



# EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE EASO-MALTA OPERATING PLAN 2021

FINAL REPORT

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## ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Acronym	Definition
<b>AWAS</b>	Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers
<b>CEAS</b>	Common European Asylum System
<b>COI</b>	Country of origin information
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus disease 2019
<b>CPT</b>	European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
<b>EASO</b>	European Asylum Support Office
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUAA</b>	European Union Agency for Asylum
<b>IOM</b>	International Organisation for Migration
<b>IPA</b>	International Protection Agency
<b>IT</b>	Information technology
<b>MAU</b>	Migrant Advisory Unit
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>OP</b>	Operating plan
<b>UAMs</b>	Unaccompanied minors
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>SOPs</b>	Standard operating procedures

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Malta continued to see a decrease in migrant arrivals in 2021, following a downward trend since their high point in 2019. From a peak of 4,015 applications for international protection in 2019, the past two years have seen a decrease in applications which correlates with the decrease in migrant arrivals. In 2020, a total of 2,410 asylum applications were recorded, compared to 1,117 applications in 2021, reflecting a 53% decrease. To help mitigate the pressure on the Maltese asylum and reception system, the European Asylum Support Office<sup>1</sup> (**EASO**)-**Malta operating plan (OP) 2021 sought to:**

- Improve access to the asylum procedure in Malta and increase capacity to manage the asylum backlog at first instance determination;
- Enhance capacity of the Maltese authorities to implement reception standards in line with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

The OP 2021 was **very relevant**. National institutions and stakeholders clearly required support in reducing the backlog of asylum applications following some years of high arrivals, especially prior to 2019, and in implementing reception standards in line with the CEAS. EASO showed flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of stakeholders, for instance by revising the objectives and targets in line with delays encountered due to largely unforeseen external factors such as a low number of migrant arrivals in Malta and the persistence of the COVID-19<sup>2</sup> pandemic.

EASO's support achieved a **significant decrease in the applications backlog** through its support to the management of the asylum system in Malta. EASO conducted 1,190 registrations of applications for international protection and 1,004 interviews in the individual asylum determination procedure. However, not all activities could be implemented as planned due to challenges in recruiting new caseworkers and high employee turnover, for both EASO and the International Protection Agency (IPA).

EASO also helped to **improve national reception standards in line with CEAS**, especially in open centres. EASO contributed to this achievement through the provision of information, enhancing vulnerability assessments, and developing guidelines and joint reporting schemes that enhanced the capacity of the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) and IPA. The effectiveness of the support was aided by the **good working relationships that EASO has developed** with staff at IPA and AWAS throughout its years of providing operational support.

All in all, **EASO significantly enhanced Malta's capacities to maintain an asylum system and to, in some respects, improve reception conditions** by offering support both in personnel and material form. Malta's capacity, especially on asylum, would have been greatly diminished without the support of EASO. Indeed, EASO's expertise in terms of reception standards, information provision, and vulnerability assessment were considered to be very important by different stakeholders. That being said, the **COVID-19 pandemic, in conjunction with recruitment challenges, hindered the potential impact of EASO's operation in Malta**.

The **efficiency of EASO's intervention was limited by a number of factors**. Already existing challenges with the recruitment of new personnel were exacerbated by a high turnover rate and difficulties retaining personnel in key management positions. Furthermore, EASO faced some risks

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Coronavirus disease 2019.

to personnel health and safety, especially when operating in detention centres. The COVID-19 pandemic also affected the efficiency of the intervention in that some personnel returned to their home country and the pool of qualified candidates in Malta shrank.

The two **measures on asylum and reception were complimentary and mutually reinforcing**. This internal coherence, as well as coherence with Maltese authorities, has been increased through regular coordination meetings between IPA, AWAS, and EASO. EASO's operations also proved complementary to many of the activities of international organisations and local non-governmental organisations, which are also working to improve access to asylum and reception conditions.

Questions regarding the sustainability of EASO's support were raised by stakeholders, especially in the event of an increase in migrant arrivals. This was particularly evident in the support to asylum where there were some signs of institutional dependency on EASO. Sustainability was slightly better on reception, where AWAS was decreasing EASO support in many activities. The **national system still requires substantial upgrading in order for EASO to make its planned phase out** of support by the end of 2024.

Based on the above key findings, the following recommendations have been proposed:

**Recommendation 1: Work with the national institutions to develop an enhanced contingency plan for an increase in migrant arrivals to Malta.**

An increase in migrant arrivals to Malta along the Central Mediterranean Route is a possible, if not likely, phenomenon. It is evident that national institutions, and by extension EASO, are not fully prepared for such a scenario and should aim to increase their preparedness for such an eventuality.

**Recommendation 2: When implementing further support to the Maltese authorities, prioritise capacity building which enhances exit preparedness.**

EASO support for AWAS and IPA in 2021 was essential. It is unlikely that these national institutions would have been as efficient or effective in the absence of EASO's support. There is thus a need to increase their capacity in anticipation of EASO's phase out.

**Recommendation 3: Address and mitigate the challenges in recruitment and retainment of personnel.**

Staffing issues proved to be the most important obstacle to meeting the operational targets set for 2021. EASO must address these staffing issues with the greatest priority.

**Recommendation 4: Re-assess how targets are set.**

Recruitment challenges in 2021 resulted in some targets not being met, especially where targets were based on a forecasted number of personnel. EASO should strive to make targets more useful for monitoring and evaluation.

**Recommendation 5: Clarify training priorities and promote training for EASO personnel, and for staff from IPA and AWAS.**

EASO personnel indicated that overall, more could be done to regularly assess training needs and to clarify training priorities, as well as clarify the different available mechanisms for overcoming these challenges.

# 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 Malta for 2021 (hereinafter: EASO-Malta OP 2021, or OP 2021). It offers a retrospective, reflective and objective assessment of the degree to which the objectives have been met, identifies the reasons for any shortcomings, and suggests lessons learned from these interventions that might be useful to EASO in the design and implementation of future interventions in Malta and beyond.

The scope of the exercise concerns EASO's operational support to Malta during 2021. For contextual reasons, the report also considers previous OPs and historical migration and asylum statistics.

## 1.2 Background

Malta continued to see a decrease in migrant arrivals in 2021, following a downward trend since their high point in 2019. In 2019, Malta recorded 3,406 arrivals,<sup>3</sup> dipping down to 2,281 in 2020,<sup>4</sup> and finally dwindling to 830 in 2021.<sup>5</sup> Migrant arrivals decreased 64% in 2021 when compared to 2020.<sup>6</sup> Of those people arriving in 2021, 65% were adult men, 4% were adult women, 25% were unaccompanied children, and 5% were accompanied children. In terms of nationalities, 26% were Eritrean, 16% were Syrian, 12% were Sudanese, and 10% were Egyptian, with the remaining 35% from other countries of origin.<sup>7</sup>

From a high point of 4,015 applications for international protection in 2019, the past two years have seen a decrease in applications which correlates with the decrease in migrant arrivals. In 2020, a total of 2,410 asylum applications were recorded,<sup>8</sup> while Malta received 1,117 applications for asylum in 2021, reflecting a 53% decrease in asylum applications when compared to 2020.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the reduction in migrant arrivals and asylum applications lodged over the past year, national institutions have been overwhelmed, resulting in a large number of pending cases at first instance. At the end of 2019, the total number of pending asylum cases at first instance stood at 4,300 cases, while by the end of 2020, the total backlog was 5,100 cases.<sup>10</sup> By the end of 2021, the backlog had been reduced to 3,265 cases.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, Malta – Sea Arrivals, January to December 2019.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, Malta – Sea Arrivals, January to December 2020.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, Malta Factsheet, 31 December 2021.

<sup>6</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, Malta Factsheet, 31 December 2021.

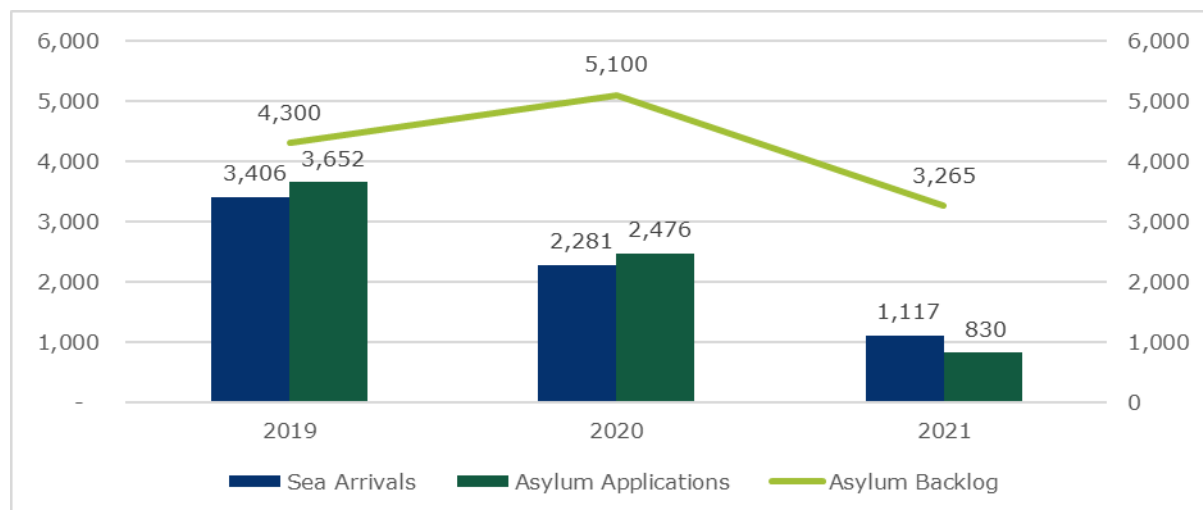
<sup>8</sup> Eurostat data.

<sup>9</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Eurostat data.

<sup>11</sup> Communication with EASO personnel, Jan 2022.

