



EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE EASO-GREECE OPERATING PLAN 2021

FINAL REPORT

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ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Acronym	Definition
AA	Appeals Authority
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
ARC	Assessment of reception conditions
ASTs	Asylum support teams
BIA	Best interest assessment
COI	Country of origin information
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DPAS	Directorate for the Protection of Asylum Seekers
DU	Dublin Unit
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EMAS	Emergency Assistance (part of AMIF)
EU	European Union
GAS	Greek Asylum Service
GSRAS	General Secretariat for the Reception of Asylum Seekers
HQ	Headquarters
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IOs	International organisations
JMD	Joint Ministerial Decision
LTAC	Long Term Accommodation Centre
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoMA	Ministry of Migration and Asylum
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
MPRICs	Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centres
NGOs	Non-Governmental organisations

ODC	Operational Data Collection
OP	Operating plan
PMO	Project Management Office
RAO	Regional Asylum Office
RIC	Reception and Identification Centre
RIS	Reception and Identification Service
SOPs	Standard operating procedures
SSPUAM	Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors
UAMs	Unaccompanied minors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO)¹ has been assisting the Greek authorities for the past 10 years in building sustainable asylum and reception systems in line with EU standards, through the provision of strategic, operational, technical and emergency support. The **EASO-Greece operating plan (OP) 2021 aimed to:**

- Enhance the capacity of the Asylum Service and Appeals Authority to implement the asylum procedure efficiently and in a timely manner, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights of applicants for international protection towards the implementation of the European Union's (EU) Asylum Acquis;
- Enhance the capacity of the National Reception Authorities to manage and operate the National Reception System, towards the implementation of EU reception standards;
- Enhance the capacity of the Greek Authorities and other involved actors to manage and implement relocation from Greece under the common agreed procedure with participating Member States;
- Contribute to the dedicated taskforce for improved reception and asylum management, including the Joint Pilot Project for a Multipurpose Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos.

The **OP 2021 was highly relevant to meet the needs of stakeholders**, as identified during the design of the OP and as they evolved during 2021. Key factors that contributed to the relevance of the OP were: (a) its measures being a continuation, to a certain extent, of measures initiated (and tested) in previous OPs; (b) EASO's long-term presence in Greece, which means it has solid knowledge of the national asylum and reception system, including its strengths and weaknesses; (c) several rounds of negotiations with the Greek authorities that preceded the signing of the OP 2021, which also involved key players (governmental high-ranking officers who run the implementation of the agreed outcomes); (d) the implementation of the OP 2021 was closely and jointly monitored by EASO and the Greek authorities; and (e) EASO showed great flexibility to adapt to changes in needs, by reallocating resources and providing interpretation services, continuous training and capacity building, and material resources where needed.

EASO's intervention in 2021 **effectively tackled the backlog created in previous years** with respect to regular and border asylum procedures and helped release the pressure from the first-line reception system (borders). With EASO's support, the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) managed for the first time in 2021 to balance the ratio between incoming first-time applications and outgoing first instance decisions. What is more, through EASO's support with relocation schemes, the special reception needs of vulnerable asylum applicants were addressed in a more effective way in line with EU reception standards.

The OP 2021 achieved its objectives to a satisfactory level. Horizontal factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the intervention in 2021 included: (a) EASO's internal changes to management, monitoring and communication; (b) EASO's flexibility in allocating resources including through the use of remote modalities; (c) EASO's stronger collaboration with the Greek authorities in target setting, monitoring and coordination; (d) the low number of arrivals throughout 2021; and (e) reforms in the national legislation that streamlined asylum and reception procedures. **Challenges** that were encountered were the limited segregated data (causing delays in mapping and sharing); shortcomings in communication between Greek authorities (whose competences

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.

concur in migration management); COVID-19² restrictions (where they could not be mitigated, e.g., through the use of remote modalities); inherent limitations to the use of the temporary agency workers scheme; and delays in the planned transfer of interpretation services to the Greek authorities.

The **efficiency** of the EASO intervention in Greece was very good, given the large-scale operation in terms of resources and the complexity of multi-level support, and the external challenges impacting implementation. Certain inefficiencies were detected with respect to a duplication of GAS and EASO resources due to the existence of bilateral relocation schemes in which EASO was not involved.

The OP's **measures were closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing**. Through EASO's support to the coordination and implementation of the relocation scheme for unaccompanied minors (UAMs), reception capacity towards UAMs was improved, coordination between different competent authorities and actors in the field was enhanced, tools for UAMs were consolidated and widely used and finally, fundamental rights of UAMs were secured. **EASO has a distinct identity and role** that prevents overlaps with the activities of other actors, such as international organisations (IOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In relocation, however, there was a certain degree of duplication stemming from EU relocation schemes running in parallel to bilateral schemes.

The added value of EASO's support in Greece is that it **integrates the EU dimension into the national system**, having as a core aim to harmonise national practices with EU standards on asylum and reception. EASO is considered a reliable, strategic, institutional EU-level collaborator that has the know-how, the resources and the flexibility to address in a speedy, effective and quality-driven manner the corresponding needs of national authorities. EASO's support in 2021 was pivotal in ensuring the effectiveness of asylum procedures and reception management.

On asylum and relocation, the support provided by EASO achieved more **sustainable results** than on reception. Mechanisms were put in place to ensure an exit strategy for EASO from the asylum support (consolidation of tools, intense capacity-building activities, wide use of the embedded model). The signing of the OP 2022-2024 will allow for the planning of long-term measures which will add to the sustainability of EASO's operations in Greece.

Five main features of the EASO Greece OP 2021 are considered **good practices that can be replicated** in other contexts/locations in Greece or even in other Member States. These are: (a) the embedded model in terms of human resources allocated to Member States, provided certain conditions are met; (b) the project approach in terms of releasing the pressure from stretched asylum systems; (c) the expertise acquired in the implementation of EU relocation schemes; (d) the remote modalities to ensure continuity and efficiency in the asylum procedures in COVID-19 context; and (e) the experience from real-time simulation exercises (evacuation of refugee camps) in refining contingency planning.

In view of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed.

Recommendation 1: Enhance the capacity of the Greek authorities in relation to the flow of information, data sharing and data management

EASO facilitated the flow of information between administrative authorities but encountered challenges with the implementation of the OP due to information not always being shared in a timely manner by the Greek authorities. In view of the above, actions towards the enhancement of the capacity of the Greek authorities in relation to the flow of information, data sharing and data management should be put forward.

² Coronavirus disease 2019.

Recommendation 2: Simplify the breakdown of EASO’s support into broader categories of measures and optimise target setting for the monitoring of their implementation

The measures of the OP 2021 were closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing. It could have been simplified if certain (sub)measures had been merged. This would have enabled a clearer workplan and facilitated monitoring of the implementation of the OP. In addition, in certain sub-measures no targets were set for the implementation of the OP, which made it difficult to measure the effectiveness of EASO’s support. Based on these findings, the restructuring of certain parts of the OP is recommended and a different approach to setting targets in certain instances is advised.

Recommendation 3: Enhance sustainability of the asylum system by reducing dependency of the GAS on EASO’s support

Following several years of resource-intensive operational support, EASO’s support to the asylum system has reached maturity. Given that there are low numbers of arrivals and less pressure on the asylum system, it is time to reduce support and gradually phase-out.

Recommendation 4: Improve human resource planning and management of EASO embedded staff

In 2021, EASO undertook a re-structuring of its internal management and extensively used the option of re-allocating financial and human resources in accordance with the needs of the authorities. However, inherent shortcomings linked to the temporary nature of the deployment of EASO embedded staff still persist and, on occasion, a more efficient and sustainable use of resources could have been attained.

Recommendation 5: Consider the Greek experience in efforts to standardise EASO’s support to relocation procedures

EASO successfully supported authorities in Greece (and other stakeholders, such as the European Commission) in relocation schemes from the frontline state to other EU Member States, back in 2015-2017 and recently in 2020-2022. This accumulated experience should not be lost, but rather capitalised on for future reference (in Greece). EASO could also explore the possibility of replicating what was done in this regard in other EASO operations as relevant.

1. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND CONTEXT

1.1 Objectives and scope

This report provides an *ex post* evaluation of the operating plan (OP) agreed between the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and Greece for 2021 (hereinafter: EASO-Greece OP 2021, or OP 2021). It offers a retrospective, reflective and objective assessment of the degree to which the OP 2021 objectives were met, identifying reasons for any shortcomings and suggesting lessons learned from the intervention that might be useful to EASO in the design and implementation of future interventions in Greece and beyond.

The scope of the report concerns EASO's operational support to Greece during 2021. For contextual reasons, the report also considers previous OPs, historical information on the asylum and migration situation in Greece, and the ongoing OP 2022-2024.

1.2 Background

Greece has faced particular asylum pressure in the past years due to a significant influx of irregular migrants at the European Union's (EU) external borders with Turkey. Following a request made by the Greek Government in February 2011, EASO agreed to support Greece with the establishment of new institutions (Asylum Service, First Reception Service, Appeals Authority), the reception system in general and the reduction of backlog on asylum cases via the deployment of asylum support teams (ASTs) and experts from different EU Member States.³ In the following years, EASO's support to Greece was extended⁴ to various areas (e.g., training of personnel on the new services and setting up a country of origin information (COI) database, collection and analysis of statistical data, improvement of reception procedures, capacity building in the field of EU funds related to asylum and reception). Further to needs assessments carried out in the context of each OP, *ad hoc* and horizontal measures were agreed each time, according to the specific needs of the Host State. For instance, EASO supported Greece with the joint processing of asylum cases of applicants eligible for relocation when the EU relocation programme from Greece to other Member States was in force,⁵ with the implementation of the hotspot approach when Greece dealt with unprecedented flows of refugees and migrants in 2015-2016⁶ and the EU-Turkey Statement.⁷

³ OP Phase I. [EASO Support to Greece](#), 19 December 2012

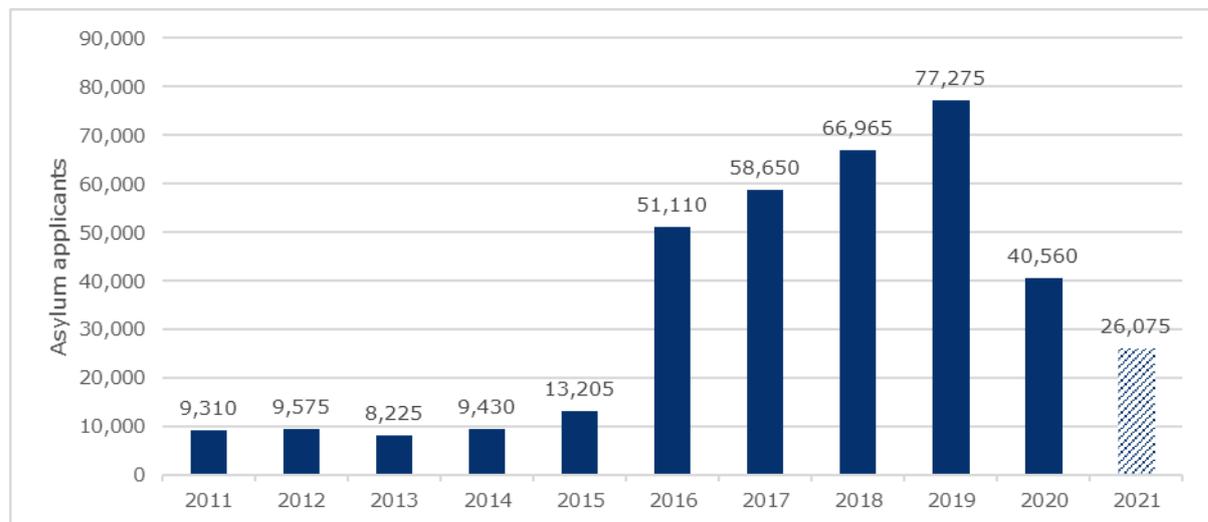
⁴ OP to Greece Phase II signed in March 2013. EASO [Press Release](#): EASO and the Greek Government sign agreement to extend EASO support to Greece until December 2014, PR 01/2013, 7 March 2013. Special Support plan between EASO and Greece signed in May 2015. EASO [Press Release](#): EASO and Greece sign agreement to continue EASO support to Greece until May 2016, PR 07/2015, 13 May 2015

⁵ Council Decision (EU) [2015/1523](#) of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece; Council Decision (EU) [2015/1601](#) of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece. See also Council Decision (EU) [2016/1754](#) of 29 September 2016 amending Decision (EU) 2015/1601 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece.

⁶ EASO signed in September 2015 a Hotspot OP to Greece which was amended several times in order to reflect the operational needs both on the islands and on mainland Greece and was extended until 31st December 2016.

⁷ EASO [Press Release](#): EASO to further support Greece: New Operating Plan for activities in 2017 has been put in place 20 December 2016. [Operating Plan](#) agreed by EASO and Greece, 13 December 2017.

Figure 1 Asylum applications, Greece, 2011-2020



Source: Eurostat asylum statistics (2011-2021)⁸

EASO's interventions in Greece from 2019 onwards (OPs for 2019, 2020 and 2021) focused on the enhancement of the capacity of the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) and Appeals Authority (AA) to implement the asylum procedure efficiently and in a timely manner and on the enhancement of the capacity of the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) to manage and operate the Reception Centres. In 2019 there was an increase in arrivals (74,613) which added to the already overwhelmed asylum and reception systems due to previous years' large number of arrivals. In December 2019, 139,150 applications were pending at different stages of the asylum procedure whereas 92,838 applicants were hosted in different accommodation schemes.⁹ In 2020, the number of arrivals dropped to a historical low (15,696) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the migratory situation was still volatile and there was still a high number of pending asylum applications at first and second instance and a high workload of the Greek Dublin Unit (DU). In addition, a large number of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) were present in Greece (5,655¹⁰) and a relocation programme on a voluntary basis from Greece to other EU Member States was launched for UAMs and children with disabilities/illnesses with their families. It was further expanded to include vulnerable asylum applicants and beneficiaries of international protection.¹¹ In September 2020, after the destruction of the Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) by fire, several thousands of asylum applicants were in immediate need of temporary accommodation in Lesvos (Mavrovouni temporary RIC). The European Commission agreed with the Greek State to establish a Task Force on Migration Management to implement a joint pilot for completely new reception facilities.¹² To this end, the Commission signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Greek authorities, that outlined a detailed plan to establish a new, up-to-standard reception centre on the island of Lesvos by early September 2021.¹³

⁸ Data for December 2021 was not yet available at the time of writing (February 2022), so the number for 2021 covers the period January-November 2021 only.

