

Final report

Evaluation of programmes financed under the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms for the period 2014–2021

Evaluation of the Programme “Justice and Home Affairs”

June 2025

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Date: 11 June 2025



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The undersigned hereby confirm that the information presented in this report is accurate and reflects the findings and conclusions of the authors.

PROJECT SHEET

Report	Final report
Contract number	04-C-U-1064/24-21
Name of the project	Evaluation of programmes financed under the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms for the period 2014 - 2021
Evaluated Programme	Justice and Home Affairs
Duration	16 December 2024 – 16 June 2025
Client	Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds
Address	Miramarska 22, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
Contractors/ Address	WYG Consulting Ltd., Ulica grada Vukovara 269 G, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia, OIB: 04303799227

Acronyms

ADR: Alternative dispute resolution

EEA: European Economic Area

ESF: European Social Fund

EU: European Union

EQ: Evaluation question

MC: Municipal Court

MoJ : Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation

MRDEUF: Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds

NMFA: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NO FM: Norwegian Financial Mechanism

NRRP: National Recovery and Resilience Plan

NFP: National Focal Point

PDP: predefined project

PO: Programme Operator

PP: Project Promoter

ToR: Terms of Reference

TSI: Technical Support Instrument

USA: United States of America

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Executive summary

Figures speak loudly:

Programme short name	HR-JUSTICE
Programme Operator	Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation (HR)
Host Programme Area	PA21 Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Judicial System, Strengthening Rule of Law
Financial Mechanisms	Norway Grants
Programme grant in EUR	€ 14,540,000.00
Programme co-financing in EUR	€ 2,565,882.36
Final incurred amount in EUR	€ 15,974,905.92
Final incurred rate %	93.39 %

*As of 09.04.2025 and subject to final approvals. Source: Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation

The absorption rate of available funds stood at 93%, a notable achievement given the scale and diversity of the Programme. Such a high level of fund utilization within the planned timeframe points to exceptionally efficient implementation. Identifying the factors that contributed to this efficiency was one of the primary objectives of this evaluation.

Another key goal was to assess the extent to which various project activities within the Programme were implemented and their translation into the desired outputs.

The most crucial aspect of this evaluation was to analyze and provide an informed assessment of how these outputs will contribute to the achievement of the intended, sustainable outcomes and influence the future trajectory of the Croatian judiciary.

Our findings have revealed the following:

1. The Programme was well designed and consistently implemented

All components (PDPs) and activities were carefully designed, thoroughly prepared and consistently implemented. All activities included (i) precise and early identification of issues/needs; (ii) clear definition and mutual understanding of issues/actions/expected results (iii) comprehensive, professional and often multi-disciplinary analysis of the respective current situation/problems; (iv) comparison with several other approaches/experiences; (v) decisions and recommendations for improvements; (vi) implementation of such recommendations; (vii) training and education; (viii) monitoring, measuring and reporting on implementation and changes achieved.

2. The Programme was very well monitored and documented

All programme documentation – from documents forming the legal framework for implementation to interim and final reports and financial documentation – provides not only a clear, empirical record of what, why, how, where, when and by whom something was done, but also tells an interesting story of a joint effort aimed at achieving the agreed results and overcoming whichever hurdles and obstacles on this path.

3. The Programme is completed

All project activities were implemented and completed. The vast majority of the agreed outputs were achieved and specific Indicators were reached. And many desired Outcomes have already started to shape, while others seem to be on a good path to bring change over time.

4. The Programme Operator had sufficient institutional and administrative capacities for implementing the Project (but not without difficulties)

The interviewees stated that work processes specific to Programme/Project implementation did not significantly differ from comparable processes in their usual work environment (such as procurement, contracting, finances, payment, reporting, and similar) or work on other projects. In segments where such processes were maybe somewhat different and slightly more demanding, they managed to adapt as that would result in some benefits (better monitoring, reporting, discipline in implementation, and similar). In addition, practical workshops on implementation specifics were conducted for all involved personnel (on programme operator/promoter levels) in the early phases of implementation.

5. The content of the Programme was well-selected and relevant

All interviewees confirmed that the content of all components and activities envisaged by the Programme/Projects was well selected according to national needs, thoroughly prepared and consistently implemented, and would not change any of them even in hindsight. (See also under "Relevance/Coherence", pg. 17.)

6. Benefits resulting from the Programme are sustainable

All persons interviewed are of the opinion that benefits resulting from the Programme will endure the test of time and can only grow and gain in strength over time. They could not think of any changes (legislative, demographical, technological) that could impair them within the foreseeable future.

In addition:

7. The Programme prompted a high level of internal cooperation in Programme implementation within the sector

All participants highlighted excellent and productive cooperation with other local colleagues, organisational units and entities participating in Programme implementation (such as procurement, accounting, IT and PR sectors within the MoJ, courts, State Judicial Council, probation service, prison system, Judicial Academy, PMU, MRDEUF and others).

8. There was high awareness about the Programme within the sector

All individuals interviewed during the evaluation process (those directly involved in the implementation and those not - users) were well informed about the Programme and aware of the specific features of the Programme, which implies a high level of interest and synergy within the Programme and externally. Interviewees had an advanced knowledge of "other" projects/activities within the Programme and were able to list

majority of particular topics the Programme was addressing. Interview participants were well acquainted with the bilateral aspect of the Programme and specific contribution of Norwegian institutions and colleagues.

9. Delays were mostly attributable to Vis Maior events

Apart from the COVID pandemic and earthquakes in Croatia (2020) none of the interviewees experienced any other events or situations that caused significant delays or stalling of activities on Programme implementation, especially not ones that could be attributable to Programme design or implementation structure or processes.

And as an added value:

10. Flexibility

All interviewees with previous experience of working on comparable projects have noticed and accented positive flexibility in Programme implementation – i.e. ability to respond to objectively changed circumstances for the purpose of achieving the agreed results and outcomes within such changes. For example, the flexibility to change activities and the ability to reallocate financial resources between budget items or activities.

11. Visibility and communication elements

On a direct question on the usefulness (cost/effort/benefit) of various visibility, media and public communication activities within the Programme, all participants answered that they found these activities extremely useful for communicating project results.

12. Increased capacity of all involved

All respondents stated that their participation in the Programme has enriched them professionally, and that they gained new skills, knowledge and understanding of different approaches.

All feel that the respective entity and/or organizational unit where they work has gained additional institutional capacities and capabilities as a result of participation in the Programme.

13. The Programme had a positive impact on beneficiaries and target groups

All interviewees noticed, in one way or another, that through their engagement in the Programme, they were able to view their work, their profession and their institution through different optics. As a side-effect of the cooperation, comparison, joint efforts and working together on solving problems, or improving work conditions, they developed a stronger sense of professional pride, a stronger sense of belonging and a stronger identification with their institution/place of work. All respondents stated that they notice increased enthusiasm and motivation in their daily work both in themselves and in their colleagues. It can reasonably be expected that this will eventually result in better services to end users/citizens. (See also under "Sustainability/Impact", pg. 30)

And what made a difference:

14. Bilateral cooperation was seen as an added value by all participants

All interviewees expressed only positive experiences and highlighted excellent cooperation with Norwegian partners – both on institutional and personal level. In that they especially appreciated the following:

- cooperation with institutions and professionals which in practice and on a daily basis work on the same or similar tasks and problems;
- expertise, professionalism, openness and collegial approach by their Norwegian peers;
- opportunity to compare their work, systems and problems with that of their Norwegian peers and ability to better “self-assess” their situation;
- opportunity to, together with their Norwegian colleagues, meet other colleagues from European countries and compare their approaches and achievements in the same fields;

Introduction

This final report is delivered under the evaluation of the Justice and Home Affairs programme under the 'Evaluation of programmes financed under the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms for the period 2014–2021' contract, managed by the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (MRDEUF), serving as the National Focal Point (NFP) for this programme. This final report contains a short description of the context, the methodology used, answers to the evaluation questions (EQs), findings, recommendations and annexes. The purpose of this service is to evaluate the Justice and Home Affairs programme and the extent to which its objectives, including expected outcomes and outputs, were achieved. The evaluation assessed the relevance and coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the programme and its components, the importance and value that bilateral cooperation added to the results and outputs, and to the daily implementation of the programme's activities.

