews were conducted in Romanian, assisted by a professional interpreter and digitally recorded. Informed consent for both the interview and the recording was requested at the start of each conversation. Interviewees were told that the information they provided would be presented anonymously in the report. All identifying details have been intentionally removed from the report.

Limitations

During the inception phase, several potential methodological limitations were identified. As data collection unfolded, some risks did not materialise, while others manifested differently than expected. Table 1 summarises how these anticipated limitations played out in practice and notes additional constraints that emerged during implementation.

Table 1: Limitations

Limitation	Summary
Language barriers	This limitation largely did not materialise. Many stakeholders had sufficient English proficiency to engage directly, and several even opted to conduct interviews fully or partially in English. This reduced the need for translation and consequently minimised the risks of misinterpretation or filtering of information. Iterative feedback loops with the project team still contributed to validating key insights, but overall, language barriers did not represent a significant constraint.
Stakeholder availability	All planned interviews were successfully conducted. Stakeholders at different levels were available as scheduled, meaning that no significant gaps in perspectives materialised.
Political context	While the political context remained dynamic, no major election-related turnover affected access to stakeholders or the availability of individuals with adequate institutional memory of the project. Snowball sampling remained available as a mitigation tool but was not ultimately needed.
Limited use of ToC	Although a theory of change was reconstructed during the inception phase and proposed as a key analytical tool, the limited engagement with this component of the inception report suggests that ToCs are not yet widely used or prioritised as instruments for strategic reflection and monitoring within the project. As a result, the evaluation did not draw on the theory of change in a systematic manner and relied on other analytical tools. The reconstructed ToC is, however, reproduced in the inception report annexed to this evaluation.
Financial reporting detail	The structure and format of the available financial reports did not allow for a granular assessment of cost-effectiveness. Budget lines are aggregated at a level that prevented deeper analysis of unit costs or comparative efficiency across activities. As a result, the evaluation could comment on overall coherence and budget execution but not on cost-effectiveness in a more detailed manner.

Structural weaknesses in the M&E system	While a range of monitoring information was available (including progress and narrative reports, the log frame, post-reform analysis and activity-level feedback tools), the ability of the M&E system to aggregate results across levels and to consistently trace causal links from activities to outcomes was limited. While higher-level changes were systematically monitored and documented in progress reports insufficient vertical coherence between activity-level and outcome-level indicators in the log frame often constrained the analysis of contribution lines. A more detailed assessment of log frame and indicator quality is provided in Annex V.
Contribution analysis	Multi-donor environment made it difficult to isolate the project's specific influence on some of the reforms. Given the scope and duration of this evaluation, it was not feasible to trace the influence of each project output on specific reform outcomes. This is a structural limitation inherent to complex governance reforms and should be considered when interpreting findings on effectiveness and contribution.

III. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings structured around the main evaluation questions and criteria in the evaluation matrix (Annex III). It draws on carefully triangulated evidence from an extensive desk review and interviews to reflect the range of perspectives, concerns, and achievements voiced by beneficiary institutions and external stakeholders.

RELEVANCE

EQ1: To what extent has the interventions been relevant to the mandate of the Council of Europe, and to the priority areas for the national reform agenda in the area of justice in the country?

EQ2: To what extent have the interventions addressed identified needs of the beneficiaries in the specific sectors?

EQ3: To what extent has the project responded to emerging new needs emanating from the EU accession process

Finding 1. The project's design reflects the main priorities defined in the Justice Sector Reform Strategy and related national commitments

Documents reviewed show a strong and deliberate alignment between project outputs and both the Justice Sector Reform Strategy (JSRS) and the more recent Rule of Law Roadmap. The project was intentionally designed to support key pillars of the JSRS, fully aligning with Strategic Direction I on independence, administration, integrity and accountability, as well as Objective 2.3 under Strategic Direction II on strengthening training and legal specialisation. This direct correspondence underscores the project's high relevance to the Republic of Moldova's core justice reform agenda. The relevance is further reinforced by the more recent Rule of Law Roadmap, which incorporates several outputs already anticipated by the project (e.g., Measure 1.4 on developing regulatory frameworks for the SCM and SCP to improve the efficiency of their work and that of their subordinate bodies), demonstrating that the project not only aligns with but actively contributes to the Republic of Moldova's evolving EU alignment commitments.

Interview evidence reinforces this assessment. Stakeholders consulted unanimously considered the project fully aligned with national priorities and directly supportive of the objectives and actions set out in the JSRS and the Roadmap. Public opinion trends further highlight the importance of this alignment. According to the [EU Neighbours-East project 2025 poll](#), Moldovan citizens rank judicial system reform among the top ten areas where they expect greater EU support, indicating that justice reform is both an urgent and widely recognised national need.

Finding 2. The project showed a notable degree of responsiveness to EU accession dynamics, redirecting efforts toward new rule-of-law priorities as they emerged

Since the decision to launch EU accession negotiations was made in December 2023, justice sector reforms in the Republic of Moldova have become highly time-bound, politically visible, and tightly linked to meeting specific EU benchmarks. Conversations held during the field mission confirmed that institutions face intense pressure to align with the nine steps and broader rule of law conditionalities set out by the European Commission. While supporting this process was not an explicit design objective, most stakeholders noted that the project has in practice provided timely, high-quality technical inputs that have helped institutions respond to these demands, underscoring its continued strategic relevance.

As mentioned, the approval of the Rule of Law Roadmap (2025), a core reference document for EU accession, further elevated the project's strategic importance. This document, now the central blueprint for the Republic of Moldova's compliance with EU requirements, explicitly incorporates several outputs already envisaged by the project (see finding 4 below) signalling a

high degree of unintended alignment between the project's design and the country's accession commitments. In this context, the project's relevance has not only been reaffirmed but significantly strengthened.

Finding 3. The project directly targets compliance with GRECO recommendations and uses Venice Commission standards to inform legal and institutional reforms

An analysis of the project's outputs shows a consistently strong alignment with the Council of Europe's mandate. The advice, assessments, draft laws and draft regulations produced are systematically grounded in European standards and best practices and the Council of Europe acquis, including GRECO recommendations, Venice Commission opinions, Committee of Ministers standards, Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE) and Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE) guidance, and ECtHR jurisprudence.

Documentary evidence from several¹² project outputs clearly substantiate this point. For example:

- The Assessment of the regulation on the selection of judges of the Supreme Court of Justice (May 2024) cites Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)12, the Venice Commission's report on judicial appointments, and CCJE Opinion No. 17 (2014).
- The Report on the initial training of the NIJ refers to Recommendation R(94)12, CCJE Opinion No. 4 (2003), and other CoE standards on professional training.
- The Comparative analysis on recovery of costs in criminal cases draws on CCPE Opinion (2012) No. 7.
- ECtHR case-law is used as a substantive interpretative basis in the Analysis of the national legal system concerning the recovery of costs in criminal cases, ensuring reforms are compatible with Article 6 of the Convention.

These few examples demonstrate that CoE standards were used not as general references but as substantive guidance shaping institutional, procedural and legislative reforms. This places the project firmly within the CoE's mandate and highlights its added value as a mechanism for embedding European standards into the Republic of Moldova's justice governance structures.

Given this systematic integration of CoE standards across project outputs and activities, it is reasonable to infer that the project likely contributed to the country's recent progress under GRECO's Fourth Evaluation Round. For example, project support to the SCM and SCP on revising procedures for selection, appointment, performance evaluation, inspection and disciplinary responsibility directly corresponds to key GRECO recommendations (notably VIII, XIII and XVIII). While it is not possible to attribute these developments solely to the project, available evidence indicates that it plausibly contributed in a supportive and enabling manner to reforms addressing GRECO-identified integrity and accountability gaps, which are now assessed as "satisfactorily implemented" in the latest compliance report.

Finding 4. Beneficiary institutions overwhelmingly confirm the project's relevance to their needs but evidence about the relevance of intermediate outcome 1 is less consistent.

Overall, beneficiary feedback and documentary evidence converge on the conclusion that the project is highly relevant, and demand driven. Interviews across all beneficiary institutions (SCM, SCP, NIJ, MoJ, CC) reflect a strong and consistent appreciation of the project's relevance to their day-to-day needs and reform priorities, particularly in helping them meet the requirements of the JSRS first and the Rule of Law Roadmap more recently. Independent experts from the CSO's

¹² This list of outputs is not exhaustive

consulted also agreed that the project rightly focuses on areas that are critical and in line with national priorities and institutional needs.

However, the strength of the evidence on relevance varies across the project's four components. Both documents reviewed and testimonies consistently agree that Intermediate Outcomes (IO) 2, 3 and to some extent 4 are clearly strategically aligned areas, as they directly support judicial and prosecutorial self-governance reforms which are core priorities under the JSRS, the Roadmap or the 2022 TAIEX report¹³. These project components address well-defined institutional needs and respond to critical rule of law benchmarks repeatedly highlighted by the EU, CoE bodies, and national authorities. Table 1 below highlights key measures from the Rule of Law Roadmap (2025) and maps them against the project outcomes and outputs that help institutions deliver on these commitments.

