



European Asylum Support Office

EASO Annual General Report 2015

June 2016

SUPPORT IS OUR MISSION



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List of abbreviations

26 EU+	24 EU Member States + Norway and Switzerland
AIP	Asylum Intervention Pool
AST	asylum support team
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
COI	country of origin information
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EMN	European Migration Network
EMN REG	European Migration Network Return Expert Group
ENAC	EASO network on the activities on children
ENP	European neighbourhood policy
ENPI	European neighbourhood and partnership instrument
EPRA	European Platform of Reception Agencies
EPS	early warning and preparedness system
EU	European Union
eu-LISA	European Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
Europol	European Police Office
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
Frontex	European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union
GDISC	General Directors of Immigration Services Conference
GPS	Group for the Provision of Statistics
HOP	hotspot operating plan
HROP	hotspot-relocation operating plan
IAS	Internal Audit Service
IARLJ	International Association of Refugee Law Judges
ICT	information and communication technology
IDS	information documentation system
IGC	Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
LGB	lesbian, gay and bisexual persons
NCP	national contact point
NCPI	national contact points on integration
RDPP	regional development and protection programme
SSP	special support plan
THB	trafficking of human beings
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction

The **EASO annual general report** lists and describes the achievements of the Agency in 2015 together with the resources employed. The structure of the report reflects the EASO Annual work programme 2015 and provides a detailed account of the progress against the objectives and performance indicators identified in the annual work programme.

Key information concerning EASO's organisation, publication and the management of human and financial resources are also provided.

The annual general report is prepared in accordance with Article 29(1)(c) of the EASO Regulation and adopted by the Management Board of EASO on 6-7 June 2016. The annual general report is sent to the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, including the Internal Audit Service (IAS), and the Court of Auditors no later than 15 June 2016. The annual general report is a public document and has been translated to all official languages of the EU.

In 2015, in line with the Communication on the guidelines for the programming document for decentralised agencies (C(2014)9641) of 16 December 2014, EASO has also drafted a **Consolidated annual activity report 2015**

in accordance with the new reporting requirements established by the Framework Financial Regulation (Article 47). The Consolidated annual activity report includes a declaration of assurance by the executive director, stating that the information contained in the report presents a true and fair view of whether the resources assigned to the activities have been used for the intended purpose in line with the principle of sound financial management and that the controls put in place give the necessary guarantees on the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions; it includes the final accounts 2015, extensive budgetary and financial management reports, the internal controls developed by the Agency, the internal and external audits performed during the year of reference, as well as information on access to documents and on EASO publications.

Part I (Policy Achievements) of the EASO Consolidated annual activity report is based on the annual general report.

The Consolidated annual activity report shall be sent, together with the assessment of the EASO Management Board, to the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, including the IAS, and the Court of Auditors no later than 1 July 2016.



Executive summary

The activities EASO has implemented in 2015 can be divided into five focus areas: **permanent support, special support, emergency support, information and analysis support and third country support.**

Within its **permanent support** activities, EASO delivered 23 train-the-trainer sessions, with the participation of 275 trainers from 26 EU+ States, organised 8 regional training sessions, developed 2 new training modules and updated 3 modules, developed 3 training handbooks and an Annual training report based on the training cockpit, organised the Annual Didactic Seminar, 1 training meeting for national contact points (NCPs) and launched the procurement for a new learning management system.

EASO's work on the quality of asylum processes and decisions included a thematic mapping on the Dublin procedure, the appeals procedure, and the practical response to high influx situations. EASO also developed thematic reports on access to procedure, special procedures, identification of persons with special needs, the Dublin procedure, and the appeals procedure. Practical guides on the personal interview, evidence assessment, the implementation of Article 15(c) QD, the identification of persons with special needs and access to procedure for first contact officials were also produced. The annual meeting of the NCPs on quality, was also held. EASO furthermore strengthened its cooperation with the members of the Courts and Tribunals by organising an annual conference and 4 events including 1 in Luxembourg and developing judicial analyses on Exclusion, introduction to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), and qualification for international protection. In the area of trafficking in human beings (THB), EASO organised 2 expert meetings and started the development of a training tool on THB.

An EASO practical cooperation conference on unaccompanied minors and 2 thematic meetings were organised and a practical guide on family tracing is being finalised. The EASO network on the Activities on Children (ENAC) was launched.

With regards to country of origin information (COI), EASO further developed the COI portal which served 610 active users with approximately 17 000 documents, created 2 new COI specific networks on Eritrea and Ukraine bringing the total number of networks to 9, organised

4 practical cooperation meetings and 1 meeting of the National Common Portal Administrators, 2 meetings of the Strategic COI Network, 2 training seminars, and processed 7 COI queries. In addition, EASO produced 7 COI reports (Afghanistan security situation and its update, Eritrea focus report, Pakistan, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Somalia security situations) and a guide on COI and lesbian, gay and bisexual persons (LGB), and an internal COI Report Referencing Guide.

Special support was provided to Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Cyprus. EASO organised a number of practical cooperation meetings on tools to provide support, contingency planning, relocation and reception.

Furthermore, EASO, in collaboration with other stakeholders, implemented the second phase joint processing pilots (asylum application pilot, asylum determination pilot and vulnerability assessment pilot), finalised a manual on joint processing activities and organised a practical workshop with experts who participate in the pilots.

EASO provided **emergency support** to Greece and Italy within the hotspots framework. EASO organised 2 meetings of the Asylum Intervention Pool (AIP) NCPs. EASO supported the EU relocation programme from Greece and Italy since September 2015.

In the area of **information and analysis support**, EASO published its 2014 annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU with inputs from various stakeholders. In addition, EASO published 4 quarterly asylum reports, 12 monthly snapshots, 12 weekly overview reports, and 6 ad hoc reports. Moreover, EASO organised 3 meetings with the Group for the Provision of Statistics (GPS), fully implemented the stage II of its early warning and preparedness system (EPS) and developed a proposal for EPS stage III, which was presented to the Management Board in June, leading to the first data collection on 15 September 2015. EASO also published a report entitled 'Description of the Hungarian Asylum System' in June 2015.

On **third country support**, EASO continued the implementation of its EASO external dimension strategy, particularly through the implementation of a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) project with Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

EASO established an external dimension network and organised 3 practical cooperation meetings and 14 activities under the ENPI project. EASO participated in several meetings with regional development and protection programmes (RDPPs). EASO organised a workshop on resettlement on 2 October 2015, focusing on new resettlement countries.

With regard to **EASO's organisation and cooperation with stakeholders**, EASO organised 3 management board meetings, held its 5th consultative forum meeting and consulted the civil society on various topics.

On 23 September, EASO also organised a conference entitled '5 years of EASO and the Common European Asylum System: results and perspectives'. The conference was addressed by a number of high profile speakers, including the Acting President of Malta, HE Mrs Dolores Cristina, Hon MEP Jean Lambert, Mr Antonio Vitorino, European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs (1999-2004), Dr Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR Dr Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Distinguished Senior Fellow and President Emeritus, MPI President, MPI Europe. Over 200 Member State representatives, civil society organisations and academia participated.

Various high level visits were organised, including the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Secretary General Mr Lamberto Zannier. Finally, EASO significantly strengthened its internal and external communication: press releases and newsletters were regularly issued and an EASO info day was organised on 19 June 2015 in Member States and in the European Parliament. EASO organised 5 Joint Contact Committee meetings with the European Commission. Finally, the EASO External evaluation was finalised and the report published in December 2015.

EASO's key results in 2015

117 meetings and workshops organised
3 764 national staff trained in ETC
2 new training modules
3 training modules updated
272 persons relocated
100 + civil society organisations consulted
EPS stage III fully implemented
3 second-phase pilot projects on joint processing and 1 pilot project on information gathering on the phenomenon of facilitation during the asylum determination process
4 operational support plans
34 publications
9 COI networks, 4 COI reports published
18 policy queries and 7 COI queries
500 000 views of EASO website
5 Joint Contact Committee meetings organised with the European Commission



'5 Years of EASO & the CEAS' Conference.

1. Setting the scene: relevant developments in 2015

In 2015, a record number of more than 1 392 155 applications for international protection were made in the EU+, representing both the highest number and the sharpest year-to-year growth since the beginning of EU-level data collection in 2008.

In the wake of the recent tragic incidents in the Mediterranean, on 20 April 2015, at the joint meeting of foreign and interior ministers, Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Commissioner Avramopoulos presented a 10-point plan outlining immediate actions to be taken in response to the crisis in the Mediterranean. The European Council, on 23 April 2015, issued a statement ⁽¹⁾ outlining various measures — several of them involving EASO — aimed at preventing further loss of life at sea and at tackling the root causes of the human emergency that the EU is facing. This was followed by a European Parliament resolution on 29 April 2015 ⁽²⁾. On 13 May 2015, the European Commission adopted the European agenda on migration ⁽³⁾, which outlines a series of steps that the EU should take to build a coherent and comprehensive approach to reap the benefits and address the challenges deriving from migration.

Following the European Council Conclusions of 25 and 26 June 2015 ⁽⁴⁾, at the 8 and 9 July 2015 informal Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council, Member States in principle supported the European Commission's proposal to use the emergency response mechanism under Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to relocate Syrian and Eritrean

applicants for international protection from Greece and Italy. Likewise, Member States supported a Commission recommendation for a European resettlement scheme. On 14 September 2015 and 22 September 2015, the Council adopted Decision (EU) 2015/1523 ⁽⁵⁾ and (EU) 2015/1601 ⁽⁶⁾ respectively, establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Greece and Italy.

All these developments have significant implications on EASO activities, mainly in Greece and Italy through the so-called 'hotspots' approach, in particular on registration of applications for international protection, joint processing of asylum applications, referral of potential outgoing Dublin take-charge requests, and assistance with the relocation of applicants for international protection from Greece and Italy. Resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes continued in 2015. On 20 July 2015, following the Commission recommendation on a European resettlement scheme, 27 Member States together with Dublin associated States agreed to resettle through multilateral and national schemes 22 504 displaced persons from outside the EU who were in clear need of international protection within 2 years. This marked the first common EU effort on resettlement.

The deadline for transposition of the recast EU asylum *acquis* elapsed in July 2015, and Member States took further steps towards implementing the relevant provisions in their national systems.

⁽¹⁾ Special meeting of the European Council, 23 April 2015 — statement: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/04/23-special-euco-statement/>. This part of the European Agenda on Migration incorporates and further develops the initiatives included in the roadmap that the Commission presented as a follow up to the Statement of the European Council of 23 April.

⁽²⁾ P8_TA-PROV(2015)0176, available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2015-0176+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>.

⁽³⁾ COM(2015) 240 final.

⁽⁴⁾ EUCO 22/15.

⁽⁵⁾ Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece, OJ L 239, 15.9.2015, pp. 146-156.

⁽⁶⁾ Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece, OJ L 248, 24.9.2015, pp. 80-94.

