



8th EASO Consultative Forum Plenary Meeting



January 2019

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8th EASO CONSULTATIVE FORUM PLENARY MEETING

5th DECEMBER, BRUSSELS



SUMMARY REPORT

1. Background and objectives

The EASO Consultative Forum (CF) provides a platform for the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge, created to ensure that a close dialogue is established between the Agency and civil society. Several activities take place throughout the year, including CF Meetings, consultations on key EASO documents, as well as direct participation of selected civil society representatives in various areas of EASO's work, through e.g. meetings, conferences, workshops, practical cooperation activities and informal consultations.

The 8th edition of the Annual Plenary Meeting focused on reception, including challenges and future perspectives. Overall, the meeting aimed to explore how civil society and EASO could (better) cooperate to improve reception conditions for applicants of international protection.

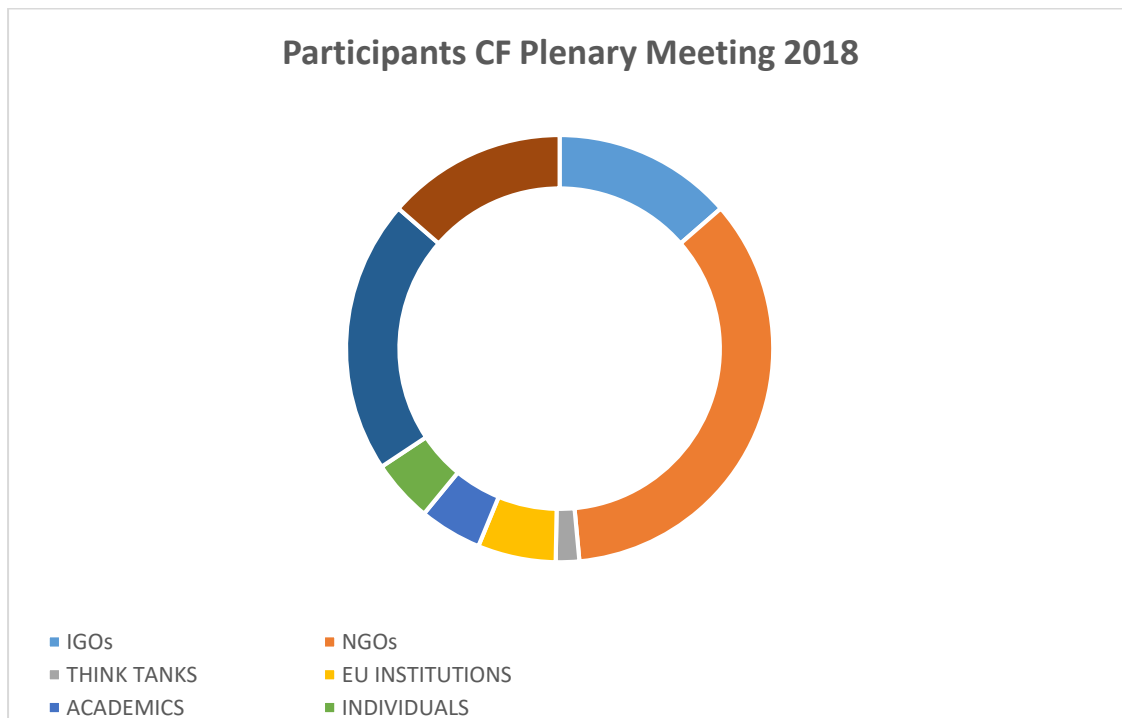
2. Format and Structure

The agenda included mixed participatory methods. The meeting was divided into four sessions, each addressing different aspects of reception. Following the opening statements, representatives from EASO first provided an overview of recent asylum trends including an overview of EASO's main activities in the field of reception. Subsequently, a panel debate took place on the flexibility of national reception systems and their capacity to efficiently and effectively respond to changing inflows. In the afternoon, participants engaged in five parallel participatory workshops on key topics of reception, including: 1) Evaluation of information activities; 2) Reception of children; 3) Emergency reception provision; 4) Coordination

between different stakeholders involved in reception, and; 5) Reception and society. A final debate on “Reception: Future Perspectives” closed the meeting.

3. Participants

A total of 170 participants attended the Consultative Forum Plenary meeting. Participants represented a high variety of different stakeholders, including NGOs (35%), EASO staff (21%), IGOs (14%), National Authorities (14%), EU institutions (6%), Individuals (4%), Academics (5%) and Think tanks (1%). The figure below shows the different proportions of stakeholders that attended.