Context

The Justice and Home Affairs programme

In June 2019, an agreement was signed between the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the MRDEUF of Croatia establishing the framework for the Justice and Home Affairs programme, an initiative aimed at strengthening the rule of law in Croatia.

The programme is implemented by the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation of the Republic of Croatia (MoJ) as the Programme Operator (PO), with relevant organisational units of the Ministry acting as project promoters. The maximum amount of the programme was EUR 17 647 059, including up to EUR 15 million from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, and up to EUR 2 647 059 from national funding. An additional amount of EUR 585 000 was allocated from the Bilateral Relations Fund.

The programme's overarching objective was to enhance judicial and correctional systems to **ensure fairer, more efficient legal processes, and improve public safety**.

The programme's objectives were to be achieved through two key expected outcomes:

- **Expected outcome 1: Increased effectiveness and efficiency of the judiciary**
- **Expected outcome 2: Improved correctional services**

These expected outcomes should be realised through four pre-defined projects¹ (PDPs) addressing specific areas within the justice and home affairs sectors.

¹ For short descriptions of projects, see Annex 1

Three PDPs were to contribute to the first expected outcome. They focused on enhancing the functioning of the judiciary in Croatia by supporting key reforms and improvements:

- PDP 1 – Reconstruction of the Municipal Court Building in Split and Promotion of E-Services
- PDP 3 – Revising the Methodology of the Evaluation of Judges' Performance
- PDP 4 – Reinforcing the System of Court-Annexed Mediation

The second outcome was expected to be achieved through one pre-defined project: Strengthening Human Rights Protection and Public Safety through Improving Capacities of the Croatian Probation Service (PDP 2).

Programme structure and management

Legal and regulatory framework

The programme and its implementation were regulated by a set of fundamental legal instruments, including:

- Regulation on the Implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 (including subsequent amendments) (NO FM)
- Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 (MoU)
- The Law on Ratification of the MoU
- Programme Agreement
- Programme Implementation Agreement
- Government's Decision on Establishing the System of Management and Use of the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms
- Detailed Description of the Management and Control System
- Public Procurement Act
- Obligations Act
- and various guidelines, manuals, templates and internal acts prepared and adapted specifically for this purpose.

Programme management structure

Implementation arrangements for the Justice and Home Affairs Programme on the Croatian side consisted of the following entities/bodies.

- **National Focal Point:** Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (as per NO FM Regulation)
- **Programme Operator:** Ministry of Justice (subsequently: Ministry of Justice and Public Administration; Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation)
- **Programme Promoters:**
 - PDP 1 – General Secretariat of the Ministry of Justice, with the Judicial Academy as Project Partner

- PDP 2 – Directorate for Prison System and Probation Services of the Ministry of Justice
- PDP 3 – Directorate for Organization of Judiciary of the Ministry of Justice, with the State Judicial Council as Project Partner
- PDP 4 – Directorate for Civil, Commercial and Administrative Law of the Ministry of Justice, with the Judicial Academy as Project Partner
- **Programme Management Unit:** For ensuring the mechanism for independent financial control and verification, as well as monitoring and reporting, a PMU was established within the Independent Sector for Strategic Development and Projects of the Ministry of Justice.
- **Cooperation Committee** - The Cooperation Committee was established for the purposes envisaged in Article 4(4) of the NO FM Regulation, i.e. as an advisory body, and was actively involved in the programme from its inception and throughout its implementation.

Norwegian Courts Administration as Donor programme partner and the Norwegian Correctional Service as project partner were actively involved in implementation. The Council of Europe was actively participating in the role of International Partner Organisation.

Projects

The Justice and Home Affairs programme aimed to improve Croatia's judicial and correctional systems through the following targeted projects. By increasing the efficiency of the judiciary and enhancing correctional services' capacity, the programme supports Croatia's commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring a more effective, transparent, and fair legal framework for all.

PDP 1: Reconstruction of the Municipal Court (MC) Building in Split and Promotion of e-Services (contributing to expected outcome 1)

This project comprises the following activities.

- **Reconstruction of the MC Split building** –The Municipal Court in Split was an example of the infrastructural problems many Croatian courts have. It operated in two locations, neither of which was built to serve as a court building, plus the main building is quite dislocated from the city centre. To solve these problems, an ex-department store building in the centre of Split was secured for reconstruction and adaptation (including the addition of a third floor) into a court building. This reconstruction and furnishing of the building were carried out under this project and expected to dramatically improve the working conditions for judges and court employees, as well as for numerous citizens of Split, its surroundings and neighbouring islands.
- **Promotion of e-services** – Despite the existence of several e-services within the judiciary, citizens were not using them. The problem was to be tackled in a five-step approach:
 1. analysing citizens' awareness and use of e-services and their preferences,

2. organising two visits to Norwegian colleagues to exchange ideas, establish working relations with the Norwegian Courts Administration and electronic registers operators,
 3. drafting recommendations for improving the existing e-services in the judiciary and introducing new ones,
 4. building and launching a promotional campaign (on TV, radio, print, social media, etc.) on the e-services,
 5. conducting a public survey to measure the effect of the promotional campaign.
- **Strengthening judges' capacities** through the secondment of Croatian judges to the European Court of Human Rights so that they improve their knowledge of human rights, observe business processes in the Court (case flow and management), and gain experience in the operation and administration of the Court to use this knowledge in their courts.
 - **Strengthening bilateral cooperation** between the Republic of Croatia and the Kingdom of Norway.

PDP 2: Strengthening Human Rights Protection and Public Safety through Improving Capacities of the Croatian Probation Service (contributing to expected outcome 2)

This pre-defined project was designed as a vehicle for reaching outcome 2: Improved Correctional Services. It included the following components.

- **Implementation of electronic monitoring in the Republic of Croatia**, through renting 150 radio-frequency bracelets with associated servers, software and technical support.
- **Upgrading probation services' material and technical working conditions** through upgrading infrastructure in the existing premises and purchasing new vehicles for probation offices, the Central Office and the Electronic Monitoring Centre.
- **Improving tools for enforcing correctional measures and sentences** by producing the scientific validation of the Risk Assessment System (RAS) and its adjustment.
- **Strengthening cooperation between prisons and the probation system**, first by analysing the needs and possibilities for better cooperation between prisons and probation systems and then by organising periodic meetings and training events for prisons and probation employees on the national and regional levels, and finally by starting a pilot project of strengthened cooperation between the two systems.
- **Strengthening bilateral cooperation between donor and beneficiary State entities** was another component.

PDP 3: Revising the Methodology of the Evaluation of Judges' Performance (contributing to expected outcome 1)

The Methodology for the Evaluation of Judges' Performance ('the Methodology') is a fundamental document based on which the performance of each judge in Croatia is

measured. It sets forth the principles on which the quantity and quality of judges' work is evaluated. Over the years, the Methodology was regularly reviewed and amended. However, there were situations where some groups of judges felt that the Methodology did not recognise certain specifics of their work and that it should be more objective.

To address these issues, the project envisaged a detailed analysis of the existing system for evaluating judges' performance; study visits to three EU countries, based on which a comparative analysis of the evaluation systems would be produced; drafting recommendations for improvement of the Methodology; and a final conference where such recommendations would be presented and discussed.

PDP 4: Reinforcing the System of Court-Annexed Mediation (contributing to expected outcome 1)

Croatian courts' efficiency, and especially the duration of court proceedings, was perceived as low by the public and court users. However, although various alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms, including mediation (previously called 'conciliation'), have existed in Croatia for several decades, these are consistently ignored and/or underutilised by the public/parties.

The project aimed to address the situation by:

- analysing the existing system of mediation in Croatia (only court-annexed),
- offering comparative analysis with mediation systems in several other EU Member States and the United States of America (USA), with recommendations,
- analysing the sociological and/or legal reasons behind such underutilisation, with recommendations,
- drafting the manual on court mediation,
- launching an extensive awareness-raising campaign on the benefits of mediation,
- conducting a training programme on mediation for the supply (judges, court staff, lawyers, mediators) and demand sides (lawyers, civil servants, state attorneys, education system, civil society) of the system.

Bilateral cooperation with Norwegian partners was envisioned for several project activities, most importantly in analysis of Croatian mediation system in comparison with other countries.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluators used standard data collection and analysis methods to answer the evaluation questions. Relevant documents and data from secondary (administrative) sources formed the backbone of data sources. They were supplemented by primary sources, relying on interviews and field visits. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in analysing the collected data. The evaluation was based on data triangulation using the sources and methods described below.