⁹ Ministry for Migration and Asylum, Annual information note 2020.

¹⁰ National Center for Social Solidarity, Situation Update: [Unaccompanied Children](#) (UAC) in Greece, 15 December 2019.

¹¹ European Commission/Migration and Home Affairs, News: [2000 vulnerable asylum seekers and recognised refugees relocated this year from Greece](#), 17 December 2020.

¹² European Commission, [Press Release](#): Migration: A European taskforce to resolve emergency situation on Lesvos, 23 September 2020.

¹³ European Commission, [Press Release](#): Migration: Commission and Greece agree joint plan for a new reception centre in Lesvos, 3 December 2020.

In light of the above, the OP agreed between EASO and Greece for 2021 had **four measures** with the following objectives:

1. **Measure EL-AS 1:** Enhance the capacity of the Asylum Service and Appeals Authority to implement the asylum procedure efficiently and in a timely manner, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights of applicants for international protection towards the implementation of the EU Asylum Acquis;
2. **Measure EL-REC 2:** Enhance the capacity of the National Reception Authorities to manage and operate the National Reception System, towards the implementation of EU reception standards;
3. **Measure EL-REL 3:** Enhance the capacity of the Greek Authorities and other involved actors to manage and implement relocation from Greece under the common agreed procedure with participating Member States;
4. **Measure EL-TF 4:** Contribute to the dedicated taskforce for improved reception and asylum management, including the Joint Pilot Project for a Multipurpose Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos.

Measures 1, 2 and 3 were largely a continuation of the measures of the EASO-Greece OP 2020, while measure 4 stems from the MoU signed between the European Commission and Greece on the establishment of a new Multipurpose Reception and Identification Centre in Lesbos after the destruction of the Moria camp (December 2020).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Evaluation questions

The following table presents the key evaluation questions we sought to answer as part of this evaluation. The questions 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, as agreed in the inception report. Specifically, this report focused on the effectiveness of EASO’s support to Greece in light of the scale of the intervention (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	General questions
Relevance	To what extent was the intervention in Greece relevant to its stakeholders, in light of their original needs and any changes therein?
Effectiveness	Priority question: Given the scale of EASO’s intervention in Greece, has EASO delivered on expectations? What worked well? What challenges arose? What lessons can be learned for the future (e.g., in terms of coordination across locations, replicability, adaptability and scalability)?
Efficiency	To what extent were the costs of the intervention justified given what has been achieved, and what factors influenced the efficiency of the intervention in Greece?
Coherence	To what extent was the intervention in Greece coherent internally, and with other interventions that have similar objectives?

EU added value	What is the additional value resulting from EASO's intervention(s) in Greece, compared to what could reasonably have been expected from Member States acting at national and/or regional levels?
Impact & Sustainability	What was the (intended) long-term impact of the intervention in Greece, to what degree has this been achieved and is it likely to be sustained?

2.2 Methodological approach

This evaluation of EASO's support to Greece 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. EASO's Operational Office in Greece has developed over the years a sophisticated system of monitoring and reporting. A meeting was held between evaluators and EASO's Greece Project Management Office (PMO) to delve into the monitoring and reporting tools being used. Additional desk research was carried out to identify further relevant documents, including latest statistics on migration flows, asylum and reception, and the situation of UAMs in Greece. Considering the large amount of data available in relation to Greece, a judgement call was made on additional sources to be consulted.

In-depth interviews

Key stakeholder interviews served to complement the already available evidence by exploring not only *what* has happened but also *how* and *why* certain results were or were not (fully) achieved. Considering the scale and importance of the Greek operation, a senior evaluator and expert in asylum in Greece undertook the interviews.

A total of **19 interviews** were conducted during December 2021 and January 2022. These involved 29 interviewees who were key actors for the evaluation of this OP, including: (a) members of EASO's Greece management team, measure and field coordinators and different categories and profiles of EASO personnel deployed in Greece (field support officers, reception and administration assistants, vulnerability assistant, security assistant); (b) the Head of the General Secretariat for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (GSRAS), the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUAM), the Director of GAS, high-ranking officers in the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), as well as field staff; (c) senior officers and field staff from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Site visits

Direct observation allows for a more in-depth understanding of the day-to-day operations in Greece, providing insights into the way in which the operation is run, the speed with which activities are carried out. A field visit to the Ritsona Long-Term Accommodation Centre (LTAC) in central Greece, where around 2,000 asylum applicants from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia and Sub-Saharan Africa are hosted, was conducted in January 2022. In addition to visiting the site itself, we undertook four interviews: with the site manager, three reception assistants (EASO embedded personnel), an administrative assistant (flow manager) and an EASO field support officer on asylum and two staff members from IOM.

Another site visit had been scheduled to take place in January 2022 in Lagadikia LTAC in northern Greece. However, due to a surge of COVID-19 at that time, the visit was cancelled, and we opted for remote interviews with the main actors (i.e., the site manager and EASO personnel supporting asylum and reception procedures in northern Greece) instead, in order to get feedback from the ground on the implementation of the OP's 2021 objectives in that region.

2.3 Limitations to the robustness of the evidence base

There were a few limitations to the methodology and to the robustness of the evidence base.

Due to COVID-19, most interviews were conducted remotely, through videoconference. This helped to flexibly reschedule interviews at the request of authorities. At the same time, in-person interviews on the premises of EASO and of the Greek authorities would have allowed for more contextualisation, providing insights on their everyday work and collaboration. In Greece, all services of the MoMA and EASO's Greece Office share the same building.

For the same reason (COVID-19 outbreak), one out of two planned field visits was cancelled. As a mitigating measure, we conducted online interviews with the main relevant actors in the field, as outlined above.

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the evaluation of EASO-Greece OP 2021, based on all the information gathered and analysed from primary and secondary sources of evidence. The findings are presented along the evaluation criteria presented above.

3.1 Relevance

The EASO-Greece OP 2021 was **highly relevant to address the needs of stakeholders**, both as they were identified during the design of the OP, and as they evolved over 2021. Key factors that contributed to the relevance of the OP were: (a) its measures being a continuation, to a certain extent, of measures initiated (and tested) in previous OPs; (b) EASO's long-time presence in Greece means it has solid knowledge of the national asylum and reception system, its strengths and weaknesses; (c) several rounds of negotiations with the Greek authorities preceded the signing of the OP 2021, which involved also key players (governmental high-ranking officers who will run the implementation of the agreed outcomes); (d) the implementation of the OP 2021 was closely and jointly monitored by EASO and the Greek authorities; and (e) EASO showed great flexibility to adapt to subsequent changes in needs, given the circumstances, as described below.

On September 2020, in preparation for the OP 2021, EASO defined priority areas for operational support based on **needs assessments**. The mapping of needs across different fields (asylum, reception, relocation and implementation of the taskforce mandate) involved a situational analysis of Greece, consultations with relevant stakeholders at different levels and the use of multiple tools (bilateral meetings, field visits, support request forms), and a needs assessment.¹⁴

The measures agreed were tailored to the needs of the Greek counterparts based on their national strategy (where applicable), and **the needs as identified in the needs assessment were largely in line with the support required throughout the year**. Indeed, the low numbers of arrivals on the islands shifted EASO's support to mainland Greece, where there was a need to ensure the timely processing of applications for international protection. Due to COVID-19, the use of

¹⁴ EASO Needs Assessments, 2021.

remote modalities was expanded. Moreover, the authorities' reception and identification capacity remained under pressure, requiring an increased need for EASO's strategic and operational support. The relocation programme, to which EASO offers valuable support in coordination between multiple national and foreign authorities, partners and other actors (i.e., European Commission) continued in 2021 – and was even extended in 2022.

Nevertheless, **shifts in needs did occur over the course of 2021**. Stakeholders identified the following as factors which impacted on the needs: (a) the sudden changes in national legislation (i.e., Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD) on the designation of Turkey as a safe third country for five nationalities¹⁵); (b) the number of arrivals that was lower than anticipated (with small increases in August and October); (c) delays in the construction of the new Multi-Purpose Reception and Identification Centres (MPRICs) in Lesbos and Chios (now planned for 2022) and prioritisation of the MPRICs in Samos, Kos and Leros, among others. These shifting needs did not require an amendment of the OP, and **EASO's operations in Greece adapted to them in an effective, flexible and timely manner**, according to the majority of interviewed Greek authorities. For instance, EASO managed relatively easily to adapt to the new legislation (JMD on safe third country) which entailed further support to GAS with its implementation¹⁶ as well as a revision of EASO's internal data collection mechanism and its reporting and monitoring tools. This also suggests that the OP 2021 was flexible enough to accommodate changing needs and allow for internal adjustments to be made.

The subsequent sections go into greater depth on the relevance of each individual measure of the OP 2021.

3.1.1 Measure 1: Enhance the capacity of the Asylum Service and Appeals Authority to implement the asylum procedure efficiently and in a timely manner, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights of applicants for international protection towards the implementation of the EU Asylum acquis

Measure 1 is divided into five sub-measures. Sub-measure 1.0 involved the provision of strategic EASO support to GAS on the planning and management of the asylum system whereas sub-measures 1.1 to 1.4 refer to operational support to first instance (islands and mainland), Dublin procedure and second instance. EASO's support to the Greek asylum system has reached a more mature stage, involving the provision of **more strategic support with the aim of ensuring more sustainable, long-term results**. Within this context, EASO's operational support to the Greek asylum system remains of relevance and critical importance to meet EU standards in terms of efficient and quality asylum procedures.

EASO's project approach to the clearance of the backlog of thousands of applications for international protection was seen to be tailored to the needs of the Greek asylum system and was widely recognised as a good practice to be replicated in the future, within Greece or in other Member States.¹⁷

¹⁵ Joint Ministerial Decision 42799, Government Gazette 2425/B/7.6.2021.

¹⁶ As a result of the new JMD on safe third country, the GAS had to adjust workflows for asylum procedures, to inform asylum applicants on the impact of the JMD in their asylum cases and to postpone interviews until the issuance of the new standard operating procedures (SOPs) and the conclusion of relevant training to caseworkers.

¹⁷ See further below under section 4.2.

3.1.2 Measure 2: Enhance the capacity of the National Reception Authorities to manage and operate the National Reception System, towards the implementation of EU reception standards

Likewise, measure 2 is divided into four sub-measures. Sub-measure 2.0 involved the provision of strategic support to GSRAS, RIS and Directorate for the Protection of Asylum Seekers (DPAS)¹⁸ on the planning and management of the National Reception System, whereas sub-measures 2.1 and 2.2 refer to operational (field) support (first line and second line reception). Sub-measure 2.3 relates to the support provided to SSPUAM and MoLSA for the implementation of the National Strategy on UAMs. In the area of reception, EASO's support was critical to meet structural and immediate needs of the Greek reception system. EASO **flexibly adapted to the increased needs** and new priorities of the authorities in this area. As most of the other actors are phasing-out, Greek authorities rely greatly on EASO to assist them in assuming all responsibilities of reception management and effectively exercising them. The SSPUAM, which was newly established, had limited resources and a "heavy" work plan; therefore, the needs in place surpassed the planned inputs and EASO doubled its support to assist SSPUAM to build its structure. Another unpredicted event was a significant number of new arrivals after August 2021 which increased RIS's need for interpretation services; EASO satisfied the authorities requests, although not always as timely as the authorities would have hoped due to the last-minute nature of the requests.¹⁹

External factors that led to changes in the needs of the Greek authorities relative to what was planned in the OP 2021 were: (a) the fact that the "unified registration procedure" was partially implemented in 2021 – the OP 2021 foresaw (under sub-measures 2.1 and 2.2) a transfer of personnel (from GAS to RIS) and extra support (training) to RIS to assist with taking over asylum registrations; however, this did not happen, and (b) the change in legislation and the planned transfer of competence of guardianship from the MoLSA to the SSPUAM; EASO provided support in the transition period, providing embedded staff in both Ministries which facilitated communication between the different departments and offices throughout the hand-over.²⁰

Finally, in 2021, EASO supported MoMA (in particular the Deputy Minister's area of responsibility) on community engagement and early pre-integration activities; a need which was not specifically foreseen in the OP 2021. A specific sub-measure on support to MoMA for the development and implementation of a national pre-integration strategy is included in the OP 2022-2024.

It is worth mentioning that interviewees did not identify any gaps, in terms of needs, which were not addressed by EASO during 2021. For future planning, interviewed field staff mentioned increased needs for IT assistants and legal officers to support site managers.

3.1.3 Measure 3: Enhance the capacity of the Greek Authorities and other involved actors to manage and implement relocation from Greece under the common agreed procedure with participating Member States

The voluntary relocation schemes for UAMs, vulnerable families with children and beneficiaries of international protection were launched in 2020. Therefore, activities planned for 2021 under measure 3 were a continuation of similar activities already undertaken by EASO in the previous year. The relocation programme was expected to end in 2021, however it was extended until March 2022. Sub-measures 3.0, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 addressed the whole range of identified needs of each stakeholder: the Greek authorities, European Commission and other Member States. EASO, through

¹⁸ DPAS was abolished in January 2021 following a restructuring of MoMA and its competences were transferred to RIS (Presidential Decree 106/2020, Government Gazette 255/A/23.12.2020).

¹⁹ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

²⁰ Based on interviews.

its capacity to ensure the timely and efficient processing of asylum applications responded to the needs of the Greek authorities by implementing a wide spectrum of activities: best interest assessments (BIA), interviews with eligible candidates, matching exercises, files for outgoing Dublin requests (Article 17(2)) and transfers, communication with pledging Member States, supporting security missions and arranging transfers. Interviewees agreed that EASO's support responded to a critical need to facilitate coordination and flow of information between all involved stakeholders: European Commission, asylum services of participating Member States, eligible candidates for relocation, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing services to asylum applicants/beneficiaries of international protection and international organisations participating in the implementation of the scheme (IOM, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)). EASO invested in the success of this EU programme by contributing directly and indirectly to needs as they occurred.

3.1.4 Measure 4: Contribution to the dedicated Taskforce for improved reception and asylum management, including the Joint Pilot Project for a Multipurpose Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos

Measure 4 is divided into three sub-measures. Among them, 4.2 is geographically restricted to the island of Lesbos while 4.0 and 4.1 relate to EASO's support to the strategic planning of an integrated reception and asylum management framework and the establishment and management of MPRICs. All sub-measures flow from the MoU signed between the EU Commission and Greece. However, due to the delays in the implementation of the "unified registration procedure" on the islands, the limited progress in the development of a national reception strategy and the delays/blockages in the tender award for the construction of the new sites in Lesbos and Chios, joint agreed inputs in the OP 2021 were evaluated as having only partially been relevant to the actual needs of the Greek authorities. Moreover, although EL-TF 4, by its title, seems to include support measures for asylum and reception management, in fact, based on its reports, EASO's support under EL-TF 4 related to reception management only. It is also worth noting that in May, the Emergency Assistance (EMAS) grant for the new MPRICs in Kos, Leros and Samos was merged with the EMAS grant for Chios and Lesbos.²¹ EASO, at the request of the European Commission, provided technical advice to all five planned MPRICs.