Table 2: Alignment with Rule of Law Roadmap measures¹⁴

Measures included in the Rule of Law Roadmap	Related Project outcomes/outputs
1.3. Strengthening the administrative capacities of the Secretariats of the Superior Council of Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors.	Intermediate outcome 2: "The judicial and prosecutorial self-governing bodies exercise their competences to select, appoint, promote, transfer, suspend and remove judges and prosecutors in an effective, objective and transparent manner in line with European standards" Immediate outcomes 2.1 and 2.2: The SCM and the SCP have the necessary internal procedures and capacities allowing for selection, appointment, promotion, transfer, suspension and removal of judges and prosecutors in line with European standards. Activities of the project included: developing the institutional strategies of both, the SCM and the SCP; revising internal procedures on issues such as the judicial inspection and disciplinary responsibility of judges and the SCM disciplinary board; the selection of judges for the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ); the selection criteria for judges and on the SCM Board for the Selection and Performance Evaluation of Judges; the procedure for organising and conducting the competition for selection of inspectors within the Prosecutors' inspection service as well as on the functioning of the Prosecutors' inspection or the procedure for the selection of prosecutors, their performance evaluation and the operation of the board for the selection and performance evaluation of prosecutors.
1.4. Development/revision by the Superior Council of Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors of their internal regulatory framework to ensure efficiency in their work and that of their subordinate bodies	
1.5. Approval of strategic development plans of the Superior Council of Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors for 2025–2029, including measures concerning human resources	
6.1. Reducing the number of pending disciplinary cases through operationalisation of disciplinary boards for judges and prosecutors	
7.1. Filling vacant positions in the judiciary/prosecution, including leadership roles, and organizing competitions until all positions are filled.	
7.4. Organisation of training courses for judges on legal writing, in line with the new structure for judicial decisions approved by the Superior Council of Magistracy.	Intermediate outcome 3: "The National Institute of Justice provides enhanced judicial training for judges and prosecutors through improved curricula and improved internal processes allowing for a more transparent and impartial selection of new judges and prosecutors and for better training capacities, in line with the 2022 TAIEX recommendations. Immediate outcomes 3.1 (The NIJ has strengthened capacities to deliver quality judicial training and allow for objective and transparent selection of future judges and prosecutors) and 3.2 (The
11.1. Development of new training modules on EU law within the National Institute of Justice.	
11.2. Organisation of continuous training courses for judges and prosecutors on EU	

¹³ A Peer Review Assessment Mission on initial and continuing legal education for judges and prosecutors at the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) was conducted in June 2022. Its purpose was to provide the European Commission and the Republic of Moldova with an assessment of the NIJ's judicial training system. The mission report sets out several recommendations that the European Commission expects the NIJ to implement soon.

¹⁴ It is important to note that the project was designed to support beneficiary institutions in meeting the requirements of the JSRS, rather than the more recent Roadmap. However, as the JSRS Action Plans, where more detailed measures are specified, were not available to the consultant, the Roadmap is hereby used as a proxy to illustrate the project's continued alignment with the persistent and evolving needs of beneficiary institutions. References to specific JSRS objectives are also included in Finding 1.

law, judicial reasoning, ethics, and integrity.	National Institute of Justice has strengthened capacities to deliver quality judicial training and allow for objective and transparent selection of future judges and prosecutors)
11.3. Revision of initial and continuous training plans by the National Institute of Justice in line with TAIEX 2022 recommendations.	Activities of the project included: the revision of the methodology for training needs assessment and impact assessment mechanisms; a comprehensive review of the concept, curricula, and methodology of the NIJ's initial and continuous training programmes, focusing on the implementation of the 2022 TAIEX and different capacity building activities on Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model and adult training methodology, new training methodologies in line with European standards and best practices and EU law and the development of NIJ institutional strategy (ongoing at the time of the evaluation)
11.4. Approval of the strategic development plan of the National Institute of Justice.	
2.1. Improvement/development of the Constitutional Court's case-law database	Intermediate outcome 4: "Constitutional justice is enhanced through increased legal capacities of members and staff of the Constitutional court and increased accessibility of Constitutional Court rulings via a new database" Immediate outcome 2.2: The level of accessibility of Constitutional Court rulings is increased Activities of the project included the development of a searchable database of Court's rulings (ongoing at the time of the evaluation)

While the table above shows a strong and direct alignment between Roadmap measures and project contributions in Components 2, 3 and 4, the picture is more nuanced for Component 1. In principle, the analytical outputs produced by the project responded directly to requests from the MoJ derived from the JSRS Action Plans¹⁵, and ministerial stakeholders continue to consider them technically relevant. However, their immediate operational usefulness diminished as EU accession accelerated and the Ministry's priorities shifted rapidly toward *acquis* transposition and other more pressing demands. In this context, while project outputs remained aligned with the original plan to support JSRS implementation, their timing, combined with limitations in the Ministry's absorption capacity, made them harder to accommodate. As a result, several analytically sound outputs were set aside and not actively used at the time of the evaluation¹⁶.

It is important to note that the project was designed before the acceleration of EU accession negotiations, and that the scale and pace of the resulting pressures on the MoJ went beyond what could reasonably have been anticipated at design stage. Throughout implementation, the project team remained in close coordination with the MoJ, and the relevance and priority of planned outputs were repeatedly discussed and reconfirmed through workplan processes, Steering Committee meetings and day-to-day operational exchanges. Nevertheless, as the Ministry's agenda intensified, some analytically demanding outputs requiring substantial beneficiary input became more difficult to absorb within constrained institutional bandwidth. Consequently, while activities remained technically aligned with JSRS Action Plans, the timing and operational traction of certain analytical products were affected. This echoes the JSRS's own caution that an overemphasis on producing legislative or analytical outputs, without sufficient space for implementation and follow-up, can limit practical uptake, particularly during periods of heightened reform pressure.¹⁷

¹⁵ The consultant did not have access to Action Plans. This aspect could not be verified

¹⁶ Two out of three analytical outputs delivered by the project (Analysis of the legal framework and the case-law of the national courts to identify the restricted procedural deadlines set for the handling of certain categories of cases and Analytical reports on the recovery of legal costs in criminal cases) had not been finalised at the time of evaluation. According to project reports and key stakeholders these had been set aside and deprioritised by the MoJ.

¹⁷ EN_Draft_Strategy_Ensuring_Independence_Integrity_of_Justice_Sector_2021-2024.pdf; pg. 12

Taken together, this suggests that although Component 1 was strategically relevant at design and aligned with MoJ demands, its practical relevance diminished during implementation as institutional needs evolved. Beyond absorption constraints, the non-use of several outputs raises a broader strategic question about whether, in responding to immediate requests, sufficient space existed for structured discussion on prioritisation and on where project support would retain the greatest leverage and priority under rapidly evolving accession pressures.

EFFECTIVENESS/RESULTS

EQ4: To what extent are immediate and intermediate outcomes being achieved?

EQ5: What factors have enabled or hindered the achievement of results?

Guided by the project log frame, this section first examines progress against intermediate and immediate outcomes and concludes with findings at the level of the project's final goal (impact). For the full log frame of the project see Annex I. A more detailed analysis of outputs delivered is also provided in Annex IV.

Finding 5. While the project delivered relevant analytical work and capacity-building, shifting priorities, structural weaknesses and MoJ absorption constraints limited the use and influence of outputs.

Intermediate Outcome 1 aims to support the MoJ in advancing JSRS implementation and ensuring that legal reforms align with European standards. However, as discussed in finding 4, evidence shows that several outputs were delivered, but their use and influence remained unclear at the time of the evaluation. Progress under this component has been partial and uneven, largely because the implementation context shifted significantly after project design.

Progress reports show that the outcome's original structure changed substantially during implementation. Several planned activities were either removed, transferred to other actors or deprioritised by the MoJ as donor support expanded and EU accession pressures intensified.¹⁸ For example, responsibilities for the evaluation of the JSRS moved to a new **EU–OECD project**¹⁹, part of the communication work shifted to the Netherlands-funded **IPRE initiative** and protocol/communication training was later taken up by government institutions. These shifts altered the core logic of IO 1 without a parallel strategic revision, weakening its overall coherence. Furthermore, interviews also noted contextual factors –such as the preparations for the September 2025 elections– that further shifted priorities and limited the Ministry's ability to absorb project outputs. Taken together these adjustments, diluted the strategic coherence of the component.

Immediate Outcome 1.1: Draft laws and sub-legal acts aligned with European standards

Despite the adjustments described above, the project delivered a set of targeted, demand-driven analytical outputs intended to support the Ministry of Justice in advancing JSRS implementation and ensuring that draft laws and by-laws reflect European standards. These included:

- an analysis of the national legal framework and case-law regarding restricted procedural deadlines;

¹⁸ Analysis of project documentation shows multiple instances of reprogramming and shifting priorities, particularly affecting Component 1.

¹⁹ The OECD project supports justice reform in The Republic of Moldova by providing analytical products (thematic reviews and policy advice) and capacity-building for staff of the Ministry of Justice and other relevant institutions. Specifically, the OECD is aiming to provide a comprehensive justice review, including a functional assessment of the Ministry of Justice and an evaluation of the justice sector strategy.

- a comparative study on recovery of legal costs in criminal cases across four European jurisdictions and an analysis of practices in The Republic of Moldova;
- an assessment of Draft Law 423, parts of which were later reflected in the legal amendments adopted in July 2024;
- two training sessions on EU law for MoJ staff and members of Inter-Agency Working Groups related to Chapters 23 and 24 and on functioning of democratic institutions (69 participants; 47 women/220 men);
- visibility materials for a national law contest; and
- an ongoing draft legislative-drafting guide under discussion among relevant institutions.

Among the analytical products developed under this component, the assessment of Draft Law 423 is the only one that has clearly fed into a tangible reform outcome. Several of its recommendations appear reflected in the amendments adopted in July 2024, suggesting that the analysis did influence the drafting process to some extent. While isolating the project's specific contribution is challenging given the number of donor inputs and internal drafting dynamics, this remains the clearest example of a project output informing a normative change under this component.

For the remaining studies -particularly those on procedural deadlines and on the recovery of legal costs- uptake has so far been limited. Although these products responded directly to MoJ requests and interviews confirm they were relevant, technically sound and aligned with CoE standards, MoJ representatives explained that they were not able to act on them because institutional capacity was consumed by the demands of accelerated EU accession. Others also noted that preparations for the 2025 elections absorbed significant institutional time and effort, diverting attention and reducing available bandwidth for legislative follow-up. MoJ representatives insisted that these analyses may become relevant in the next policy cycle but their contribution to legislative reform remains limited at this stage.

On a separate but related note, CSO experts confirmed that analytical products of this kind are much needed in the sector, yet none were aware of the studies produced. While project staff explained that dissemination was delayed pending MoJ feedback, CSO representatives noted that the absence of broader publication or discussion further constrains visibility and policy influence. Without circulation beyond the Ministry, these outputs have limited prospects of informing public debate or upcoming reforms.

Finally, another key project output, the legislative drafting guide, has generated strong expectations among stakeholders regarding its potential to improve the quality of legal drafting, not only within the Ministry of Justice but more broadly across the Government of the Republic of Moldova.²⁰ However, the guide was still being finalised at the time of the evaluation, and no evidence of its effects is therefore available at this stage.

Taken together, evidence gathered points to a core effectiveness issue: outputs were relevant but not always actionable under prevailing institutional conditions. In this context, the partial uptake under Component 1 suggests that future support should be more strategically focused,

²⁰ MoJ representatives explained that the guide is to be used by all government departments, not only the MoJ. At the time of the evaluation, the legislative drafting guide had not yet been finalised or applied in practice. As a result, any assessment of its contribution to improved drafting quality would be premature.

prioritising implementation and operationalisation, particularly in relation to EU acquis alignment, over additional analytical or narrowly legislative inputs. Future activities may therefore need to more closely track the Ministry's evolving legislative agenda to ensure operational relevance and increase the prospects of uptake.