Desk research

The desk research relied greatly on the repository of available programming documents, and the preliminary analysis of available documents and data sources².

Interviews

Interviews, as a qualitative research method, supplemented and clarified the results of the desk research and enabled in-depth insight into programme implementation and achievements. The target groups encompassed the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia as the Programme Operator, and the Project Promoters of the four implemented projects. Eight semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Programme Operator and Project Promoters were conducted in person and online for the evaluation:

- 17 February 2025: Mr Domagoj Maršić (Programme Operator, PMU)
- 21 March 2025: Ms Karla Dragica Lepej (PDP 1, Project Manager)
- 21 March 2025: Mr Vanja Bilić (PDP 4, Project Manager)
- 26 March 2025: Judge Dražen Maravić (PDP 1, Court President)
- 27 March 2025: Judge Daniela Pivčević (PDP 1, Judge seconded to ECHR)
- 31 March 2025: Mr Goran Brkić (PDP 2, Project Manager)
- 04 April 2025: Ms Martina Vrdoljak, Ms Luca Grgić Petrović and Ms Justina Skoko Letilović (PDP 3, Project Managers, team members)

Field visits

Field visits were conducted for three projects. They were essential to assess the programme's impact in real-world contexts and gain a deeper understanding of its practical implementation. These visits observed how the objectives translate into tangible outcomes by engaging directly with stakeholders and identifying any challenges and successes on the ground. Combining qualitative insights from the field with quantitative data ensured that the evaluation captured a holistic view, enhancing the credibility and relevance of our findings. The following field visits were made:

- 26 March 2025: Municipal Court in Split (PDP 1, Reconstruction of the Municipal Court Building in Split; during the visit Judge Dražen Maravić, Court President and Ms Tatjana Renić, Court Manager were interviewed; in addition, evaluators spoke to Heads and personnel of court registry offices; and one user – an attorney from Split)
- 26 March 2025: Municipal Court in Split (PDP 4, Reinforcing the System of Court-Annexed Mediation, discussing the court-annexed mediation issues with Judge Zrinka Tironi and Judge Dražen Maravić)

² The key documents that were considered for the desk research are listed in Annex 2

- 31 March: Probation Service Zagreb II (PDP 3, Strengthening Human Rights Protection and Public Safety through Improving Capacities of the Croatian Probation Service, Ms Tatjana Hip)

Research findings by evaluation criterion

RELEVANCE/COHERENCE

EQ1: To what extent was programme design relevant to the country context and coherent with national strategies? In relation to the priority areas, how did the programme provide added value?

The programme aligned with four out of five priority areas of the National Plan for Justice System Development 2022–2027 and similar documents preceding it³, namely:

- judicial efficiency,
- digitalisation and access,
- judicial infrastructure,
- challenges within the prison and probation systems.

Low efficiency, low public confidence and trust in the judicial system, poor state of most infrastructure used by the justice system, over capacitated prisons, were only some of the problems facing the system. The programme was designed to address selected issues within the above-mentioned strategic areas and thus contribute to wider national efforts in a tangible way. Examples of this include, among others:

- Reconstruction of the court building of the Municipal Court in Split – the building is completed, equipped and now it represents an adequate infrastructural solution for the second-largest municipal court in the country for many decades to come.
- As a direct result of the programme, the Probation service in Croatia today is a much stronger institution than it was in 2020. It is now much better equipped and capacitated to fulfil the role assigned to it by the National Plan.
- Mediation (ADR) has been present in Croatia since at least 2003⁴. Although at times there were high expectations regarding its possible positive impact on court efficiency (i.e. reducing the inflow of cases and burden on courts), so far it has not met those expectations. Within the programme the reasons for such a

³ Such as: Justice System Reform Strategy for 2011-2015 (NN 145/2010); Justice System Development Strategy – Core Values and Strategic Guidelines for Development of Justice System in the Republic of Croatia for 2013-2018 (NN 144/12); Ministry of Justice - Strategic Plan for 2018-2020; 2019-2021 and 2020-2022; European Commission, annual Rule of Law Reports – Country Report Croatia.

⁴ In that year, the country introduced the Reconciliation Act, establishing a legislative framework for mediation. This act was later replaced by the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act, which came into force in 2024, marking the 20th anniversary of Croatia's commitment to promoting mediation and other forms of conflict resolution. See Legalease Ltd., *Croatia > Dispute Resolution Act*, 04.01.2024, available at: <https://www.legal500.com/developments/thought-leadership/new-alternative-dispute-resolution-act-milestone-in-croatias-attempts-to-promote-conflict-resolution-in-all-areas-of-social-life/?utm>.

situation were thoroughly analysed for the first time and particular solutions were implemented (coinciding with the new legislation and organisational structure).

According to all interviewees, the components and activities of the Programme were strategically selected and carefully designed. They also emphasised that implementation was carried out consistently. In retrospect, they expressed full satisfaction with the programme and would not have changed any aspect of it.

One interviewee offered this as another example where this programme differed from some other experiences they had – i.e. where project content was not thoroughly thought over and prepared in advance or was proposed in a rush to meet certain deadlines or to secure funding, which would later lead to problems in implementation and/or results.

EQ2: To what extent did the programme complement or had synergy with EU initiatives? What was the added value of the programme compared with similar EU initiatives?

All the activities were clearly in synergy with other EU and local initiatives around strengthening the judicial system, such as those financed through the European Social Fund (ESF), Technical Support Instrument (TSI), National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). For example, the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation is currently focused on improving the infrastructural situation within the justice sector and has approximately 30 construction sites in various stages of civil works. Therefore, the completion, furnishing, and operational use of the second-largest municipal court in the country represents a significant achievement for the MoJ and aligns well with its ongoing infrastructure development efforts.

However, this programme also brings added value and difference through a detailed and studious approach to the selected issues, consistent and full implementation of chosen solutions, and high motivation and 'ownership' by all local participants, further strengthened by bilateral partnership and cooperation.

Mediation provides a clear example of this added value. While several initiatives aimed at "strengthening mediation" have been implemented in Croatia since the early 2000s, none adopted such a comprehensive and analytical approach to diagnosing underlying challenges and developing targeted, sustainable solutions. Some interviewees, who had experience working on similar projects, highlighted key differences that underscore the added value of the programme. They noted that other initiatives were often less flexible, making it difficult to adapt when changes were needed. Additionally, topics addressed in those projects were sometimes insufficiently analysed or prepared in advance. Interviewees also pointed out that funding limitations in other programmes frequently prevented the inclusion of all necessary or useful activities. In contrast, they viewed the Norwegian-funded programme as more adaptive, better planned, and more comprehensive in its execution.

Design and preparation of the programme

The work on establishing the complex legal framework enabling the implementation of the programme was carried out within approximately 17 months. This is comparable with other similar projects. Namely, this process involved several state entities on both sides (i.e., Norway and Croatia) working in a concentrated effort to create the legal and regulatory foundation necessary for implementing the programme.

This encompasses the time from concluding the Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 (July 2018) and its ratification in Croatian Parliament (November 2018) to the programme launching event (in Split, 13 December 2019) and subsequent signing of the Programme Implementation Agreement between the MRDEUF and the Ministry of Justice (January 2020).

During this time, teams of the programme operator and project promoters, with the participation of Norwegian counterparts, were drafting and refining the Concept Note – a document defining the subject, scope and planned results of the programme. The Concept Note was approved by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) in February 2019 and based on it and additional documentation provided, the NMFA and MRDEUF signed the Programme Agreement on 4 June 2019.

During this programming phase, the Ministry of Justice, as the programme operator, intensively cooperated with representatives of the Norwegian Courts Administration, as the donor programme partner, and the Council of Europe, as an international partner organisation.

The effort resulted in a programme consisting of four pre-defined projects (PDPs) with clearly and detailly defined purposes, scopes, budgets, activities, timelines and performance indicators, as well as structured project management, implementation mechanisms and work processes.

The benefits of such a thorough and well-thought-out preparation of the programme were recognised throughout its implementation.

EFFECTIVENESS

EQ3: To what extent has the programme achieved the planned results, taking into account the specific issues of the programme?