Finally, there was a high degree of relevance of sub-measure 4.1, corresponding to the increased needs of the Greek authorities in relation to the operation and management of the temporary RIC in Mavrovouni. EASO provided much needed support not only in terms of human resources – different profiles were deployed – but also in terms of equipment and infrastructure. EASO also flexibly adapted to the needs on the ground. For instance, EASO supported in the coordination and implementation of fast-track exercises for the issuance of resident permits and travel documents to beneficiaries of international protection.²²

3.2 Effectiveness

In terms of effectiveness, the EASO-Greece OP 2021 achieved its intended outcomes overall to a satisfactory level. Even if given individual targets under each measure were not always met, it is important to "read" the results from the perspective of the overall impact that EASO had on the situation in Greece.

Key internal and external factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the OP 2021 are:

²¹ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

²² EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

Internal factors:

- The re-structuring of EASO's internal management;²³
- The development of EASO's internal reporting tools (Operational Data Collection (ODC));²⁴
- Better communication channels and internal meetings between EASO's Greece Office and field staff were established in 2021;
- Regular Steering Committee meetings with the Greek Authorities and other stakeholders to discuss the implementation of the OP and plan future steps took place;
- The appointment of focal points for specific thematic areas by the Greek authorities to liaise with EASO and ensure effective operational coordination, implementation and monitoring; and
- Working groups (for instance on vulnerability or relocation) were set up between focal points of EASO, the Greek authorities and other actors (if relevant) to coordinate actions.²⁵

External factors:

- The reduction in the number of irregular arrivals of third country nationals in Greece;
- The new legal framework (L 4825/2021) introducing speedier asylum procedures; and
- The wider use of the remote modalities in the asylum system due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, **specific challenges** arose during the implementation of the OP 2021 that were addressed to a certain extent by EASO; key lessons can be derived from these.

- **Need for detailed data:** For the effective implementation of Projects North and South, segregated data on the number of pending applications per accommodation site were needed, which could not easily be extracted. EASO supported the GAS with this mapping exercise as part of a needs assessment exercise prior to the launching of the Projects. On the other hand, a precondition for EASO's support to relocation from Greece was the establishment of a pool of candidates eligible for relocation. Greek authorities were able to draw up these lists; however, the delays in their drafting and delivery to EASO affected the smooth operation of relevant support measures. This challenge has not been tackled.
- **Need for enhanced communication:** EASO facilitated or participated in different coordination meetings with the Greek authorities and other stakeholders where suitable. In this respect, the OP 2021 contributed to an enhanced cooperation between EASO and Greece. EASO, through the use of its embedded personnel across all services/departments of MoMA (and MoLSA), *de facto* facilitated inter-office communication when needed. In addition, other tools used jointly by EASO and GAS, for instance a file-sharing SharePoint® site, helped the coordination across locations (caseworkers, Regional Asylum Offices (RAOs), EASO field staff) in asylum procedures.
- **Response to COVID-19 restrictions:** Due to governmental measures against COVID-19, face-to-face services by the GAS were suspended (with certain exceptions) during the first quarter. This affected also face-to-face interviews within Project North. In addition, in case of COVID-19 outbreaks in an accommodation site, certain services, other than asylum procedures, provided in these sites were suspended. Finally, irregularities in the procedures occurred when

²³ Three Measure Coordinators (on asylum, reception and relocation) were appointed as well as Quality and Procedures Focal Points for each measure. The PMO was integrated within operations to strengthen the collaboration and the project management approach. The Results Framework detailing the intended outputs and outcomes along with indicators and targets was also revised in April 2021 to set targets for indicators based on the outcomes of the inception period, add new indicators and introduce a new methodology (tool) to measure progress under each measure.

²⁴ The ODC tools collect data complementary to narrative reports on vulnerability, information provision and UAMs. This was relevant to the effectiveness of sub-measures 2.1 and 4.1 on EASO's support to first-line reception and sub-measure 2.2 on EASO's support to second-line reception.

²⁵ This was much appreciated by the deployed staff who had often felt "cut off" from EASO's Greece Office based in Athens.

asylum applicants tested positive to COVID-19 prior to their interviews. To the extent possible, challenges were partially addressed through the use of remote technologies.

- **Discontinuation of services due to the end of contracts of temporary agency workers:** In 2021, more than 94% of the EASO human resources deployed in Greece were temporary agency workers; the majority of them were seconded to the Greek authorities.²⁶ Given the inherent limitations of this deployment scheme (short-term contracts with option of renewal), gaps may occur between contracts or new recruitments. This, according to interviewees, has an impact on the productivity and motivation of the team and on the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the results.²⁷ This was partially justified during the time of hand-over from one recruitment agency to the other.²⁸ EASO, with a view to further mitigate the consequences of the simultaneous expiry of the contracts of temporary agency workers with the same profile, opted, in the new recruitments, for different start dates (rotation system).²⁹
- **No alternative for the provision of interpretation services:** In the OP 2021, the gradual phasing-out of EASO's support for interpretation services was foreseen by handing them over to the Greek authorities. However, due to the delays in the tender for the provision of interpretation services to MoMA, EASO continued to support Greece with interpretation services. In fact, the OP 2022-2024 provides for the continuation of such support by EASO.

3.2.1 Measure 1: Enhance the capacity of the Asylum Service and Appeals Authority to implement the asylum procedure efficiently and in a timely manner, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights of applicants for international protection towards the implementation of the EU Asylum acquis

The main trends in the support provided by EASO to the Greek asylum system as per measure 1 were the shift to the provision of more strategic support and tailored capacity building to GAS and AA through quality review procedures, while maintaining a high efficiency rate in assisting GAS to clear the backlog of pending asylum cases. It is clear, based on this evaluation's evidence, that this was a truly common goal for EASO's operations in Greece and GAS which was relevant throughout 2021; this element of alignments in terms of priorities between the parties added significantly to the results in measure 1 and the effectiveness of EASO's support in this field. Likewise, the levels of satisfaction shared between responsible authorities, beneficiaries and EASO are proof of the effectiveness and EU added value stemming from EASO's operations in Greece (see section 3.5 for details).

In 2021, EASO case analysts and GAS undertook a substantive amount of quality reviews on finalised cases (i.e., interviews, opinions drafted by EASO personnel and decisions). This enabled EASO to identify concrete needs to be addressed by capacity-building activities (workshops). Tools and standard operating procedures (SOPs) had to be adjusted by the GAS with EASO's support, after the entry into force of the new JMD designating Turkey as a safe third country for five nationalities. SOPs on the remote modality were shared with EASO field staff at the beginning of Project South, but in their view more details on administrative tasks were needed.³⁰ A good practice established in Project South was the launch by EASO and use by all relevant stakeholders of a SharePoint® tool for scheduling remote interviews. This also helped to share data and extract statistics.

²⁶ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

²⁷ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

²⁸ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

²⁹ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

³⁰ Recommendation 3 of the evaluation of the OP 2020 invited EASO to expand the use of remote settings on the mainland and after an evaluation, develop appropriate guidelines. The drafting of SOPs on remote technologies falls within this context.

3.2.1.1 Sub-measure 1.0: Support the Asylum Service to strategically plan and manage the Asylum System

Both targets relating to this measure were satisfactorily achieved.³¹ The average number of **training sessions** organised/supported by EASO and attended by each GAS staff and operational personnel deployed by EASO in Greece was 3.43 instead of the targeted 3.74. It is noteworthy that EASO jointly with GAS developed and implemented a detailed, large scale training plan with various types of capacity-building activities involving both GAS officials and EASO deployed staff.³² For instance, all caseworkers received at least one on-the-job coaching session in 2021 by EASO and GAS staff.³³ EASO team leaders as well as GAS quality focal points participated in train-the-trainer sessions with the aim of creating a national pool of trainers.³⁴ Moreover, the target of organising 84 **coordination meetings** between Greek authorities, relevant stakeholders and EASO was achieved by the end of September 2021 (in total 130% of the goal was achieved).³⁵

3.2.1.2 Sub-measure 1.1: Support the Asylum Service to process applications for international protection at first instance on the islands

In 2021, EASO's support was shifted from asylum procedures on the islands to asylum procedures on the mainland due to the lower number of arrivals on the islands and the clearance of the backlog achieved in 2020 (a few hundred cases were pending at the beginning of 2021). Results under measure 1.1 were **slightly below target since they were calculated on the basis of a higher anticipated number of arrivals on the islands** (registrations: 4,653 instead of 5,100, interviews: 4,496 instead of 5,400).

Given the lower workload on the islands and in light of the increasing needs on the mainland (in preparation for the Project South), a number of registration assistants were moved from the islands to the mainland at the beginning of the year. In addition, a number of caseworkers were also re-assigned from the islands in order to support Project South on the mainland. After the end of Project North and the reduction of the backlog, EASO gradually reduced the number of caseworkers.

Restrictions to face-to-face interviews were imposed due to COVID-19 and remote interviews conducted from Lesbos, Chios, Leros and Kos ensured continuity of operations. In addition, caseworkers located on the islands, given the lower workload in most of the year, conducted more interviews remotely with applicants on other islands and on the mainland.³⁶ Their physical presence on the islands allowed for a degree of flexibility in the event of a new increase in the number of arrivals. For instance, in November, caseworkers on the islands prioritised the interviews of the new arrivals.

Finally, the relatively low number of opinions drafted as compared to the initial planning (3,367 instead of 5,700 that was planned for 2021) is explained by the application of the safe third country concept to most asylum cases from June 2021. The majority of asylum applications in Greece during 2020 pertained to applicants from Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Bangladesh.³⁷ The new JMD that was issued in June 2021 and designated Turkey as a safe third country for applicants from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia was estimated to

³¹ In the revised Results Framework, there was an adaptation of the above indicators. Indicator 1 was calculated on the ratio of the number of actual training participants in relation to the actual target population. Indicator 2 did not take into account internal and *ad hoc* meetings.

³² The training plan provided for: (a) national train-the-trainer courses (b) on the job coaching sessions; (c) training sessions on the Management in the Asylum Context module; and (d) support in the delivery of national training sessions, as needed.

³³ Evaluations from coaching sessions were very positive, with over 90% satisfaction rates.

³⁴ EASO, internal training data, 2022.

³⁵ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021. In total, 109 coordination meetings took place in 2021 under sub-measure 1.0.

³⁶ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021

³⁷ Eurostat, [Five main citizenships of first-time asylum applicants](#), 2020.

affect the status and the procedures of 67% of asylum applicants in the country.³⁸ Their cases were examined based on admissibility criteria. GAS and EASO agreed that caseworkers would not draft opinions on these cases, thus resulting in lower numbers of opinions.³⁹

3.2.1.3 Sub-measure 1.2: Support to the Asylum Service to process applications for international protection on mainland

Overall in 2021, the number of registrations (6,336 instead of 8,000) and opinions drafted (5,829 instead of 13,200) on the mainland were lower than planned whereas the number of interviews were higher (16,167 instead of 13,200).

In Q1, registrations, interviews and opinions were lower than planned due to the outbreak of COVID-19, which suspended face-to-face services, such as interviews in the asylum clusters in sites of Project North.

In Q2, higher results were achieved thanks to; (a) the new workflow for the efficient mapping of pending applications (numbers and locations); (b) the assessment of needs (through joint site visits of EASO/GAS/RIS/IOM to reception sites in Attica and the surrounding region) during the planning of Project South⁴⁰; (c) the allocation of additional resources which increased the processing capacity of asylum applications; and (d) the extensive use of the remote modalities which enabled the continuation of the operation despite COVID-19 restrictions.

In Q3, interviews conducted by EASO far exceeded the initial planning (140%). This can be explained by the implementation of the new JMD on safe third country, which resulted in shorter interview slots (on admissibility), thus allowing for more interviews to be scheduled for each caseworker. This was also the result of no opinions being drafted by caseworkers, as mentioned above. In addition, since the number of arrivals remained low on the islands, caseworkers from the islands continued to provide support to interviews on the mainland.

In November, a Circular of the General Secretary for Migration Policy on the implementation of articles 39 paragraph 1 and 46 of Law 4636/2019 was issued, by virtue of which the lodging of asylum applications on the mainland falls under RIS's responsibility with the exception of specific cases (subsequent applications, vulnerable persons including UAMs and persons with a referral documentation from the Hellenic Police) that continue to be registered in RAOs. This impacted on low numbers of registrations during Q4 (a 40% decrease in December).⁴¹

Project North was concluded as planned in September 2021 with positive results. At the time of writing, only one asylum cluster (out of seven) was still operational in Lagadikia LTAC for the remaining interviews and to address *ad hoc* needs as they emerge. Despite different challenges,⁴² Project North boosted the capacity of RAOs in examining in a timely and efficient manner the pending applications for residents in the Northern sites. Indicative of the strong impact of EASO's support towards an effective and sustainable asylum system was the shortening of the length of the proceedings by years; interviews originally scheduled for 2023 and 2024 were already being conducted in 2021.

³⁸ Greek Council for Refugees, [Press Release](#): Decision declaring Turkey a "safe third country" brought before Greek Council of State, 7 October 2021.

³⁹ On the islands, applicants originating from Afghanistan, Somalia Syria and Pakistan submit the majority of asylum applications; thus, opinions drafted under Measure 1.1 were similarly affected by the issuance of the JMD on safe third country.

⁴⁰ Implementation of Project South started in Q2. Project North was implemented in parallel.

⁴¹ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁴² Interviewees identified as challenges: (a) the changing profile of the population residing in the Northern sites (different languages spoken which had an impact on interpretation needs); (b) the level of communication between EASO staff and RAOs; and (c) the level of engagement of local authorities with Project North.

