



EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE EASO-CYPRUS OPERATING PLAN 2021

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ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Acronym	Definition
AIDA	Asylum Information Database
AIP	Asylum Intervention Pool
AIU	Alien and Immigration Unit
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
ARC	Assessment of reception conditions
CAS	Cyprus Asylum Service
CDM	Complementary deployment mechanism
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CODECA	Centre for Social Cohesion, Development and Care
COI	Country of origin information
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CSO	Civil society organisation
CyRC	Cyprus Refugee Council
CRMD	Civil Registry and Migration Department
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EU	European Union
FTE	Full-time equivalent
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPAC	International Protection Administrative Court
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODC	Operational data collection

Acronym	Definition
OKYPY	<i>Organismos Kratikon Ypiresion Ygeias</i> (State Health Services Organisation)
OP	Operating plan
RSD	Refugee status determination
RVP	Reception of vulnerable persons
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
SOP	Standard operating procedure
SSP	Special support plan
SWS	Social Welfare Services
UAMs	Unaccompanied minors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO)¹ has been supporting the Cypriot asylum and reception system since 2014. Despite continuous support and improvements in the capacity of Cypriot authorities since then, the high number of asylum applications, a continuously high backlog of pending cases at first instance and a growing backlog at second instance required a significant upscaling and expansion of EASO's operational support in 2021. The **EASO-Cyprus operating plan (OP) 2021 sought to achieve the following objectives:**

- The access to the asylum procedure and the asylum registration system is compliant with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and is implemented as per agreed standard operating procedures (SOPs), particularly in Pournara First Reception Centre;
- Reception conditions are in line with the CEAS and form an integral part of a national reception strategy;
- Efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of the first instance asylum processing is improved to reduce the backlog;
- The International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC) is strengthened in its functioning capacity and backlog is reduced.

EASO's operation in 2021 was very relevant in addressing both structural and operational needs of the targeted Cypriot authorities. Most measures were effective in contributing to the broader objectives of the OP 2021. Some input and output targets remained unmet, primarily due to COVID-19²-related obstacles, but also shortcomings and constraints in the recruitment and deployment of interim and Member State experts. Despite challenges, EASO significantly contributed to the **timely processing of registrations** and the **stabilisation of the backlog** in cases pending **at first instance**, as well as to a systematic vulnerability assessment, information provision and referral procedure at the different stages (registration, reception and refugee status determination (RSD)) of the asylum procedure. EASO **established quality assurance procedures** at first instance RSD and continued to establish remote workflows, including digitalised data systems or remote interviewing and interpretation procedures.

Despite the progress made, the broader impact and sustainability of EASO's support on the structural and operational performance of the beneficiaries of EASO's support activities is still suboptimal, primarily due to limitations in the capacity of partners to absorb the support, expertise and knowledge provided by EASO experts. For instance, while EASO personnel supported the Alien and Immigration Unit (AIU) by handling more than 70% of all asylum applications lodged in 2021, its support to the IPAC was not sufficient to cope with the rapidly growing backlog of pending cases at second instance.

Across the four measures of intervention, **EASO operations underspent the budget available for 2021**. The budget was increased substantially compared to 2020, in an attempt to realise the ambitious goal to stabilise or even reduce pressure on asylum and reception systems that were under the most severe stress in Europe (in terms of applications per capita). While the budgetary increase was justified, it could not be fully absorbed due to internal and external constraints. Human resource constraints should be urgently addressed to respond to a growing number of applications and realise the goal of a substantial reduction in the backlogs at first and second instance determination.

¹ On 19 January 2022, EASO became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), when Regulation (EU) 2021/2303 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2021 on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 (hereinafter: **EUAA Regulation**) entered into force. However, as this is a retrospective evaluation of 2021, the Agency is referred to as EASO, as was its official name during 2021.

² Coronavirus disease 2019.

EASO facilitated and contributed effectively to the coordination and interaction between stakeholders along the various phases of the asylum procedure. Coordination and communication efforts were particularly relevant and effective in facilitating the development of the national reception strategy and in the collaboration on reception conditions at the Kofinou reception and accommodation centre, while in other areas (e.g., EASO's support at second instance), communication and coordination efforts may be further enhanced.

Overall, in light of these findings, the evaluation recommends the following:

Recommendation 1: Enhance the capacity of national authorities in registration with a view to progressively handing over responsibilities

The evaluation has shown the crucial role EASO has taken in registration, including vulnerability identification and information provision. EASO should aim to increase its operational and strategic support to the responsible national authorities in the short term, to enhance their capacities and ownership of the operational areas which currently are predominately dealt with by EASO.

Recommendation 2: Enhance support to improve overall reception conditions

After approval of the national reception strategy, its rapid implementation requires significant managerial and operational (including logistical) support. Support should focus on enhancing collaboration between the Cyprus Asylum Service (CAS) and external stakeholders and support for the implementation of the national reception strategy.

Recommendation 3: Enhance support to CAS for realising a substantive backlog reduction at first instance

In the context of high levels of arrivals and asylum applications, a substantive reduction in the backlog of pending cases at first instance requires increasing efforts. EASO should provide support through additional human resources, improved workflows and capacities for accelerating RSD procedures.

Recommendation 4: Enhance support to IPAC for substantive backlog reduction at second instance

With the funding allocated to the IPAC to be received from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the next five years, the IPAC will be able to enhance its capacity significantly. EASO should focus on complementary support to safeguard the joint impact of the combined financial and technical assistance from European institutions. This should include the development and implementation of agreed SOPs, workflows and procedural rules between EASO research officers and judges and testing remote peer-to-peer exchange between Member State experts and IPAC staff.

Recommendation 5: Provide cross-cutting support to the Cypriot asylum and reception system

Based on close coordination with and under the ownership of national authorities and stakeholders, EASO should consider supporting the development and implementation of an integrated national data collection and management system to ensure that asylum and reception-related data collection is centralised and accessible to relevant stakeholders for monitoring, evaluation and planning purposes.

1. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND CONTEXT

1.1 Objectives and scope

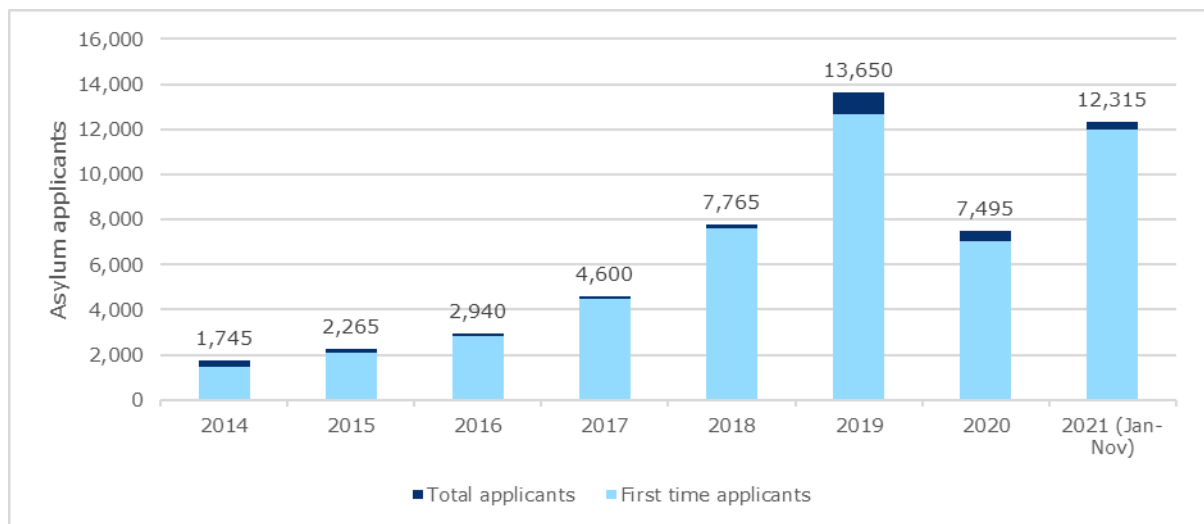
This evaluation provides an *ex post* evaluation of the Operating Plan (OP) agreed between the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the Republic of Cyprus (hereinafter: Cyprus) for 2021 (hereinafter: EASO-Cyprus OP 2021, or OP 2021). It concerns a retrospective, reflective and objective assessment of the degree to which the OP 2021 outcomes were met, identifying reasons for any shortcomings, and suggesting lessons learned that might be useful to EASO in the design and implementation of the OP 2022-2024 and potential future interventions in Cyprus and beyond.

The scope of the exercise concerns EASO's operational support to Cyprus during 2021. For contextual reasons, the report also considers previous OPs and historical migration and asylum statistics and trends, as well as the already ongoing OP 2022-2024.

1.2 Background

A continued pressure on the asylum system of Cyprus is a core trend and growing concern, evidenced by the steady increase in annual asylum applications since 2013, amounting to 12,313 applications lodged between January and November 2021 (see Figure 1). This is similar to the number of applications in 2019 and considerably higher than in 2020.³ As for most European Union (EU) Member States, the drop in applications in 2020 resulted from the COVID-19 outbreak which forced Cyprus to take several measures which temporarily disrupted the operation of the entire Cypriot asylum procedure, substantially affecting the number of new arrivals.

Figure 1. Asylum applications in Cyprus, Jan 2014–November 2021



Source: Eurostat asylum statistics [MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA]⁴

The growing number of asylum applications during the past decade put a strain on the capacity of the Cypriot asylum system, leading to a continuous increase in the number of asylum applications pending at the refugee status determination stage. While the number of pending cases remained

³ In 2021, Cyprus remained the EU Member State with the highest share of applicants per capita with about eight per 1000 inhabitants.

⁴ Note that at the time of writing, data for December 2021 was not yet available for Cyprus.

at manageable levels before 2014/15, the number of cases accumulated to 23,710 cases pending at both first and second instance by September 2021.⁵

To face this situation, the EASO-Cyprus OP 2021 was signed on 17th December 2020, following a request for support from the Cypriot government. The OP was designed following an in-depth needs assessment, to ensure it provided effective and flexible support to the identified needs of Cyprus.

The EASO-Cyprus OP 2021 constitutes a continuation of EASO’s previous support to the country. Since July 2014, EASO has provided operational support to Cyprus through a special support plan (SSP). In 2018, the first OP was signed, covering the year 2019, which was followed by the second OP, covering the year 2020. In spite of significant improvements over time, the asylum system is still under pressure due to high influxes of arrivals and applications for international protection. The OP 2021 consisted of **four measures** with the following result-level objectives:

- **Measure CY1:** The access to the asylum procedure and the asylum registration system is compliant with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and is implemented as per agreed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), particularly in Pournara First Reception Centre;
- **Measure CY2:** Reception conditions are in line with the CEAS and form an integral part of a national reception strategy;
- **Measure CY3:** Efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the first instance asylum processing is improved to reduce the backlog;
- **Measure CY4:** The International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC) is strengthened in its functioning capacity and backlog is reduced.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Evaluation questions

The questions this evaluation sought to answer are based on the requirements for evaluations of the European Commission’s Better Regulation Guidelines but tailored to the OP and specific elements of interest to EASO. For this evaluation, that concerned a question related to the extent to which EASO was able to facilitate and contribute to coordination/interaction between stakeholders at various phases of the asylum procedure (see Table 1). A more detailed overview of the questions is presented in the evaluation matrix in Annex 2.

Table 1. Evaluation questions

Evaluation criterion	Questions
Relevance	To what extent was the intervention in Cyprus relevant to its stakeholders, in light of their original needs and any changes therein?
Effectiveness	What have been the (quantitative and qualitative) effects of the intervention in Cyprus and to what extent can these be credited to the intervention rather than external factors? Priority question: To what extent has EASO facilitated and contributed to the coordination/interaction between stakeholders along the various phases of the asylum procedure? What factors helped or hindered this? What implications has

⁵ Eurostat asylum statistics [MIGR_ASYPENTZM] (2021). Data from October-December 2021 was not yet available at the time of writing.

