



Roadmap for Cooperation EASO - Albania (2020-2022):

Strengthening the asylum and
reception systems in line with the
Common European Asylum
System and EU standards



Roadmap for cooperation between EASO and Albania (2020 – 2022): strengthening the asylum and reception systems in line with the Common European Asylum System and EU standards



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRIË
MINISTRIA E PUNËVE
TË BRENDSHME



The development and implementation of the Roadmap for cooperation between EASO – Albania (2020-2022): strengthening the asylum and reception systems in line with the CEAS and EU standards is supported through “Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management in the WB and Turkey- Phase II”, a project funded by the European Union and EASO. Its contents are the sole responsibility of EASO and Ministry of Interior of Albania and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

I. Acronyms

APD – Asylum Procedures Directive; **BIA/BID** – Best Interest Assessment/Best Interest Determination; **CEAS** – Common European Asylum System; **DAC** – Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship; **EASO** – European Asylum Support Office; **EC** – European Commission; **EU** – European Union; **EU MS** – EU Member States; **EU+** – EU Member State and Associated Countries; **GoA** – Government of Albania; **IOM** – International Organisation for Migration; **IPA** – Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance; **IPSN** – Identification of Persons with Special needs; **M&E** – Monitoring and Evaluation; **MARRI** – Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative; **MHSP** – Ministry of Health and Social Protection **MoI** – Ministry of Interior; **MoJ** – Ministry of Justice; **NCRA** – National Commission for Refugees and Asylum; **NGO** – Non-Governmental Organisation; **OSCE** – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe; **QD** – Qualifications Directive; **SOPs** – Standard Operating Procedures; **TtT** – Train the trainers; **UAM** – Unaccompanied minor; **UNHCR** – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. **VoT** – Victims of Trafficking.

II. Introduction and Background

EASO has started cooperating with Albania to strengthen its asylum and reception system through the implementation of regional activities within the framework of the “Regional support to protection-sensitive migration management in the Western Balkans and Turkey”, a project co-implemented by EASO and financed by the European Union Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II (Phase I: 2016-mid 2019 and Phase II: mid 2019-2021). Under the Phase II of this project, EASO has strengthened the bilateral cooperation with Albania through the development of a Roadmap.

The overall objective of the “Roadmap for cooperation between EASO and Albania (2020 – 2022): strengthening the asylum and reception systems in line with the CEAS and European Union standards” (herein: EASO – Albania Roadmap) is to enhance the protection space for asylum seekers and refugees in Albania in line with the CEAS and EU Member States’ practices. The present document identifies priority areas where the EASO support to Albanian authorities has an added value and, and where possible, contributes to the accession process and has a direct impact on the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the European Commissions’ Progress Reports¹, in particular those aimed at meeting the criteria for the Chapter 24: Justice, Freedom and Security. Furthermore, this Roadmap may contribute to increased harmonization of asylum and reception systems at a regional level, therefore contributing to one of the objectives of the wider project “Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance – Phase II” funded through the Multi-country Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (MC IPA).

The EASO – Albania Roadmap has been developed using a participatory approach, where EASO and the Ministry of Interior of Albania have been working together in identifying and drafting areas of cooperation. The Ministry of Interior and EASO took particular care of including relevant authorities in the drafting process, as they will be involved in the implementation of activities in line with their responsibilities within the asylum and reception systems in Albania.

¹ European Commission SWD (2019) 215 final, Albania 2019 Report, 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy. <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>
European Commission SWD (2020) 354 final, Albania 2020 Report, 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania_report_2020.pdf

During the implementation phase, EASO and the Ministry of Interior agree to an open two-way communication to ensure technical level, day-to-day support in smooth implementation of the activities planned within the Roadmap. To allow for flexibility and adaptability to the external circumstances, as well as the needs and available resources of both sides, the proposed Roadmap includes a possibility to alternate between face to face and remote meetings and it takes into consideration a possibility for back-to-back meetings where participants may overlap to a large extent.

This document can be revised, if need arises, upon agreement of EASO and the Ministry of Interior. During the implementation of the Roadmap, and subject to its capacity, EASO remains available to address emerging needs identified by Albania through ad-hoc requests submitted by the authorities.

The implementation period of the Roadmap is 24 months from 1 December 2020 to 30 November 2022². The Roadmap development and implementation are financed partly through IPA funds and EASO will complement through its own funds and resources wherever the need arises and when the current IPA regional project implementation will end.