EASO replicated the project approach adopted for the clearance of the backlog of asylum applications in the North to the residents of LTACs in the South.⁴³ **Project South** was launched in April 2021 and was still ongoing at the time of writing. A significant difference, based on lessons learned from Project North is the use of existing (rather than new) resources (re-allocation of human resources) and spaces provided by the Greek authorities.⁴⁴ The majority of interviews were not being conducted face to face but remotely with caseworkers situated in different locations. Where an asylum case was pending in the RAO of Piraeus, it could be the case that the caseworker assigned to this case was situated in Lesbos and the asylum applicant resides in Ritsona LTAC. For the facilitation of all processes (before, during and after interviews) EASO deployed administrative assistants/flow managers in the selected LTACs (Malakasa, Inofyta, Ritsona, Corinth and Thiva) to facilitate the procedures between asylum applicants residing in the above five accommodation centres of the southern mainland, caseworkers and RAOs. EASO also deployed personnel in the RAOs of Piraeus to conduct face-to-face interviews with asylum applicants residing in urban settings.

Projects North and South were large scale projects that entailed the participation of different authorities at local, regional and central level. For instance, Project South involves the participation of five LTACs, three RAOs and caseworkers from five islands. This is a positive precedent that can be capitalised on for the future in terms of the systematisation of a communications and cooperation channel between all these different authorities.

3.2.1.4 Sub-measure 1.3: Support to the Dublin Unit to process outgoing and information requests according to the Dublin Regulation criteria

Overall, EASO's support to the DU remained stable during 2021 and without significant challenges. The results were satisfactory, i.e., 2,593 outgoing Dublin requests were performed instead of the 2,400 foreseen for 2021. In Q1 the results were lower than anticipated due to the move of the DU to new premises and the lack of access to the DubliNet system from all office workstations (and laptops during teleworking).⁴⁵ In the following months, results picked up. The number of outgoing requests for March 2021 increased since it included re-sent take charge requests following the conclusion of a new contract with the travel agency for transfers (which was lacking in previous months).⁴⁶ For the calculation of results under this sub-measure, outgoing requests related to relocation (sub-measure 3.2) were also taken into account.⁴⁷ Targets set, according to interviewees, have integrated this parameter. It is also worth mentioning that the EASO-embedded personnel in the DU processed more than 3,000 information requests.⁴⁸

3.2.1.5 Sub-measure 1.4: Support to the Appeals Authority to process applications for international protection at second instance

In recent years, EASO has provided support to the AA with the deployment, among other profiles, of research officers (rapporteurs) who prepare essays for the appeals lodged. The number of rapporteurs deployed by EASO to the AA is additional to the number of rapporteurs that the AA employs (21 in total). In 2021, there was a significant decrease in the number of EASO rapporteurs:

⁴³ See also relevant Recommendation in the evaluation of the OP 2020 (recommendation 4 on replicating Project North, keeping in mind the different contexts that implementation modalities need to be adapted to).

⁴⁴ In Project North, specific recruitment was made by EASO for the interviews and containers were provided by EASO to Asylum Clusters within Northern LTACs. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, there were some delays in certain locations of the Project North. In such cases, lessons learned indicated that it is useful to have an alternative, such as re-allocation of staff. EASO Internal documentation related to Project North.

⁴⁵ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁴⁶ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁴⁷ 32.1% of the total number of outgoing requests are related to relocation (831 out of 2,593). EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁴⁸ According to an interviewee.

from 12 in 2020 to 8 in 2021 (and finally 6 at the end of 2021).⁴⁹ Therefore, the outputs achieved were below the target set (3,250 essays) since they corresponded to the inputs (number of rapporteurs) and to the number of appeals referred to them to draft an essay. Out of the 17,470 appeals submitted in 2021, EASO rapporteurs received 1,915 appeals and delivered 1,840 essays.⁵⁰ EASO support to the AA also included two statisticians and five to six administrative assistants. EASO was willing to deploy more personnel, if needed; however, the deployed personnel met the needs of the Authority, according to the AA.

During 2021, EASO invested more in the capacity building of members of independent appeal committees (judges).⁵¹ Nevertheless, the results were slightly not met, as there was a lower-than-planned ratio between the number of judges and staff that had attended professional development sessions organised/supported by EASO.⁵² That being said, EASO managed to increase the degree of effectiveness of support to the AA through professional development sessions and thematic workshops on new COIs (Afghanistan, Iraq). EASO focused on more systematic and less *ad hoc* training.⁵³ For instance, in November 2021, EASO organised training for rapporteurs on article 15C of the Qualification Directive, Evidence and Credibility Assessment and planned to repeat similar workshops in 2022. In November, EASO signed a MoU with the National School of the Judiciary, establishing a framework for more tailored support of EASO to the needs of Greek judges working in the field of international protection. The results of this agreement, not measurable at the time of writing, were compatible with the overall target set for the provision of more strategic support on asylum procedures.

3.2.2 Measure 2: Enhance the capacity of the National Reception Authorities to manage and operate the National Reception System, towards the implementation of EU reception standards

As a result of the decrease in the numbers of the hosted population, the Greek authorities interviewed were of the opinion that in 2021 it was time to focus more on **quality elements** in the reception system. EASO holds a unique role here through its capacity-building activities and the development of tools.

As regards capacity building, EASO jointly with RIS agreed on the training plan for 2021 which involved training on the induction course on reception ('Induction to Reception' module) which was jointly elaborated and translated into the Greek language.⁵⁴ This induction course was taken by first line and second line reception staff as well as staff deployed at central services, including interpreters.⁵⁵

In terms of tool development, the most important achievement under this measure was the progress made with regards to the goal set by the Greece OP 2020, i.e., the establishment of an operational National Reception Monitoring Framework. More particularly, the assessment of reception conditions (ARC) tool was pilot rolled out in four facilities in 2021.⁵⁶ Once fully rolled out,

⁴⁹EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁵⁰ MoMA, Information note on International Protection, December 2021 (Annex). EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021. Between 15.9.2021 and 15.11.2021, there were zero rapporteurs embedded in the AA as a result of the end of their contracts. In November, 6 instead of 7 rapporteurs were assigned; one resigned.

⁵¹ Recommendation 8 of the evaluation of the OP 2020 invited EASO to expand support at second instance through professional development of the judges, among others.

⁵² EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁵³EASO Evaluation management responses.

⁵⁴ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁵⁵ Indicatively, based on EASO reports, 94 RIS reception official were enrolled in EASO training. In total 115 RIS officers/officials were trained and 352 EASO officers/assistants/interpreters were enrolled.

⁵⁶ The ARC tool was tested in the LTACs of Schisto and Ritsona in central Greece and the LTACs of Katsikas and Nea Kavala in northern Greece.

it is anticipated that it will enhance the capacity of RIS to self-assess reception conditions.⁵⁷ Moreover, EASO provided valuable support to RIS in the development of thematic SOPs and guidelines with the scope of harmonising and mainstreaming reception procedures across RICs/LTACs. Furthermore, EASO established a joint working group (EASO/RIS) on vulnerability, aiming at implementing a harmonised approach and standardised tools for both RIS and EASO embedded staff.⁵⁸

At operational level, EASO continued to provide substantial (in numbers), continuous and adequate (in terms of expertise) support to RIS with the management of RICs and the LTACs throughout 2021.

Other **key achievements** in the reception area which can be attributed to EASO support are: (a) the simulation exercise “Promachos” (real time evacuation operation), organised by GSRAS and EASO with the participation of six RICs;⁵⁹ and (b) the launch of a national tracing and protection mechanism for unaccompanied children, including a 24/7 hotline by the SSPUAM with EASO’s support and in collaboration with UNHCR and other partners.⁶⁰

Although targets were met (94%) and tangible results were achieved, EASO encountered under this measure the **biggest challenges in the implementation of the OP 2021**; most of them were outside its control. Stakeholders identified the following gaps: (a) the absence of a national strategy on reception which hindered efficiency; (b) the shortage of national staff employed by the Greek State in the RIS and the SSPUAM; and (c) the need for enhanced coordination on exchange of information and data sharing between different administrative authorities at central and local level and between involved actors in the field that provide complementary services to the same residents.⁶¹

Other challenges were linked to the implementation of the embedded model in reception support. All relevant stakeholders stressed the crucial contribution of EASO personnel in the daily operation of the sites; where one of member of staff was missing due to an end of his/her short-term contract, a bottleneck was created in the provision of services, especially if there was no other person deployed with the same profile.⁶² In addition, based on different sources, EASO seconded staff to RICs/LTACs was sometimes assigned different tasks to those in their job descriptions. EASO in cooperation with RIS initiated a review process of the job descriptions for all profiles during 2021 with a view to amend the profiles.⁶³

3.2.2.1 Sub-measure 2.0: Support the National Reception Authorities to strategically plan and manage the National Reception System

Given the high number of newly recruited personnel by EASO for the implementation of reception support and the increased needs for training of RIS personnel, EASO delivered a significant number of training sessions on thematic areas, such as reception of vulnerable people, communication and

⁵⁷ See also Recommendation 7 of the evaluation of the OP 2020 whereby EASO is invited to focus its support to authorities with the implementation of a monitoring tool for reception conditions.

⁵⁸ Based on EASO documents, 8 meetings of the Working Group took place focusing on the development of a tracking tool for vulnerable individual cases.

⁵⁹ <https://promachos2021.migration.gov.gr/en/>

⁶⁰ UNHCR, [Joint press release](#): Greece launches national tracing and protection mechanism for unaccompanied children in precarious conditions, 6 April 2021.

⁶¹ Based on feedback received from stakeholders in Ritsona and Lagadikia LTACs.

⁶² On the day of the site visit to Ritsona LTAC, two officers were absent; one RIS administration assistant was on sick leave and for one out of four EASO reception assistant his/her contract was terminated. As a result, administrative documents piled up on the desk of the absent RIS assistant, waiting to get a protocol number when he/she returned and residents were queuing in front of the reception container.

⁶³ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021

information provision, among others.⁶⁴ EASO achieved 80% of the target set on the average number of training sessions organised/supported by EASO which were attended by reception authorities staff and operational EASO staff (1.48 was the average number of training sessions/person instead of 1.84). Since the reception system was undergoing a lot of changes, 24 coordination meetings were held instead of the eight foreseen. The RIS-Headquarters (HQ) helpdesk (Queries desk), supported by EASO embedded legal officers, continued to provide valuable guidance to RIS field staff by replying to queries on legal and operational matters; 99% of all queries received were responded to within a month. EASO embedded staff also assisted in the consolidation of all queries and replies by developing and disseminating four newsletters to all Directors of RICs and LTACs.⁶⁵ Visits of the Joint Monitoring Committee led by IOM, with the participation of EASO and other actors took place in Q1, Q2 and Q3 to assess the reception conditions of the LTACs (14 monitoring visits – no target set). In addition, joint monitoring visits by RIS/EASO to roll out the ARC tool were held in Q2 and Q3 (4 monitoring visits in total – no target set).

3.2.2.2 Sub-measure 2.1: Support the National Reception Authorities to manage first-line reception

EASO supported first-line reception through the deployment of multidisciplinary teams (reception assistants to the site managers, reception assistants/UAMs, reception assistants/transfers, reception assistants/communication/info, legal officers, legal officers/UAM, vulnerability assistants, logistics assistants) and the provision of interpretation services in the RICs of Samos, Chios, Kos and Leros, as well as the RIC in Evros region. The planned results were not fully met since there was a decrease in the number of residents in RICs and a low number of new arrivals. Increased assessments and information sessions were conducted in the context of *ad hoc* activities, such as relocation process from the old RIC to the new MPRIC in Samos. More specifically, EASO supported with 2,238 individual assessments (target was set at 2,547), with information provision to 13,591 beneficiaries (target was set at 13,658) and with 2,238 referrals (target was set at 3,111).

3.2.2.3 Sub-measure 2.2: Support the National Authorities to manage second-line reception

EASO fully reached the target of providing support to RIS with the management of second-line reception facilities, through the deployment of embedded personnel and interpreters to all 31 (currently 27) LTACs in northern and southern Greece, with special focus on site management (100% of LTACs were supported by EASO deployed staff).

In 2020, site managers were appointed in the LTACs. EASO supported each site manager with two reception assistants. In 2021, they were gradually vested with more duties and competences due to the phasing out of other actors in the field but without a parallel provision for an increase in administrative staff (i.e., civil servants from RIS). EASO continued to provide support to RIS in its take-over of different responsibilities within those listed in the OP.

As mentioned above, EASO staff boosted the management capacity of the LTACs and achieved excellent results in the field, based on the level of satisfaction of the stakeholders interviewed. Even if the number of the deployed EASO reception assistants per LTAC is relatively small (two to three per centre), their deployment in the field had a significant impact given that: (a) at the beginning there was no RIS staff in the LTACs, except for the site managers; (b) site managers often lacked the hands-on experience and expertise (migration management); and (c) EASO staff had previous hands-on experience in the field – sometimes even in the same location, having been employed by a different stakeholder (NGO, IO).

Even though the OP 2021 defines the support to be offered to second-line reception, no relevant indicators, were set by EASO's PMO to monitor the implementation of results under EL-REC 2.2.

⁶⁴ See also recommendation 5 of the OP 2020 evaluation.

⁶⁵ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

The ODC tool, which was introduced to record the relevant activities under measure 2.2, was only implemented at the end of 2021. Consequently, it is not possible to evaluate in quantitative terms the outcomes of the activities under measure 2.2, nor to draw conclusions on whether the eventual assignment of EASO seconded staff to tasks other than those provided for in the terms of reference had an effect on productivity.⁶⁶

3.2.2.4 Sub-measure 2.3: Support to the National Authorities to implement the National Strategy on Unaccompanied Minors

The SSPUAM was established in 2020 and EASO provided many levels of support with regard to unaccompanied minors - in relocation and the reception of UAMs, at central level. No targets were set for 2021 with respect to the selected output-level indicators. EASO supported the SSPUAM in all four pillars of the National Strategy and offered training to 33 participants from EASO staff and permanent staff of the SSPUAM. The level of EASO's support under this measure was characterised by the Greek authorities as "excellent". The following contributing factors to the achievement of results under EL-REC 2.3 and EL-REL 3 were identified by interviewees: (a) the flexibility of EASO (i.e. for remote interviews or additional personnel in the limits of the OP); (b) the establishment of focal points (for every activity) and coordination meetings; and (c) the quality of the staff who are evaluated as "effective", "committed", "experts that can deliver".

In 2020, EASO seconded personnel supported the SSPUAM with the drafting of the legislation on abolishing protective custody and setting out the general lines and key pillars of the National Strategy on UAMs. In the OP 2021, it was foreseen that EASO would support the SSPUAM with the implementation of the National Strategy and the MoLSA with the management of the National Guardianship and Foster Care programmes. Both Greek authorities were satisfied with the level of EASO's support to these activities. In 2021, the National tracing and protection mechanism for unaccompanied children became operational (falling under the first of the four pillars). EASO supported the authorities in seeking funding opportunities for the activities undertaken by SSPUAM and MoLSA and prepared a note on alternative funding sources related to the National Strategy.