Immediate Outcome 1.2: MoJ staff are better equipped to communicate progress on justice reforms

Progress reports show that, under this outcome, the project delivered one training on institutional communication and media engagement for 12 MoJ officials (10 women, 2 men), aiming to strengthen the Ministry's ability to communicate reform progress, formulate coherent institutional messages and interact effectively with the press. The project also produced visibility materials for the national law contest for young lawyers and students (May 2025).

It is important to note that this immediate outcome was the one most affected by shifting priorities and the discard of originally planned activities, as several outputs were taken over by other donors or deprioritised by the Ministry. This limited the project's ability to deliver a more coherent or systemic package of communication support. As a result, while the activities implemented were relevant and appreciated, their contribution to broader changes in MoJ communication practices remains modest and difficult to assess.

Stakeholders interviewed generally agreed that the MoJ's communication practices and transparency have improved in recent years, citing developments such as more structured public messaging, increased transparency around reform efforts, and the establishment of consultative councils that engage civil society and others during crisis moments. However, multiple development partners, including IPRE and UNDP, also support or have supported the Ministry's communication functions. Because of this and given the relatively modest scale of the project's communication-related activities, it is difficult to isolate the project's specific contribution to these improvements. Communication gains appear to reflect the cumulative effect of several support streams rather than the impact of any single intervention.

Finding 6. Significant progress has been made toward strengthening the effectiveness, objectivity and transparency of judicial and prosecutorial self-governance, although full consolidation of new procedures and capacities will require time and continued support.

Under Intermediate Outcome 2 the project intends to support the judicial and prosecutorial self-governing bodies in their competences to select, appoint, promote, transfer, suspend and remove judges and prosecutors in an effective, objective and transparent manner in line with European standards.

Evidence from project reports, interviews, GRECO's 3rd Interim Report (2024), the EU Enlargement Report (2025) and CSO monitoring (LRCM, IPRE) all point in the same direction: both the SCM and SCP have made substantial procedural and institutional improvements since 2023. These sources indicate clearer, more transparent and predictable governance, more standardised selection procedures, improved reasoning in decisions and greater openness in their activities. GRECO notes that the Republic of Moldova has satisfactorily implemented 13 of 18 recommendations from its Fourth Evaluation Round, many directly linked to judicial and prosecutorial governance and disciplinary frameworks. The 2025 EU Enlargement Report also highlights improvements in both councils following the extraordinary vetting process and notes clearer procedures in selection and disciplinary practices.

Immediate Outcome 2.1: The SCM has the necessary internal procedures and capacities allowing for selection, appointment, promotion, transfer, suspension and removal of judges in line with European standards.

Evidence from project documentation, interviews and external monitoring indicates that the SCM has made substantial institutional gains during the project period. The project's technical assistance filled long-standing procedural gaps through the revision of a comprehensive set of internal regulations including: the Regulation on judicial inspection, the Regulation on disciplinary responsibility of judges and the SCM Disciplinary Board, the Regulation on the selection of judges of the Supreme Court of Justice and draft regulations on the selection criteria for judges and on the SCM Board for the selection and performance evaluation of judges. This regulatory strengthening was complemented by targeted trainings for judicial inspectors, joint disciplinary workshops with the SCP, capacity-building for SCM members in administrative matters, expert support to enhance communication capacities, and assistance to develop the Council's first-ever institutional strategy.

Interviewees consistently described the SCM as more transparent, organised and predictable than in previous mandates. This perception is corroborated by external sources such as LRCM's analytical monitoring, the EU Enlargement Report (2025) and the GRECO 3rd Interim Report²¹, all of which attest to positive changes in the SCM's procedures and decision-making practices. The EU Enlargement Report (2025), although insists in the need to continue reinforcing the SCM's capacity, similarly acknowledges that the SCM (and the SCP) are fully operational and that the framework for the regulation of accountability is now satisfactory.

"Reasoned judgments now include the number of votes for and against, as well as the dissenting opinions, which is a concrete improvement over the previous work of the SCM, which was criticized for hiding these details in its decisions"

"There have been significant positive developments in the conduct of competitions for the appointment of judges, both in terms of the transparency of the process and the qualitative assessment of the candidates through a weighted scoring system"

LRCM analytical note 2025²²

Beyond regulatory improvements, and despite a few persistent challenges most believe that the SCM has demonstrated stronger collegial functioning and more substantive deliberation. Interviewees described longer and more meaningful Council meetings or public debates on sensitive issues such as judges' freedom of expression. This shift toward open and deliberative governance reflects an evolving institutional culture that aligns more closely with European standards of judicial self-governance.

These institutional gains have been reinforced by the project's support in strengthening communication capacities, including training on institutional messaging and transparency. Members of the SCM interviewed noted that these efforts have supported more proactive engagement with the public and, most importantly, within the judiciary, an observation also echoed by CSOs and other stakeholders. Finally, changes in the internal culture of the SCM are reflected in perception gains among judges, an important proxy indicator of legitimacy and effectiveness, as shown in LRCM survey data which point to more positive views of the SCM's openness and communication practices:

"Judges report a positive evolution in their relationship with the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM), highlighting an increase in perceptions of transparency (from 61% in 2020 to 83% in 2025), reasoning

²¹ GRECOS 3rd interim report considers that all recommendations regarding judges are now implemented and that "progress has been made to amend the legal framework on disciplinary proceedings", paragraph 86.

²² Results of monitoring the activity of the Superior Council of Magistracy 2023 – 2024; Analytical note 2025; LRCM

behind decisions (45% → 79%), safeguarding the independence of the system (31% → 75%), and communication efficiency (37% → 72%).

LRCM Survey on the “Perception of judges, prosecutors, and lawyers on justice and corruption”, April 2025

Immediate Outcome 2.2: The SCP has the necessary internal procedures and capacities allowing for selection, appointment, promotion, transfer, suspension and removal of judges in line with European standards.

The institutional capacity of the SCP has been reinforced through training, new regulations, and the adoption of an institutional strategy. The project played a central role in revising a comprehensive package of prosecutorial regulations, covering selection, performance evaluation, disciplinary procedures and the functioning of the Evaluation Board, and delivered targeted trainings and joint workshops with the SCM to support their implementation. SCP members interviewed confirmed that many project recommendations were integrated into their newly approved regulations

Triangulated evidence from interviews, SCP documentation and independent monitoring indicates that these inputs have translated into visible improvements not only in procedures but also in day-to-day practices. Stakeholders pointed to a marked shift toward greater transparency as the SCP now holds open votes, livestreams its meetings, and regularly uploads recordings to its website and YouTube channel. CSO monitoring²³ confirms additional positive changes such as examining disciplinary appeals in public and ending the previously unlawful practice of voting during deliberation. Interviews with project staff and findings from GRECO’s third interim report also point to another important institutional shift: the prosecutorial inspection has become operational as an autonomous body within the SCP. This change marked a clear departure from previous practice, as the investigative arm of disciplinary proceedings was moved out of the Prosecutor General’s Office (PGO) and placed under the authority of the SCP. The project supported this transition by reviewing the regulatory framework that established the prosecutorial inspection within the SCP and by training newly appointed prosecutorial inspectors, thereby helping to lay the foundations for its effective functioning.

Progress is also evident in the quality and competitiveness of selection processes. SCP members reported using the assessments provided by the project to organise more objective and competitive contests, including for temporary and higher-level posts. Selection processes now rely on standardised criteria and publicly broadcast interviews. Independent CSO monitoring notes a clear increase in procedural consistency and transparency²⁴, and recent GRECO (2024) and EU Enlargement (2025) reports also acknowledge improvements in prosecutorial governance.

Interviewees further reported a notable increase in disciplinary activity compared to previous years, including sanctions and decisions previously considered unlikely such as the downgrading of a chief prosecutor or the dismissal of a senior prosecutor. While official reported data on sanctions remains inconclusive, these cases were widely cited as early signs of a cultural shift toward greater accountability.

²³ Transparency of activity of the Superior Council of Prosecutors (1 January – 31 October 2024), LRCM, November 2024

²⁴ According to the *Civil Society for European Integration Project “2nd Shadow report changes to internal regulations and the involvement of the Chief Prosecutor of the specialized prosecutor’s office or the Prosecutor General in selection processes contributes to increasing the transparency and objectivity of the evaluation process. Shadow Report No. 2 Assessment of the progress of the Republic of Moldova in implementing the European Commission’s recommendations on the Fundamentals Cluster in the context of EU accession; Civil Society for European Integration Project; 29 July, 2025; pg. 47*

Unlike the more extensive communication support provided to the SCM, assistance to the SCP in this area was relatively modest in the project's design.²⁵ Nonetheless, SCP members felt that the project's inputs prompted meaningful adjustments in their internal practices and helped broaden their outreach to prosecutors. A widely praised example was the SCP's first-ever tour of nearly 40 territorial prosecution offices, which fostered two-way communication, surfaced systemic issues, especially around working conditions, and informed follow-up actions such as infrastructure upgrades and improved internal reporting.

Despite these advances, progress remains uneven in areas affecting institutional independence. Structural constraints persist, including the composition of the SCP (still lacking a prosecutorial majority) and the partial implementation of GRECO recommendations. Interviews and CSO monitoring reports also highlight remaining gaps in the publication of agendas and decisions, inconsistencies in the reasoning of decisions, and limited administrative capacity, all of which continue to shape perceptions of independence.

Finding 7. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has made meaningful progress toward strengthening its training capacities and aligning its curricula and processes with European standards, though full consolidation of reforms depends on institutional leadership and legislative adjustments.

