



EASO Annual General Report 2017



June 2018



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SUPPORT IS OUR MISSION

The report was adopted by the EASO management board on 7 June 2018.

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List of abbreviations

AIP	asylum intervention pool
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AST(s)	asylum support team(s)
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CF	Consultative Forum
CIR	country intelligence reports
COI	country of origin information
COSI	Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security
CSO	civil society organisations
DGMM	directorate-general for migration management (Turkish ministry of the interior)
EAIPS	EASO asylum intervention pool system
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EFSA	European Food Safety Authority
EITF	EUAA implementation task force
EMN	European migration network
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EPRA	European platform of reception authorities
EPS	early warning and preparedness system
EU	European Union
EU+	EU Member States (EU-28) and associate countries, Norway and Switzerland
EU-28	total of the countries of the EU
EUAA	EU Agency for Asylum
EU-FRANK	facilitating resettlement and refugee admission through new knowledge project
Europol	European Police Office
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GAS	Greek asylum service
GPS	group for the provision of statistics
ICOPs	IDS country operations platforms
ICT	information and communications technology
IDS	information and documentation system
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
IPCR	integrated political crisis response

IPSN	identification of persons with special needs
ISAA	integrated situational awareness and analysis
IT	information technology
JHA	justice and home affairs
LAL	<i>List of available languages</i>
LO	liaison office
MARRI	Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative
MedCOI	medical country of origin information
NCPs	national contact points
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OVT	origin-verification tool
PVLMM	post-visa-liberalisation monitoring mechanism
RDPP	Regional Development and Protection Programme
RIS	reception and identification service
SOGI	sexual orientation and gender identity
SOPs	standard operating procedures
SRSS	structural reform support service
SSP	special support plans
THB	trafficking in human beings
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WB	western Balkans

Foreword

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) reached its sixth year of operation in 2017. On the operational front EASO was very active in 2017 in supporting Member States in dealing with the protracted migratory challenges and continued pressure on their asylum and reception systems. The very high numbers for new applications for international protection persisted, which meant that a lot of work remained for EASO. The increased focus that EASO had to place on operations in 2016 continued in 2017. In particular, the opening of the new EASO offices in Cyprus, Lesbos and Kos in 2017 highlighted EASO's expanding role in operational support.

In addition to this, 2017 was a year in which EASO was compelled to drastically intensify its efforts in all areas of its mandate in order to respond appropriately to the evolving needs and challenges on the ground. This was particularly challenging considering that EASO had to grow rapidly to keep pace with the increase in the operations requested by Council conclusions, the relocation decisions and the EU-Turkey (TR) statement. Moreover, ensuring an appropriate EASO presence in the hotspots in Italy and Greece remained challenging due to the difficulty for Member States to deploy a sufficient number of experts to support EASO operations.

Against this backdrop, in 2017 EASO continued to consolidate its core activities, further developed its operational and technical capability, and developed new activities in line with the EU agenda on migration and applicable Council conclusions and operating plans. For example, in Italy, EASO signed an amendment to its operating plan in July in order to set up a cooperation with the Italian ombudsperson for unaccompanied minors. EASO also had success with a new campaign reaching out to Eritreans in Italy who had not been registered for relocation. For frontline Member States, the implications of the asylum trends on their asylum and reception systems have been tremendous. EASO has therefore been seen as a crucial player to help them improve reception, processing capacity and increased response capacity in implementing procedures.

In 2017 EASO delivered well in its core-business areas, notably information and analysis, permanent support and horizontal activities. Overall, EASO continued to enhance its role, contributing to driving forward the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) by Member States. A whole number of tasks were undertaken to support this objective. They are all described in greater detail in this publication. For example, following increased demand, numerous national and regional training programmes were held. This significantly strengthened EASO's role as a provider

of training programmes for Member States and others. EASO also delivered numerous support tools for operations and relocation.

One of EASO's areas of particular focus in 2017 related to country guidance. EASO conducted an in-depth analysis of the variation in recognition rates, which indicated (among other things), that two of the possible reasons behind variations are; the different assessments made in Member States of the situation in a specific country of origin, and the interpretation of certain legal concepts. Therefore, EASO undertook substantial work in this area throughout the year and made progress on country of origin information (COI) and set up a country-guidance network. Its pilot exercise to draft a *Country guidance note on Afghanistan* has helped EASO to set the framework and methodology for future guidance.

EASO also closely monitored developments in the situation of asylum and delivered regular and reliable updates on asylum applications in the EU-28 and associate countries (EU+). Its reports throughout the year highlighted even more the indispensable role for EASO in supporting Member States at the external borders of the EU.

Further steady progress was made in our work on third-country support. Among others, following the signing of an exchange of letters by EASO and the directorate-general for migration management (DGMM) (Turkish ministry of the interior), EASO started to implement specific capacity-building activities with Turkey.

EASO's communication activities and relations with stakeholders have always been key to the success of the EASO's activities. Throughout 2017, we engaged closely with the management board, EU Member States, EU institutions, international and national non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs). Furthermore, EASO seized the opportunity offered by the Maltese presidency of the Council in the first 6 months of the year, to meet and receive numerous key high-level delegations at its headquarters.

EASO also actively engaged in interagency forums such as the justice and home-affairs-agencies network. Also, given the interconnected activities of EASO and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), EASO organised a joint meeting in Malta for the management boards of both agencies. This meeting was unique in several respects. It was the first time that both management boards sat together to look into how their agencies can improve their operational cooperation and increase their exchange of information to the benefit of both partners. They signed a 2-year cooperation

agreement to ensure a more integrated approach, the first of several concrete initiatives.

Another new activity in 2017 was our social-media-monitoring project, which we took over from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The data collected has been instrumental for the understanding of the social-network general trends and discourse related to flight and migration, smuggling networks, document fraud and integration issues. Further, following this success, EASO was asked by a number of Member States to look into the possibility of conducting targeted information campaigns in third countries. In response, EASO developed a social-media campaign targeted at Nigerians from scratch. This pilot project, even with a low budget, is counteracting wrong and unrealistic information and messages on asylum and migration which are spread on social media by smugglers and others.

New and expanded responsibilities bring new challenges. In particular, the importance gained by EASO's operational work had to be matched with the appropriate resources. In order to manage the large scale of its operations, EASO had to increase its human resources and logistics. In consequence, it had to find sufficient available financial resources for operations. In doing so, EASO had to make difficult budget reprioritisation and deprioritisation decisions and budget transfers throughout the year. EASO also met the challenge of finding sufficient crew to carry out its operational work in Italy and Greece. Whereas the Member State experts continued to represent the core element of EASO's capacity to respond to the challenges in EU frontline Member States, EASO started recruiting interims and individual experts to fill the gaps where Member State national-expert resources were exhausted.

In a certain sense, 2017 can be seen as a transitional year, since EASO started scaling down its operations towards the second half of the year because of the end of the EU relocation programme and the decrease in arrivals following the EU-Turkey statement. At the same

time, we started making changes at the level of EASO's organisation, in order to prepare EASO to take up new responsibilities in line with the Commission's proposal for a European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), which will transform EASO into a fully-fledged agency with added competencies. As the text of the new regulation developed further and our new roles took more shape with political agreements being reached between the co-legislators, one of the primary goals in 2017 was to boost our preparedness to implement the new mandate. Noteworthy in that context is the work undertaken by our internal task force and our management board in following the legislative processes closely and putting in place the foundations necessary so that the new agency can have a smooth kick-off once set up. In doing so, the task force has maintained a flexible approach so that activities can be easily adapted depending on the final outcome of the decision on the EUAA regulation.

In conclusion, it is evident that EASO's operational and permanent support to the countries facing migratory pressure continues to be indispensable. The figures in this publication are testimony to EASO's substantial contribution on the ground. However, big challenges lie ahead, and in 2018 EASO will be working to further fine-tune its activities in all areas in order to satisfy the needs of the Member States and the asylum seekers (also in the context of the forthcoming EUAA). A question we often get is whether EASO's engagement in Europe brings more quality to the national asylum systems. While the quantity of our engagement in training and support in asylum processes is very clear, EASO will need a monitoring role in order to go and check whether the CEAS is being implemented. The results of treatment of applications still varies widely across countries and there is still a long way ahead for EASO to help cultivate the much-needed convergence and bring high-quality standards in the EU. Hopefully, EASO can bring even more tangible added value with its new mandate.

Lastly, but not least, EASO's staff members remain the heart of EASO, and as I welcomed 82 new ones in 2017, I thank all of them for making 2017 a successful year. I look forward to continuing to build a stable, strong workforce.

1. Introduction



EASO's mission statement

EASO's mission is to contribute to the implementation and development of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) by providing support and facilitating, coordinating and strengthening practical cooperation among EU+ countries as an independent centre of expertise on asylum.

EASO's principles

In fulfilling its mission, EASO endeavours to always do the following.

- Provide comprehensive and timely support to requesting Member States.
- Stimulate quality and efficiency gains in the asylum and reception systems of Member States.
- Act as an independent and impartial centre of expert advice.
- Provide accurate and up-to-date data, analyses and assessments on asylum-related matters.
- Support Member States in taking up their responsibilities in asylum and in showing solidarity with Member States whose asylum systems are under pressure.
- Facilitate and stimulating joint and common practical cooperation measures in asylum and, as a result of that, foster mutual trust among Member States.
- Provide evidence-based input to EU policymakers on asylum.
- Cooperate with EU institutions, EU agencies and bodies, third countries, international organisations and civil society.



The EASO annual general report

The annual general report describes the achievements of EASO in 2017 and is prepared under Article 29(1)(c) of the EASO regulation ⁽¹⁾. The report was adopted by the EASO management board and was sent to the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, including the Internal Audit Service, and the Court of Auditors no later than 15 June 2018. The annual general report is a public document and is translated into all official languages of the EU.

EASO produces a separate annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union under Articles 12(1) and 29(1)(d) that report is also made available publicly.

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU) 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 establishing a European Asylum Support Office, OJ L 132, 29.5.2010, p. 11.

2. Setting the scene: developments in 2017



Tackling the continued migratory pressure

The year 2017 did not bring any particular major policy changes which impacted significantly the work of EASO. As a matter of fact, the work undertaken in 2017 built mainly on the efforts, structures and policy frameworks put in place in the two preceding years, such as the adoption of the European agenda on migration, which set out a comprehensive approach to improve the management of migration in 2015, and the introduction of the EU-Turkey statement in 2016. EASO however, had new operating plans in place with frontline Member States which were designed such to take into consideration the specific needs of these states in 2017, while aligning them with the EU policy adopted in previous years.

Throughout 2017, the high number of applicants for international protection in the EU+ persisted, albeit not at the levels of 2015 and 2016. The frontline EU Member States were especially affected by the situation, experiencing significant pressure on their asylum and reception systems. This means that demand for EASO's operational work remained. Furthermore, given the continued migratory pressure, EASO had to expand its operations in 2017 and devote increased resources to its operational activities in Greece and Italy in particular.

Taking stock of developments in Greece

Further to the EU-Turkey statement of 2016, Greece saw a considerable drop in the daily number of arrivals. However, the number of asylum applications lodged in 2017 increased exponentially. EASO continued to support Greece, in line with its operating plan, in the implementation of the EU relocation programme, the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement and the implementation of the CEAS, with a particular focus on support to the reception and identification service (RIS) and the Greek asylum service (GAS). Experts also provided support to caseworkers of the Dublin unit.

The European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) asked consultancy firm McKinsey to analyse the situation on the Greek islands and in December 2016, the European Council endorsed the consultancy action plan to clear the backlog by April 2017. The Greek authorities and the SRSS asked EASO to be a key driver of the actions identified in the plan, together with the GAS. A series of recommendations and key actions related to the increased efficiency, speed and quality in the first instance of the asylum procedure were implemented in the first half of the year, which required an increase in EASO-deployed experts and interpreters.

An increased presence in Italy

Italy saw a sharp rise in the number of arrivals through the Central Mediterranean route, and an increase in arrivals by minors, including unaccompanied minors, which led to increased pressure on its reception system.

In 2017 EASO provided support through activities related to; relocation, the Dublin family-reunification procedure, registration of applications for international protection, reception (with a particular focus on unaccompanied minors), capacity building for local authorities and authorities managing unaccompanied-minor accommodation centres and professional development for the staff of the Italian ministry of the interior dealing with asylum and reception, including COI support.

In addition to this, the Italian ombudsperson for children and adolescents wrote to EASO at the end of May 2017 requesting further support. This resulted in the signature of an amendment to the operating plan to include a new measure to support the new system of voluntary guardians. The measure, whose implementation started in August, is closely linked to the high number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy during the year as well as to their access to the procedure for international protection.

In July EASO also replied positively to a request from the operational commander of the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) to support Operation Sophia in the training of the Libyan coast guard and navy personnel, as well as in the delivery of lectures to EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia personnel.

The European Commission, in its July 2017 action plan to support Italy, requested that EASO support additional action in Italy. The aims of this were to process applications and identify and register all potential applicants for relocation, in particular those from Eritrea. In response, EASO launched a reach-out campaign and the mobilised additional support teams.

Overall, EASO increased its presence in Italy in 2017, partly with mobile teams, covering multiple new locations, disembarkation areas, new hotspots and also accommodation centres. Since the beginning of April 2017, Member State experts have been deployed to the EASO operational office in Rome for the setup of a helpdesk.

A much enhanced role in Cyprus

In line with the amendment to the special support plan (SPP) to Cyprus, EASO engaged in 2017 in support to the asylum service in backlog management, and the enhancement of the national reception system, as well as the organisation of workshops, training and study visits for staff of the Cypriot asylum and reception services. In April EASO opened its operational office in Nicosia, within the premises of the asylum service, and an EASO field coordinator has been permanently based in Nicosia since September 2017.

EASO's search for experts

Overall, the large scale of EASO's operations on the ground in 2017 led to an increased need for experts, which could not be sufficiently met by the Member States for various reasons. EASO, in response, launched an open calls for experts, with clearer profile and task descriptions, produced longer-term outlooks on deployment needs and started developing weekly situational pictures on security. EASO also started working on improving its planning capability, with the development of the EASO asylum intervention pool system (EAIPS) in order to ensure the necessary resources are available at all times.

At the request of several Member States and in order to provide the EU-28 with the necessary assurances for them to increase their commitment and number of deployments of experts to the hotspots, EASO organised a fact-finding trip ('mission') to assess the security and health situation in the hotspots in Lesbos and Kos in July. This visit took place in close cooperation with the Greek authorities, with a small delegation composed of representatives of the EASO management board and the European Commission, supported by EASO staff and a health and safety/security expert. The subsequent report listed the security and health shortcomings identified and made several recommendations to be addressed by the relevant Greek authorities.

EASO, in 2017, continued to rely heavily on Member States making their national experts available. However, in the absence of Member State experts, EASO amended relevant rules to allow for the recruitment of interim workers and the deployment of individual experts to EASO when a national pool is exhausted. EASO also started welcoming more junior profiles from the Member States. Extensive work went into their training under a newly introduced special training programme for junior experts.

Downsizing its operations

In the second half of the year, EASO's support changed. Considering the EU relocation programme and the priorities following the implementation of the joint action plan on the EU-Turkey statement completed, EASO started scaling down its support in these areas, gradually downsizing its teams (though support to RIS and to the GAS for the implementation of the regular asylum procedure and the Dublin outgoing requests continued). Finally, with reference to the EU-Turkey statement, actions during the last quarter of the year focused on: improving the vulnerability-identification-and-referral pathway, enhancing the quality of the procedure, ensuring proper communication of rights and obligations to applicants, guaranteeing the safety and security of staff and operational sites. EASO also agreed to support Greece in the regular asylum procedure.

EASO on the international arena

At the international level, EASO contributed to improving asylum and reception capacity in third countries in 2017 in line with the overall EU external-relations policies and priorities, in particular, the Commission communication on establishing a new partnership framework with third countries under the European agenda on migration.

EASO engaged in activities under the regional Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) II Project on protection-sensitive migration management (2016-2018) in the western Balkans. In North Africa EASO ensured some of the follow-up actions to the ENPI plan, which had closed in 2016, in particular with Jordan and Tunisia. In addition, it carried out some activities related to the RDPP North Africa.

EASO also played a role in resettlement, in line with the Commission Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Union Resettlement Framework and amending Regulation (EU) No 516/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council — COM(2016) 468. EASO started developing tools and training in close cooperation with the facilitating resettlement and refugee admission through new knowledge (EU-FRANK) project, and is collecting data on resettlement to the EU+. In addition to this, an EASO resettlement expert joined the EU delegation in Ankara and a cooperation agreement was signed with the Turkish ministry of the interior (implementation started, 2017).