2. EASO priorities in 2015

In 2015, EASO consolidated and further developed its existing core activities, but new activities will be promoted following a step-by-step approach. EASO invested significant efforts in implementing the activities assigned to it in the European agenda on migration, which include several activities in Greece and Italy as part of the ‘hotspots’ approach. EASO focused its efforts on contributing to the effective, coherent and consistent practical implementation of the recast EU asylum *acquis*. Key to the further development of the CEAS is sufficient capacity in EU+ countries’ national asylum systems. EASO developed a more central role in coordinating these capacity building measures through practical cooperation activities, including training, COI and quality reports. EASO enhanced its capacity to collect and exchange information and documentation on asylum systems, as well as its EPS. EASO continued its support to the external dimension of the CEAS in line with the EASO external dimension strategy, in agreement with the European Commission and within the framework of the EU external relations policy. EASO organised advance practical cooperation activities for EU+ countries, the European Commission and other stakeholders, including conferences, workshops, expert meetings and specialised networks in order to discuss and take action on various issues of EU-wide relevance in the field of asylum (e.g. on policy, implementation of EU asylum law, situations in countries of origin, best practices, emergency flows, etc.). EASO also streamlined the methodology and activities to promote practical cooperation in the field of asylum. EASO organised practical workshops back to back to the meetings of the contact committees on themes identified by Member States.

EASO’s main results in 2015
Start implementing the activities earmarked for EASO in the European agenda on migration and 10-point plan
Strengthening the role of common training and professional development in the field of asylum
Improving the quality of asylum processes and decisions
Producing more common COI
Developing joint processing
Stimulating judicial dialogue in the field of asylum
Supporting better identification of vulnerable persons
Collecting and exchanging accurate and up to date information and documentation on the functioning of the CEAS and further developing an EPS to provide analysis of trends
Providing timely and comprehensive operational support to Member States
Promoting adequate reception conditions and integration measures
Fostering synergies between migration and asylum practices, including on return of failed asylum seekers
Supporting the external dimension of the CEAS

3. Permanent support

EASO's permanent support to Member States aims at supporting the implementation of the CEAS and improving the quality of the asylum processes and systems. Its aim is to promote a consistent implementation of the CEAS within the EU and to share common knowledge and skills, organisation and procedures, information, resources and best practices.

3.1 EASO training

EASO's main results in 2015
275 participants from 26 EU+ States and other stakeholders participated in 23 train-the-trainers sessions organised by EASO
271 national training sessions in the EASO training curriculum administered for 3 611 asylum officers
The development of 2 training modules was concluded and 3 new modules were initiated
3 training modules have been undergoing updates, while the full curriculum has been revised in view of the certification of EASO training
1 training report published

EASO's training activities aim at supporting EU+ countries in developing the knowledge, skills and competencies of their staff responsible for asylum matters. In line with the framework created by the training strategy ⁽⁷⁾ adopted in 2012, EASO follows a two-track approach: on one hand, EASO develops relevant training material and, on the other hand, EASO organises training based on a train-the-trainer system.

The EASO training curriculum ⁽⁸⁾ covers core aspects of the asylum procedure by means of soon-to-be 19 interactive modules that follow a blended learning methodology, combining online e-learning and face-to-face sessions. EASO performs regularly targeted consultations with international and civil society organisations, through the Training Reference Group consisting of representatives from the European Commission, UNHCR, the Odysseus Network, the European Council of Refugees and Exiles and other ad hoc members. The involvement of these entities plays an important role in the training development process and in maintaining good quality standards. EASO also organises annual NCP meetings, which are used as a platform to discuss training needs and future training developments with EU+ States.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/EASO-Training-strategy.pdf>

⁽⁸⁾ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/BZ0413152ENC.pdf>

In 2015, the curriculum was expanded by the development of a number of new modules whilst some other modules were upgraded. Two modules: 'Gender, gender identity and sexual orientation' and 'Reception', were finalised. The development of three other modules started during this year and is expected to finish in 2016: a module on didactic methods, a module on fundamental rights and international protection in the EU and a module on an introduction to international protection. Furthermore, the update of three existing modules started in 2015 and is expected to finish in 2016: the modules on evidence assessment, on the Dublin III Regulation and on the end of protection.

EASO published a handbook on interviewing vulnerable persons and started the development of the handbook on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation module and the handbook on evidence assessment, which are expected to be finalised in 2016. The aim of these training handbooks is to serve as a reference tool for those who have already completed the online and the face-to-face sessions of the respective training module. The handbooks accompany asylum practitioners in the course of their daily work by providing a summary of the key elements of the training material.

In the course of 2015, 23 train-the-trainer sessions were delivered in the following modules: Asylum Procedure Directive, Country of origin information, Dublin III Regulation, Evidence assessment, Exclusion, Inclusion, Interview techniques, Interviewing children, Interviewing vulnerable persons, Module for managers, Common European Asylum System, Gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, and Reception. 275 trainees from 26 Member States, Norway and other stakeholders participated in the train-the-trainers sessions (including 9 participants from EASO's staff). As in 2014 and in order to facilitate broader participation, EASO organised regional trainings covering a combination of modules. 8 train-the-trainer sessions were delivered in Vienna, Brussels, Tallinn and Germany and one session within the EASO External Dimension was organised in Istanbul. Those sessions involved the participation of 106 asylum officers from Member States, from Western Balkan countries and from Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia (ENPI countries).

Furthermore, 271 national training sessions were administered by EASO on its e-learning platform, training 3 611 officers.

Moreover, progress was made in the development of a certification for the EASO training. Four expert meetings were organised. All modules of the EASO Training Curriculum were revised, in order to develop

all elements necessary for the certification (i.e. shift from learning objectives to learning outcomes and develop European Qualification Framework descriptors). Preparatory work was undertaken for receiving external consultancy to support the EASO training certification process.

In 2015, efforts were taken to start a project to migrate from the current learning management system to a new platform. With the assistance of an external consultancy company, EASO has analysed its needs, defined technical specifications and an open call of tender has been launched in August. The evaluation of tenders started in Q4. The framework contract was to be awarded and signed in January 2016.

EASO continued to report on the progress in the implementation of the EASO Training Curriculum. The Annual training report for 2014 was published in 2015 and provides key figures and a compilation of EASO training country factsheets.

3.2 Quality support

EASO's main results in 2015
Development of the EASO practical tool on identification of persons with special needs (IPSN tool)
Development of the EASO-Frontex practical tools on access to procedure for first-contact officials
Preparation of the establishment of the EASO Network of Dublin Units
Publication of Quality matrix reports presenting key findings from the mapping exercises conducted on access to procedure, special procedures and identification of persons with special needs.
3 plenary thematic meetings and 6 working group meetings organised

EASO aims at supporting Member States in achieving common standards within the CEAS through practical cooperation, mapping of EU+ States practices and policies and subsequently the development of practical tools.

The EASO Quality matrix initiative, which was launched in 2012, intends to cover comprehensively all areas of the CEAS by developing a set of interrelated deliverables (mapping of Member States' current practices and policies, thematic meetings and reports, list of projects and initiatives, practical tools).

The Quality matrix also enables EASO to identify Member States' support needs. In 2015, the Quality matrix mapping focused on the Dublin procedure

and the appeal procedures. Thematic meetings were organised jointly with the contact committee meeting dedicated to the same topic.

In 2015, EASO also developed and made available on its website a number of practical tools and guides to support the daily work of asylum officers and other relevant officials: the 'EASO practical guide on the personal interview', the 'EASO practical guide on evidence assessment', and the 'EASO practical guide on the implementation of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive (QD)'. The 'EASO practical tool on identification of persons with special needs' was also created to support the timely identification of applicants with special needs in line with the Asylum Procedures Directive (recast) and Reception Conditions Directive (recast). This online tool is being promoted for integration in national processes, in particular in Member States which receive special support from EASO (BG and CY). Furthermore, EASO developed jointly with the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), and in cooperation with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and UNHCR, 'Practical tools on access to procedure for first-contact officials', to help first-contact officials identifying persons who may wish to apply for international protection. Moreover, the toolkit provides guidance on follow-up assistance and procedural guarantees that are to be provided to such persons (provision of information, registration, referral and other assistance and procedural guarantees). These tools are expected to be published early 2016. These tools are currently available in English and are being translated in a number of EU languages (up to 18) in order to facilitate their use.

In 2015, EASO continued its work on preparing and publishing thematic reports on key issues of the CEAS. Three thematic reports, the 'Quality matrix report on access to procedure', the 'Quality matrix report on special procedures' and the 'Quality matrix report on identification of persons with special needs' were published and shared with Member States, the European Commission and UNHCR for internal use. Furthermore, preparatory work was undertaken for the publication of two additional reports: the 'Quality matrix report on Dublin procedure' and the 'Quality matrix report on appeals procedures'. The publication of these reports is planned for 2016.

In addition, the annual meeting of the quality NCPs took place in November with 27 participants from 14 EU+ countries, UNHCR and the European Commission. The meeting included a dedicated session on the topical issue of possible practical responses to the situation of high influx, especially with respect to ensuring quality of asylum processes. The 'EASO Paper on ensuring quality

in high influx situations' was prepared as an outcome of this session and shared with the Member States for internal use.

In line with the EU Agenda on Migration of May 2015, EASO facilitated the development of a concept note and draft terms of reference for the new EASO Network of Dublin units relying on the Quality matrix methodology. These documents were shared with EU+ countries for consultation and will be finalised in early 2016. Moreover, EASO consolidated the EASO Quality network by introducing terms of reference for its work.

3.3 Country of origin information

EASO's main results in 2015
9 COI specialist networks
4 COI specialist network meetings
4 practical cooperation meetings
1 workshop on COI and LGB
2 workshops on internet and social media for COI research
4 COI reports
1 practical research guide
2 StratNet meetings

EASO's work in the field of COI aims at developing a comprehensive EU COI system, by raising and harmonising standards together with Member States and the European Commission via a network approach. The development of the EASO specialist networks promotes the harmonisation of policies and practices among Member States. Information on COI needs and products are shared and the duplication of efforts avoided. Networks also engage in joint assessment of key sources of COI, discuss specific asylum-relevant issues in countries of origin and offer a framework for joint COI production and jointly answering COI queries.

In line with this objective, in 2015 the EASO COI network approach, launched in 2013, was further developed: 2 new networks were established on Eritrea and Ukraine, in addition to the 7 networks already established (Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Somalia and Syria). The 9 networks consist of 189 participants.

3 practical cooperation meetings were organised on Afghanistan, Nigeria and Ukraine (COI, policy and trafficking in human beings), one on COI and LGB, in addition to a practical cooperation conference on Afghanistan.

A first evaluation of the work of the COI networks has taken place in March/April 2016 where high satisfaction levels were revealed.

In 2015, EASO published 4 COI reports: *'Afghanistan: security situation'*, *'Eritrea country focus'*, *'Pakistan country overview'*, and *'Nigeria: sex trafficking of women'*. Researchers and experts from various Member States were involved in the drafting and peer reviewing processes. Also, updates of the *'Afghanistan: security situation'* report and of the *'Somalia: security situation'* report (published in January and February 2016, respectively) and a report on the *'Russian Federation: justice and security sector'* have been finalised (to be published in 2016).