Evaluation criterion	Questions
	this had on the overall effectiveness of EASO's support in Cyprus? What lessons can be learned for the future?
Efficiency	To what extent are the costs of the intervention in Cyprus justified given what has been achieved, and what factors influenced its efficiency?
Coherence	To what extent was the intervention in Cyprus coherent internally, and with other interventions that have similar objectives?
EU added value	What was the added value of EASO's intervention compared to what the Cypriot authorities could have achieved alone?
Sustainability	What is the likelihood that the results of the intervention will be sustained, and what mechanisms were introduced to ensure this?

2.2 Methodological approach

This evaluation of EASO's support to Cyprus combines the use of quantitative and qualitative data to enable an in-depth assessment of the results of the interventions. Data collection consisted of the following activities:

Desk research

A broad selection of relevant documents for the evaluation were shared by EASO which were analysed and relied on for the evaluation. Additional desk research was carried out to identify further relevant documents, including latest statistics on the asylum situation in Cyprus.

In-depth interviews

Key stakeholder interviews served to complement the available evidence by exploring not only *what* has happened but also *how* and *why* certain results were or were not (fully) achieved.

A total of **nine interviews (involving 16 interviewees)** were conducted for the evaluation of this OP, including EASO staff, the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs

(DG HOME), the Alien and Immigration Unit (AIU), the Cypriot Asylum Service (CAS), IPAC, and the Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC). All interviews were conducted virtually via videoconference. Some interviews were organised as group interviews with a manageable number of participants.

2.3 Limitations to the robustness of the evidence base

Despite being initially planned, direct observations were not feasible in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the surge in cases due to the Omicron variant at the start of 2022. This is a limitation to the assessment of the achievements of the interventions as it would have provided further insights into EASO's day-to-day operations, including working processes. It would also have given access to end beneficiaries to assess their satisfaction with the intervention.

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the evaluation of the OP 2021 for Cyprus, based on the information gathered, reviewed and analysed, from both primary and secondary sources of

evidence. It includes the review of monitoring data and evidence made available by EASO and supplementary interviews with DG HOME, EASO staff, authorities in Cyprus and a non-governmental organisation (NGO). The findings are presented following the evaluation criteria outlined above.

3.1 Relevance

In the context of rapidly growing numbers of new arrivals and registrations and steeply rising backlog in pending cases, there was a clear need for EASO's continued support to Cyprus in 2021.

The OP 2021 was informed by a needs assessment conducted in November 2020, which identified five prioritised needs.⁶ The OP was designed accordingly, to address the most pressing needs at the time of its adoption, and partly also responding on flexibly and on an *ad hoc* basis to some new but immediate needs (e.g., containers and other facilities at Pournara) and challenges arising throughout the year.

3.1.1 Measure 1: Improved registration system and access to the asylum procedure in Cyprus with particular attention to Pournara First Reception Centre

Since 2018, EASO has been providing support to Cypriot authorities to improve the registration system and overall access to the asylum procedure. For 2021, planned activities included the development of revised SOPs on registration, and tools for early identification and referral, the establishment of a comprehensive registration system and workflow for information provision at the Pournara First Reception Centre, and the actual registration of applicants (including vulnerability assessments) at Pournara. In fact, 83% (target 80%) of Pournara new entries received basic information from EASO personnel and 1462 (target 1,190) vulnerability assessments were performed by EASO personnel, of which 299 were identified as vulnerable persons.

EASO's intervention on measure 1 addressed an important bottleneck of the Cypriot asylum system. The large number of new applications lodged since 2018 - with a brief decline in the first half of 2020 caused by COVID-19 restrictions - put various registration offices under increased stress due to the limited human resources available to respond. The fact that EASO registration assistants covered more than three quarters of all registrations (see section 3.2.1), and nearly all registrations at the First Reception Centre at Pournara, indicates the high relevance in addressing a continuous gap EASO has filled in this area of the asylum system in regard to the key stakeholders, AIU and CAS.

EASO was also in charge of the identification of vulnerable persons.⁷ The clear division of labour between the Cypriot police and EASO in the registration procedure at Pournara made the presence of EASO registration assistants essential for the functioning of asylum registrations and, ultimately, the entire asylum procedure. Without the support of the EASO registration team, fewer registrations would have been conducted because increased numbers of arrivals could exacerbate existing

⁶ Prioritised needs are: (i) Improve digital data management through a common and accessible database for CAS, Asylum Intervention Pool (AIP), and IPAC. Support the initiation of a coordinated monitoring and evaluation system of Cyprus asylum and reception system, (ii) Improve efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of the access to asylum, registration, first and second instance procedures supporting the AIU, CAS, and IPAC through innovative tools and prioritising credible remote work methodologies, (iii) Establish a comprehensive reception strategy at national level within CAS (incl. contingency measures, entry/exit strategies), (iv) Consolidate EASO's presence and set up a stable coordination and support structure, (v) Provide cross-cutting support for vulnerability identification, assessment and procedures across various Cypriot stakeholders (e.g. CAS, AIP, NGOs). Enhance capacity to improve referral mechanisms for vulnerable applicants. Upscale and replicate best practices on social work.

⁷ This was identified as a need in the needs assessment.

pressures on the AIU for completing registrations, and the identification of vulnerable cases would not have taken place to the same extent and quality level.⁸

3.1.2 Measure 2: Enhanced implementation of improved reception conditions

In 2021, EASO continued its support to the Cypriot reception authorities through several activities, predominantly performed at the Kofinou reception and accommodation centre, which is the primary reception centre in Cyprus for longer-term stay of asylum applicants. The main tasks of EASO personnel included social work, interpretation and reception support, which covers vulnerability identifications, assessment and referrals, information provision and counselling, as well as the organisation of training and capacity building activities as well as pre-integration and coordination support.

The main needs to be addressed with regards to reception were (and still are) supporting CAS in the elaboration and implementation of a functional integrated reception model for Cyprus, including the development and implementation of a comprehensive national reception strategy, which contains a strategy for harmonised data collection. The OP 2021 foresaw the strengthening and implementation of reception coordination mechanisms among multiple stakeholders at central and local levels that are engaged in reception activities as well as the consolidation of workflows and revised SOPs for the reception system. Based on good practices of EASO's engagement at the Kofinou reception centre since 2019, activities on measure 2 aimed for a consolidation and expansion of the reception support at Kofinou and the transfer and application of good practices to the safe zone for vulnerable groups at Pournara First Reception Centre. The "safe zone" for vulnerable applicants (specific area assigned to persons with special needs and vulnerable applicants) was not operational in 2021;⁹ therefore, EASO did not deploy a measure 2 team to Pournara (see section 3.2.2).

As the pre-condition of establishing a fully operational safe zone at Pournara was not met, EASO's support under this measure focused on the development of the reception strategy and on its engagement at Kofinou, which was still relevant. EASO responded to persistent needs in enhancing reception conditions of the Kofinou reception centre (e.g., information provision, counselling, vulnerability identification, assessment and referral) and the improvement of the reception mechanism, particularly with regards to social work and pre-integration activities. The EASO reception team deployed to Kofinou was highly relevant in addressing the specific needs of the assigned population. EASO operated in close coordination with the Centre for Social Cohesion, Development and Care (CODECA), the Social Welfare Services (SWS) and other stakeholders to ensure that basic living conditions and other needs of the residents for legal, medical, psychological, etc. support were met. Compared to 2020, EASO invested more effort in providing information at arrival, while support on aspects beyond arrival and pre-integration, in areas like information on housing and labour market integration, is still limited (partially due to the lack of a mandate).¹⁰

Some needs remained largely unaddressed, including the safety support for unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and other vulnerable groups at Pournara, the establishment of a digitalised system for reception or the establishment of a functional entry-exit system at Kofinou (see section 3.2.2).

⁸ Interview with national authorities.

⁹ Vulnerable persons were housed in this area; however, reports were received indicating that many unaccompanied children were accommodated outside of the 'Safe Zone' in tents or prefabricated housing units, often with non-related adults. Furthermore, the 'Safe Zone' is not properly supervised or monitored throughout the day or night (Asylum Information Database (AIDA) 2021).

¹⁰ Even though dedicated support to integration activities is outside EASO's mandate, the social work interims continued to provide this kind of support to individual beneficiaries assigned to EASO team who had to leave the centre.

Regarding the priority question of this evaluation, EASO was very supportive in coordinating and connecting stakeholders at the camp level and at national level. In particular, facilitation of the development of the national reception strategy is an example of EASO's ability to connect multiple stakeholders in a complex process. Similarly, at the Kofinou First Reception Centre, EASO personnel were active in sharing and communicating good practices to other stakeholders. The role was generally appreciated by stakeholders and EASO may further enhance its capacity in this regard by taking a stronger facilitating role in coordinating collaboration among local, national, and international stakeholders to improve reception conditions and mechanisms (provided that the new national reception strategy is implemented by Cypriot authorities).

3.1.3 Measure 3: Increased capacity to manage and reduce first instance backlog

According to the Cypriot refugee law, the Asylum Service shall ensure that the examination procedure is concluded as soon as possible, i.e. within six months of the lodging of the application, and without prejudice to an adequate and complete examination.¹¹ However, in practice, the time required for the majority of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) decisions on asylum applications exceeds the six-month period, and the time taken for the issuance of a decision may still take more than two years (median time in 2021: 747 days).¹² As a consequence, and in combination with rising numbers of asylum applications for most of 2021, the number of pending cases at first instance RSD accumulated to 18,805 by the end of 2021.¹³

EASO's intervention on measure 3, by far the largest in terms of staff and budget, was and still is of critical importance because the backlog has been cemented at a very high level. Filling needs and addressing challenges of the Cypriot asylum system by providing RSD caseworkers is EASO's core area of activity. EASO's casework fills an ongoing need in the asylum system as CAS is still a state agency with very limited resources for handling the RSD backlog of this size.

3.1.4 Measure 4: Increased capacity for the Administrative Court for International Protection

In 2018, the IPAC was established to take on the second instance cases related to international protection,¹⁴ and in June 2019 started operating with three judges. The IPAC immediately faced challenges such as limited capacity for data collection and statistics, the absence of a digital filing system, limited or lack of infrastructure, and limited administrative and legal support staff. EASO's secondment of initially three research officers in 2020 intended to provide technical support to the Court.

For 2021, EASO's actions to the IPAC aimed to reinforce support to the work of the judges and strengthen its capacity to effectively and efficiently process second instance cases with the aim of reducing the existing backlog. In fact, the OP 2021 planned for ten research officers (of which on average seven full-time equivalent research officers had been deployed, with some turnover), and additionally five research officers when the planned five new judges were in place. However, because the five new judges were ultimately not deployed in 2021 (but only started in January 2022), no extra research officers were deployed by EASO, in line with the principle of proportionality (cf. recommendation of external evaluation of OP 2020 and the OP 2021 itself). Despite this, the OP 2021 foresaw an increase in the level of support in legal research, clerical aid to judges, enhancing the IPAC's data and case management system, and to provide peer-to-peer support of international experts compared to 2020.

¹¹ Articles 13(5) and 13(6)(a) Refugee Law.

¹² EASO internal operational monitoring. 2021.

¹³ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

¹⁴ Law N. 73(I)/2018 on the establishment of IPAC.

When EASO started its activities on measure 4 in March 2020, the IPAC was already dealing with a substantive backlog of 750 appeal cases. This number of pending cases is minimal compared to the situation at the end of 2021 (6,420 cases at the end of December 2021).¹⁵ Support to the IPAC therefore is crucial to stop the backlog from growing further and to, ultimately, reduce it.

EASO's support in 2021 was certainly relevant, yet not enough to address the substantive needs. EASO research officers contributed to the rising capacity and productivity of the IPAC, yet the total number of cases that were finalised and on which the research officers performed a certain type of task e.g., draft decision, country of origin information (COI), etc., was relatively limited. Note that the research officers are not responsible for finalising cases or drafting decisions, they can merely provide input to the judges to do this.