Intermediate Outcome 3

The project's support to the NIJ has contributed to steady and visible progress toward the intermediate outcome of enhancing judicial training and improving internal processes for transparent, skills-based selection and preparation of new magistrates. Across project documentation, interviews with NIJ staff and leadership, and independent assessments such as the GRECO 3rd Interim Report, IPRE's 2025 Shadow Report and the EU Enlargement Report (2025), the NIJ is consistently described as an institution undergoing a tangible process of modernization. Although some reforms pre-date the project and others depend on decisions outside the NIJ's control, there is broad consensus that the NIJ is moving closer to TAIEX recommendations and to other European training standards. One key reform area where progress remains insufficiently visible, however, concerns the role of the NIJ in judicial and prosecutorial entry pathways. In this regard, several stakeholders consulted perceived a growing preference for NIJ graduates in recent selection processes, an important benchmark in both the TAIEX report and the project's assessments. Still, NIJ internal statistics do not clearly reflect this shift, indicating that the anticipated change has not yet fully materialised. It is important to note, however, that the lack of an observable shift in consolidating the NIJ as the main entry point to the judiciary reflects a broader systemic issue that requires coordinated engagement by multiple institutions, notably the SCM and the SCP, as already noted in the TAIEX recommendations.

Finally, it is important to note that according to most stakeholders since the appointment of the new NIJ Director there has been a visible acceleration of reforms and that many of the expected results will emerge only in the next implementation period and therefore fall outside the scope of this evaluation.

Immediate Outcome 3.1: NIJ has strengthened capacities to deliver quality judicial training and for objective and transparent selection of future judges and prosecutors.

During the first two years of the project, the NIJ benefitted from several targeted capacity-building and institutional strengthening activities. Early on, a study visit to the Centre for Judicial Studies in Portugal introduced staff to European approaches to judicial training,

²⁵ 1 training for members and staff of the SCP (15 persons: 9 women and 6 men) about contextual elements of the institutional communication, formulating institutional messages and interacting with the press, aspects relevant to efficient, transparent and continuous communication about the steps taken in the justice reform process as well as crisis communication.

including mock trials, trainer recruitment models and modern methodologies for continuous training. The project also delivered training on the Kirkpatrick evaluation model and adult learning principles, which NIJ staff highly valued and considered highly relevant to the institutional needs. Additional support included the introduction of a continuous training module on EU law and a Training of Trainers module that enabled NIJ trainers to deliver two supervised EU-law sessions for magistrates and prosecutors. These steps, together with enhanced engagement in the European Judicial Training Network facilitated by the project, have begun to build the groundwork for strengthening the NIJ's training offer over time.

In parallel, the project supported a key institutional reform: the development of the NIJ's new institutional development strategy, a requirement under the Rule of Law Roadmap. NIJ representatives noted that the forthcoming strategy -currently close to finalisation- replaces the outdated 2021 document and was drafted through broad consultations with the judiciary and other partners. While it is too early to assess its effects, this process is expected to contribute to more coherent planning, clearer institutional priorities and, ultimately, a more structured approach to improving training quality.

External evidence confirms that progress in internal processes and selection governance is taking shape. For example, GRECO's 3rd Interim Report highlights the adoption of asset and interest declaration requirements for trainee magistrates, an integrity-related measure suggested in the project's assessment of Draft Law 423. IPRE's 2025 report also notes improvements in admission governance following the July 2024 amendments to the NIJ Law, which introduced more transparent, balanced examination committees. Stakeholders described these changes as an important shift toward reducing institutional bias and ensuring greater impartiality in candidate selection.

The process has not been without constraints. Many stakeholders pointed to prolonged periods of acting leadership, which limited strategic direction until the appointment of a permanent director of the Institute in March 2025. Interviewees also underlined that some reforms needed to strengthen NIJ processes -such as changes to recruitment, admission and graduation rules- require the active involvement of other stakeholders such as the MoJ, SCM or SCP.

Immediate Outcome 3.2: Revised training curricula and training methodology allow for effective and efficient training of current and new judges and prosecutors.

Progress on curriculum reform and training methodology has been particularly visible. By the second year, the project had completed two expert assessments of NIJ's initial and continuous training curricula in line with the TAIEX recommendations.

Independent sources confirm that some changes are evident in practice. CSO reports indicate ongoing curriculum updates, modernised teaching methods and the integration of new themes such as EU law, judgecraft, prosecutorcraft, legal writing and legal argumentation, areas directly supported by the project²⁶. The 2025 EU Enlargement Report similarly recognises the inclusion of EU law modules and more modern methodologies, while noting that several TAIEX recommendations remain outstanding.²⁷ NIJ staff interviews echoed this view and valued the project's support, described by some as "the most substantive" among development partners.

²⁶ Shadow report no.2: Assessment of the progress of the Republic of Moldova in implementing the European Commission's recommendations on the Fundamentals Cluster in the context of EU accession; Civil Society for European Integration Project; July 2025; pg. 39

²⁷ Outstanding TAIEX-related recommendations cited by the European Commission primarily concern procedural and systemic aspects, including the current model for recruiting candidates and appointing judges and prosecutors, as well as admission and graduation procedures at the NIJ, rather than curriculum content itself (European Commission, 2025 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy; SWD(2025) 758 final, p. 30).

Still, they stressed the need for further simplification and a more comprehensive reform of the curriculum, which will require legal amendments and continuous support in the future.

External experts also highlighted a reputational challenge for the NIJ, shaped by years of institutional instability and increased scrutiny linked to integrity requirements. They suggested that the NIJ could benefit from a more visible rebranding or communication effort. Planned project support for a communication strategy may help counter declining applicant numbers, a trend influenced by many factors, including low public sector salaries and stricter integrity requirements.

Finding 8. Progress has been made toward enhancing the legal capacities of the Constitutional Court and improving the accessibility of its rulings, but results are only starting to emerge and are still difficult to assess.

Intermediate Outcome 4: *“Constitutional justice is enhanced through increased legal capacities of members and staff of the Constitutional Court and increased accessibility of Constitutional Court rulings via a new database.”*

Evidence from progress reports and interviews indicates that the Constitutional Court (CC) received support broadly aligned with its institutional needs, particularly in the context of the country’s EU accession process. While IO 4.1 was framed around improving the quality of constitutional rulings through stronger legal reasoning and interpretation skills, implementation placed particular emphasis on strengthening EU law knowledge and familiarity with European standards through trainings, peer exchanges and technical support. This focus reflects both the Court’s evolving needs and wider contextual shifts linked to EU accession. Similarly, evidence points to progress in increasing the accessibility of Constitutional Court rulings, notably through the laying of key foundations for an upgraded rulings database and strengthened capacities of CC staff and the judiciary at large on admissibility criteria, including through targeted training on requests submitted under the exception of unconstitutionality.

Immediate Outcome 4.1: Improved legal reasoning and interpretation skills

During the first two years of implementation, the project delivered two substantial EU law trainings for CC judges and staff, covering EU institutions, decision-making processes, the relationship between the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and national constitutional courts, and human rights protection within the EU framework. Interviewees emphasised that these sessions filled a critical knowledge gap, as the Court increasingly faces questions requiring engagement with EU law and reported that they continue to use the materials (slides, summaries and reference documents) in their daily work.

As a result of these training sessions, staff reported greater awareness of EU law and more frequent reliance on EU legal sources in their work. However, it remains unclear how this enhanced capacity or knowledge has translated into tangible changes in the “quality” or content of rulings, as no systematic analysis of jurisprudence is available to assess such effects and these concepts are insufficiently specified. To date, monitoring data collected by the project has mostly focused on tracking references to ECHR jurisprudence²⁸ in CC rulings, an indicator that, while still relevant, provides only limited insight into how the support provided (notably training on EU law) has contributed to incorporating European standards, and whether this has led to changes in judicial reasoning and overall quality of CC decisions.

These constraints point to limitations in the current formulation of the outcome and indicator that could be addressed during the remaining implementation period. First, the nature of the outcome (“improved quality of rulings / stronger legal reasoning”) is normative, underspecified

²⁸ See annex V

and lacks a clear baseline to measure progress²⁹. Second, the outcome-level indicator (“number of references to European standards”) implicitly relies on an untested assumption that increased references reflect improvements in quality or legal reasoning. As a result, because neither quality, legal reasoning, nor baseline/target change are clearly defined, the monitoring data can only offer partial proxy evidence of change as it is not clear that by counting references you can tell you how European standards are being used, nor whether reasoning has improved. These limitations do not undermine the relevance of the project’s objective but they do affect the extent to which progress against that objective can be substantiated. A more precise formulation of the outcome and indicator, focused, for example, on the visible and reasoned incorporation of European standards into judicial argumentation, would strengthen the framework and allow monitoring data to better reflect changes in the quality of rulings over time.

Notwithstanding the current limitations in evidencing outcome-level change in judicial reasoning, the evaluation identified other forms of contribution generated by the project that are observable and valued by stakeholders. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the project’s role in raising the Court’s visibility and international profile. Support for major events, such as the Congress of the Conference of European Constitutional Courts (CECC) in Chişinău in May 2024 and the regional conference marking the 30th anniversary of the CC in May 2025, was widely praised for providing unprecedented exposure and reinforcing the Court’s standing within the broader European constitutional community. These events also served, according to progress reports, as practical forums for CC members and staff to exchange knowledge and practices with peers and representatives from other European Constitutional Courts and key European bodies, including the Venice Commission or the CJEU, thereby strengthening professional networks and comparative understanding. Other project-supported outputs, such as the bilingual protocol publication of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and the pocket edition of the latter, were also valued as tools that enhance public understanding of constitutional law and contribute to the Court’s broader communication efforts.

Immediate Outcome 4.2: Increased accessibility of Constitutional Court rulings

Progress on improving accessibility was also evident. The project finalised the concept, business requirements and technical design for a new database for CC rulings, drawing on consultations with various Council of Europe services and comparative insights from Türkiye Constitutional Court and Court of Cassation. At the time of the evaluation, the technical work was largely complete, while population of the database with rulings was scheduled to commence shortly, in line with the project’s implementation plan. Interviewees expressed strong confidence that the new system will significantly enhance transparency, user experience and public access once operational, especially given the Court’s current limitations in presenting information in a searchable and modern format. As with IO 4.1, evidence at outcome level remains partial, as the database is technically ready but not yet populated, and improvements in accessibility will only fully materialise once it is operational and consistently maintained. Nonetheless, key enabling conditions for increased accessibility have been put in place.

Beyond these technical foundations, and at a more procedural level, evidence shows that the project’s support to strengthening understanding of admissibility requirements and constitutional procedures has also triggered a few valuable behavioural and relational shifts³⁰. For example, according to key stakeholders in the Constitutional Court, the workshop on admissibility criteria for exceptions of unconstitutionality created a rare neutral space for

²⁹ According to the project log frame (443-383 Annex A (002)) baseline information about the number of references to European standards and practice was to be collected during the 1st Year of implementation. The log frame also acknowledges that “a regular need to increase the knowledge of judges and Court’s staff on constitutional matters, human rights and fundamental freedoms, legal writing, legal reasoning, etc.”