**Figure 1. Number of sea arrivals and asylum applications in Malta**



Source: Own elaboration from Eurostat, UNHCR, and EASO data. Asylum backlog figures are for the end of year.

In 2021, EASO registration personnel flagged 440 applicants for international protection as potentially vulnerable and therefore in need of a follow up.<sup>12</sup> This number is lower than in previous years with 871 vulnerability cases referred in 2019 and 934 in 2020.<sup>13</sup> In terms of unaccompanied minors (UAMs), more than 780 UAMs (making up 23% of all arrivals) reached the Maltese shores in 2019, while in 2020 there were 537 UAMs (24% of all arrivals),<sup>14</sup> and finally in 2021 Malta received 205 UAMs (25% of all arrivals).<sup>15</sup>

Despite a trend toward lower numbers of migrant arrivals and asylum applications over the past two years, Malta maintains specific needs and continues to benefit from the operational support of EASO. EASO is a key actor supporting an effective policy response and the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Bilateral cooperation between EASO and the Maltese national authorities started in 2017, when EASO provided training for case officers from the Office of the Refugee Commissioner (today the International Protection Agency or IPA). In early 2019, EASO started providing support for *ad hoc* voluntary relocations in Malta, which included support on the registration and lodging of applications for international protection, information provision, and the Dublin Unit.

In June 2019, EASO and the Maltese authorities signed their first OP which aimed to ensure that persons in need of protection in Malta had swift access to the international protection determination procedure, to increase Malta's capacity to deal with the pending cases at first instance, and to enhance the capacity of the Dublin Unit. This was followed by a second agreement signed in December 2019, which focused on four measures: (1) improving access to the asylum procedure; (2) increasing the national authorities' capacity to manage and reduce the asylum backlog; (3) enhancing the Dublin Unit's capacity; and (4) enhancing the capacity of the national authorities to implement reception standards in line with CEAS.

In December 2020, EASO and the Maltese authorities signed a new OP for 2021, whose objectives related to two measures:

<sup>12</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021

<sup>13</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR, Malta – Sea Arrivals, January to December 2020.

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR, Malta Factsheet, 31 December 2021.



- **Measure MT 1.0:** Improve access to asylum procedure in Malta and increase capacity to manage the asylum backlog at first instance determination;
- **Measure MT 2.0:** Enhance capacity of Maltese authorities to implement reception standards in line with CEAS.

In addition, EASO offered support on cross-cutting areas such as information provision, interpretation, training, IT-related projects, and logistics. In terms of human resources, deployed personnel increased from 65 in 2020 to 149 in 2021. The total budget for the intervention in 2021 was set at €6,418,738.05.<sup>16</sup>

The national stakeholders were the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement, the IPA, the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), the Principal Immigration Officer (Police), and the Detention Services. However, the main stakeholders directly affected by EASO's intervention were IPA and AWAS.

IPA is the national authority responsible for receiving and examining applications for international protection in Malta. IPA became operational in August 2020.<sup>17</sup> IPA replaced the Office of the Refugee Commissioner established by the Refugees Act, Chapter 420 of the Laws of Malta,<sup>18</sup> which opened its doors in 2001 and became fully operational at the beginning of 2002. Among various reasons for the establishment of the new agency in 2020 was the need to have the appropriate infrastructure and a fully-fledged agency capable of handling a rapidly expanding workload.

AWAS implements national legislation and policy concerning the welfare of refugees, other persons enjoying international protection, and asylum applicants. This agency manages several reception facilities, namely three reception centres in Ħal Far, one reception centre in Fgura dedicated to minors between the ages of 13 and 16 years old, and one initial reception centre in Marsa for families and other vulnerable groups. Since 2020, the initial reception centre in Marsa has been transformed into an open-closed centre so that people who are medically cleared have the possibility to leave the centre, while those who are not yet medically cleared must remain in the closed part of the centre. In addition, this agency carries out vulnerability screening and age assessments, provides information programmes in the area of employment, housing, health, welfare and education, and promotes voluntary returns.

The Detention Services is a government body that falls under the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement. It was set up to manage all closed accommodation centres, where detained migrants are accommodated pursuant to the issuance of a detention order by the Principal Immigration Officer. In 2021, there was one operational detention centre in Malta, the Safi Detention Centre, located within the Safi military barracks.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions this report sought to answer are based on the requirements for evaluations of the European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines but tailored to the Malta OP and specific elements of interest to EASO. Importantly, it covers two priority questions, related to the impact

<sup>16</sup> Agency internal financial monitoring (non-validated).

<sup>17</sup> Legal Notice 194 of 2020, Public Administration Act, Chapter 594 of the Laws of Malta, International Protection Agency (Establishment) Order, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Refugees Act, Chapter 420 of the Laws of Malta, 2001. Available here: <https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/1009/file/acf4e8a7551788d76b660fabfe09a726.pdf>



and sustainability of EASO's support to Malta (see Table 1), in view of its planned phase out. A more detailed overview of the questions is presented in the evaluation matrix in Annex 2.

**Table 1. Evaluation questions**

Evaluation criterion	Questions
<b>Relevance</b>	To what extent was the intervention in Malta relevant to its stakeholders, in light of their original needs and any changes therein?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	What have been the (quantitative and qualitative) effects of the intervention in Malta and to what extent can these be credited to the intervention rather than external factors?
<b>Efficiency</b>	To what extent are the costs of the intervention in Malta justified given what has been achieved, and what factors influenced its efficiency?
<b>Coherence</b>	To what extent is the intervention in Malta coherent internally, and with other interventions that have similar objectives?
<b>EU added value, Impact &amp; Sustainability</b>	<p><b>Priority question 1:</b> What would have been different if EASO were not supporting the Maltese authorities?</p> <p><b>Priority question 2:</b> Which mechanisms are foreseen to promote sustainability in the aftermath of EASO's phase out? Are these sufficient to ensure continuity of efforts and results?</p>

## 2.2 Methodological approach

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

### Desk research

A broad selection of relevant documents for the evaluation were shared by EASO which were analysed and relied on for the evaluation. Additional desk research was carried out to identify further relevant documents, including latest statistics on the asylum situation in Malta. Desk research was the main source of evidence for questions pertaining to the achievements of the OP. Results and fidelity monitoring data are especially important for the evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency, while contextual information forms the basis for the assessment of relevance. The desk research has made full use of available data and is coherent with earlier evaluations conducted.

### In-depth interviews

Key informant 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.

We conducted a total of **six interviews** for the evaluation of this OP involving 16 interviewees, including with EASO personnel, national authorities, and members from international organisations and civil society. Interviews with national authorities included staff members from IPA and AWAS. Interviews with international organisations and civil society included representatives from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Jesuit Refugee Services, and the Red Cross.

## 2.3 Limitations to the robustness of the evidence base

All interviews were done via videoconference due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the surge in cases at the start of 2022 when field visits were planned. Face-to-face interviews were not possible. More significantly, it was not possible to travel in order to conduct a field visit in Malta due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This limited knowledge of the situation on the ground, especially in the reception centres, open centres, and detention centre. Interviewing advocacy organisations that operate in these spaces, as well as the inclusion in a group interview of some EASO personnel members who regularly work in these spaces, mitigated the impact of this constraint to some extent. Nevertheless, insights into the day-to-day operations, including working processes and any inefficiencies related to them, were difficult to glean.

## 3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

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

### 3.1 Relevance

At the end of 2020, EASO conducted a series of consultations, both internal and with stakeholders and the Maltese authorities, to identify priority needs to be addressed in the Malta OP 2021. This needs assessment, amongst other conclusions, noted that migratory pressure remained high in Malta and highlighted the correlation between the number of migrant arrivals and the number of applications for asylum, thus homing in on the backlog discussed throughout this report. Following this needs assessment exercise, measurable targets were set for EASO's intervention under the Results Framework for the OP for 2021.

Overall, interviews and desk research conducted in the course of this external evaluation confirmed the need for and relevance of the EASO operation in Malta in 2021. Moreover, across measures 1 and 2, flexibility was built into the framework to allow EASO to adapt to the changing needs of stakeholders without amending the OP. Indeed, midway through 2021, amendments were made to the Results Framework and a revised version was used for reporting purposes as of the beginning of May. The new Results Framework took into account delays from stakeholders in achieving the original targets, delays in the agreement of standard operating procedures (SOPs) with stakeholders, as well as unforeseen external factors such as a low number of migrant arrivals in Malta and the persistence of the pandemic. This flexibility allowed EASO to, for example, start the year supporting IPA with the backlog of registrations but to then move to also covering IPA's front desk, as well as carrying out more interviews, registration, and interpretation, as IPA lost personnel.<sup>19</sup>

EASO personnel noted certain limitations on the areas of intervention due to the obligation to respond to requests for support from the Maltese authorities rather than being able to identify areas of operation.<sup>20</sup> Capacity building and contingency planning for future arrivals, have not yet been prioritised by the Maltese authorities. These areas are likely to become more significant as EASO gradually phases out support for Malta.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021; Results Framework.

<sup>20</sup> As EASO transitions to an EU agency, there may be more scope to suggest areas of work.

<sup>21</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021.

### **3.1.1 Measure 1: Improve access to asylum procedure in Malta and increase capacity to manage the asylum backlog at first instance determination**

Drawing from the needs assessment conducted in late 2020, it was concluded that under measure 1 of the OP for 2021, EASO would continue to provide support to the national authorities in particular with the registration of applications for international protection, first instance determination, and support for relocation.

Despite a significant decrease in migrant arrivals since 2019, migratory pressure over the past five years contributed to a large number of pending asylum cases on the islands. At the beginning of 2020, the total number of pending asylum cases at first instance stood at 4,300 cases, while at the beginning of 2021, the total backlog was 5,100 cases.<sup>22</sup> Thus, at the beginning of 2021, the Maltese authorities faced a large backlog of asylum cases that necessitated institutional support, whilst asylum applicants faced exceptionally long periods of uncertainty awaiting the processing of their asylum claims.

