European Asylum Support Office

Independent External Evaluation of EASO's activities covering the period from February 2011 to June 2014

Final Report

December 2015

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EY

Acronyms

ABB	Activity Based Budgeting
ASTs	Asylum Support Teams
ARC	Asylum Research Consultancy
AWP	Annual Work Programme
CCME	Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe
CIDA	Centre for Information, Documentation and Analysis (EASO)
CIREA	Centre for Information, Reflection and Exchange on Asylum
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
COI	Country of Origin Information
COS	Centre for Operational Support (EASO)
COREPER	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CTQE	Centre for Training, Quality and Expertise (EASO)
DG HOME	Directorate General Migration and Home Affairs
EAC	European Asylum Curriculum
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EC	European Commission
ED	Executive Director
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
EEAS	European External Action Service
EMN	European Migration Network
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EPS	Early Warning and Preparedness System
ERF	European Refugee Fund
EURASIL	European Union Network for asylum practitioners
EUREMA	Pilot Project for intra-EU Relocation
EUROPOL	European Union's law enforcement agency
EUROSTAT	Statistical Office of the European Union
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
FRONTEX	European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the MS of the European Union
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GAAU	General Affairs and Administration Unit (EASO)
GDISC	General Directors of Immigration Services Conference

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KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
HLWG	High Level Working Group
HoU	Heads of Unit
IAS	The Internal Audit Service
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs Council
MAWP	Multi Annual Work Programme
MB	Management Board
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MS	Member State
NCPs	National Contact Points
NCPAs	National Common Portal Administrators on COI
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
SCIFA	Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed objectives
SNEs	Seconded National Experts
THB	Specific Programmes on Trafficking in Human Beings
UAM	Specific Programmes on unaccompanied minors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Executive summary

1.1   Objectives and scope of the evaluation

Article 46 of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Regulation (EU) 439/2010, establishes a legal obligation for an "*independent external evaluation which shall cover the* [European Asylum] *Support Office's impact on practical cooperation on asylum and on the [Common European Asylum System]*". In 2013, EASO underwent a first internal evaluation carried out by the European Commission, in compliance with the provisions included in the "Communication on enhanced intra-EU Solidarity in the field of asylum"[1].

In 2014, EY (ex-Ernst & Young)was mandated by EASO to conduct the independent external evaluation of EASO's activities covering the period from February 2011 to June 2014. By decision of the Steering Group, the temporal scope was extended to cover the entire period since the Agency began operations. All activities implemented by EASO have been covered, across all the Member States of the European Union (MS).The evaluation was conducted between October 2014 and July 2015.

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

1.2   Evaluation approach, data collection tools and limits

The evaluation exercise was organised into three phases: an initialphase focused on the setting up ofthe evaluation framework (definition of judgment criteria, indicators and related data collection tools for each evaluation question) and a detailed description of the relevant contextual elements, followed by a second phase consisting of the execution of the data collection plan taking into account all stakeholders, concluded by a third phase dedicated to data analysis, the formulation of judgments and answers to the evaluation questions and the elaboration of recommendations.

Primary data collection gathered inputs from various types of stakeholders: Management Board members, EASO staffand the Executive Office, EU stakeholders, national stakeholders, experts, trainers and members of National Courts and Tribunals:

► Over 30 interviews were conducted with Management Board members;

► Group and individual interviews targeted staff members of EASO fromeach of itsfour centres;

► 12 interviews were carried out with EU stakeholders, includingthe directors of EU agencies, representatives of NGOs and Members of the European Parliament;

► Ane-survey was addressed to a spectrum of stakeholders involved in and/or having interest in the implementation of EASO's activities, in orderto gather concrete data on both their understanding of EASO's strengths and weaknesses and their involvement in the activities of EASO; and

► 21 additional interviews were conducted in the framework of six case studies at national level (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Sweden) providingin depth analysis of EASO's activities, added-value, and impact at the national level, as well as of EASO's mission in relation to national needs and situations.

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[1]COM (2011) 835 final

The main limitation of the evaluation was that hard data was lacking in some evaluation fields. Whilst EASO was able to provide robust data on the implementation of the five clusters of activities foreseen in its establishingRegulation ((i.e. (i) permanent support, (ii) special support, (iii) emergency support, (iv) information and analysis support, (v) third-country support), it was difficult to obtain reliable data on the actual impact of those activities on the implementation of the CEAS.