New tasks: social-media monitoring

For the first time, in 2017, EASO monitored social-media in Arabic, Pashto, Dari and Farsi, as part of a social-media-monitoring project taken over from UNHCR. The project that started as a joint UNHCR-EASO project in the first 3 months of the year developed into an exclusive EASO project with three persons working on it full-time by the end of 2017. EASO collaborated with a number of national and international offices and agencies for successful delivery and follow-up of the findings of the project.

A year marked by difficult budget decisions

The significant increase in EASO operational activities in 2017 required appropriate financial resources. EASO started the year with a budget of EUR 69.2 million. A first amendment to the budget provided an extra EUR 3.8 million, which was allocated mainly to finance costs incurred by the operational support to Greece and Italy and in the area of training.

Around the middle of the year, it became evident that the operational expenditure would exceed the previous estimates. Consequently, a second budgetary amendment was made, increasing the budget by EUR 13.78 million in commitment appropriations and EUR 6.17 million in payment appropriations. This major budget increase (September 2017) was necessary in order to finance the translation of an increased number of core EASO training modules and to finance the operations in Greece and Italy, which were marked by an increased workload, and higher numbers of

deployments of experts and interpreters. As to Italy, the higher cost of the operations was a direct result of the amendment to the operating plan for extended support in relation to unaccompanied minors in collaboration with the ombudsperson for children and adolescents. At the same time, the agency also conducted two deprioritisation processes, which redirected money to the implementation of support activities in Greece and the development of support tools for operations.

Preparing for a new mandate

While the negotiations on the proposed legal instruments of the reformed CEAS are ongoing, EASO preparations for future developments have been in full swing since early 2017. EASO is monitoring the state of play of the draft CEAS legislation package and both the EASO management board and EASO are preparing for its expanded role and new specific tasks. Under EASO's preparations for implementation of the new EUAA regulation, an internal EUAA implementation task force (EITF) was set up on 24 April 2017. Its remit is to steer and oversee planning for the EUAA regulation. In 2017 the agency has also started seeking the guidance of the management board in preparation for its new tasks and priority areas.

As to the preparations from the administration side, EASO continues to build its internal structure and recruitment is progressing with key positions being filled. EASO has also made significant investment in information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and is negotiating contracts to provide for the space to accommodate extra personnel.

3. EASO priorities in 2017



EASO set out its priorities for 2017 in the work programme 2017 (adopted by the management board on 18 November 2016 and subsequently adjusted in line with the adopted EU budget). The work programme and the budget were amended twice to take into account significant changes that took place during 2017.

EASO priorities in 2017 were as follows.

- **Enhancing operational support**

- Increasing operational support based on the emerging needs of Member States to fully implement the EU asylum laws ('the EU asylum *acquis*'), in particular for those Member States subject to pressure on their asylum and reception systems due to extraordinary increases in applications for international protection.

- In parallel and in addition to the ongoing operations, EASO being ready to deploy staff and experts and to provide the necessary infrastructure/services support according to the needs on the ground and the requests of Member States.

- Completing the relocation of 160 000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU+ countries.

- Developing support tools for operations and relocation.

- Improving the collection and analysis of operational data.



- **Information, analysis and knowledge development**

- Consolidating EASO's role as clearing house for national COI by: coordinating national COI production, producing more common COI through the network approach and promoting effective use through the COI portal.
- Boosting the in-house production capacity of the COI team under the Council conclusions of 21 April 2016.
- Preparing a gradual transfer of medical country of origin information (MedCOI) activities, as appropriate, according to an action plan set up in consultation with the Commission and Member States.
- Continuing to produce information relevant for the possible designation of safe countries of origin.
- Further developing the EASO information and documentation system (IDS) as a new systematic monitoring tool on the CEAS, with input from various sources including the quality matrix mapping, national and European case-law, and national legislation.
- Further developing the EASO early warning and preparedness system in order to foster the creation of an effective situational picture on migration, which can be used for policymaking, response preparation, and future monitoring.
- Continuing to pursue efforts to create an empirically validated model of the functioning of asylum-related migration through the EASO research programme on push and pull factors.

- **Improving the quality of asylum processes and reception conditions**

- Continuing to map policies and practices in relation to the CEAS and developing tools and guidelines aiming to improve the quality of asylum processes and decisions, based on identified needs and best practices.
- Developing operational standards and indicators and the corresponding assessment frameworks for the future monitoring function of EASO.
- Enhancing support for quality-management mechanisms at EU and national levels.
- Supporting the better identification of vulnerable persons, including in the context of hotspots and while implementing relocation.
- Consolidating the network of the national Dublin units set up in 2016, aiming to foster mutual cooperation

and consistent application of the Dublin system, including for the purposes of relocation.

- Strengthening the work of the network of the national reception authorities to foster the exchange of information and best practices, as well as further developing operational standards and indicators on reception conditions.

- **Training and professional development**

- Further strengthening the role of common training and professional development in asylum.
- Further updating and upgrading the EASO training curriculum in line with the EASO module life-cycle principle.
- Rolling out a new e-learning platform to enhance the existing e-learning possibilities.
- Setting up an international sectoral qualification, ensuring that certified asylum officials have the required level of knowledge, skills and competencies.
- Providing thematic training sessions for specific groups.
- Resuming joint preparation of professional-development materials for members of national courts and tribunals, while fully respecting the principle of the independence of the judiciary.

- **External dimension**

- In line with the 2016 Commission Communication and in coordination with the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), supporting the approach of renewed partnerships with third countries, through tailored 'compacts', to be developed according to the situation and needs of each partner third country.
- Geographically targeting EASO activities in line with the EASO external action strategy, with a continued focus on the western Balkans, Turkey and North Africa.
- Carrying out EASO activities in the western Balkans through enhanced cooperation with EU agencies and international organisations (e.g. the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)) to respond to the needs in the region by providing capacity building, as well as operational support (where appropriate), taking into account existing regional arrangements.

- Following up on the Valletta summit action plan of November 2015 by providing training and improving quality of the asylum processes, as appropriate, in the relevant third countries.
 - Supporting the implementation of the European resettlement scheme and other EU+ country resettlement actions through capacity-building measures in Member States that have little or no experience of resettlement, through a pilot project in a strategic third country.
- **Horizontal activities**
 - Strengthening effectiveness horizontally among all relevant stakeholders of the EASO cooperation network, including UNHCR and the EU agencies, in particular the justice and home affairs (JHA) agencies. Further developing EASO's positive relationship with civil society through more targeted consultations, transparency and outreach activities.

4. EASO achievements in 2017



EASO's results for 2017 are described in detail below under the respective headings for its core-business activities.

4.1. Operational support

EASO carries out operational-support activities aimed at addressing the emerging needs of Member States to fully implement the EU asylum *acquis* and to respond to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems. EASO tailors its operational support to the specific needs as well as the requests made by individual Member States.

Operational support is provided by deploying EU+ country experts in asylum support teams (ASTs) or by providing other support as required, including through joint processing and by making interim staff available. EASO cooperates with the relevant bodies in providing such support, devoting special attention to operational cooperation with Frontex and other stakeholders.

To ensure efficient implementation of activities on the ground, EASO provides the necessary logistics, equipment, furniture, as well as the necessary services, such as interpretation or cultural-mediation services, transportation services and administrative support.

4.1.1. Italy

EASO's main results in 2017
1 Operating Plan amended and implemented and 1 new Operating Plan signed
371 experts deployed: 34 for training and capacity building of the Italian COI unit 327 experts involved in procedures and tools in support of relocation 10 interim experts in support of the Italian Ombudsman
78 cultural mediators and 30 EASO interim staff contracted
540 participants from national and local authorities, and civil society in support measures (reception capacity building, training, professional development)
Almost 44 000 migrants in Italy were informed about relocation and Dublin following EASO support
10 726 applications for international protection were registered with the support of EASO
11 464 persons were relocated with EASO support, of which 8 808 in 2017

Technical and operational assistance

Following a request for support from the Italian authorities, EASO signed an operating plan with Italy in December 2016, encompassing all technical and operational assistance, including support for the relocation procedure. This plan was implemented over 12 months (January-December 2017). At the end of 2017 EASO, in close collaboration with the Italian authorities, identified the operational needs for 2018, and signed a new operating plan.

Under the original plan for 2017, EASO further developed its operational support for Italy by responding to the particular pressure on Italy's asylum and reception systems and by supporting the full implementation of the EU asylum *acquis*. EASO has been responsible for providing the following.

- Support with informing and registering applicants for international protection.
- Support with handling outgoing Dublin take-charge requests.
- Strengthened reception capacity, especially with regard to unaccompanied minors.
- Support for the professional development and COI activities of civil-liberties-and-immigration-department staff within the Italian ministry of the interior.

EASO also facilitated the exchange of information between the national contact points (NCPs) and the competent authorities in Italy.

Training support

EASO support in improving reception capacity: EASO delivered eight 2-day training sessions in 2017 for authorities managing accommodation centres for unaccompanied minors. For more information on operational training please see the sections 'development of support for operations, the hotspots and relocation' and 'training'.

In addition to the above (and at the request of the Italian authorities), EASO provided containers to be used as reception units, medical buildings, storage and mobile offices for the Taranto hotspots.

In support of professional development aimed at enhancing skills, knowledge, tools and procedures of the Italian national staff, EASO organised one study visit of the Italian asylum commission staff to the Swiss asylum authorities, two international COI conferences on Nigeria and Pakistan, two COI factsheets on Bangladesh

and Nigeria, and trained Italian staff in various related areas.

A capacity-building role

In 2017 EASO also continued to support the Italian authorities by carrying out capacity-building activities to enable them to deal with the high influx better.

EASO ASTs informed almost 44 000 migrants (arriving in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route) about the EU relocation programme and the Dublin procedure. EASO also supported the identification, referral and registration of 10 726 applications for international protection under the EU relocation programme, family unity criteria (Dublin III regulation), and the Italian national asylum procedure.

More specifically, EASO supported the Italian authorities with the preparation of 7 999 relocation requests and 9 203 relocation decisions, and the handling of 1 320 Dublin take-charge requests. As a result of this support, 11 464 candidates were relocated from Italy by the end of 2017.

In the second quarter of 2017, EASO also provided support in updating the templates used for the detection of potential exclusion cases, vulnerability checks and for the registration of family members in the relocation context.

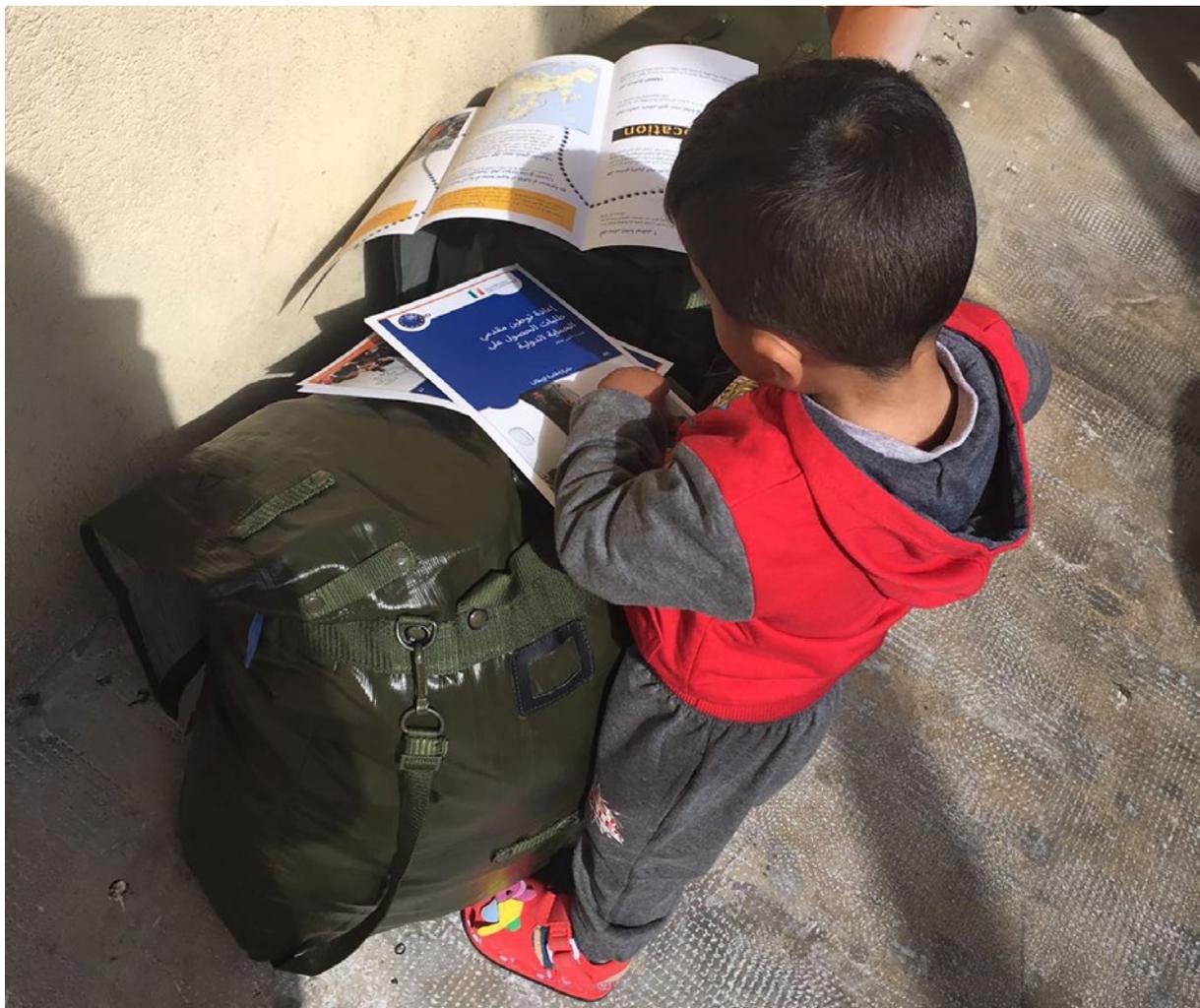
An extended role in Italy

Adapting to the rapidly evolving situation in Italy and upon request from the Italian authorities, EASO adjusted its activities in order to provide appropriate support to address newly emerging needs.

In July 2017, the operating plan was therefore amended, extending EASO's role in Italy with a measure aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Italian ombudsperson for children and adolescents and implementing protection measures for unaccompanied minors.

In this context, EASO prepared a list of voluntary guardians, all trained by EASO (five 4-day training sessions). The support measure also comprised an extensive awareness-raising campaign (refer to 4.5.2 *EASO communication and stakeholder relations*, for more details). Ten experts were deployed for the implementation of this task, six of whom were based in the office of the ombudsperson in Rome and four were deployed in the regions of Tuscany, Sardinia and Abruzzo under the direct responsibility of the ombudsperson. These activities will be continued and evaluated in 2018.

Also noteworthy is that in 2017, EASO extended the space in its operational office in Rome to provide more room for support facilities such as training rooms.



4.1.2. Greece

EASO's main results in 2017
1 Operating Plan implemented and 1 new Operating Plan signed
7 500 calls per week answered by 2 EASO Hotlines
2 'Escalation Desks'
13 containers provided with furniture and ICT equipment
51 experts deployed for support in EU Relocation Programme
19 interim staff seconded for support in EU Relocation Programme and regular asylum procedure
A pool of 124 interpreters provided interpretation for relocation and support for the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement
Support in registration of 27 000 applications for relocation
Support in sending 24 904 relocation requests
Over 50 site visits conducted for information provision
9 experts and 6 interims deployed and seconded to the Greek Dublin unit
139 Greek national authority participants in capacity-building support measures
308 experts, and interpreters deployed for the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement
124 interpreters and 148 EASO interim staff contracted
58 interim caseworkers deployed for the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, 25 interim registration assistants, and 3 interim operational assistants
11 assistant legal rapporteurs seconded to the Independent Appeals Committees
9 134 interviews for the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement conducted with support of EASO, i.e. roughly 68 % of all interviews conducted in the 5 hotspots in 2017
2 274 vulnerability assessments in the framework of admissibility and eligibility procedures and the merged workflow
645 vulnerability interviews conducted for the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement
14 430 persons relocated with EASO support

In December 2016, EASO signed an operating plan with Greece, encompassing all technical and operational

assistance to be provided (January 2017-December 2017).