³⁰ Output 4.2.2

dialogue between Constitutional Court judges and lower-court stakeholders, promoting interactions that normally do not occur to avoid any perception of compromised impartiality. They described this exchange as highly useful for clarifying procedural misunderstandings and strengthening mutual trust.

Finding 9. While confidence in the justice system is still limited, emerging increases in trust coincide with -and may be partly driven by- steady advances in the implementation of justice sector reforms.

The project was originally designed to help the Republic of Moldova implement justice reforms in line with European standards, ultimately contributing to fairer justice delivery and better public perceptions of judicial independence, efficiency and service quality. In the project document, progress toward this long-term goal (impact) was expected to be reflected in improvements in public perceptions of the justice system.³¹

Although available evidence collected through external public opinion polls show still fragile levels of trust in the justice system, stakeholders consulted almost unanimously perceive a gradual improvement in trust, which they tend to associate with the ongoing reform process. In this context, and while attribution remains difficult, the project's support to key reforms aligned with European standards provides plausible grounds to consider that it may have likely contributed to shaping these perceptions. The **Public Opinion Barometer** (2025) confirms this trend and shows an encouraging and remarkable upward shift, with over 25% of respondents expressing some trust in the justice system, up from 15.2% the previous year. Those results are also broadly consistent with findings from other surveys, such as the **EU Neighbours East Survey** (2025)³² and the **UNDP Access to Justice Survey**³³ (2024) and show a modest but optimistic picture.

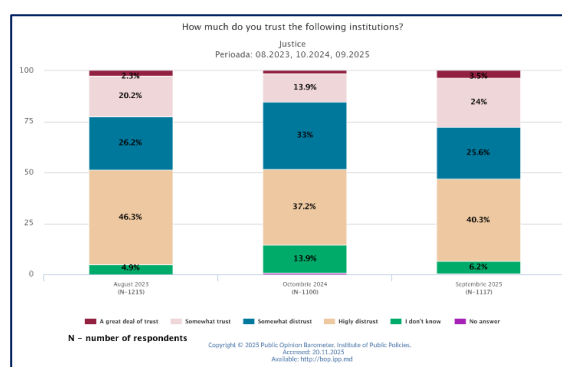


Figure 3: Public Opinion Barometer

However, assessing progress solely through this perception indicator provides only a partial and potentially misleading picture of the project's contribution to its overarching goal. Trust indicators tend to be slow-moving, are highly sensitive to political narratives, and often lag behind institutional reforms. Furthermore, the indicator captures one expected effect of justice reforms (trust), but not the reforms themselves, nor the degree to which these reforms reflect European standards. Moreover, shifts in public perception are influenced by a wide range of political, institutional, and societal factors, making it difficult to attribute changes to any single initiative. As a result, evaluating the impact of the project only against this indicator would understate achievements in areas where reforms have, in fact, advanced significantly. For a more meaningful assessment, it is necessary to look beyond perception data and examine evidence of actual reform implementation, which more directly reflects the project's stated goal of supporting alignment with European standards.

In this regard, all sources consulted point to clear progress. Ministerial sources consulted for this evaluation reported that around 60% of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy (JSRS) had been implemented by June 2025, and that implementation was expected to exceed 70% by year-end,

³¹ Project target for this goal is an increase of 3 to 5% in the perception level of the population regarding of judicial independence, efficiency, and service quality

³² In the 2025 survey, 76% of respondents reported low or no trust in the judicial system ("tended not to trust"). Comparisons with 2024 are not possible due to slight changes in question wording.

³³ "The findings reveal widespread distrust in Moldova's justice system, with 44.6% of respondents expressing little or no confidence, and only 11.2% reporting high levels of trust" (pg. 3)

a level largely regarded as satisfactory. The 2025 EU Enlargement Report similarly rated the implementation of the JSRS and its action plan as satisfactory, noting advances in judicial governance, disciplinary mechanisms and training, areas which are directly supported by the project. Moreover, as discussed in previous findings, GRECO's 3rd Interim Compliance Report (2024) finding that 13 of 18 recommendations were satisfactorily implemented, and The Republic of Moldova's rise from 82nd to 64th place in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (2020–2024)³⁴ reinforce a broader pattern of improvement.

In light of the changes and results discussed in earlier findings and the project's support to justice reforms aligned with European standards, the gradual improvement in public trust is an encouraging signal, but establishing direct causation with the project requires caution.

EFFICIENCY

EQ6: To what extent has the project management/human resources structure contributed to an efficient delivery of results?

EQ7: To what extent the Project management and decision-making process are efficient? How could it be improved (if needed)?

Finding 10: Budget execution is broadly on track, but uneven spending patterns and lack of financial disaggregation limit value-for-money analysis.

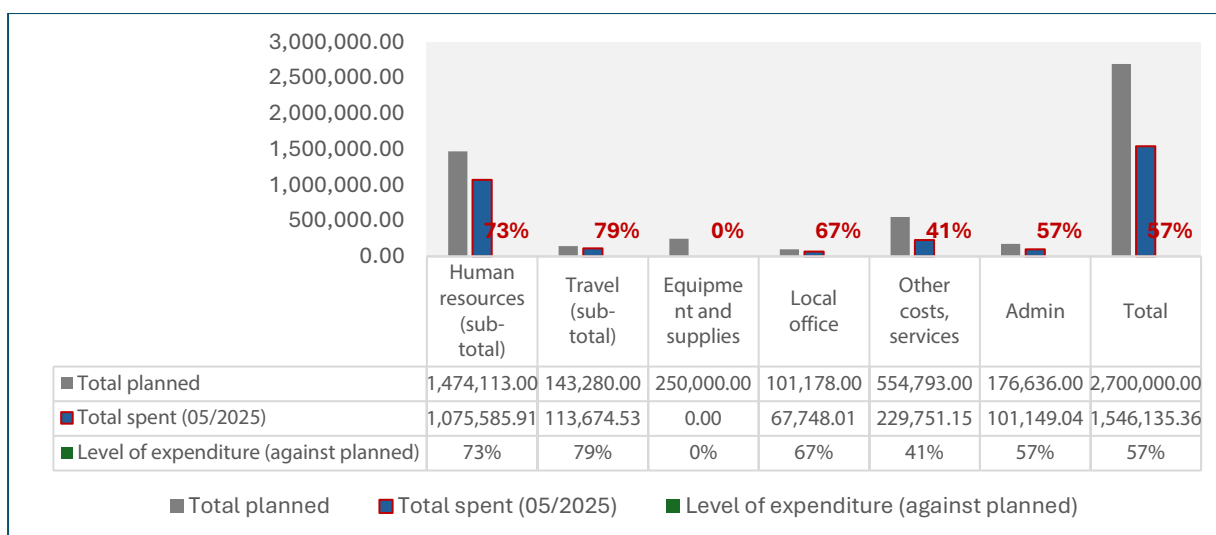
Financial execution during the first half of the implementation period shows moderate progress, with 57% of the budget disbursed by June 2025, mirroring the 53% of implementation time elapsed. This suggests an overall delivery rate broadly aligned with the project timeline. However, a closer look reveals uneven utilisation across budget lines. Consistent with a project centred on providing technical expertise, human resources account for roughly 70% of current expenditure. Yet, while staff costs³⁵ are almost fully executed (81%), local and international consultancy services remain below expectations (42% compared to planned resources) and several budget lines, including publications, visibility actions³⁶, and equipment³⁷ are heavily underutilised, indicating limited investment in outputs that could have amplified impact and outreach. Project staff explained that lower-than-anticipated expenditure under the equipment budget line also reflects savings generated through a highly competitive procurement process, which allowed the identification of a qualified local provider at a significantly lower cost. These savings were partially anticipated by the project and, after the first year of implementation, the corresponding budget allocation was reduced and redistributed to other budget lines.

³⁴ LRCM Justice & anticorruption reforms forum DIGEST, September 2024

³⁵ Staff costs include the total cost of both international and local staff

³⁶ Publication and visibility actions show a delivery rate of 11% and 9% respectively. According to financial reports facilitated by the project team no equipment had been acquired by May 2025.

³⁷ The low level of implementation under the "equipment" budget line is primarily due to the fact that a major expenditure related to the procurement of services for the development of the database of the CC (exceeding EUR 100,000), was not reflected in the financial report available to the consultant.



It is important to note that financial analysis is hindered by the lack of financial disaggregation by component or activity, as financial reports only track broad budget lines. This structural limitation makes it difficult to conduct a meaningful value-for-money analysis and obscures which areas of the project offer the highest return relative to cost. For example, with the data available it is not possible to assess the cost-effectiveness of study visits, an activity frequently used by the project and highly appreciated by participants, but whose measurable outcomes remain modest or, at the very least, uncertain.³⁸ In sum, while spending levels are broadly on track, the quality of financial execution and monitoring remains not granular enough, limiting more strategic resource management.

Finding 11: Activity delivery was affected by procurement bottlenecks, shifting institutional priorities, and external processes, making timeliness dependent on ad hoc adjustments.

Timely delivery has been uneven across components and affected by a mix of internal and external factors. Progress reports and interviews indicate that delays tended to appear in activities that depended on beneficiary readiness, such as the SCM and SCP's slower constitution of specialised boards following the extraordinary evaluation process, or the NIJ's prolonged period without a permanent Director.³⁹ Although these issues did not result in major delays, they did affect some institutions' ability to absorb project activities as originally planned. This situation was further compounded by the preparations for the national elections held in September 2025, which temporarily redirected the agenda and availability of government institutions. Moreover, the acceleration of the EU accession process placed additional pressure on the MoJ, reducing their capacity to engage with certain project activities. As a result, several planned outputs were postponed, delayed, or, in some cases, dropped altogether.