The programme has achieved almost all planned results, and many were even exceeded – both in substance and numerically, per the planned indicators. Only two specific targets (as indicators expressed in numbers) were not fully met by the end of the programme: the share of court-annexed mediation proceedings in the total number of civil litigation proceedings, and the number of convicted persons placed under electronic surveillance.

Namely, the promotion of mediation as an alternative to litigation in civil disputes represents one of the strategic priorities of the Croatian justice sector. During the programme implementation period, the programme operator has very successfully used the respective programme activities (PDP 4) to create synergy with its other activities in this specific area and has invested all its efforts to achieve the results planned. Specifically, the multi-disciplinary analysis of the current situation in mediation was

conducted, results of the analysis were studied, a so-far unparalleled awareness rising campaign on advantages of mediation was launched (including the promo materials, comic book, noticeable presence on all media platforms, etc.), a practical manual on mediation for all participants in mediation proceedings (court-annexed or private) was produced and distributed (2000 copies), and an extensive training programme on mediation (including for groups of participants that were never before included in such programmes) was successfully completed (with 543 participants). In parallel, the new Civil Procedure Act (June 2022) and the new Act on Mediation (July 2023) were adopted, providing a better legal framework for mediation. Although all these efforts have greatly changed and improved the landscape for mediation in Croatia, the desired increase of the share of court-annexed mediation proceedings in the total number of civil litigious proceedings was not reached (specifically, an increase from 0.35% to 0.95%). However, the achieved 0.56% share can be seen as a moderate success, with some additional time needed for all the outputs of the Programme (and other complementary activities) to yield the desired outcomes in this particular field.

Similarly, the number of persons convicted of criminal acts and sentenced to imprisonment, but who are conditionally released from prison and put under the measure of electronic surveillance instead (62 out of 150 planned), depends on numerous factors and circumstances that only a judge assigned with each particular case can decide upon (with active participation of several other officials). In addition, the final piece of body of law regulating the matter was enacted in late June 2022 (The Ordinance on Conditional Release under the Electronic Surveillance, NN 78/2022). Nevertheless, the system is now in place, necessary equipment available, 349 relevant officials (judges, prosecutors, prison and probation officers, police, etc.) were educated and trained, and the time will show how realistic and practical this indicator (150 persons under the el. surveillance) was in the first place.

Despite this, all other targets, as indicated in the respective programme indicators, were successfully met or exceeded, reflecting overall success in achieving the programme's objectives (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Indicators and results

OUTCOME 1: Increased effectiveness and efficiency of the judiciary			
INDICATOR	BASELINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Share of court-annexed mediation cases in the total number of civil litigation cases	0.35%	0.95%	0,56%
Share of judges and judicial personnel at the Split Court satisfied with working conditions	29%	80%	89,6%
Annual number of court users and citizens using e-services	1 484 370	1 622 011	1 682 183
Share of recommendations on improving the methodology of the evaluation of judges' performance officially adopted by the State Judicial Council	N/A	20%	100%
Output 1.1: System of (civil and commercial) court-annexed mediation reinforced			
INDICATOR	BASELINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Analysis of the existing mediation system in comparison with other European states carried out	NO	YES	YES
Socio-legal examination of the reasons behind the underutilisation of mediation carried out	NO	YES	YES
Manual on court mediation developed	NO	YES	YES
Number of professional staff trained	0	500	543
Number of awareness-raising campaigns carried out	0	1	1
Number of people reached by awareness raising campaign	0	1 500	3 600 109
Output 1.2: Judicial infrastructure upgraded			
INDICATOR	BASELINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Municipal Court building in Split reconstructed and operational	NO	YES	YES

Output 1.3: Capacity of judges reinforced			
INDICATOR	BASLINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Number of judges seconded to the European Court of Human Rights	0	3	3
Output 1.4: Use of e-services within the judicial system reinforced			
INDICATOR	BASLINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Analysis of e-services within the judicial system used by the citizens completed	NO	YES	YES
Number of awareness-raising campaigns promoting the use of e-services carried out	0	1	1
Number of people reached by the awareness-raising campaign promoting the use of e-services	0	1 000 000	3 197 386
Recommendations for improving existing and introducing new judicial e-services drafted	NO	YES	YES
Output 1.5: System of the evaluation of the performance of judges revised			
INDICATOR	BASLINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Comparative analysis study of evaluation of the performance of judges in two EU member states completed	NO	YES	YES
Recommendations for improving the methodology of the evaluation of judges' performance elaborated	NO	YES	YES
OUTCOME 2: Improved correctional services			
INDICATOR	BASLINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Number of persons under the electronic monitoring system	0	150	62
Share of custodial sentences in the total number of criminal convictions	19.50%	<19%	15.50%
Level of perceived quality of cooperation between prison and probation staff	3.46	>4	4.07
Output 2.1: Electronic monitoring system implemented			
INDICATOR	BASLINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE

Number of electronic monitoring bracelets/anklets procured	0	150	200
Electronic monitoring centre set up	NO	YES	YES
Number of probation and prison staff and judges, prosecutors, police and other relevant stakeholders trained in electronic surveillance of offenders	0	200	349

Output 2.2: Probation service's material and technical working conditions upgraded

INDICATOR	BASLINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Number of existing probation offices with upgraded infrastructure	0	14	14
Number of new mobile units in use by probation offices, Central office and Electronic monitoring centre	0	4	4

Output 2.3: Tools for the enforcement of correctional measures and sentences improved

INDICATOR	BASLINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Scientific validation of the Risk Assessment System and its adjustment completed	NO	YES	YES

Output 2.4: Cooperation between prison and probation system strengthened

INDICATOR	BASLINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Analysis of the needs and possibilities for improving cooperation between prison and probation system carried out	NO	YES	YES
Annual number of regular periodic meetings between prison and probation staff on national and regional level	0	6	6
Number of prison staff trained	0	30	131
Number of probation staff trained	0	30	45
Pilot project of strengthening cooperation between prison and probation system implemented	NO	YES	YES

What is an Output?

Output 1.2: Judicial infrastructure upgraded			
	BASELINE VALUE	TARGET VALUE	ACHIEVED VALUE
Municipal Court building in Split reconstructed and operational	NO	YES	YES

In this example Output refers to the fact that the court building for the Municipal Court in Split – a flagship project of this Programme – was built, completely furnished, it has passed all inspections, obtained all permits, and all equipment, files and archives were moved from the old location, workspaces for all judges and employees were prepared, IT systems are up, everything is checked and 70 judges and 210 court employees can start with their usual work in a brand new building. All costs amounting to EUR 10.744.291,44 were paid. This is a major accomplishment.

And this is exactly what happened on Monday morning, January 29, 2024, when the Municipal Court in Split opened its doors in the new building located in Split city centre - as an output 1.2 of the "Justice and Home Affairs Project", funded from NMA 2014 - 2021.

What is an Outcome?

It is expected that this particular Output will result in many positive Outcomes, all contributing to the ultimate one – Increased Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Judiciary.

The new building is now an adequate, greatly improved workspace for 280 judges and court staff. It hosts hundreds of citizens in need of Court's services every day. It can be expected that the Court will now be more efficient, faster and better in performing its services, and be able to solve more cases, reduce its backlogs and speed up proceedings.

But, can we expect such changes to take place and be visible within just 1 year?