Similar to its support for Italy, in Greece EASO contributed to building the capacity and resources of the Greek authorities to implement the CEAS and the EU relocation programme. In Greece, EASO's support also includes support for making the EU-Turkey statement operational, in line with the European Commission's joint action plan. EASO also supported Greece in the regular asylum procedure.

In parallel with deploying experts (and contingent on requests received), EASO assisted the Greek authorities in 2017 with logistics, equipment and other services. These included containers (i.e. mobile work stations) with furniture and ICT equipment, processing support by interim staff and interpretation services.

Relocating from Greece

EASO responsibilities under the EU relocation programme in Greece in 2017 were similar to those in Italy. They involved providing information to potential relocation candidates, referring them to the GAS, supporting the full registration of their applications, and (in cooperation with the GAS, the Member States and UNHCR) contacting and supporting applicants in relation to their interview appointments (e.g. providing transport). EASO also provided support in the detection of document fraud in the asylum-service-relocation premises.

To enhance the effectiveness of the programme, EASO did the following:

- Staffed two dedicated hotlines;
- Staffed two 'escalation desks' for both quality review and advice (Greek relocation unit in Athens and Thessaloniki);
- Developed a 'matching tool' (refer to Section 4.1.4 development of support tools) to support of the relocation-process 'matching unit'.

Helping Greece to cope with arrivals from Turkey

Since March 2016, EASO has provided support to the Greek authorities in EU-Turkey statement implementation on the Greek islands. In 2017, this support was increased with interim caseworkers to support the interview procedure on the islands, the secondment of interim registration assistants to the GAS and the secondment of interim assistant legal rapporteurs to the independent appeals committees to prepare files in support of the processing of asylum claims at the second instance of the asylum procedure.

EASO caseworkers and interpreters provided support in performing 9 134 asylum interviews and drafting concluding remarks under the border procedure. In addition to this, in order to assure quality in the procedure, EASO undertook several initiatives to train and prepare staff (refer to Sections 4.1.4 and 4.3.1 for more details) for their key specified tasks on the Greek islands.

In February 2017 EASO set up a helpdesk in Athens where it has senior experts advising on COI-related matters and on complex individual cases. Furthermore, on a biweekly basis, EASO has quality-reviewed interview transcripts, vulnerability assessments and expert opinions in cases examined by the deployed experts.

In terms of office facilities, EASO had to carry out refurbishment works in 2017 in its offices in Lesbos and Chios to make the EASO facilities operational, and contracted two interim security assistants for these locations. With this, EASO now has security services in place in all areas of operation on the Greek islands. (For more information on operational training please see the sections 'development of support for operations, the hotspots and relocation' and 'training').

A better response to needs of vulnerable applicants

EASO's capacity-building activities in the area of reception comprised thematic meetings, one train-the-trainers session in the EASO reception module, and two workshops on reception. Five experts from EU+ countries were deployed in the context of reception capacity building and six interim support staff were seconded to the Greek RIS to support operational needs.

Their main area of focus was on enhancing the identification and categorisation of vulnerabilities and the referral of vulnerable persons. Training sessions were delivered on: the assessment of vulnerabilities; newly developed medical/vulnerability templates and ICT equipment to the RIS (refer to Section 4.1.4 Development of support tools). A workshop was also delivered on the IPSN tool, in addition to a briefing for RIS child protection officers.

Supporting the decisions on which country is to process the asylum application

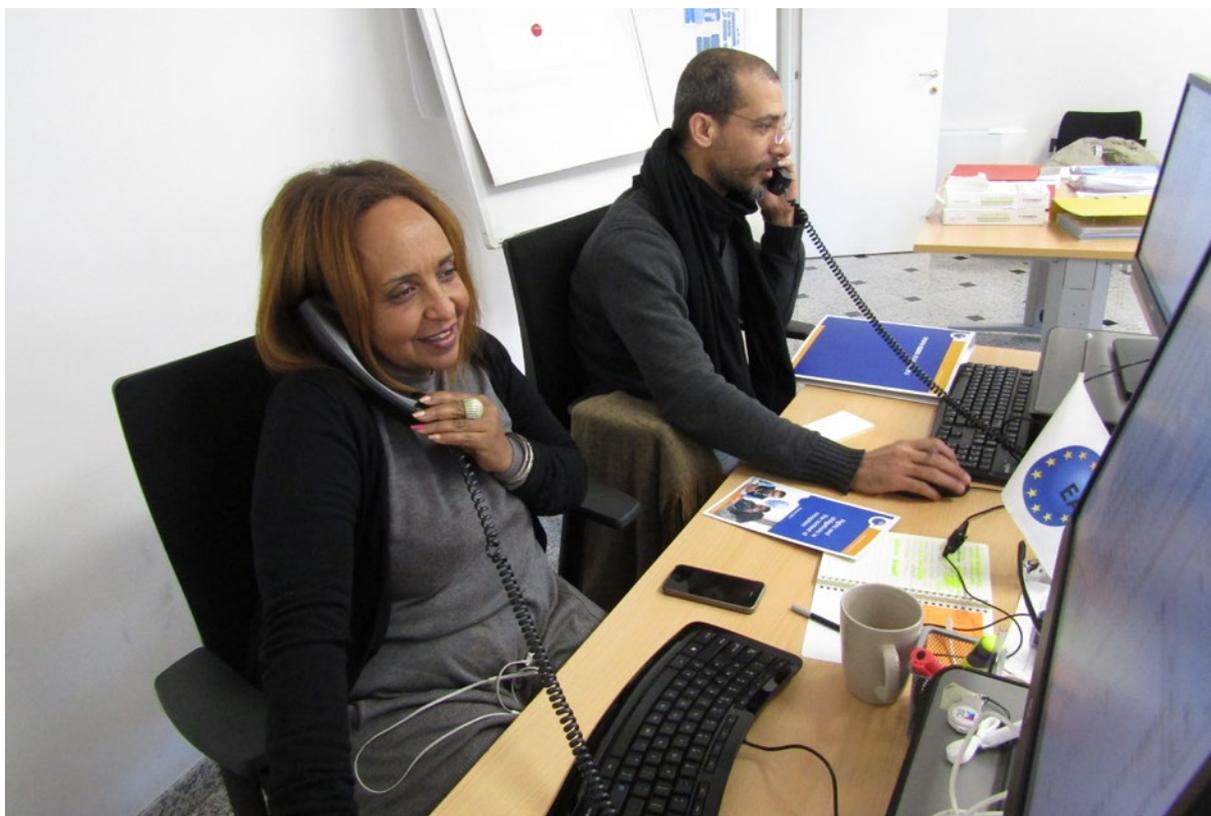
Furthermore, EASO's ASTs also played a significant role in supporting the caseworkers in the Dublin unit in Athens with the processing of outgoing requests and transfers, on-the-job coaching and advice, training, capacity-building and operational support. During the year, EASO deployed nine experts to the Dublin Unit to provide advice, tools and presentations and seconded six interim support staff.

Support in funds absorption

EASO assisted the RIS in the effective management and absorption of EU funds and other financial resources, by deploying Member State experts and interim staff to support drafting and managing of project proposals and strategic planning.

Support with ICT tools

EASO, lastly, provided initial support for the design of an access system for entry and exit in the hotspots. To this end, EASO facilitated a study visit to Belgium for four RIS officials



4.1.3. Bulgaria and Cyprus

EASO's main results in 2017
Third amendment of Special Support Plan for Bulgaria
6 two-day training sessions organised in Bulgaria on 3 EASO modules
4 experts and 17 interpreters deployed in Bulgaria
4 judicial analyses translated into Bulgarian or underway
2 training sessions held for interpreters in Bulgaria
2 study visits organised for Bulgarian officials
Third and fourth amendment of Special Support Plan for Cyprus
26 experts, 12 interpreters and 14 interim staff deployed in Cyprus
372 interviews conducted and 304 concluding remarks drafted on applications for international protection
4 training sessions held in Cyprus
3 study visits organised for Cypriot officials

Supporting Bulgaria and Cyprus

In 2017, EASO continued to provide special support to Bulgaria and Cyprus as part of the SSPs signed with these two Member States.

Throughout 2017 EASO continued to face a lack of nominations of Member State experts to Cyprus, resulting in a delay in the implementation of support activities, a challenge that was partially remedied by the deployment of interim staff.

Amended and extended support

The Bulgarian state agency for refugees signed the SSP for Bulgaria in 2014. When the first SSP extension expired on 30 June 2017, the SSP was amended for the second time with a new duration until the end of October 2017. During this extended timeframe, a complete review of the support measures was conducted, resulting in a third amendment of the SSP, focusing on enhancing the capacity of the Bulgarian authorities to deal with the high influx of mixed migration flows. The lifespan of the current SSP is from 27 October 2017 until 31 October 2018.

The SSP for Cyprus, originally signed in 2014 and amended in 2015 and 2016, was extended for the third time on 28 February 2017, upon request of the Cypriot authorities. This gave EASO the task of continuing to implement the previously agreed support measures and to enhance its role in Cyprus with some new measures

related to backlog management and contingency planning. A fourth amendment of the plan was signed in December, allowing for an extension of EASO support in Cyprus until 31 January 2019, focusing only on three measures: backlog management, support in reception and open accommodation, and a contingency support measure for the emergency centre, upon request of the Cypriot asylum service.

Increasing quality through tools and training

In 2017 the support provided by EASO for Bulgaria comprised primarily capacity-building measures. In Bulgaria, EASO has supported the competent authorities with the application of quality tools in the asylum procedure and compliance with the EU asylum *acquis*. To this end, EASO translated several quality tools and practical guides into Bulgarian. In addition to this, EASO organised six 2-day training sessions based on three EASO training-curriculum modules ('inclusion', 'interviewing techniques', and 'interviewing vulnerable persons') in two different locations in Bulgaria.

Reception-related support

The reception capacity and conditions in Bulgaria have been under constant revision since 2013, and EASO was requested to respond to Bulgaria's need for developing contingency measures for maintaining and improving quality standards. Against this backdrop, in 2017 EASO organised a workshop and one study visit (Poland) on the topic of detention for Bulgarian reception staff. Complementary to this, the support measure included the deployment of experts to assist in the drafting of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for detention.

From the beginning, a key part of EASO's engagement in Bulgaria has been to ensure efficient identification of special needs and early referral of vulnerable asylum applicants (including unaccompanied minors) to relevant services. In 2017 the competent Bulgarian authorities continued to request EASO's guidance and strategic advice in relation to the screening of persons with special needs in open reception centres (in particular unaccompanied minors) and the assessment of vulnerabilities. Also in this context, EASO supplied advice on guardianship, undertook a mapping of the Bulgarian childcare system and organised a workshop on age assessment.

In Cyprus, EASO delivered four workshops in 2017 on the medico-legal aspects of torture for medical professionals and asylum caseworkers. Furthermore, EASO organised two study visits for Cypriot officials (Germany and Sweden) on access to education, and one study visit (the Netherlands) on the screening of asylum seekers.



EASO also deployed one psychologist to deliver psychological support to children experiencing a traumatic migration, as well as to deliver workshops and guidance on recognising and interviewing applicants with psychological disorders.

In parallel, EASO deployed 13 experts and eight interim reception assistants to support reception activities in the Kofinou reception centre in Cyprus and organised one operational training on reception for them.

Furthermore, EASO organised a workshop on the reception of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons in collective accommodation.

Interpretation support

EASO has also been active in providing support to enhance Member State access to interpretation, among others through the *List of available languages* (LAL) (refer to Section 4.3.8 for more details).

EASO also deployed 17 interpreters to Bulgaria and 12 interpreters to Cyprus in 2017, and ensured the translation (or start of the translation) of four judicial analyses into Bulgarian.

EASO also organised two operational courses for interpreters working for the Bulgarian national asylum

authority and training for interpreters was held in Nicosia, Cyprus. This allowed the interpreters to consolidate their interpretation knowledge and skills in the asylum context and to exchange best practices in relation to the role of the interpreter in the asylum processes.

Clearing the backlog in Cyprus

EASO deployed 11 experts and six interim caseworkers in Nicosia for backlog management, and held two operational training sessions on this very same topic, drafting a SOP for this purpose.

ICT tools and fund management

As part of EASO's support in developing ICT tools for both Member States, it organised one study visit (Italy) for the electronic case-management system for the Dublin procedure for Bulgarian officials.

In support of Cyprus, two Member State experts from Hungary provided a test entry-exit barcode system for reception centres.

Finally, EASO deployed experts to Bulgaria to assist with drafting best practice and internal guidelines related to the allocation of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)/EU+ funds.



4.1.4. Development of support tools for operations, the hotspots and relocation

EASO's main results in 2017
Development and testing of the first version of the EAIPS
3 web-based platforms made available on IDS and merged by ICOPs
1 practical guide for experts in EASO Operations finalised
2 AIP NCP meetings organised
12 practical tools developed, 6 practical tools refined
13 training materials developed on relocation and the hotspot approach
55 training sessions delivered on relocation and the hotspot approach
804 participants in training sessions on relocation and the hotspot approach
40 weekly reports on hotspots and relocation issued

In 2017 EASO undertook substantial work to develop and, where needed, improve its tools and training materials used in operations and in particular those used for the implementation of the EU relocation scheme and the hotspot approach.

Throughout 2017 EASO also continued to develop its role, contributing to enhancing the capacity of national authorities to relocate applicants for international protection and to consistently implement the hotspot approach, by means of an impressive number of training sessions.

In addition to this EASO meets and communicates at regular intervals with the NCPs in order to facilitate and improve practical cooperation related to Member State experts in EASO operations.

Developing information technology tools for operations

Firstly, EASO worked further on developing an integrated web-based platform for the management of operational resources, the EAIPS. The year 2017 saw the development of the first version to be tested in collaboration with NCPs. The development of this ICT-supported environment is considered an important step towards electronically managing the calls for experts, the nominations, the selection and the deployment of Member State experts in the AIP.

Secondly, EASO's IDS was improved in 2017 with three new web-based platforms made available and later

merged by the IDS country operations platforms (ICOPs), combining operational information on Greece, Italy and Cyprus for staff and experts deployed in the ASTs.

Thirdly, in 2017 EASO concluded the development of a matching tool to assist Greece with the matching of international-protection applicants eligible for relocation with pledged places. The software proposes a match for each open Member State pledge to relocate an applicant. This matching process aims to facilitate the integration of applicants into a host society; hence, it serves the interest of both the applicant and relocation Member State. This process has the additional benefit of minimising the risk of secondary movements after relocation.

Other new practical tools for EASO operations

In 2017, EASO developed a guidance note on admissibility and admissibility and eligibility (i.e. 'in-merits') assessment, and following a new development on the processing of international-protection applications on the Greek islands, EASO also had to draft a SOP for a combined procedure of admissibility and in-merits assessment, developed jointly with the GAS.

Additionally, EASO drafted three country-specific interview-guidance documents for use in the Greek-hotspot operations with nationals of Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, and prepared a list of COI references for these, the top three nationalities arriving on the Greek islands. EASO also developed argumentation tools to support the Greek Dublin unit, and prepared information on Member State policies and practices on reunification of families from Turkey.

In support of the vulnerability assessments, EASO, together with the Greek ministry of health, the RIS and the GAS, finalised a common template for medical examinations. Furthermore, EASO developed a vulnerability guidance note for operations in the context of the Greek border procedure, as well as making proposals for definitions of categories of vulnerability, and supplying information on what might constitute an incurable disease.

EASO built some origin-verification tools (OVTs), (notably for Eritrean and Syrian origins) and updated them in 2017 with input received from the COI strategic network. EASO also developed focused COI tools in the form of factsheets to support the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement in the Greek hotspots, and set up a COI-query system in Athens. For the same reason, EASO set up a helpdesk, which also responds to queries sent to them by EASO hotspot field experts and EASO produced 21 quality feedback reports, reviewing almost 200 interviews and opinions prepared by experts and interim caseworkers.

In 2017 EASO finalised and promoted the *Practical guide for experts in EASO operations*. This is a handbook used in EASO operations and includes, among other things, sections on intercultural awareness, planning and reporting.

Continuously reviewing and refining practical tools

One of the products EASO had to review in 2017 was its guidance note on admissibility and eligibility ('in-merits') examination.

EASO also revised and updated the AST relocation-programme templates to be used in Italy, and the interview, vulnerability assessment and opinion templates used by caseworkers on the Greek islands.