Moreover, an innovative mentorship programme was launched by the SSPUAM with EASO's support, whereby former UAMs provided guidance, motivation, support and role modelling to current UAMs in Greece.⁶⁷ EASO seconded personnel also provided targeted legal support and advice on: (a) drafting the legal framework for the transfer of responsibility of Guardianship and Representation of UAMs and separated children from MoLSA to SSPUAM; (b) the revision of the guardianship system for UAMs in Greece; (c) the design of the regulating framework of the operation of shelters for UAMs; (d) the design of the content of a national database for UAMs; (e) the implementation of the age assessment procedure; and (f) the management of particular cases of UAMs and on any other legal issues related to UAMs that may arise in the field of reception conditions and asylum procedures.⁶⁸

3.2.3 Measure 3: Enhance the capacity of the Greek Authorities and other involved actors to manage and implement relocation from Greece under the common agreed procedure with participating Member States

The relocation programme from Greece to other Member States which ran from mid-2020 and throughout 2021 was effective in terms of the results achieved (2,211 people had been relocated

⁶⁶ Based on EASO reports and feedback from interviewees, qualified staff with extended expertise in the fields had to undertake administrative tasks, such as food distribution or no tasks at all.

⁶⁷ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89933>

⁶⁸ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

as at 31.12.2021)⁶⁹ and the capacity building provided to the Greek authorities with training and tools (e.g., templates and guidance drafted and harmonised in cooperation between EASO and UNHCR, a relocation case management system - REDAMAS). Also, an improvement in the timely coordination between different competent authorities (GAS, DU and SSPUAM) was largely achieved thanks to EASO's support.

Factors that hindered the effectiveness of the results achieved, as identified by interviewed stakeholders were: (a) the non-timely receipt of the pool of eligible candidates which even caused monthly delays in the process; and (b) the strict criteria for eligibility set by Member States,⁷⁰ which could not cover most profiles of the refugee population in Greece. Delays were also caused by the pledging Member States, once the matching exercise had been done and an outgoing request had been sent. Other challenges that needed to be addressed related to the challenges linked to the guardianship system in Greece, the lack of spaces for interviews and applicable COVID-19 restrictions (medical checks, quarantines).⁷¹

Moreover, bilateral relocation schemes concluded with Portugal and France –and not supported by EASO- were implemented at the same time which created a **duplication of efforts**.

3.2.3.1 Sub-measure 3.0: Support the Greek authorities to coordinate relocation activities

Given that the relocation scheme was expected to end in 2021, there was no target set for 2021; EASO continued its capacity-building activities on the basis of the needs identified and managed to cover all needs for training, including those that exceptionally came up before a new team took over at the end of 2021. Training sessions were delivered on BIA, assessment and interviews for vulnerable persons and beneficiaries of international protection. Moreover, information sessions on the use of the new SharePoint® site were included in the calculation of results under indicator 3.0.1 on the number of relocation authorities' staff and operational personnel deployed by EASO who had received training (in total 133 for 2021). Moreover, a significant number of coordination meetings with Member States, the European Commission, Greek Authorities (SSPUAM, GAS, DU) and other stakeholders were conducted (82 in total instead of the 31 foreseen).

3.2.3.2 Sub-measure 3.1: Support the Greek authorities to conduct relocation interviews and assessments

As set out above, EASO experienced significant delays in the processing of the UAM caseload due to the lack of a pool of eligible candidates for relocation referred by the Greek authorities. EASO provided support in February 2021 with a registration exercise of unregistered UAMs in Attica to possibly identify eligible candidates. It also supported SSPUAM in the consolidation of lists of eligible UAMs and families with vulnerable children.⁷² The lower results (447 assessments instead of 700) were mainly due to external factors, such as the withdrawal of 250 pledges from Portugal, the reduced capacity of Metadrasí to provide guardians⁷³ and the limited space in the RAO of Attica for interviews. Internal factors that had an impact on the effectiveness of this measure included the lack of interpreters for the relocation interviews in December⁷⁴ and the limited availability of EASO embedded staff. In December, only two BIA were conducted; many were transferred to the Q1 of

⁶⁹ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁷⁰ The Fundamental Rights Agency recommended to Member States to make eligibility criteria less stringent (e.g., limiting eligibility to specific nationalities, date of arrival or certain ages) in order for identification of eligible children to be possible in practice. FRA, [Relocation of unaccompanied children from Greece](#) - FRA input on the initiative of the European Commission and a group of Member States to relocate unaccompanied children, 17 March 2020.

⁷¹ Based on feedback of interviewees and EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁷² EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁷³ Metadrasí is an NGO running a program (Guardianship Network for Unaccompanied Minors) that offers guardians to UAMs. It has an extensive network of guardians in place.

⁷⁴ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

2022. In terms of relocation assessments, the results were better (301 assessments instead of 320 foreseen). However, the same restrictions as detailed above applied.

3.2.3.3 Sub-measure 3.2: Support the European Commission to propose and agree with Member States the persons eligible for relocation

EASO led the relocation matching process in support of the Greek authorities and European Commission. The results achieved with regards to the number of candidates matched are satisfactory (993 instead of 1,020). It is worth noting that a parallel system of bilateral relocation schemes with France and Portugal was running (EASO was not involved in this). Consequently, it occurred that candidates, although matched with pledges of Member States under the EU relocation scheme, did not complete the procedure since they had already been relocated through the other scheme, thus causing additional work. In relation to the low number of outgoing Dublin requests (831 instead of 1,020), it should be noted that the DU is not involved in the relocation scheme for the third eligible category, i.e., the beneficiaries of international protection;⁷⁵ so the numbers relating to this indicator cannot be compared to the number of candidates matched for relocation.

3.2.3.4 Sub-measure 3.3: Support pledging Member States in conducting required selection missions

EASO managed to support all interpretation requests made by Member States, even at short notice and considering the COVID-19 restrictions (100% of selection missions/interviews conducted with EASO support upon request).

3.2.4 Measure 4: Improve the contribution to the dedicated Taskforce for improved reception and asylum management, including the Joint Pilot Project for a Multipurpose Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos

The structure and outputs of this measure reflect EASO's project approach to Greek operations. Given the circumstances unforeseen at the time of the design of the OP 2021 (i.e., increased flows in Lesbos, delays in the closure of the Mavrovouni RIC and in the opening of the new MPRICs), EASO's support, especially under sub-measure 4.1, was crucial for the effectiveness of the reception system (and asylum system, under a different measure) in Lesbos.

3.2.4.1 Sub-measure 4.0: Support the Task Force to strategically plan and implement an integrated reception and asylum management framework

At the European Commission's request, EASO provided comments on the Draft General Regulations of Operation for MPRICs. EASO participated in all 11 coordination meetings held between Greek authorities, relevant stakeholders and EASO (92% of the target was achieved).

3.2.4.2 Sub-measure 4.1: Support the Local Reception Authorities to manage and operate the temporary Reception and Identification Centre in Lesbos (Mavrovouni)

Under this sub-measure EASO provided multi-level support to the Mavrovouni temporary RIC as per the OP 2021, i.e., communication and information provision, identification and referral of vulnerable residents, support to UAMs and separated minors, legal, site management and technical support. More particularly, EASO supported RIS in April 2021 during the closure of Kara Tepe and the transfer of people to the Mavrovouni RIC.⁷⁶ EASO supported RIS with the establishment of a shelter allocation mechanism for vulnerable persons.

Although the actual number of individual assessments and referrals was below the target set for 2021 (5,481 assessments instead of 6,048 and 2,516 referrals instead of 3,652), this can be explained by the low number of arrivals and the decrease in the number of residents. The same

⁷⁵ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁷⁶ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

challenges analysed under measure 2 apply also with respect to EASO's support in the Mavrovouni RIC, i.e., re-allocation of tasks of EASO embedded staff irrespective of profile and disruptions in the deployment of reception assistants, limited availability of working space and lack of equipment and delays in data reporting due to high workload in the field.⁷⁷ With respect to information provision, the actual results significantly surpassed the target (1,241%). This can be partially attributed to *ad hoc* large-scale activities which required information provision (issuance/delivery of resident permits and travel documents, roll-out of cash assistance scheme etc).

3.2.4.3 Sub-measure 4.2: Contribute to the establishment and management of Multipurpose Reception and Identification Centres including the implementation of the Pilot Project in Lesvos

At the European Commission's request, EASO developed and shared 15 technical documents with the Greek Authorities on the establishment of the MPRICs. Indicatively, EASO provided its technical assistance on the following matters: (a) the masterplans of the new MPRICs of Lesvos and Chios; (b) the EMAS grant application for the establishment of these two new MPRICs;⁷⁸ and (c) the blueprints of the MPRICs of Lesvos, Samos, Kos and Leros.

3.3 Efficiency

The planned **budget** for the EASO-Greece OP 2021 was € 46,894,642.89. At the end of 2021, the total consumption was estimated at 99.9% of the overall commitments.⁷⁹ The breakdown of the costs shows that most of the expenditure is dedicated to the deployment of asylum support teams, in particular of experts and temporary agency workers, and provision of interpretation services.

In 2021, two changes were made with regard to the use of human resources: (a) on asylum support (Project South), existing human resources were used with the help of remote technologies instead of dedicated teams being deployed in the LTACs as in the Project North; (b) on relocation support, dedicated teams were deployed instead of using existing resources as in 2020. Based on the results achieved, both decisions were suitable to serve the requirements of flexibility and efficiency under each measure concerned. In particular, the set up and implementation of a remote modality in Project South allowed EASO to efficiently support first-instance asylum processing in the context of COVID-19 restrictions and remote locations of reception centres, and to engage all EASO caseworkers across Greece regardless of their location and the location of arrivals. This accelerated the achievement of results, i.e., clearance of backlogs and therefore, EASO's gradual phasing out of the support with caseworkers became possible earlier than anticipated. At the end of 2021, the contracts of more than half of the caseworkers were not renewed since, also given the low number of arrivals, their services were no longer needed.⁸⁰

As analysed above (section 3.2), the assignment of different tasks than those prescribed in the terms of reference to EASO embedded personnel in LTACs likely impacted the efficient use of EASO human resources; however, since there were no targets set on second-line reception, this cannot be measured.

Interpretation costs were largely high in 2021 with April, June, July and August, exceeding the planned budget. However, this was justified given that is difficult to predict the use of interpretation services as there are often urgent needs for interpretation.

⁷⁷ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁷⁸ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁷⁹ Agency internal financial monitoring (non-validated).

⁸⁰ At the beginning of the year, 123 caseworkers were deployed on the islands. Their number gradually reduced to reach 23 in December. However, this number is expected to increase in 2022 since new caseworkers will be deployed as of January 2022. EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

Apart from the budget spent on human resources, other direct costs for buildings rental and maintenance, office supplies, etc. were incurred during 2021. Based on EASO's reports and interviews with EASO staff, in certain time periods and specific locations there was limited availability of working spaces and equipment.

In 2021, new approaches to EASO's internal reporting, monitoring and analysis mechanisms were endorsed, aiming at stronger results-oriented and real-time monitoring.⁸¹ In September 2021, a closure assessment exercise for measures 1, 2 and 4 (jointly), and 3 was conducted at three levels: (a) internally at EASO's Greece Office; (b) extended with the participation of EASO operational personnel; and (c) externally with the relevant Greek authorities to assess the activities carried out in 2021. This was a pilot exercise, which also fed into the planning of activities for 2022 under the new OP 2022-2024. At the time of writing there was no estimation of any concrete efficiency gains resulting from the changes made to the reporting and monitoring system, but it was suggested that it should reduce duplicate reporting, and thus the time spent on reporting overall. If successful, this system could be replicated in other EASO operations.

Likewise, it is likely that efficiency gains resulted from the use of remote modalities, but EASO has not estimated these quantitatively (e.g., reduction in travel expenses).

3.4 Coherence

In terms of **internal coherence**, the measures of the OP 2021 are closely related to one another and interlinked. In particular, EL-REC 2.3 is closely associated with EL-REL 3 since they fall under the competence of the same manager, namely the Special Secretary for the Protection of UAMs, and in fact mutually reinforce each other. Through EASO's support to the coordination and implementation of the relocation scheme for UAMs, reception capacity towards UAMs has been improved, coordination between different competent authorities and actors in the field has been enhanced, asylum procedure tools for UAMs have been consolidated and widely used and finally, fundamental rights of UAMs have been secured.⁸² On the other hand, reception shortcomings impacted on asylum procedures and vice versa. This is why data sharing and jointly agreed targets between EASO, GAS and RIS is a prerequisite for the effective implementations of outputs. Another example of internal coherence is the fact that activities undertaken under EL-TF 4.1 (in Lesbos) run parallel to first-line reception support under EL-REC 2.1 (in Samos, Chios, Kos, Leros) and were dealt by EASO in a unified manner.⁸³

As regards **external coherence**, the majority of interviewees stressed the "unique" role of EASO (its mandate) which *a priori* excludes the possibility of any duplications/overlaps with the activities of other actors. This is particularly true when it comes to asylum support. However, in the reception area, multiple stakeholders are active in Greece, such as international organisations (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF) and NGOs, increasing the potential for duplications and overlaps. In 2021, under the new organigramme of MoMA, one single authority is responsible for all actors, which facilitates coordination and helps to ensure coherence. EASO and the Greek authorities commonly agreed on the specific areas of EASO's support in the OP 2021, while IOs have a specific role to play, as defined by MoMA and as per their mandate. Moreover, working groups were established per sector, led by one stakeholder with the participation of others which further ensured the complementarity of the work of given actors. In relocation, as mentioned above under chapter 3.2 there was indeed a

⁸¹ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

⁸² In the OP 2022-2024 these two areas have been unified and support to the SSPUAM has been addressed as a separate measure (Measure 3).

⁸³ In the OP 2022-2024 support to the site planning and design of reception centres in accordance with EU standards falls henceforth under measure 2 (Reception Support).

duplication between the relocation schemes supported by the EU and EASO and the bilateral relocation schemes between Member States.

3.5 EU added value

EASO has developed a good reputation given its effective interventions over the years. Based on interviews with the Greek authorities, **EASO is considered a reliable, strategic, institutional EU-level collaborator that has the know-how, the resources and the flexibility to address in a speedy, effective and quality-driven manner the corresponding needs of national authorities.** The difference in terms of the organisation and productivity between the departments of the national administration receiving EASO's support and those that did not benefit from its support in 2021 speaks for itself.