III. Methodology

a. Needs Assessment and Rationale for the Intervention

The needs assessment and roadmap planning and design undertaken during the period from June 2019 to November 2020 followed a demand-driven, needs-based and normative approach. It builds on a desk review of the existing National Strategy on Migration³, Accession progress reports of the European Commission, evaluation and assessment reports prepared by IOM, UNHCR, and NGOs as well as interviews with key stakeholders in Albania. Further consultations were carried out remotely between July 2020 and November 2020 with national authorities, international stakeholders and civil society organisations in Albania to refine the findings of the needs assessment and design appropriate interventions outlined in the EASO – Albania Roadmap below. Consultative and coordination efforts were undertaken to strengthen the links and synergies with other cooperation initiatives, in particular with UNHCR and IOM, as well as projects financed by the European Commission services, EU Member States and EASO Associated Countries. These areas that will require increased coordination efforts have been specified in the below Roadmap.

b. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Monitoring and Evaluation strategy will make use of a number of tools developed in order to collect input from the implementation of the Roadmap and to guarantee feedback loop mechanisms. EASO and the Ministry of Interior will systematically collect data and information on the implementation of the Roadmap and structure these in outputs and outcomes focusing on intended results and implementation processes. Both EASO and the Ministry of Interior will rely on active contribution of all authorities involved in the implementation of the Roadmap to provide data and feedback and share the state of play which will allow EASO and the Ministry of Interior to monitor and evaluate the progress in reaching the specified outcomes.

² During the development of the current Roadmap, some activities in line with priorities identified, have been already implemented (e.g: revision/comments on the new asylum law, participation to the Modules of Manager, participation to EASO Training Module on Trafficking in Human Beings, etc.)

³ MoI Albania, with the support of IOM, (2019) The National Strategy on Migration and Action Plan 2019-2022.

The evaluation will aim to assess criteria such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of EASO-Albania Roadmap. A mid-term review will be carried out following the first year of implementation of the Roadmap. The main goals of the mid-term review exercise will be to provide recommendations for adjusting activities during the Roadmap lifecycle. These will build on evaluation findings and will be structured in an actionable manner, allowing review, corrective actions and/or follow up. The mid-term review and its recommendations will be discussed at the Mid-term Review Meeting where the Roadmap might be adjusted in line with the recommendations (foreseen for November 2021).

A second evaluation exercise is foreseen towards the end of the Roadmap, which will generate a Final Evaluation Report outlining findings and conclusions and producing an overall assessment of the Roadmap cooperation framework, building on the mid-term review and enhancing the preliminary findings. The Final Evaluation Report will be accompanied by an updated needs assessment exercise to assess revised needs, in view of possible further cooperation.

A Final Meeting will take place towards the end of the implementation phase in order to present the findings of the final evaluation and needs assessment and to discuss the content of the possible extension of the present document, alternatively a new Roadmap document, based on lessons learnt and best practices identified in the course of implementation.

Regular updates and coordination meetings will also make possible the adjustment of the Roadmap implementation in order to reach the necessary results and impact.

IV. General Pre-conditions/Assumptions

- All relevant stakeholders from both EASO and Albania are committed to participate actively in the agreed activities and to implement the agreed commitments in line with the envisaged timeline;
- EASO and Albania are willing to change/adapt their practices in order to take advantage of the experience and knowledge gained through the implemented activities;
- EASO and Albania are willing to maintain an open two-way communication at technical level, compatible with the normal workload of relevant human resources;
- Financial and human resources, on both EASO and Albania side, are available for effective and timely implementation.

V. Summary

The overall objective of the EASO – Albania Roadmap is to enhance the protection space for asylum seekers and refugees in Albania in line with the CEAS and EU Member States’ practices.

Based on the needs assessment and roadmap planning and design undertaken during the period from June 2019 to November 2020, EASO and the Albanian authorities (Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Health and Social Protection) identified and designed the following areas towards which relevant activities will be implemented and contribute to: (1) strengthening of asylum related legislation, institutions and systems, (2) effective asylum procedures and (3) effective reception system.

The implementation period of the Roadmap is from 1 December 2020 to 30 November 2022.

A summary of the agreed objectives and outputs resulting from the identified areas of cooperation are provided below.