These migratory pressures were exacerbated in Malta by an institutional restructuring which saw the Office of the Refugee Commissioner, the national authority responsible for the registration of asylum applicants, transformed into the IPA. IPA became operational in August 2020,<sup>23</sup> however it is still not yet fully functional and requires the employment of further personnel. In view of continued arrivals and the concomitant asylum applications lodged, coupled with the restructuring at IPA, a high turnover of its staff, and the challenges of functioning during a pandemic, the asylum determining authority in Malta has been under pressure.<sup>24</sup> Thus, under the OP 2021, EASO aimed to deploy personnel, provide support with the registration of asylum applicants, assist in the identification and referral of vulnerable persons, and provide information about the asylum procedure to increase accessibility and intelligibility on the part of applicants.

The relevance of EASO's 2021 intervention to increase the capacity of the national authorities to process asylum claims was evinced in the interviews conducted for this report in which national authorities and civil society organisations recognised the necessity of the support received in registering asylum applicants.<sup>25</sup>

### **3.1.2 Measure 2: Enhance capacity of Maltese authorities to implement reception standards in line with CEAS.**

Drawing from the needs assessment conducted in late 2020, it was concluded that under Measure 2 of the OP for 2021, EASO would continue to support the national authorities in the assessment of vulnerable cases in reception centres as well as with age assessments, start providing support for social work in a reception context, and offer additional support on a certain number of cross-cutting areas.

More specifically, the second measure of the Malta OP 2021 aimed at supporting the Maltese reception system by enhancing the capacity of the relevant authority, AWAS. AWAS manages reception facilities and is also responsible for vulnerability screening, referrals, and age assessments which EASO's intervention aimed to support.

<sup>22</sup> Eurostat data.

<sup>23</sup> Legal Notice 194 of 2020, Public Administration Act, Chapter 594 of the Laws of Malta, International Protection Agency (Establishment) Order, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Evaluation of Malta OP 2020, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Interviews: National Authorities, Civil Society, Jan 2022.

Relatively high migrant arrivals leading up to 2020 exerted pressure on the Maltese reception system. By 2020, the total population in Malta's reception centres amounted to 2,925,<sup>26</sup> a high number relative to the Maltese population (525,285 people in 2020).<sup>27</sup> This pressure on the Maltese reception system explains, in part, the challenges national authorities faced in trying to provide reception standards in line with the CEAS. These challenges were exacerbated by the large backlog, the median duration of time from entry to registration (84 days in 2020), and the high percentage of UAMs (24% of arrivals in 2020) (see also Background section 1.2). Together, these factors indicate that vulnerable individuals had their initial screening and asylum registrations delayed. Thus, throughout 2021, EASO aimed to support the Maltese authorities, particularly AWAS, in the area of reception, in order to strengthen the agency's age assessment procedure, improve the screening of vulnerability, and effectively refer vulnerable applicants.

The relevance of EASO's 2021 intervention to increase the capacity of the national authorities to implement reception standards in line with CEAS was also evinced in the desk research and interviews conducted for this report.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.2 Effectiveness

EASO's support has been effective both at increasing access to asylum (MT1) and improving reception conditions in line with the CEAS (MT2). EASO has had a positive and practical impact in the areas of information provision, quality of care due to the deployment of social workers, vulnerability assessment, and asylum registrations. This support provided by EASO boosted capacity within the Maltese system.<sup>29</sup> However, advocacy organisations stress that these specific improvements in the system have not led to overall improvements in access to asylum and reception standards. For example, there has been an expanded use of detention, especially but not only for people who fall into this category, which produces and exacerbates vulnerability, and undermines EASO's effectiveness.<sup>30</sup>

EASO and the national institutions continue to face challenges with a shortage of caseworkers, issues with the recruitment of new caseworkers, and high employee turnover resulting from high stress conditions on the job. The COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions negatively affected the ability of EASO and the Maltese authorities to recruit personnel from outside of Malta. As regards training, throughout 2021, EASO identified and recommended training pathways for newly recruited as well as experienced personnel, trained a high number of temporary employees and interpreters, offered conflict and risk assessment training, and offered six *ad hoc* training sessions to Police, Customs and Border personnel on access to asylum.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, certain training challenges remained, especially within the area of reception due to the high-stress and changing environment, alongside limitations within the EASO training structure to respond quickly to new training needs arising in the field.

Moreover, throughout 2021, EASO sometimes faced difficulty in accessing reception centres, in part due to COVID-19 restrictions.<sup>32</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic complicated the provision of access to asylum and reception conditions, not least because practices limiting the spread of infectious diseases were sometimes not sufficient or not adhered to in national detention facilities. A two-

<sup>26</sup> Population in AWAS Open Centres: 1,701; in Detention Centres: 820; in the Initial Reception Centre: 150; in Church-run open centres: 254. Information available from: UNHCR, Malta – Sea Arrivals, January to December 2020.

<sup>27</sup> According to Eurostat and World Bank data.

<sup>28</sup> Interviews with National Authorities, Civil Society, Jan 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Interviews with National Authorities, Civil Society, EASO Personnel, Dec 2021 - Jan 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Interviews with Civil Society, Jan 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021; cf. EASO Internal training plan.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021.

week quarantine period remained obligatory for any migrant arrivals. Nevertheless, most activities continued throughout the year without the need to suspend work for long periods of time.<sup>33</sup>

Across both measures, effectiveness was aided by the good working relationships that EASO has developed with staff at IPA and AWAS. Stakeholders saw the pilot joint reporting scheme, initiated first between EASO and IPA and then between EASO and AWAS, as a positive development. Joint reporting allowed for the sharing of challenges and information between the different stakeholders, as well as the cross-checking of data leading to the identification of errors. However, the joint reporting process suffered from delays throughout the year. The quality and consistency of reporting was also hampered by capacity issues stemming from recruitment challenges across AWAS, EASO, and IPA.<sup>34</sup> Some minor limitations to the reporting template were also raised, for example in terms of being able to identify how many protection certificates were issued by IPA compared to EASO.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, joint reporting was seen as a process that increased accountability and capacity building.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the clear quantitative data collected by EASO and the national authorities, measuring the effectiveness of EASO's intervention in Malta in 2021 is complicated by a number of confounding factors at play. For example, while EASO supported the national authorities in making a reduction to the backlog of pending asylum cases and shortening the asylum application process, these achievements must be considered within the broader context of a reduction in migrant arrivals in that year. It is difficult to isolate and measure the specific impact of EASO's intervention amidst multiple dynamic variables affecting migration realities in Malta. However, qualitative feedback from stakeholders across the spectrum indicates, in part, the degree to which outcomes can be attributed to support from EASO. For example, IPA personnel asserted that EASO's support in 2021 was crucial for business continuity.

### **3.2.1 Measure 1: Improve access to asylum procedure in Malta and increase capacity to manage the asylum backlog at first instance determination**

EASO's effectiveness on many of the targets under measure 1 was limited in 2021 by challenges in recruiting new caseworkers and high employee turnover resulting from high-stress conditions on the job and other factors.<sup>37</sup> IPA faced similar recruitment and retainment challenges, limiting their ability to deploy staff. Indeed, IPA and other stakeholders acknowledged that without EASO support, it would have been difficult for IPA to operate.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, as with measure 2, EASO noted the positive impact their work had on structures, guidelines, and SOPs at IPA.<sup>39</sup>

#### ***Registrations, interviews, and evaluation reports***

In 2021, EASO conducted 1,190 registrations of applications for international protection, thus exceeding the yearly target of 920.<sup>40</sup> This figure, well below the 2,186 registrations conducted in 2020,<sup>41</sup> reflects the significant decrease in migrant arrivals to Malta in 2021. In this period, applications for international protection stemmed primarily from nationals from Sudan, Syria, Somalia, and Eritrea. Furthermore, the average number of registrations per EASO registration

<sup>33</sup> Interviews, Dec 2021- Jan 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, National Authorities, Dec 2021- Jan 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021 - Jan 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Interviews with National Authorities, Civil Society, EASO Personnel, Dec 2021 - Jan 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021 - Jan 2022.

<sup>40</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Evaluation of Malta OP 2020, 2021.

assistant per week stood at six, above the target of five per week.<sup>42</sup> IPA and EASO personnel, along with advocacy organisations in Malta, confirm the significant contribution EASO made to decreasing the registration backlog, thus allowing for a more efficient registration system.<sup>43</sup> Despite this success, the time between entry and registration increased in 2021 to 124 days (median duration), up from 84 days in 2020, due in part to delays in the medical clearance of applicants. The median duration between notification of medical clearance and registration was 43 days.<sup>44</sup>

At the beginning of 2020, the total number of pending asylum cases at first instance stood at 4,300, while by the beginning of 2021 the total backlog was 5,100 cases.<sup>45</sup> In their efforts to reduce the backlog, EASO caseworkers conducted 1,004 interviews in the individual asylum determination procedure in 2021, a substantial increase over the figure for 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cessation of interviews for a two-month period. The 2021 figure represents 72% of the yearly target of 1,400 personal interviews.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, EASO caseworkers submitted 900 evaluation reports in 2021, making up 64% of the yearly target of 1,400.<sup>47</sup> Recruitment problems in IPA and EASO were a significant factor hindering achievement of yearly targets. Indeed, individual caseworkers exceeded their targets and lessons have been learned about setting targets based on the number of employed personnel in future. All but one of EASO's opinions on asylum applications were accepted by the national authorities, reflecting the positive nature of collaboration between EASO and IPA.<sup>48</sup>

In 2021, EASO thus helped achieve the first decrease in the backlog in some years, also helped by a lower number of migrant arrivals than in previous years. This was achieved despite changing guidance and templates from IPA, which required some interviews to be redone.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, a large backlog of 3,265 cases remained at the end of 2021 with many people who filed their application in 2019 still awaiting a decision.<sup>50</sup> IPA's emphasis on prioritising claims it deems unfounded adds to the time that asylum applicants with manifestly founded claims spend awaiting a decision.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Quality control support***

EASO supported the establishment of a Quality Control Unit in IPA, with the creation of related internal guidelines and tools. The Unit was comprised of two EASO quality assurance officers and two IPA quality assurance officers.<sup>52</sup> In supporting the creation of a Quality Control Unit and an asylum quality assurance mechanism, EASO conducted 803 quality checks (over double its annual target of 400) in 2021, its first year of operation.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, national authorities noted that the activities of IPA's Quality Control Unit had been hampered due to recruitment challenges and staff inexperience.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>42</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring 2021

<sup>43</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, National Authorities, Civil Society, Dec 2021 – Jan 2022.