Concerning the methodology of COI research, two training workshops were organised: on 'Internet security and privacy in COI research' and 'Setting up social media tools for COI research'. Also a practical guide on researching COI and LGB was published in May 2015, and presented during a workshop on COI and LGB in May 2015.

As regards the general EASO COI report methodology published in 2012, its revision is ongoing and takes into account recent experiences with drafting different types of EASO COI reports.

In 2015, EASO made substantial progress in the update and further development of the EASO COI portal. The portal, which was built by the European Commission and transferred to EASO in 2012, enables asylum officials to access a wide range of COI from a single point of entry. At the end of 2015, there were 17 000 COI-related documents currently linked via the portal, which now has a publicly accessible interface and 300 registered users. A beta version of the new EASO COI portal platform was launched on 5 February 2016 and new features will be added in the course of 2016.

At the managerial level, the strategic network, composed of COI heads of units or experts otherwise responsible for COI from all EU+ countries, met in April and November 2015, providing strategic input and feedback on EASO COI activities and exchanging managerial experiences with regard to COI research.

3.4 Specific programmes

3.4.1 Cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals

EASO's main results in 2015
2 judicial analyses finalised on 'Exclusion' and 'An introduction to the CEAS' respectively
Further professional development activities undertaken, including 1 professional development workshop on implementing the judicial analysis on Article 15(c) QD
1 high-level conference on 'Judging on the CEAS: key issues in the judicial implementation of the CEAS' organised in cooperation with the Court of Justice of the European Union

In order to support the full and coherent implementation of the CEAS, EASO cooperates with EU+ countries' courts and tribunals. EASO's activities are undertaken in line with the principles adopted in 2013, with full respect to the independence of courts and tribunals, as well as the methodology for professional development activities available to members of courts and tribunals (revised version, October 2015).

To fulfil the professional development needs of members of courts and tribunals, EASO has intensified its efforts to create a professional development series consisting of judicial analyses on specific subjects, which are to be accompanied by judicial trainer's guidance notes. In addition to the judicial analysis on Article 15(c) QD ⁽⁹⁾, which is already accompanied by such a judicial trainer's guidance note, in 2015, two further judicial analyses were finalised by EASO. Work was completed on a judicial analysis on exclusion in accordance with Articles 12 and 17 QD. In addition, EASO, in cooperation with the European Chapter of the International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ-Europe) completed a judicial analysis on an introduction to the CEAS. Furthermore in 2015, EASO has started the preparation of a judicial analysis on qualification for international protection, also with the support of IARLJ-Europe. In developing the judicial analysis on exclusion, EASO organised 3 expert working group meetings at which the drafting team composed of judges and a representative of UNHCR attended.

A high-level practical cooperation event on 'Judging on the CEAS: key issues in the judicial implementation of

the CEAS' was organised with the cooperation and at the premises of the Court of Justice of the EU in Luxembourg. In addition to a large number of high-level speakers from judiciary, academia and other areas, the event gathered 95 participants from 28 EU+ countries. This meeting was intended to act as a forum for members of courts and tribunals who deal with questions of asylum law to engage in discussion with peers from a wide range of EU+ countries. It represented an important opportunity for an exchange of practice and experience between judges with a view to ultimately furthering the mutual understanding and harmonisation of judicial standards throughout the EU+ countries in respect of the CEAS. It also provided a timely opportunity for EASO to undertake a step towards raising the profile of EASO among the wider judicial community as a provider of support and, in particular, professional development.

In addition to this high-level meeting, EASO also organised a workshop for potential judicial trainers on implementing the Judicial Analysis on Article 15(c) QD in national training activities. This event, held on 23-24 April 2015, was attended by 18 members of courts and tribunals from 13 Member States and 2 judges from Germany and the United Kingdom acted as judicial trainers. Practical support in the form of professional development was also provided to members of the judiciary in Germany regarding the methods of researching and assessing country-of-origin information. This event took place on 18 June 2015 in Brunswick, Lower Saxony.

Finally, an initial meeting examining the possibility of establishing a further practical cooperation measure in the form of a case-law database was held. Experts attended from a range of Member States as well as the Court of Justice of the EU and the European Court of Human Rights, academia and civil society. A specific proposal on this subject was then presented at the annual coordination and planning meeting of the EASO network of court and tribunal members as to how to proceed with collecting and collating case-law.

The already established EASO network of court and tribunal members maintained its activities in 2015, including its annual coordination and planning meeting. At this meeting, further practical cooperation activities, such as the case-law database were discussed and endorsed. Moreover, the further steps to be taken in the creation of the professional development series for members of courts and tribunals for the coming years were discussed.

⁽⁹⁾ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Article-15c-Qualification-Directive-201195EU-A-judicial-analysis.pdf>

3.4.2 EASO activities on children, including unaccompanied minors

EASO's main results in 2015
2 plenary meetings on children and 1 advanced expert workshop organised
Development of an EASO practical guide on family tracing
Launch of ENAC

In 2015, EASO continued to provide support and to facilitate practical cooperation on issues relating to asylum seeking children, including unaccompanied children. In doing so, it takes into account the work on protection of the rights of the child developed, *inter alia*, by the European Commission, in particular in line with the EU action plan on unaccompanied minors, FRA, UNHCR and the UN General Committee on the Rights of the Child.

ENAC was inaugurated in 2015 and an online platform for the network was launched.

A thematic meeting on children victims of human trafficking and family tracing was organised with the participation of 14 EU+ States representatives and EU Agencies, UNHCR, and other international organisations and non-governmental organisations with expertise on the topic. The meeting was devoted to identification and prevention of the risk of (re)trafficking of children. In addition, EASO took the opportunity to present the current state of play of the upcoming EASO practical guide on family tracing and of the EASO Experts Network on Activities of Children.

The internal draft of the Practical guide on family tracing was finalised. The document will be published in the 2nd quarter 2016. This guide is intended to provide guidance on the family-tracing process for asylum officials and other relevant stakeholders.

EASO continued to collaborate actively with the European Commission and contributed to the final report on the EU action plan on unaccompanied minors.

The third annual conference on EASO activities on children was held on 15-16 December 2015, with the participation of 29 representatives from 13 EU+ States, the European Commission, UNHCR, as well as organisations of civil society (Child Circle; Defence for Children-ECPAT the Netherlands; ADCS; International Organization for Migration (IOM); Missing children Europe; NIDOS; Unicef). In addition to taking stock of the EASO activities on children, the conference addressed child-related topics relevant in the international protection context, such as the best interests of the child and age assessment.

3.4.3 Trafficking in human beings

EASO's main results in 2015
1 conference and 1 practical cooperation meeting on THB organised by EASO
1 training tool on THB in development
Further coordination and cooperation with JHA agencies in the fight against trafficking
Establishment of the EASO expert network on trafficking in human beings (EASO THBNet)

EASO aims at supporting the EU strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings (2012-2016) and its coherent implementation in cooperation with the European Commission and other EU institutions, bodies and agencies, such as the European Police College, the European Police Office (Europol), FRA and Frontex. To achieve this objective EASO supports policy coherence and mainstreams THB related aspects in all its activities.

In 2015, EASO attended three coordination meetings of the THB contact points in JHA agencies organised by the Office of the EU Anti Trafficking Coordinator. The aim of these meetings was to ensure that agencies exchange information on all activities and actions related to THB and, whenever appropriate, work closely together in order to provide for synergies and avoid duplication of tasks while fostering a multidisciplinary approach.

Additionally, EASO organised two events on THB. The 2nd EASO annual conference on THB and international protection was held in May, with a focus on the 'Identification of victims of trafficking of human beings who may be in need of international protection'. Challenges and solutions for the proper identification of potential victims of trafficking of human beings (THB) during the asylum procedure, as well as detection of possible abuse of the procedure were discussed and identified, leading to the initiation of the development of specific training material by EASO.

EASO also organised a practical cooperation workshop on 'THB and international protection: a special focus on victims from Nigeria'. This workshop was focused on expert discussions of case studies of THB-related Nigerian applications and the main difficulties case officers face when it comes to assessing their claims. The workshop was organised back to back with a COI meeting on Nigeria in order to build synergies between COI and policy in this field.

Finally, in order to enhance practical cooperation on THB, EASO has set up a network of experts in the EU+ supported by an electronic platform.

3.4.4 Information gathering on the phenomenon of facilitation of secondary movements during the asylum determination procedure

In line with action 3.6 of the **Action plan of the Commission Communication on the Task Force Mediterranean** ⁽¹⁰⁾, EASO, together with Frontex, Europol and the European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit, engaged in a joint pilot project with Germany and Sweden to gain knowledge about the phenomenon of facilitation of secondary movements during the asylum process, in order to analyse trends and profiles. The aim of this project was therefore to systematically collect information and gain knowledge during the asylum process on the phenomenon of facilitation of secondary movements in order to analyse trends and profiles with a view to a possible broader use of the methodology and lessons learned during this project. The first meeting of the project team took place on 3 and 4 September 2015. The project is expected to run until October 2017.

3.5 EASO list of available languages

EASO supports Member States in obtaining easily access to available languages in the other Member States through the list of available languages.

In 2015, EASO maintained the list to its current state. In Q4 documentation for customised consultancy services on technical solutions to facilitate the use of the list of available languages and language analysis has been prepared. One particular challenge is related to the limited availability of interpreters in rare languages. Furthermore, the asylum authorities are facing difficulties in providing the necessary logistical arrangements to ensure the presence of an interpreter for every procedural step where translation is needed. Language analysis is a tool that is widely used by some Member States for credibility assessment and identification purposes, while some other Member States currently have no access to/information on this service. Using the most recent information and communication technology (ICT) developments, tools like videoconferencing or electronic communication can provide a solution for some of the challenges mentioned above. Further developments for the list and relevant meetings were postponed due to urgent priorities in 2015 in other areas of EASO's work.

⁽¹⁰⁾ COM(2013) 869 of 4 December 2013.

4. Operational support

4.1 Asylum Intervention Pool

The AIP was developed to enable EASO to react in a timely manner to emergency situations and to Member States' requests for support. EASO updated the pool of experts (343 experts in 2012 grouped in 13 profiles, 497 experts in 2013-2014 grouped in 20 profiles, 500 experts in 2015 grouped in 18 profiles), kept open communication lines with the AIP NCPs on all matters pertaining to the asylum support teams (ASTs) and provided constant assistance on all issues relating to the conditions of deployment of those teams. 2 meetings with the AIP NCPs were organised to discuss different aspects and tools relevant for the deployment of experts, such as participation of national experts in EASO operational activities, planning of future operations along the year as part of the European Agenda for Migration and further use of AIP to serve as an active tool of support of solidarity in line with EASO Regulation.

In its meeting on 2 March 2015, the Management Board repealed Decision No 8 on the overall number and the profiles of the experts to be made available for the ASTs and adopted the Management Board Decision No 24 of 2 March 2015 on the profiles and the overall number of the experts

made available for the AIP in view of their participation in the operational support activities coordinated by the agency. While some profiles were deleted or changed, others were amended. The new list of profiles covered 18 experts' profiles and the overall number of experts in the AIP was decided to be a minimum of 100.