Lastly, in the course of 2017 EASO revised and fine-tuned the question and answer (Q&A)/script for information provision in Greece (relocation-programme support), the Turkey information package and the Greek-hotline SOP.

Relocation and hotspot training sessions

In 2017, EASO organised 37 operational courses (spread over 55 training sessions, and followed by 804 participants) to support the implementation of the EU relocation scheme and hotspot approach in Greece and Italy. Through these operational training sessions EASO trained diverse groups involved in the implementation of relocation and the hotspot approach, such as EASO-deployed experts (caseworkers, team leaders, vulnerability experts), EASO interim caseworkers, EASO-deployed interpreters, Greek/Italian asylum officials and reception officers. The course delivered to newly deployed EASO experts is described in detail in the section on permanent support (see 4.3.1 Training).

In Italy EASO organised the following:

- Two training sessions on the identification of Dublin cases and the EASO best-interest assessment tool;
- Two training sessions on the Dublin regulation module of the EASO training curriculum;
- A didactic session for the trainers involved in the training of future voluntary guardians;
- Five courses for future guardians and facilitated four training sessions on the reception of unaccompanied children (tailor-made for Italian reception officials).

Additionally, EASO has delivered two sessions as part of the EUNAVFOR MED training programme for the

Libyan coast guard. EASO also supported 10 Frontex operational briefings by presenting the *EASO tool on access to the procedure* for first-contact officials (648 participants in total).

In Greece, EASO organised the following:

- Two information sessions on Dublin (one for registration assistants and one for EASO interviewers);
- An operational training session for experts deployed in the Greek helpdesk;
- Two ad hoc training sessions on interviewing techniques;
- Two training sessions on the EASO training modules on inclusion and COI for assistant legal rapporteurs;
- One train-the-trainer session for interpreters and three extensive training programmes for four groups of EASO interim caseworkers.

The latter consisted of three components, notably EASO core modules (inclusion, interviewing techniques, evidence assessment), operational training and on-the-job coaching.

In both Greece and Italy EASO conducted training sessions and practical cooperation activities in relation to vulnerable groups: three IPSN-tool training sessions for the Greek RIS (in the Greek hotspots of Lesbos, Chios and Kos) and two training sessions in Italy.

Over 800 participants took part in all the training sessions listed above and they expressed satisfaction with the high quality and effectiveness of the EASO training curriculum and training materials.

Development of training materials

Throughout all of this training in 2017, EASO developed relevant training materials, guidance notes, trainer manuals and training programmes on specific subjects and these were used in preparation and during the delivery of each and every one of the training sessions.

For example, the induction package for experts deployed in Greece is a comprehensive training kit, comprising several relevant materials such as European Council conclusions, the EU-Turkey statement, forms and templates, SOPs, and EASO-developed practical tools and guides. (For further information on training material for operational training, please refer to the section on permanent support).



Practical cooperation for operational support

EASO organised two meetings with the AIP NCP network in 2017 in order to discuss EASO operations, improvements to the operationalisation of the AIP and to present and promote the newly developed tools to be used in operations.

Just like the year before, in 2017 EASO undertook weekly relocation-data collection from Greece and

Italy, and produced weekly reports on the progress of the relocation process, the deployment of experts and forecasts for experts needed in the following 6 weeks.

Also noteworthy in this context is that EASO regularly shared information with NCPs on the security situation in the places of EASO operations and on the forecast of long-term deployment needs.

4.2. Information, analysis and knowledge development

4.2.1. Country of origin information

EASO's main results in 2017
12 Regular COI reports published and 10 other COI products delivered
24 COI-related meetings and events organised
920 downloads of the top 5 COI reports from the EASO COI portal
An annual total of 24 711 downloads from the EASO COI portal
59 COI queries answered

Contributing to convergence in decision-making

EASO has become an important player in Europe for making available reliable, accurate and up-to-date COI for asylum decision-makers and policy experts. The correct use of high-quality COI plays a determining role in ensuring that similar applications for international protection receive similar outcomes across the EU.

EASO's work in the area of COI aims to develop a comprehensive EU COI system, which allows for more-informed decision-making. Thanks to EASO efforts together with experts from European COI units and other key stakeholders, standards of COI are being

raised and practices harmonised, thus contributing to achieving a solid, well-functioning CEAS.

Bolstering EASO COI production

In 2017, EASO published four COI reports on Afghanistan, two on Nigeria and one each on Bangladesh, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia, Somalia and The Gambia. All reports were drafted and quality reviewed under the published EASO COI-report methodology and in cooperation with national COI units and, in some cases, external experts. In addition to regular COI reports, COI support was provided to EASO experts in the Greek hotspots, with the production of 10 draft COI factsheets.

Another EASO product is the COI-query response. EASO received and answered 59 COI queries in 2017. Among these, eight were regular COI queries, circulated in the COI-specialist networks and compiled by EASO, whereas 51 COI queries were processed in support of caseworkers deployed to hotspots.

To support the revision and update of the EASO COI-report methodology, a dedicated working group met twice in 2017, followed by a wide consultation of stakeholders. EASO intends to publish this methodology in 2018. EASO also developed in parallel a writing-and-referencing guide for COI products to facilitate the drafting process, especially when different drafters contribute to the same product, and to facilitate consistency in language and style.



Information exchange and knowledge generation through COI networks

The COI-specialist networks on key countries of origin (set up by EASO) organised meetings and conferences in 2018 on key countries of origin and themes, including; Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia, Somalia, Syria and Ukraine.

Practical cooperation meetings and conferences, which have a wider audience and often also include policy discussions, were held on Iraq, Nigeria and Pakistan.

EASO organised two meetings of the COI strategic network in April and November 2017. The strategic input given by the members of this network feeds into the development of EASO's work plan for COI and provides guidance on all EASO COI activities, especially as part of the EASO COI network approach.

Additionally, the strategic network provides a forum for discussions on improved coordination and planning of national COI efforts.

Over time, the abovementioned networks have provided substantial added value in information exchange and knowledge generation.

Making COI publicly available

EASO manages a publicly accessible online COI portal, which provides a common entry point to COI produced by EASO, for national COI units and EU institutions and agencies. The number of users of the EASO portal has grown steadily from 30 users daily in April 2016 to 110 users daily by December 2017. In 2017, there were 24 711 downloads from the EASO COI portal. The most downloaded COI reports on the EASO COI portal were those on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Somalia. More documents are now available in different languages.

Getting ready to produce medical COI

In 2017, EASO kicked off a project for the gradual takeover of MedCOI activities. MedCOI is an EU-funded multiannual project managed by MedCOI teams in Belgium and the Netherlands which aims to provide information on the availability and accessibility of medical treatment in countries of origin. A first meeting with key stakeholders took place in September, three technical meetings were organised in October, and a Dutch project staff member was invited to EASO to improve knowledge transfer. In November and December, two more technical meetings were held and two EASO staff members underwent training in Belgium and the Netherlands on medical information services.

4.2.2. Early warning and preparedness

EASO's main results in 2017

All 30 EU+ countries participated in the monthly data exchange for the Early Warning & Preparedness System (EPS Stage III)

21 EU+ countries contributed to the reception indicators introduced in February 2017

A strengthened EPS network with new Terms of Reference

49 weekly reports on the situation of asylum in the EU, on EASO operational activities in Greece and the state of play of relocation from Italy and Greece

3 EASO analytical briefs for JHA Council meetings

Common analytical workspace for EPS community

24 country intelligence reports (CIR) on 20 countries of origin or transit

12 public monthly latest asylum trends newsletters

1 annual public newsletter and associated press release

3 data visualisation tools on the restricted EASO website — weekly, monthly and Dublin indicators

12 monthly trends analysis reports

3 data visualisations based on Eurostat data and published on IDS

1 annual trends analysis report

10 resettlement overview reports

4 reports on Dublin implementation and 3 reports on reception

5 bi-monthly and 1 annual report on the Post-Visa-Liberalisation Monitoring Mechanism (PVLMM)

2 meetings of the EPS network

Other ad hoc thematic reports and analyses

New dissemination guidelines for EPS data and analytical products

Collecting data on migration

The EASO EPS is an EASO data-exchange system which aims to provide EU+ countries, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament with accurate, timely information and analyses on flows of asylum seekers to and within the EU and on the EU+ countries' capacity to deal with them. In 2017, EASO further enhanced its EPS system and drafted new dissemination guidelines in collaboration with the EPS community in order to enhance transparency for the data providers and to raise the visibility of EPS analytical products. The data exchange focuses on all stages of the CEAS, and the different stages are being rolled-out gradually. In 2017

EASO collected and analysed data under Stage III, i.e. data collection on these indicators:

- access to the procedure,
- reception,
- first-instance determination,
- return of failed asylum seekers,
- Dublin
- resettlement.

An advisory-group meeting in 2017 discussed the expansion of the EPS collection to Stage IV indicators, focusing on data collection at the second and higher instances of the asylum procedure. During the meeting, agreement was reached to produce draft guidelines and share pilot data in order to set the scene for more comprehensive data sharing in the future.

Supporting policymaking and response

The EPS feeds into the early warning, preparedness and crisis-management mechanism provided for in Article 33 of the Dublin III regulation ⁽²⁾. EASO will continue to ensure development of the system is consistent with Eurostat and Frontex data collections in order to foster the creation of an effective situational picture on migration for policymaking and response preparation, as recommended in the European agenda on migration.

Overseeing the data exchange

EASO receives data shared by all 30 EU+ countries (EU-28 plus Norway and Switzerland). Compliance by the EPS community reached an effective level and delays in data provision in 2017 were generally short.

Difficulties in sharing data on some indicators persisted throughout the year but compliance by data providers has slightly improved. An advisory-group meeting of the EPS network took place in September to discuss the complexity of the return indicators and the potential involvement of Frontex, which has since been confirmed.

Providing asylum statistics, trends and analyses

EASO produced weekly reports providing expedient analysis on the situation of asylum in the EU+ as part of EU-wide crisis-management mechanisms. These reports

were shared with EU+ countries and with the Commission integrated political crisis response (IPCR) as input to the integrated situational awareness and analysis (ISAA) reports. The analysis was improved with the addition of a networked analytical approach to illustrate the top trends in terms of the full overview of the citizenships of all applicants per Member State, receiving countries and applicants claiming to be unaccompanied minors.

EASO also publishes an annual PVLMM report. This report provides a detailed analysis of the asylum picture for 23 countries that have visa-free access to the Schengen area.

In 2017, EASO introduced a new product: the EASO analytical brief. It is a high-level strategic product that highlights the main trends in a qualitative and easy-to-digest way for senior decision-makers. Three editions were published for distribution at JHA council meetings.

The tailored analytical reports analysed the variation in recognition rates and the double counting of asylum applications in the EU+ at the request of the EASO management board.

EASO uses a contractor for the production of asylum-related migration intelligence from the main countries of origin and transit. Twenty-four CIR were published in 2017 on 20 countries of origin or transit. Feedback on the reports was gathered from stakeholders via a survey and was used to further improve the quality.

4.2.3. Information and documentation system (IDS)

EASO's main results in 2017

Information collected on national asylum systems of 30 EU+ countries', including on national case-law

29 EU+ countries in the IDS network, 8 of which joined in 2017

2 IDS network meetings

Increase in active users from 86 in April to 497 in December 2017

Information on the asylum procedure and legislation

EASO manages the IDS, a searchable library available online to registered users, which provides comprehensive overviews of how each key stage of the asylum process is carried out in individual EU+ countries and in the EU+ in general. The IDS is organised around key thematic sections including: access to the procedure, determination at first instance, determination at second instance, Dublin procedures, reception and detention, return and content on protection/integration. The IDS also contains information on asylum legislation,

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast), OJ L 180, 29.06.2013, p.31.

statistics, and national and European case-law in key areas of the CEAS.

Expanded with more information on the CEAS

EASO has been expanding and updating content in the IDS across a wide spectrum of topics. In the course of 2017 EASO further bolstered the library, offering a one-stop-shop on national practices such as the organisation of EU+ countries' asylum and reception systems, and the practical functioning of the CEAS. By systematically collecting this information and by coordinating and promoting the exchange of information between the relevant stakeholders, EASO actively assumes its role of contributing to consistent implementation of the CEAS and ensuring a uniform application of the EU asylum *acquis*, as set out in the European agenda on migration.

The information available in the IDS on national case-law in key areas of the CEAS increased steadily throughout 2017, with national case-law collected from 30+ EU countries, the Court of Justice of the EU and the European Court of Human Rights. In December, a national case-law resource was launched on the IDS.

Obtaining and validating information

Initial information is collected from a range of sources, including EASO quality-matrix reports, European migration network (EMN) reports, national administration databases, IDS network member input and data collected for the Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU.

Information in the IDS is validated and updated with the support of the IDS network. The IDS network consists of EU+ asylum-administration experts and expanded in 2017 with eight new EU+ countries joining, bringing the total to 29 EU+ countries active in the network.

The user base of the IDS expanded throughout the year. EASO optimised the IDS software in 2017 and conducted a survey to evaluate user satisfaction with the platform with a view to planning future improvements on the content and technical side.

4.2.4. Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union

EASO's main results in 2017
30 EU+ countries contributed
Highest number ever of contributions from civil society
160+ attendees at the launch event, an increase of 49.5 % compared to 2016

Improving the functioning of the CEAS

Every year, EASO publishes an annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU, which provides a comprehensive overview of the asylum situation in the EU for national and EU policymakers and stakeholders.

The aim of the report is to improve the quality, consistency and effectiveness of the CEAS.

Providing evidence-based analysis of data

The report provides evidence-based analysis of application and decision data, asylum trends (including key challenges and responses during the year), major institutional and legal developments and it provides an overview of the practical functioning of the CEAS.

As part of the report, EASO also evaluates the results of the operational and support activities carried out in line with its mandate.

A wide range of sources

The report is based on information obtained by EASO from EU+ countries, the EASO network of court and tribunal members, JHA agencies, UNHCR, civil society, information specialists and field officers. Statistical data is from Eurostat and supplemented with relevant data collected by EASO within the EPS.

Disseminating the 2016 report

Following its adoption by the EASO management board in June 2017, EASO launched the *Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU 2016* publicly on 5 July 2017 in Brussels in the presence of key media representatives and other stakeholders. The report was also distributed in the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and amongst other relevant stakeholders.

The section on Dublin was finalised in September due to the unavailability of Eurostat Dublin-indicator statistical data at the time of the report's approval.

An online version was made available on the EASO website. The key findings in the report were translated into all EU official languages and published on the EASO website.

An evaluation survey on the usefulness and added value of the annual report was conducted in late 2017, bringing valuable insights and suggestions for next editions of the report.

4.2.5. Integration and further development of asylum-information systems

EASO's main results in 2017
Preparatory work to extend COI Portal functionalities executed
Discussions held with two Member States on the connection of systems to the COI Portal
Statistical visualisations made available on IDS
Interactive World Map on World Refugee Day and Interactive European map
Over 20 000 impressions on Social Media

Focus on data visualisations

In 2017 EASO worked on integrating and further developing its asylum-information systems, including the COI portal, the IDS, the EPS platform and the EASO website. EASO has focused its efforts here on providing the most recent statistical information in a more dynamic way with automated feeds of some specific latest news and documents on the website.

Visualisations of asylum data on interactive maps generated numerous visits to the EASO website and impressions on EASO social media.

Further developing and integrating asylum-information systems

One of EASO's objectives in relation to this topic is the extension of COI portal functionalities. To this end, EASO explored solutions throughout 2017 to develop a cooperation platform for COI-specialist networks, as well as the development of country-overview pages, which would also display relevant statistics, and which would allow for geographical navigation using dynamic online maps. EASO expects to start the development work on this in 2018.

EASO held discussions with two Member States to learn which adaptations are to be made to their systems for a potential connection to the COI portal in the future.

As regards the IDS, EASO has improved the interface and functionalities of the system, e.g. visualising Eurostat data for individual countries, and envisages undertaking further work in this area.

Among other things, EASO tailored the relevant maps and charts to be user-friendly for different target audiences. The ultimate aim is to make parts of the IDS accessible to the public in the long term. For the time being, it remains accessible with password-protected access for the duration of a test period.

As part of the developments to the IDS, EASO is developing a query platform which will allow for centralised management of all the different queries EASO manages, including those processed in the context of specific networks, and which will be linked up with, for example, the COI portal.