1. Summary of the Meeting

The following sections of the report provide an account of the key topics presented and discussed during the meeting.

Opening Statements

EASO’s Executive Director a.i., Jamil Addou, opened the meeting, recalling that the Agency’s cooperation with civil society had over the years evolved into a more dynamic and inclusive relationship. The number and type of CF meetings increased and 2018 saw the introduction of a thematic approach which aimed at enabling more in-depth and targeted discussions. Reception was underlined as key area through which civil society could contribute to the Agency’s work. An area in which the Agency itself had also vastly increased its activities. Under the EUAA, the Agency’s mandate would further be reinforced, including the role of the CF. Preparatory measures for the operationalisation of the EUAA had been a key priority throughout the year. In a context where the Agency’s mandate and activities would further increase, regular consultations with civil society would become even more important. The Director pledged to bring cooperation with civil society to higher levels in the years to come.

The **European Commission’s Deputy Director General of DG Home and Migration, Simon Mordue**, provided an overview of the CEAS state of play. Agreement had been reached on five out of the seven proposals put forward by the Commission in 2016 as part of the CEAS

reform package, including the EUAA. No agreement had yet been reached on Dublin and the Asylum Procedures Regulation. It was important to move forward on these instruments, including on the EUAA. Additionally, the importance of a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder approach including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) was deemed of paramount importance in building a long-term sustainable approach to managing reception. Much EU funding was available to improve reception standards including for projects directly implemented by CSOs. CSOs were further encouraged to provide input to EASO's practical tools and operational support activities, through which they could also contribute to the provision of dignified reception conditions in the EU.

The **Belgian Commissioner General for Stateless Persons and Refugees, Dirk van den Bulck**, emphasised EASO's important role in the field of asylum and acknowledged that the Agency has played an important role in harmonising Member States' asylum policies insofar as its mandate and resources have allowed.

Overview of recent asylum developments and EASO's main activities

Teddy Wilkin, Head of EASO's Research Sector, provided an overview of recent asylum trends – see PPT. The overview of statistics indicated the following: although the number of asylum applications decreased to around 50.000 per month in 2018, national authorities still had a huge amount of work to carry out with some 436,337 cases pending at first instance and 485,000 in appeal. The workload for national authorities was also higher than the numbers arriving at the external borders, with data indicating that the number of asylum applications was consistently higher than the number of irregular border crossings. Beyond monitoring the situation of asylum in the EU, EASO also monitored the situation in third countries for purposes of early warning. Participants were encouraged to visit the EASO website where an overview of latest asylum trends was available to the public.

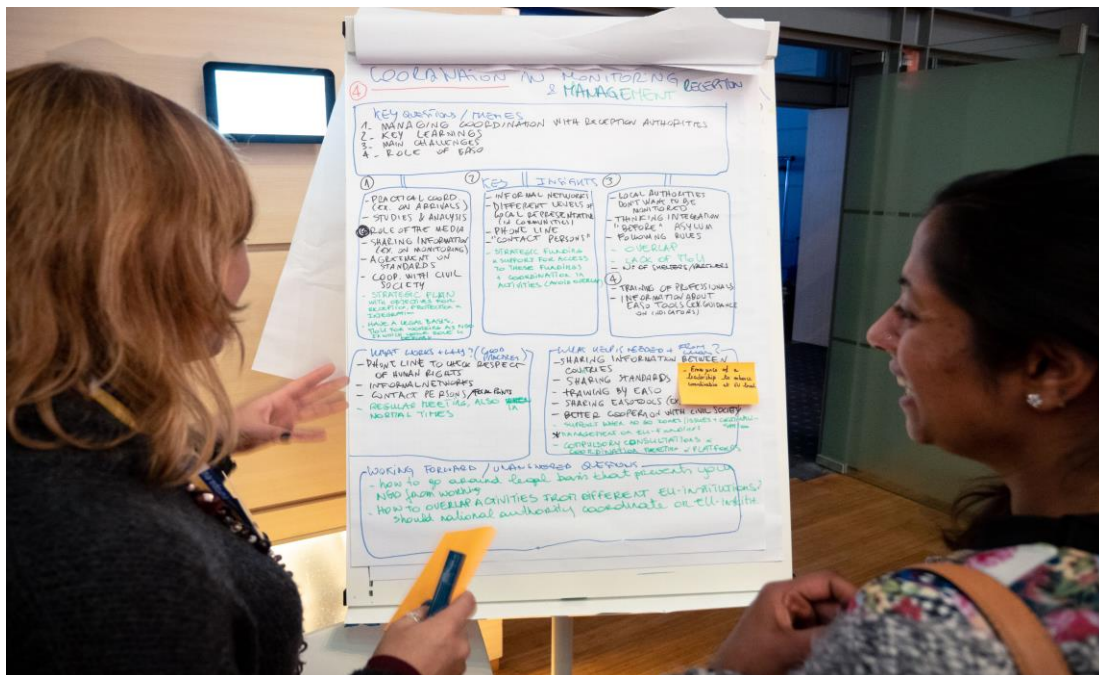
Istvan Ordog, Senior Programme Manager, provided an update on EASO's operational activities. EASO's operational support was planned to continue in Italy, Greece, and Cyprus, with conclusion of the Operating Plans for 2019 pending at the time of the meeting. The nature of EASO's operational support would change from mostly frontline support to supporting Member States in managing the backlog of asylum cases. For the first time, the Operating Plans for 2019 were drafted using a project management approach, including an intensive planning and review process, and building on a comprehensive needs assessment methodology. During such needs assessment, EASO not only consulted Member States concerned, but also various CSOs through a range of open workshops. This was considered good practice and was planned to be repeated in the coming years.