Internal procedural constraints also significantly affect timeliness. Project staff and beneficiaries consistently described complex and time-consuming procurement procedures as a major bottleneck, requiring extensive administrative effort that slowed implementation and diverted staff time away from more substantive work. Despite these delays, interviewees noted, and external stakeholders agreed, that the project often adapted effectively when external circumstances evolved, redirecting efforts toward emerging priorities. While the cumulative effect of procurement hurdles, institutional capacity constraints and shifting beneficiary demands suggests that timeliness has been fragile and reliant on ad hoc adjustments, there are

³⁸ In the first two years of implementation, and in addition to supporting the participation of key stakeholders in international events and professional networks, the project organised three study visits (Outputs 1.1.2, 2.1.2 and 3.1.2). Three additional study visits are planned for Year 3 under Outputs 1.1.2, 3.1.2 and 4.1.1.

³⁹ The institution remained under interim leadership until the appointment of Ramona Strugariu as Director of the NIJ in February 2025.

no indications that the full set of activities will not be completed within the project period, with only a short no-cost extension needed, if at all.

Finding 12: Efficiency was constrained by the high turnover of human resources and workload pressure experienced during the first period of implementation.

The human resource structure has been both a critical enabler and a constraint for efficient project delivery. Efficiency was undermined by significant staff turnover in the first implementation period, including vacancies in senior positions and the departure of key staff. These gaps slowed implementation and increased the burden on remaining staff. The project recently assembled a six-person team combining HQ-based and local staff, a scale that seems more appropriate for a programme-level workload. It is worth noting that, despite these pressures and with limited human resources in the early phase, the team made a considerable effort to maintain momentum and largely keep pace with planned activities. This was frequently acknowledged by beneficiary institutions, who valued the project's continuity and responsiveness even during periods of transition.

Finding 13: Governance arrangements enable coordination but are underused for strategic steering and adaptive management.

The project's governance arrangements, particularly the Steering Committee (SC), were widely regarded as effective coordination mechanisms. Meetings have taken place as scheduled twice a year, with participation from all beneficiary institutions and key observers including CSOs and development partners. Members of the SC consistently highlighted the SC's role in facilitating information exchange, ensuring transparency, and avoiding duplication, citing concrete examples where overlap with other donor initiatives was detected and corrected through SC discussions. However, the review of available minutes and the testimonies gathered for the evaluation suggest that SC's contribution to strategic decision-making and reflective learning remained limited. Meetings are generally short and operate primarily as approval and reporting forums, rather than spaces for structured discussion of strategic adjustments, cross-institutional synergies, or long-term planning. Much of the substantive coordination occurs outside the SC forum through pre- and post-SC bilateral exchanges between project staff and beneficiaries, leaving the formal governance structure underutilised as a tool for adaptive management.

Finding 14: Gaps between activity monitoring and outcome analysis limit strategic learning and results-based steering.

This finding reflects the evaluator's technical judgement, and it is based on the review of project documents, monitoring datasets and interviews with project staff. A more detailed technical analysis of log frame indicators is provided in Annex V.

The analysis suggests that technical weaknesses in how the project's design and monitoring system connect activities, outputs and outcomes may have constrained its ability to steer strategically and to demonstrate progress toward justice sector reforms in a more structured and evidence-based manner.

A key constraint relates to gaps in the structure of the project's log frame and M&E system. A review of progress reports and internal documents shows that the project team undertakes substantial analytical work on justice sector reforms, drawing on systematic analysis of developments in the justice sector, monitoring of recommendations from CoE bodies, and analysis produced by civil society organisations and other independent sources. These inputs provide a well-informed, high-level picture of the evolving reform context and are appropriately used to track broader sectoral developments at outcome level.

However, this outcome-level analysis is not clearly anchored in, or systematically connected to, the project's activity and output-level monitoring data. Existing delivery-focused monitoring tools, such as participation records, pre- and post-training surveys and feedback forms, are primarily used to assess the quality and immediate effects of individual activities and support operational adjustments. However, while fit for these purposes, it is the evaluator's opinion that these tools offer limited insight into how specific outputs contribute to intended outcomes and offer limited support for systematic reflection on the project's underlying assumptions.

As a result, activity-level monitoring and outcome-level analysis tend to operate in parallel, without a structured results framework that links delivered outputs to observed changes in the justice sector and supports plausible contribution analysis. This limits the project's ability to assess how, and to what extent, its support relates to the broader trends identified in narrative reports and reduces opportunities for structured, evidence-informed strategic reflection.

These limitations are reinforced by the limited revision of the project's original design over time. As noted in earlier findings, significant contextual shifts, particularly related to the EU accession process, led to substantial adjustments in activities and priorities. While these adaptations were widely welcomed by beneficiary institutions and positively assessed, the log frame and indicator framework remained largely unchanged, lagging behind changes in implementation focus.

This limited correspondence is evident in several indicators under Intermediate Outcomes 1 and 4. For example, some of the indicators associated to IO1 reflect ambitions that the project cannot realistically influence at its current scale (e.g. media visibility indicators under Outputs 1.2.1 and 1.2.2). For IO4, the project addressed the notion of "quality" in a substantively meaningful way, focusing on legal reasoning and interpretative capacity. This was to be achieved with targeted training activities, as well as peer exchange and networking initiatives and the broader understanding of quality operationalised through observable increases in the reference to European standards and practices in Constitutional Court rulings. However, its operationalisation in monitoring and reporting to date has focused primarily on references to European Court of Human Rights case law. As project implementation progressively shifted towards EU law and comparative constitutional dialogue in response to the accession process, this narrow application of the indicator provided a partial picture of the support delivered and its intended effects. The resulting gap does not reflect weak delivery, but rather indicators that no longer captures the nature of the project's interventions or the types of influence they are realistically positioned to exert.

All these factors suggest that while the project has adapted effectively at activity level, these adaptations have remained largely tactical rather than conceptual. Limitations in the log frame and M&E system make causal pathways difficult to articulate and test, constraining the project's ability to reflect strategically on how the support provided to beneficiary institutions is plausibly contributing to the changes observed at outcome level. In contexts where the project represents a prominent external influence, such as the self-governing bodies, these links are easier to discern. In others, for example the MoJ or the CC, the nature and misalignment of indicators make it more difficult to assess the extent to which project support has contributed to observed changes, such as improvements in communication capacity or legal reasoning respectively. Overall, these constraints have reduced opportunities for structured strategic reflection, and for revisiting assumptions and aligning monitoring more closely with the project's evolving theory of change.

SUSTAINABILITY

EQ8: To what extent are the positive outcomes and changes from the project likely to last beyond the project's completion?

EQ9: What could be approaches for a potential follow-up project action to build on and strengthen the sustainability of the achieved results? Which outcomes and outputs would be still relevant for the potential follow-up project action?

EQ10: What steps would need to be taken to increase the sustainability of the results during the remainder of the project implementation period?

Finding 15: The systemic nature of many outputs suggests they are likely to endure, as they strengthen procedures and regulatory frameworks. However, as in any reform process, their long-term sustainability will depend on institutional capacities and the direction of future political priorities.

The project has delivered important inputs (revised procedures and draft regulations, updated curricula, trainings, a database platform and strategic documents) that create real foundations for longer-term change. In areas such as the revision of SCM/SCP internal rules and the NIJ curricular updates, outputs have been formally adopted and are likely to be sustained, as they are embedded in formal regulatory texts and institutional processes. This is reinforced by the strong sense of ownership expressed by all beneficiary institutions, which reflects the high relevance of the support provided and further increases the likelihood that these outputs will be maintained over time.

Beyond these specific examples, the durability of outcomes is shaped by factors largely outside the project's control. As many stakeholders noted, sustainability also depends on modest and sometimes fragile institutional capacities. Some of these challenges are structural, such as understaffed secretariats, limited internal communication teams, and the general risk of staff turnover. Others are more specific, such as the limited specialist expertise within self-governing bodies or the recent political changes in the leadership of government institutions like the MoJ. These shifts can also influence whether reforms are implemented consistently and maintained over time. At the same time, the EU accession process is widely perceived as a positive driver, exerting continued pressure on institutions to sustain and deepen reform efforts.

Concrete examples illustrate this overall positive yet uneven picture. Draft regulations and methodological guidance for self-governing bodies' selection and disciplinary boards have been adopted and provide a durable legal basis. However, both the SCM and SCP boards acknowledge gaps in financial-forensic expertise, meaning that many workstreams such as vetting follow-up, disciplinary case processing or financial analyses will require continued capacity development and resources if these functions are to be sustained independently.

Another example reflects a more structural sustainability challenge about the communication support provided to the MoJ and the SCM. While the project has delivered useful tools, guidance and occasional training, these inputs remain largely punctual and project-driven, and there is limited evidence that they are embedded in stable internal structures. Interviewees consistently noted the in the absence of permanent, adequately staffed communication units, gains in messaging, media engagement and public outreach risks declining once external support ends.

A similar pattern applies to the legal analytical products developed for the MoJ. While these assessments were highly valued by MoJ representatives, evidence of their sustained remains

limited, as their future uptake will depend largely on political choices, legislative momentum and the transition beyond the current JSRS period, ending in 2025.⁴⁰

By contrast, sustainability prospects under IO3 are comparatively stronger. NIJ curriculum revisions, EU-law modules, ToT sessions and emerging institutional and communication strategies are widely seen as durable outputs. NIJ staff and external monitors noted visible institutional modernisation and highlighted that sustainability measures (such as pairing international experts with local trainers) are already in place. However, further steps are needed to ensure long-term impact, including embedding continuous professional development practices (regular ToT cycles, pre-/post-testing, Kirkpatrick-style evaluation), simplifying and consolidating curricula, and in some cases adopting legislative amendments to modernise admission and graduation procedures. Without periodic refresher trainings and stronger internal systems to track outcomes (e.g., follow-up surveys of trainees), the longer-term impact of capacity building risks dilution.

Finally, the project's support to more durable institutional tools, most notably the development of the Constitutional Court's decisions database and HUDOC-like search engine, has the potential to strengthen transparency, accessibility of jurisprudence, legal certainty over the long term. However, as the database was not yet operational at the time of the evaluation, its contribution to sustainability could not be assessed and will depend on effective roll-out and institutional uptake.⁴¹

Finding 16: Stakeholders identify clear priority areas where continued support is essential to sustain and deepen reforms

Across interviews with beneficiary institutions, civil society and development partners, a consistent set of future capacity gaps emerged. These reflect both long-standing structural limitations and the increased pressures generated by the EU accession process. Stakeholders agreed that, while the project has laid important groundwork, several areas require targeted follow-on assistance to ensure reforms consolidate into durable institutional practice.