Interviews and monitoring reports made clear that EASO's support at the IPAC through seconding research officers was welcomed but was also challenging due to unclear responsibilities and workflows, or terms of reference that were not fully and timely clarified. There was (and still is) a clear need for specified terms of reference and templates to create a clear understanding of EASO's support and clarify competences and expectations.

3.2 Effectiveness

EASO's operational support to Cyprus in 2021 contributed to strengthening the national capacity to manage the asylum and reception system. Measures 1 and 2 were most effective: the registrations team took care of almost all (even though the overall target of 70% of all registrations was not fully achieved) new arrivals at Pournara despite challenging circumstances, and targets on the identification and assessment of vulnerable cases were largely met. However, numerous factors hindered EASO's operation in Cyprus from significantly reducing the pressure on the Cypriot asylum and reception system in 2021 compared to 2020.

Measures 3 and 4 were somewhat less effective, affected by challenges such as high staff turnover rates, limited coordination by experienced, long-term deployed personnel, and little progress made in establishing smooth and resource-effective workflows and procedures.

3.2.1 Measure 1: Improved registration system and access to the asylum procedure in Cyprus with particular attention to Pournara First Reception Centre

The overall aim of measure 1 was to improve the registration and referral system in Cyprus. This was not fully achieved, as certain intended outputs could not be fully delivered on, mostly due to COVID-19-related restrictions and suspensions, but also due to limits in coordination among authorities in Pournara.

EASO's support in 2021 progressively moved (January-March) from Pournara First Reception Centre and regional Police districts to only Pournara (as of end of March). This centralisation of registrations led to an increase in the number of EASO-supported registrations by nearly 50% compared to 2020 (with nearly the same full-time equivalents (FTEs)). Also, performed vulnerability assessments surpassed the target by 22%.

Regarding the priority evaluation question, communication with the AIU Police and CAS was sometimes challenging as there were on several occasions delays in the response of these stakeholders to requests of EASO. Communication with and between national stakeholders proved challenging, also causing coordination issues in matters of programming for EASO. Once EASO established a more permanent presence in Pournara, coordination intensity with relevant stakeholders increased. At a higher level, EASO Management had regular coordination meetings

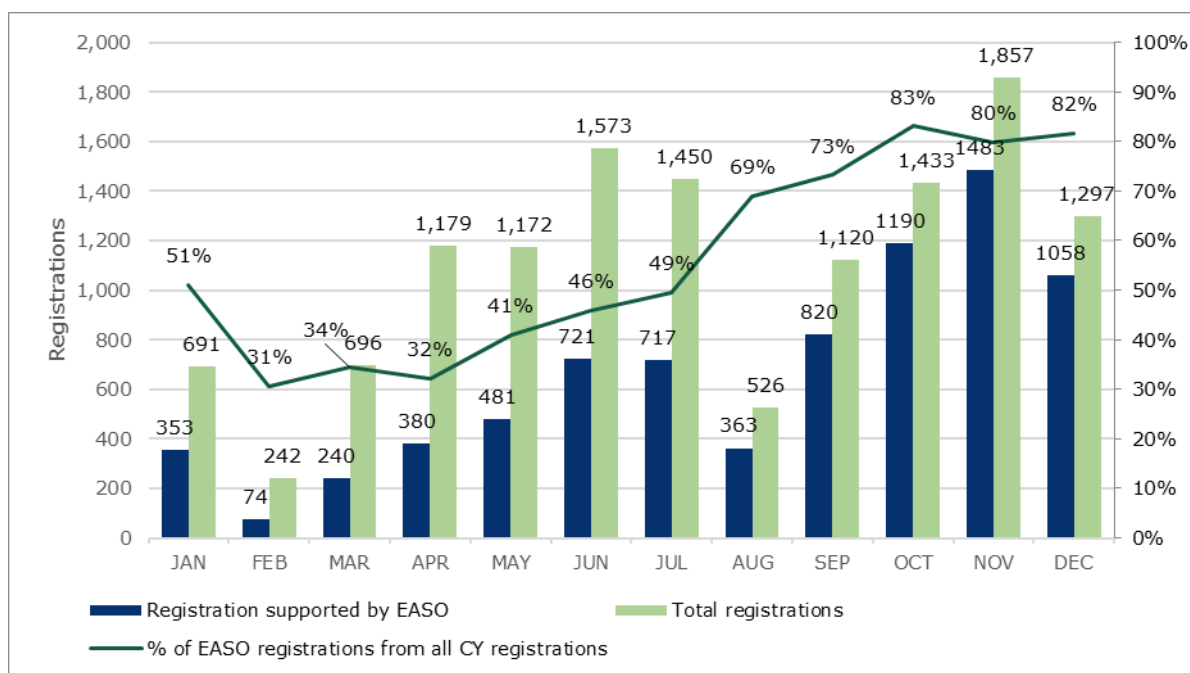
¹⁵ EASO internal operational monitoring

with AIU and CAS senior staff. EASO hereby contributed to an enhanced level of interaction between stakeholders which had a positive effect on the implementation of measure 1.

The centralised presence of EASO in Pournara ensured an improvement in the flow management and allowed immediate support to the needs to register specific applicants as priorities (usually vulnerable cases that need to exit Pournara). Later in the year, with support of the EASO Quality Unit, the draft of new SOPs was finalised to be shared with CAS. However, it is likely that EASO’s support on measure 1 could have achieved even more if preconditions were met regarding more workspace, more efficient communication with CAS/AIU and the full implementation of already existing SOPs and workflow. EASO, through its presence at Pournara, pressured for change in the workflow and in the structure of the CAS to better manage the asylum procedure. EASO did not manage to achieve a change in the presence and functions of SWS, and only in limited way on the AIU. Furthermore, EASO supported the restructuring of the flow management, so that basic components of the procedure could be expanded such as the insertion of info provision, supervision of applications and identification of vulnerable applicants, or the piloting of face-to-face registrations.

EASO registration assistants were able to support 7,880 registrations (exceeding the target of 4734, and the achievement of 5,317 registrations in 2020). The target of carrying out 70% of all registrations in Cyprus was met between August and December 2021. The average percentage of EASO registrations throughout all of 2021 amounted to 60% of the 13,236 registrations in 2021 (see Figure 2). However, overall, there was a 50% increase in the number of EASO-supported registrations compared to 2020, with nearly the same FTEs, pointing to an increase in productivity.¹⁶

Figure 2. Registrations (total and EASO-supported) per month in 2021



Source: EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021

¹⁶ Even though the set target of 70% of overall registrations was not fully met, it would be more appropriate to calculate EASO’s contribution on registrations only for those who have been entering irregularly and been transferred to Pournara, i.e., in total 10587 persons, of which EASO registered about three out of four (74%).

The fluctuation in registrations over time can be explained by several factors. In late January, there was a decision of the AIU police to not conduct registrations and take fingerprints from applicants that were residing in Pournara camp. This halted the registration process for applicants that entered Cyprus. That decision was based on the discovery of COVID-19 cases among applicants, insufficient testing and isolation protocols, and as a result of the tensions created in the camp due to overpopulation. By February, the number of applicants exceeded 1,500, with applicants waiting outside Pournara to be admitted on a daily basis. In some exceptional cases, applicants, usually applicants with vulnerabilities, were released from Pournara. The AIU police resumed activities necessary for registration only by 25th February. During this period, EASO had to suspend its support for registration in Pournara. In August, a COVID-19 outbreak with approximately 190 positive cases led to a decrease in registrations. Due to interruptions of activities in the previous steps of the camp SOPs (e.g., fingerprinting and de-briefings), EASO registration assistants interrupted lodgings. However, the registration team switched to other activities, including operational support to archive or clear the backlog of medical documents and vulnerability assessments not inserted into the folders. As a consequence, all folders leaving Pournara had complete documentation.

Despite some positive achievements, the targets that were not met refer mostly to the areas that would enhance the long-term capacity of the Cypriot authorities to improve the quality of processing registrations. For instance, revised SOPs on registration and referrals were shared by EASO with counterparts in October 2021 but not agreed and finalised by the end of the year. Activities enhancing the registration capacity at Pournara including workflows, information provision for new arrivals, and development of a comprehensive registration system were fully realised.

In 2021, EASO vulnerability officers performed 1,462 vulnerability assessments and identified 299 vulnerable cases. Systematic vulnerability screening and assessments were not consistently done in all locations due to EASO's focus on Pournara, even though EASO gained an important coordinating role on vulnerability identification and assessments.

The camp situation at Pournara continued to deteriorate (see section 3.2.2). There was an increase in demand for psychological support and increasing numbers of applicants experiencing symptoms of mood and anxiety disorders, suicidal ideation, and violent behaviours. Furthermore, an increased number of health problems were observed.¹⁷ These issues were mostly due to the prolonged stay of people in the camp, the poor living conditions and the limited communication with their families and services and organisations outside the camp. Limited prioritisation of vulnerable cases after the screening upon arrival led to limited and delayed support (e.g., to pregnant women). It was agreed and recognised that EASO vulnerability officers would become the focal point for the coordination of the vulnerability assessments of all vulnerability officers in Pournara.

Information flow from CAS/AIU was not optimal. Despite efforts to establish a communication channel with the camp manager and AIU personnel, insufficient progress could be made and challenges persisted. For instance, in early 2021, CAS informed EASO that all vulnerability officers should consider the overall risk rating for UAMs 'low' if no other vulnerability indicator is present, without informing EASO prior to the decision. This represented a source of concern for EASO since it was agreed before that UAMs' vulnerability status would generally be rated 'medium'. Such abrupt changes in approach can cause confusion and potential inconsistencies in the work, which should be avoided by putting in place clear, agreed workflows and SOPs.

EASO provided various training modules to both internal and external registration assistants which enhanced the overall capacity and quality of the registration system across districts. EASO implemented five training sessions in total. These were attended by 66 participants, including 22 from national authorities. While still a minority, this was a considerable improvement compared to

¹⁷ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

2020 (when only one participant was from the authority side). This, arguably, constitutes a step in the right direction towards enhanced capacity building on the side of the AIU.

3.2.2 Measure 2: Enhanced implementation of improved reception conditions

The main aim of measure 2 was to support the elaboration and implementation of a functional national reception strategy for Cyprus. In this regard, EASO played an important role in facilitating the coordination process with stakeholders (priority question). For instance, EASO supported 13 coordination meetings at central level, in addition to the four workshops organised for the development of the national reception strategy. The EASO team reached almost all (94%) residents assigned to EASO in terms of social work, provision of information, counselling, and a workflow for medical and legal referrals of vulnerable cases, even though the number of counselling sessions, 1,021, was slightly below the set target of 1,500. EASO reception officers and social workers were very active in providing information sessions for residents and new arrivals – including reaching out to CODECA’s cases - but also in screening for vulnerability cases of which 31% of all cases have been identified by EASO social workers. Good progress was made in improving the living situation at Kofinou.

Overall, there were considerable staffing issues that hindered the achievement of targets as well as endorsement of the national reception strategy, the development of a digital database that communicates with the digital database for asylum, or the entry-exit system that is tested at all reception facilities and centrally managed.

EASO played a key role in supporting and coordinating the process of developing the integrated comprehensive reception strategy in Cyprus (which was nearly finalised by December 2021), in close collaboration with CAS. CAS, in collaboration with SWS and the Civil Registry and Migration Department (CRMD), and with EASO’s support¹⁸, conducted four workshops covering procedures in the field of reception. In addition to strategy development workshops, 15 bilateral meetings were held with multiple stakeholders, including public services and departments, NGOs, reception centres (management and service providers), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), CyRC, Associations of Communities and Municipalities, etc. EASO provided full support with the participation of five employees based in Cyprus and Malta. A team was set up between CAS and EASO, which gathered all the necessary information. From September, the team was supported for three months by an expert from the Netherlands to conduct workshops and meetings, as well as to draft the strategy document. The draft document, however, was not yet fully finalised and endorsed by the end of December 2021.