More importantly, as an EU Agency, EASO adds value by integrating **the EU dimension into the national system** (mostly with its embedded personnel), having as a core aim the harmonisation of national practices with EU standards on asylum and reception. This relationship was described by one interviewee as mutually beneficial; the Greek state develops expertise and EASO gets insights on the national asylum system.

Others stressed that with EASO's support they **gain time and resources.** They all regarded EASO's support as crucial at the present time, while wishing to maintain it at the current level in the future. "EASO is an integral part, if they leave, the gap will be tremendous" commented one interviewee. In this regard and in connection with the first point above, while EASO's embedded staff is seen as an integral part of the Greek administration, both from inside and outside the organisations they support, special attention needs to be paid to securing the reputation of the EU Agency by encouraging EASO embedded staff to report incidents to EASO management where these occur.

3.6 Impact & Sustainability

Impact

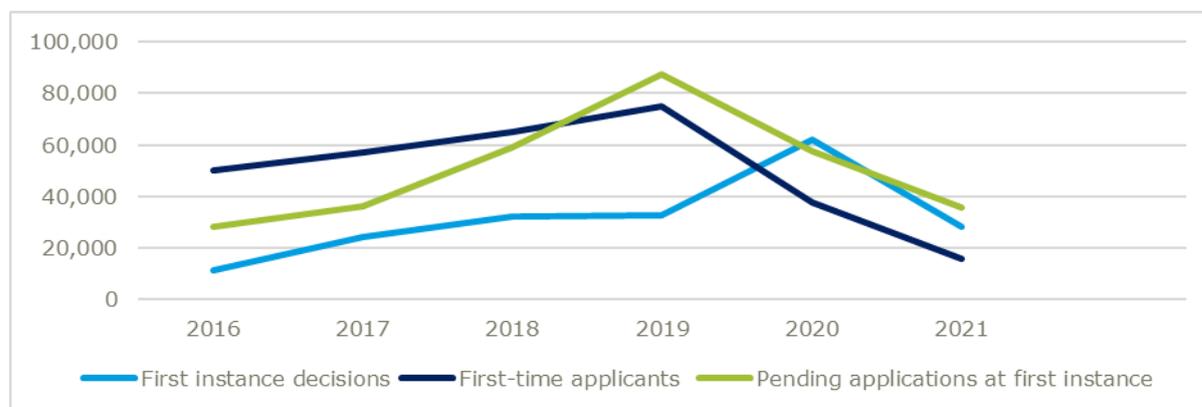
As mentioned in section 1.2, Greece dealt with an unprecedented inflow of refugees and migrants during 2015-2016, which strained the limits of its asylum system. In addition, Greece had limited capacity to host almost 60,000 people which were stranded in Greece after the closure of the Western Balkan route. EASO provided emergency support to the host state to strengthen its capacity to process asylum applications and build a reception system. After the "normalisation" of flows (since 2020), EASO was able to provide more strategic support and together with the Greek authorities, increase its impact and lay the groundwork for a sustainable asylum and reception system.

After 2020, EASO's support, after years of experience in the field, became more sophisticated by adopting a tailored approach with targeted measures which had an impact on the overall system. EASO's support to the asylum and relocation procedures (highly rated in this evaluation) not only effectively tackled the bottleneck created in previous years with respect to regular and border asylum procedures but also helped release the pressure from the first-line reception system (borders).⁸⁴ Given the available statistics, **the GAS with EASO's support managed for the first time in 2021 to balance the ratio between incoming first-time applications and outgoing**

⁸⁴ Indicatively, for 2021, 39% of the total number of registrations can be attributed to EASO's support (EASO internal operational monitoring 2021). Moreover, although specific data on the percentage of EASO support to the overall reduction of the asylum backlog do not exist, we should note that at the end of 2020, 76,335 asylum applications were pending at first degree, whereas at the end of September 2021 (after the conclusion of Project North), the respective number was 38,078 (MoMA, Information Note – International Protection, December 2020 and September 2021).

first instance decisions (see Figure 2).⁸⁵ According to Eurostat, GAS was the 4th most productive in Europe in Q3 in issuing first instance decisions. The Greek Minister for Migration and Asylum publicly expressed satisfaction with this result.⁸⁶

Figure 2. First instance applications and decisions, Greece, 2016-2021



*Data of 2021 until end of September
 Source (first-time applicants and first instance decisions): Eurostat
 Source (pending applications at first instance): MoMA/GAS

With EASO’s support, the reception authorities were able to take over responsibilities from IOs and NGOs, which constituted a priority for 2021 according to the Greek authorities interviewed. A comprehensive National Strategy for Unaccompanied Minors was concluded in 2021 with tangible results.

Sustainability

Building upon lessons learned from the previous OPs,⁸⁷ EASO agreed with Greece to introduce a **three-year planning cycle** (OP 2022-2024). A shared concern of all stakeholders was the short duration of the OP which in fact, left no room to plan sustainable, long-term measures. The signing of the new OP for three years is expected to contribute to resolving this and increasing the sustainability of EASO’s operations in Greece.

Sustainability is primarily achieved through **capacity-building activities** which have a multiplier effect. The OP 2021 invested greatly in training and capacity-building sessions, organised both by EASO’s Greece Office and EASO’s HQ. In 2021, there was an improvement in tailor-made actions based on thorough joint planning with the Greek authorities (GAS/RIS). EASO maximised its impact and sustainability gains not only by reaching out to a wide number of participants from national authorities but also by organising train-the-trainer sessions which resulted in the creation of a strong national pool of trainers.

⁸⁵ This comparison is made to emphasise the impact that EASO’s support had on the “normalisation” of the Greek asylum system given the balance achieved for the first time in this particular part of asylum procedures. It should be noted that the national asylum system is more complex, and this chart does not reflect the whole range of asylum procedures. For instance, subsequent applications - that add to the incoming applications- were not taken into account. Furthermore, in the two last years, the MoMA also keeps data on the expression of wills by third country nationals to submit an asylum application (pre-registration phase). These numbers have not been taken into account since they cannot be comparable with previous years, where such data were not being kept.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Migration and Asylum, [Press Release](#): The Greek Asylum Service is the 4th most productive in Europe among the 27 member states, 10.1.2022

⁸⁷ See also recommendation 2 of the evaluation of the OP 2020.

Furthermore, sustainability is achieved through the **consolidation of tools**. In 2021, the elaboration, roll-out and training of personnel on the use of asylum, reception and relocation tools continued and were in fact enhanced. For instance, SOPs and workflows jointly developed by EASO and GAS on the use of remote technologies for asylum interviews can be capitalised on by GAS for future use. In reception, upon consultation with RIS HQ, EASO piloted the ARC tool which is expected to have an impact on the sustainability of the reception system.⁸⁸

Finally, the **embedded model** implemented by EASO in the Greek context adds to the sustainability of results, through the interaction and transfer of knowledge from EASO personnel to permanent Greek staff working side by side. However, the degree to which this is the case depends on the internal management of each office. If, for instance, EASO embedded staff is assigned with different duties to their colleagues, there is a lesser scope for collaboration and transfer of know-how between them. On the other hand, when responsibilities are shared between staff members, the transfer of knowledge is possible and there are more guarantees in place for the continuity and maintenance of quality services, should one staff member leave, thus ensuring greater sustainability.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 General conclusions

Overall, the **relevance** of the EASO intervention in Greece in 2021 was **very good**. The four measures responded to the needs of the stakeholders and EASO showed great flexibility to adapt to changes in needs by reallocating resources, providing interpretation services, continuous training and capacity building, and material resources where needed. The OP 2021 was based on extensive and thorough joint planning with the Greek authorities. EASO's support to asylum procedures (**measure 1**) was designed to offer more strategic support and tailored capacity building to GAS and AA, while maintaining a high efficiency rate in assisting GAS to clear the backlog of pending asylum cases. After decongestion of the islands (with the support of EASO), emphasis was equally placed by the MoMA/GSRAS on the enhancement of the second-line reception system (**measure 2**). EASO's support was multi-level; it provided a significant number of human resources to boost the capacity of the authorities at central level and field locations, assisting the authorities who had limited financial and human resources. Needs were changing along with the priorities of the Greek authorities and EASO flexibly adapted to these. **Measure 3** was tailored to the needs of the authorities since it was largely a continuation of OP 2020 with slight amendments. EASO covered a wide spectrum of activities and provided crucial support with coordination of multiple stakeholders. **Measure 4** followed the signing of the MoU between the European Commission and Greece on the establishment of a new MPRIC in Lesbos by the second semester of 2021. This did not happen and EASO adapted both to the change of plans, i.e., construction of the MPRICs in Samos, Kos and Leros first, and to the change in flows – Lesbos received a significant percentage of new arrivals during 2021.

The **effectiveness** of the EASO intervention in Greece in 2021 was overall **very good, with the exception of measure 4 which was good**. In terms of the measures more specifically:

- Although lower results than planned were achieved under **measure 1** (asylum support), this was mainly justified given the low number of arrivals (and thus few new applications). Also, this reflected a common understanding with GAS in the context of the implementation of the new legislation on safe third countries and the subsequent amendment of procedures, SOPs and workflows. Nevertheless, EASO achieved high results in the support to first-instance procedures

⁸⁸ The ARC tool is available as an online application and has been translated into the Greek language.

on mainland (number of interviews conducted) thanks to the results of Project North and the implementation of Project South through remote modalities. In 2021, emphasis was placed on the consolidation of tools and the proliferation of capacity-building activities. On the latter, EASO achieved high results considering the pandemic. Support to the DU and AA were stable, albeit achieving lower results for the AA due to a lower workload and agreed non-replacement of EASO seconded staff who resigned.

- For the monitoring of **measure 2** (reception support), no specific targets were set in relation to certain outputs. Joint target setting was improved in 2021 but not totally achieved and there is still room for improvement on coordination matters (between EASO and GSPAS/RIS, GAS and RIS, EASO/GSPAS/RIS/other stakeholders). However, important progress was made: (a) RIS started taking over responsibilities with the support of EASO; (b) a tool for self-assessing reception conditions was piloted by EASO; and (c) large-scale training on the reception modules took place. EASO through its support to the development of SOPs, guidelines, the operation of the Queries desk and the thematic working groups empowered RIS to manage and operate the reception system. Increased support shifted throughout the year to the SSPUAM with tangible results (i.e., national referral mechanism in place, mentorship programme, assistance with EU funds, National Strategy finalised and published).
- EASO supported with the coordination and management of the EU Relocation Scheme (**measure 3**). Although the targets set were not fully achieved, all stakeholders considered this a success considering the high risks entailed in such an activity.
- **Measure 4's** (Taskforce) effectiveness was rated good. The effectiveness of reception support to the temporary RIC in Lesbos was very good given the achieved results. However, little progress was made on the strategic planning of an integrated reception and asylum management framework and the effectiveness of EL-TF 4.2 related to the establishment and management of the MPRICs in Lesbos and Chios could not be fully assessed since the new sites were not functional in 2021.

Relatedly, as regards the **priority question** of the evaluation,⁸⁹ EASO delivered on expectations to a satisfactory degree, given the large scale of the operation in Greece, not only in terms of resources but also in terms of multiple and diverse fields/levels of support.

In 2021, there were two **aspects that worked particularly well** and can be seen as an asset for future OPs: (a) changes introduced by EASO internally in management (measure coordinators), monitoring (ODC tool) and communication (between EASO's Greece Office, HQ and field staff); and (b) the establishment of stronger collaboration with the Greek authorities in target setting (for instance with respect to national training plans), monitoring (regular steering committee meetings) and coordination (for instance in thematic working groups).

However, **external challenges** still persist with regard to limited segregated data (causing delays in mapping and sharing), shortcomings in communications between the Greek authorities (whose competences concur in migration management), COVID-19 restrictions, inherent limitations to the use of the temporary agency workers scheme and delays in the transfer of interpretation services to the Greek authorities.

EASO managed to overcome some of them and draw valuable **lessons for future OPs**. For instance, given the delays in the mapping of pending applications for the launch of Project North, EASO assisted the authorities with the mapping exercise prior to Project South. Furthermore, the networking of EASO personnel which is embedded across all services/departments of MoMA (and MoLSA) functions as an open channel for communication across locations. Moreover, EASO used

⁸⁹ Given the scale of EASO's intervention in Greece, has EASO delivered on expectations? What worked well? What challenges arose? What lessons can be learned for the future (e.g. in terms of coordination across locations, replicability, adaptability and scalability)?

tools (for instance on SharePoint®) to enhance practical cooperation in a specific context, such as asylum matters in Project South. With respect to mitigating the COVID-19 impact on the continuity of operations, EASO promoted the use of remote technologies. This had an impact on adaptability in change of needs and scalability since it resulted in a cut in human resources.

Finally, three examples from the implementation of the OP 2021 support the **replicability** of EASO activities within Greece: (a) the wide use of the embedded model which serves both the needs at central and at local/field level; (b) the project approach to clear asylum backlog which was first used with respect to Northern Greece and then in 2021 was replicated in Southern Greece taking into consideration lessons learned from the previous project; and (c) the pilot implementation of the ARC tool in different sites on the mainland which is expected to be replicated across all sites in Greece.

The **efficiency** of the EASO intervention in Greece was **very good to good**. Actual resource consumption was within the overall budget allocated for the operation. In terms of human resource management, EASO swiftly reallocated staff from one post to another and used remote technologies where possible. However, disruptions in the provision of services, especially in reception (measure 2) still remained. Based on the evaluation findings, there were instances of inefficiencies in the use of EASO and authority resources in measure 3, caused by duplications in relocation schemes (voluntary EU and bilateral schemes). Interpreters' costs could not always be estimated accurately. Procurement procedures ran smoothly.

The **coherence** of the EASO intervention in Greece in 2021 was **very good to good**. Changes in the internal management structures and communication means helped to achieve internal coherence. Despite the fact that some measures are closely interlinked, no major inconsistencies were identified. With regards to measure 4, sub-measure 4.0⁹⁰ could have been merged with sub-measure 4.2⁹¹ whereas sub-measure 4.1⁹² could be integrated into sub-measure 2.1 on support to first-line reception. Consequently, we evaluated the internal coherence of this measure as good. In terms of external coherence, EASO has a distinct identity (EU Agency) and role (support to the asylum and reception systems of EU Member States) that prevents overlaps with other actors, such as IOs and NGOs which have a different mandate and rules of engagement. In reception, where multiple stakeholders are involved, the Greek authorities have inaugurated a new model of management to ensure more coherent actions. However, in relocation (measure 3), due to duplication of EASO's support with the bilateral relocation schemes, the external coherence was evaluated as good.