Francois Bienfait, Head of the Department of Asylum Support (DAS) a.i., provided an overview of the different types of activities implemented by his department, focusing in particular on activities with involvement of civil society and those related to reception (see PPT). Overall, in many of the DAS activities, civil society is consulted via a Reference Group including members of CSOs. For example, the Reference Group is consulted on the development, update and quality maintenance of all EASO training modules and tools and is also involved in the development of all practical tools and guidance. Moreover, a total of 32 CSOs form part of the EASO Vulnerability Experts Network (VEN) in addition to 17 EU+ States, the Commission, FRA, and UNHCR. As regards reception, EASO implements various activities, primarily on the basis of its Reception Network. Activities include e.g. NCP meetings, thematic workshops, exchange programmes, and practical tools. In the latter, CSOs have consistently been involved including in the development of: the Guidance on Reception Conditions: Operational Standards and Indicators; Guidance on Contingency Planning; Guidance on Reception Conditions for UAMs. EASO is also active in providing operational support related

to reception and has done so in a.o. Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Bulgaria as well as FYROM, Turkey, Serbia and Bosnia. Prior to such operational activities, CSOs were consulted during field visits to help make an assessment of what kind of support was required.

During Q&A, several questions were asked related to the quality of EASO data, EASO's training activities, its practical tools, the Vulnerability Expert Network (VEN), activities on reception as well as activities in the external dimension. EASO clarified that the quality of its data is ensured through thorough analysis and cross-checking of different data sources. If data issues are detected, these are always discussed with Member States in the context of the Early Warning and Preparedness network. Concerning trainings, it was clarified that the main target group for trainings is officials from Member States. However, the system is a train-the-trainer one, and trainings at national level are in some Member States open for participation by CSOs. Whilst EASO encourages Member States to allow CSOs to participate, the Agency cannot oblige Member States to do so. With regard to the possibility for CSOs joining the EASO VEN, it was clarified that a call for membership was launched during summer 2018. Many expressions of interest were received with 32 organisations who have been selected. Concerning the practical tools and whether the feedback of children is taken into account in the development of relevant practical guidance, EASO explained that their feedback is indirectly passed on by CSOs who are involved in the development of trainings and tools as part of the Reference Group. EASO further explained, with regard to its activities in the external dimension, that it closely cooperates with third countries by providing capacity-building support, technical assistance and operational support to national authorities in third countries (e.g. FYROM, Turkey, Bosnia, Serbia). Moreover, EASO also monitors the asylum situation in third countries from the perspective of 'big data' with the aim of identifying potential future migration flows. Finally, as regards activities on reception, it was clarified that EASO's main aim is to support Member States in the organisational set-up of reception systems. By doing so, EASO officers may be present at reception centres to observe the daily challenges and workflows, but they do not themselves provide material reception conditions.

Parallel Workshops on different aspects of Reception





Five parallel workshops were held on different aspects of reception. Below is a summary of each workshop, with an overview of the main outputs per workshop in Annex.