<sup>44</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021; Evaluation of Malta OP 2020, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Eurostat data.

<sup>46</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, National Authorities, Dec 2021-Jan 2022; EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel Malta, Dec 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews with National Authorities, Civil Society, Jan 2022; Communication with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Interviews with Civil Society, Jan 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>53</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring 2021

<sup>54</sup> Interviews with National Authorities, Jan 2022.

### ***Country of origin information***

EASO did not meet its target of establishing a country of origin information (COI) unit at the IPA in 2021, due to staffing problems at IPA. Instead, the EASO COI Helpdesk responded to 100% of all COI queries, well above its target of fielding 75% of the queries for that year.

### ***Dublin support***

EASO processed 100% of outgoing Dublin requests in 2021. The dynamic in both these cases reflects the effectiveness of EASO's operation, while also highlighting the risk of an unsustainable institutional dependency on EASO.

### ***Digitisation***

EASO worked on the archiving of documents and digitisation, where there were positive but slow developments. For instance, EASO achieved the target of establishing a workflow for the digitisation of paper files.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Document analysis***

Lastly, EASO carried out document analysis and verification in Malta, which has not been done in other operational contexts. This work was positively received by the Maltese authorities.<sup>56</sup> Training workshops with a Document Analyst expert for all registration officers, caseworkers (EASO and IPA), and IPA administrative staff were organised in late 2021.

## **3.2.2 Measure 2: Enhance capacity of Maltese authorities to implement reception standards in line with CEAS**

Overall, EASO was effective at supporting the authorities to implement reception standards in line with the CEAS, especially in open centres. Along with services such as information provision and vulnerability assessment, advocacy organisations noted the material improvements in open centres, such as the creation of a recreational centre for UAMs in Ħal Far Tent Village, and the building of a kitchen for families and single women and the refurbishment of a briefing room for information sessions both at the Ħal Far Hangar Open Centre. Nevertheless, civil society actors noted that more improvements are necessary, especially with regard to immigration detention, for reception conditions to be in line with the CEAS.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Information provision***

In 2021, EASO contributed to an improvement in information provision, although information materials were not fully updated until the second quarter of that year. EASO conducted 580 information provision sessions in 2021 that catered to the needs of 458 attendees, with some people attending multiple information sessions.<sup>58</sup> When compared to approximately 272 information sessions provided in 2020, this number indicates a continued enhancement of EASO's capacity to provide relevant information on asylum, reception conditions, and employment.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, EASO met 105% of its target of 550 information provision sessions for the entire year by the end of 2021. However, it only reached 57% of its target to provide information to 800 people in reception

<sup>55</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022; EASO internal operational monitoring 2021.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021

<sup>57</sup> Interviews with Civil Society, Jan 2022.

<sup>58</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Evaluation of Malta OP 2020, 2021.



centres.<sup>60</sup> Personnel resignations and changes in AWAS instructions, including the bubble system put in place as a COVID safety measure, resulted in fewer people dedicated to information provision: where five had originally been planned and recruited, resignations occurred after only a few weeks. In September, AWAS instructed EASO to keep just three personnel dedicated to information provision.<sup>61</sup>

The decision by AWAS to reduce the maximum period of residence in reception facilities to six months also led to a reduction in access to asylum applicants and other migrants. This impinged upon EASO's ability to deliver information provision as well as assess vulnerability.<sup>62</sup> Low attendance at information provision sessions was also noted due to residents' work commitments during normal working hours. EASO and AWAS have attempted to reach more applicants by introducing shifts, whereby information providers are present in the centres late in the afternoon. However, this logistical change has not yet had a measurable impact. Finally, group sessions were reduced or suspended throughout the year due to COVID-19.<sup>63</sup>

Despite these challenges, the improvement in information provision in 2021 is confirmed by IPA, AWAS, and EASO personnel, as well as advocacy organisations in Malta.<sup>64</sup> Many pointed to the important role of the Migrant Advisory Unit (MAU), established in 2020, which continued to improve its services in 2021. Indeed, EASO also confirmed that their personnel dedicated to information provision developed good working relationships with staff from the MAU, co-developing information provision which was then taken on by the Unit as a good practice.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, further improvements to information provision are needed. For example, interviewed international organisations noted that although information provision by EASO was foreseen for those chosen for relocation at registration, this was not carried out due to personnel shortages. Nevertheless, advocacy organisations observed that EASO has contributed to a positive cultural shift within national agencies, where information provision is now more of a priority.<sup>66</sup>

### ***Vulnerability assessments***

Vulnerability assessment is an important element of the Maltese asylum and reception systems, as it is an operational context with high rates of vulnerability.<sup>67</sup> In 2021, EASO conducted 810 vulnerability assessments, 81% of its target of 1,000 assessments for that year.<sup>68</sup> COVID safety bubbles in the centres, which minimised personnel on the ground, referrals to the therapeutic and social workers team, and a lack of assessments for minors all led to the decreased number of foreseen assessments. In 2021, the average time from entry into Malta to submission of opinion on vulnerability was 273 days.<sup>69</sup> This lengthy period has been attributed to the fact that an efficient workflow was not agreed with AWAS in early 2021 and that stakeholders and authorities may not immediately identify vulnerability. Some civil society organisations suggested that EASO support at disembarkation would improve vulnerability identification.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>60</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>62</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Civil Society, Jan 2022.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Interviews, Dec 2021- Jan 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews with Civil Society, Jan 2022.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021.

<sup>68</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>69</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Interviews with Civil Society, Jan 2022.

On UAMs, progress was made to overcome workflow challenges associated with changes in the Child Protection Act in 2020,<sup>71</sup> which required a magistrate to assign a legal guardian to each UAM. This change made it more difficult to recognise a person as a minor and unaccompanied, resulting in delays and many care orders being rejected. In response, AWAS and EASO worked with Child Protection Services in order to be able to put in place temporary care orders on arrival before assessment.<sup>72</sup>

### ***Age assessments***

In close cooperation with the AWAS Care Team, EASO finalised an SOP on age assessment in Q3 which was formally approved by AWAS management in Q4 2021. The changes in the Child Protection Act led to a delay in finalisation of this document. It is now ready for use, but AWAS requested the activity not to be implemented with EASO's support so no age assessments were carried out.<sup>73</sup>

### ***Care Team and social workers***

In 2021, EASO enhanced the capacity of the AWAS Care Team through the establishment and recruitment of social worker positions within the team. Although new positions for nine social workers were agreed between AWAS and EASO, recruitment challenges as well as changing instructions from AWAS resulted in only three joining the team: two working with adults and one with UAMs. Moreover, two of three positions were only filled in August and September 2021.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, at the end of 2021, 92 cases were being followed by EASO social workers supporting the AWAS Care Team, above the target of 90 cases for that year (30 cases per social worker).<sup>75</sup> A social work case management tool was also developed by EASO social workers and tested in Q4 with positive responses from AWAS, which will adopt the tool for all AWAS social workers in 2022.<sup>76</sup>

Despite these successes, room for improvement in the collaboration between EASO and AWAS remained this year. For example, there was limited peer-to-peer collaboration between social workers at EASO and AWAS.<sup>77</sup> Some interviewees also noted the need for further training of personnel operating in difficult conditions, including training on secondary trauma, and the need for peer or other support systems in place.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Developing methodologies, guidelines and SOPs***

Overall, EASO noted success in developing guidelines and templates that may be used in other operations. For example, EASO has contributed to developing SOPs on age and vulnerability assessment. Indeed, a methodology on vulnerability assessment has been adopted by AWAS and has been assessed by the Maltese government as 'added value' that allows AWAS to work beyond its capacity.<sup>79</sup> Building on this support, AWAS indicated their intention to create their own vulnerability assessment team in 2022, suggesting a possible positive development in terms of

<sup>71</sup> Evaluation of Malta OP 2020, 2021.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with National Authorities, Jan 2022.

<sup>73</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>74</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021 - Jan 2022;

<sup>75</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021; National Authorities, Jan 2022.

<sup>79</sup> "The added value of EASO's support is a structured methodology for vulnerability assessments, support to carry out more assessments which go beyond AWAS' capacity to do so." Quoted in CPT, 'Report to the Maltese Government on the visit to Malta carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 17 to 22 September 2020', 10 March 2021, p. 26.

capacity building and sustainability.<sup>80</sup> Although more needs to be done in order to establish a clearly defined referral pathway for vulnerable cases from AWAS to the national authorities, EASO had some success in establishing a formal referral mechanism to replace the informal practices in place, with a positive response from the Maltese authorities.<sup>81</sup> In addition, it was noted that EASO is positively influencing AWAS' working methods so, for instance, social workers are now specialising in particular areas rather than working across different areas. Indeed, throughout 2021, EASO focused on supporting AWAS to develop systems and structures, including centralised data collection tools for social workers. These tools will allow for better monitoring and planning.