The **EU added value** of EASO's intervention in Greece in 2021 was **very good** overall. If EASO had not intervened in 2021, the effectiveness of asylum procedures would have suffered and the gap in the reception management at central level and in the field would have been significant. EASO is a strategic partner of the European Commission when it comes to the implementation of voluntary relocation schemes among Member States or with an MoU between the Commission and a Member State.

The **impact** of EASO's intervention given the overall situation in Greece was to effectively tackle the bottleneck created in previous years with respect to regular and border asylum procedures through asylum support. Since asylum and reception measures are closely interlinked, the release of the pressure on asylum systems and the effective implementation of relocation schemes with EASO's crucial support also had a positive impact on the enhancement of EU reception standards on the islands and the mainland. For these reasons, the impact of EASO operations in 2021 was

⁹⁰ Support the Taskforce to strategically plan and implement an integrated reception and asylum management framework.

⁹¹ Contribute to the establishment and management of MPRICs including of the pilot project in Lesbos.

⁹² Support to the local reception authorities to manage and operate the temporary RIC in Lesbos (Mavrovouni).

rated from **very good** (for measures 1 and 3) to **good** (for measure 2 and sub-measure 4.1) and **fair** (for sub-measures 4.0 and 4.2).

As regards **sustainability** of the OP 2021 measures, mechanisms were put in place to ensure an exit strategy for EASO from the asylum support. Moreover, the relocation exercise coordinated by EASO favoured the smooth coordination of different authorities with stakeholders and led to the development - to the benefit of GAS, SSPUAM and other authorities - of tools with an overall impact on the situation of UAMs, vulnerable persons and beneficiaries of international protection in Greece. For measures 2 and 4, it is too soon to draw conclusions on sustainability, even if EASO implements the same approach across measures to ensure sustainable results. The reception system is relatively new, and it will take time for it to become sustainable without EASO's support. Similarly, the targets set for 4.1⁹³ were not meant to promote sustainability, but rather to respond to the urgent needs on the ground (quantitative targets set instead of qualitative). Sub-measures 4.0⁹⁴ and 4.2⁹⁵ also addressed one-off needs and were of a standalone nature. Consequently, sustainability was rated from good to fair.

The table below presents a scoring for each criterion and each measure, formulated on the basis of the results presented in this report.

Table 2. Scoring of achievements of the EASO Greece OP 2021

	Measure EL-AS 1	Measure EL-REC 2	Measure EL-REC 3	Measure EL-TF 4
Relevance	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good
Effectiveness	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good
Efficiency	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good
Coherence	Very good	Very good	Very good/Good	Good
EU added value	Very good	Very Good	Very good	Very good
Impact	Very good	Good	Very good	Fair
Sustainability	Good	Fair	Good	Fair

4.2 Key lessons learned and good practices

EASO support to the Greek authorities in asylum and reception management has evolved over time. EASO had implemented different OPs with a variety of approaches and in collaboration with multiple actors. After 10 years of presence in Greece, the following good practices (in terms of effectiveness, replicability and sustainability) can be identified, building on lessons learned from 2021.

Embedded model: This model was further reinforced and consolidated in 2021. After consecutive years of good results and positive feedback received by relevant stakeholders, this model can be replicated in other Member States if certain preconditions are met, such as a sufficiently mature national system with the willingness and capacity to absorb EASO embedded support, and a detailed

⁹³ Support to the local reception authorities to manage and operate the temporary RIC in Lesvos (Mavrovouni).

⁹⁴ Support the Taskforce to strategically plan and implement an integrated reception and asylum management framework.

⁹⁵ Contribute to the establishment and management of MPRICs including of the pilot project in Lesvos.

OP with common agreed objectives, benchmarks, inputs and outputs. In fact, the Greek authorities use this model in relation to seconded personnel from International Organisations. The use of this model is a quick way to boost the capacity of national systems, not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of the quality of services. Furthermore, it adds to the sustainability of EASO's support, where EASO embedded staff and permanent national staff collaborate effectively in different tasks, sharing knowledge, expertise and ideas. However, there is a risk of the authorities becoming dependent on the qualified seconded staff which by definition is of a temporary nature (temporary agency workers).

Project approach: Significant milestones were reached in 2021 in relation to the implementation of the project approach in the clearance of the asylum backlog in Greece thanks to the timely and effective implementation and closure of Project North and the speedy roll-out and adaptability of Project South. This approach can be replicated in other locations where a bottleneck has been created. In combination with a strategic approach to asylum procedures, the project approach can release the pressure from saturated asylum systems.

EU relocation schemes: Relocation schemes are commonly used by the European Commission or bilaterally agreed between EU Member States as a provisional measure in emergency situations, in application of the principle of solidarity and responsibility sharing provided by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The voluntary relocation scheme for UAMs, vulnerable families with children and beneficiaries of international protection was activated in 2020 and reinforced after the fire in Moria and in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of 2020, more than 4,000 UAMs were situated in Greece –most of them in a precarious situation. With EASO's support, 4,646 were relocated between May 2020 and December 2021.⁹⁶ EASO's support to the coordination of the three EU relocation schemes was crucial. The tools, SOPs and workflows developed for the relocation schemes together with the accumulated experience of EASO staff can be consolidated to be replicated in other Member States with similar needs.

Remote modalities in the asylum procedure: EASO shifted to remote modalities on the islands in 2020 to mitigate the effects of measures against the COVID-19 which restricted access to the asylum and processing of pending applications. Indeed, the introduction of remote interviews ensured the continuity of EASO operations but also maximised effectiveness through an efficient use of available resources. In 2021, remote modalities were used on the mainland in connection with Project South but also in different RAOs. Guidelines were agreed between EASO and GAS, training was provided to caseworkers and specific equipment was allocated to these activities. This is a good practice that can be replicated by EASO in all of its operations and by the Greek authorities in different kinds of service provision to asylum applicants requiring a face-to-face meeting. However, it should be noted that this tool is not suitable to meet the needs of all applicants: face-to-face interviews should be preferred with respect to applicants with vulnerabilities.

Contingency planning: To prevent a coronavirus outbreak in RICs/LTACs, the GSRAS elaborated in 2020 the so-called 'Agnodiki Plan' which is an emergency operating plan. This Plan was implemented every time there was a COVID-19 outbreak inside RICs/LTACs. In 2021, the simulation exercise "Promachos" took place in Samos, with the participation of all five RICs on the islands and Fylakio (Evros), authorities, residents, even the press. It was organised by GSRAS with the support of EASO. This exercise was the first real time evacuation operation at the European level. There was also a live streaming of the event. Based on the conclusions from the evaluation of Promachos, such an exercise will be replicated on mainland Greece, but it can also be replicated in other Member States. Such exercises are helpful to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of the contingency planning and participants deemed it important to participate in similar exercises in the future. In addition, EASO provided in 2021 onsite training for the personnel in LTACs of Northern Greece, with

⁹⁶ Greek Council of Refugees, Save the Children, "[Children on the move](#)", September – October 2021 update.

the assistance of the Fire Corps. When a fire broke out near the LTAC of Serres in July, EASO staff knew how to use the fire hose.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions presented above, the following recommendations are proposed:

Recommendation 1: Enhance the capacity of the Greek authorities in relation to the flow of information, data sharing and data management

Based on the findings of this evaluation, EASO in different contexts (asylum, reception and relocation support) facilitated the flow of information between administrative authorities. On the other hand, EASO encountered challenges with the implementation of the OP due to information not always being shared in a timely manner by the Greek authorities. Furthermore, in reception, field officers reported that there were parallel data management systems which impeded their everyday tasks. In asylum, EASO staff reported a lack of access rights to the central database. Such data sharing constraints hinder the effective monitoring and evaluation of EASO's support. In view of the above, we recommend to:

- Enhance data sharing between EASO and the Greek authorities to be able to link EASO data with national data, aiming at more efficient monitoring and evaluation of EASO's intervention and for planning of targeted activities.
- Support RIS at central and field level to systematise data entry and analysis, in particular through the development of guidance, training, and SOPs as necessary for the implementation of this action.
- Facilitate the flow of information between GAS/RIS especially on the registration (lodging) of applications for international protection in view of the wider use of the unified reception procedure in the future and the smooth cooperation of asylum and reception authorities in different tasks such as the exchange of information related to the legal status of the applicants residing in RICs/LTACs or/and ESTIA accommodation scheme.
- Facilitate access of EASO embedded staff to asylum and reception databases, as relevant and to the extent possible.

Recommendation 2: Simplify the breakdown of EASO's support into broader categories of measures and optimise target setting for the monitoring of their implementation

In the OP 2021, EASO's operational support was broken down into four measures. The measures were closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing. A merger of certain (sub)measures could have simplified the OP structure and enabled a clearer workplan and facilitated monitoring of the implementation of the OP.⁹⁷ Moreover, there were no targets set for certain sub-measures, which made it difficult to measure the effectiveness of EASO's support. Paired with the challenges encountered for the achievement of the targets that were set, a revision of the targets in certain sub-measures is recommended. In particular, it is recommended to:

- At the time of drafting future OPs, consider interlinkages between measures and whether there is room to simplify / merge (sub)measures to structure the OP in a simpler manner.
- Revise the target setting policy with respect to assessments and referrals (in reception) and registration, interviews, opinions, second instance reports (in asylum). Instead of setting a target in absolute numbers based on anticipated number of arrivals/residents or workload to be

⁹⁷ For example, sub-measure 4.0 could have been merged with sub-measure 4.2 since in practice they both related to EASO's support for the construction and operation of MPRICs in the islands. Sub-measure 4.1 regarding reception support to Mavrovouni RIC in Lesbos could have been integrated into sub-measure 2.1 on support to first line reception (other four islands and Fylakio in Evros) since similar activities were foreseen with respect to assistance in management, registration and information provision.

assigned to EASO staff, it is advisable to adopt a more streamlined approach, using percentages as indicators.⁹⁸

Recommendation 3: Enhance sustainability of the asylum system by reducing dependency of the GAS on EASO's support

EASO's support to the Greek asylum system has reached maturity. Over the last two years, EASO scaled up its support to GAS (by doubling its human resources, introducing remote modalities, etc.) to improve the efficiency, quality and sustainability of the asylum system. In 2021, EASO also maximised its capacity-building activities to this end, strengthening the pool of national trainers in Greece. Through EASO's support, the Greek authorities have gained expertise and capacity. EASO tools have already been adapted to the national context and incorporated in the asylum procedures. Given that there are low numbers of arrivals and less pressure on the asylum system, it is time to reduce support and gradually phase-out.⁹⁹ To this end, the following is recommended to:

- Set more quality-related targets (indicators) for the monitoring of the next OP, to better reflect EASO's contribution to the efficiency and sustainability of the national asylum system.
- Evaluate the impact of EASO's training in 2021 through regular qualitative reviews and provide support to GAS to conduct its own capacity-building activities (national training sessions).
- Initiate discussions with Greek authorities to outline an exit strategy from asylum support, taking into consideration the particularities of the Greek operation (e.g., EASO support to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement) and the new EUAA mandate. An exchange of knowledge with the EASO operation in Malta, who have already agreed on an exit strategy with the Maltese authorities, is strongly encouraged.

Recommendation 4: Improve human resource planning and management of EASO embedded staff

An inherent shortcoming of the deployment of EASO embedded staff is the temporary nature of their deployment through short-term contracts. All stakeholders reported that the disruption in the provision of EASO's support caused by contracts ending during the year affected the productivity of the team, and as a result sometimes impacted the effectiveness of the support provided. This is also partially due to the fact that EASO embedded staff are qualified experts who the Greek authorities greatly rely on for the execution of everyday tasks and competences. On occasion, EASO embedded staff was also directed to undertake tasks which were not relevant to their profile, thus not making the best or most efficient use of their time and competences. While a certain degree of flexibility is needed, it can impact the degree of achievement of the results of the OP. Therefore, it is preferable that EASO harmonises internal management plans for an efficient and sustainable use of its resources. The following actions could be taken:

- Adapt the terms of reference for each profile to the needs, in consultation with the Greek authorities and include a clear description of their duties.
- Provide early notification to EASO temporary agency workers of the renewal status of each contract and details of the terms of the renewal.
- Considering the multiannual nature of the new OP 2022-2024, EASO together with the Greek authorities can better plan the human resource needs and, if appropriate and possible, provide

⁹⁸ For instance, EASO's achievements in assessments and referrals in the islands can be measured as a percentage of the actual number of residents in the RIC. In relation to asylum support at second instance, EASO could set as a target a percentage of decisions issued in juxtaposition with the appeals received by EASO rapporteurs from the AA.

⁹⁹ It is already provided in the OP2022-24 (under Measure ELAS 1.1) that: "Provided that the trend of low number of arrivals continues at similar levels throughout 2022, the Agency will reduce operational support, and will gradually handover to GAS. Surge support will be provided when necessary". See also Single Programming Document, Work Program 2023, Preliminary Draft, November 2011, p.16

longer contracts (e.g., 9 months) to avoid disruptions. This would likely have a positive effect on planning by the authorities to which EASO staff is deployed.