Impact
Enhanced protection space for asylum seekers and refugees in Albania

High-level Outcome I:
Contributing to the strengthening of asylum legislation, institutions and systems, in line with the CEAS and EU standards

High-level Outcome II:
Contributing to effective asylum procedures

High-level Outcome III:
Contributing to an effective reception system

Outcome 1:
Asylum-related Legislation aligned with the CEAS and EU Standards

Outcome 2:
Strengthened Access to asylum procedures including the identification of persons with special needs

Outcome 3:
Reinforced Examination of asylum applications in line with CEAS and EU standards

Outcome 4:
Enhanced reception services and conditions available to unaccompanied minors and vulnerable migrants

Outcome 5:
Enhanced preparedness for a scenario of high influx in the field of reception for asylum seekers

Output 1.1:
Revision/development of secondary legislation/by laws related to asylum legislation

Output 1.2:
Mechanisms for implementation of the asylum-related legislation, developed/strengthened

Output 2.1: Improved capacity and knowledge of first contact officials regarding access to procedures

Output 2.2: Revised pre-screening instruction (293/2015) and procedures, improving identification of cases with specific protection needs implemented

Outputs 2.3: Developed accelerated procedures

Output 2.4: Preconditions for developing Rights Compliant Age Assessment Process are accomplished

Output 3.1: Improved knowledge and developed skills of the case officers to assess the asylum claims effectively and efficiently in line with the CEAS and EU standards

Output 3.2: Enhanced quality of asylum process and asylum decisions taken

Output 3.3: Country of Origin Information (COI) is produced and used in the international protection decision-making process

Output 4.1: Strengthened capacity of Albanian authorities to manage and provide good quality reception services with a specific focus on vulnerabilities

Output 5.1 : A contingency plan in line with EASO guidance is rolled out

Areas of priority and Activities

- I. Contributing to the strengthening of asylum related legislation, institutions and systems in line with the CEAS and EU standards

1. Asylum related legislation aligned with the CEAS and EU Standards	
Outputs (expected results)	<p>Output 1.1: Secondary legislation/by laws related to asylum legislation developed/revised and aligned to CEAS and EU standards</p> <p>Output 1.2: Mechanisms for implementation of the asylum-related legislation, developed/strengthened</p>
Responsible Authorities/Target groups	Ministry of Interior (Moi) , Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP), Ministry of Justice (MoJ) / Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship; The National Commission for Asylum and Refugees; Border and Migration Police; non-government stakeholders who are partners with the Government of Albania (GoA) in the field of asylum and migration.
Description and assessment of the situation/ EASO added value	<p>A new Law on Asylum is expected to be adopted by the Parliament in 2020, aligning the national regulation in the domain of asylum and international protection with the relevant EU <i>acquis</i> (CEAS). The draft asylum law has been reviewed and commented by the European Commission (EC), UNHCR⁴, and EASO⁵, recalling on the principle of non refoulement, and providing recommendations for legal changes.</p> <p>Albanian authorities are also currently reviewing the Law on Foreigners, which will establish the legal framework for key areas on asylum, including residence permits, work permits, examination of admissibility of third country nationals at borders, expulsion and deportation, etc.</p> <p>The drafting of secondary legislation and internal guidelines to regulate procedures and guide competent authorities will be necessary in order to ensure full implementation of the asylum legislation and related laws in line with the CEAS. To this end, an inter-sectoral, inter-institutional Working Groups will be set up to prepare the secondary legislation (by-laws) as envisaged in the new Law on Asylum.</p>
Pre-condition(s)/ Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All relevant authorities and stakeholders are open and committed to developing effective communication channels and cooperation mechanisms. ▪ Establishment/Functioning of a working group to monitor implementation of the new asylum law and related by laws.
Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asylum-related legislation (Asylum Law and Law on Foreigners) and accompanying by-laws aligned to CEAS and EU standards

⁴ UNHCR (2019), UNHCR Comments on the Draft Law on Asylum in the Republic of Albania, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5da068f54.pdf>