Overall, the structured approach to vulnerability assessments, as well as social workers, was seen as an effective system and positive development by AWAS.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, EASO personnel raised questions as to the impact of referrals and vulnerability assessments, noting that where extreme vulnerability is found, EASO recommendations for extra conditions to be in place during an asylum interview are not always adhered to. It was reported that this affected some asylum applicants' confidence in the system.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Integrated tools for reception management***

The testing of an IT reception management system in AWAS centres during 2021 did not materialise.<sup>84</sup> Delays occurred due to a lack of capacity in EASO as well as a lack of response from the Maltese authorities about a kick-off meeting. A feasibility study is being conducted to see if a Norwegian system might be adapted to the Maltese context.<sup>85</sup>

## **3.3 Efficiency**

EASO's relative success at achieving most of its targets for 2021 and proving instrumental to the national authorities in Malta came at a cost of an estimated €4,750,258.92 for its operations in Malta in 2021, less than the annual planned budget of €6,418,738.05.<sup>86</sup>

EASO spent an estimated €2,494,893.83 on measure 1 in 2021, below the planned annual budget of € 3,079,619.216. Under measure 1, less than budgeted was spent on employment in all three subcategories: Member State experts, temporary personnel, and interpreters and cultural mediators. Similarly, EASO spent an estimated €1,304,591.63 on measure 2, below the planned annual budget of €2,096,972.11. As with measure 1 costs, less than budgeted was spent on employment in all three subcategories in measure 2: Member State experts, temporary personnel, and interpreters and cultural mediators.<sup>87</sup>

EASO spent an estimated €950,773.46 on other direct costs in 2021, below the planned annual budget of € 1,242,146.73. The highest cost items in the other direct costs category included temporary support personnel, IT equipment, and transport.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021; National Authorities, Jan 2022.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with National Authorities, Jan 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>84</sup> EASO Internal operational monitoring; Interview with National Authorities, Jan 2022.

<sup>85</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021 – Jan 2022.

<sup>86</sup> Agency internal financial monitoring (non-validated).

<sup>87</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring; Agency internal financial monitoring (non-validated).

<sup>88</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring; Agency internal financial monitoring (non-validated).

### ***EASO personnel: recruitment and retention***

As discussed in some detail in the Effectiveness section and indicated by the financial data above, EASO's efficiency in achieving its targets in 2021 was hampered primarily by staffing issues at EASO and its partner institutions, IPA and AWAS. Although deployed personnel increased from 65 to 149 in 2021, EASO did not deploy and retain the envisioned personnel for that year. Further inefficiencies were incurred when the recruitment process of six social workers and six care team officers was not completed in light of decreased arrivals in 2021.<sup>89</sup>

On average, 68% of EASO's personnel in 2021 was made up of operational temporary workers, 17% was made up of support temporary workers, 10% of the personnel were MS experts, and 5% were statutory staff.<sup>90</sup> While EASO aimed to maintain a deployment rate of MS experts of 90-100% throughout 2021, there were six months when the deployment rate fell well below 90%. Similarly, the occupancy rate for statutory staff positions fell below the 90% target for five months in 2021. Furthermore, the essential position of MT1 Measure Coordinator remained unfilled. The MT2 Measure Coordinator left their position in the middle of May 2021 and was only replaced in September 2021. EASO was therefore operating without an MT1 and an MT2 Coordinator for much of 2021, requiring existing staff to take on these duties alongside their own.<sup>91</sup>

Likewise, while EASO aimed to maintain an occupancy rate of temporary support positions of 90-100% throughout 2021, there were six months when the occupancy rate fell marginally below 90%. Only in two months throughout 2021 did EASO manage to fulfil its target of over 90% occupation rate for temporary operational positions. For much of the year the occupancy rate for temporary operational positions was not much over 50%, not least because temporary positions took on average 85 days to fill.<sup>92</sup>

Compounding these hiring issues, EASO faced major challenges retaining personnel in 2021 with 39 temporary personnel members leaving EASO before the end of their contract in that year. This high turnover rate was a major factor hindering greater efficiency.<sup>93</sup>

Throughout 2021, personnel turnover and shortages created gaps in EASO human resources that affected the achievement of targets as well as relations between EASO and IPA/AWAS. A number of broad factors contributed to EASO's challenges with personnel employment and retention. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions on international travel exacerbated the challenge posed to employment by a limited pool of employable people on the island. Furthermore, EASO continues to operate under conditions where security and safety of the personnel have not always been effectively ensured. Due to shortcomings in this regard (lack of a sustainable crowd management system and limited Detention Service resources), there is a risk of safety/security incidents and emergencies that has an impact on personnel wellbeing and operations. Despite this risk, its severity decreased during 2021 due to efforts and improvements by the Maltese authorities, including improved Detention Service guard presence, deployment of AWAS guards to Safi to accompany open-centre applicants, a Detention Service agreement to ensure security with regard to applicants from private accommodation, and a camera system. EASO has tried to mitigate remaining safety and security issues by keeping personnel updated on levels of risk and possible measures to reduce them, providing sufficient and up-to-date security equipment to all operational

<sup>89</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>90</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring.

<sup>91</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring.

<sup>92</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring.

<sup>93</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring.

locations, providing relevant security/safety training, reviewing the possible need for contracted security services, and reviewing existing emergency procedures.<sup>94</sup>

Some registration and asylum interviews are carried out by EASO in Safi Detention Centre, which not only negatively affect personnel but also contribute to inefficiencies due to increased costs for security and transport. In addition, EASO noted the inefficiency of maintaining separate pools of interpreters for asylum and reception. It was suggested that one pool of interpreters would be more efficient.<sup>95</sup> MT1 efficiency was also affected by changing guidance from IPA which resulted in the need to redo some interviews. Under MT2, similar inefficiencies could be seen when recruitment for six social workers was halted after it began due to changing instructions from AWAS. Despite this, generally good working relationships between EASO and IPA and AWAS contributed to efficiency.<sup>96</sup>

### **Training**

Personnel productivity was also limited by some training challenges. Due to EASO's relatively small operation in Malta, access to training often relied on other operations and their capacity. Despite this, a series of training sessions, either on EASO Training Curriculum modules or in the form of thematic sessions, took place under measures 1 and 2, targeting both EASO deployed staff, as well as AWAS and IPA officials. All relevant training activities were based on the MT 2021 training plan and organised in close cooperation with the MT Reception Training NCP.<sup>97</sup>

More training was conducted under measure 1 (where 164 participations occurred), as compared to measure 2 (112 participations). Under measure 1, training involved 72 individuals, while measure 2 involved 68 individuals.<sup>98</sup> In line with this, some further training needs were identified under measure 2, due in part to the high stress and changing environment within open centres and detention centres, as well as the high staff turnover. In response, EASO's operation in Malta developed 'briefings' in order to respond quickly to training needs in the field. For example, a briefing on female genital mutilation was carried out for personnel in 2021.

During 2021, national officials of IPA and AWAS, as well as EASO MT 2 staff, continued participating in EASO's Train the Trainers sessions, building on the cooperation during the previous years. In the area of reception (MT 2) specifically, national trainers delivered national training sessions on the Reception of Vulnerable Persons block A module, while a national session on the Management in the context of Reception module was delivered with the support of EASO's Training and Professional Development Centre. All sessions were attended by both AWAS and EASO MT 2 staff. In Malta, this will strengthen the national capacity of trainers and give the national authorities the autonomy to deliver EASO training curriculum modules in 2022. EASO's Training and Professional Development Centre is also working on new reception training modules for 2022.<sup>99</sup>

EASO personnel indicated that, overall, more could be done to regularly identify new training opportunities and to clarify training priorities, as well as clarify the different available mechanisms (curriculum) in order for it to be exploited in the most effective and efficient way.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup> EASO internal operational monitoring.

<sup>95</sup> This is in line with the recommendation in the Malta OP 2020 evaluation to set up pools of already trained personnel (Recommendation 4).

<sup>96</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Feb 2022.

<sup>98</sup> EASO internal training plan 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan - Feb 2022.

<sup>100</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan - Feb 2022.

### ***COVID-related risks***

The fact that EASO personnel continued to face the risk of contamination from an infectious disease in 2021 negatively impacted personnel wellbeing and operational activities and resources. EASO aimed to mitigate this risk by deploying personal protective equipment to all operational sites and instructing personnel to follow all the preventive measures, such as wearing a mask, maintaining physical distances, and washing hands. Staff were also offered the possibility to sign up for swab tests organised every week in Safi Detention Centre in collaboration with Detention Services medical staff. Transport was provided for staff signing up for the test.<sup>101</sup>

### ***Registration and asylum interview no-shows***

In 2020, a high number of no-shows for registration and asylum interviews (546 in total) was noted as hampering the effectiveness and efficiency of EASO's operation. This continued to be a problem in 2021 with 269 no-shows, 238 implicit withdrawals of asylum interviews, and 505 no-shows for registrations – a higher total of no-shows (774) than in 2020.<sup>102</sup>

## **3.4 Coherence**

Across all interviewees, it was agreed that there was a great degree of internal coherence in the operation: the two measures on asylum and reception were seen as complimentary and mutually reinforcing.<sup>103</sup> EASO confirmed that coherence had been increased through regular coordination meetings between IPA, AWAS, and EASO. Joint target setting and joint reporting also increased coherence, as EASO actively looked to build synergies with the Maltese authorities. Indeed, all these activities led to not only an increase in coherence between the two measures but also between EASO and the Maltese authorities. Regular coordination meetings led to significant suggestions, such as the provision of information occurring jointly with the two agencies, rather than separately. In addition, there is some evidence of sharing of information between AWAS and IPA, with for instance, IPA sharing indicators of vulnerability from initial registration with AWAS. This is currently occurring with EASO support.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, some challenges remain here in terms of coordination between EASO and the authorities (IPA and AWAS). For instance, there was limited peer-to-peer collaboration between social workers at EASO and AWAS.<sup>105</sup>

EASO's operation and its measures are complementary to many of the activities of international organisations and local non-governmental organisations, which are also working to improve access to asylum and reception conditions. These actors are regularly included in EASO's needs assessment process and work with EASO in a number of ways: for instance, they refer vulnerable cases and share interpreters. EASO is also sharing information and coordinating with the IOM on relocation. EASO is committed to coordinating with these actors in order to avoid overlap and duplication of work.<sup>106</sup>

## **3.5 EU added value and impact**

In relation to priority question 1, EASO significantly enhanced Malta's capacities to maintain an asylum system and, in some respects, to improve reception conditions. This support came in the

<sup>101</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Jan 2022

<sup>102</sup> Note that for January and February, 'implicit withdrawals' and no-shows were accumulated together so the data is not 100% accurate. Evaluation of Malta OP 2020, 2021; Author communication with EASO, Jan 2022.