Workshop 1: Provision of information

Following on from previous CF meetings on the provision of information, this workshop focused specifically on the *evaluation* of information activities. After presentations by EASO, participants discussed three main questions in smaller groups, focusing on what evaluation criteria, specific indicators, and data collection methodologies could be used to assess information activities. Participants also discussed challenges that could be encountered whilst monitoring and performing evaluation of information activities. Table 1 in Annex provides an overview of the main outcomes of this workshop.

Workshop 2: Reception of Children

Workshop 2 focused on the needs and gaps that children face once they reach the EU. The workshop aimed at enhancing and shaping reception conditions for children. Following introductory statements provided by EASO, discussions in smaller groups focused on: reception of accompanied children; reception and care arrangements for unaccompanied children, and; reception of children with specific needs. Table 2 in Annex provides an overview of the main outcomes of this workshop.

Workshop 3: Emergency reception provision

Workshop 3 focused on contingency planning in the context of reception and the monitoring of reception capacity including forecasting. The high influx of applicants in 2015-2016 brought about an exponential learning curve in the domain of contingency planning. The main aim of this workshop was to map what Member States' practices are with regard to contingency planning and to explore the role that CSOs have played. Following introductory remarks by EASO and the Migration Policy Institute, participants debated three main themes and questions, including: how to involve CSOs in contingency planning? How to consolidate knowledge on contingency planning? How to monitor the performance of reception systems

in relation to their ability to be able to deal with changing inflows and prevent the early onset of “an emergency situation”? Table 3 in Annex provides an overview of the main outcomes of this workshop.



Workshop 4: Coordination between different stakeholders – how to structurally embed civil society in Member States’ reception systems?

This workshop aimed at identifying guidelines on how CSOs can structurally be embedded in Member States’ reception systems, both at operational, tactical and strategic levels. This workshop took place in plenary format with presentations provided by EASO, Fedasil and CLES s.r.l. Questions that guided discussions included: How do CSOs coordinate with reception authorities (both at operational, tactical and strategic levels; what are the key learnings and main challenges when it comes to coordination with national authorities?; Is there a role for EASO to support coordination between CSOs and national reception authorities on the management and monitoring of reception? Table 4 in Annex provides an overview of the main outcomes of this workshop.



Workshop 5: Reception & Society

This workshop aimed to explore the role of reception authorities regarding the management and development of activities, with an overall view of promoting the integration of residents within local community networks and initiatives. Following an introduction provided by EASO, a panel composed of representatives from Eurocities, City of Athens, City of Ghent, and the City of Milan presented policies and practices related to the governance of integration highlighting how reception authorities, CSOs and local authorities work hand in hand within their respective roles to foster better integration outcomes at local level for beneficiaries of international protection. Table 5 in Annex provides an overview of the main outcomes of this workshop.

Closing Debate

A closing debate on the challenges and future perspectives of reception with four panellists was **moderated by Mark Camilleri, Head of EASO's Executive Office a.i.** Before giving the floor to the panellists, he highlighted some key words which had dominated discussions during the day. These included:

- Contingency planning in the area of reception;
- The use of detention or restricted movement by some MS;
- The role that EASO/EUAA plays in reception and the need to strengthen EASO's mandate;
- Need for more thematic consultations with civil society on reception;
- Vulnerable persons in the context of reception;
- Role of politicians as well as the influence that could be made to affect political decisions in the field of asylum/migration;
- Role of fundamental rights including within EASO;
- The Dublin system;
- EU-Turkey statement;
- Private sponsorship;

- Communication to counter the populist narrative on migration;
- Interpretation and the importance of language regime;
- Integration measures;
- The need for solutions to be long-term and durable and not ad hoc;
- Sustainability of measures implemented;
- Importance of legal aid;
- Taking stock of lessons learned and using them;
- Response both by EU and CSOs;
- Perspectives on the future.

The UNHCR Regional Representative of EU Affairs, Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, highlighted several remaining challenges in the field of reception, including the detention of children, sub-optimal reception conditions and a lack of contingency planning by many Member States. He underlined the important role that EASO plays in the field of reception through e.g. their activities in the context of the network on reception, practical tools and training modules. EASO was encouraged to increase cooperation with civil society in the area of reception, underlining the added-value of CSOs' long standing practical experiences in this field. Cooperation with CSOs was encouraged, not only in the development of tools and trainings, but also in the dissemination of these. **A concrete suggestion was made to organise follow-up CF meetings in 2019 on the theme of reception, in parallel to the EASO network activities on reception.**