⁵ EASO (2020), Comments on the Draft Law on Asylum in the Republic of Albania

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Operating procedures and workflows to ensure effective processing of claims
Description of the activities	<p>Output 1.1: Secondary legislation/by laws related to asylum legislation developed and aligned to CEAS and EU standards</p> <p><i>Activity 1.1.1 Workshops on specific asylum procedures, to prepare the ground for the bylaws</i></p> <p><i>Activity 1.1.2 Revision/development/drafting guidance of secondary legislation/by laws related to asylum legislation</i></p> <p>Output 1.2: Mechanisms for implementation of the asylum-related legislation, developed/strengthened</p> <p><i>Activity 1.2.1. Work on developing baselines, SOPs/workflows related to asylum legislation implementation through provision of Senior Expert/s support;</i></p> <p><i>Activity 1.2.2. Organisation of field or online study visits in France, Sweden or another Member States to exchange practices.</i></p>
Synergies	<p>UNHCR has been supporting the drafting of the new Asylum law, through provision of legal expertise, and is planning to support the drafting of the related bylaws. Considering the number of bylaws to be reviewed and the short timing, (6 months), close coordination is envisaged with UNHCR.</p> <p>Synergies with NGO active in the field of asylum (e.g: RMSA, Caritas, Tirana Legal Aid Society) are also encouraged to build an effective asylum system in Albania.</p>

II. Contributing to effective asylum procedures

2. Strengthened access to the asylum procedure, including the identification of persons with special needs	
Outputs (expected results)	<p>Output 2.1: Improved capacity and knowledge of first contact officials to fulfil their obligations to ensure access to asylum procedure and procedural safeguards for children and vulnerable groups</p> <p>Output 2.2: Revised pre-screening instruction (293/2015) and procedures, improving identification of cases with specific protection needs implemented</p> <p>Outputs 2.3: Developed accelerated procedures both for persons in need of international protection and the unfounded claims, in respect of international protection and CEAS standards</p> <p>Output 2.4: Preconditions for developing Rights - Compliant Age Assessment Process are accomplished</p>
Responsible Authorities/Target groups	Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Child Protection Agency / Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship; Border and Migration Police; non-government stakeholders who are partners with the GoA in the field of asylum and migration.
Description and assessment of the situation/ EASO added value	<p>Under the existing legislation and practices, asylum requests are recorded by the Border and Migration Police during pre-screening and are then referred to the Directorate for Asylum. There is consensus among stakeholders that the pre-screening instructions should be amended to include additional safeguards and involve the participation of other relevant ministries, notably for the identification and referral of persons with specific needs.⁶</p> <p>In early 2019, the Pre-Screening Instruction was revised by relevant authorities precisely in order to enhance identification and referral of persons with specific needs/in situations of vulnerability. OSCE and UNHCR jointly supported the process, and the draft was consulted and agreed upon with all stakeholders. It remains to be officially adopted and implemented.</p> <p>EASO, UNHCR, IOM and the Albanian authorities have also identified the need to improve the protection for vulnerable groups, asylum-seeking women, unaccompanied minors, and Victims of Trafficking and/or gender-based violence as one of the priorities.</p> <p>First Contact Officers / Directorate of Migration at the Department for Border and Migration that monitors and consults the processing of screening at national level should be further trained on access to procedure.</p> <p>The new Asylum Law (under Art 34) foresees the application of accelerated border procedures, to be implemented by the relevant structure at the Ministry in charge of asylum and refugee issue, for manifestly unfounded claims and manifestly well-founded claims. This will require the definition of circumstances when an application is likely to be unfounded or likely to be well-funded, and where there are specific grounds, to accelerate the examination procedure, in particular by introducing shorter, but reasonable, time limits for certain procedural steps, without prejudice to an adequate and complete examination being carried out and to the applicant's effective access to basic principles and guarantees provided for in the CEAS.</p>

⁶ European Commission SWD (2019) 215 final, op.cit.