Following the adoption of the new profiles list, EASO sent a request to AIP NCPs on 6 March 2015, enabling EASO to keep the AIP updated. NCPs are requested to forward the CV of experts together with the nomination notification. NCP's are also responsible for informing EASO on any changes concerning availability of their experts to this pool. The pool remains open to new nominations and EASO encourages and welcomes any new nominations to the pool. 19 Member States have constituted their national expert pools and informed EASO for further activating the AIP. 298 individual experts were nominated by the Member States in 2015. Considering their nomination in different types of expertise, the AIP is now formed of around 500 experts.

An updated EASO Code of conduct ⁽¹¹⁾ for persons participating in EASO operational support activities, was published and distributed to all experts before



EASO Experts providing information on the relocation process in Italy.

⁽¹¹⁾ https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/EASO_CODE_OF_CONDUCT.pdf

deployment with EASO. It sets out principles and rules which guide the conduct of persons participating in EASO operational support activities, namely members of the ASTs from participating Member States deployed under Article 16 of the EASO Regulation, experts from Member States participating in the implementation of the special support plans (SSPs) and persons participating in EASO joint processing activities.

A feedback system on the support provided by deployed experts as part of a results-based monitoring and evaluation system for operations was presented and discussed with AIP NCPs in September 2015. A manual for EASO staff was developed and finalised in December 2015 for the implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system, including feedback to experts.

4.2 Operational support

4.2.1 Tailor-made/special support to Member States with specific needs

EASO's main results in 2015
Special support plans to 4 countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Cyprus)
Cyprus: 22 experts deployed to Cyprus from 8 MS, 16 support activities implemented, 4 CY experts participated in EASO Train the trainer sessions and meetings, 10 CY experts participated in study visits in DE and NL.
Bulgaria: 31 experts deployed, 20 SSP activities implemented, 55 BG experts participated in trainings, study visits and meetings
Greece: 21 experts deployed, 7 SSP activities implemented, 33 GR experts participated in trainings, study visits and meetings
Italy: 4 special support teams and 2 long-term experts deployed, 40 IT experts participated in trainings

Building on the experience of the previous years, in 2015 EASO developed further measures to assist Member States in need of special support in their asylum and reception systems. EASO provided special support to Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Cyprus on the basis of SSPs. This support was rendered in accordance with the request by those Member States and the assessment by EASO based, among others, on its analyses using the EPS.

Bulgaria

A Special Support Plan was signed between EASO and the Minister of Interior of Bulgaria on 5 December 2014

aiming to improve and enhance Bulgaria's asylum and reception system. The duration of the SSP is until the end of June 2016. In 2015, EASO experts have provided support to the State Agency for Refugees in further developing an inter-institutional screening and referral mechanism for persons with special needs, enhancing social work and activities in reception centres, updating COI factsheets and standard operating procedures, developing standard training and code of conduct for interpreters, further developing quality assurance tools for the asylum procedure, induction training for newly-hired staff, workshops and tools for EU funding as well as providing tailor-made workshops, including for judges. Other support measures allowed Bulgarian officials to participate actively in EASO practical cooperation meetings in the area of quality, statistics, COI and children, train-the-trainer sessions in the EASO training curriculum and study visits for exchange of good practices.

In total in 2015, 31 experts from 10 Member States participated in the implementation of 20 activities in the framework of the Special support plan to Bulgaria. Furthermore, 49 Bulgarian experts participated in EASO practical cooperation meetings and 6 Bulgarian experts in study visits in Germany and the Netherlands.

Greece

On 13 May 2015, EASO and Greece signed a new SSP for a period of 12 months (until May 2016). EASO experts provided support in the area of Dublin III procedures, the development of several COI focus reports, long-term assistance in the area of EU funds and other financial resources. They also provided practical support to the first reception centre in Moria/Lesvos in the area of social work and daily activities, as well as training Greek personnel in the EASO training curriculum. Greek authorities have participated in several EASO train-the-trainers sessions, as well as in practical cooperation meetings in the area of COI and statistics/data.

In total in 2015, 21 experts from 8 Member States participated in the implementation of 7 activities in the framework of the Special support plan to Greece. Furthermore, 31 Greek experts participated in EASO practical cooperation meetings and trainings and 2 Greek experts in a study visits in Germany.

Italy

In the context of the Special support plan to Italy⁽¹²⁾, which has a duration until 31 March 2016, EASO provided technical and operational support to enhance Italy's instruments for the implementation of the EU asylum *acquis*. EASO and Italy worked together on a number of prioritised areas, such as COI and long-term support of

⁽¹²⁾ https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/20150311-SSP-PHASE-2-Italy-DEF_0.pdf

the Italian Dublin unit. 40 Italian officials working with the National Asylum Commission and its subordinated Territorial Commissions attended EASO specialised training on COI in June 2015, in Rome. The trainers' team was deployed by the National Asylum Commission to the Scuola Superiore dell'Amministrazione dell'Interno in a four-member support team in order to facilitate and perform the face-to-face training session on the COI module within EASO's training curriculum for 40 participants.

4 special support teams have been deployed in the first part of the year 2015 (capacity building for territorial commissions — 2 teams deployed in Rome and Verona, support to Dublin unit — 1 team of 4 experts performing joint processing, support in the field of COI — 1 team of 3 experts drafting a comprehensive mission statement and a training plan). Further to EASO special support team deployment in the National Asylum Commission, the name of the Italian COI unit was confirmed and a common format in producing responses to COI queries was developed, together with new internal rules on how to produce responses and guidance to judges and territorial commissions on how to ask for COI. Capacity building support in this field continued until March 2016.

Two long-term experts were deployed in the second part of year 2015 in the field of Dublin-support and their

work put the basis of the application of joint processing elements, based on the Procedural manual of the Italian Dublin unit, jointly developed by EASO and Italy in May 2015.

Cyprus

The implementation of the Special support plan to Cyprus⁽¹³⁾ started in July 2014 with the support measures in the field of reception and open accommodation. On 1 July 2015 it was extended until 29 February 2016. In 2015 the SSP contained the following measures: Measure CY 1 Data collection and analytical capacity, Measure CY 2 International protection training, Measure CY 3 Identification of persons with special needs, Measure CY 4 Support minors/unaccompanied minors, Measure CY 5 Support in the field of reception, Measure CY 6 Study visits, Measure CY 7 Training, Measure CY 8 Support in enhancing the capacity of the Dublin Unit.

In total in 2015, 22 experts from 8 Member States participated in the implementation of 16 activities in the framework of the Special support plan to Cyprus. Furthermore, 4 Cypriot experts participated in EASO train-the-trainer sessions and meetings and 10 Cypriot experts in study visits in Germany and the Netherlands.



Inside one of the camps in Pozzallo, Italy.

⁽¹³⁾ [https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO%20SPECIAL%20SUPPORT%20PLAN%20TO%20CYPRUS_July_2015%20\(without%20signatures\).pdf](https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO%20SPECIAL%20SUPPORT%20PLAN%20TO%20CYPRUS_July_2015%20(without%20signatures).pdf)

4.2.2 Emergency support

EASO's main results in 2015
Emergency support to 2 countries (Greece, Italy)
Greece: 11 experts deployed, 1 hotspot operating plan (HOP) activity implemented
Italy: 17 experts deployed, 3 hotspot-relocation operating plan (HROP) activities implemented
272 persons relocated (82 from Greece, 190 from Italy)

In 2015, EASO developed further its activities to support Member States under particular pressure in their asylum and reception system, particularly by providing support to Greece and Italy and by strengthening EASO's capacity to respond in a timely and effective manner to emergency situations.

Greece

On 30 September 2015, EASO and Greece signed a HOP for a period of three months. Asylum support teams were deployed in Lesvos to identify potential relocation candidates, provide relevant information about the program and international protection procedure, as well as refer them to the Greek Asylum Service. On the 17 December 2015, an amendment was signed to extend the HOP initially until March 2016 with automatic renewal until the end of 2016. According to the HOP, ASTs will continue to provide information to potential relocation candidates on Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos, refer interested candidates to the asylum service, support the asylum service during the registration process (on national assessment and exclusion issues), submission of Dublin and relocation cases (including the matching procedure) and provide support in the area of document fraud detection.

In total in 2015, 11 experts from 9 Member States participated in the implementation of support measures in the framework of the HOP Greece (Measure HEL 1 — information provision on relocation and referral to the Greek Asylum Service). By the end of 2015 approximately 4 000 persons have been informed by EASO experts and over 500 have been referred to the regional asylum office in Lesvos. By the end of 2015, 82 persons were relocated from Greece.

Italy

Following up on the information sent to NCPs in May 2015 in reference to the EASO calls for experts for joint processing of applications in Italy, EASO discussed with the Italian asylum and police authorities a comprehensive package of operational support under the EC hotspot

approach and started the hotspot-relocation support activities on 15 September 2015, under the framework of existing cooperation (SSP). A pilot phase of the hotspot-relocation started in Lampedusa (hotspot), Villa Sikanía (registration hub) and Rome (registration hub and Dublin support), confirming the introduction of EASO support with this pre-identification, pre-registration and referral of potential outgoing Dublin take charge requests, as main phases of the hotspot approach for EASO ASTs deployed in Italy.

On 12 December 2015, EASO and Italy signed a HROP to be implemented until the end of June 2016 with the possibility of extension. The HROP foresees the support to hotspots and relocation including the provision of information and pre-identification of potential relocation candidates and support with the registration of applicants for international protection (especially relocation candidates).

In total in 2015, 33 experts from 17 Member States participated in the implementation of 3 hotspot-relocation support activities in Italy. By the end of 2015, 190 persons were relocated from Italy.

By the end of 2015, EASO was active and supporting the hotspot-relocation process in two areas: Measure IT1 — Lampedusa, Villa Sikanía, Rome, Milano: capacity building pre-identification and registration of applications for international protection in view of the relocation procedure; Measure IT2 — Dublin Unit in Rome: support to the take charge requests for relocation cases.

4.3 Relocation

On 14 September 2015 and 22 September 2015, the Council adopted Decision (EU) 2015/1523⁽¹⁴⁾ and (EU) 2015/1601⁽¹⁵⁾ respectively, establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Greece and Italy. These decisions had significant implications on EASO activities, mainly in Greece and Italy through the so-called 'hotspots' approach, including on providing assistance with the relocation of applicants for international protection from Greece and Italy.

In the context of implementation of the two decisions EASO developed specific activities in Italy and in Greece in the form of emergency support and aiming to support the two countries in implementing relocation. HOPs were signed with both countries and ASTs were deployed

⁽¹⁴⁾ Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece, OJ L 239, 15.9.2015, p. 146–156.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece, OJ L 248, 24.9.2015, p. 80–94.

to implement activities within the hotspot approach (see above under I.4.2.2.). By the end of 2015, 190 persons were relocated from Italy and 82 from Greece.