A first cluster of needs concerns the SCM and the SCP. Although representatives consulted emphasised that sustainability is ultimately their own responsibility and that they should not remain dependent on external assistance, they acknowledged gaps in the specialised skills required for fully operational selection, evaluation and disciplinary functions, particularly in financial-forensic analysis, disciplinary case handling and methodological expertise. External experts similarly stressed the need to reinforce the disciplinary capacities of the newly established specialised boards.

The NIJ also emerged as a priority area for continued support. Interviewees highlighted the need for periodic Training-of-Trainers cycles, a streamlined curriculum and a more robust monitoring system capable of assessing learning impact over time. Legislative adjustments to admission and graduation procedures, echoing recommendations from the TAIEX peer review, were also cited as important for sustaining quality once donor support tapers off.

Finding 17: Most agree that a follow-up phase should shift from norm-setting to practice-building, while the current project can already take targeted steps to strengthen sustainability

Building on the priority needs identified by stakeholders it is clear that any follow-up support should move decisively from *developing rules* to *helping institutions apply them*.

⁴⁰ Both assessments provided were included in the JSRS Action Plan and therefore should have been implemented by December 2025

⁴¹ As already mentioned, at the time of the evaluation, the technical development of the database was largely complete, but population with rulings had not yet started, in line with the project implementation plan.

For the SCM and SCP, this means focusing on operationalising selection, evaluation and disciplinary procedures through practical, hands-on modalities such as mentoring, embedded expertise and specialised training (e.g. financial-forensic analysis for integrity checks, disciplinary standards and practices) and supporting them to effectively implement their newly adopted institutional and communication strategies.

For the NIJ, stakeholders agree that, beyond any required legislative amendments, the immediate priority is to consolidate recent reforms through regular Training-of-Trainers cycles, curriculum simplification and the introduction of monitoring tools capable of capturing training outcomes over time.⁴²

For the MoJ, future support would benefit from a more strategic reorientation toward the institution's evolving role in the EU accession process. The intensified *acquis* alignment agenda has reduced the Ministry's capacity to absorb broader analytical outputs, while increasing demand for highly specialised, rapid-turnaround assistance on legislative drafting and transposition. Any follow-up support should therefore be carefully prioritised, focusing on areas that can act as effective levers for justice reform and where the Ministry has both the mandate and the capacity to absorb and use external support.

Several steps to strengthen sustainability can already be initiated during the remaining project period. Short-term actions include shifting toward learning-by-doing modalities in which international experts work alongside national staff on real files, supporting the practical implementation of existing institutional and communication strategies to enhance performance, transparency and visibility, and preparing concise handover packages for key outputs. The project could also pilot light mechanisms to track training outcomes (for example, follow-up surveys) and enhance visibility through short public summaries of results. Upcoming Steering Committee meetings could also be used to secure beneficiary commitments and clarify the strategic direction of a possible next phase. This is particularly important for the MoJ and the CC, where future support must be carefully tailored to the most strategic institutional needs.

ADDED VALUE

EQ11: To what extent does the Council of Europe have a clear comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors in the implementation of the interventions in the Project's remit? What, if any, are the shortcomings compared to other implementers?

Finding 18. The Council of Europe enjoys a strong and clearly differentiated comparative advantage in justice reform, with only limited operational shortcomings compared to other implementers

Across interviews, stakeholders consistently highlighted the Council of Europe's normative authority as its strongest comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international actors. The ability to draw directly on Venice Commission standards, GRECO recommendations, CCJE/CCPE opinions, HELP modules and a wide network of European judicial actors was repeatedly cited as added value that few implementers can readily replicate. This combination of standard-setting authority, specialised expertise and access to European judicial practice was seen as particularly critical for reforms requiring alignment with European standards.

Interviewees further emphasised the CoE's capacity to translate these standards into practice through training, peer exchanges, study visits and exposure to comparative experience. The

⁴² For example, this could include providing capacity building support for the self-governing bodies to follow up on the use of competencies acquired through NIJ training and/or establishing coordination mechanisms that allow the NIJ and concerned institutions to assess the utility of training and adjust their offer accordingly.

organisation's convening power and long-standing relationships with European judicial networks were widely regarded as a distinctive asset that supports institutional learning and effective policy transfer.

A recurring theme across interviews was the value attributed to the CoE's sustained and consistent engagement in the Republic of Moldova's justice sector. With justice-related interventions representing a substantial share of the CoE's national portfolio, stakeholders perceived the organisation's support as cumulative and long-term, fostering trust and institutional familiarity. While this density of engagement sometimes made it difficult for beneficiaries to distinguish the contribution of individual projects, it was generally viewed as a strength rather than a weakness, reflecting the CoE's embeddedness and reliability as a reform partner.

Against this largely positive comparative positioning, only a limited number of shortcomings were identified in comparison with other implementers. The most frequently cited concerned the pace of administrative and procurement procedures, which were perceived as slower and less flexible than those of some other international actors. At the same time, a notable insight from interviews was that, despite frequent references to procedural and administrative rigidity, stakeholders consistently described the CoE's support as substantively responsive and adaptable. Interviewees emphasised the organisation's ability to listen, recalibrate and adjust assistance to evolving needs, often providing tailored guidance at critical moments when new challenges emerged. This perceived responsiveness was closely linked to the CoE's steady, long-term engagement in the justice sector which has allowed it to build institutional trust and retain contextual knowledge over time. In this sense, procurement-related constraints were seen as practical limitations rather than structural weaknesses, and did not alter the prevailing view that, compared to other implementers, the CoE remains one of the most reliable and programmatically flexible partners in the Republic of Moldova's justice reform landscape.

GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

EQ12: To what extent has the project mainstreamed the gender and human rights approach in its design and implementation, finally contributing to gender equality and promoted the principles of human rights approach?

Finding 19. Human rights considerations are systematically integrated in project outputs, while gender mainstreaming is visible but not consistently substantive and opportunities for more systematic application were occasionally missed.

A review of a sample of project outputs (see Annex VI), combined with interviews and progress reports, shows that human rights considerations were consistently and visibly integrated across activities. Expert assessments, training materials and institutional strategies routinely referenced human rights standards and ECHR case-law.

By contrast, the integration of gender dimensions was less consistent. While all outputs reviewed used gender-sensitive language and progress reports systematically included sex-disaggregated participation data, many deliverables did not go beyond these basic requirements. A positive example is the SCP strategy and action plan, in which gender equality

measures were explicitly incorporated.⁴³ This was confirmed through interviews with SCP members, who described gender considerations as having been deliberately integrated into the strategic framework as suggested by project experts. By contrast, in other technical products - such as the legislative drafting guidance or the technical paper for the SCM institutional strategy- gender considerations were minimally reflected or absent altogether. Although SCM members interviewed believed gender aspects were adequately addressed in the final strategy, this could not be independently verified, as the final document was not available for review. In the case of the legislative drafting guide, MoJ representatives regarded gender dimensions as “not applicable” and project staff acknowledged that these omissions, while not widespread, represented missed opportunities to integrate straightforward and relevant elements, such as guidance on inclusive language, consideration of differential impacts, or implications for different user groups.

While the project was not designed to address structural gender inequalities in the justice sector, gender dimensions would nonetheless be expected where relevant. Based on the review, this expectation was only partially met. In sum, human rights mainstreaming is clearly embedded and consistent, whereas gender mainstreaming is visible but not always substantive. More explicit guidance and clearer expectations regarding gender-responsive elements would help strengthen consistency in future phases.

⁴³ See for example, Action 4.2.3 in the SCP Strategy: Organising training sessions and thematic workshops for employees of the Prosecutor's Office, focused on promoting equal opportunities, combating gender stereotypes and other forms of discrimination, and developing inclusive communication skills.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the evidence presented in previous section, the evaluation derived the following conclusions

Conclusion 1. The project demonstrates very high strategic relevance, reflecting a design closely aligned with The Republic of Moldova's justice reform priorities and the Council of Europe's mandate, and reinforced by its capacity to adapt to rapidly emerging needs linked to the EU accession process. However, this relevance is uneven across components with Component 1 showing only partial alignment and limited strategic contribution. *(Based on findings 1-4)*

The project's logic and outputs correspond directly to the objectives of the JSRS, the Rule of Law Roadmap and the broader EU conditionality framework, embedding GRECO, Venice Commission, CCJE/CCPE and ECtHR standards into core institutional reforms. This alignment has been further strengthened by the project's ability to recalibrate activities in response to fast-evolving EU accession demands, allowing it to act as a timely and credible source of support on rule-of-law obligations. Taken together, these factors place the project in a strategically important position within the country's justice reform landscape.

At the same time, the relevance of Component 1 is less clear. Frequent adjustments during implementation, overlaps with other donor interventions and fluctuating ministerial priorities reduced the coherence and strategic focus of this component, limiting its contribution to overarching reform objectives. This contrast underscores that while the project is highly relevant overall, maintaining coherence across all components requires stronger mechanisms for strategic prioritisation and alignment with evolving institutional needs.

Conclusion 2. Overall, the project has delivered visible and meaningful progress across several immediate and intermediate outcomes, most notably in the areas of judicial and prosecutorial self-governance (IO 2) and in strengthening the NIJ (IO 3). Evidence of progress under Outcome 1 is more limited due to gradual dilution of strategic focus during implementation, and challenges in ensuring systematic uptake of analytical work. Progress under Outcome 4 is less straightforward to assess, primarily because of tensions between the way the outcome and its indicators were formulated and the way activities ultimately evolved in response to contextual and institutional dynamics. *(Based on findings 5-9 and 14)*

Overall, the project has contributed to substantive institutional advances, particularly across Intermediate Outcomes 2 and 3, including strengthened selection and disciplinary procedures in the SCM and SCP, improved transparency and decision-making practices, and clear steps toward modernised, European-aligned judicial training at the NIJ. Most of these gains reflect the project's high technical quality, strong beneficiary ownership, and its ability to adjust rapidly to EU accession pressures. These enabling factors, flexibility, credibility, responsiveness, and demand-driven engagement, explain why progress is strongest where the project worked directly with institutional actors able to absorb and apply support.

In contrast, progress under Outcome 1 has been modest. Frequent redesigns, limited MoJ absorption capacity, political turnover, and constrained dissemination meant that analytical outputs, though technically sound, were not consistently used. These factors diluted the component's strategic focus during implementation. For Outcome 4, evidence points to positive developments in EU-law competence and improved interaction with lower courts, but assessing progress against the formal outcome is challenging because indicators were not adapted to shifts in activity focus, reducing the evaluability of results.