	<p>In addition, it will require instructions on when applications can be prioritised, which according to CEAS is when an application is ‘likely to be well-founded’ or is lodged by a vulnerable person or in need of special procedural guarantees, particularly in the case of unaccompanied children.</p> <p>There is currently no procedure on age assessment in Albania. EASO could support the evaluation of the current practice and share best practices of EU MS.</p>
Pre-condition(s)/ Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All relevant authorities and stakeholders are open and committed to developing effective communication channels and cooperation mechanisms. ▪ National authorities committed to development of the right compliance age assessment process.
Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ XX Printed Albanian version of the Access to Procedure tool kit based on the EASO – Frontex tool ▪ XX case officers trained on Registration, Information provision and Vulnerability assessment ▪ EASO IPSN tool (Albanian version) disseminated ▪ Revised instructions regulating pre-screening and workflows between relevant Ministries ▪ Evaluation on age assessment practices and proposal/guidance for new Rights compliant process and methods developed ▪ XX staff trained on best interest of the child and age assessment
Description of the activities	<p>Output 2.1: Improved capacity and knowledge of first contact officials to fulfil their obligations to ensure access to asylum procedure and procedural safeguards for children and vulnerable groups</p> <p><i>Activity 2.1.1: Dissemination of the Access to Procedure toolkit</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.1.2: Operational trainings on Registration, Information provision and Vulnerability assessment.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.1.3: Dissemination of the Tool for Identification of Persons with Special Needs (IPSN) (Albanian version)</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.1.4: Workshop/on the job coaching on the usage of the EASO IPSN Tool</i></p> <p>Output 2.2: Revised pre-screening instruction (293/2015) and procedures, improving identification of cases with specific protection needs implemented</p> <p><i>Activity 2.2.1. Support to roll-out of the revised instructions regulating pre-screening in line with CEAS</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.2.2 Operational training on best case examples and practices on identification of persons with special needs for first contact officials, social workers, case workers and NGO representatives.</i></p> <p>Outputs 2.3: Developed accelerated procedures which respect international protection and CEAS standards</p> <p><i>Activity 2.3.1. Provision of expert advice and presentation on EU practices related to accelerated procedures.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.3.2 Support to roll-out new accelerated procedures in line with CEAS</i></p>

	<p>Output 2.4: Preconditions for developing Rights Compliant Age Assessment Process are accomplished</p> <p><i>Activity 2.4.1: Assess current practice and legal framework related to child right compliant age assessment</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.4.2: Prepare a proposal/guidance on age assessment procedures for discussions among key stakeholders.</i></p>
Synergies	<p><u>EASO regional activity under the IPA II project:</u></p> <p>Participation in the regional workshop on Access to Procedure organised</p> <p>Practical Guide on Age Assessment translated in Albanian and disseminated (c.f 2.1.6 Project Activity Plan)</p> <p>Synergies to be built with UNHCR work on the roll out of the revised pre-screening instructions, as well as on the piloting of new accelerated procedures. Possible synergies with FRONTEX on joint training on access to Procedure and accelerated procedures at the border.</p> <p>Possible synergies with the Security Academy, on the organisation of specialised training on asylum procedure, in relation with the Twinning project.</p>

3. Reinforced Examination of asylum applications in line with CEAS and EU standards	
Outputs (Expected Results)	<p>Output 3.1 Improved knowledge and developed skills of the case officers to assess the asylum claims effectively and efficiently</p> <p>Output 3.2. Enhanced quality of asylum process and asylum decisions taken</p> <p>Output 3.3 Country of Origin information (COI) is produced and used in the international protection decision-making process</p>
Responsible Authorities/ Target group	Ministry of Interior/DAC
Description and assessment of the situation/ EASO added value	<p>In 2019, 6,677 individuals applied for asylum in Albania, 52% more than in 2018 (4,386). In the first five months of 2020, there were 2,057 applications, 129 less than in the same period of 2019. Albania remains a transit country for asylum seekers. As most asylum seekers leave the country after a few days, the vast majority of asylum applications were withdrawn. In 2019, 60 applications were formally lodged. One applicant was granted refugee status and 23 were granted subsidiary protection. During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, asylum procedures and interviews have been limited.⁷ The long time elapsed and delays in lodging of applications, and the lack of temporary residence permits issued for asylum seekers wishing to pursue the asylum applications in Albania, resulted in a significant number abandoning the procedure and leaving the country.</p>

⁷ European Commission SWD (2020) 354 final, Albania 2020 Report, 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania_report_2020.pdf