4.2.6. Research on early warning and root causes

EASO's main results in 2017
Review of surveys of asylum-related migrants
Feasibility study for an EASO survey
Successful feasibility study on the semi-automated monitoring of big data and event monitoring
Call for tender launched for Report on Pull factors
2 events organised in the framework of the EASO Research Programme

Research for an enhanced early warning system

In 2017, EASO made further progress on its research programme on early warning and understanding root causes. The EASO's research sector undertook the work on this research programme which aims to better understand the root causes of migration in order to develop a true early warning system for future asylum flows.

A review of surveys of asylum-related migrants was carried out by the end of the year by the University of Siena and the consulting and research agency Kantar Public Brussels, and coordinated by EASO. The report (to be published on the EASO website) reviews 550 surveys of migrants conducted in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the United States between 2000 and 2017. The review is complemented by an annotated bibliography of quantitative surveys of asylum seekers, refugees and displaced migrants. In addition to this, a dataset has been compiled that includes information on single surveys, including their methodologies. The dataset will also be published on the EASO website.

By the end of the year EASO also finalised a feasibility study in preparation for an EASO pilot project to survey asylum seekers (scheduled for 2018).

Monitoring 'big data'

As part of its research programme, EASO is developing a tool for semi-automated monitoring of big data and media events for analysis and early warning. In this context, EASO collaborated with the European Space Agency on a project on big-data applications to boost preparedness and response to migration. EASO also conducted its own feasibility study, which yielded

encouraging results. Therefore, EASO will engage in 2018 in a pilot project to assess the real potential in the use of big data for early warning of asylum-related migration.

Understanding asylum seekers' destination choice

In addition to the above, EASO published a call for tender for the drafting of a report on push factors. The aim of this project is to improve the understanding of asylum seekers' choice of destination country in the EU+. EASO intends to understand the extent to which the lack of harmonisation in asylum policies in the EU+ countries have a pull factor effect on asylum-related mobility, particularly in the context of secondary movements, and whether this can be quantified and monitored over time.

Forecasting for anticipation

In June, EASO organised a joint EASO-Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) workshop in Paris to discuss how to better prepare for

future challenges related to migration. The organisation of the workshop was part of the broader collaborative relations between the two organisations as part of the EASO research programme and out of a common interest in approaches to the early warning and forecasting of migration. The key objective of the meeting (attended by approximately 70 participants) was to take stock of existing good practices for better anticipating different types of migration movements.

In September, EASO held a workshop on migration modelling for early warning. The workshop was primarily aimed at EPS members, but representatives from Directorate-General (DG) Migration and Home Affairs, the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the OECD and UNHCR also attended. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the preliminary results of the application of methods for early warning to EPS data, to expose participants to a real-time forecasting experience, and to discuss the potential, limitations and challenges of the proposed approach.



4.3. Permanent support

EASO's permanent support to Member States is to assist in the implementation of the CEAS and improve the quality of the asylum processes and systems. More specifically, its goal is to promote the consistent implementation of the CEAS within the EU and to share common knowledge and skills, organisation and procedures, information, resources and best practices.

4.3.1. Training

EASO's main results in 2017
32 train-the-trainer sessions, of which 16 at EASO headquarters, 15 regional sessions in 6 countries and one session organised in the context of the external dimension
Total of 488 trainers trained, of which 248 in Malta and 240 regionally
331 national training sessions administered on EASO e-learning platform
5 459 persons trained within national training sessions
318 national trainers supported by EASO to deliver national trainings
17 language versions uploaded on the EASO e-learning platform
2 new training modules developed
7 operational training sessions for deployed experts in Greece and 4 tailor-made trainings in Italy
4 training sessions for EASO staff and increase in the participation of EASO staff in train-the-trainer sessions
1 Member State receiving adhoc support
3 field/study visits in training units of EU+ countries
Progress on certification and accreditation of EASO Training Curriculum

Towards common high-quality standards across the EU+

EASO supports EU+ countries in developing the knowledge, skills and competencies of the staff responsible for asylum matters through qualitative common training. By supporting a common quality level across the EU, EASO's training contributes to the consistent implementation of the CEAS. To this end, EASO follows a two-track approach: on the one hand, by developing relevant training materials and, on the other hand, by organising and delivering courses based on a train-the-trainer methodology.

Training experts across the EU and beyond

In 2017, EASO intensified and enhanced the implementation of its training curriculum, a common vocational-training system for case officers and officials of asylum and migration services, through the delivery of 16 train-the-trainer sessions at its headquarters in Malta. Training was provided on the following modules:

- 'interviewing children',
- 'reception',
- 'evidence assessment',
- 'Dublin III regulation',
- 'interviewing vulnerable persons',
- 'end of protection',
- 'inclusion advanced', 'fundamental rights and international protection in the EU',
- 'country of origin information',
- 'module for managers',
- 'exclusion', 'didactics',
- 'gender, gender identity and sexual orientation' (delivered twice),
- 'trafficking in human beings' (delivered twice).

EASO also delivered the following training.

- Regional train-the-trainer sessions in Athens for the following modules:
 - 'inclusion',
 - 'interview techniques',
 - 'reception'
 - 'Dublin III regulation'.
- Two sessions in Vienna with the following modules:
 - 'evidence assessment',
 - 'interviewing vulnerable persons'.
- One session in Rome on 'Dublin III regulation'.
- One session in Brussels on the 'reception' module.
- Two sessions in Estonia on the 'inclusion' and 'evidence assessment' modules.

In addition to the list above, Germany organised five regional train-the-trainer sessions on the 'inclusion' and 'interviewing vulnerable persons' modules.

EASO trained a total of 488 trainers during 32 train-the-trainer sessions in 2017 and another 5 459 persons were trained during 331 national training sessions administered by EASO.

Training EASO-deployed experts

Additionally, EASO ensures structured training for experts who are part of the EASO asylum intervention pool. In this regard, EASO conducted seven operational training sessions in 2017 for EASO experts deployed to support the implementation of the Greek border procedures in the context of the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement. It is a regular activity to support capacity and capability building for EASO's operational activities in the hotspots.

Similarly, EASO organised two training sessions in Italy on the identification of Dublin cases and best-interest assessments in relocation and two training sessions for EASO-deployed experts as part of EASO operations in Italy.

Training EASO staff

In 2017, EASO organised pilot training sessions for EASO staff consisting of two sessions on the CEAS module and two sessions on the introduction to international

protection module. Fifty-four EASO staff members followed these training sessions.

Development of training materials

Development of training material is an ongoing EASO activity. Content-expert groups (17 individuals) contribute to the development, upgrading or updating of the training modules. The development of two new training modules on 'inclusion advanced' and 'trafficking in human beings' was concluded in 2017. EASO also continued with the work on the development of a new 'module for interpreters' and started to work on two new areas: 'resettlement' and 'reception for vulnerable persons'.

In 2017, EASO finalised its handbook on 'inclusion advanced'. As part of the upgrading process of the module, the handbooks for 'interview techniques' and 'interviewing vulnerable persons' were reviewed, and training handbooks for the 'interviewing children' and 'end of protection' are being developed.

Lastly, EASO finalised the development of the trainer manuals for the operational training for 'interpreters', 'access to the asylum procedure' and 'reception', and is in the process of finalising another operational trainer manual on 'registration of applicants for international protection in Italy'.



Cooperation with the reference group

The EASO training reference group also provided input to the drafting, review and finalisation of manuscripts and manuals. In particular, the reference group reviewed the module ‘inclusion advanced’ and formed an integral part of the module development group by working alongside and actively participating and cooperating with Member State content experts on the development of this module. The reference group also provided expert advice on the development/upgrading of the module for interpreters and the modules on ‘COI’, ‘resettlement’, ‘interview techniques’, ‘interviewing vulnerable persons’ and ‘interviewing children’.

In December EASO held its annual meeting of the reference group with the participation of the European Commission, UNHCR, ECRE, Odysseus and the Fundamental Rights Agency.

Evaluation of the EASO training curriculum

The process for evaluating the EASO training curriculum and assessing the effectiveness of EASO’s training activities in EU+ countries was concluded in 2017. Consultants launched questionnaires and in-depth interviews with a number of Member States and other stakeholders and presented a final report at a conference in December 2017 where recommendations were discussed and an action plan was devised.

Certified and accredited

During 2017, EASO made further progress towards implementing and enhancing the certification and accreditation of its training curriculum. In fact, EASO’s aim is to ensure that asylum officials trained in the EASO training curriculum receive an international sectoral qualification for asylum officials.

Before the implementation of the certified and accredited modules, the learning outcomes, trainer manuals and transcripts for the 13 certified modules were reviewed and modified in order to fulfil the requirements of Middlesex University, under the regulated National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for England and Wales (United Kingdom).

Middlesex University has awarded five credits at level five for each of the accredited 13 EASO training-curriculum modules in the English language version. This formed the basis for discussions on designing an award under an NQF using occupational standards for competence profiles for asylum officials as a basis for the learning outcomes. This laid the foundation for a sectoral qualification for asylum officials.

In 2017 EASO also prepared for the process of mapping the quality-assurance procedures currently in place for the assessment of the EASO training curriculum, in line with the EASO quality-management system.

The 13 certified and accredited modules were uploaded to the EASO learning and management system during 2017.

EASO offered the certified and accredited version in eight train-the-trainer sessions on ‘COI’, ‘Dublin’, ‘evidence assessment’, ‘exclusion’ (2 sessions), ‘inclusion’ and the ‘gender, gender identity and sexual orientation’ modules. Of the 141 participants enrolled in the certified sessions, 97 chose to take the final assessment. Of the 97 that took the final assessment, 86 were successful (89 %). One certified and accredited session in the ‘evidence assessment’ module was delivered in national training (English language version).

Training materials translated

In 2017 17 different language versions of training materials were uploaded to the e-learning platform:

- Five in English (end of protection, inclusion advanced, THB, Introduction to international protection and fundamental rights modules);
- Four in Russian (module for managers, gender and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), reception, didactics and inclusion);
- One in Romanian (Dublin III regulation);
- One in Dutch (reception);
- One in Turkish (evidence assessment);
- Three in German (CEAS, Dublin III regulation, gender and SOGI);
- One in French (reception).

Developing training plans

Throughout 2017 EASO supported a number of EU+ countries in identifying their training needs and designing training plans for them. As an illustration, EASO assisted Malta in developing a training plan for Maltese border officers, case officers at the office of the refugee commissioner and members of the refugee appeals board. To this end, EASO also assisted these bodies with the organisation of training sessions on various core modules both online and face-to-face. Likewise, EASO has supported Germany in organising regional train-the-trainer sessions in interviewing vulnerable persons and in exclusion.

4.3.2. Asylum processes

EASO's main results in 2017
Thematic Meeting on 'Withdrawal of International Protection'
Development of a Practical Guide on Qualification for International Protection
2017 EASO Info Day dedicated to practical tools
1 annual meeting of the Asylum Processes Network
5 Promotional/tutorial products on practical tools
1 Quality Management meeting; work on Quality Assurance Tool and Matrix Report

Furthering common and superior standards

In 2017 EASO continued to enhance its practical cooperation activities initiated under the EASO quality-matrix process with the overall aim of supporting Member States in achieving common standards as required by the CEAS. In this regard, EASO carries out mappings of Member States' current practices and policies on specific areas of the CEAS and in this way contributes to the monitoring of the implementation of the CEAS.

In 2017 EASO focused its collection of information on the implementation of the CEAS in particular on 'withdrawal of international protection', with a thematic meeting in March and the publication of a quality-matrix report on this theme to follow, in 2018.

Fresh practical tools

EASO has developed a range of common practical tools and guides targeted at certain aspects of the asylum processes. EASO makes them available to Member State officials to support them in the daily implementation of the CEAS. EASO developed a *Practical guide on qualification for international protection* after consultation with EU+ states, the Commission and UNHCR, for publication in 2018.

The annual meeting of the asylum processes network was organised in November. It was an opportunity to take stock of developments in 2017 and discuss the topics for practical tools and thematic reports and general planning for 2018. Further, the meeting had a thematic focus on IT tools in support of asylum processes.

Boosting the use of EASO practical tools

Particular attention was also given to promoting awareness and increased use of the EASO practical tools by means of an updated brochure, leaflet and promotional/tutorial video and presentations at internal and external events.

EASO made one video available on the IPSN tool (identification of persons with special needs) and two videos on 'access to the procedure' on YouTube.

Moreover, EASO dedicated its 2017 Info Days specifically to the theme of (training and) practical tools.

Lastly, at the EASO CF, a specific session was devoted to the involvement of civil society in the development of practical tools and guides.

Ensuring quality in decision-making

Equally important to helping Member States reach common standards, EASO supports Member States in the quality management of the national asylum decision-making process and other aspects of the CEAS through the organisation of activities to exchange information and good practices, promoting cooperation and developing a quality-assurance tool.

In that regard, EASO held a quality-management meeting in October 2017, developed an EASO quality-assurance tool and drafted the *Quality matrix report on quality management*, to be published in 2018.

4.3.3. Convening a network on exclusion

EASO's main results in 2017
18 EU+ states represented in the EASO Exclusion Network
Overview of national exclusion systems and processes

In 2017 EASO engaged in strengthening practical cooperation and exchange of information on exclusion-related matters by setting up a dedicated expert-exclusion network.

The EASO exclusion network is composed of contact points within 18 national determining authorities dealing with exclusion from international protection.

The first meeting of the EASO exclusion network was organised in February and was followed by a joint meeting of the EASO exclusion network and the network of COI specialists on Afghanistan in November. Specifically, the network also shares information between its members by means of quarterly updates and network meetings. The network also helped EASO to prepare an overview of national exclusion systems and processes.

In addition, EASO published (January 2017) a *Practical guide on exclusion*, primarily intended to support case officers with their daily work when interviewing people and assessing potential exclusion cases.

4.3.4. Activities on vulnerable applicants

EASO's main results in 2017
4th EASO Annual Conference on THB and International Protection
5th Annual Conference on EASO activities on children in asylum processes
2 thematic workshops on vulnerable groups
2 Consultations were held and the findings were made available to national authorities
EASO Practical Guide on Age Assessment finalised
EASO child-friendly information booklet on relocation and colouring book
Development of the EASO Practical Guide on Best Interests Assessments

Sharing expertise and developing practical tools

Throughout 2017, EASO continued to provide support and to boost practical cooperation among EU+ countries and other relevant experts on issues relating to vulnerable applicants. The support is provided in the sharing information and expert advice and developing

common practical tools in order to contribute to better identification of vulnerable applicants in the asylum process. The development of practical tools also promotes common standards and best practices in relation to vulnerable persons and subsequently contributes to the implementation of this aspect of the CEAS.

Sharing vulnerable-group expertise

To enhance practical cooperation in this field, EASO also organised conferences and thematic expert-working-group meetings, which have contributed to deepening knowledge of Member State practices and policies, to identifying certain needs and to promoting the exchange of best practices in relation to the areas discussed.

As an example, EASO organised the fifth annual conference on EASO activities relating to children in the asylum processes. The thematic session built on identifying the different issues that authorities face when handling the international-protection applications of children (diverging understanding, leading to different treatment in similar cases) and good practices put in place to deal with some of these issues.



Additionally, a thematic workshop on the examination of applications for international protection raising SOGI-related considerations took place in May to discuss best practices and challenges that Member States face with the examination of SOGI-related asylum applications and to share practices in the different Member States.

In October, EASO held a working group meeting on best-interests assessments for the child to further support the development of an upcoming dedicated EASO practical guide to be finalised in 2018.

To map the existing practices on the mentioned topics, EASO sent two questionnaires to national authorities, the first on the examination of applications for international protection raising SOGI-related considerations and the second on asylum procedures for children. The findings from these consultations were presented in the respective meetings.

Protecting victims of trafficking in human beings

In May EASO organised the fourth EASO annual conference on THB and international protection. The conference endeavoured to find a practical and coordinated response to the situation of asylum-seeking victims of THB where it comes to implementing Member State obligations in this area. The conference included two thematic sessions on the situation in Libya as a transit country, where the trafficking networks are reported to be very active and forced marriage a potential means for exploitation.

Developing and promoting practical tools on vulnerable groups

As regards to new common tools and guides developed in 2017, EASO finalised the second edition of the *EASO practical guide on age assessment*, and progressed significantly on the development of the *EASO practical guide on best-interests assessments* with the support of the EASO network on activities on children and civil society organisations. Likewise, EASO published and disseminated a child-friendly information booklet on relocation in different languages and developed a colouring book for children.

As mentioned in section 4.3.2, EASO worked on promoting awareness and the use of all its practical tools (including those related to vulnerable persons such as the IPSN tool) through various means.