Municipal Court in Split – Unsolved cases, per type of case, 2020 – 2025 (Q1)

Municipal Court Split / Type of proceedings	Unsolved at the end of period					
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Q1)
Ex parte cases	2.022	2.090	2.143	2.246	2.294	2.039
Out-Of-Trial panel cases	195	157	192	232	233	207
Criminal cases 1st instance	4.182	4.550	4.689	4.549	4.130	3.852
Mediation	0	0	0	0	3	6
Indictment Panel cases	445	479	502	459	445	349
Probate / Inheritance cases	1.575	1.323	1.420	1.280	1.217	1.211
Enforcement cases	2.988	2.892	2.611	3.119	2.501	2.731
Civil-litigious cases	18.161	23.138	20.579	20.628	20.294	18.958
R2, Assistance, Certificates	1.511	956	852	672	588	475
Consumer Bankruptcy cases	1.561	762	587	998	780	484
TOTAL	32.640	36.347	33.575	34.183	32.485	30.312

Municipal Court in Split – Clearance Rate, per type of case, 2020 – 1Q 2025

Municipal Court Split / Type of proceedings	Clearance Rate (CR)					
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Q1)
Ex parte cases	95,7%	95,9%	96,9%	94,6%	97,5%	146,4%
Out-Of-Trial panel cases	97,6%	103,6%	96,5%	95,3%	99,9%	109,4%
Criminal cases 1st instance	77,5%	79,2%	92,2%	109,4%	126,5%	162,6%
Mediation	-	-	-	-	0,0%	0,0%
Indictment Panel cases	94,5%	97,0%	98,0%	104,6%	101,2%	136,0%
Probate / Inheritance cases	101,8%	138,2%	111,8%	148,2%	126,4%	131,7%
Enforcement cases	89,3%	101,9%	103,6%	94,1%	106,3%	88,5%
Civil-litigious cases	69,5%	69,4%	124,3%	99,5%	103,3%	154,9%
R2, Assistance, Certificates	117,7%	114,7%	102,5%	105,3%	102,7%	114,8%
Consumer Bankruptcy cases	255,1%	158,8%	110,7%	85,3%	111,9%	229,7%
TOTAL	95,6%	88,5%	109,8%	98,8%	105,7%	132,1%

According to these and other court statistics, yes. The Court is already showing a trend in reducing the number of unsolved cases and increasing its clearance rate (or incoming/solved ratio).

Therefore in this particular example, the Programme is very effective and has achieved all the planned results as Outputs, plus has already started contributing to ultimate Outcomes.

EQ4: Which factors have influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the planned outcomes?

The factors influencing the achievement, or non-achievement, of the programme's planned outcomes are multifaceted.

For the targets related to court-annexed mediation and electronic surveillance, the main challenge lies in the time needed for demand to develop. In the case of mediation, it will take time for civil disputes and the parties involved to recognise the benefits of mediation as an effective dispute resolution method. Similarly, the implementation of electronic surveillance as a measure will require enough criminal cases where all legal preconditions are met.

However, the programme has laid the necessary groundwork to facilitate these developments. It has established solid foundations, strengthened key institutional capacities, and produced tools that the programme operator and respective stakeholders can use to further advance these areas. This positions them to implement future interventions or fine-tune existing processes to improve outcomes.

As for the programme's overall success, the positive results can be attributed to several factors, including the well-designed nature of the activities, thorough preparation, adequate financing, efficient implementation, and proper monitoring. Additionally, the

dedication and persistence of all involved stakeholders have been key drivers in the programme's achievements.

EFFICIENCY

EQ5: To what extent was the programme adapted to the institutional and administrative capacities of the programme operator and project promoters?

First, the timely and successful implementation of the programme and its activities does not give rise to the dilemma of whether the programme operator or project promoters had sufficient capacities to implement the programme and utilise all its benefits.

The MoJ has considerable experience in implementing similar programmes and projects funded from various sources, and most personnel involved in the programme implementation had previous experience working on such projects. As such, they were familiar with the requirement to adjust to the specific rules and requirements of each donor or partner to achieve the intended results.

Each programme promoter and the PMU had a designated project manager and a project team consisting of 3 to 10 persons. These team members were selected from among the MoJ's employees and appointed to work on the respective projects in addition to their regular duties (approximately 30% of their time). To ensure their commitment to the programme, these employees were compensated for their additional workload with a salary increase.

Additionally, various organisational units within the MoJ provided essential services from their specialised areas of expertise, including the Independent Sector for Public Procurement, Accounting and Finance Sector, IT Sector, and the PR Department.

Most interviewees felt that work processes specific to programme/project implementation did not significantly differ from comparable processes in their usual work environment (such as procurement, contracting, finances, payment, reporting, and similar), nor did they differ much from work on other projects. In areas where these processes were somewhat more demanding or different, interviewees were generally comfortable with the changes, seeing them as a potential benefit, such as better monitoring, reporting, and discipline in implementation.

In addition, in early phases of programme implementation (March 2020) all MoJ personnel appointed to work on programme implementation (per programme promoters) received appropriate training, in the form of workshops, where specific roles and responsibilities of programme operator and programme promoters were explained, the manual on implementation and control was presented and particular issues regarding financial and administrative management, project management, monitoring and reporting were discussed.

Indeed, some interlocutors noted that after the initial adjustment, the strictly regulated processes (rules, guidelines, milestones, monitoring, reporting) helped them in their work on programme implementation and that they adopted some of these practices in

their other activities. Others pointed out that certain aspects were simpler or more flexible than in comparable projects. For example, the flexibility to change activities, realistic budgeting, and the ability to reallocate financial resources between budget items or activities.

EQ6: To what extent were the programme activities implemented in the available time period?

All planned activities were completed in full and within the planned times. However, there were some initial delays in the programme's start due to external factors beyond the control of the programme operator or project promoters. The COVID-19 pandemic, earthquakes in Croatia, and the merger of the Ministry of Justice with the Ministry of Public Administration all temporarily shifted priorities and resources, which delayed the start of certain activities. For instance, some pre-defined projects (PDP2 and PDP4) started in June 2020, and PDP3 started in March 2021 rather than in the initially expected timeframe.

Despite these delays, the programme was able to recover and complete all activities on time. This was achieved through adaptive measures, such as shifting to remote work and focusing on preparatory tasks during the restricted periods. These adjustments helped to mitigate the impact of external delays, and by the end of the programme, all activities were successfully implemented within the overall period.

EQ7: What are the main factors that caused delays in implementation and in what ways?

The only factors that have caused some delays at the beginning of the programme implementation were the factors out of the control of the programme operator or project promoters: the COVID-19 pandemic, earthquakes in Croatia and, to some extent, the merging of the Ministry of Justice with the Ministry of Public Administration.

These events certainly shifted everyone's attention to other problems and priorities for a certain period and greatly limited the possibility for implementing activities requiring travel and meetings in person, for example.

However, in the end, they did not affect the programme implementation and completion in a material way.

EQ8: How can the factors that cause delays be best mitigated?

There was no way to avoid or mitigate the events mentioned above. However, the consequences that these events had on programme implementation were mitigated by quickly switching to online work and communication (meetings, discussions, workshops), and by using this time to focus on activities that can be done (drafting tenders and specifications, preparing the activities for the time when they can be implemented, and similar.)

EQ9: Are there more efficient ways to achieve programme results?

Even in hindsight, none of the respondents was able to think of any better ways for achieving programme results, even when offered some (hypothetical) options or alternatives by the evaluators.

On the other hand, evaluators were not present when the first discussions and deliberations on particular topics/projects to be addressed by the Programme took place, nor were they made aware if there were any other options, or different approaches discussed. Therefore, any comments/opinions on this issue by evaluators would be of purely speculative nature.

Nevertheless, as elaborated elsewhere in this Report, all projects and activities implemented were found as coherent and relevant, in line with the actual needs and the country's strategic priorities, they were efficiently implemented within the agreed time and available resources, and have already started to contribute to the desired outcomes.

EQ10: How many financial and human resources were needed for the preparation and implementation of the programme? Which elements brought administrative burden? Are there elements of programme preparation and implementation that could be simplified?

Originally, following the Programme Implementation Agreement concluded between the MRDEUF and MoJ in June 2019, the maximum amounts for eligible costs of the programme were agreed as follows:

- EUR 13 000 000.00 from the NO FM Grant
- EUR 2 294 118.00 as a national contribution by the beneficiary state, of which 60% could be used for infrastructure, plus
- EUR 125 000.00 from the Bilateral Relations Fund.

However, by Addendum No. 1 to the Programme Implementation Agreement of 8 April 2022, the funding was increased as follows:

- EUR 15 000 000.00 from the NO FM
- EUR 2 647 059.00 as national contribution by the beneficiary state, of which 66% could be used for infrastructure.

By Addendum No. 2 to the Programme Implementation Agreement, the amount available from the Bilateral Relations Fund was increased to EUR 450 500 in June 2023, but this increase was cancelled by Addendum No. 3 in early May 2024 as one Project Promoter withdrew its project proposal. However, towards the end of the programme, the amount of EUR 460 000 was reallocated from the programme Grant (project management item) to the Bilateral Relations Fund, so currently, the balance of the Fund amounts to EUR 585 000.