Taken together, it can be safely concluded that the project has effectively contributed to early institutional results in several core areas, but consolidation remains fragile and uneven, with

progress dependent on continued capacity-building, clearer strategic prioritisation, and stronger alignment between the results framework and the reality of implementation.

Conclusion 3. Strong enabling factors (technical quality, adaptability, demand-driven assistance, local ownership) have supported project gains and achievements, while contextual and delivery constraints (MoJ absorption limits, crowded donor scenario, political turnover, limited dissemination) have occasionally hindered project effectiveness. *(Based on Findings 5, 6 and 7 (enabling/hindering dynamics referenced in Findings 8–10)).*

The project's adaptive management and high-quality technical support were decisive enablers that allowed rapid, credible responses to accession-driven needs. Conversely, shifting institutional priorities, frequent redesigns, limited MoJ capacity to absorb outputs, election-related leadership changes, and insufficient public dissemination have reduced the uptake and influence of some analytical products and affecting progress. These enabling and hindering factors explain why results are concentrated and more robust in self-governance and training components, but weaker and more uncertain for MoJ-facing legislative and communication objectives.

Conclusion 4. Delivery has been broadly efficient, with the project maintaining momentum and meeting planned timelines, although some efficiency gains were reduced by uneven resource use, procurement delays and workload pressures linked to earlier staffing instability. *(Based on Findings 10, 11 and 12)*

The project has maintained implementation largely on schedule, with financial execution generally aligned to the timeline and a team that continued delivering despite high turnover. However, several factors may have reduced value-for-money, including uneven spending across budget lines, underutilised consultancy resources, and procurement processes that absorbed significant staff time. The absence of financial disaggregation by component or activity further limits the ability to assess cost-effectiveness and constrains strategic decision-making, making it difficult to determine whether resources were deployed in the most efficient way. Combined with early HR vacancies and workload strain, these conditions suggest that some activities may have been delivered with higher transaction costs than optimal.

Conclusion 7. Governance arrangements enable coordination but are underused for strategic steering, limiting the efficiency of decision-making and adaptive management. *(Based on Findings 13 and 14 and reinforced by Findings 11–12)*

The Steering Committee offers a strong coordination platform that has effectively prevented overlap with other donors and ensured transparent information sharing, but its potential to operate as a strategic thinking body has not yet been fully capitalised. To enhance its contribution, the Committee could evolve from a primarily reporting forum into a space for strategic discussion, prioritisation and joint problem-solving. Strengthening its role in guiding shifts in priorities and longer-term planning would enable more timely strategic adjustments, reinforce cross-component integration and help shift the project from a largely reactive adaptation model to a more deliberate and efficient decision-making approach.

Conclusion 5. The likelihood that project-supported reforms will outlast the project is moderate to strong where outputs have been embedded into formal regulations and institutional processes but remains fragile in areas dependent on specialised capacities and stable internal structures. *(Based on Findings 15 and 16)*

Outputs such as the revised SCM/SCP regulatory frameworks, updated NIJ curricula and teaching methodologies, and the Constitutional Court database architecture have strong prospects for durability as they are already institutionalised, formally adopted, and backed by high beneficiary ownership. However, the long-term durability sustainability of these reforms still depends on institutional capacities that remain uneven and, in some cases, fragile

(particularly disciplinary and financial-forensic expertise, communication functions, and staff continuity within justice sector institutions). Without targeted reinforcement of these capacities, there is a risk that some reforms will remain “on paper” rather than becoming fully embedded in organisational practice. Sustainability is further influenced by leadership changes, overstretched secretariats, and the pace of EU accession reforms, which can either accelerate or hinder long-term consolidation.

Conclusion 6. Sustainability will require a shift from norm-setting to practice-building, both during the remainder of implementation and in any follow-up phase, with priority given to strengthening specialised functions where institutions cannot yet operate independently. (Based on Findings 16 and 17)

The majority of stakeholders consulted agree that a follow-up phase should focus on operationalising existing reforms through hands-on mentoring, embedded expertise, targeted capacity-building for SCM/SCP boards (disciplinary casework, integrity checks, evaluations), periodic ToT cycles and curriculum consolidation at the NIJ, and support to the Constitutional Court to further embed European human rights standards in judicial reasoning and fully operationalise the judicial rulings database. During the current project period, sustainability can be enhanced through practical measures such as learning-by-doing modalities, preparing handover packages for key outputs, piloting simple outcome-tracking tools (e.g., short follow-up surveys), and using Steering Committee meetings for more strategic discussions. These steps would help transform technical products into durable institutional routines and ensure that the gains achieved to date continue to mature beyond the project’s lifespan.

Conclusion 7. The Council of Europe brings an exceptional and widely recognised added value to The Republic of Moldova’s justice reforms, combining unmatched normative authority with deep technical expertise, long-standing institutional partnerships and a responsiveness that beneficiaries consistently describe as indispensable. (Based on Findings 2, 18)

Stakeholders unanimously emphasise the CoE’s unique capacity to translate GRECO standards, Venice Commission opinions, CCJE/CCPE guidance and European judicial practice into concrete institutional reforms. Its expert networks, convening power and comparative insights from across Europe have enriched the country’s reform processes supported by the project and provided the type of credible, standards-based support required for EU alignment. Beneficiary institutions also repeatedly praised the CoE’s flexibility and its ability to deliver tailored guidance at critical moments, highlighting its long-term presence as a key source of trust and continuity. While certain administrative, visibility and internal coherence constraints can limit the full projection of these contributions, they do not diminish the overwhelming consensus that the CoE remains one of the most authoritative, reliable and responsive partners in the Republic of Moldova’s justice reform landscape, bringing a comparative advantage that is both substantive and deeply valued.

Conclusion 8. Responsiveness is a major asset of the project but requires stronger strategic anchoring to avoid dilution over time. (Based on Findings 4, 5 and 14)

The project’s flexibility and adaptive capacity clearly strengthened institutional ownership and enabled it to respond effectively to rapidly evolving priorities linked to the EU accession process. As documented in Findings 4, 5 and 14, responsiveness to requests from beneficiary institutions was widely valued by stakeholders and enhanced the project’s perceived relevance and legitimacy.

At the same time, the evaluation found that when such adaptations were made incrementally and without systematic strategic discussion, they created risks of reduced coherence over time. This was most visible under IO 1, where a series of justified adjustments in response to immediate institutional needs gradually shifted the emphasis of activities, without always being

explicitly reviewed against the intended results framework or longer-term strategic objectives already outlined in the findings. This does not suggest that responsiveness to beneficiary priorities was misplaced but highlights the need for more deliberate use of existing governance spaces, particularly the Steering Committee, to periodically reflect on emerging needs, assess opportunity costs, and confirm continued alignment of activities with expected outcomes. Stronger strategic steering would help ensure that flexibility continues to reinforce, rather than inadvertently dilute, relevance, effectiveness and sustainability in any future phase or follow-up programme.

Conclusion 9. Human rights were consistently mainstreamed across the project, but the integration of gender equality considerations needs to be more systematic. *(Based on Finding 19)*

The project has consistently mainstreamed a human rights approach throughout its design and implementation, with human rights standards and ECHR case-law consistently integrated into analytical outputs and activities contributing to promoting human rights principles within beneficiary institutions. Gender mainstreaming, although present, was less systematic. While gender-sensitive language and sex-disaggregated data were consistently applied, many technical outputs did not go beyond these minimum requirements, and gender considerations were sometimes deemed “not applicable.” As a result, the project’s contribution to gender equality has been more limited and largely indirect, suggesting the need for a more intentional integration in future phases.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations were developed by the consultant with input from validation meetings with both the project team and the EUD.

Issue	Priority	Recommendation	Target Group Affected by Recommendation	Responsibility	Based on Findings
Low uptake and limited strategic use of analytical outputs (Intermediate Outcome 1)	High	1. Strategically refocus Component 1 to maximise uptake and strategic traction. Clarify, in close dialogue with the Ministry of Justice and through the Steering Committee, a limited set of high-priority areas where analytical support is most likely to be absorbed and used, taking into account institutional capacity and evolving EU accession demands. Ensure that analytical outputs are not only technically sound but also realistically scoped, well sequenced, actively disseminated and linked to ongoing reform processes, with clear follow-up arrangements to support use and institutional change.	SCM, SCP, MoJ, CC, NIJ	Steering Committee	4, 5
Gaps in M&E system do not facilitate strategic decisions	High	2. Strengthen results-oriented monitoring to support strategic steering and clarify the project's contribution logic. Maintain a streamlined M&E system centred on a small number of clearly articulated outcome-level indicators that reflect the project's core change pathways. Particular attention should be given to preserving a clear vertical logic between activities, outputs and outcome-level indicators, so that the project can better understand where its contributions are plausibly occurring and where they are more limited. When activities or priorities are adapted in response to evolving institutional or political conditions, outcomes and indicators should be reviewed and, where necessary, adjusted in a transparent and documented manner. This would help ensure that monitoring supports learning and strategic decision-making rather than focusing primarily on activity-level tracking.	All beneficiary institutions	CoE Project Team; CoE HQ M&E Advisors; Steering Committee	5-9,14
Inconsistent integration of gender equality elements	Medium	3. Strengthen the integration of gender equality across all components and outputs. Introduce light but systematic tools across outputs: brief gender notes for major outputs, simple gender analysis prompts in ToRs, and minimum requirements for gender visibility in deliverables. Encourage beneficiary institutions to reflect these elements in their own processes and training programmes.	SCM, SCP, NIJ, MoJ, CC	CoE Project Team	19
Delays caused by contextual volatility and institutional changes	High	4. Consider a short no-cost extension to consolidate achievements and address delays caused by contextual volatility. Consider a short (3–6 month) no-cost extension to consolidate results and improve uptake, and smoother beneficiary engagement, particularly as institutional reforms and political conditions continue to evolve.	All beneficiary institutions	CoE HQ; CoE Project Team; EUD; Steering Committee	10, 11,12
Limited communication	Medium	5. Enhance strategic communication and visibility. Strengthen strategic communication, early dissemination planning, and tailored messaging to maximise the visibility and influence of project outputs.	SCM, SCP, MoJ, NIJ, CC	CoE Project Team; CoE HQ	5

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ANNEXES (Separate volume)

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