As part of the efforts to establish a national reception strategy, the OP 2021 foresaw the strengthening and implementation of reception coordination mechanisms among multiple stakeholders at central and local levels that are engaged in reception activities as well as the consolidation of workflows and revised SOPs for the reception system. However, little progress was made in this regard: EASO’s assessment of reception conditions (ARC) monitoring tool was tested but not implemented as planned, and the implementation of a digitalised database for reception that would communicate with databases at CAS and also AIU on registration was presented to CAS and tested informally in Kofinou, yet not put in place. Also, the establishment of a centralised entry-exit system that would connect different reception facilities is not in place yet.

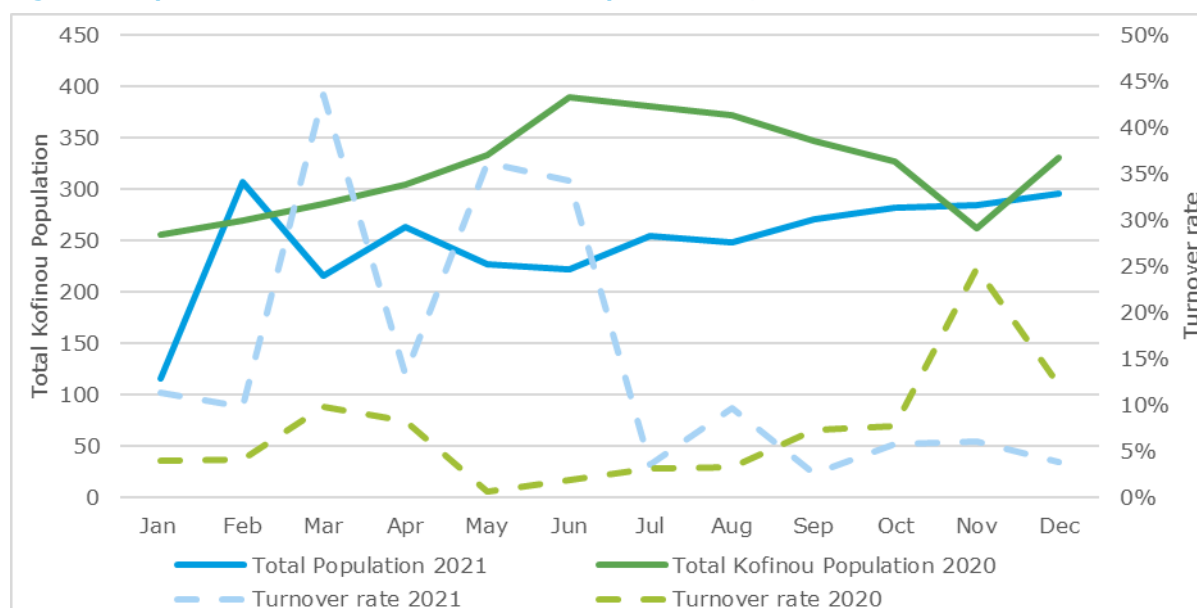
Over the past three years, the living situation for Kofinou residents significantly improved, partly due to the effective support of EASO’s social workers, reception support officers and interpreters, but also through the upscaling of capacities of other stakeholders (e.g., SWS deployed officers to the camp). Vulnerability identification and referrals, social work and information provision also

¹⁸ EASO provided all the logistical support, such as renting rooms and providing catering and microphone services.

improved. Yet, like in 2020, the absence of an integrated and comprehensive national reception strategy, as described above, impacted the functioning of the reception facilities and procedures and lead to *ad hoc* decisions and workflows.

The occupancy at Kofinou centre relaxed in 2021 compared to 2020. The number of residents dropped in January but resumed to a relatively stable level at about 250 residents throughout 2021 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Population and turnover at Kofinou reception centre, 2020 vs. 2021



Source: EASO internal operational monitoring 2020 and 2021

However, the duration of stay at Kofinou continued to be protracted due to low outflow and lengthy departure procedures. There were delays in the outflow from the camp and, in addition to that, there seem to be so far no facility/referral mechanisms for vulnerable beneficiaries of international protection (e.g., psychiatric cases). This issue should be addressed through the implementation of the new national reception strategy.

Despite considerably high needs at Pournara First Reception centre due to its overcrowding situation (2,600 people out of which 204 UAMs in December),¹⁹ EASO did not have a mandate to intervene on reception conditions due to delays in implementing the safe zone. Needs in Pournara were overwhelming and EASO's support could have made a difference if it had been requested by CAS. Several measures that were planned for the support of the reception conditions in the safe zone at Pournara were not implemented because the safe zone was not put in place. Towards the end of 2021, living conditions further deteriorated due to heavy overpopulation and acute shortages of decent accommodation in the centre. Furthermore, limited exit and low number of referrals led to prolonged stay periods.²⁰ Only minimum criteria of division of areas were foreseen (families), but no formal separated areas (i.e., a 'safe zone') exist. UAMs remained mixed with adults and different camp areas had porous borders.

At Kofinou, a key limitation to reaching targets was persistent understaffing and the absence of key profiles, including reception support officers and social workers, which had detrimental effects on

¹⁹ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

²⁰ The stay at the Centre is supposed to be for 72 hours for the purpose of registration, lodging asylum applications, medical and vulnerability screening (AIDA 2021).

the scope of the reception support activities. At the end of March 2021, some of the most experienced team members with individual expert contracts were no longer employed due to contractual constraints. This information was communicated quite late and affected business continuity due to loss of institutional memory and affected well-established relationships with stakeholders. A significant backlog was left behind, especially in relation to residents' files and counselling notes, given the high workload required by follow-up of vulnerable cases. Temporary support was received from measure 3 via the deployment of a caseworker and Member State expert to Kofinou with reception experience to fill the gap. Except for the third quarter, the team at Kofinou was understaffed, even though a Member State expert covering Reception Support was of significant help.

With regard to SWS officers deployed to Kofinou, the EASO social workers team supported and shadowed them (e.g., during vulnerability assessments). EASO established a pharmacy within the Kofinou centre, and the Red Cross ensured residents' access to free medications. EASO also cooperated with the Red Cross to address other material needs of the residents (e.g., non-food items). The EASO team resumed collaboration with the CyRC on residents' individual legal matters leading to an info session to Kofinou staff that was delivered by CyRC on the asylum procedure, information provision and the appeal procedure (including Refugee Law Amendments). Introduction of teleworking allowed social workers to reduce their backlog in terms of paperwork (e.g., pending or lost counselling notes).

The EASO reception team at Kofinou supported residents with info sessions, both upon arrival and individually upon request (e.g., before asylum interviews, following a rejection, before leaving the camp). Trust, enhanced collaboration and improved communication with CODECA resulted in less duplication in activities provided and increased access to non-assigned residents, especially in the context of information provision and in guiding residents during the appeal procedure, also thanks to the cooperation with CyRC and UNHCR. At Pournara, EASO did proceed in structuring the workflows of reception to facilitate the presence of guardians across procedural steps. EASO also provided some impactful support and advice on site design for the Pournara safe zone (but also the new Limnes reception centre). Yet overall, limited progress and engagement by stakeholders on the establishment of a fully operational safe zone was a key obstacle for an enhanced support of reception conditions at Pournara.

EASO provided training to about the same number of external and internal staff as in 2020 (34 vs. 37 participants).²¹ In May, for the first time, reception stakeholders (both from CAS and CODECA) attended EASO's training. In total, 37 persons were enrolled for various reception-related training courses, including 14 participants from national authorities and stakeholders. However, even though many stakeholders registered for training, attendance was rather low and was characterised by significant dropouts. For instance, the national session on reception of vulnerable persons (RVP) *Block A* had 13 participants, but only three finalised the module; or, the *Management in reception* (train-the-trainer) session had three Cypriot participants, but only one finalised the module; or, for the thematic session on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) registered ten participants, but only five attended; or 12 participants enrolled for the *Introduction to International Protection*, but only two participants started. Reasons for poor attendance and completion rate are unclear and should be further investigated.

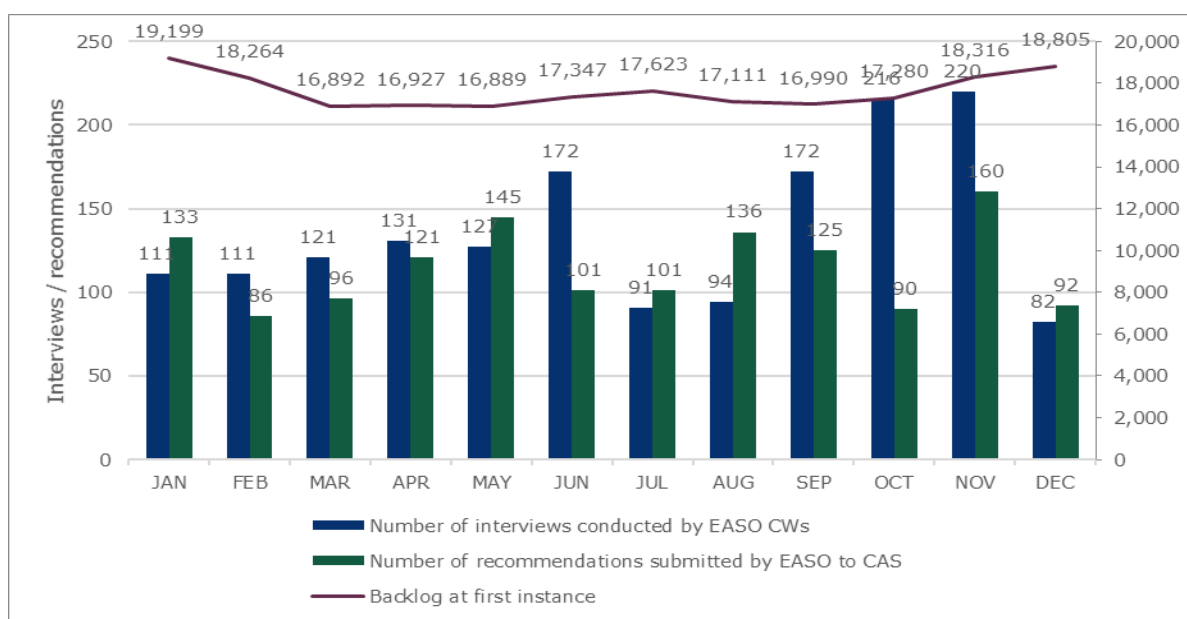
3.2.3 Measure 3: Increased capacity to manage and reduce first instance backlog

The OP 2021 intended to effectively stabilise and reduce the first instance backlog. EASO aimed to contribute to the reduction in the number of pending applications by 3,300 cases by producing recommendations. De facto, this reduction in pending cases did not materialise. In fact, the number

²¹ EASO internal training plans, 2021.

of pending cases was only reduced by 394 (from 19,199 cases in January 2021 to 18,805 cases in December 2021), for various reasons. The two main reasons were the continuous increase in new applications (on average 1,103 per month in 2021), and the limited increase in RSD capacity at CAS, but also on the side of EASO. In fact, EASO contributed on average to (only) 15% of all new cases at first instance (measured by EASO's caseworker interviews by the number of new cases). This limited contribution is the result of the limited deployment of caseworkers by EASO which was significantly lower than foreseen in the OP 2021, partly due to the limited absorption capacity at CAS (limited space) but also due to ongoing challenges in the contractual and recruitment situation.

Figure 4. EASO's interviews and recommendations compared to the backlog at 1st instance, 2021



Source: EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021

In total, EASO caseworkers conducted 1,648 interviews, which is about 80% more than in 2020 but significantly below the target of 3,300 interviews set for 2021. Likewise, the number of recommendations drafted by EASO and submitted to CAS fell short of the target of 3,300.