<sup>103</sup> Interviews: Dec 2021- Jan 2022.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021; cf. Interview with National Authorities, Jan 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Interviews with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021 - Jan 2022.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021.

form of personnel, the development of services, and material support. In particular, the head of IPA highlighted the fact that the crucial support provided by EASO allowed them to continue to operate in 2021.<sup>107</sup>

Different actors stressed the importance of EASO's expertise in terms of reception standards, information provision, and vulnerability assessment from other operational contexts. In some areas, interviewees noted a change in culture in terms of, for example, the need for information provision but also the need to have better internal governance, clear workflows, and SOPs.<sup>108</sup> For example, EASO supported the implementation of a quality assurance framework in IPA, which is due to be enhanced in 2022. A similar quality assurance framework will also be implemented in AWAS in 2022.<sup>109</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other recruitment challenges, hindered the potential impact of EASO's operation in Malta. Questions around sustainability were also raised across the interviews. High turnover rates may result in the longer-term loss of training and capacity building efforts. Advocacy organisations stressed that some of the positive impacts of EASO's work may not be sustained when sea arrivals increase. Indeed, organisations noted that although EASO had a positive impact, this has not led to an overall improvement in terms of access to asylum and reception conditions, in line with the CEAS.<sup>110</sup>

### **3.6 Sustainability**

In relation to priority question 2, a number of stakeholders attested to the fact that EASO did, to some degree, build the capacity of Malta's national institutions in 2021. For instance, there was a particular focus on influencing SOPs and other governance issues to ensure sustainability. Improved dialogue with counterparts at IPA granted EASO a certain degree of influence on IPA's SOPs and the development of a new organigramme for IPA in 2020, improvements which are expected to aid IPA in becoming more capable and independent. Similarly, the development of a referral mechanism, in conjunction with AWAS, and input into the adaptation of AWAS working methods whereby social workers are now specialising in different fields rather than working across all areas, should enhance the independent capacity of AWAS going forward.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, Maltese authorities highlighted the improvements to institutional capacity achieved at AWAS with EASO's support in 2021.<sup>112</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact that both qualitative and quantitative data indicate the extent to which EASO played an instrumental role in supporting Maltese institutions throughout 2021 may not bode well for the sustainability of the national institutions going forward. It is clear that the national system still requires substantial upgrading in order for Malta to develop the independent capacity necessary for EASO to make its planned phase out of support by the end of 2024. While quantitative targets were largely met this year, questions remain as to whether the national system is robust or coherent enough to take on this work alone.

In part because of personnel shortages at all three institutions, EASO did not make substantial headway in building up the capacity of AWAS and IPA in 2021 and may have even strengthened the dependence of national institutions on EASO. For example, EASO carried out onboarding for IPA caseworkers. This will be the first time that EASO team leaders will coordinate and lead the host

<sup>107</sup> Interview with National Authorities, Jan 2022.

<sup>108</sup> Interviews with Civil Society, National Authorities, Jan 2022.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021.

<sup>110</sup> Interviews with Civil Society, Jan 2022.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with EASO Personnel, Dec 2021.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with National Authorities, Jan 2022



state's caseworkers. Although this will likely result in a positive impact on IPA workflows and structures through the harmonisation of procedures, better alignment between the different caseworkers, and access for national authority caseworkers to EASO training, the process also reflects and might reinforce dependency on EASO, raising questions of sustainability.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 General conclusions

The **relevance** of EASO's operation in Malta in 2021 was **very good** as national institutions and stakeholders required support in reducing the backlog of asylum applications following some years of high arrivals, especially prior to 2019, and in implementing reception standards in line with the CEAS. Overall, interviews and desk research confirmed the relevance of EASO's operations and that the objectives of the OP 2021, its measures and its targets, proved especially relevant to local stakeholders. As noted above, much would have been different on the island in the absence of EASO's support. IPA's capacity would have been hampered without EASO's support, significantly less progress would have been made in managing the backlog at first instance, national institutions would have developed less independent capacity, and reception standards would have been less in line with the CEAS.

The **effectiveness** of EASO's intervention on measure 1 was **good** as it achieved a significant decrease in the applications backlog by conducting 1,190 registrations of applications for international protection and 1,004 interviews in the individual asylum determination procedure. The effectiveness of EASO's intervention on measure 2 was **fair** as EASO served to improve national reception standards in line with the CEAS through the provision of information, enhancing vulnerability assessments, and developing guidelines and joint reporting schemes that enhanced the capacity of AWAS and IPA. Across both measures, effectiveness was aided by the good working relationships that EASO has developed with staff at IPA and AWAS.

The **efficiency** of EASO's intervention on measure 1 (**fair**) and measure 2 (**fair**) in 2021 was limited by a number of factors. First and foremost, efficiency was hampered by the fact that EASO and the national institutions it works with did not employ and retain the number of personnel members envisioned for 2021. Challenges with the recruitment of new personnel were exacerbated by a high turnover rate and a failure to retain personnel in key management positions. Furthermore, EASO personnel faced some training challenges and risks to personnel health and safety especially when operating in detention centres which affected personnel retention and efficiency. The COVID-19 pandemic also affected the efficiency of the intervention in that some personnel returned to their home country and the pool of qualified candidates on the island shrank.

The **coherence** of EASO's intervention was **good**. All interviewees agreed that there was a great degree of internal coherence in the operation: the two measures on asylum and reception were seen as complimentary and mutually reinforcing. This internal coherence, as well as coherence with Maltese authorities, has been increased through regular coordination meetings between IPA, AWAS, and EASO. EASO's operations also proved complementary to many of the activities of international organisations and local non-governmental organisations, which are also working to improve access to asylum and reception conditions.

The **EU added value** and **impact** of EASO's intervention on measures 1 and 2 were both **good**. There is no doubt that EASO significantly enhanced Malta's capacities to maintain an asylum system and to, in some respects, improve reception conditions by offering support both in personnel and material form. Malta's capacity, especially under measure 1, would have been greatly diminished without the support of EASO's intervention (priority question 1). Indeed, different actors stressed

the importance of EASO's expertise in terms of reception standards, information provision, and vulnerability assessment from other operational contexts. As discussed in detail above, the COVID-19 pandemic, in conjunction with recruitment challenges, hindered the potential impact of EASO's operation in Malta.

The **sustainability** of EASO's intervention on measure 1 was **fair**, and **good** on measure 2. Questions regarding sustainability were raised across the interviews conducted for this study, especially in the event of an increase in migrant arrivals. This was particularly evident under measure 1 where there were some signs of institutional dependency on EASO. Sustainability was slightly better under measure 2, where AWAS was decreasing EASO's support in many activities. The national system still requires substantial upgrading in order for Malta to develop the independent capacity necessary for EASO to make its planned phase out of support by the end of 2024 (priority question 2).

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 Malta OP 2021**

	Measure 1	Measure 2
<b>Relevance</b>	Very Good	Very Good
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Good	Fair
<b>Efficiency</b>	Fair	Fair
<b>Coherence</b>	Good	Good
<b>EU added value &amp; Impact</b>	Good	Good
<b>Sustainability</b>	Fair	Good

## 4.2 Key lessons learned and good practices

In 2021, one of the key lessons learned was the importance of effective recruitment processes and the retention of personnel. With high turnover rates and challenges with recruitment in EASO, as well as IPA and AWAS, personnel shortages had the largest negative impact on performance in 2021. Some factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the limited pool of employable people in Malta, and the short-term nature of many EASO posts, remained outside institutional control. However, other areas were noted that may have a positive impact on staffing in the future, including mitigating stresses and risks associated with work conditions, especially in detention and open centres, adequate and clear onboarding that would prepare personnel for their roles and manage their expectations, and increased training opportunities throughout employment periods. In early 2022, IPA was also in the process of renegotiating staff work packages, including salary and work conditions, in an attempt to make posts more attractive.

Targets for 2021 were set based on an expected number of employees, which in turn depended on successful recruitment. Due to the challenges faced in recruiting and retaining staff, a number of targets had to be revised after four months and, nevertheless, some targets were still not met. To overcome these challenges, targets might instead be based on the productivity of personnel members in post. The inability of quantitative targets to capture important elements of the operation, such as changes in culture within national agencies, was also noted.

EASO's operational activities in 2021, especially in the area of asylum, revealed the crucial role they played in maintaining IPA's operations. Although commendable, the experience also raises questions about sustainability and the importance of building capacity at IPA in light of EASO's planned phase out by the end of 2024. For example, 2021 was the first year in which EASO team leaders coordinated host authority caseworkers in IPA. Although this harmonised procedures and different caseworkers' activities, it may have encouraged dependency.

In the area of reception, EASO developed guidelines and templates that contributed to a methodology on vulnerability assessment, adopted by AWAS. Such a good practice may be emulated in other operations. EASO also introduced new social worker positions in AWAS in 2021. EASO's inclusion of more social work in reception was noted in 2020 as innovative and a good practice. As they previously did with vulnerability assessments, EASO developed guidelines and templates with AWAS for this area. Lessons were learned about the need for social workers to be licensed, the risk of burnout, and thus the need for adequate guidance, clarity on the role, and ongoing structured peer support and counselling for personnel.