Status as of 9 April 2025:

Programme short name	HR-JUSTICE
Programme Operator	Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation (HR)
Host Programme Area	PA21 Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Judicial System, Strengthening Rule of Law
Financial Mechanisms	Norway Grants
Programme grant in EUR	€ 14,540,000.00
Programme co-financing in EUR	€ 2,565,882.36
The final incurred amount in EUR	€ 15,974,905.92
Final incurred rate %	93.39 %

The general opinion of all interviewed Programme participants is that the Programme was adequately financed and that they felt that all activities were implemented efficiently, cost-wisely. At the same time, all activities were very carefully and prudently estimated during the preparation phase of the Programme (which estimates were audited and confirmed by an independent auditor), and these estimates were confirmed in practice during the implementation. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Programme had adequate financial resources secured for the fulfilment of all of its objectives.

Interviewees also offered several suggestions that could be considered for the purpose of planning the needed human resources, reducing the administrative burden and/or simplifying the implementation:

- The majority of interviewees believed that reporting requirements – on a quarterly basis and in such detail - represented a burden that was not always necessary or productive.
- All members of project teams were working on Programme implementation on a part-time basis, i.e. in addition to their usual responsibilities in their respective institutions. Some stated that, in order to complete their project-related tasks on time, they mostly had to work overtime. Several proposed that maybe a core team of 1 or 2 persons for each project working full time, assisted by others on a part-time basis, could be considered as a more efficient and more productive model.
- Some interlocutors who joined the implementation in later phases and have not participated in the initial implementation workshops (see under EQ 5, page 26) stated that they needed to invest some time and energy for initial orientation and for learning the specific processes and workflows. This only accents the importance of a thorough preparation of everyone involved in implementation as early as possible. After initial workshops implemented by the PO, the PP had the

responsibility to onboard any new project implementation unit members and train them for their assignment.

- Financial controls included control of each programme-related invoice received, while on some projects this is performed on a sample basis.
- Archives – A project of this size generates a large volume of documents. Apparently, Programme-related documents had to be kept and archived in paper form, which requires space. At the same time, it was noticed that the majority, if not all documents are being kept in at least 2 locations physically (PDP, procurement, finances, PMU), and at least one place digitally (SharePoint). Implementation of a system where all documents are kept in 1 place digitally and 1 place physically, with secured traceability and access, could be considered.

SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

EQ11: What has the impact of the programme on project partners and final beneficiaries been? How has the programme contributed to improving the quality of life of target groups and final beneficiaries?

The Programme had very tangible impact on project partners and beneficiaries, and these can be clearly recognized in the results achieved and documented in the final Programme documentation (i.e. buildings built and furnished, offices equipped, workspaces improved, personnel trained and educated, tools developed, indicators achieved, etc., as elaborated elsewhere in this Report).

But, more importantly, the Programme has already yielded some important results on the “output level” – bringing positive changes relevant for all affected end users/citizens.

For example, the Municipal Court in Split, operating now in an adequate court building, is already performing noticeably better than before (see Court performance data on pg. 24-25). It has increased its clearance rate and is reducing its backlogs. Short of some sudden surges in the inflow of new cases, the Court should now be able to concentrate more on the duration of proceedings and quality of its judgments. This is something that all citizens of Split and the surrounding areas will benefit from. And as this is the second largest municipal court in the country, this represents a significant contribution to efficiency and effectiveness of the overall justice system.

Probation service, being a relatively new segment of the criminal justice system in Croatia, has benefited tremendously from this Programme. Participation in this Programme enabled this profession and these professionals to better identify and position themselves within the legal system, their working conditions were improved, specific tools were developed, their knowledge, skills and insights were enriched, and working cooperation with the Prison system, courts and other partners was improved and strengthened. Or, in words of one interviewee: “For us in the Probation service, this Programme was a “game-changer”. And since probation officers work (among other) with perpetrators of criminal offences released from serving their sentence in prison, for

various reasons, this can certainly be translated into improved public safety for citizens, and better protection of human rights of the convicted persons.

Mediation in Croatia, as one form of alternative dispute resolution, has also benefited from the Programme. Namely, within the respective pre-defined project, a multi-disciplinary analysis of the reasons for underutilization of mediation in Croatia was conducted. Based on the findings of the analysis, an extensive training programme was developed and delivered to a large number of potential users/participants. A manual on mediation proceedings was drafted and distributed. And all this was supported by a wide and professionally managed media campaign aimed at the general population. These efforts, in parallel with the new legislative framework, have clearly set much firmer foundations for mediation in Croatia to grow. It is also evaluators' opinion that this moment should be seized and activities on further strengthening (and widening) of mediation should be continued (see under Recommendations, pg. 40).

At the same time the Programme has brought on numerous intangible benefits, but clearly recognised and felt by all participants. These include knowledge, experiences, new approaches, professional improvement, better motivation, and enthusiasm for work, which will all eventually translate into better services to citizens/users.

All respondents stated that their participation in the Programme has enriched them professionally and that they gained new skills, knowledge and understanding of different approaches.

On a direct question of whether they feel that now they would need less time, or no time at all, to prepare and start working on a similar project, the answer was unanimously affirmative.

On a direct question of whether they would be willing to work on a similar project again, all immediately answered yes.

All feel that the respective entity and/or organisational unit where they work has gained additional institutional capacities and capabilities as a result of participation in the Programme.

All interviewees noticed, in one way or another, that through their engagement in the Programme, they were able to view their work, their profession and their institution through different optics. As a side-effect of the cooperation, comparison, joint efforts and working together on solving problems, or improving work conditions, they developed a stronger sense of professional pride, a stronger sense of belonging and a stronger identification with their institution/place of work. All respondents stated that they noticed increased enthusiasm and motivation in their daily work both in themselves and in their colleagues.

Although rather intangible, this can certainly be viewed as a positive outcome and added value of this effort.

EQ12: To what extent are the expected benefits from the programme likely to be sustained in the five years after the end of the programme?

As mentioned elsewhere, all activities implemented within the Programme were closely aligned with strategic priorities of the Croatian justice system, conceptually well-conceived and thoroughly prepared – always with a view on their importance and sustainability. It is unlikely that such strategic priorities could suddenly change.

In other words, it is highly unlikely that the Municipal Court in Split will move from the building reconstructed and adapted for its needs through the Programme. The same applies to probation offices furnished and equipped within PDP2, or various manuals and tools developed under the Programme. All these deliverables will continue to be used for the very purpose they were developed/built for.

In addition, all participants and beneficiaries of the Programme have demonstrated a strong “ownership” of the results achieved.

All persons interviewed are strongly convinced that benefits resulting from the Programme will endure the test of time and can only grow and gain in strength over time.

On a direct question of whether they see any trends or changes (such as demographic, technological, legal and similar) that could impair these benefits, none could foresee any developments with such effects in the foreseeable future.

BILATERAL COOPERATION

EQ13: How and to what extent do bilateral partnerships (at programme and project level) add value to programme implementation and results, programme operator, donor Programme partner, project promoters and donor project partners?

Based on everything analysed, learned, seen and heard during this evaluation process, it can only be concluded that bilateral partnership, as organized and implemented in this particular Programme, represents the best practice possible.

Both partners, on all levels, were optimally paired, both partners are professionally engaged and have expertise and practical experience in the same fields, and both sides have demonstrated true and sincere will to work together on achieving the desired results and improving the selected issues.

All interviewees were deeply impressed by and greatly appreciated the personal, professional and collegial approach of all persons participating on the donor partner side. During the interviews, all project representatives felt the need to accent the openness, availability and willingness to listen, understand, learn and act by their foreign partners.

In addition to those “hard” facts characterizing the Programme (such as sufficient resources, advanced expertise of the donor partner in all fields covered, and similar)

there are several other features that participants recognized as an added value brought by this Programme (compared to others):

- Presence. The fact that donor project partners (often the same persons) were present and actively involved throughout the life span of the Programme – from inception to completion. This helped in building mutual trust, understanding of daily developments, ability to quickly respond, and sharing;
- Flexibility. Whenever a situation arose offering or requiring a better, or more efficient, but different way to proceed towards achieving the desired outcome, the Programme was able to promptly analyse the situation, find the best way to go, adopt all the necessary formal decisions and adapt. Participants felt that, compared to other similar situations, this was achieved very efficiently and painlessly, without the need to amend the very fundamental documentation through complex and time-consuming procedures.
- Communication and visibility. Although some participants felt at first that this element is somewhat excessive (cost-wise and time-wise), by the end they all highlighted this as something new and very useful in the Croatian justice system environment. Namely, the Croatian justice system has yet to find the most efficient ways to communicate its messages to both the professional and general public. Or, as one respondent expressed it: "We don't know how to brag about good things we do".