EASO has offered advice to Greece and Italy on improving and completing their registration forms for applications for international protection in order to meet the requirements of the relocation scheme. EASO has designed the procedure for Member States of relocation to indicate the numbers of persons to be relocated, as well as their preferences and capacities to receive particularly vulnerable persons. EASO established and maintains the list of the NCPs for relocation. Also, EASO has developed an information leaflet on relocation and gave advice to other stakeholders on the communication strategy.

EASO continues to work together with the Commission, the other relevant EU agencies and the Italian and Greek authorities on the permanent improvement of the relocation processes in the field. EASO is developing tools which can assist Member State experts and agents of the Italian and Greek authorities in the field of access to the asylum procedure, vulnerability assessment, nationality check and exclusion. EASO has extended its data collection under the EPS to the relocation procedure.

In addition to the activities targeting Greece and Italy, in 2015 EASO participated in three EC relocation and resettlement fora and organised two practical cooperation meetings in synergy with these EC relocation and resettlement fora.

4.4 Joint processing activities

In 2015, EASO carried out a number of pilot projects on joint processing, particularly within the framework of the Task Force Mediterranean. Following this experience EASO aimed in 2015 to conduct an evaluation of the projects and draft a handbook on joint processing. Furthermore, additional joint processing activities were prepared in 2014 and they were launched and completed in 2015: Asylum application pilot (PL as host country; concluded in February); Asylum determination pilot (NL as host country; concluded in March); Vulnerability assessment pilot (UK as host country; concluded in June).

EASO has undertaken an evaluation of the outcome of the joint processing pilots. Two practical workshops were organised with the participation of experts deployed in joint processing support teams. The EASO report on joint processing activities and an EASO manual on joint processing were drafted and finalised as a result of these meetings.

In 2015, within the context of the migration crisis, additional large-scale joint processing activities were launched by EASO in Italy and in Greece (see above under I.4.2.2).

4.5 Synergies between asylum and migration

EASO aims to foster coherence in the implementation of activities in the fields of asylum and migration, in particular in the area of return of failed asylum seekers. This aspect is an integral part of an effective asylum system. EASO aims to explore possibilities of exchanging information and best practices to mainstream elements relevant to return of failed asylum seekers in close collaboration with the European Migration Network Return Expert Group (EMN REG).

In 2015, EASO participated in relevant meetings on return organised by EMN REG, European Reintegration Network, Frontex and the Common Support Initiative on Return. The first meeting on the process following the rejection of an application for international protection has been postponed to Q1 2016.

4.6 Reception and integration

EASO started building in 2014 its internal capacity for providing support on reception systems and conditions in Member States. To this end, synergies were developed with relevant experts networks in the area, particularly the European Platform of Reception Agencies (EPRA).

A practical cooperation expert meeting on reception systems and conditions with EPRA was held in Malta in June 2015 and in December 2015 EASO participated in the full-round EPRA meeting in Brussels and presented the first results of the EASO data collection on reception and of the pilot training of the reception module.

A data collection on reception has started as part of EPS stage III (see below under I.5.3).

Additionally, EASO is developing a handbook on contingency planning, containing best practice guidance in EU Member States towards setting up a contingency plan in facing large and disproportionate migratory flows. The handbook is based on a contingency outline already developed by EASO, which provides an indication of the steps Member States could take in case of emergency. During 2015 one expert meeting was organised for the development of the handbook, which will be finalised and published in 2016, following additional drafting from EASO and confirmation by the Member States experts in the core group. During 2015, EASO and Ireland analysed together with the other Member States the replies to a specific questionnaire issued by the European Migration Network (EMN) on this topic. It was agreed that the development of such a handbook within the CEAS would encourage practical cooperation and exchanges of best practices, provide common contingency tools for those Member states

which do not yet have contingency planning in place, as well as provide guidance for enhancing existing national contingency plans.

With regard to integration, EASO was invited for the first time at the meeting of the national contact points on integration (NCPI) in March 2015 to present the agency and exchange views with NCPIs. Preliminary feedback was received from Member States on a possible EASO involvement in this field.

Furthermore, EASO will also, building on existing initiatives and as per the European agenda on migration, develop the EASO EU+ network on reception.

5. Information and analysis support

5.1 Information and documentation system

In 2014, EASO started the development of a combined content management system and database — the information documentation system (IDS) — in the form of an IT tool which will provide a detailed and up-to-date overview of the practical functioning of the CEAS. IDS is planned to be a searchable library that provides comprehensive overviews of how each key stage of the asylum process is carried out in individual EU+ countries. These key elements include: access to procedure, application for international protection, Dublin procedures, determination at first instance, determination at second instance, reception and detention, return and content of protection/integration. It is planned to form an IDS network of Member State experts to validate the information in the IDS and to update it on a regular basis so that users can consult, compare and analyse asylum practices across the EU.

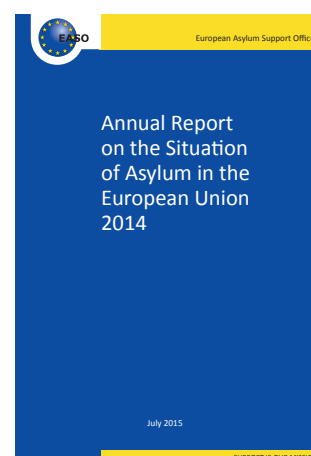
EASO set up a pilot version of IDS which was presented to the Management Board and the Consultative Forum and in 2015 the development of the system continued with finalisation of the structure and functionalities of the tool. Initial content covering main stages of the asylum process in all EU+ countries was inserted by EASO, taking into account information gathered in sources, such as the EASO quality matrix, the EMN reports, the contributions to the Annual report on the situation on asylum (including from UNHCR and civil society) and information from national websites and databases. A meeting was held with the EASO network of court and tribunal members to discuss the integration of national case law into IDS. Finally, a kick-off meeting of the IDS network (with representatives of 16 EU+ countries) was held at EASO in January 2016. The network will continue to validate the IDS content in order to ensure the accuracy of the information stored and to help further develop a system.

5.2 Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2014

In 2015, EASO published its fourth yearly reference report: *'The annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union 2014'* ⁽¹⁶⁾. The report provided a comprehensive overview of the situation of asylum in the EU, by examining requests for international protection to the EU, analysing application and decision data, and focusing on some of the most important countries of origin of applicants for international protection. In particular, the report focused on three asylum flows that underlined the very different characteristics of asylum applicants in the EU: Syria, Russian Federation and western Balkans countries.

The report also highlighted major developments with regard to EU/national policies, legislative changes and jurisprudence. In the framework of Regulation 862/2007, Eurostat was the primary source of statistical data used for the annual report. To ensure high quality data, EASO liaises with Eurostat regarding compliance, reminders and consistency of the datasets published on their website. Data gathered by EASO through the EPS data collection system provided for additional information, to be used in the report in support of the existing analysis and to expand statistical references in the thematic sections. Furthermore, all Member States, UNHCR and 15 civil society organisations provided input to the report.

The annual report was adopted by the EASO Management Board on 8 June 2015 and it was launched to the public in Brussels on 8 July 2015 during a conference open to Member States and civil society attended by around 120 participants. In order to promote its broad dissemination, the report was translated in 5 languages (ES, DE, EN, FR, IT).



⁽¹⁶⁾ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/EASO-Annual-Report-2014.pdf>

5.3 Early warning and preparedness system

EASO's main results in 2015
4 quarterly reports
12 monthly trend analysis reports published within 10 days
12 monthly snapshots
10 contributions to EASO newsletter on latest asylum trends (public)
12 weekly overview reports of the situation of asylum in the EU+ (since week 40)
4 post-visa liberalisation monitoring mechanism reports (since July 2015)
3 GPS network meetings
Weekly relocation reports began October 2015
EPS Stage III indicators collection began in September 2015 (Access to procedure, Dublin, reception, return)
7 ad hoc risk analyses and reports
EASO research programme on push-pull factors in asylum-related migration began

EASO continued the data collection under its EPS. Article 33 of the recast Dublin Regulation foresees the establishment of a European mechanism for early warning, preparedness and crisis management with a key role for EASO in information provision. In this framework, EASO's EPS is designed to be a fundamental part of this mechanism and aims to provide accurate, timely and complete monitoring of the practical functioning of the CEAS via timely operational data collection. The 28 European Union Member States, Norway and Switzerland, also referred to as EU+ countries, provide data on a monthly basis to EASO within 15 calendar days after the end of the reference month.

According to the agreed process, the development of EPS is envisaged to proceed step-by-step in stages. In 2015, the launch of EPS Stage III was prepared. Data collection for Stage III began on 15 September 2015. The additional indicators include otherwise closed cases, access to procedure, reception, return and Dublin. Although a majority of the states provided some data for Stage III from its inception, several states had — as expected — difficulties in providing information for some indicators, because time was needed to adjust national IT systems and to put in place national coordination, since some information had to come from other agencies/ministries. The level of compliance is therefore expected to gradually improve in the course of 2016. Otherwise closed cases, Dublin and reception had the highest level of compliance, while data provision for access to procedure and return proved too difficult for several states.

In 2015, EASO issued 12 monthly trends analysis reports, 12 monthly snapshots, 3 quarterly reports⁽¹⁷⁾ and 7 ad hoc reports (i.e. early warning notes, situational updates and impact assessments). While some of those documents were EU restricted or limited and were addressed to the members of the Management Board, EASO also provided 10 contributions on latest asylum trends to the EASO newsletter, a public document broadly disseminated. Since July 2015, EASO published four post-visa liberalisation monitoring mechanism reports. Also, since week 40 EASO started to publish weekly overview reports on the situation of asylum in EU+, in order to provide updated and timely information on the migration crisis. 12 weekly reports were published in 2015 for limited use.

In 2015, EASO produced and/or updated a number of ad hoc reports. The reports on Ukraine and on Eritrea were updated. A visa liberalisation report for Ukraine was produced. A visa liberalisation risk analysis for Turkey was produced and updated during the year. Also the visa liberalisation risk analysis for Georgia was also updated. The asylum applicants from the western Balkans: comparative analysis of the trends, push-pull factors and responses was updated.

3 meetings were organised with GPS members. The first one aimed at discussing the feasibility of the Stage III proposal, the second one aimed at discussing the implementation of the Stage III indicators and the third one aimed at reviewing the first data provision under Stage III of the data collection.

In order to have an improved understanding of asylum influx, and thus enhance the quality of analyses and improve capabilities to develop forward-looking scenarios, EASO began a research programme on the push and pull factors of 'forced' migration. The idea was discussed at several MB meetings and, given the extensive support demonstrated, a specific activity was included in Section 4.3 of the 2015 work programme. The research programme should eventually lead to the development of an empirically validated model detailing the relative importance of the various key push and pull factors determining asylum-related migration for certain typical flows. A staff member of the requisite level dedicated full-time to manage the programme was recruited by EASO in October 2015 and is situated in the Centre for Information, Documentation and Analysis.