	<p>Directorate needs greater capacity and more staff. More training is needed on how to assess individual claims, particularly the information on country of origin and cases involving vulnerable people⁸.</p> <p>Every member/caseworker of the Directorate has to conduct his/her own research about the information from the country of origin while examining the asylum application. Staff members attended no specialized trainings particularly aimed at enhancing their capacities to collect, process, verify and adequately use country of origin information.⁹</p> <p>However, the Directorate planned to recruit 2 country of origin information experts.</p> <p>COI trainings and knowledge of COI publication is necessary in order to equip new COI staff within the Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship.</p> <p>EASO proposes to develop capacity on COI in a complementary manner at national level through the Roadmap action plan and at regional level through the organization of regional workshops and the establishment of a Western Balkan practitioner network.</p> <p>In addition the authorities and EASO have identified several training needs for new recruits (EASO modules), as well as for asylum officials from MoI, MHSP, and relevant insitutions in order to be better equipped in their tasks.</p> <p>To increased quality of decision making in asylum procedures, EASO will support the operationalisation of EASO practical guides in Albania through expert support and on-the-job trainings. (The EASO Practical Guides provide national authorities, asylum and case officers with practical tools to increase the consistency and quality of decision making through different stages of the asylum process.)</p>
Pre-condition(s)/ Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ministry of Interior (DAC) identify training needs of asylum officials based on their daily tasks and duties ▪ Incentive to retain qualified staff ▪ Recruitment within the DAC of 2 COI Staffs ▪ At least 1 new staff has working level of English to access COI sources (mostly available in English)
Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ XX Trained DAC staff on relevant EASO modules, as per identified annual needs. ▪ XX Trained staff on relevant EASO modules, as per identified annual needs. ▪ EASO Practical Guide on Personal interview translated into Albanian printed, shipped and disseminated in Albania. ▪ EASO Practical Guide on Evidence assessment translated into Albanian printed, shipped and disseminated in Albania. ▪ COI staff trained on COI Methodology, COI Writing and Referencing. ▪ EASO Practical Guide on the use of COI for case officers translated in Albanian.
Description of the activities	<p>Output 3.1 Improved knowledge and developed skills of the case officers to assess the asylum claims effectively and efficiently</p> <p><i>Activity 3.1.1 Provision of specialised trainings/workshop to Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship (DAC) and other asylum and reception officials.</i></p> <p>Output 3.2. Enhanced quality of asylum process and asylum decisions taken</p>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Report assessment of COI capacities of Asylum authorities in Albania.

	<p><i>Activity 3.2.1: Dissemination of EASO Practical Guide: Personal interview (translated) and EASO Practical Guide: Evidence assessment (translated).</i></p> <p><i>Activity 3.2.2: Expert support and on-the-job coaching to support the operationalisation of the EASO Practical Guides: Personal interview, Evidence assessment.</i></p> <p>Output 3.3 Country of Origin information (COI) is produced and used in the international protection decision-making process</p> <p><i>Activity 3.3.1: Translation in Albanian of the Practical guide on COI for case officers</i></p> <p><i>Activity 3.3.2: Relevant Staff trained in EASO COI Module. Additional Webex sessions on COI methodology and/or Drafting and Referencing, organised if needed.</i></p>
Synergies	<p>EASO will maintain close coordination with UNHCR, as well as other international organisations, to ensure a smooth flow of information and close cooperation in provision of trainings and asylum capacity building activities to support the quality of decision-making in the Republic of Albania.</p> <p>At regional level, initiated under the IPA II programme, UNHCR is developing a Quality Assurance project to be rolled out in the WB6 countries. Synergies between efforts at country and regional level will be sought.</p> <p><u>Specifically, on COI:</u></p> <p>EASO Regional workshop on Country of Origin Information, on 3-4 December 2019 in Sarajevo; EASO Regional workshop on Country of Origin Information for WB Judges (c.f 2.2.1.2, Project Activity Plan).</p> <p>EASO kick off and 2nd meeting of the first WB practitioner’s network on COI (c.f 2.2.3.1 and 2.2.3.2, Project Activity Plan of IPA II regional project).</p> <p>UNHCR activities (c.f 2.1.11.2 and 2.1.12.1, Project Activity Plan).</p> <p>Refugees and Migrants Services in Albania (RMSA) are legally representing refugees in the asylum process and therefore often search for valid and strong arguments to support their cases, they have formed their own COI database. Potential synergies to be developed/strengthened.</p>