Good working relations between EASO, on the one hand, and AWAS and IPA, on the other, proved productive in 2021. In particular, co-development of materials as well as joint reporting built mutual trust and understanding, leading in some instances to good practices being adopted. For example, in the area of information provision, EASO worked closely with the MAU in order to co-develop information that was seen as good practice and extended to other parts of the MAU's operation. Joint reporting with the Maltese authorities allowed for the sharing of challenges and information between different stakeholders, as well as the cross-checking of data, which increased accountability and built capacity. However, considering the delays experienced during 2021, the system has not yet reached sufficient maturity to further roll out joint reporting. This could be explored if some of the recruitment challenges are resolved, however.

Another good practice that relied on positive working relations between EASO and national authorities was the joint setting of targets. Along with joint reporting, the joint setting of targets involved EASO actively building synergies with the Maltese authorities. Similarly, the importance of ongoing dialogue, not only between EASO and the national agencies but also between IPA and AWAS, was evident. The absence of such dialogue was highlighted in the case of vulnerability assessments and the lack of impact they had on asylum processes. Despite this, there was evidence of IPA sharing vulnerability indicators with AWAS from initial registrations. Both these experiences point to the inherent interconnectedness between asylum and reception and the need for robust communication and information sharing between the different agencies.

A final lesson learned in 2021 relates to various challenges around identifying training needs and providing training opportunities, especially in the area of reception, in part due to the small size of EASO's operation in Malta. Here, EASO began to deliver 'briefings' in order to respond quickly to immediate training needs, as well as to train personnel in Malta as 'trainers' in order to be able to roll out national versions of EASO training modules. The inclusion of personnel from EASO as well as national agencies in training was pointed to as a good practice leading to a shared understanding of standards and challenges, as well as learning from each other and other Member State contexts.

Despite being hampered by challenges with the recruitment and retention of personnel, there is evidence that EASO's 2021 operations in Malta established a number of good practices, increased dialogue and information sharing with national institutions for example, which promise to enhance the capacity of the national institutions in the years to come. This success is in part evinced by the fact that of all its country operations only in Malta has EASO initiated discussions with the national authorities aimed at realising EASO's planned phaseout from the island.

## 4.3 Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1: Work with the national institutions to develop an enhanced contingency plan for an increase in migrant arrivals to Malta.**

An increase in migrant arrivals to Malta along the Central Mediterranean Route is a possible if not likely phenomenon. It is evident that national institutions, and by extension EASO, are not fully prepared for such a scenario. To help mitigate the challenges posed by a potential increase in arrivals, EASO could:

- Work with authorities to 1) identify thresholds and/or warning signs, 2) define potential needs (e.g., human resources, financial, and material), and 3) draw up recruitment plans/strategies with a view to supporting authorities to be able to expand staff capacity in asylum and reception areas.

### **Recommendation 2: When implementing further support to the Maltese authorities, prioritise capacity building which enhances exit preparedness.**

EASO support for AWAS and IPA in 2021 was essential. It is unlikely that these national institutions would have been as efficient or effective in the absence of EASO's support. In anticipation of the planned phase out of EASO's operational support to Malta, EASO should:

- Aim to ensure a smooth transition by supporting the national authorities to recruit more staff (especially in IPA) and to decrease EASO support to these agencies over the next few years;
- Ensure that any future measures of effectiveness focus on sustainable as well as quantitative outcomes, for instance measuring how EASO has supported capacity building at national institutions;
- Have a clear, agreed exit strategy in place.

### **Recommendation 3: Address and mitigate the challenges in recruitment and retainment of personnel.**

Staffing issues proved to be the most important obstacle to meeting the operational targets set for 2021. EASO must address these staffing issues with the greatest priority by:

- Enhancing awareness of the work context before personnel are brought on board;
- Improving the wellbeing of active personnel members through the enhancement of counselling services and psychological first aid.

### **Recommendation 4: Re-assess how targets are set.**

Recruitment challenges in 2021 resulted in some targets not being met, especially where targets were based on a forecasted number of personnel. To make the indicators more useful for monitoring and evaluation, EASO could consider:

- Setting annual targets per personnel member, allowing for different levels of output depending on personnel recruitment;
- Exploring how targets can be flexible enough to capture the nuanced realities of the different types of cases a social worker might face;
- Supplementing quantitative targets with qualitative targets that take sustainability into account.

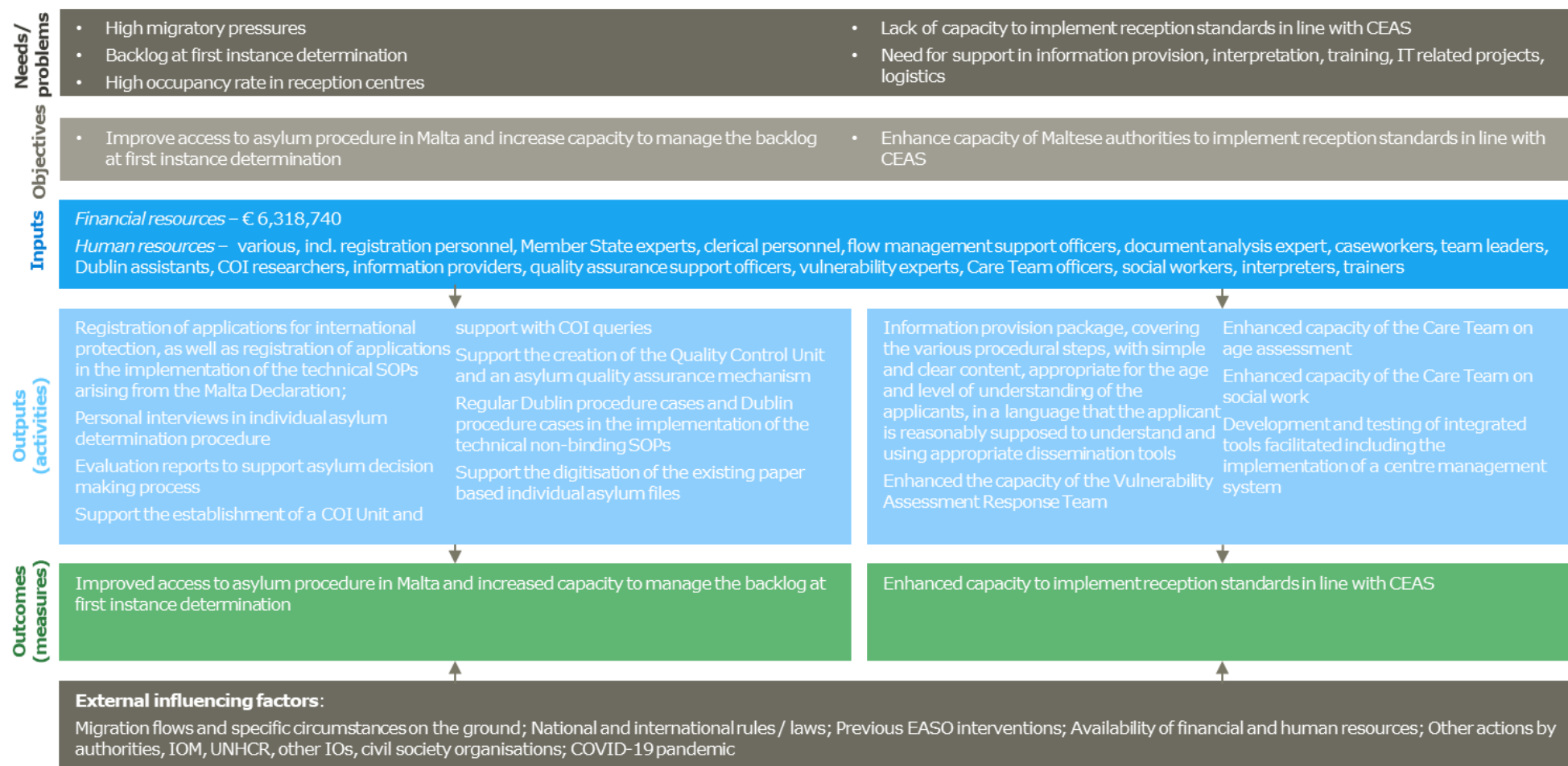
**Recommendation 5: Clarify training priorities and promote training for EASO personnel, and for staff from IPA and AWAS.**

EASO personnel indicated that overall, more could be done to regularly re-assess training opportunities and to clarify training priorities, as well as clarify the available curriculum. EASO should thus:

- Enhance communication between its Training and Professional Development Centre and its Maltese operation to regularly assess training needs and create clear training priorities;
- Increase its capacity to provide training to EASO, AWAS and IPA personnel in areas within the scope of EASO training, and if necessary, develop training on areas identified in training needs analyses;
- Respond in an agile way when training requests are received in relation to national versions of EASO modules under the Train the Trainers programme.