4.3.5. Cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals

EASO's main results in 2017

5 Judicial Analyses published; 3 finalised and pending publication

6 professional development workshops for trainers organised

4 national judicial training sessions conducted

1 annual meeting with the EASO Network of Court and Tribunal members organised

Participation in 2 events of the National Judicial Training Bodies

Boosting practical cooperation with courts

Throughout 2017, EASO further developed its cooperation with EU+ country courts and tribunals with the general objectives of contributing to the consistent implementation of the CEAS and advancing practical cooperation among EU+ countries on asylum. EASO's practical cooperation activities in 2017 were undertaken in line with the set framework and in compliance with the independence of courts and tribunals. These include professional-development materials, professional workshops for judicial trainers, national judicial training sessions and meetings of the EASO network of court and tribunal members.

Practical guides and judicial analyses

Professional-development materials developed by EASO for members of courts and tribunals in the course of 2017 include the following.

- *EASO judicial practical guide on country of origin information*, and the compilation of jurisprudence on country of origin information.
- EASO judicial analysis, a compilation of jurisprudence and a *Judicial trainer's guidance note on evidence and credibility assessment in the context of the CEAS*.
- EASO judicial analysis, a compilation of jurisprudence and a *Judicial trainer's guidance note on asylum procedures and the principle of non-refoulement*.
- EASO judicial analysis, a compilation of jurisprudence and a *Judicial trainer's guidance note on qualification for international protection* (published).
- *EASO judicial analysis on exclusion: Articles 12 and 17* and *Judicial trainer's guidance notes on exclusion: Articles 12 and 17* (published).

- *EASO judicial analysis on Article 15(c) Qualification Directive and Judicial trainer's guidance notes on Article 15(c) Qualification Directive* (published).
- *EASO judicial analysis on introduction to the CEAS and Judicial trainer's guidance notes on introduction to the CEAS* (published).

Advancing the professional development of the judiciary

In addition to the development of professional-development material, six professional-development workshops for judicial trainers were organised in 2017.

- Qualification for international protection (two training sessions).
- Subsidiary protection, Article 15(c) qualification directive.
- Ending international protection.
- Evidence and credibility assessment;
- Introduction to the CEAS.

EASO also organised a number of national judicial training sessions and capacity-building activities for the judiciary. This includes four judicial training workshops for the Greek independent appeals committees and two workshops for Serbian judges and one workshop for western Balkans judges. Furthermore, two study visits were organised under the external-dimension mandate. Tunisian judges visited Greek independent appeals committees and western Balkans judges visited the Polish supreme administrative court.

Maintaining excellent communication with judiciary

Apart from the professional-development series and workshops, EASO also continued to stimulate dialogue with judicial stakeholders in asylum. EASO organised an annual planning and coordination meeting with the EASO network of court and tribunal members and circulated two newsletters with updates of relevance to the network. The number of stakeholders participating in the network remained unchanged and includes the EU-28, Switzerland, Norway, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Court of Human Rights, the International Association of Refugee Law Judges, the Association of European Administrative Judges, the European Judicial Training Network, the Academy of European Law and UNHCR. Lastly, EASO participated in two events organised by the national judicial training bodies, with whom EASO has established solid cooperation and dialogue for the enhanced exchange of information and best practices.

4.3.6. EASO network of Dublin units

EASO's main results in 2017

4 meetings organised

30 Dublin Units participating in the EASO Network of Dublin Units

4 queries from Dublin Units responded and 4 reports prepared

4 periodic update reports

Launch of the work on a Practical Guide on Dublin

EU Member States are responsible for implementing the Dublin system and need to consistently apply the legal clauses related to family reunification and the discretionary clauses, which allow the Member States to decide to examine an asylum application and so relieve the pressure on the Member States with external EU borders.

In order to support the Member States in the full implementation of the Dublin system, EASO set up a network of Dublin units. In 2016, in line with the European agenda on migration, all 30 EU+ countries are participating in the network and each has decided on a Dublin NCP.

In 2017, EASO organised two meetings of the Steering Group, and one expert meeting organised jointly with the European Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA). These network meetings serve as a forum for discussion of current needs and priorities within the Dublin context and to initiate, discuss and support measures for cooperation. They enhance cooperation and information sharing among the 30 Dublin units participating in the network.

In addition, EASO set up a working group for the development of a practical guide on the implementation of the Dublin regulation, to be published in 2018.

Four queries, three periodic reports

Furthermore, EASO plays a coordinating and facilitating role to ensure regular reporting and information exchange on the implementation of the Dublin regulation. To this end, EASO circulated four queries at the request of national Dublin units to obtain information from network members, and as a result, four query reports were produced.

In 2017, EASO also produced four periodic (quarterly) update reports on Dublin-related developments, including qualitative and quantitative information (statistical data and updates from the Member States and the Commission).

4.3.7. Reception

EASO's main results in 2017
4 meetings on Contingency planning in reception
1 Guidance on Contingency planning in reception finalised
1 thematic workshop on Unaccompanied Children in reception
1 thematic workshop on reception and society
2 Reception national contact points meetings
Translation of the EASO Guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators into 22 languages
Launch of the development of the EASO Guidance on Reception standards for Unaccompanied Children

Towards appropriate reception

Throughout 2017, EASO further boosted its internal capacity to support EU+ countries with activities aimed at promoting appropriate reception conditions.

EASO translated its 2016 *EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators* into 22 additional languages.

EASO further developed the network of reception authorities (set up in 2016) for enhancing practical cooperation and promoting best practice in the field of reception, and worked in cooperation with the partners involved, in particular the European Platform of Reception Authorities (EPRA). Three coordination meetings took place with EPRA.



Further, EASO organised two reception NCP meetings, and two workshops of the EASO network in collaboration with EPRA on 'reception and society' in Paris in May and on 'reception of unaccompanied children' in Stockholm in October.

A first working group meeting on reception standards for unaccompanied children took place, marking the launch of the development of an EASO guidance document on the subject to be published by the end of 2018.

Boosting preparedness

EASO held four working group meetings in 2017 on contingency planning in the context of reception and finalised *Guidance on contingency planning in the context of reception*, which was presented to the reception network. The guidance was published in March 2018 and will be translated into 22 languages.

The guidance serves as an aid for reception authorities to the detailed planning and management of the various players in a high-influx situation and aims to enhance preparedness and facilitate early action against a potentially serious situation.

The guidance focuses on key aspects of contingency planning on reception, through an integral approach, notably on monitoring and evaluation, risk analysis, management and the decision-making process. The standards included in the document reflect existing and commonly agreed practice across EU Member States, as well as good practices identified across the EU.

4.3.8. Country guidance for convergence

EASO's main results in 2017
In-depth analysis on divergences in recognition rates in a pilot development of country guidance on Afghanistan
Progress on the methodology to develop Country Guidance
2 chapters of the first guidance note on Afghanistan completed
2 meetings of the Country Guidance Network
7 meetings of the Country Guidance Drafting Team on Afghanistan

Studying divergences as a first step towards reaching convergence

The ultimate aim of the country-guidance activities is to foster convergence in the examination of applications for international protection. A first step to reach this aim is to understand the current divergences and the reasons why they exist. In the context of the country-guidance

network, EASO engages with Member States in senior-level policy discussions and in an in-depth analysis of current policies and practices, and brings them closer to a joint assessment of the situation in specific countries of origin.

Drafting the first country guidance

The country-guidance network, set up in 2016, continues its work in the pilot country-guidance exercise on Afghanistan. Of the EU+ states, 23 are participating in the process, supported by a drafting team of experts from 5 EU Member States. In regular meetings and consultations, the drafting team and the country-guidance network made significant progress towards a common analysis and guidance note on one of the main and most complex countries of origin, Afghanistan.

The first chapters developed in the pilot exercise focused on the applicability of Article 15(c) and Article 8 of the qualification directive. By the end of 2017, further progress was made on the development of the remaining chapters that would form a complete guidance note and common analysis on Afghanistan.

Horizontal guidance and ongoing COI production as a prerequisite

Two items are crucial in the development of country guidance: horizontal guidance to ensure a common understanding of the stages required for the legal analysis, and relevant, up-to-date common COI to ensure that the guidance is based on an accurate factual understanding of the situation in the country of origin.

In 2017, EASO developed the *Practical guide: qualification for international protection* to address the horizontal guidance needs of the pilot exercise.

A number of COI reports were also produced for the specific purposes of the development of country guidance, offering an information base for ongoing discussion in the drafting team and country guidance network. The report *Afghanistan — key socioeconomic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City* was published in August 2017. In December 2017, EASO published three other COI reports on Afghanistan: *Afghanistan — individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict*, *Afghanistan — Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms* and *Afghanistan — security situation*. Additional reports are planned for publication in 2018, in order to complete the first country guidance on Afghanistan.

Preparing for the future

In addition to the development of country guidance on Afghanistan, the aim of the pilot exercise is to develop

and test the methodology and standard terms of reference for future developments of common analysis and guidance notes on specific countries of origin.

The completion of the pilot in June 2018 will be followed by an evaluation exercise, aiming to assess, improve and streamline the country-guidance development process.

The next country on which country guidance will be developed in 2018 is Nigeria, followed by country guidance on Iraq.

4.3.9. Other tools for permanent support

EASO query system

EASO supports Member States on a permanent basis through the collection and compilation of information and data in reply to queries from national asylum authorities. Such queries touch upon a wide spectrum of asylum-related subjects, policies and practices. Based on a specific request from a given EU+ country, EASO circulates the query, collecting replies from other EU+ countries and supplementing it with other relevant data and information. Query reports are then made available to asylum administrations, providing useful timely input on topical issues in EU+ country practices.

In 2017, EASO further developed its query system to better respond to information needs of EU+ countries, revising the templates and enhancing the drafting process by direct consultations with the respondents. A comprehensive archive of all past EASO queries was made available on the EASO IDS for easy access by relevant stakeholders.

EASO received and processed 23 queries in 2017. These were used to set up new practices which helped us to better implement the CEAS.

Support with interpretation

Another manner in which EASO provides permanent support to Member States is through enhancing their access to interpretation services across the EU by means of the EASO LAL.

Although overall use of the tool remained low in 2017 due to the low relevance and practical applicability, EASO facilitated contact between two requesting Member States and respective source EU+ countries on a wide range of languages following a consultation of the LAL.

In 2017, EASO initiated an update for the list in cooperation with the AIP NCPs. During a meeting in June,

EASO also dedicated a session to the use, the update and the state of play of implementation of the LAL, as well as available tools and technical solutions that could contribute to the efficiency of the interpretation services and communication channel.

4.4. External dimension

EASO supports the external dimension of the CEAS in agreement with the European Commission as part of the EU external-relations policy and in line with the EASO external action strategy.

4.4.1. Third-country support

Extending support beyond European borders

In 2017, as part of EASO's external work on asylum and international protection, EASO continued to provide capacity-building support mainly to the western Balkans (WB) region and Turkey but also extended it to certain parts of the southern neighbourhood.

Supporting the western Balkans

A part of this work was implemented under the regional IPA II funded project 'Regional support to protection-sensitive migration management in the western Balkans and Turkey' (2016-2018). The overall aim of the project is to help manage fluctuating migration flows and develop improved asylum and international protection systems in line with EU requirements. EASO is implementing the project in partnership with Frontex, UNHCR and IOM.

EASO's support is implemented at a regional level but also as part of the roadmaps agreed with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and with Serbia. Many activities took place in 2017, and EASO continued to work very closely with the partner countries in the region. For example, during a visit to EASO in January 2017, representatives of the Serbian ministry of the interior expressed their interest in more capacity building and operational support and a future working arrangement with EASO.

In January, representatives of the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) visited EASO and expressed their interest in more long-term cooperation with EASO. Later in 2017, EASO participated in the MARRI regional forum in Belgrade, and at the request of the Serbian administrative court, EASO started translating its *Judicial analysis on qualification for international protection* and completed the translation of its *Judicial analysis on Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive*, as a result of that extending its practical tools to Serbian judges.

Developing-national roadmaps for western Balkan countries

Following meetings, field visits and consultations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and with Serbia, one very important outcome agreed in close cooperation with these two countries is the development of national roadmaps outlining the technical cooperation to take place between EASO and the national authorities, in cooperation with the EU delegations, UNHCR and IOM.

In order to take stock of achievements to date and look at planned activities, the yearly IPA project regional steering committee convened in April with all project partners and partner countries. During this meeting, participants welcomed the development of national roadmaps as very-much-appreciated support by EASO.

Organising training and development

EASO funded and implemented a number of other capacity-building support activities complementary to the IPA II project, including two professional-development workshops on the CEAS for 40 Serbian judges, with the support of experts from Norway and Slovenia. In addition, EASO also organised two national rollout training sessions on Interview Techniques for officials from Albania, Kosovo⁽³⁾ and Montenegro. These were supported by experts from Germany and Sweden.

The abovementioned IPA project also supported the participation of officials from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and from Serbia in EASO train-the-trainer modules on reception and on COI, held respectively in Malta and Brussels. National training on the EASO module on inclusion was organised in Albania.

EASO also organised a workshop on the CEAS and the asylum procedures directive, in order to promote the exchange of experience between authorities from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and from Serbia. On-the-job coaching on COI took place in both countries. In Serbia, EASO also organised a workshop on an introduction to the methodology used to identify persons with special needs and an introduction to the IPSN tool.

In addition to regional training and capacity building, EASO delivered its train-the-trainers module for managers and its train-the-trainers module on interviewing vulnerable persons in Montenegro. Officials from all WB countries and Turkey participated.

Furthermore, EASO facilitated a study visit to Poland for 13 administrative judges from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and from Serbia.

Three regional events were held in Malta, including a regional practitioner's network meeting, a workshop on EASO tools and practical guides, and a policy meeting in cooperation with MARRI.

Capacity building in Turkey

Most important in the development of EASO capacity-building support to Turkey in 2017 was the official exchange of letters in September between EASO and the DGMM (Turkish ministry of the interior). The agreement on future cooperation and on the details of this cooperation was the result of a high-level study visit of Turkish officials to EASO (financed by a UNHCR project), a technical study visit on COI and e-learning, and a visit at technical and executive director level to Ankara.

As a result, a pilot roadmap document with specific, agreed capacity-building activities in four areas, i.e. COI, training, data analysis and contingency planning, and vulnerable groups and support to the Ankara processing centre, was agreed over the period September 2017 to February 2018 with over 15 activities implemented.

Among the activities implemented in 2017 were two workshops for DGMM officials which adapt the EASO core modules on inclusion, interview techniques and evidence assessment to the international and Turkish legal framework for national training. Several EASO practical tools and guides are being translated into Turkish, including the IPSN tool, country interview guidelines for Iraq and Pakistan and other COI publications.

Supporting compact countries

Next to its activities in the WB and Turkey, EASO aims to provide capacity building in the North Africa region and, where appropriate, to contribute to the implementation of the regional development and protection programme (RDPP). EASO also follows up on the Valletta summit action plan of November 2015 and can provide, where appropriate, training and support to improve the quality of national asylum systems and practices to align such with EU and international standards.

To this end, EASO participated in two RDPP North Africa steering committee meetings and in the Valletta senior-officials meeting in Malta.

EASO also followed up on the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) project, which had ended in 2016. EASO organised a study visit to Greece

⁽³⁾ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

for five Tunisian administrative judges and supported the participation of 15 judges from Morocco and Tunisia to the International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ) world conference in Athens. As to activities in Jordan, EASO discussed with Jordan the potential planning of a seminar on reception and vulnerable groups, possibly in cooperation with the Czech Republic as part of the mobility partnership. EASO has also explored in 2017 potential new activities to be implemented in key compact countries, upon request by and in coordination with EU institutions.

Maintaining the dialogue with third countries

EASO organised a number of practical cooperation workshops and meetings in 2017, including two external-dimension network meetings during which updates on EASO activities were shared with EU Member State officials.

A communication skills workshop was organised to foster intercultural communication skills for experts who are to be deployed in external-dimension activities. Another workshop focused on negotiation skills with the objective of boosting EASO and EU Member State experts' skills and strategies for reaching negotiating goals in negotiations with third-country national authorities on the content of roadmaps and specific activities.

4.4.2. Resettlement

As part of its external-dimension activities, EASO contributes to the enhanced implementation of the European resettlement schemes. In this regard, EASO can act upon requests to implement bilateral support activities in EU Member States and participating associate countries with limited prior experience with Resettlement. The aim is to ensure successful resettling in line with agreed targets and to enhance coordination and exchange of information between EU+ countries.