III. Contributing to an effective reception system

4. Enhanced reception services and conditions available to unaccompanied minors and vulnerable migrants	
Output (Expected Result)	Output 4.1. Strengthened capacity of Albanian authorities to manage and provide good quality reception services with a specific focus on vulnerabilities
Responsible Authorities/ Target group	Mol, MHSP/DCA
Description and assessment of the situation/ EASO added value	<p>The migrant reception capacity of Albania increased in 2019 and 2020. However, the National Centre for Asylum Seekers in Tirana was filled to capacity on a number of occasions at the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020. The asylum centre in Babbru can host 240 people. It needs proper maintenance and adequate living conditions up to European Standards. Due to lack of repairs and damage sustained by overuse, the Centre is currently not operational, except for a small number of long-term asylum seekers. A worsening security situation within the centre has remained unaddressed. Its closed reception centre for irregular migrants in Karreç, with a total capacity of 100 beds, also requires refurbishment. Albania should establish alternatives to detention for children, women at risk and people with serious medical conditions, as provided for in the Law on foreigners. A new reception facility for 60 people established by IOM close to the border crossing point at Kapshtica was opened in October 2019.</p> <p>A new facility to host 30 vulnerable persons in Erseka was also opened in June 2020 with the support of UNHCR. Another CARITAS facility for 30 vulnerable persons will open in Gjirokastra (functioning as from January 2021), with UNHCR support.</p> <p>Overall, Albania has approximately a total capacity of 500 beds.</p> <p>Albania does not have separate facilities for unaccompanied minors.¹⁰ Accommodation for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) – including identification of a reception centre – has remained a key priority for several years, as separate reception facilities specifically for UASC do not exist. The current facilities do not allow for differentiated or separate accommodation/services for UASC arriving in the country. UASC have been accommodated in mainstream reception facilities (both temporary and permanent), where some attempts have been made to allocate designated areas for UASC (i.e. the NRCAS and the two short-term border centres). Considering the special reception needs of UASC, they have also been accommodated in small-scale reception structures, such as municipal social centres.</p> <p>In light of the increased number of unaccompanied and separated children, a mechanism needs to be build up for their effective and timely identification and referral to competent bodies to receive assistance and services, including reception conditions adequate for Unaccompanied Children, in line with international standards.</p>

¹⁰ European Commission SWD (2020) 354 final, op.cit.

	UNHCR and UNICEF are currently working on a detailed proposal on this under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.
Pre-condition(s)/ Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All relevant authorities and stakeholders are open and committed to developing effective communication channels and cooperation mechanisms.
Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ XX staff and relevant stakeholders trained ▪ Publication and dissemination of EASO guidance on reception conditions (Albanian version) ▪ Translation in Albanian of the EASO Guidance on reception conditions for unaccompanied children: operational standards and indicators ▪ Assessment of reception conditions with a specific focus on vulnerable groups ▪ Feasibility study on opening facilities dedicated to unaccompanied children
Description of the activities	<p>Output 4.1. Strengthened capacity of Albanian authorities to manage and provide good quality reception services with a specific focus on vulnerabilities</p> <p><i>Activity 4.1.1. Participation in EASO Training of Trainers on Reception and Reception of Vulnerable Persons or specific dedicated workshops/operational trainings e.g.: on the EASO Guidance on reception conditions for unaccompanied children.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 4.1.2: Publication and dissemination of the EASO Guidance on reception conditions. (Albanian version)</i></p> <p><i>Activity 4.1.3: Translation in Albanian and publication of the EASO Guidance on reception conditions for unaccompanied children: operational standards and indicators.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 4.1.4: Assessment of reception conditions in Albania and feasibility study to support opening a reception facility for unaccompanied children/vulnerable group.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 4.1.5: Expert support/operational advice on establishing and managing a reception centre for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable persons (through deployment of expert/on the job coaching and/or (virtual) visit of UAM structure in France, Belgium, Germany or another EU Member States).</i></p>
Synergies	EASO will maintain close coordination with UNHCR, as well as other international organisations and NGO, to ensure a smooth flow of information and close cooperation in design and implementation of support provided to the national authorities regarding reception conditions and management.