Virtually all interviewees expressed only positive experiences and highlighted excellent cooperation with Norwegian partners – both on institutional and personal levels. In that, they especially appreciated the following:

- cooperation with institutions and professionals who in practice and on a daily basis work on the same or similar tasks and problems;
- expertise, professionalism, openness and collegial approach by their Norwegian peers;
- opportunity to compare their work, systems and problems with that of their Norwegian peers and ability to better "self-assess" their situation;
- opportunity to, together with their Norwegian colleagues, meet other colleagues from European countries and compare their approaches and achievements in the same fields;

On a direct question whether they remember a situation where they felt that this bilateral aspect (i.e. a foreign partner) has caused or contributed to a delay or difficulty in Programme implementation (adjusting to different situations and systems, time for learning basic facts, different work processes, waiting for approvals, or similar) none could point to a single situation or event of such a kind.

On the contrary, an example was given where the implementation of a particular activity slowed down at a certain moment for internal reasons, and then it was the Norwegian counterpart who provided adequate positive impulses for bringing it back on track.

The interviewees stated that they have continued some form of cooperation with Norwegian partners. Some examples include: participation in similar projects in third countries; membership in a working group, an invitation to deliver a presentation at a conference, and preparing topics to be proposed for a possible future similar programme.

EQ14: In what ways could bilateral cooperation be further improved?

Based on all the findings and impressions described above, all forms of bilateral cooperation, in general, could consider using this particular Programme as a “best practice model”, study it and apply similar solutions.

Key findings and recommendations

1. The Programme was well-designed and successfully implemented

All components (PDPs) and activities were carefully designed, thoroughly prepared and strictly implemented. All activities included (i) precise and early identification of issues/needs; (ii) clear definition and mutual understanding of issues/actions/expected results (iii) comprehensive, professional and often multi-disciplinary analysis of the respective current situation/problems; (iv) comparison with several other approaches/experiences; (v) decisions and recommendations for improvements; (vi) implementation of such recommendations; (vii) training and education; (viii) monitoring, measuring and reporting on implementation and changes achieved.

2. The Programme was very well monitored and documented

All programme documentation – from documents forming the legal framework for implementation to interim and final reports and financial documentation – provides not only a clear, empirical record of what, why, how, where, when and by whom something was done, but also tells an interesting story of an impressive, joint effort aimed at achieving the agreed outcomes and overcoming whichever hurdles and obstacles on this path.

3. There was high awareness of the Programme within the judicial system

All individuals interviewed during the evaluation process (those directly involved in the implementation and those not - users) were well informed about the Programme and aware of the specific features of the Programme, which implies a high level of interest and synergy within the Programme and externally. All had at least an advanced knowledge of “other” projects/activities within the Programme and were able to list all or the majority of particular topics the Programme was addressing. All were well acquainted with the bilateral aspect of the Programme and the specific contributions of Norwegian institutions and colleagues.

4. The Programme Operator had sufficient institutional and administrative capacities

The interviewees stated that work processes specific to Programme/Project implementation did not significantly differ from comparable processes in their usual work environment (such as procurement, contracting, finances, payment, reporting, and similar) or work on other projects. And in segments where such processes were maybe somewhat different and slightly more demanding, they managed to adapt as that might result in some benefits (better monitoring, reporting, discipline in implementation, and similar).

5. There was a high level of internal cooperation in Programme implementation

All participants highlighted excellent and meaningful cooperation with other local colleagues, organizational units and entities participating in Programme implementation (such as procurement, finances, IT and PR sector within the MoJ, courts, State Judicial Council, probation service, prison system, Judicial Academy, PMU, MRDEUF and others).

6. Delays, if any, were the consequence of Vis Major

Apart from the COVID pandemic and earthquakes in Croatia (2020) none of the interviewees experienced an event or a situation that caused delays or stalling of activities on Programme implementation, especially not ones that could be attributable to Programme design or implementation structure or processes.

7. There was an adequate level of flexibility

The interviewed persons have noticed and accented flexibility in Programme implementation as a positive treat – i.e. adequate level of flexibility in responding to objectively changed circumstances and exclusively for the purpose of achieving the agreed results and outcomes within such changes. For example, the flexibility to change activities, realistic budgeting, and the ability to reallocate financial resources between budget items or activities. The goodwill, cooperation and flexibility of all stakeholders – horizontally and vertically - in responding to such situations were especially highlighted. This was also mentioned as an example of positive difference and added value compared to similar projects.

8. The Programme content was well-selected and designed

All interviewees confirmed that the content of all components and activities envisaged by the Programme/Projects was well selected according to national needs, thoroughly prepared and consistently implemented, and would not change any of them even in hindsight. (See also under "Relevance/Coherence", pg. 17.)

9. Visibility and Communication activities were seen as an added value

On a direct question on the usefulness (cost/effort/benefit) of various visibility, media and public communication activities within the Programme, all participants answered that they found these activities extremely useful for communicating project results. Several volunteered their personal opinion that the justice sector (in a wider sense) seems too passive, or too "shy", or maybe has no capacity to actively promote positive messages and good achievements of the sector. The Programme has increased the visibility of improvements made within the justice sector.

10. Sustainability of benefits resulting from the Programme

All persons interviewed are strongly convinced that benefits resulting from the Programme will endure the test of time and can only grow and gain in strength over time.

11. Capacity of all involved was increased

All respondents stated that their participation in the Programme has enriched them professionally and that they gained new skills, knowledge and understanding of different approaches. All feel that the respective entity and/or organizational unit where they work has gained additional institutional capacities and capabilities as a result of participation in the Programme.

12. Bilateral cooperation was seen as an added value by all participants

Virtually all interviewees expressed only positive experiences and highlighted excellent cooperation with Norwegian partners – both on institutional and personal levels. In that, they especially appreciated the following:

- cooperation with institutions and professionals who in practice and on a daily basis work on the same or similar tasks and problems;
- expertise, professionalism, openness and collegial approach by their Norwegian peers;
- opportunity to compare their work, systems and problems with that of their Norwegian peers and ability to better “self-assess” their situation;
- opportunity to, together with their Norwegian colleagues, meet other colleagues from European countries and compare their approaches and achievements in the same fields;

13. The Programme had a positive impact on beneficiaries and target groups

All interviewees noticed, in one way or another, that through their engagement in the Programme, they were able to view their work, their profession and their institution through different optics. As a side-effect of the cooperation, comparison, joint efforts and working together on solving problems, or improving work conditions, they developed a stronger sense of professional pride, a stronger sense of belonging and a stronger identification with their institution/place of work. All respondents stated that they noticed increased enthusiasm and motivation in their daily work both in themselves and in their colleagues.

14. Some administrative burdens were recognised and suggestions for simplification were given

The majority of interviewees believed that reporting requirements – on a quarterly basis and in such detail - represented a burden that was not always necessary or productive.

All members of project teams were working on Programme implementation on a part-time basis, i.e. in addition to their usual responsibilities in their respective institutions. Some stated that, in order to complete their project-related tasks on time, they mostly had to work overtime. Several proposed that maybe a core team of 1 or 2 persons for each project working full time, assisted by others on a part-time basis, could be considered as a more efficient and more productive model.

Financial controls included control of each programme-related invoice received, while on some projects this is performed on a sample basis.

Archives – A programme of this size generates a large volume of documents. Apparently, Programme-related documents had to be kept and archived in paper form, which requires space. At the same time, it was noticed that the majority, if not all documents are being kept in at least 2 locations physically (PDP, procurement, finances, PMU), and at least one place digitally (SharePoint). Implementation of a system where all documents are kept in 1 place digitally and 1 place physically, with secured traceability and access, could be considered.

Recommendations:

Our recommendations for any future, similar projects are the following:

A. Preparation and Implementation:

1. Sufficient time for adequate prior analysis and selection of the content to be addressed by a programme/project should be allocated.

Every effort should be made to make sure that both partners and all participants have the same understanding of the concepts in question. This seems self-evident, but in practice, it is not always so.