Given the complexity of the subject, the project is designed as a comprehensive, large-scale, multi-annual programme that will be implemented step by step. Since EASO does not have the human resources available to carry out such an extensive research programme internally, lots for research services will be publicly tendered in order to conduct the work and to provide

⁽¹⁷⁾ <https://easo.europa.eu/asylum-trends-analysis/quarterly-report/>

the key deliverables. The first lot — a literature review identifying all significant push/pull factors — was tendered on September and awarded in October 2015. The invitation to tender for lot 2 — a methodological survey of existing empirical migration models — was issued in December 2015. Four valid proposals were received, and the evaluation would start in January 2016.

As part of the effort to achieve an improved understanding of asylum flows, as well as to fulfil its mandate as the EU body providing COI to Member States and other institutional stakeholders, a pilot project for the outsourced collection and analysis of qualitative information relevant to push factors in major countries of origin was launched in Q3-4. The output will consist of monthly country intelligence reports for three countries for 6 months. They will contribute to the EASO analytical products and COI research, and be also distributed to contact networks external to EASO. The tender for country intelligence reports was awarded in November 2015. The preparatory work started on December 2015, but the reports will be delivered starting from January 2016.

6. Third country support

The EASO third country support is in line with the EASO external action strategy ⁽¹⁸⁾, which conforms with the overall EU external relations policies and priorities, especially with the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, the European neighbourhood policy (ENP) and the EU enlargement strategy. The EASO strategy and activities in this field are based on the understanding that the internal and the external dimensions of both migration and asylum are closely interlinked. Therefore, migration and asylum cannot be effectively addressed without taking into consideration the cooperation with third countries.

6.1 External dimension

EASO's work aims to contribute to the implementation of the external dimension of the CEAS in agreement with the European Commission and within the framework of the EU external relations policy.

Within this context, EASO engaged in a project financed by the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI) related to the participation of Jordan in the work of EASO as well as the participation of Morocco and Tunisia in the work of EASO and Frontex. The implementation started on 1 March 2014 and was extended until the end of June 2016. It contributes to a better understanding of the function, operations and activities of EASO and Frontex and the role EU Member States play. The project assesses and identifies the technical assistance needs of Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia and the suitability of EASO and Frontex tools for their possible adaptation. The target groups of the project activities are asylum and border management authorities, both having operational responsibilities (including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Ministries of Interior and the Ministries of Justice) and those performing supporting activities (such as the exchange of information, capacity building, international cooperation and legal activities).

The implementation of the project continued in 2015. In total, 14 activities were implemented in 2015, including 3 study visits of the countries' officials to France, Spain, and the United Kingdom, a seminar for Moroccan Members of Parliament and a thematic seminar in Jordan, 2 EASO field visits in Jordan and in Tunisia. Officials from the three target countries participated in a train-the-trainer training on the CEAS in Malta, as well as in other EASO trainings on inclusion, exclusion, evidence assessment and interview techniques.

Furthermore, EASO implemented activities within the context of the EASO external dimension network, which was established in 2014 to mainstream communication and share information with Member States, the European Commission, the European External Actions Service, relevant JHA Agencies and international organisations. EASO organised 2 external dimension meetings, as well as a workshop on communication skills in the external dimension. The workshop was facilitated by an external expert in multicultural communication with the purpose to further develop multicultural communication skills for experts deployed in the external dimension. Several new areas were covered and the experts were equipped with new techniques and insight in cross-cultural communication.

EASO also organised, as part of its external dimension mandate, two regional workshops and trainings: the training in Vienna addressed evidence assessment and third country nationals, mainly from the western Balkans and Tunisia, composed the largest contingent of the participants; the training in Istanbul, which was exclusively aimed to third country nationals, on the three core EASO training modules 'Inclusion', 'Interviewing techniques' and 'Evidence assessment', was attended by officials from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. Additionally, where places opened up, officials from western Balkan countries attended a number of EASO trainings in Malta, Brussels and Tallinn. Translations of EASO Trainings into Croatian (Interviewing technique module); French (CEAS module); and Arabic (EASO handbooks, etc.) were launched.

During 2015 EASO has been following the developments in the western Balkans route. In response to the statement adopted at the leaders' meeting on refugee flows along the western Balkans route EASO put in place the following actions: an EASO contact point was nominated in the Centre for Operational Support; a draft/internal EASO action plan was developed; missions were organised to western Balkan countries (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia) for meetings with authorities; participation and contribution to the regular videoconferences with the countries along the western Balkan route and other stakeholders, chaired by the cabinet of President Juncker and weekly overviews on the situation of asylum and the latest asylum trends.

Finally, EASO continued its actions to support the implementation of RDPPs. EASO participated in RDPP North Africa missions to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia and has been included in the task force for the RDPP North Africa. EASO attended the Steering Committee meeting of RDPP North Africa in Rome on 20 October

⁽¹⁸⁾ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/EASO-External-Action-Strategy.pdf>

2015 and submitted a proposal for a project under the RDPP North Africa framework after consultation with the EU Member States. The EASO project proposal is still pending availability of funding. Also, EASO attended the Valletta Summit on 11-12 November 2015 and has consequently been identified as a relevant actor in providing capacity building, including training, to countries of origin, transit and destination.

6.2 Resettlement

In the field of resettlement, EASO aims at playing a coordinating role in exchanging information and best practices among EU+ countries, as well as in other actions. In cooperation with UNHCR and IOM, EASO aims to promote coordination between EU+ countries in achieving agreed targets of resettlement, not only in terms of submissions, but also in terms of effective departures to the EU. In the field of resettlement, EASO works in close cooperation with UNHCR and IOM and aims at strengthening the EU role in this area.

In line with this objective, in 2015 EASO developed a proposal for collection of data and operational information on resettlement. The proposal was sent to EU+ countries for comments in December 2015 and data collection started early 2016.

Furthermore, EASO discussed the possible development of a training tool on resettlement at the training NCP meeting in May 2015. After consultations with Member States, other areas were prioritised for the development of training tools in 2015. Resettlement remains however an area of interest for training activities in the coming years, to be developed either directly by EASO or in partnership with relevant actors.

EASO participated actively in the 3rd Resettlement and relocation forum and on 2 October 2016, back-to-back with the Resettlement and relocation forum, organised a workshop on resettlement focussing on new resettlement countries. EASO also participated in an inaugural workshop, the EU-FRANK, project led by Sweden and the Annual Tripartite Consultation on Resettlement.



Press briefing in the margins of the Valletta Summit 2016.



EASO data analysts interpreting migration trends.



Volker Türk, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection during the EASO 5 Year Conference.

7. EASO's framework, network and organisation

7.1 Management board

EASO's main results in 2015

3 Management Board meetings held

10 decisions adopted

The Management Board is the governing and planning body of EASO. In 2015, it was composed of 31 members and observers (one member from each Member State, except for Denmark, which is invited to attend as an observer, two members of the European Commission and one non-voting member of UNHCR). Moreover, representatives of the associate countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) were invited to attend the meetings of the Management Board as observers. Frontex was also regularly invited to take part in the relevant items of the Management Board meetings, especially with regard to the situation of asylum in the EU and EPS.

3 Management Board meetings were organised in March, June and September 2015. At its June meeting, the Management Board selected Mr David Costello, the member from Ireland, as the board's Deputy Chair.

During 2015, the Management Board adopted the following documents and decisions:

- Adoption of the EASO 2015 budget;
- Reviewed Management Board Decision No 8 on the profiles and the overall number of experts to be made available for the ASTs;
- Adjustments 1 and 2 of the EASO Work programme 2015;
- The Work programme 2016;
- Amendment 1 of the EASO Work programme 2016;
- The EASO Budget 2016 and Establishment plan 2016;
- General annual report 2014;
- The Consolidated annual activity report 2014;
- The Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2014;
- Opinion of the Management Board on the final annual accounts for the financial year 2014.

In 2015, the EASO Management Board continued their strategic discussions on the practical management of the CEAS, including on joint processing, recognition rates, the 10-point action plan and the European agenda on migration, diasporas, and various themes related to

the situation of asylum in the EU. Trends, challenges and best practices were discussed among members and representatives.

The Management Board discussed on the progress related to the implementation of the activities in the framework of the European agenda on migration, the Task Force Mediterranean and the EASO support measures to Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Cyprus. Particular attention was given to training and professional development, to quality processes and to COI and the development of the COI portal.

Regarding EPS, the Management Board discussed on the implementation of Stage III of the process and received the monthly and quarterly reports on asylum. Finally, the EASO Management Board received an update at every meeting on the state of play of the EASO external evaluation, which was finalised in December 2015.

7.2 Cooperation network of EASO

7.2.1 Cooperation with the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission

EASO's cooperation with EU institutions results in 2015

Regular meetings with the European Commission

1 high level visit organised with the European Commission

Participated in the western Balkans leaders meeting and Valletta Summit

5 Joint Contact Committee meetings

EASO acts within the policies and institutional framework of the EU. In 2015, EASO submitted to the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission, among others, its annual work programme, its Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU, its Annual activity report, and its final accounts.

In relation with the European Commission, regular bilateral meetings and video conferences were organised between EASO and the Commission at different levels. The structured cooperation continued with the European Commission in its capacity as formal member of the EASO Management Board. European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and

Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos visited the EASO to discuss EASO's role in the CEAS as well as to discuss the latest asylum trends.

The relations between EASO and the Directorate-General (DG) for Home Affairs were further developed. EASO worked closely with DG for Home Affairs on administration and on policy and operational issues. Furthermore, EASO continued working closely with the Commission in organising joint and back to back meetings with the Contact Committee meetings.

Moreover, EASO participated regularly in EMN steering board meetings and NCP meetings, and cooperated on the publication of their respective Annual report, in the areas of statistics, glossary and in the EMN REG.

In 2015, EASO also enhanced its cooperation with DG Development and Cooperation-EuropeAid (DG Devco) and the EEAS on the implementation of the ENPI project, and Eurostat with regard to the collection of data on asylum. Regular cooperation on budgetary and financial aspects, as well as on human resources, was promoted in 2015 with DG for Budget and DG for Human Resources, respectively.

With regard to the Council of the EU, EASO participated, the western Balkans leaders meeting, the Valletta summit, Justice and Home Affairs Ministers' Councils and Strategic Committee of Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA) and high level working group meetings.

EASO participated in 4 meetings in the European Parliament providing factsheets on trends and analysis and presenting the annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU and the EASO annual activity report 2014. Furthermore, EASO organised in June an EASO info day in the European Parliament in Brussels providing information material on the activities of the agency.

7.2.2 Cooperation with UNHCR and other international organisations

EASO's cooperation with UNHCR and other international organisations results in 2015
High level meeting with UN High Commissioner for Refugees
Visit by Dr Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR
Visit by OSCE Secretary General Mr Lamberto Zannier
Regular participation in the General Directors of Immigration Services Conference (GDISC) and Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC) meetings

In fulfilling its tasks, EASO in 2015 acted in close cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR) and with other relevant international and intergovernmental organisations. EASO and UNCHR signed a working arrangement in 2013 which enabled a strengthened cooperation in all areas covered by the EASO Regulation. In 2015, the cooperation with UNHCR covered in particular the areas of training, quality processes, trends and analysis, unaccompanied minors, resettlement, the external dimension of the CEAS, special and emergency support, including relocation from Greece and Italy. Dr Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR delivered a key note speech at the EASO conference in September and one senior management consultation was hosted by UNHCR in July 2015. UNHCR participated in the EASO Management Board as a non-voting member and shared factsheets. Furthermore, the UNHCR permanent liaison office to EASO based in Malta actively participated in EASO's activities throughout the year, facilitating cooperation between UNHCR and EASO.