Compared to 2020, the overall number of pending cases at first instance decreased only marginally by 181 cases (from 18,805 in December 2020 to 18,986 in December 2021). In other words, a significant reduction in the number of pending cases at first instance was achieved during the first three months of 2021, but this trend reversed towards the end of 2021. For the entire year, the number of pending cases did not reduce as expected. This was because of a resurgence in the number of asylum applications after a short drop during 2020 (due to COVID-19 restrictions), and limited absorption capacity and lack of additional resources (caseworkers) at CAS. But EASO also struggled to provide sufficient caseworkers.

Due to the rise of COVID-19-cases in early January, a national lockdown was imposed. In response, EASO explored alternative solutions to efficiently process asylum applications. During the first half of 2021, most interviews were conducted remotely, and workflows had to be adapted accordingly, e.g., by applying the "three rooms approach" (applicant, interpreter, caseworker in different rooms using Microsoft Teams® for video calls). As a result, the number of interviews could be kept relatively stable (even though on a lower level than planned). However, the volume of remote interviews was limited in January/February due to access restrictions for applicants, which is why more attention was given to reviewing of recommendation reports and to the closure of files.

EASO further adapted flexibly to COVID-19 related interruptions by shifting efforts to other aspects of the RSD procedure, including finalisation of recommendations and drafting of concluding remarks. Overall, EASO caseworkers finalised 1,887 recommendations, about 57% of the 2021 target (3,300). In addition, measure 3 took advantage of reduced workloads to capitalise on coaching sessions and training and COI research officers continued their activities according to workplan and established a new COI database to be used by EASO and CAS.

In June, COVID-19 related measures were lifted by national authorities so that the operation returned to office, and measure 3 teams resumed face-to-face interviews by the end of June. In mid-June, an EASO team joined the CAS team at the Pournara Examination Centre processing cases from Pournara (i.e., irregular entries). At the end of June, new EASO offices at Nicosia (Strovolos) were opened, providing initially space for three caseworker teams. Coordinating the procedure at three locations required a sound data management and case allocation system. EASO managed to enhance the capacity for effectively processing cases at first instance by digitalising 1,624 files (even though they need to be printed again for the final review by CAS) and the deployment of a quality assurance officer which led to improved tools for vulnerability assessment and processing. However, procedural gaps and integrated workflows continue to remain a challenge. RSD procedures, including digitalisation of files and data transfer and integration between measure 1 registration and RSD are still not as smooth as they should be, with major implications on the overall effectiveness, quality and resource efficiency of case management and workflows. Capacity limitations on the side of CAS, at the managerial and the infrastructural level, and the limited resources for casework, are key constraints for absorbing EASO's support.

Security and safety incidents caused many disruptions in the day-to-day business in all operating locations of measure 3, e.g., cancelling or rescheduling of interviews, suspending operations due to security incidences, etc. In addition, the fragmented file allocation mechanisms at CAS together with poor organisation in CAS's file management system challenged the workflow for EASO caseworkers. No progress was made on harmonisation of vulnerability flows between registration phases, or on the establishment of a prioritisation system with a focus on referrals.

The major cause for the shortcoming in the volume of interviews and recommendations, however, was the consistently high level of staff (and team leader) turnover. End of contracts and resignations caused a continuous loss of institutional knowledge, and reduced team morale and the level of activity. For example, not having a security officer negatively impacted the number of interviews conducted if interviews had to be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, the scarcity of permanent EASO team leaders posed serious challenges in terms of caseworker supervision and mentoring, but also on the quality monitoring of recommendations. Continuous resignations of interim personnel created significant challenges in the day-to-day business and the general productivity, especially in view of the expansion of measure 3 to three locations.

At the same time, vacancies remained open for extended periods and recruitment consumed resources. The amendment of the Temporary Agency Work Law²² in May, which provides the possibility for extension of the interim contracts, has not fundamentally changed the recruitment and contractual situation. Continued changes in personnel resulted in a need for urgent amendment of workflows and team composition, which absorbed operational resources. Limited availability of senior officers continued to be a challenge for operational continuity and institutional memory but also for supporting purposes at RSD. EASO provided technical support in this direction to improve the overall capability and efficiency of CAS in handling first instance RSD procedures more effectively despite major structural and operational challenges. Despite some improvements, however, CAS was not always able to follow up on submissions by EASO caseworkers in a timely

²² Temporary Agency Work Law of 2012 (N.174/2012)

manner. Interviews have shown that recommendations submitted by EASO were closed by CAS with some delay, which contributed - among the other factors mentioned - to the backlog.²³

Compared to 2020 when EASO provided training to almost 300 participants, the number of enrolled participants was only about half (163) of which about a third (51) were external coming from national authorities (CAS).²⁴ The reduction of training organised under measure 3 in 2021 was due to the high staff turnover. Moreover, the 'newly' hired personnel had already received training under previous positions with EASO so they did not require additional training in order to perform their tasks.

3.2.4 Measure 4: Increased capacity for the Administrative Court for International Protection

EASO focused its support on measure 4 primarily on assisting in file preparation and COI research, but also on enhancing data management capacity. EASO's research officers (between six and eight on average throughout the year) provided support and assistance to the five judges by preparing files regarding appeals against first instance decisions, but also against detention orders and refusals for legal representation in support of the decision-making process. Technical assistance to the development and implementation of a digital case management system, provision of training and expert knowledge by two Member State experts aimed to strengthen the structure and the capacity of IPAC to reduce the backlog at second instance.

The second instance backlog increased dramatically in 2021 – even though the productivity of IPAC increased significantly in the second half of 2021, and the backlog only increased by 2% in November and December. The high number (1,375 per month) of first instance decisions, many of which (around 80%) were rejections, led to a steady increase in caseload for IPAC. Around 70-80% of the rejected applicants lodged an appeal before IPAC, so the backlog at second instance rapidly increased. To tackle this bulk of new appeal cases, EASO research officers prepared unique 639 files, compared to a target of 674. The individual productivity increased in the course of 2021 from less than one to almost three files file per week per research officer. However, productivity could have been higher, and was hindered by the absence of a team leader to coordinate issues between the research officers and the Judges, the limited experience and legal expertise, and the turnover of research officers²⁵. In addition, clearly specified and agreed SOPs and workflows between the research officers and judges (which could not be implemented because it depended on the possibility to host missions of Member State judges) as well as a more efficient case management may have contributed to a higher productivity and output in terms of the absolute and per capita number files prepared for the five judges.

Beyond file preparation, EASO contributed to the establishment of an operational data collection (ODC) system that was deployed in December of 2021. This was a crucial step as there was no digital database before and no data at all on second instance in Cyprus. TEASO's operation was the first operation to set up an ODC on second instance.

Furthermore, up to eight EASO research officers took part in 20 training sessions, and IPAC staff also participated in EASO's training activities. The training plan, which was agreed with national contact points and Courts and Tribunals, foresaw a limited number (four) of compulsory courses for

²³ According to EASO's internal operational monitoring, it took EASO personnel about 11 days to draft the concluding remark and submit it to the Cypriot Asylum Service, then almost two more months were required to review the recommendations and then finalise the case.

²⁴ EASO internal training plan, 2021

²⁵ For instance, 3 research officers departed during the first week of March, and on 22nd of March 2021, five new research officers have joined measure 4.

research officers²⁶ to ensure a homogeneous approach and a proper balance between professional growth through training, and the main priority of tackling the existing and growing backlog. A peer-to-peer initiative for judges was implemented - two Member State experts (judges) came on mission providing review and recommendations, though with a slight delay as this was initially hindered by the COVID-19 restrictions to travel. Remote ways for enabling further peer-to-peer exchange may have been considered.

Overall, the effectiveness of measure 4 was reduced due to the absence of a team leader as coordinator for facilitating workflows and communication between research officers and the Judges and to ensure continuity in a team characterised by a high turnover. A team leader (ideally equipped with a long-term contract) would have improved the overall functioning of the EASO team in the Court as well as the liaison between EASO Office and the President of the Court. A respective profile should urgently be recruited (e.g., through the complementary deployment mechanism (CDM) senior asylum expert – second instance) in 2022.

3.3 Efficiency

Due to below-target deployments, the planned annual budget for the OP 2021 for Cyprus was €7,689,088.56. Estimated consumption amounted to €5,218,572.08.²⁷ .

In 2021, **deployments** were significantly below target on all types of deployed personnel. Occupancy rates (i.e., planned vs. actual positions and deployments) were 77% for statutory staff (seven instead of nine), 48% for interim operational positions (66 instead of 135), and 6% for Member State experts.

The significant shortfall in deployment of operational temporary personnel, even though their number increased from 50 in January to 66 in December 2021, hindered the efficiency of the intervention. In this group staff turnover was highest, as the uncertainty that surrounds the contractual situation contributed to demotivation and resignation of contracts. Temporary workers on 12-month maximum contracts are (understandably) constantly looking for opportunities for longer-term employment, and the fact that contracts cannot be significantly extended may result in suboptimal engagement and identification.

High turnover costs including usage of resources for constant recruitment, basic introductory and specialised training for new personnel and the constant loss of organisational, procedural, and contextual knowledge of trained and experienced personnel with technical skills may reduce overall efficiency of resources.

Around 12% of the total OP 2021 costs (€ 666,592) were estimated to be spent on **measure 1**. Most resources spent on measure 1 were used for interpretation and significantly less for Member State experts. In particular, underspending on staff costs for interpretation was significant, as there were no Member State experts deployed for measure 1 due to operational conditions in Pournara not being met and COVID-19 travel restrictions.

EASO did not reach the staffing on registrations as foreseen. Even though the number of registration assistants continuously increased from August towards the end of 2021, the average number of research assistants deployed was only half of the planned number. This was mainly due to restrictions of temporary contracts, delayed replacements, prolonged recruitment procedures, a limited pool of applications, but also limited space available. At the same time, productivity in terms of the number of registrations per person and per week significantly increased compared to 2020 (Table 2).

²⁶ COI, inclusion, inclusion advanced, evidence assessments.

²⁷ Agency internal financial monitoring (non-validated).

Table 2. Achievement of output-level indicators for an improved registration system, 2021 vs. 2020

	EASO registrations per day	EASO registrations per person per day	EASO registrations per person per week	Equivalent # of registration assistants
2021	30.8	7.4	37.2	4.5
2020	21.4	4.1	20.3	4.8

Source: EASO internal operational monitoring 2020 and 2021

In relation to **measure 2**, the resources available for Kofinou were efficiently used. Yet, and primarily due to EASO's absence from Pournara, the planned budget for measure 2 was significantly underspent.

Support on **measure 3** was by far the largest budget item of the OP; with about two-thirds of the 2021 assigned budget for personnel. However, due to the fact that the number of deployed personnel remained significantly below plan (30 instead of 60 caseworkers), slightly less than half of the budget was consumed.

With regards to the examination of the applications at first instance, EASO's contribution in terms of the conducted interviews increased by about 78% compared to 2020. This was mainly due to an increase in the average number of caseworkers but also an increase in the individual productivity. While the number of caseworkers fluctuated throughout 2021, the number of interviews per caseworker and week was relatively stable. Compared to 2020, individual productivity in terms of the average number of interviews per caseworker and week was slightly lower (1.2 compared to 1.3 in 2020), while the number of submitted recommendations per person was significantly higher in 2021 (1.1) than in 2020 (0.7). This confirms that during periods when interviews were put on hold, time resources were efficiently re-allocated to the drafting of recommendations.

Measure 4 was the smallest measure in terms of budget and deployment. The intervention expanded from three research officers in 2020 to eight (yet not ten as planned) at the end of 2021. In addition to a statistics assistant, five court assistants were deployed and contributed to the improvement of administrative procedures. In the last quarter, two Member State experts (judges) came on mission providing review and recommendations on case flow management and procedural regulations (report drafted).

Evidenced by the fact that numerical targets were nearly met (94%), the budget spent on activities at second instance was very well invested and overall well-received by IPAC. It provided critical support at a time when IPAC was (and still is) under severe pressure.