5. Enhanced preparedness for a scenario of high influx in the field of reception for asylum seekers	
Output (Expected Result)	Output 5.1 A contingency plan in line with EASO guidance is rolled out
Responsible Authorities/ target group	Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance
Description and assessment of the situation/ EASO added value	<p>Albania has been updating its contingency plan for a possible mass influx of migrants and asylum seekers. This updated contingency plan is currently under approval by the Council of Ministers. The Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship have identified locations of reception centres to be. These are former army barracks which are no longer in use. There is still lack of report on the financial cost for each institution involved into the contingency plan and source of funding.¹¹</p> <p>This contingency plan will require a budget and clear modality for its triggering. EASO could enhance the skills and preparedness of the DAC and relevant stakeholders through a workshop on the EASO guidance on contingency planning in the context of reception.</p>
Pre-conditions(s)/ Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishment of a coordination group/unit in charge of implementing the contingency plan ▪ The cooperation of all relevant actors along the process is ensured (State institutions, local authorities providing reception conditions, NGO, international organisations, notably UNHCR and IOM); ▪ Financial resources for each institution to implement the contingency plan is guaranteed
Deliverable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contingency plan
Description of the activities and indicative timeline	<p>Output 5.1: A contingency plan in line with EASO guidance is rolled out</p> <p><i>Activity 5.1.1: Expert comments on the preparation of the roll-out of the updated contingency plan.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 5.1.2: Organisation of workshop based on EASO Guidance on contingency planning.</i></p>

¹¹ Update provided by Mr. Sokol Sheti – Director of Asylum and Citizenship, on 14/09/20 during the national steering committee meeting

Annexe I: Main Stakeholders in charge of border control, access to territory and asylum rights in Albania¹²

National Institution	Responsibilities
Ministry of Interior	The Ministry of Interior through the Border and Migration Department of the Albanian State Police and Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship have the main responsibility for handling the migration and asylum system in Albania.
The Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship	The Directorate for Asylum and Citizenship works on the basis of the Law for Asylum in the Republic of Albania 121/2014 and is responsible for asylum seekers and refugees. This Directorate is in charge of reviewing, logging, and collecting the necessary information for asylum applications. It is responsible for handling applications, processing, examining and hearing and collecting other data necessary to complete the documentation for any asylum application. Since 2017, it has been in the process of being restructured.
Border and Migration Police	Border and Migration Department is under the supervision of the State Police and is in charge of processing foreigners who enter, transit, or stay on the territory of Albania. It operates at both the national and regional level and is responsible for: preventing and countering illegal migration through integrated border management; controlling the legal residence of foreigners in Albania; ensuring voluntarily returns; releasing eviction orders; preventing illegal foreigners and deporting them to their country of origin and/or last transit country; implementing Readmission Agreements with other countries; conducting pre-screening procedures for foreign nationals at the borders and informing them about integration in Albania; ensuring regional cooperation with other countries by exchanging information and data about illegal migration; identifying potential victims of trafficking and unaccompanied minors;
The National Commission for Asylum and Refugees	The National Commission for Asylum and Refugees is the decision-making authority for all complaints presented by asylum seekers against the decisions of relevant institutions.
Ministry of Health and Social Protection	The MHSP is charged with the responsibility to oversee the running of Albania's healthcare system and social care services in the Republic of Albania. In particular, the MHSP is the main institution responsible for ensuring social care services for re-integration into society of individuals, families and children, as well as the child who enjoys international protection in the Republic of Albania, according to the legislation in force on asylum.
The State Social Service	The State Social Service, subordinate to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, is responsible for implementing the policies set out by the ministry responsible for economic assistance, disability and social care services.
State Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights	This institution is responsible for protecting the rights of children in Albania, including asylum seeking and migrant children.

¹² IDM (June 2019) Vulnerable Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants in Albania Trends, Challenges, and Policy Solutions

CSO	Responsibilities/Project
Refugee and Migrant Services in Albania	This NGO provides social and legal service to refugees and asylum-seekers in Albania
CARITAS Albania	Caritas Albania has been working in collaboration with the Albanian border and migration police on the border crossing points of Greece, Montenegro and Kosovo, to ensure humane treatment of people on the move, while providing basic assistance in the form of food packages, medical help and asylum applications. It ensures that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are informed about their rights.
Tirana Legal Aid Society (TLAS)	TLAS provide legal aid services for specified target groups of people in need and publish information on important legal and human rights problems that have been brought to the attention of TLAS and where appropriate, lobby the Albanian government and other institutions to tackle these problems. https://www.tlas.org.al/en
International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)	ICMPD implement an EU funded project “EU Support for the effective management of green and blue borders in Albania (EU4SAFEALB)” with EUR 6.000.000 and with duration of 24 months, supports the provision of the modern technical means to the Border and Migration Police to enhance the Albanian national capacity to counter organized cross-border crime and drug trafficking.