This Programme can serve as a good example of how adequate effort on these issues in early phases pays off during the implementation phase and in final results.

2. A workshop or other form of training on specific administrative rules and procedures should be considered in the early phases of project implementation, i.e. as soon as project team members are known. After initial workshops implemented by the Project Operator, the Project Promoter is responsible to onboard any new project team members and train them for their assignment.

Experiences shared by interviewees who joined the implementation in later phases clearly demonstrate advantages of this (see under EQ 10).

3. Models suggested by the interviewees regarding the (i) staffing of project teams (full-time, part-time, or a combination) and (ii) archiving requirements, could be discussed with future project promoters during the preparation phase (see under EQ 10).
4. Frequency and detailedness of the required reporting could be reviewed. Namely, the majority of personnel participating in programme implementation felt that compiling and drafting comprehensive reports on a quarterly basis represented an excessive drain of time and effort of everyone involved (see under EQ 10).

A system consisting of an online platform where actual changes and transactions within programme/project implementation could be recorded and monitored in real time, combined with semi-annual (full) reports was suggested as an alternative to be considered.

B. Content

1. Mediation

Based on the outputs and outcomes achieved within this Programme (PDP 4, specifically), it is our belief that a continuation and widening of activities on strengthening mediation in Croatia should be considered – either within a programme/project similar to this one, or otherwise. However, this time the private, external (i.e. not only court-annexed) mediation should be encompassed as well.

Namely, during the evaluation and analysis of the Programme, the evaluators received from external sources at least anecdotal evidence that some programme outputs have “spilled over” to private, external mediation as well (which can be seen as a positive outcome *per se*!). Apparently, the awareness campaign, as well as training activities and manuals developed, prompted an increased interest in mediation among citizens and lawyers. Although it was not possible to empirically measure and corroborate this information within this evaluation (nor is such data readily available at this moment), it seems that a momentum was created.

At the same time, the regulatory and institutional framework for mediation in Croatia was recently strengthened with the adoption of the new Mediation (ADR) Act (*Zakon o mirnom rješavanju sporova*, NN 67/23, June 2023) and establishment of the Centre for ADR (*Centar za mirno rješavanje sporova*) as an institution responsible for regulating, overseeing, licensing and training of all providers of ADR services on the national level. (see also under EQ3, pg. 19-20)

This certainly seems like a good opportunity and the right time to gather on board the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation, courts, the ADR Centre, the Croatian Bar Association and other relevant institutions (such as the Croatian Mediation Association) to jointly work on increasing the attractiveness of mediation (ADR) to potential users.

Should this happen, several issues should be carefully considered and agreed upon in the early phases of preparation:

- how to maintain control over the programme/project implementation with several independent institutions/partners with different paces of work, procedures and, possibly, different interests;
- how to avoid overregulating and over formalising the mediation environment, which can only thrive if it is less regulated and less formal than the court system (and faster, more efficient and cheaper).

Annex 1 List of documents

Programme documents:

- NO FM Regulation
- Programme Agreement
- Programme Implementation Agreement
- Annual Programme reports for years 2019 - 2023
- Call for proposals
- Final Programme Report FM 14-21 - Justice and Home Affairs

Project documents:

- Project Applications
- Final project reports
- Sources and data for establishing indicators, baseline values and targets, all project deliverables (analysis, surveys, recommendations, manuals, training materials, promo materials, and other project related materials)

Annex 2 Biographies of experts

Sectoral expert

Key Expert 1: Nenad Vukadinović

Nenad is a seasoned Croatian lawyer with three decades of experience in legal reform, specializing in the evolution of Croatia's judiciary and legal framework. His career began in 1995 with the American Bar Association's CEELI project, where he played a key role in supporting Croatia's transition to a society grounded in the rule of law and a free-market economy. For nearly a decade, he worked on strengthening legal institutions, fostering judicial independence, and promoting democratic legal principles.

From 2004 to 2016, Nenad contributed to two World Bank-financed projects aimed at modernizing the judiciary. His work focused on court and case management, IT and e-justice, judicial administration, the independence of judges and the court system, legal training, and legislative reforms. He was also involved in improving court infrastructure, ensuring that modernization efforts extended beyond policy to tangible, systemic advancements.

Since 2016, Nenad has worked on several highly specialized projects in the judiciary, funded by the European Union, the World Bank, and the United States. These initiatives have targeted specific aspects of judicial reform, further refining legal processes and strengthening Croatia's legal institutions.

In addition to his legal expertise, Nenad is a certified court interpreter for English, allowing him to engage with the legal system in practice on a daily basis. His linguistic proficiency extends to Croatian, English, and Polish, with working knowledge of German and Slovenian.

WYG experts

Evaluation expert – Mladen Vojković

Mladen Vojković, Managing Director of WYG, has 15 years of experience in human resources development, public administration reform and regional development and 12 years of experience in monitoring and evaluating projects, programmes and politics. As a team leader and evaluator, he has participated in numerous project and programme evaluations in the fields of employment, institutional development, management, cross-border cooperation, horizontal principles, etc. Mladen was one of the Key Experts in the evaluation of the Operational Program Effective Human Resources 2014 - 2020 (Group 4: Evaluation of Priority Axis 4 "Good governance", Group 6: Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the implementation of the OPEHR and ESF interventions according to the regional and local representation criteria with evaluations of horizontal principles), and a Team Leader of evaluations of different CBC programmes (Croatia-Slovenia, Croatia-Serbia, Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro).

Quality assurance expert – Jelena Kljaić Šebrek

Jelena Kljaić Šebrek, Director of WYG, has more than 15 years of experience in preparing and implementing projects funded by EU funds (IPA programme, Structural Instruments, Union Programmes, Territorial Programmes cooperation, Integrated Territorial Investment). She gained work experience as a manager of many projects in which she coordinated project activities and led project teams. Jelena has been a lecturer for many years in the field of preparation and implementation of projects financed by EU funds. She holds a PhD in quantitative economics. She has extensive experience in project evaluation in the field of research and development, and she has developed evaluation methodologies for many project and programme evaluations. Jelena was one of the experts who participated in the interim evaluation of the Operational Program Effective Human Resources 2014–2020.

Quality assurance expert – Ninon Gautier

Ninon is Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Research at WYG, with over seven years of experience conducting evaluations and studies. She is a seasoned project manager with a proven track record of designing and applying a broad range of methodologies, including stakeholder consultation, crafting targeted questionnaires, conducting interviews, performing qualitative and quantitative analyses, and quality reviewing deliverables.

Ninon has led several high-profile evaluations, including, most recently, the midterm evaluation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFAF) for the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. This role encompassed data collection, in-depth analysis, and reporting, ensuring that all outputs met stringent quality standards.

Ninon's international experience and fluency in French, English, and Spanish and working knowledge of Norwegian, equips her with a nuanced understanding of diverse contexts. Ninon combines linguistic proficiency with deep expertise in quality assurance.

Evaluation expert and project coordinator – Mona Manojlović

Mona Manojlović, a Consultant at WYG with a master's degree in political science, has over four years of experience with the preparation and implementation of projects financed by EU funds. Most of her work focuses on evaluation projects – she participated in five evaluations of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the Operational Programme Effective Human Resources 2014–2020, four evaluations of the cross-border cooperation programmes, and numerous evaluations of small-scale projects financed by EU funds. As part of her work, she has focused on documentation and data analysis, collecting and processing quantitative and qualitative data, and providing

recommendations based on the analysis. She is also experienced in coordinating teams of experts and managing projects in the domain of evaluations. Most recently, Mona was running an Impact Evaluation of the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia - Croatia 2014-2020.

Evaluation expert and project coordinator – Dario Gašparić

Dario Gašparić holds a master's degree in political science and a certificate in the Development and Management of EU-funded Projects. He has been working as a consultant and project manager at WYG for four years, where he has mostly worked on the preparation and implementation of projects financed by the EU and other organisations. His day-to-day work mostly consists of contacts with contracting authorities, communication with experts, monitoring of contract implementation and reporting. Dario is also experienced in data collection and analysis, and he has also participated in many evaluations in the socio-economic sector. His most recent work includes the Final evaluation of the project Support to Vocational Education and Training Reform in Kosovo (Phase II) and a project evaluation of "Establishment and implementation of systematic energy management and development of a new financing model".