ECRE's Secretary General of ECRE, Catherine Woollard, commented on the challenges facing reception systems and made suggestions as to how EASO could help address these. Findings from the AIDA database indicate the following main challenges in the field of reception: sub-standard reception conditions; lack of capacity in reception systems; increased use of detention; nationality-based discrimination in reception centres, as well as; the punitive and unfair withdrawal of reception conditions. EASO plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges by e.g. facilitating the exchange of information, identification of good practices, and development of practical tools and trainings. **The Agency was encouraged to continue and further expand such activities and to increase cooperation with civil society. Moreover, she encouraged EASO to try to influence the policy debate on reception.**

Policy and Advocacy Director at Caritas, Shannon Pfohman, provided practical examples of how Caritas is involved in the provision of reception. Examples were provided of Caritas' involvement both in Italy and in Greece. In Italy, Caritas Italiana provides shared accommodation and communal residential housing to refugees since 2014. They organise families to host refugees until they become sufficiently independent. Social workers guide the process and the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach was emphasised. Caritas Italiana further assists asylum seekers at the hotspots by referring them to lawyers who can provide legal assistance. In Greece, Caritas Greece has been active in reception and integration activities since 2015. On the islands, Caritas Greece provides first reception services whereas on the mainland Caritas cooperates with UNHCR to provide housing to vulnerable persons in addition to being active at social centres. The challenging situation in Greece, especially at the islands, was underlined. Several suggestions were made to help overcome the challenges faced, including by making investments in community sponsorship schemes, more funding, efforts to address the populist rhetoric, and a stronger role by EU institutions – including EASO- in speaking out to Member States who provide sub-optimal reception conditions. **EASO was further encouraged to help create more sustainable solutions by strengthening cooperation with CSOs and capitalising on their knowledge.**

EASO's Executive Director a.i., Jamil Addou, emphasised a key challenge in the field of reception, namely the fragmentation of different aspects in the asylum chain. He advocated

for a more comprehensive approach to ensure higher efficiency of the overall asylum procedure. He reiterated the many activities that EASO implements in the field of reception (setting up the reception network, training, guidance, providing operational assistance on reception, etc.) and the resulting wealth of knowledge, including identification of good practices and innovative solutions. A new mandate was considered important to build further on existing initiatives and to make a real difference on the ground. The call for EASO to better involve CSOs in their work on reception was fully taken. EASO was open to strengthening cooperation with civil society across an increased range of activities but emphasised that the trust of national authorities constitutes a precondition. **Finally, a call was made for participants to help frame the modalities for cooperation with EASO. Suggestions on how the Agency could better reach out and engage with CSOs were more than welcomed. To this purpose, EASO would launch a Survey at the beginning of 2019 in order to collect input from CF members on the 2019 CF activities.**

During **Q&A**, the panellists debated whether the crisis in 2015-2016 could be labelled as such and discussed the effect of punitive measures on the management of asylum and reception systems. There was consensus amongst participants that there had been a crisis, though representative from ECRE and Caritas argued that this had primarily been a 'political' crisis and/or a 'solidarity' crisis rather than a 'refugee' crisis. As regards punitive measures, UNHCR saw punitive measures as harmful as they risk pushing migrants underground for fear of detention and deportation.

In his **closing statements**, the **EASO Executive Director a.i., Jamil Addou**, warmly thanked participants for their active participation. Many challenges had been discussed, but also many uplifting solutions identified. Those solutions should now be transferred from one situation to another. The key findings from this plenary would also be communicated to the EASO Reception Network.

Annex: Reporting Templates Parallel Workshops

Workshop 1: Evaluation of Information Activities

Key Questions/Themes

- Questions and Indicators
- Data collection methodologies
- Challenges and ethical concerns

Key Insights

Criteria:

Relevance
Effectiveness
Efficiency
Coherence

Data collection and methodologies:

Survey
Focus groups
Interviews
Observations
Documents

Challenges include:

Resources
Expertise
Quality
Cultural differences
Applicant expectations
Vulnerability
Bias
Trust

What works & why? (*good practices*)

What help is needed & from whom?

Looking forward/Unanswered Questions – *in collaboration with each other and EASO*

- More operational insights;
- Engage target audience in M&E process
- Identify and review existing evaluations

Workshop 2: Reception of Children

Key Questions/Themes

- Coordination of response
- Which child qualifies for special needs
- Overlooking of accompanied children

Key Insights

Key Insights		
Accompanied More likely detained Longer in asylum procedure Lack of dedicated facilities People with them might not be family	Unaccompanied Holistic approach Face-to-face real contact with child Personalize the system Timely timeframes CSOs filling the gaps!	Specific Needs Identification Training to identify Lack of referral mechanisms Building trust takes time Resources (language, psychologists)

What works & why? (*good practices*)

Access to children for CSOs
 Peer mentors (from host country)
 Child friendly spaces
 Buddy system and for family/children
 Communication through art
 Spaces to talk
 Round tables to assess the child
 Schools and their role
 Talking to children
 Appointing guardian (timely)
 Family care

What help is needed & from whom?