In 2017, EASO engaged with Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia in respect of resettlement support at different stages for the three countries.

EASO's work on resettlement from Turkey continued in 2017, with an EASO resettlement expert hosted in the EU delegation in Ankara, with the migration policy team there. In October, EASO organised a workshop to present a mapping exercise of EU+ countries preparing for resettlement from Turkey, and started a feasibility assessment on the possible provision of logistical support to EU+ countries for resettlement from Turkey.

EASO is also an active member of the EU-FRANK project, led by the Swedish migration agency. In close cooperation with the EU-FRANK project, EASO worked

on the development of tools and a resettlement training module for strengthening EU+ countries' ability to resettle refugees and promote cooperation under the European resettlement scheme.

EASO continued its monthly data collection on resettlement throughout 2017, for which 27 out of 30 EU+ countries provided information.

In addition, at the request of the European Commission, in 2017, EASO started working on a pilot project on private sponsorship programmes.

4.5. Horizontal activities

4.5.1. Civil society and the Consultative Forum

EASO's main results in 2017

More than 160 activities and meetings with civil society

9 consultations on EASO documents with civil society, with 332 contributions received

1 Annual Consultative Forum in Brussels with 227 participants

15 new contacts in the EASO civil society membership base, now reaching 135 organisations

1 thematic workshop, 1 informal planning meeting, 1 regional thematic meeting organised

In 2017, EASO enhanced its engagement with relevant CSOs who have a vested interest in the work managed by EASO.

EASO maintained a constructive two-way dialogue with CSOs through the organisation of Consultative Forum (CF) meetings, consultations on key EASO documents, and direct involvement in various areas of EASO's work. EASO optimised the implementation of CF activities by involving civil society in the organisation of the activities.

Moreover, EASO strengthened its relationship with local operational NGOs and placed more focus on organising smaller-scale regional thematic CF meetings.

Article 51 of the EASO regulation set up the 'EASO Consultative Forum' as a mechanism for the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge, with a view to maintaining close dialogue with relevant CSOs and competent bodies operating in asylum policy,

EASO's Consultative Forum membership and meetings

In 2017, EASO's relationship with civil society grew stronger and the CF membership base expanded with 15 new contacts, bringing the total number of members to 135 organisations.

The seventh annual plenary meeting of the CF was convened in Brussels on 17 November and attracted an unprecedented diversity in stakeholders and a record number of 227 participants, who expressed a high level of satisfaction with the forum.

The annual meeting focused on EASO's operational activities to frontline Member States and forms of strengthened cooperation with civil society under the future EUAA.

For the first time, the meeting was prepared in close cooperation with civil society through the establishment of an ad hoc working group of interested CF members who advised and assisted on the format and programme of the meeting.

EASO also organised a Regional Thematic Meeting in Trapani on 29 September on 'EASO operations: lessons learned and future perspective'. The meeting served to strengthen cooperation with civil society players working in and near to the Italian hotspots, with participants discussing how cooperation on the ground could be made more sustainable and effective.

With a view of optimising the implementation of CF meetings and activities, EASO organised an informal Consultative Forum planning meeting on 5 July. An update was provided on (planned) activities and CF members were given an opportunity to contribute to the agenda setting of upcoming CF events (notably the regional thematic meeting and the plenary).

Consultations with civil society

EASO consulted civil society organisations on various key EASO documents. Through the launch of nine open consultations, EASO welcomed comments from civil society on:

- the draft work programme 2018,
- the annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU (and an open satisfaction survey on the same document),
- the *Annual general report 2016*,
- a draft practical judicial guide on COI,
- a draft judicial analysis on asylum procedures,
- the draft EASO training module on interpreting in the asylum context,
- the draft EASO guidance on contingency planning,
- the development of a guidance on reception standards for (un)accompanied children.



Direct involvement of civil society in EASO's work

EASO also involved selected CSOs in various different areas of its work.

For example, some CSOs were invited to participate in EASO COI-related country-specific meetings, in the co-drafting and reviewing of some COI reports, in meetings dedicated to discussions on the EASO COI methodology, medical COI and the COI network approach, and under the EASO external-dimension activities and EASO's research programme on push and pull factors.

As from May 2017, EASO has opened its train-the-trainer sessions to CSOs for those modules relevant to civil society. Various civil society representatives participated in EASO training activities including its 'national contact points' meeting and train-the-trainer sessions on the modules 'inclusion advanced', 'trafficking in human beings', 'country of origin information', 'fundamental rights and international protection in the EU', 'exclusion', 'gender, gender identity and sexual orientation' and the 'module for managers'.

A number of CSOs also joined the EASO operational training in Greece for EASO-deployed experts and the operational training for interpreters in in Bulgaria and Cyprus.

Selected CSOs were further consulted in the process of the development or upgrading of a number of EASO 'practical tools', e.g. the *Practical guide on qualification for international protection*, a new edition of the EASO publication on age assessment, guidance on contingency planning on reception, and the quality-assurance tool.

With regard to cooperation with civil society as part of EASO's operational activities, EASO held weekly or biweekly meetings with all stakeholders, including CSOs, at the hotspots in Greece, ad hoc meetings with academia (i.e. researchers) and numerous NGOs working in asylum and reception in both Greece and Italy.

Evaluating and improving cooperation with civil society

In 2017, EASO conducted an internal evaluation on the workings of the CF which ran from April to July 2017.

The internal evaluation included several data-collection tools such as desk research, surveys, face-to-face interviews, as well as a stakeholder workshop. The latter convened 15 representatives from international organisations and NGOs, including operational NGOs working in the field. Output from the different data-collection methods was triangulated and integrated into a final report. This report will form the basis for

the development of a proposal for the revised format and composition of the CF under the EUAA.

Civil society consulting EASO

Throughout the year, EASO also maintained a dialogue with CSOs by providing relevant information in response to queries.

Participating in other civil society networks

EASO contributed to the activities of the CF of other JHA agencies through its participation in three Frontex CF meetings and through its participation in the European migration forum. EASO, also provided regular input to documents provided as part of the consultation process. As an illustration, EASO participated in the regional stakeholder consultation of UNHCR.

EASO participated in civil society asylum networks at EU and national levels, identifying developments relevant for EASO and providing contributions where necessary. As an illustration, EASO participated in a Polish civil-society-network meeting on asylum protection and in an Italian civil-society-network meeting on relocation and the hotspot approach. Furthermore, EASO was amongst the participants of the network of practitioners on civil dialogue, a joint initiative organised by the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Commission in October in Brussels, the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union meeting in December in Brussels; and the Academic Research Network on Agencification of the EU Executive Governance Dialogue Committee Hearing.

Lastly, EASO ensured its participation in various conferences, meetings, workshops and other events that involved CSOs.

4.5.2. EASO communication and stakeholder relations

EASO's main results in 2017
4 Management Board meetings and 1 Preparatory Group meeting
Participation in +/- 190 external meetings and organisation of +/- 140 meetings with stakeholders
1 EASO Info Day organised in over 15 countries with over 350 participants
1 Journalist Network meeting organised
1 Communication Multipliers meeting organised
11 study visits hosted by EASO
3 press visits in Italy and 9 press-related meetings
170 press interviews

EASO's main results in 2017
166 participants at the journalist network meeting and launch of the Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU
11 issues of the EASO newsletter
85 weekly and 7 monthly Social Media Monitoring reports
39 new EASO publications and 116 translations of EASO publications
78 % increase in traffic on the EASO website: 930 000 website views in 2017 and over 9 400 weekly visitors
17 000 likes on EASO Facebook page (250 % increase)
4 700 likes on EASO Relocation Facebook page
178 000 Twitter followers (385 % increase)
2 200 followers on LinkedIn and 700 followers on Instagram

EASO intensified its efforts in managing and maintaining excellent relationships with key stakeholders in 2017, in line with the objectives set out in its *Communications and stakeholders plan 2017*.

EASO promoted its work and raised awareness of its achievements, objectives and added value, and promoted the use of EASO's practical tools and training curriculum. EASO's engagement with stakeholders and its communication activities again proved pivotal to the successful and effective delivery of the work programme of EASO and contributed directly to supporting EASO's strategic priorities in 2017.

Throughout all of its communication activities in 2017, EASO further enhanced its reputation and strengthened its credibility with its stakeholders and the general public. EASO maintained a continuous dialogue and good cooperation with all its stakeholders, which also contributed effectively towards reaching common objectives.

Reporting to its planning and monitoring body

EASO's management board plays a vital role in the supervision of EASO's effectiveness in the delivery of its statutory mandate. Moreover, it constitutes an important forum for the planning and coordination of activities, sharing information, exchanging views and reaching joint decisions with EU Member States, associate countries, the European Commission and UNHCR. The EASO management board sets the approach to be followed and the tasks to be undertaken by EASO staff. EASO is strongly committed to consulting with all members of its management board and takes

into consideration any request from any member for enhanced support or reporting.

In 2017, EASO held three meetings with its management board and one additional meeting jointly with Frontex with a view to finding new collaboration and strengthening cooperation between both agencies. Topics discussed in 2017 included:

- The situation of asylum in the EU;
- EASO operations;
- EASO's role in the resumption of Dublin transfers to Greece;
- Aspects of collaboration with Frontex;
- The variation in recognition rates;
- The country-guidance pilot on Afghanistan.

At the same time, the EASO management board started boosting EASO's and the board's preparedness for its future role and tasks under the new mandate for EASO, which is being negotiated by the co-legislators. At the joint EASO-Frontex management board meeting, both agencies signed an agreement for a renewed cooperation strategy for 2017-2018, focusing on two priority areas of joint work, notably in regard to migration management support teams in the hotspots and data sharing for the development of a common situational picture.

The EASO management board decided in September by consensus to introduce a preparatory group for a pilot period (until the end of 2018). This group met once in its restricted format in 2017 to prepare the last management board meeting of the year with the aim of contributing to facilitating decision-making and strategic discussions during the meeting.

Engagement with stakeholders

As in previous years, EASO continued to strive in 2017 to ensure that it engaged with all its stakeholders so that it is able to take well-informed decisions and ensure that stakeholders are optimally informed of, and have the opportunity to provide input to EASO's work.

To this end, EASO held approximately 140 meetings with key stakeholders, and participated in 190 external meetings in 2017. EASO hosted over 60 visits of high-level delegations and 14 study visits by students and academics at its headquarters. It hosted in total over 1 300 participants in various bilateral and other meetings, lunch briefings and visits to the EASO headquarters.

Its interlocutors included directors, high-ranking officials, ministers, ambassadors, representatives and members, e.g. from:

- EU agencies;
- the European Parliament;
- the Council of the European Union;
- the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper (Comité des représentants permanents)) and its Antici group;
- Member State permanent representatives, national parliaments;
- other high-level delegations;
- key national and local authorities in Member States (especially in those where EASO has a presence), as well as in non-EU countries.

In particular, EASO met bilaterally with a number of justice and home-affairs ministers of EU Member States in the margins of the informal JHA council in Malta in January 2017. In addition to this, representatives of the Maltese and Estonian presidencies of the Council of

the European Union together with the Commission (DG Migration and Home Affairs) participated in a number of meetings and regular video conferences.

Collaboration with other EU agencies

Another forum where EASO plays an active role is the network of JHA agencies. EASO actively contributed to the discussions at six meetings with the other JHA agencies, notably network meetings and thematic meetings on training, ICT and the external dimension. Such contacts led to the development of stronger working relations, closer cooperation and greater collaboration between the agencies, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

The network also proved useful for the following.

- Exchanging information, in particular on changes within the agencies resulting from policy developments.
- Sharing of best practice.
- Mapping current areas of cooperation and identifying areas for future cooperation.





The key achievements of the network and priorities for the forthcoming year are presented to the European Council Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI) on an annual basis, and the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE).

In 2017 EASO also hosted the informal network meeting of the heads of home-affairs agencies in Malta, which discussed interagency cooperation and priorities in their joint work in 2017, notably related to asylum, migration and border management. These items were on the agenda:

- The cooperation of home-affairs agencies in the context of hotspots;
- Undertakings in the external dimension;
- A debate on shifting from emergency response to addressing joint challenges by sustainable, preventive measures;
- A debate on turning bottlenecks into opportunities as regards the internet in times of migratory and security challenges.

On a broader level, EASO participated in the meetings of the EU agencies network, with the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as the 2017 chair. This allowed EASO to benefit from best practices shared by other agencies, in particular related to administration, performance development and communication, and to jointly organise outreach activities aimed at highlighting the added value of EU agencies.

Joining efforts with international organisations

In 2017, EASO cooperated a great deal with UNHCR, and in particular with its EASO liaison office (LO) in Malta. The UNHCR LO held biweekly meetings at the EASO headquarters and regular meetings at field level. These meetings were successful in discussing and coordinating the existing cooperation and expanding it with new fields of cooperation.

In addition, thematic meetings took place on an ad hoc basis and a meeting at operational and technical level was held in Athens. The latter allowed EASO and UNHCR representatives to update one another on their respective activities, plans and challenges on the Greek mainland and the Greek islands, to set up a more structured way of exchanging information, and to map existing coordination and find additional ones, with a view to further strengthening collaboration and operational support to Greece.

In addition, the meeting gave the opportunity to further discuss and clarify roles, responsibilities and complementarity between the two agencies in certain areas and to develop common messaging.

Outreach via press, web and social media

EASO has significantly stepped up efforts in the domain of explaining and promoting EASO's work to the press and via web and social media. This was reflected in the increased presence and positive mentions of EASO in the press, the increase in visitors to the EASO website and the sharp increase in the EASO follower base on social media.

EASO complies with a policy of full transparency of its working processes and activities, and uploads key documents, including operating plans, work programmes, practical guides and meeting reports on the document registry section of the EASO website, which makes them directly accessible to the public. The increased traffic on the EASO website in 2017 also made evident the increased value and user-friendliness of the website.

Among other things, press conferences fostered positive relations with the media in 2017 and allowed for the presentation of EASO's activities and programmes, while clarifying misconceptions and stressing the importance of the added value of all the outcomes of EASO's work. In January, EASO hosted a high-level press visit which attracted a significant number of journalists representing major EU, national and international press outlets. A number of other press conferences were held with media representatives from specific countries, in addition to press visits to the EU regional task force in Catania (Italy), where EASO also briefed the press about its work on several occasions, including in the context of high-level visits.

In order to convey the most important messages related to EASO's activities and programmes, 150 press interviews were given in 2017. As an illustration, the executive director held an exclusive interview with the high-profile EU publication, *EU Observer*, which resulted in a very positive article focused on EASO and its future. Another example was a strategic interview with the

Italian state broadcaster by the EASO spokesperson. This gave EASO a chance to explain, among others, its work in the hotspots and its cooperation with the Italian ombudsperson for children and adolescents.

Promoting the EASO training curriculum and practical tools

EASO organises an annual Info Day, which, in 2017, was held in more than 15 countries across Europe, with more than 350 participants overall, representing a major success for EASO's outreach activities. The EASO Info Day also included the organisation of special activities in Greece, Italy, Malta and at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The core themes for the 2017 Info Day were the EASO training-curriculum modules and the EASO practical tools because of the importance of training and practical support activities for the implementation of the CEAS and because their number had increased significantly in 2016.

During the Info Day, EASO staff and national experts had the opportunity to discuss EASO's work, to share knowledge, exchange best practices and explore future objectives. Several activities, including informative seminars, workshops, quizzes, press events and events for schoolchildren and students were organised with the cooperation of EASO's network of national and communication contact points.

Community of practice for asylum communicators

For the fifth consecutive year, EASO organised a 'communication multipliers' meeting in Malta. The meeting helped in sharing best practices in communication and implementing communication campaigns. It also helped EASO to streamline its communication efforts with those of the communication departments in national asylum services, the European Commission, other JHA agencies and UNHCR. EASO informed about the latest developments in its communication campaigns and a brainstorming session helped to find innovative ways to communicate in the hotspots in Greece and Italy.

The relocation café

Each year EASO organises a journalists' network meeting. In 2017, for the third consecutive year, EASO decided to hold this network meeting together with the launch of the *EASO annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU* because the annual report's findings provide for an interesting and newsworthy event for journalists. The event, which was held on 5 July 2017 in Brussels, brought together an audience of 166 persons, among which 26 reporters specialised in asylum-related



stories from news agencies, print, broadcast and online media, registering an increase of 49.5 % in the number of participants compared to the previous year. This reflects the importance of and increasing interest in EASO's work.