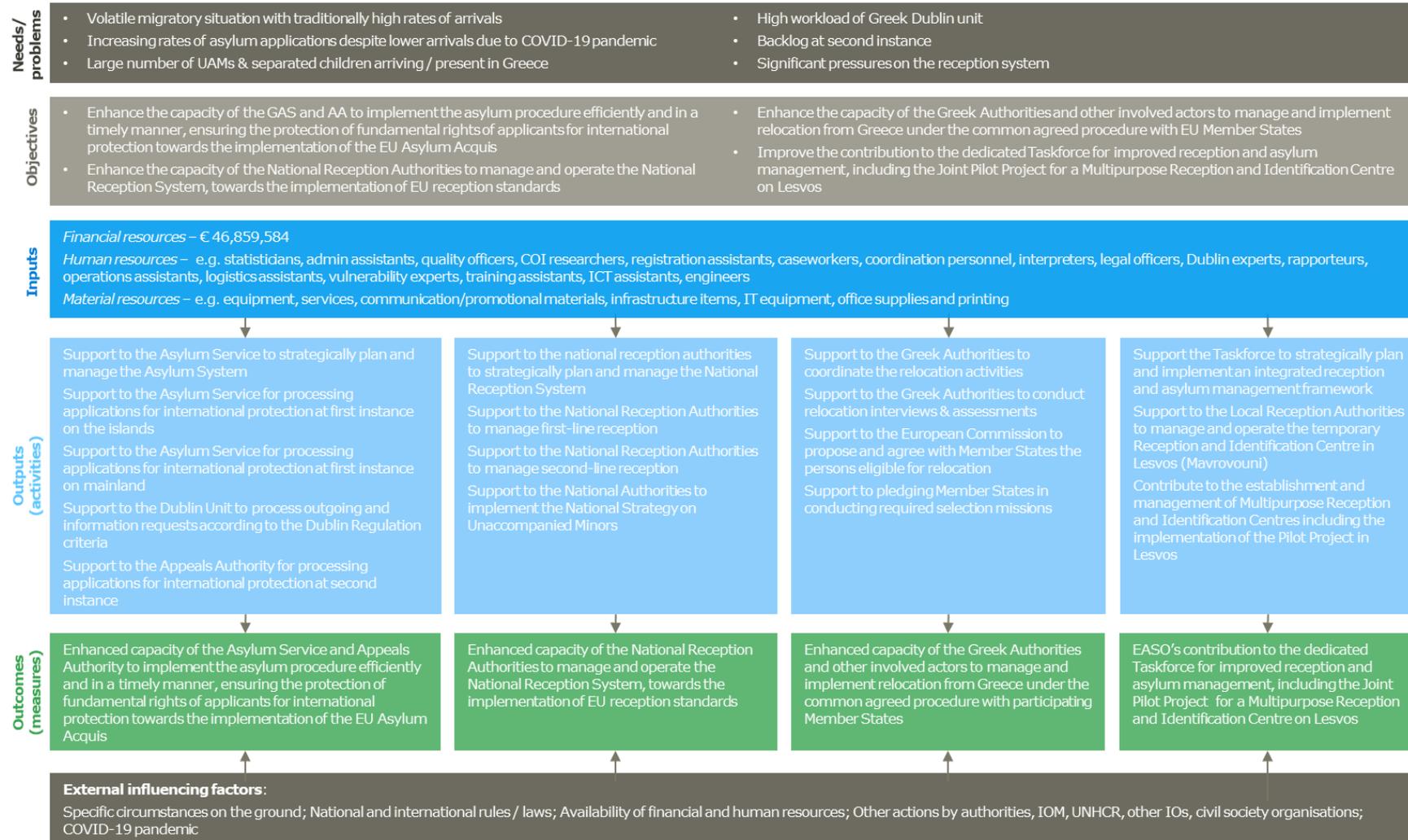
- Introduce a pre-agreed procedure to assess performance and productivity of EASO embedded staff by the Greek authorities with the participation of the recruiting agency and EASO. Evaluations can be further discussed with the authority where staff members are re-deployed to increase the effectiveness of the results and better internal management. Performance appraisals can be taken into account for the renewal of contracts, if applicable.
- Encourage communication of EASO embedded staff with EASO's Greece Office (regular meetings) and reporting to the HQ as soon as possible in case of serious incidents. Provide training on the available means for reporting.

Recommendation 5: Contribute to the standardisation of EASO's support to relocation procedures based on the Greek experience

EASO supported authorities in Greece (and other stakeholders, such as the European Commission) in relocation schemes from the frontline states to other EU Member States, in 2015-2017 and recently in 2020-2022. EASO's support was critical throughout all steps of the relocation procedure. This accumulated experience should not be lost, but rather capitalised on for future reference (in Greece and elsewhere). To this end, we recommend to:

- Draft internal EASO guidance on interviews, matching exercises, and support to the security missions of Member States.
- Think about solutions to mitigate risk situations by taking account of the lessons learned in the Greece OP (e.g., delays in identifying eligible candidates, strict eligibility criteria by pledging Member States, possible duplications with other (bilateral) relocation schemes).
- Create EASO online tools (BIA, interview templates) that can easily be adapted to different national contexts.
- Explore whether it would be useful for all Member States to develop a practical guide in support of relocation procedures.

Annex 1 Intervention logic



Annex 2 Evaluation matrix

Table 3. Evaluation matrix

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
Relevance: To what extent was the intervention in Greece 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 Greece, 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>Did the needs and problems faced by stakeholders evolved over the course of 2021?</i></p> <p><i>What were the objectives of the intervention in Greece when first established? Were these appropriate to meet the needs of stakeholders? Were these objectives feasible to achieve? Why? Why not? What means were put in place to achieve them?</i></p> <p><i>Were the objectives/targets/outputs adjusted during the implementation of the intervention in Greece? Why/why not? Were these appropriate to meet the needs of stakeholders?</i></p>	<p>Intervention logic, objectives of the OP</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)</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 lessons to be learned for future needs assessments and design of OPs</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 IOs</p> <p>Results from the evaluation of effectiveness</p>
Effectiveness: What have been the (quantitative and qualitative) effects of the intervention in Greece and to what extent can these be credited to the intervention rather than external factors?			
<p>Targeted question: Given the scale of EASO's intervention in Greece, has EASO delivered on</p>	<p>Intervention logic and its causal links</p>	<p>Activities were implemented as</p>	<p>OP 2021</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p>expectations? What worked well? What challenges arose? What lessons can be learned for the future (e.g. in terms of coordination across locations, replicability, adaptability and scalability)?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Measure EL-AS 1: Was the capacity of the Asylum Service and Appeals Authority to implement the asylum procedure efficiently and in a timely manner, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights of applicants for international protection enhanced in 2021? Why or why not? What worked well? What challenges arose? What lessons can be learned for the future? (Linked to recommendation 8 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>Was Project South successful? Why or why not? To what extent was it informed by the lessons learned from Project North and how did this influence the results? (Linked to recommendation 4 of the OP 2020 recommendation)</i></p> <p><i>Measure EL-REC 2: Was the capacity of the National Reception Authorities to manage and operate the National Reception System, towards the implementation of EU reception standards, enhanced in 2021? Why or why not? What worked well? What challenges arose? What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent were capacity building activities enhanced compared to 2020? Did this have an impact on the effectiveness of the support? (Linked to recommendations 1 and 5 (training of reception authorities) of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p>	<p>Degree of achievement of targets (output and outcome level) set out in the results framework</p> <p>Evidence / examples of the key achievements (<i>all measures</i>), i.e.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence / examples of enhanced capacity of the asylum system in Greece resulting from EASO's support in 2021, e.g., through Project South (<i>Measure EL-AS 1</i>) - Evidence / examples of enhanced capacity of the reception system in Greece resulting from EASO's capacity building support (incl. training of reception authorities) in 2021 (<i>Measure EL-REC 2</i>) - Evidence of joint target setting having been implemented with authorities in the reception area (<i>Measure EL-REC 2</i>) - Evidence of a monitoring tool having been created for reception conditions (<i>Measure EL-REC 2</i>) - Evidence / examples of enhanced capacity of the Greek Authorities and other involved actors to manage and implement relocation from Greece thanks to EASO's support (<i>Measure EL-REL 3</i>) - Evidence/examples of EASO's contribution to the dedicated Taskforce for improved reception and asylum management, including the Joint Pilot Project for a 	<p>planned; any changes were duly justified</p> <p>Expectations of given stakeholders were met</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>Lessons (e.g., in terms of coordination across locations, replicability, adaptability and scalability) can be learned and applied elsewhere as relevant</p>	<p>Previous OPs (for context)</p> <p>Results framework</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations (for context)</p> <p>Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Interviews with all stakeholders</p> <p>Results from the evaluation of efficiency</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>To what extent was joint target setting with authorities implemented in the reception area? To what extent did this influence the observed results? (Linked to recommendation 6 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent was a monitoring tool for reception conditions implemented? To what extent did this influence the observed results? (Linked to recommendation 7 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>Measure EL-REL 3: Was the capacity of the Greek Authorities and other involved actors to manage and implement relocation from Greece under the common agreed procedure with participating Member States enhanced in 2021? Why or why not? What worked well? What challenges arose? What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p> <p><i>Measure EL-TF 4: What was EASO's contribution to the dedicated Taskforce for improved reception and asylum management, including the Joint Pilot Project for a Multipurpose Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos? Was it successful? Why or why not? What worked well? What challenges arose? What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent was the use of remote modalities enhanced compared to 2020? To what extent did this influence the achieved results? (Linked to recommendation 3 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p>	<p>Multipurpose Reception and Identification Centre on Lesbos (<i>Measure EL-TF 4</i>)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of challenges faced by authorities in Greece and by EASO, and reasons for these (<i>all measures</i>)</p> <p>Degree to which lessons can be learned relating to, e.g., coordination across locations, replicability, adaptability and scalability (<i>all measures</i>)</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the appropriateness of the scale of the support and degree to which expectations were met (<i>all measures</i>)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of factors that helped and/or hindered the achievement of intended results (<i>all measures</i>)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of the impact of EASO's support compared to other (external or internal) factors (<i>all measures</i>)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of adjustments made during 2021 to mitigate resource and/or operational constraints (<i>all measures</i>)</p>		
<p>Efficiency: To what extent are the costs of the intervention justified given what has been achieved, and what factors influenced the efficiency of the intervention in Greece?</p>			

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p>What costs were associated with the implementation of the intervention in Greece? Is there room for efficiency gains? Do the benefits of the intervention in Greece outweigh the costs?</p> <p>Prompts:</p> <p><i>How were these costs distributed across the four measures? Was this distribution appropriate?</i></p> <p><i>How were costs and benefits distributed across stakeholder groups? Were they balanced/ proportionate?</i></p> <p><i>What internal or external factors influenced the efficiency with which outputs / outcomes were achieved? Were there notable differences across the four measures? (Also relevant for the priority question)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent and how could the efficiency of the intervention in Greece be improved? (Also relevant for the priority question)</i></p>	<p>Implementation costs of the intervention(s) (monetary/FTEs)</p> <p>Financial and human resources invested into the OP and per measure</p> <p>Invested resources compared to achieved outcomes</p> <p>Outputs and outcomes generated compared to their costs</p> <p>Costs and benefits for different groups of stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which costs are proportionate to the outcomes achieved in Greece</p> <p>Evidence / examples of inefficiencies in implementation / achievement of outputs and outcomes in Greece</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which efficiency could be improved in Greece</p>	<p>The costs of the intervention in Greece were justified compared to the achieved outputs and outcomes</p> <p>Encountered inefficiencies were appropriately addressed / mitigated by EASO</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> <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 Greece 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 Greece? Were they complementary, working together to achieve coherent outcomes?</p> <p>Prompts:</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 (within and across measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mutual reinforcement or complementarity between activities (within and across measures)</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</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p> <p>Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>To what extent was coordination between reception and asylum authorities incentivised? What implications did this have for the intervention? (Linked to recommendation 1 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</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 in Greece 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 Greece?</i></p> <p><i>Were any inconsistencies identified? Were the interventions mutually complementary?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of other interventions with similar objectives/results (at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of synergies or complementarity between other interventions and the EASO intervention in Greece</p> <p>Evidence / examples of overlaps or duplication between other interventions and the EASO intervention in Greece</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the coherence and complementarity of the interventions in Greece (or lack thereof)</p> <p>Lessons learned to improve coherence and complementarity in the future</p>	<p>mutually reinforcing and/or complementary, there were no unnecessary overlaps or duplications</p>	<p>national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Interviews with DG HOME</p> <p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Interviews with IOs</p> <p>Coherence analysis</p>
<p>EU added value: What is the additional value resulting from the EASO intervention(s) in Greece, 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 in Greece compared to what the Greek authorities could have achieved alone?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>What might have happened if EASO had not intervened in Greece?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of added value of the intervention in Greece</p> <p>Extent to which the activities in Greece would not have taken place or taken place with a reduced scope or speed in the absence of the intervention</p> <p>Stakeholder views on what would have happened without EASO's support in Greece</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>Interviews with IOs</p> <p>Results from all previous evaluation questions</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>Is there evidence suggesting that the outcomes of the intervention in Greece could not have been achieved to the same degree without EASO's intervention?</i></p>			
<p>Impact & sustainability: What was the (intended) long-term impact of the intervention in Greece, to what degree has this been achieved and is it likely to be sustained?</p>			
<p>Sustainability: To what extent have concrete steps been taken (in 2021) to enhance the sustainability of the intervention in Greece? Did these work well? (Linked to recommendation 2 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</p> <p>Impact: What impact has the intervention had in proportion to the overall situation in Greece?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>To what extent was EASO's support to Greece shifted from more operational to more strategic support compared to 2020? Has this had any implications on the intervention? (Linked to recommendation 1 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>What mechanisms to ensure sustainability of results have been put in place by EASO and / or the authorities? Is this sufficient to ensure the sustainability of results?</i></p> <p><i>What internal or external factors influence the likely impact and sustainability of the intervention in Greece?</i></p>	<p>Intervention logic (<i>impact level</i>)</p> <p>Examples / evidence of long-term impacts of the intervention in Greece</p> <p>Stakeholder expectations on long-term impacts of the intervention in Greece</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mechanisms put in place (in 2021) to help the intervention in Greece continue beyond its direct implementation</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which these mechanisms ensure sustainability of results</p> <p>Evidence / examples of factors influencing the likely impact and sustainability of the intervention in Greece</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the likelihood that the benefits of the intervention in Greece 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 IOs</p> <p>Results from all other evaluation questions</p>

Annex 3 Follow-up on the OP 2020 evaluation recommendations

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

Table 4. Recommendations from 2020 evaluation

Recommendation	Status	Progress / achievements
1. Enhance the provision of support at a strategic level.	Implementation concluded	OP 2021 includes relevant activities.
2. Identify concrete steps to strengthen the sustainability of the operation.	Implementation concluded	3 years planning cycle has been introduced. Requires also changes in the planning of other actors.
3. Develop a concrete workplan and establish procedures for the use of teleworking.	Implementation concluded	OP 2021 implementation foresees the use of remote interviews across the mainland. Clear procedures have been agreed with GAS.
4. Replicate Project North, keeping in mind the different contexts that implementation modalities need to be adapted to.	Implementation concluded	OP 2021 includes activities in the South. Project South is expected to end mid-2022.
5. Further develop and implement a training programme for reception authorities.	Implementation concluded	OP 2021 includes relevant activities.
6. Expand joint target setting with authorities to the reception area.	Implementation concluded	Data collection is piloted and targets/objectives are set per profile of expert (ongoing)
7. Focus support on the implementation of a monitoring tool for reception conditions.	Implementation concluded	OP 2021 foresees such support, however it is not the development of the tool (already developed and piloted) but rather the full implementation of such a self-assessment tool that is needed. This tool is already rolled out in 4 camps and is on the new OP 2022.
8. Focus on provision of targeted support at the second instance.	Implementation concluded	OP 2021 foresees such activities and additional cooperation is negotiated via HQ. However, the support shall be systematic instead of accommodating the <i>ad hoc</i> individual needs of a group of personnel, i.e., rapporteurs (ongoing). An MoU was signed with National School of Judges.