Following the deployment of five additional judges (to reach ten in total) as of early January 2022, the EASO team of research officers should expand proportionally. As a response to IPAC's planned expansion due to significant AMIF funding (€5 million) for the period of 2022-2027, which, according to plan, will allow IPAC to hire 15 Admin Staff with legal background as well as 11 Court Assistants and various other positions, EASO's measure 4 (measure 1.3 under OP 2022-2024) operation will have to adapt accordingly in terms of a scaling up but also to enhance complementarity to changes in staffing at IPAC.

3.4 Coherence

Compared to 2020, overall coherence of EASO's interventions improved mainly due to more regular meetings at different levels, better information flow, mutual exchange and communication between Ministry of Interior (MoI)/CAS, EASO and the European Commission, as well as discussions with

SWS and CRMD and other stakeholders. The deployment of a permanently present head of EASO's operations in Cyprus was an important step and contributed to improved internal and external coherence of EASO's operation. According to interviewees, availability of a counterpart from the AIU and CAS at the operational (mid-management) would have further facilitated the development of guidelines and the operationalisation of planned EASO's activities.

In regard to the priority evaluation question, **communication and coordination with AIU of Cypriot Police and CAS has generally improved, even though there are still delays in the response of these stakeholders to requests from EASO.** Some of these coordination problems can be attributed to the limited coordination among various governmental departments. Once EASO strengthened its presence in Pournara for registration, exchange and coordination intensity with relevant stakeholders increased and ensured an improvement in the flow management and allowed immediate support to the needs to register specific applicants as priorities.

At a higher level, the EASO Operations Coordinator and Measure Coordinators had regular coordination meetings with local and national authorities. The level of complementarity with the work of other stakeholders at Kofinou was good. CODECA as provider of social services was a well-organised partner and the support of EASO's social workers was largely complementary.

Enhanced cross-measure communication and information exchange is evidence for the attempt to improve internal coherence of EASO's operation (see also section 3.2.2). For instance, close communication between the measure 1 team in Pournara and the measure 2 team in Kofinou allowed timely information sharing (incl. vulnerability assessments and info provision) of new Kofinou residents who were transferred from Pournara. But cross-cutting measure coordination and cooperation has increased coherence on vulnerability information procedures that has also taken place between measures 2 and 3 when EASO social workers shared initial assessments and provided vulnerability reports to measure 3 caseworkers prior to asylum interviews, which allowed prioritisation of cases.

IPAC's successful request for funding from AMIF (€5 million) for the next five years was supported and facilitated by EASO. These AMIF resources are planned to be used for recruiting additional administrative staff with legal background, court assistants, interpreters, a statistics officer and for the purchase of relevant equipment (including office space).²⁸

3.5 EU added value

Most findings of this evaluation suggest that there was an added value resulting from the 2021 intervention compared to what the Cypriot authorities could have achieved alone. For instance, EASO's support had a clear added value in establishing systematic and digitalised procedures on screening, identification, assessment, and referral of vulnerable cases at registration, reception and first instance RSD, which was a cross-cutting area in which EASO helped to lift the Cypriot Asylum System to a higher quality level. AIU could not have handled the high numbers of registrations without the EASO registrations team, according to an interviewee, and the identification of vulnerable cases would not have taken place to the same extent and quality level. Furthermore, EASO's capacity to provide general and specialised training as well as job shadowing is a gap that cannot be filled by other actors.

At the same time, it has become obvious that EASO's added value and impact could have been higher under different circumstances. Due to the persisting challenges that place a strain on the absorption capacity of local and national authorities, interruptions due to COVID-19-related restrictions, and delays on establishing the safe zone at Pournara First Reception Centre, EASO was

²⁸ According to funding proposal submitted to AMIF, according to EASO internal operational monitoring 2021.

not able to realise added value to the extent that could have been possible. This applies primarily to measure 3, where the EASO teams provided important and tailored support but not to the extent that both the average processing duration (which increased from 659 days in 2020 to 747 days in 2021) or the number of pending cases could be significantly reduced. This can be explained by the ongoing high migration pressure, but also below-target deployment of caseworkers and limited resources at CAS.

At the same time, activities at the Kofinou accommodation centre on social work, information provision, vulnerability procedures and training were of exceptional value and well-recognised by stakeholders. Support on digitalisation and remote workflows helped to secure business continuity on all measures in exceptional times when pandemic-related (health and security) incidences and restrictions in combination with an all-time high in new arrivals and registrations put the Cypriot asylum system under severe stress. The development of the national reception strategy progressed well - even though it was not endorsed before the end of 2021.

3.6 Sustainability

Interviews and monitoring documents confirmed that, like in 2020, implementation and ultimately long-term impact and sustainability of all measures were significantly affected by the legal constraints in recruiting and retaining contracted temporary workers due to still restrictive labour laws preventing longer employment contracts for interim workers. Even though the labour law was amended in May 2021, the maximum period for temporary contracts is still limited to 24 months.

In addition, the recruitment of temporary workers (e.g., social workers or interims with legal expertise) was challenged due to legal restrictions as well as the limited pool of applicants. High staff turnover due to early resignation and termination of contracts is one if not *the* fundamental constraint of the entire EASO's operation to create immediate, but also sustainable impact for enhancing the Cypriot asylum and reception capacity. As mentioned, the interruptions in business continuity due to the contractual situation of temporary registration assistants and caseworkers undermined the sustainability of support.

The frequent turnover of staff was a serious detriment to the overall effectiveness and long-term impact of EASO's support to Cyprus. The constant loss of organisational, procedural and contextual knowledge of more experienced staff with technical skills suggests limited sustainability of the operation. Regular resignations and limited motivation and ownership due to precarious contractual situations prevented usage of human resources to their full potential. This situation should urgently be addressed as it not only requires additional managerial resources for additional coordination, but also for recruitment and recurrent (on-the-job) training for new staff.

Furthermore, the 'division of labour' in terms of EASO's central role on registrations at Pournara may be justified from the perspective of efficiency and effectiveness, yet the fact that EASO is performing almost 100% of registrations of irregular entries seems rather unhelpful for securing sustainability and enhancing the long-term capacity of the Cypriot authorities (Police) to perform most registrations themselves (including vulnerability screening, identification, assessing, referrals).

On the other hand, capacity building activities in terms of specialised training, job shadowing, but also the support for an enhanced and integrated data management systems create long term impact. Equally, the finalisation and upcoming implementation of a comprehensive national reception strategy is (and will be) an achievement that lifts the scope and quality of the Cypriot asylum and reception system to another level.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 General conclusions

In the context of rapidly growing numbers of new arrivals and registrations and also steeply rising numbers of appeals, the operation was highly **relevant** to the needs of local and national authorities and the Cypriot asylum and reception system. The OP 2021 was designed to address the most pressing needs at the time of its adoption and designed in a way that enabled it to respond on an *ad hoc* basis to some new but immediate needs (e.g., containers and other facilities at Pournara) and challenges arising throughout the year. Regarding the priority question, EASO increased its efforts and support on enhancing communication and coordination of and with stakeholders. This was exemplified by its role in facilitating the development of the national reception strategy, but also by sharing its expertise (good practices) on reception with stakeholders operating at Kofinou accommodation centre.

Overall, but with varying levels of success across the four measures, EASO's support to Cyprus was rather **effective**. Particularly on measures 1 and 2, but also measure 4, targets were mostly met. The registrations team took care of almost all new arrivals at Pournara, despite the extremely challenging circumstances on the ground. Also, the work on vulnerable cases was mostly effective and according to plan. Yet, and notwithstanding the significant increase in budget made available for the OP 2021, several targets were not met due to multiple, mostly structural, reasons. As a consequence, EASO's operation in Cyprus was not effective enough to significantly reduce the pressure on the Cypriot asylum and reception system in 2021 compared to 2020. Some achievements were hindered by factors that were largely beyond the responsibility of EASO (lockdown, sub-optimal information flow from MoI, limited communication and coordination on the status and progress on Pournara). Also, the continued constraints set by the Cypriot labour law on temporary deployments were largely beyond the control of EASO.

Measures 3 and 4 did not achieve their targets in terms of EASO's contribution to reducing the backlog at first and second instance by supporting the speed at which decisions could be taken. Besides exogenous factors like the continued high migration pressure and the high appeal rate, some internal factors such as high staff turnover, limited experience and productivity, and absence of effective coordination by an experienced, long-term deployed team leader on measure 4, and only partial progress on establishing smooth and resource-effective workflows and procedures were key obstacles in achieving the set objectives.

Compared to resources dedicated to OP 2020, the OP 2021 budget was significantly scaled up in an attempt to realise the ambitious goal to stabilise or even reduce pressure on an asylum and reception system that is currently under the most severe stress in Europe (in terms of applications per capita). In that regard, the budgetary increase in 2021 was well justified. However, the budget could not be fully absorbed. The budgetary outflow was limited primarily due to constraints on deployments on all staff categories: the operation and its **efficiency** would have benefited from more statutory staff and team leaders that would enhance the overall managerial and operational capacity, but also from a significant upscaling in the number of temporary workers across various roles and measures. At the same time, the slightly more than € 5 million spent in 2021 on technical assistance were well and efficiently spent to deliver outputs and outcomes.

The OP 2021 was well designed regarding the **coherence** with needs and personnel adjustments in national authorities and partners. EASO established a good line of communication and cooperation with stakeholders such as CODECA or SWS at Kofinou reception centre, but also structural coherence across measures was improved by establishing workflows and information flows on vulnerable cases across measures. However, the 'embedded model' was not implemented to the extent foreseen by the OP either due to legal barriers, limitations in the operational and

managerial capacities and willingness of partners to establish fully integrated workflows and SOPs with seconded contract workers (e.g., between research officers and judges at IPAC). EASO's involvement in processes for drafting applications for AMIF funding ensured complementarity with IPAC's strategic development. With the AMIF application successfully approved by the end of 2021, the additional resources from AMIF will be providing new opportunities for IPAC from 2022 onwards, and EASO is challenged to ensure coherence in this process of combining financial and technical European resources at IPAC.

This evaluation identified an **added value** resulting from EASO's 2021 operation compared to what the Cypriot authorities could have achieved in its absence. In particular, the intervention on measure 1 was essential for coping with registrations at Pournara First Reception Centre. EASO also had a distinct value added in providing relevant and hands-on training opportunities and in deploying highly qualified Member State experts for targeted and specialised technical support. Also, EASO's coordinating role in the process of developing the national reception strategy was central for a, in the end, largely positive outcome.

Beyond the immediate effects on various output and outcome indicators, the more long-term impact and **sustainability** of EASO's intervention remains difficult to assess. In the hypothetical case of a withdrawal, EASO would leave numerous staff from local and national authorities and stakeholders better trained and qualified, and some good practices on reception and on procedures on vulnerable cases might remain. Also, the comprehensive and integrated national reception strategy is an outcome that has the potential (if implemented) to create long-term impact. At the same time, the 'division of labour' approach on registrations is an emergency methodology but does not enhance local capacities to effectively and sustainably cope with registrations. Nonetheless, some methodologies, guidelines, quality assurance tools, SOPs and workflows that have been developed and co-created by EASO will continue to strengthen stakeholders' structures and procedures also in the longer term.

Table 3 presents scores of the achievements for each measure of the EASO-Cyprus OP 2021. The scoring summarises this evaluation after all evidence and information had been assessed and thoroughly analysed.

Table 3. Scoring of achievements of the four measures of the OP 2021

	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4
Relevance	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Effectiveness	Good	Good	Fair	Fair
Efficiency	Good	Good	Fair	Good
Coherence	Good	Good	Good	Good
EU added value	Good	Good	Good	Good
Sustainability	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair

4.2 Key lessons learned and good practices

The continued constraints due to the COVID-19 pandemic required many workflows to be adapted to new ways of operation. Adaptation of the working environment by, e.g., the digitalisation of files, virtual meetings and interviews, online training, remote support to reception, etc., and the

introduction of new technologies for remote work and the establishment of a range of new security, occupational health and safety protocols and procedures to address COVID-19 issues. Despite the entire operation being largely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020, significant steps were taken to ensure continuity (and minimise interruptions) of operations in terms of administration, communication and support of local and national authorities.