A visit to EASO by OSCE Secretary General Mr Lamberto Zannier, took place in November 2015. EASO maintained also close contacts with other relevant international and intergovernmental organisations working in areas of asylum, such as the Council of Europe, GDISC, IGC and the IOM. Concerning the Council of Europe and IOM, EASO exchanged regularly views and contributed to their work. With regard to the GDISC, EASO participated in the GDISC steering board meetings, conferences and workshops, whereas, on the basis of an exchange of letters with the IGC, EASO has been attending regularly the IGC working groups and the executive director took part in the IGC full round.

7.2.3 Cooperation with EU agencies and JHA agencies

EASO's cooperation with EU agencies in figures 2015
Participated in 3 contact group meetings with JHA agencies
Participated in 2 head of JHA agencies meeting
JHA press officers and communication multipliers meeting organised
Participation in 4 EU agencies' network meetings

During 2015, EASO continued its mutual contacts and relations on a bilateral level with the JHA agencies, in particular via the channels of the JHA inter-agency cooperation. Following specific working arrangements with Frontex, FRA and the European Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA), bilateral activities will be implemented as detailed hereunder.

During 2015, the JHA Agencies have maintained permanent formal and informal contacts and held

regular meetings regarding their activities. EASO provided input to the preparation of the final report of the JHA Agencies cooperation activities in 2015.

In the context of the broader network of the EU decentralised agencies, EASO actively participated during 2015 in 2 heads of administrations and heads of agencies meetings, and provided inputs to various consultations and surveys.

7.3 Consultative Forum

EASO's cooperation with the Consultative Forum in 2015
100 organisations consulted on various areas of EASO's work
60 organisations participated in conference on 5 years of EASO and the CEAS
120 participants in launch of EASO Annual report and conference
100 participants in 5th plenary of the Consultative Forum

The EASO Consultative Forum allows for the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge between EASO, civil-society organisations, and relevant bodies operating in the field of asylum policy. The EASO Consultative Forum was set up in 2011. Civil society operating in the field of asylum is characterised by a considerable number of active and diverse organisations that play a key role both in the debate on and implementation of asylum policy and practices at national and EU level, and in the implementation itself through various activities. Some organisations have also been instrumental in supporting the fairness and accuracy of asylum procedures, particularly by giving support to bringing certain cases to the Court of Justice of the European Union and European Court of Human Rights.

During 2015, EASO strengthened its relationship with civil society and the Consultative Forum membership base grew to 80 organisations. EASO consulted and involved civil-society organisations from various areas of its work, including members of the reference group that participates in the drafting and updating of the EASO training modules. EASO welcomed comments by civil society on the 2015 EASO work programme and the EASO annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU and Annual activity report. The report was launched on 8 July 2015 at a special dissemination and discussion event in Brussels attended by a large number of civil-society organisations. Consultative Forum members were requested by the executive director, via an open call for input published on the EASO website in 2015, to provide information about work that they carried out throughout the year which in their view contributed

to the implementation of the CEAS. EASO took into consideration all relevant input received from civil society and reflected it in the reports.

Experts from civil society were invited to participate in EASO events throughout the year. In 2015, several organisations were directly involved in the work of EASO. A dedicated area for the Consultative Forum facilitates consultations. A quarterly consultation calendar is published on the EASO website. EASO published 9 newsletters in 2015, also containing reports of EASO meetings and workshops to ensure that civil society has access to the information. On 30 November 2015 EASO held the fifth EASO Consultative Forum plenary meeting ⁽¹⁹⁾ in Valletta at which about 100 representatives from 45 organisations participated.

7.4 Communication

EASO's main results in 2015
In 2015, EASO tripled its presence in the press
Replied to over 1 800 information requests
Set up a network of journalists working on asylum
Organised an EASO info day in Member States
Held over 100 high level interviews

In line with the EASO communication strategy, EASO undertakes a wide range of communication activities using diverse channels in order to promote the agency's role, values, activities and work.

The EASO website will be the centrepiece of its communication efforts. Other channels include written and audiovisual press, participation in events (such as EU open days, public hearings and other events including large, politically important occasions), presentations and exhibitions of EASO's work and activities, publications and reports, EASO's monthly newsletter, press releases; and daily press extracts (for internal use).

In 2015, the EASO website saw an increase of 30 % in its page views. 10 editions of the newsletter were issued and the subscribers increased by 36 % compared to 2014.

EASO tripled its presence in the press. 20 press releases were issued and over 100 interviews were held since January 2015. EASO monitored its press coverage daily and published 42 of the most important articles concerning EASO's activities on the EASO website. In total in 2015, over 2 000 articles on EASO were recorded in the press archive.

A journalist network was set up; it consists of 35 journalists composing the core group and an additional

⁽¹⁹⁾ <https://easo.europa.eu/easo-consultative-forum/registration/>

76 journalists. A meeting of the network was held on 1 June 2015 and it was attended by 19 participants. Also a meeting for the EASO communication multipliers was organised on 30 March 2015. 18 external participants attended the meeting and provided ideas and feedback which was incorporated in the EASO outreach activities.

An info day was organised on 19 June 2015 in the Member States. 17 info desks were organised across EU+ countries and 5 EASO officials delivered presentations in Belgium, France, Hungary, Malta, and Romania.

EASO effectively managed the EASO info mailbox and answered to more than 1 000 email requests. In addition, EASO replied to nearly 1 800 press and other requests. EASO's policy is to reply to press requests within 48 hours. Most requests were replied within 24 hours.

In 2015, 50 publications, including programming documents, reports, training materials, handbooks, brochures were published by EASO in line with its visual identify. Merchandise was also distributed.

The production of an EASO corporate video ⁽²⁰⁾ was completed in 2015, as well as an EASO video on the Annual activity report 2014 was also produced.

To support the EASO activities on relocation, 3 videos on relocation were produced. EASO also started work on leaflets and other communication tools related to relocation.

7.5 Management of resources

In 2015, EASO's internal organisational structure was headed by its executive director, who was directly supported by an executive office, by 4 heads of the following units/centres, as well as by the accounting officer:

- General affairs and administration unit
- Centre for information, documentation and analysis
- Centre for operational support
- Centre for training, quality and expertise

Throughout the year, the executive director and the 4 heads of units/centres convened a weekly management team meeting to monitor the progress on EASO's activities and organisation and discuss the upcoming activities. These were supplemented by senior thematic meetings organised on key horizontal content related matters affecting the organisation.

EASO had 93 staff members (in service and appointed) at the end of 2015, including 61 temporary agents,

21 contract agents and 11 seconded national experts. 22 nationalities of EU Member States were represented in EASO at the end of 2015. EASO completed 21 recruitment procedures, while several competitions for posts foreseen in the 2015 establishment plan were only finalised at the beginning of the following year. 30 new posts were assigned to EASO in 2015 (establishment plan, amendment 2): the recruitment of those new posts started in the last quarter of the year.

The gender balance amongst EASO resulted in 63% female staff members and 37% male staff. EASO Staff Committee was elected in September 2015 performed regularly its activities according to its mandate.

The agency has signed agreements with private/international schools in Malta to compensate for the current lack of a European school within a perimeter of 50 km from EASO's headquarters. In this sense, the Management Board adopted in November 2013 a Decision on the EASO contribution to school fees for children attending a private/international school in Malta and to support their integration in the local environment. The Decision foresees the provision of adequate financial support to staff members whose children attend these schools, also taking into account the development of a sustainable and balanced approach between the financial support to the annual school fees and the agency's expenditure.

Several cultural and social events for the staff, including 8 thematic activities, were organised by EASO. They aimed to keep EASO staff informed on important issues and to serve as team building activities.

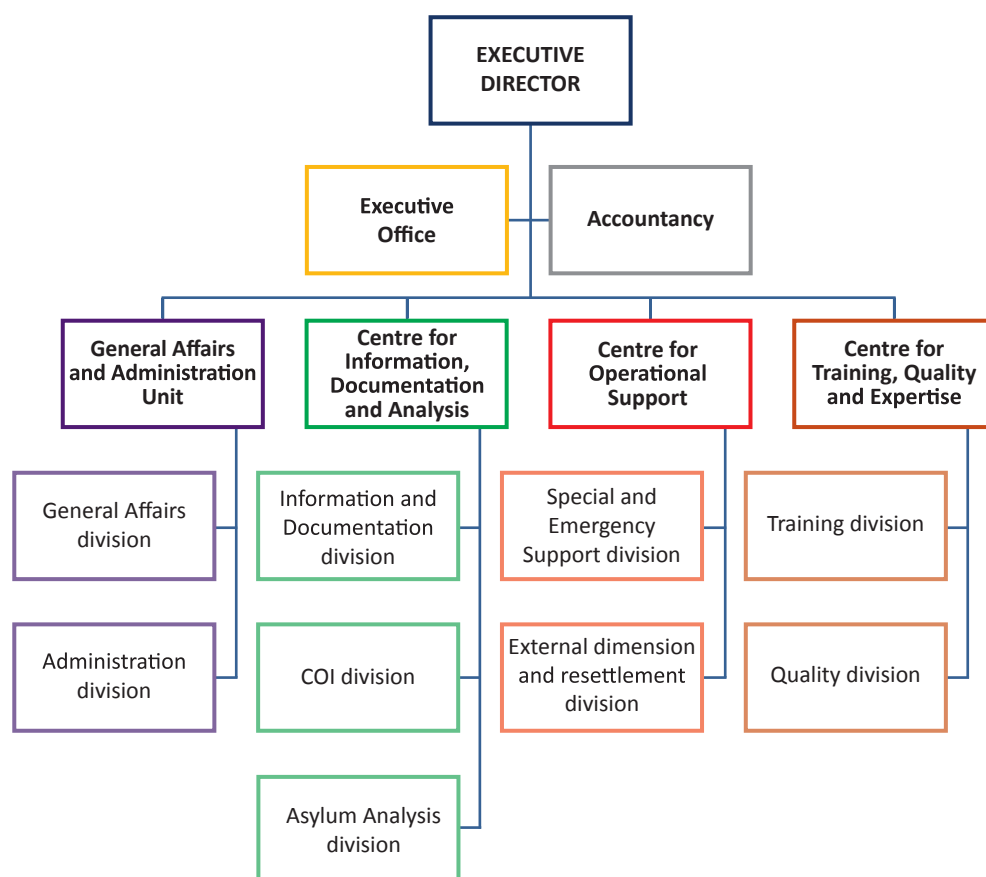
Concerning the budget and its implementation, EASO's budget in 2015 amounted to approximately 15.9 million EUR in commitment and payment appropriations, including the earmarked funding for the ENP project and the financial contribution from Norway. Two budget amendments were adopted in 2015.