For the first time, EASO, in collaboration with the Belgian asylum authorities, opened a 'relocation café' at the event, where participants could obtain information from EASO asylum experts about EASO support to Greece and Italy in the context of the EU relocation programme, and have conversations with successfully relocated persons from Greece and Italy to Belgium.

Making messages go viral

A key part of its engagement with stakeholders since 2017 is through EASO's interactivity with followers on social media. EASO is present on social media with two Facebook pages, one of which focuses on the EU relocation programme, and profiles on Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and Flickr. These social-media platforms were used in 2017 to promote EASO's meetings, news, events and publications amongst others. By the end of the year, the number of followers attracted to its platforms reached over 17 000 people for the EASO Facebook page, and 178 000 for Twitter.

In response to the significant amount of Eritreans arriving in Italy in recent years, EASO developed a campaign on social media targeting Eritreans in Italy potentially eligible for the EU relocation programme. This was part of EASO's broader communication campaign on the EU relocation programme and in the context of the operational support offered by EASO to the Italian authorities. EASO provided them with specific and accurate information on asylum in the EU, their rights, their obligations, as well as the risks implied by not following the legal pathways. The information

was provided using existing communication materials translated into Tigrinya, video testimonials showing real success stories of Eritreans relocated from Italy to Germany, Lithuania, and Portugal as well as banners and advertisements specifically developed for this purpose and disseminated via social media. Moreover, the campaign aimed at increasing their awareness of the EU relocation programme.

EASO also held two information meetings with the Eritrean diaspora in Italy in order to ensure a wider reach of its messages. EASO also set up a dedicated hotline where Tigrinya-speaking cultural mediators were able to support Eritreans by providing guidance on the eligibility criteria and application procedure for the EU relocation programme, and on the status of their application.

In October 2017, EASO started implementing a pilot social-media campaign to inform migrants or potential migrants from Nigeria (focused mainly on south-Nigeria) about asylum in the EU and who is eligible. The campaign also informed on the dangers of travelling to Europe via smugglers such as, human trafficking, forced prostitution, sex trafficking, torture, modern slavery, forced labour, domestic servitude and drowning at sea. In general, the ongoing campaign counters the smugglers' narrative, replacing it with a realistic narrative and proposing alternatives to illegal migration. For this campaign, five research visits took place in 2017 to meet with Nigerian asylum seekers and members

of the Nigerian diaspora community in Italy, Malta and the United Kingdom, with the aim to understand the main communication paths of potential migrants, to discover potential 'influencers', and to calibrate messages for the campaign. EASO collected testimonials from Nigerians and victims of THB and produced a number of videos, which EASO made available on its website and Facebook pages.

Observing the discourse of refugees and migrants

In 2017, EASO started monitoring social media in search of trends and developments on migration and flight-related issues in Arabic, Pashto, Dari, Urdu, Sorani, Tigrigna, Amharic and other languages. More specifically, a specialised team in EASO produced weekly reports and analytical monthly reports on the general discourse on social networks related to flight and migration, smuggling networks, document fraud, integration issues and related topics. The team also researches specific topics at the request of a given Member State.

EASO is in constant contact and cooperation with the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), the International Criminal Police Commission (Interpol), other EU agencies as well as home-security departments of EU Member States in order to ensure efficient communication and follow-up of its findings. The reports have received very positive feedback from various stakeholders on the quality and the value of the information they provide.

Publications and EASO newsletter

In 2017, EASO produced and published 39 new EASO publications and provided 116 quality translations of EASO publications.

EASO improved the newsletter with a more user-friendly format and design and managed to ensure wider dissemination. The new newsletter also generated more EASO website traffic.

As part of EASO's efforts in Greece, EASO continued to produce branded promotional materials for its communication campaign on relocation, in collaboration with the GAS, and as part of EASO's operational support to the Italian ombudsperson, a range of new communication materials were produced and disseminated.

Lastly, in 2017 EASO engaged external consultants to develop EASO's new visual identity in response to the evolving discussions on the new regulation setting up the EUAA.

Information and press requests

Much work went into answering the 1 400 written information requests from civil society and press requests received in the course of 2017 via the info@easo.europa.eu and press@easo.europa.eu mailboxes.

In addition to this, 2017 saw an increase in the number of requests from the general public to access documents under Regulation 1049/2001.





Annexes

A.I. EASO organisational structure

The administrative and management structure of EASO comprises the management board as well as the executive director and the staff of EASO.

The executive director, in exercising the responsibilities laid down in Article 31 of the EASO regulation, is supported by the executive office, including the accounting officer, the communications and stakeholders unit, the liaison officers to the EU institutions and to Frontex, and the policy adviser.

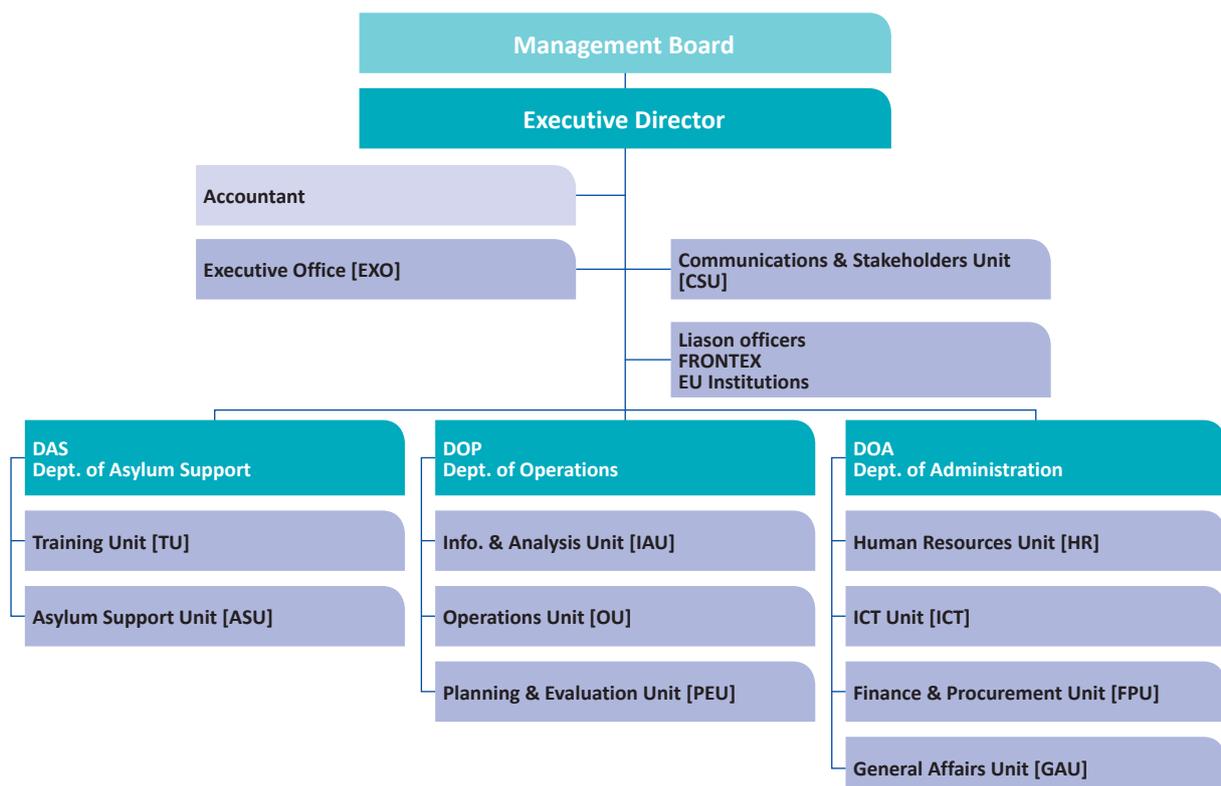
The department of asylum support contributes to the implementation of the CEAS by providing support with the aim of enhancing the capacities of EU+ countries to implement the CEAS through common training, coordinated practical cooperation and through the development and monitoring of operational standards and guidance.

The department of operations develops and implements a comprehensive approach for EASO activities in operations, bringing together situational and country of origin information (COI) and intelligence, operational planning and intra and extra-EU operational support under one coordinated framework. The department of operations is underpinned by operational protocols and tools and a planning-and-evaluation mechanism to ensure optimal results.

The department of administration provides support systems and services to the core areas of work.

EASO conducts its activities from the headquarters in Valletta Harbour, Malta, from two operational offices in Rome and in Athens, and an LO in Brussels.

Figure A.1: EASO's organisational chart



A.II. EASO budget in 2017

Table A.1: Budget execution of commitment appropriations (CA) per fund source

Budget title	Fund source	CA budgeted (EUR)	CA implemented (EUR)	CA (%)
Title 1 — Staff expenditure	C1	16 345 514.13	15 971 138.07	97.71
	C8	437 208.40	337 442.99	77.18
	R0	216 220.94	146 481.34	67.75
Total Title 1		16 998 943.47	16 455 062.40	96.80
Title 2 — Infrastructure and operating expenditure	C1	7 888 229.12	7 380 070.65	93.56
	C4	1 555.07	1 476.91	94.97
	C8	2 484 820.40	2 243 396.78	90.28
	R0	1 797 838.36	1 437 961.43	79.98
Total Title 2		12 172 442.95	11 062 905.77	90.88
Title 3 — Operational expenditure	C1	58 756 246.27	57 052 930.70	97.10
	C4	7 938.30		
	C5	2 820.00	2 820.00	100.00
	C8	16 694 507.79	15 345 451.43	91.92
	R0	3 623 069.58	1 064 214.27	29.37
Total Title 3		79 084 581.94	73 465 416.40	92.89
Title 4 — Other external projects	R0	2 561 238.73	2 451 451.98	95.71
Total Title 4		2 561 238.73	2 451 451.98	95.71
Total CA		110 817 207.09	103 434 836.55	93.34

Table A.2 Budget execution of payment appropriations (PA) per fund source

Budget title	Fund source	PA budgeted (EUR)	PA consumed (EUR)	PA (%)
Title 1 — Staff expenditure	C1	16 345 514.13	14 999 104.89	91.76
	C8	437 208.40	337 442.99	77.18
	R0	216 220.94	79 982.24	36.99
Total Title 1		16 998 943.47	15 416 530.12	90.69
Title 2 — Infrastructure and operating expenditure	C1	7 888 229.12	4 641 149.26	58.84
	C4	1 555.07		
	C8	2 484 820.40	2 243 396.78	90.28
	R0	1 797 838.36	685 501.07	38.13
Total Title 2		12 172 442.95	7 570 047.11	62.19
Title 3 — Operational expenditure	C1	51 146 246.27	49 735 496.53	97.24
	C4	7 938.30	1 879.05	23.67
	R0	3 623 069.58	485 554.87	13.40
Total Title 3		54 777 254.15	50 222 930.45	91.69
Title 4 — Other external projects	R0	2 561 238.73	2 181 147.45	85.16
Total Title 4		2 561 238.73	2 181 147.45	85.16
Total PA		86 509 879.30	75 390 655.13	87.15

A.III. EASO staff

On 31 December 2017, EASO had 215 staff members appointed and in service, 139 of whom were temporary agents (TAs), 72 were contract agents (CAs) and four were seconded national experts (SNEs).

Table A.3: EASO establishment plan 2017

Category and grade	Authorised under the EU budget 2017		Amending budget 1/2017		Amending budget 2/2017		Plan at end of 2017 ⁽⁴⁾	
	Official	TA	Official	TA	Official	TA	Official	TA
AD 16	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AD 15	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
AD 14	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AD 13	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AD 12	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	4
AD 11	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
AD 10	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	9
AD 9	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	5
AD 8	-	11	-	-	-	-	-	11
AD 7	-	41	-	-	-	-	-	41
AD 6	-	11	-	-	-	-	-	11
AD 5	-	24	-	-	-	-	-	24
Total AD	-	107	-	-	-	-	-	107
AST 11	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AST 10	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AST 9	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AST 8	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AST 7	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AST 6	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0
AST 5	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
AST 4	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	10
AST 3	-	26	-	-	-	-	-	26
AST 2	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	5
AST 1	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	4
Total AST	-	48	-	-	-	-	-	48
Total	0	155	0	0	0	0	0	155

Assistant grade (AST), administrator grade (AD), official: permanent staff.

⁽⁴⁾ The establishment plan was not modified by budget amendments; no modifications were made during 2017 by application of the flexibility rule.

Chart A.1: Distribution of EASO staff on 31.12.2017 by gender

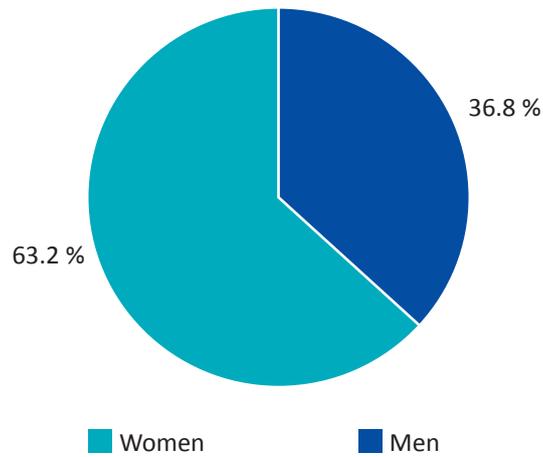
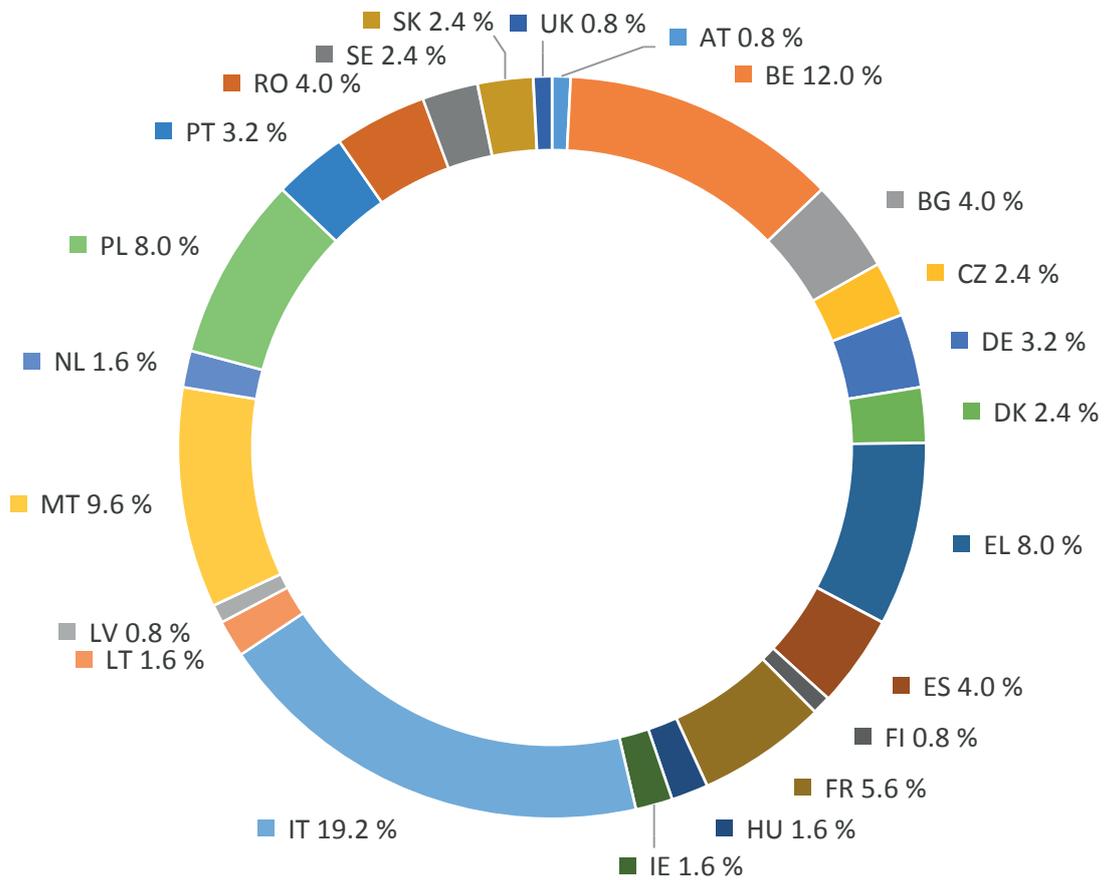


Chart A.2: Distribution of EASO staff on 31.12.2017 by nationality



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