Training (NGO + authorities)
 Improving operational support
 Protect CSOs; help CSOs to be understood by authorities
 How to identify children with special needs in collaboration with CSOs
 Increase access for CSOs
 Database/mapping of services

Looking forward/Unanswered Questions – *in collaboration with each other and EASO*

Participation of children
 De-institutionalization (small-scale facilities)
 Family scale
 Integration with CP
 Promoting coordination of inputs by CSOs
 Building trust between CSOs and authorities
 Transition to adulthood

Workshop 3: Emergency Reception Provision

Key Questions/Themes

How to involve CSOs in contingency planning?
 How to consolidate knowledge?
 How to monitor performance?

Key Insights

<p>Collection of data From MS From CSOs → persons falling through the cracks and issues</p> <p>How to gather data? Process Template/database Common indicators</p>	<p>MS to create buffer capacity Conclude more agreements with CSOs and make it easier to do so</p> <p>Creativity and flexibility in the use of existing resources</p> <p>Recruitment: Appeal Employment site Training</p>	<p>Consult CSOs prior to adopting contingency plan</p> <p>Risk of fragmentation</p>
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What works & why? (*Good practices*)

Systematic consulting (on a periodic basis)
 Reporting and re-assessing

What help is needed & from whom?

USECSO network to recruit fast
 Traineeships from university
 MS to act in line with EU standards
 No longer exclusively CSOs filling gaps

Looking forward/Unanswered Questions – *in collaboration with each other and EASO*

- Definition of reception capacity and related indicators
- Benchmark for emergency situation & hence triggering of contingency planning
- What happens as a result of monitoring?

Workshop 4: Coordination between different stakeholders involved in reception

<p>Key Questions/Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing coordination with reception authorities - Key learnings - Main challenges - Role of EASO 		
<p>Key Insights</p>		
<p>Practical coordination e.g. on arrivals Studies and analysis Role of the media Sharing of information e.g. on monitoring Agreement on standards Cooperation with civil society Strategic plan with objectives for reception, protection and integration Have a legal basis for cooperation with NGOs in which roles are clearly defined</p>	<p>Informal networks Different levels of local representatives (e.g. in communities) Phone line Contact persons Strategic funding Support to access funding and coordination of activities (avoiding duplication)</p>	<p>Local authorities don't want to be monitored Thinking integration before asylum Following rules Overlap Lack of MoU Nr of shelters and partners Training of professionals Information about EASO tools (e.g. Guidance on reception indicators and standards)</p>

<p>What works & why? (Good practices observed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phone line to check respect of human rights - Informal networks - Contact persons - Regular meeting also in normal times 	<p>What help is needed & from whom?</p> <p>Sharing of information between countries Sharing standards Training by EASO Sharing EASO tools Better cooperation with civil society Support in no-go-zones Management of EU funding Compulsory consultations Coordination meetings and platforms Emergence of leadership to enhance coordination at EU level</p>
<p>Looking forward/Unanswered Questions – <i>in collaboration with each other and EASO</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to go around the legal basis that prevents your NGO from working? - How to overlap activities from different EU institutions? - Should national authority coordinate or EU institution? 	

Workshop 5: Reception & Society

Key Questions/Themes

- Pre-integration & social inclusion
- City/state cooperation

Key Insights

Integrated approach Coordination Innovation Social cohesion	Standing up to national level More evidence-based policies Sustainability of funding	Bridging the gap Between arrival and integration
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What works & why? (Good practices observed)

- City labs/partnership approach
- Integration from day 1
- Transparent communication
- Complement or substitute the role of the state

What help is needed & from whom?

- EU = better funding (is coming)
- Better coordination = multi-stakeholder approach
- Counter negativity

Looking forward/Unanswered Questions – *in collaboration with each other and EASO*

- Hard facts, not politically motivated
- Direct negative impact of political decisions
- Bridging issue = lack of support → more/better communication with social work organization to improve integration
- Improve guidance towards refugee/asylum seekers on where to get assistance on 'daily lives' issues