## Annex 1 – Intervention logic

Figure 2. EASO-Malta OP 2021 intervention logic



## Annex 2 – Evaluation matrix

Table 3. Draft evaluation matrix

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Sources of evidence
<b>Relevance: To what extent was the intervention in Malta relevant to its stakeholders, in light of their original needs and any changes therein?</b>			
<p><b>Were the objectives of the OP 2021 relevant to the needs of stakeholders, including in light of any changes encountered during 2021?</b></p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>What needs and problems were identified prior to the launch of the intervention?</i></p> <p><i>How have the needs and problems faced by stakeholders evolved over time?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any gaps in terms of needs or problems not addressed by the intervention?</i></p> <p><i>Were the intended results/activities/targets adjusted during the implementation of the intervention? Were changes appropriate to meet the needs of stakeholders?</i></p>	<p>Intervention logic</p> <p>Needs identified in needs assessment of the intervention</p> <p>Evidence of problems / needs and their evolution over time (e.g., trends in arrivals, trends in asylum applications, etc.)</p> <p>Stakeholder views on their needs and the degree to which the intervention addressed their needs and problems</p> <p>Adjustments made to original objectives (if applicable)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which the objectives were appropriate to meet the needs</p> <p>Evidence / examples of gaps not addressed by the objectives</p>	<p>The intervention was relevant throughout 2021 to meet the needs of stakeholders</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 / NGOs</p> <p>Results from the evaluation of effectiveness</p>
<b>Effectiveness: What have been the (quantitative and qualitative) effects of the intervention in Malta and to what extent can these be credited to the intervention rather than external factors?</b>			
<p><b>To what extent were the intended results of the OP 2021 achieved? What factors helped or</b></p>	<p>Intervention logic and its causal links</p>	<p>Activities were implemented as planned;</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Previous OPs (for context)</p>



Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Sources of evidence
<p><b>hindered the achievements and how did EASO cope with any challenges?</b></p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>MT 1.0: To what extent were access to asylum procedure in Malta, and the capacity of authorities to manage the backlog at first instance determination improved in 2021? Why or why not? What lessons can be learned for the future?</i></p> <p><i>MT 2.0: To what extent was the authorities' capacity to implement reception standards in line with CEAS enhanced in 2021? Why or why not? What lessons can be learned for the future? (Linked to recommendation 5 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent were targets (both measures) achieved in 2021? If they were not, were the targets reasonable? (Linked to recommendation 2 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent did the implementation of joint reporting and monitoring with Maltese authorities in 2021 influence the observed results? (Linked to recommendation 1 and 8 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent was deployed personnel in Malta sufficiently trained to carry out their work effectively in 2021? (Linked to recommendation 4 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent is EASO's support in Malta likely to produce lasting long-term impacts?</i></p>	<p>Degree of achievement of targets (output and outcome level) set out in the results framework (both measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in access to the asylum procedure (MT 1.0)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in the capacity of Maltese authorities to manage the backlog at first instance (MT 1.0)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in the backlog at first instance (MT 1.0)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in the capacity of Maltese authorities to implement reception standards in line with CEAS (MT 2.0)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of factors that helped and/or hindered the achievement of intended results (all measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of the impact of EASO's support compared to other (external or internal) factors (all measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of adjustments made during 2021 to mitigate resource and/or operational constraints (all measures)</p>	<p>any changes were duly justified</p> <p>Intended outputs and outcomes were achieved; any changes were duly justified</p> <p>Achieved outcomes can be attributed to EASO's support</p>	<p>Results framework</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Internal training plans</p> <p>Previous evaluations (for context)</p> <p>Legal base (CEAS) Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Interviews with all stakeholders</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Sources of evidence
	<p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which the outcomes can be attributed to EASO's support (both measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of unintended effects of the intervention in Malta</p> <p>Evidence / examples of lessons learned for the future</p> <p>Examples / evidence of long-term impacts of the intervention</p> <p>Stakeholder expectations on long-term impacts of the intervention</p>		
<b>Efficiency: To what extent are the costs of the intervention in Malta justified given what has been achieved, and what factors influenced its efficiency?</b>			
<p><b>What costs (financial, material, inefficiencies) were associated with the implementation of the intervention in Malta? Is there room for efficiency gains? Do the benefits of the intervention in Malta outweigh the costs?</b></p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>How were the costs distributed across the two measures? Was this distribution appropriate?</i></p> <p><i>What internal or external factors influenced the efficiency with which outputs / outcomes were achieved? Were there notable differences across the two measures?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent and how could the efficiency of the intervention be improved?</i></p>	<p>Implementation costs of the intervention(s) (monetary/FTEs)</p> <p>Outputs and outcomes generated compared to their costs</p> <p>Costs and benefits for different groups of stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which costs are proportionate to the outcomes achieved</p> <p>Evidence / examples of inefficiencies in implementation / achievement of outputs and outcomes</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which efficiency could be improved</p>	<p>The costs of the intervention 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>Internal training plans</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p> <p>Interviews with EASO</p> <p>Interviews with authorities <a href="#">Results from the evaluation of effectiveness</a></p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Sources of evidence
<p><i>How were costs and benefits distributed across stakeholder groups? Were they balanced/proportionate?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent were inefficiencies related to insufficient levels of experience of deployed personnel identified during 2020 resolved in 2021? (Linked to recommendation 4 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent were inefficiencies related to working procedures identified during 2020 resolved in 2021? (Linked to recommendation 6 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of improvements in efficiency through better training of personnel</p>		
<b>Coherence: To what extent is the intervention in Malta coherent internally, and with other interventions that have similar objectives?</b>			
<p><b>Internal coherence: Were there any inconsistencies or contradictions between the activities of the intervention in Malta? Were they complementary, working together to achieve coherent outcomes?</b></p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Were the two measures mutually reinforcing? How were they coordinated and did this work well?</i></p> <p><i>Were there specific mechanisms in place to ensure a coherent response in Malta? Did this influence the added value and sustainability of EASO's support? (Linked to priority questions 1 and 2)</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>Evidence / examples of inconsistencies or contradictions between activities</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mutual reinforcement or complementarity between activities and measures</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mechanism in place for coordination</p> <p>Evidence / examples of other interventions with similar objectives/results (at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of synergies or complementarity between other interventions and the EASO intervention</p>	<p>There are no inconsistencies or contradictions within the intervention, they were mutually reinforcing</p> <p>The EASO intervention and interventions by other actors are mutually reinforcing and/or complementary, there were no unnecessary overlaps or duplications</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p> <p>Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Interview with DG HOME</p> <p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Interviews with IOs / NGOs</p> <p>Coherence analysis</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Sources of evidence
<p><b>External coherence: Was EASO's work complementary to other sources of support or was there unnecessary overlap or duplication?</b></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 Malta?</i></p> <p><i>Were any inconsistencies identified? Were the interventions mutually complementary?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of overlaps or duplication between other interventions and the EASO intervention</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the coherence and complementarity of the interventions (or lack thereof)</p>		
<p><b>EU added value, Impact &amp; Sustainability: What is the additional value resulting from the EASO intervention? To what degree have the intended (long term) impacts been achieved, and are they likely to be sustained?</b></p>			
<p><b>Priority question 1: What would have been different if EASO were not supporting the Maltese authorities?</b></p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>What is the added value of EASO's intervention compared to what the Maltese authorities could have achieved alone?</i></p> <p><i>What might have happened had EASO not intervene in Malta?</i></p> <p><i>Is there evidence suggesting that the outcomes of the intervention in Malta could not have been achieved to the same degree without the intervention?</i></p> <p><b>Priority question 2: Which mechanisms are foreseen to promote sustainability in the aftermath of EASO's phase out? Are these</b></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of added value of the intervention in Malta</p> <p>Extent to which the activities would not have taken place or taken place with a reduced scope or speed in the absence of the intervention in Malta</p> <p>Stakeholder views on what would have happened without EASO's support in Malta</p> <p>Intervention logic (<i>impact level</i>)</p> <p>Examples / evidence of long-term impacts of the intervention in Malta</p> <p>Stakeholder expectations on long-term impacts of the intervention in Malta</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mechanisms put in place to help the intervention in</p>	<p>The intervention in Malta added value compared to what could have been achieved in its absence</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 / NGOs</p> <p>Results from all other evaluation questions</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Sources of evidence
<p><b>sufficient to ensure continuity of efforts and results?</b></p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>What mechanisms (if any) have been put in place by EASO and / or the authorities in Malta to ensure the sustainability of the results? Is this sufficient to ensure the sustainability of the results?</i></p> <p><i>Did the intervention in Malta contribute to the intended long-term impacts, or are they likely to have a long-term impact in the future?</i></p> <p><i>What internal or external factors influenced the likely impact and sustainability of the intervention in Malta?</i></p> <p><i>What impact has the intervention had in proportion to the overall situation in Malta?</i></p>	<p>Malta continue beyond its direct implementation</p> <p>Evidence / examples of factors influencing the likely impact and sustainability of the intervention in Malta</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which these mechanisms ensure the sustainability of the results</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the likelihood that the benefits of the intervention in Malta could continue beyond the intervention's implementation</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 Malta OP 2020, as per the follow-up to the 2020 Management Response Sheet.

**Table 4. Recommendations from 2020 evaluation**

Recommendation	Status	Progress / achievements
<b>Establish a methodological approach when launching a new measure.</b>	Under implementation	While no new measure was introduced since this recommendation, there were new activities under each measure for 2022. Staffing still required.
<b>Adjust and tailor targets to the situation in Malta to ensure they are realistic.</b>	Implementation Concluded	Targets revised in Q2 2021. How targets are defined/measured should be considered.
<b>Put in place a clear structure for the coordination team to ensure that the mandatory roles for an operation are covered.</b>	Under Implementation	Ongoing process at C1 level. Due to shift from EASO to EUAA, C1 is currently reorganising C1 including a rapid response unit.
<b>Explore the possibility of setting-up a pool or roster of people who are, to a certain degree, already trained.</b>	Under Implementation	Ongoing process at C1 level. Due to shift from EASO to EUAA C1 is currently reorganising C1 including a rapid response unit.
<b>Further improve EASO personnel training in Malta vis-à-vis reception conditions.</b>	Implementation Concluded	Concluded in Q3 2021 and is an ongoing activity.
<b>Systematically address the inefficiencies encountered in the implementation of the OP.</b>	Under Implementation	Turnover of personnel will continue throughout OP 2021.
<b>Complete and adjust the Results Database in an exhaustive and timely manner to allow for better monitoring and reporting.</b>	Implementation Concluded	
<b>Conduct joint monitoring with the Maltese national authorities, where appropriate.</b>	Implementation Concluded	There is a plan from PMES to move away from the current monitoring workflows in 2022.