Despite the COVID-19-related challenges and the high rate of new applications, EASO responded flexibly to *ad hoc* needs and requests where necessary. Whether by providing hands on support on equipment or establishing a pharmacy in the Kofinou reception centre the Red Cross to provide access to free medication and addressing other material needs of Pournara residents.

Furthermore, the improved cross-measure communication and information exchange, or the flexible re-designation of a measure 3 caseworker with reception experience to Kofinou to address staffing needs are examples of good practices. Close communication between the measure 1 team in Pournara and the measure 2 team in Kofinou has become essential to improve workflows across measures as it has allowed timely information sharing (incl. vulnerability assessments) of new Kofinou residents who were transferred from Pournara. Even though there has not been a structured workflow and digital database for such transfers, close cooperation between measure 1 and measure 2 has allowed transfer and processing of information (e.g., on vulnerabilities) on new arrivals from Pournara.

Cross-cutting measure coordination and cooperation on vulnerability assessment has also taken place between measure 2 and measure 3. EASO social workers shared initial assessments and vulnerability reports (if applicable) with measure 3 colleagues, prior to asylum interviews. These documents then also got included in the asylum folders at CAS, which has improved overall quality of procedures.

4.3 Recommendations

The following list of recommendations reflects the consolidated outcome of interviews, the validation workshop and desk research as part of this evaluation. The list is not exhaustive, and some similar proposals have already been made previous evaluations.

Recommendation 1: Enhance the capacity of national authorities in registration with a view to progressively handing over responsibilities

The evaluation has shown the crucial role EASO has taken in registration, including vulnerability identification and information provision. EASO should aim to increase its operational and strategic support to the responsible national authorities in the short term, to enhance their capacities and ownership of the operational areas which currently are predominately dealt with by EASO. In particular, EASO should:

- Support national authorities in gradually taking on more responsibility for registration activities by enhancing their capacities to process registrations at larger scale, including age assessment, vulnerability identification and assessment, information provision, and referral procedures. This could include: additional facilitation and training for relevant national authorities; support on SOPs for age assessment and first reception conditions (safety, care) for UAMs; and support in provision of office space (containers) to address working space limitations.

Recommendation 2: Enhance support to improve overall reception conditions

After approval of the national reception strategy, its rapid implementation requires significant managerial and operational (including logistical) support. EASO should:

- Enhance collaboration with CAS and external stakeholders (CODECA, SWS, Ministry of Health (MoH) in reception and accommodation centres in supporting pre-integration (language, employability, *curriculum vitae* writing, etc.) and exit preparation activities;
- Support CAS and other stakeholders in fully implementing the national reception strategy by providing strategic and operational advice based on good practices, support in coordinating stakeholders and provision of peer-to-peer training and mentoring by Member State experts.

Recommendation 3: Enhance support to CAS for realising a substantive backlog reduction at first instance

In the context of high levels of arrivals and asylum applications, a substantive reduction in the backlog of pending cases at first instance requires increasing efforts, additional human resources, improved workflows and capacities for accelerating RSD procedures. EASO should:

- Support CAS in implementing accelerated procedures for RSD, should it request additional support;
- Increase the number of deployed caseworkers (provided that the required space and absorption capacity is available) to help reduce average processing time;
- Support the development of an operational data collection system for Dublin support.

Recommendation 4: Enhance support to IPAC for substantive backlog reduction at second instance

With the funding to be received by the IPAC from AMIF for the next five years, IPAC will be able to enhance its capacity significantly. EASO should focus on complementary support to safeguard the joint impact of the combined financial and technical assistance from European institutions. Therefore, EASO should:

- Ensure complementarity of deployed profiles with new AMIF-funded recruitments by IPAC. This should include the development and implementation of agreed SOPs, workflows and procedural rules between EASO research officers and judges to increase the efficiency of support;
- Test and enable remote peer-to-peer exchange between Member State experts and IPAC staff (judges, research assistants, admin) to increase efficient use of resources and facilitate flexible and continuous exchange with and support by Member State experts.

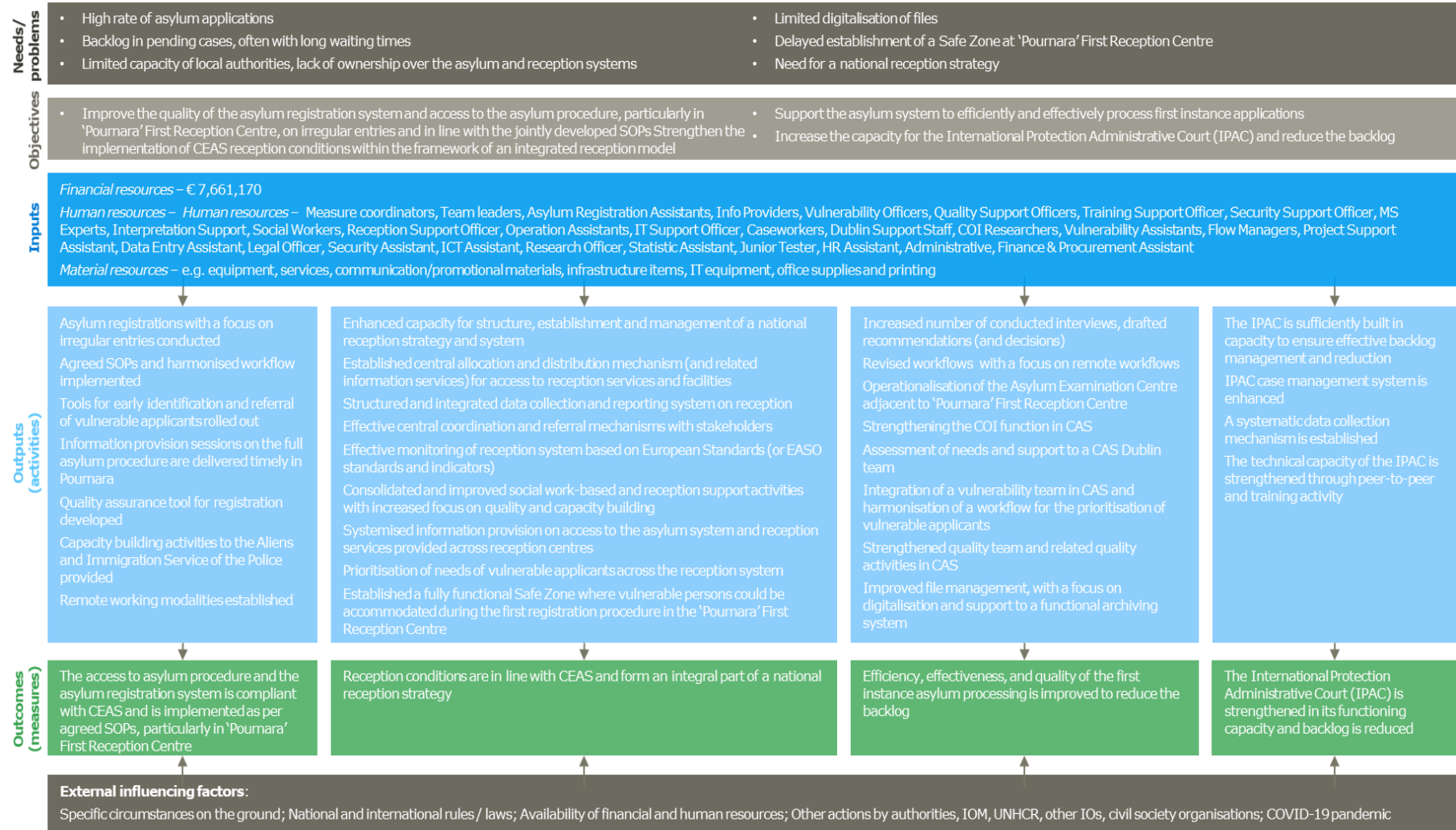
Recommendation 5: Provide cross-cutting support of the Cypriot asylum and reception system

Based on close coordination with and under the ownership of national authorities and stakeholders, EASO should consider supporting the development and implementation of an integrated national data collection and management system to ensure that asylum and reception-related data collection is centralised and accessible to relevant stakeholders, for monitoring, evaluation, and planning purposes. EASO should:

- Further enhance systematic coordination and cooperation with national and international stakeholders, within the framework of the new masterplan on the Pournara First Reception Centre (if approved and implemented by the Cypriot authorities), to increase the effectiveness of EASO's support;
- Further reinforce communication with local authorities and other national and international stakeholders regarding mid-/long-term planning to ensure complementarity and awareness about EASO's priorities and plans;
- Support the design, development, and implementation of a national (cross-institutional) data management infrastructure of the Cypriot asylum system;

- Consider putting in place a training support officer in Cyprus to encourage higher participation rates in training sessions, including by investigating and subsequently addressing reasons for high dropout rates from training modules; and testing remote peer-to-peer training and job shadowing schemes;
- Develop and pilot a sharing deployment mechanism for Greek-speaking human resources (e.g., caseworkers, research officers) with EASO's operation in Greece.

Annex 1 Intervention logic



Annex 2 Evaluation matrix

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
Relevance: To what extent was the intervention in Cyprus relevant to its stakeholders, in light of their original needs and any changes therein?			
<p>Were the objectives of the OP 2021 relevant to the needs of stakeholders in Cyprus, including in light of any changes encountered during 2021?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>What needs and problems were identified prior to the launch of the intervention?</i></p> <p><i>How have the needs and problems faced by stakeholders evolved over time?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any gaps in terms of needs or problems not addressed by the intervention?</i></p> <p><i>What were the objectives of the intervention when first established? Were these appropriate to meet the needs of stakeholders?</i></p> <p><i>Were the objectives/targets/outputs adjusted during the implementation of the intervention? Were these changes appropriate to meet the needs of stakeholders?</i></p>	<p>Intervention logic</p> <p>Needs identified in needs assessment of the intervention</p> <p>Evidence of problems / needs and their evolution over time (e.g., trends in arrivals, trends in asylum applications etc.)</p> <p>Stakeholder views on their needs and the degree to which the intervention addressed their needs and problems</p> <p>Adjustments made to original objectives/targets/outputs (if applicable)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which the objectives were appropriate to meet the needs</p> <p>Evidence / examples of gaps not addressed by the objectives</p>	<p>The intervention was relevant throughout 2021 to meet the needs of stakeholders and to achieve the intended results</p> <p>Where new needs / problems arose, appropriate steps were taken to adjust to these</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Results framework</p> <p>Needs assessment</p> <p>Eurostat data on migration and asylum</p> <p>National statistics on migration and asylum</p> <p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Interviews with international organisations / civil society organisations (CSOs)</p> <p>Results from the evaluation of effectiveness</p>
Effectiveness: What have been the (quantitative and qualitative) effects of the intervention in Cyprus and to what extent can these be credited to the intervention rather than external factors?			