EASO successfully implemented the procurement plan 2015, supporting the conduct of 7 open calls, 8 tenders below 60 000 EUR, 64 negotiated procedures below 15 000 EUR, 7 exceptional negotiated procedure and 1 call for expression of interest.

In the field of ICT, the ICT infrastructure was enhanced to support operational activities and administrative activities. Business impact analysis exercises were signed and they were completed at 79 %. A paperless management system was launched and is expected to go live in 1 March 2016. Further steps were taken regarding the ICT disaster recovery plan and a Memorandum of Understanding with eu-LISA for a disaster recovery secondary site is expected to be signed in January 2016.

In line with the recommendations by the IAS and the European Court of Auditors, EASO implemented and

⁽²⁰⁾ <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/videogallery/EASOFEATUREMASTERINTERNETVERSION.mp4>



developed further its internal controls according to the internal control standards adopted in November 2012. In addition to the audit on the annual accounts, in 2015 an audit report on training management in the framework of EASO's permanent and emergency/special support activities was delivered by IAS and an action plan to address the recommendations included in the report was developed.

7.6 EASO external evaluation

Article 46 of the EASO Regulation states that EASO shall commission an independent external evaluation of its achievements. Following the adoption of the terms of reference of the Management Board and the applicable procurement procedure, EY (ex-Ernst & Young) was mandated by EASO to conduct the independent external evaluation of EASO's activities covering the period from February 2011 to June 2014. The EASO Management Board nominated a steering group consisting of two Management Board members and two staff members of EASO. By decision of the steering group, the temporal scope was extended to cover the entire period since the agency began operations. All activities implemented by EASO have been covered, across all the Member States of the European Union. The evaluation was conducted between October 2014 and July 2015.

In particular, the thematic scope of the evaluation covered EU added value, effectiveness and impact of EASO in contributing to the implementation of the CEAS, including the new asylum legislative package. The efficiency and quality of working practices during its first years of operations have also been examined. The ultimate objective of the external evaluation was to provide concrete recommendations to address possible changes to EASO's legal framework, structural changes to EASO (without amending its legal framework) and a further increase in practical cooperation amongst Member States, in particular in the field of training, data collection, COI and operational support.

The evaluators conducted group interviews with EASO staff, the Members of the EASO Management Board, and EU stakeholders. Moreover, online surveys targeting national stakeholders, EASO expert and trainers pools, members of courts and tribunals have been completed. Case studies in the 6 selected Member States (Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Poland and Sweden) have been carried out in order to analyse EASO's mission in relation to related national needs and situations and to collect more information on EASO activities, added-value, and impact at national level.

A kick off meeting on the evaluation took place in Malta on 20 October 2014, followed by various technical meetings and a steering group meeting on 2 December.

The evaluators also observed the 1 December 2014, March 2015 and June 2015 Management Board meetings and the Consultative Forum plenary on 11 and 12 December. The final evaluation report was presented to the steering group in December 2015. The external evaluators presented the findings and recommendations to the EASO Management Board in January 2016. At that meeting, EASO agreed to develop an action plan based on the recommendations and to report on the state of play of implementation to the Management Board at its next meetings.

Recommendations:

R1. Foster political willingness for an update of EASO's mandate in order to cover relevant topics and to include all additional tasks deriving from the evolving legal and political framework.

R2. Strengthen the involvement of civil society during the programming phase of EASO's activities.

R3. Better communicate upon the results and impacts of its activities.

R4. Further clarify the coordination with other EU agencies and international organisations, in particular EMN and UNHCR.

R5. Improve the need assessment process of Member States requesting EASO's support.

R6. Streamline the experts sent out to Member States in order to facilitate their participation.

R7. Revise the overall procedure for the provision of ASTs.

R8. Increase the number, depth and usage of EASO internal communication flows and coordination processes.

R9. Speed up the implementation of the EASO performance appraisal procedures.

8. Annexes

8.1 Budget execution and financial report

8.1.1 Budget execution of commitment appropriations per fund source

Commitment appropriations					
Budget title	Fund source	Current budget	Current execution	Remaining balance	Ratio (%)
Title 1	C1	5 891 360.00	5 533 270.59	358 089.41	93.92 %
	C4	481.02	0.00	481.02	0.00 %
	C5	338.49	0.00	338.49	0.00 %
	C8	217 839.83	157 903.58	59 936.25	72.49 %
	R0	100 000.00	20 000.00	80 000.00	20.00 %
Total title 1		6 210 019.34	5 711 174.17	498 845.17	91.97 %
Title 2	C1	3 384 833.08	2 917 077.57	467 755.51	86.18 %
	C4	102 748.00	72 551.55	30 196.45	70.61 %
	C8	608 848.44	553 408.61	55 439.83	90.89 %
	R0	235 349.36	185 965.00	49 384.36	79.02 %
Total title 2		4 331 778.88	3 729 002.73	602 776.15	86.08 %
Title 3	C1	6 178 000.00	6 036 799.46	141 200.54	97.71 %
	C5	11 476.20	4 164.00	7 312.20	36.28 %
	C8	2 691 892.44	2 488 551.14	203 341.30	92.45 %
	R0	324 024.53	324 024.53	0.00	100.00 %
Total title 3		9 205 393.17	8 853 539.13	351 854.04	96.18 %
Title 4	R0	574 302.93	540 873.84	33 429.09	94.18 %
Total title 4		574 302.93	540 873.84	33 429.09	94.18 %
Total commitment appropriations		20 321 494.32	18 834 589.87	1 486 904.45	92.68 %

8.1.2 Budget execution of payment appropriations per fund source

Payment appropriations					
Budget title	Fund source	Current budget	Current execution	Remaining balance	Ratio (%)
Title 1	C1	5 891 360.00	5 344 958.07	546 401.93	90.73 %
	C4	481.02	0.00	481.02	0.00 %
	C5	338.49	0.00	338.49	0.00 %
	C8	217 839.83	157 903.58	59 936.25	72.49 %
	R0	100 000.00	20 000.00	80 000.00	20.00 %
Total title 1		6 210 019.34	5 522 861.65	687 157.69	88.93 %
Title 2	C1	3 384 833.08	1 840 494.26	1 544 338.82	54.37 %
	C4	102 748.00	72 551.55	30 196.45	70.61 %
	C8	608 848.44	553 408.61	55 439.83	90.89 %
	R0	235 349.36	125 587.89	109 761.47	53.36 %
Total title 2		4 331 778.88	2 592 042.31	1 739 736.57	59.84 %
Title 3	C1	6 178 000.00	4 763 583.78	1 414 416.22	77.11 %
	C5	981.87	745.62	236.25	75.94 %
	R0	324 024.53	0.00	324 024.53	0.00 %
Total title 3		6 503 006.40	4 764 329.40	1 738 677.00	73.26 %
Title 4	R0	574 302.93	430 861.20	143 441.73	75.02 %
Total title 4		574 302.93	430 861.20	143 441.73	75.02 %
Total payment appropriations		17 619 107.55	13 310 094.56	4 309 012.99	75.54 %

8.2 Breakdown of EASO staff

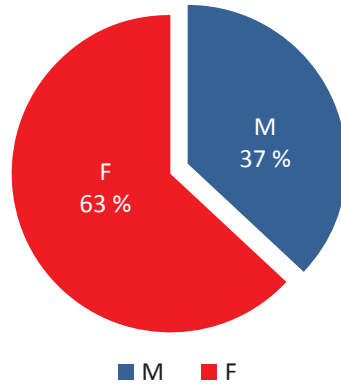
The overview of EASO staff as of 31 December 2015 is the following: 93 staff members (in service and appointed). Both statutory staff and seconded national experts are represented. The composition is 61 temporary agents, 21 contract agents, 11 seconded national experts.

Structure of EASO staff as per establishment plan 2015

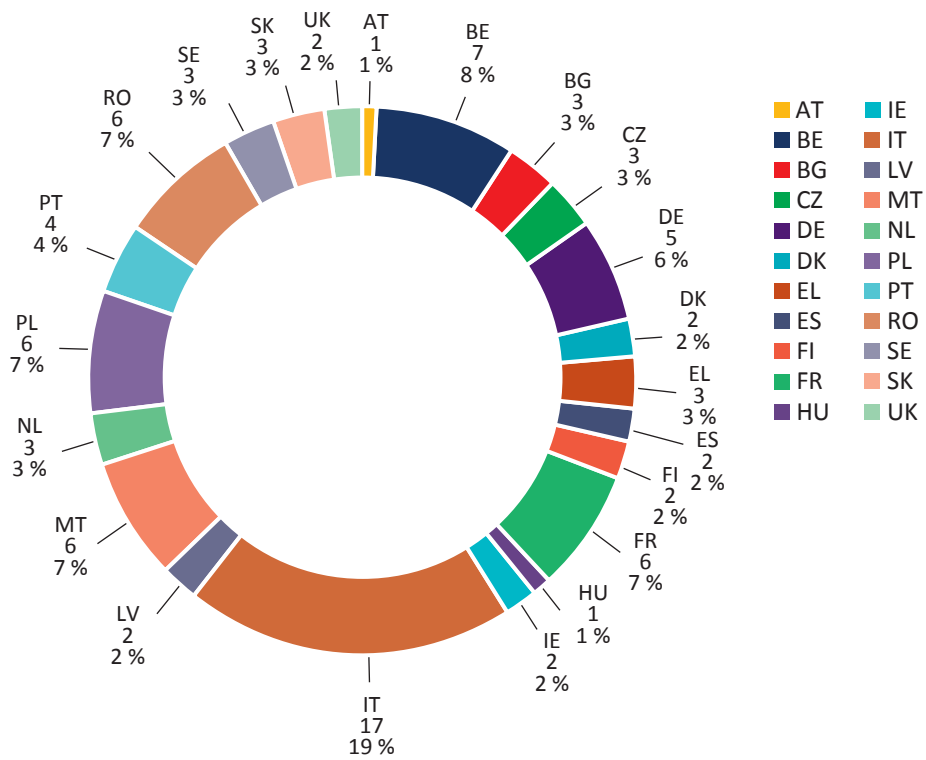
Category and grade	Authorised under the Union Budget 2015		Amending Budget 2/2015		Amendment 2/2015	
	officials	TA	officials	TA	officials	TA
AD 16						
AD 15						
AD 14		1				1
AD 13						
AD 12						
AD 11		1				1
AD 10		4		4		8
AD 9		4		5		9
AD 8		8		2		10
AD 7		13		15		28
AD 6		5				5
AD 5		9				9
Total AD		45		26		71
AST 11						
AST 10						
AST 9						
AST 8						
AST 7						
AST 6						
AST 5						
AST 4		2		4		6
AST 3		6				6
AST 2		1				1
AST 1		5				5
Total AST		14		4		18
Total		59		30		89

Statistics on EASO staff

Total staff by gender (data until 31.12.2015)



EASO National Balance



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