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p>To what extent were the intended results of the OP 2021 achieved? What factors helped or hindered the achievements and how did EASO cope with any challenges?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Measure CY 1: To what extent was access to the asylum procedure and the asylum registration system made compliant with the CEAS and implemented as per agreed SOPs, particularly in 'Pournara' First Reception Centre? What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p> <p><i>Measure CY 2: To what extent are reception conditions in line with the CEAS and to what extent do they form an integral part of a national reception strategy? What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent did EASO support the establishment and implementation of a comprehensive reception strategy at national level in Cyprus? (Linked to recommendation 5 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>Measure CY 3: To what extent was the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the first instance asylum processing improved to reduce the backlog? What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p> <p><i>Measure CY 4: To what extent was the functioning capacity of IPAC strengthened and its backlog reduced? What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent did EASO support comprehensive and integrated vulnerability procedures at all intervention areas (registration, reception, first instance RSD)</i></p>	<p>Intervention logic and its causal links</p> <p>Degree of achievement of targets (output and outcome level) set out in the results framework (all measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in access to the asylum procedure (CY 1)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of the asylum registration system having been made more compliant with the CEAS and implemented as per agreed SOPs (CY 1)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in reception conditions (CY 2)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in the national reception strategy in Cyprus (CY 2)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of the first instance asylum processing (CY 3)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in the backlog at first instance (CY 3)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in the capacity of IPAC (CY 4)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in the backlog of IPAC (CY 4)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of factors that helped and/or hindered the achievement of intended results (all measures)</p>	<p>Activities were implemented as planned; any changes were duly justified</p> <p>Intended outputs and outcomes were achieved; any changes were duly justified</p> <p>Achieved outcomes can be attributed to EASO's support rather than other factors</p> <p>EASO adjusted to structural and operational challenges that arose throughout 2021</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Previous OPs (for context)</p> <p>Results framework</p> <p>Previous evaluations (for context)</p> <p>Legal base (CEAS)</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at national/regional/local level, by international organisations, by CSOs)</p> <p>Interviews with all stakeholders</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>across various Cypriot stakeholders? (Linked to recommendation 3 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent is EASO's support in Cyprus likely to produce lasting long-term impacts?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of the impact of EASO's support compared to other (external or internal) factors (all measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of adjustments made during 2021 to mitigate resource and/or operational constraints (all measures)</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which the outcomes can be attributed to EASO's support (all measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of unintended effects of the intervention</p> <p>Evidence / examples of lessons learned for the future</p> <p>Examples / evidence of long-term impacts of the intervention</p> <p>Stakeholder expectations on long-term impacts of the intervention</p>		
<p>Priority question: To what extent has EASO facilitated and contributed to the coordination/interaction between stakeholders along the various phases of the asylum procedure? What factors helped or hindered this? What implications has this had on the overall effectiveness of EASO's support in Cyprus?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Who are the key stakeholders and what is their role in the various phases of the asylum procedure?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of challenges faced by EASO and authorities in Cyprus (notably in relation to human resources, absorption capacity, digitalisation)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of actions taken by EASO to facilitate coordination/interaction between stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which these actions were successful</p>	<p>EASO's support facilitated and contributed to the coordination/interaction between stakeholders along the various phases of the asylum procedure in Cyprus</p> <p>The strengthened cooperation/interactions improved the</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Results framework</p> <p>Needs assessment</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations (for context)</p> <p>Interviews with all stakeholders</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>What were the challenges faced by key stakeholders in Cyprus? How were these addressed by EASO through its intervention?</i></p> <p><i>What actions were taken to facilitate coordination/interaction between stakeholders? (Linked to recommendation 6 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent did EASO support the development and implementation of a comprehensive data management system across stakeholders, and did this lead to better cooperation/interaction between them? (Linked to recommendation 2 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>Were these actions successful? Why or why not?</i></p> <p><i>What factors, internal and external, helped or hindered this?</i></p> <p><i>What implications did this have on the overall effectiveness of EASO's support in Cyprus?</i></p> <p><i>What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p>	<p>Evidence of a change in the degree of coordination/interaction between stakeholders</p> <p>Evidence / examples of helping and/or hindering factors</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which the outcomes can be attributed to EASO's support</p> <p>Evidence / examples of lessons learned for the future</p>	<p>effectiveness of EASO's support overall</p>	
<p>Efficiency: To what extent are the costs of the intervention in Cyprus justified given what has been achieved, and what factors influenced its efficiency?</p>			
<p>What costs were associated with the implementation of the intervention in Cyprus? Is there room for efficiency gains? Do the benefits of the intervention in Cyprus outweigh the costs?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>How were the costs distributed across the four measures? Was this distribution appropriate?</i></p>	<p>Implementation costs of the intervention(s) (monetary/FTEs)</p> <p>Outputs and outcomes generated compared to their costs</p> <p>Costs and benefits for different groups of stakeholders</p>	<p>The costs of the intervention were justified compared to the achieved outputs and outcomes</p> <p>Encountered inefficiencies were</p>	<p>Cost data from EASO and other stakeholders (where available)</p> <p>OP 2021</p> <p>Results framework</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>What internal or external factors influenced the efficiency with which outputs / outcomes were achieved? Were there notable differences across the four measures?</i></p> <p><i>Did the degree to which stakeholders coordinate/interact in Cyprus have any implications on the overall efficiency of EASO's support? (Related to the priority question)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent and how could the efficiency of the intervention be improved?</i></p> <p><i>How were costs and benefits distributed across stakeholder groups? Were they balanced/proportionate?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent were inefficiencies related to human resource availability and recruitment identified during 2020 resolved in 2021? (Linked to recommendation 1 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p>	<p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which costs are proportionate to the outcomes achieved</p> <p>Evidence / examples of inefficiencies in implementation / achievement of outputs and outcomes</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which efficiency could be improved</p>	<p>appropriately addressed / mitigated by EASO</p>	<p>Interviews with EASO</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Results from the evaluation of effectiveness</p>
<p>Coherence: To what extent is the intervention in Cyprus coherent internally, and with other interventions that have similar objectives?</p>			
<p>Internal coherence: Were there any inconsistencies or contradictions between the activities of the intervention in Cyprus? Were they complementary, working together to achieve coherent outcomes?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Were the four measures mutually reinforcing? How were they coordinated and did this work well?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of inconsistencies or contradictions between activities</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mutual reinforcement or complementarity between activities and measures</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mechanism in place for coordination</p> <p>Evidence / examples of other interventions with similar objectives/results (at</p>	<p>There are no inconsistencies or contradictions within the intervention, they were mutually reinforcing</p> <p>The EASO intervention and interventions by other actors are mutually reinforcing and/or complementary,</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p> <p>Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Interviews with DG HOME</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>Was the coordination/interaction between stakeholders along the various phases of the asylum procedure sufficient? Did it work well? Was it facilitated by EASO? (Linked to priority question)</i></p> <p><i>How was this facilitated or supported by the Team Europe approach implemented in Cyprus?</i></p> <p><i>What lessons can be learned for the future in terms of the internal coherence of EASO's support?</i></p> <p>External coherence: Was EASO's work complementary to other sources of support or was there unnecessary overlap or duplication?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Which other interventions (funded by the EU, e.g., AMIF, or funded through national/regional/local funds) were relevant to EASO's work in Cyprus?</i></p> <p><i>Were any inconsistencies identified? Were the interventions mutually complementary?</i></p>	<p>national/regional/local level, by international organisations, by CSOs)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of synergies or complementarity between other interventions and the EASO intervention</p> <p>Evidence / examples of overlaps or duplication between other interventions and the EASO intervention</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the coherence and complementarity of the interventions (or lack thereof)</p>	<p>there were no unnecessary overlaps or duplications</p>	<p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Interviews with international organisations/ CSOs</p> <p>Coherence analysis</p>
<p>EU added value: What is the additional value resulting from EASO's intervention in Cyprus, compared to what could reasonably have been expected from Member States acting at national and/or regional levels?</p>			
<p>What was the added value of EASO's intervention compared to what the Cypriot authorities could have achieved alone?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>What might have happened if EASO had not intervened in Cyprus?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of added value of the intervention</p> <p>Extent to which the activities would not have taken place or taken place with a reduced scope or speed in the absence of the intervention</p>	<p>The intervention added value compared to what could have been achieved in its absence</p>	<p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Results from all previous evaluation questions</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<i>Is there evidence suggesting that the outcomes of the intervention could not have been achieved to the same degree without EASO's intervention in Cyprus?</i>	Stakeholder views on what would have happened without EASO's support		
Sustainability: What is the likelihood that the results of the intervention will be sustained, and what mechanisms were introduced to ensure this?			
<p>Which mechanisms to ensure sustainability of results have been put in place by EASO and / or the authorities? Was this sufficient to ensure sustainability of results?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>To what extent was the proportionality of EASO's support in line with the capacity of national authorities introduced? (Linked to recommendation 4 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>Was there an improvement in the absorption capacity of the Cypriot authorities in 2021? To what extent was this the result of EASO's support?</i></p> <p><i>What implications has this had / will this have on the sustainability of the support going forward?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of mechanisms put in place in 2021 to help the intervention in Cyprus continue beyond its direct implementation</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which these mechanisms ensure sustainability of results in Cyprus</p> <p>Evidence / examples of factors influencing the likely sustainability of the intervention in Cyprus</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the likelihood that the benefits of the intervention in Cyprus could continue beyond the intervention's implementation</p>	<p>EASO's support is likely to have a lasting impact</p> <p>Appropriate mechanisms have been put in place to stimulate sustainability of the intervention</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p> <p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with DG HOME</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Interviews with international organisations / CSOs</p> <p>Results from all other evaluation questions</p>

Annex 3 Follow-up to the 2020 recommendations

The table below sets out the progress made in 2021 in relation to the recommendations of the evaluation of the Cyprus OP 2020.

Table 4. Recommendations from 2020 evaluation

Operational recommendation	Action	Status	Progress / achievements
1. Enhance stable and sustainable deployment of experts and staff	1.1. Recruit temporary interim workers, under the amended Cypriot labour law.	Discontinued	Amended CY labour law did not cover all interim contracts meaning that challenges relating to interim contracts persist. Additionally, CDM recruitment modality to be implemented Q4 2021/ Q1 2022 will eliminate most if not all of the interim contracts in place by Q3 2022.
	1.2. Recruit temporary interim workers, under the amended Cypriot labour law. Recruit externally remunerated experts via the CDM.	Under implementation	CDM recruitment in Cyprus under implementation, profiles contracted under interim contracts will all transition to CDM in 2022.
2. Support the development of a comprehensive data management system	2.1. Digital data sharing among measures and between EASO and external stakeholders	Under implementation	Addressed in OP 2022-2024
	2.2. The use of an integrated digital data management system relies on national	Under implementation	Addressed in OP 2022-2024
3. Support comprehensive and integrated vulnerability procedures	3.1. Vulnerability screening, identification and referral using a standardised and harmonised tool across measures (registration, first instance examination, reception).	Under implementation	Addressed in OP 2022-2024

Operational recommendation	Action	Status	Progress / achievements
	3.2. SOPs revision for Pournara, vulnerability workflow.	Under implementation	SOPs agreed, Safe Zone in Pournara should be operational in early 2022.
	3.3. Strengthen the prioritisation system for vulnerable applicants	Under implementation	
4. Aim for proportionality of EASO's support Introduce proportionality as a general principle to ensure capacity of national authorities to absorb EASO's support	4.1. At second instance, deployment of Ros aligned with the appointment of IPAC Judges.	Implementation concluded	
	4.2. At first instance, align deployment of EASO caseworkers in Pournara Examination Centre with the deployment of CAS caseworkers.	Under implementation	Pre-condition for support in OP 2022-2024
5. Support mainstreaming of the reception strategy and its implementation	5. Support the drafting (workshops) and the endorsement of a comprehensive reception strategy at national level.	Under implementation	All workshops for reception strategy have been conducted and concluded in collaboration with CAS. The drafting of the strategy is also in its final stages. The final draft of the report can be expected early in the first quarter of January 2022 when the focus of EASO's support will shift towards operationalising the priorities identified in the reception strategy.
6. Intensify coordination and communication with stakeholders	6. Operationalise the Steering Committee with signatories of the OP2021. Dedicate specific resources to communication activities, both internal and external.	Implementation concluded	Steering committee was formed and regular meetings were hosted.

Operational recommendation	Action	Status	Progress / achievements
7. Consider a strategic planning framework	7. Organise internal consultation on how to move towards a more strategic support during the drafting process for OP 2022.	Implementation concluded	OP 2022-2024 was finalised in early December 2021. Consultations were held internally with measure coordinators on OP structure as well as with key stakeholders including CAS, AIU and IPAC. New stakeholders such as CRMD, MoH/Organismos Kratikon Ypiresion Ygeias (OKYPY) and SWS were also consulted as part of this process.