The key findings and recommendations of the evaluation per criteria are presented in the following sections.

1.3   Findings per evaluation criteria

The findings of the evaluation are drawn on the evidence collected over EASO's activities during the evaluation period, i.e. from February 2011 to June 2014.The conclusions of the evaluation must however be interpreted in the light of the recently adopted European Agenda on Migration, which reaffirmed the Agency's role and tasks within the European policy context.

In the wake of the tragic incidents in the Mediterranean, on 20 April 2015, at the joint meeting of Foreign and Interior Ministers, Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Commissioner Avramopoulos presented a 10-point plan outlining immediate actions to be taken in response to the crisis in the Mediterranean. The European Council, on 23 April 2015, issued a statement ([1]) outlining various measures — several of them involving EASO — aimed at preventing further loss of life at sea and at tackling the root causes of the human emergency that the EU is facing. This was followed by a European Parliament Resolution on 29 April 2015 ([2]). On 13 May 2015, the European Commission adopted the European Agenda on Migration ([3]), which outlines a series of steps that the EU should take to build a coherent and comprehensive approach to reap the benefits and address the challenges deriving from migration. Following the European Council Conclusions of 25 and 26 June 2015[4], at the 8 and 9 July 2015 informal JHA Council, MS supported in principle the European Commission's proposal to use the emergency response mechanism under Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to relocate Syrian and Eritrean applicants for international protection from Italy and Greece. Likewise, MS supported a Commission recommendation for a European resettlement scheme. On 14 September 2015 and 22 September 2015, the Council adopted Decision (EU) 2015/1523[5] and (EU) 2015/1601[6] respectively, establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece.

All these developments have significant implications on EASO activities, mainly in Italy and Greece through the so-called 'hotspots' approach, in particular on registration of applications for international protection, joint processing of asylum applications, referral of potential outgoing Dublin take-charge requests, and assistance with the relocation of applicants for international protection from Italy and Greece. A key clearing house role for EASO in the resettlement of 20,000 refugees is also foreseen, in addition to the clearing house for national COI. Furthermore, the June 2015 European Council Conclusions also call on EASO to coordinate the implementation of the "safe country of origin" provisions in the Asylum Procedures Directive. EASO will have an enhanced role in the monitoring of the CEAS, as well as in the area of reception (establishment of a new dedicated network of reception authorities, pilot project on shared reception, development of quality criteria for reception centres in cooperation with the Commission).

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

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

([3])   COM (2015) 240 final.

([4])   EUCO 22/15

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

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

1.3.1 Relevance and internal consistency

EASO's mission and tasks, as set outin its establishing Regulation, are relevant to address MS needs. EASO's mandate is broken down into three major objectives, namely: contributing to the implementation of the CEAS; supporting practical cooperation on asylum; and supporting MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems.

The mandate of EASO is sufficiently clear in terms of its objectives and tasks. However, EASO's ability to reply to the emerging needs of key stakeholderscould in theory be limited by the topics covered by its Regulation and EASO's management of financial resources in emergency situations is perceived as relatively rigid. **Four topics**, which are not currently mentioned in the EASO Regulation, **could potentially be included in an extension of the EASO Regulation**: joint processing, integration, reception and return.

EASO's implemented activities correspond to its mandate. The operational objectives attributed to the Agency by other relevant policy and legal documents show a high level of coherence with the Regulation, even if some duties result from a liberal interpretation of the legal base.

EASO is largely considered to beresponsive to MS needs, which are identified by the Agencythrough a comprehensiveanalysis and consultation process aimed at establishing the Annual Work Programme (AWP). The Agency's adaptability is proven by the inclusion of a number of emerging activities, which have been developed upon request of MS (e.g. Special support plan for Sweden or the operating plan for Bulgaria in 2013), of the EC (e.g. activities related to the Task Force Mediterranean or "Preparedness for emergency support" activities) and/or on the basis of the Agency's own initiative (e.g. the "Promoting the participation of Jordan in the work of EASO" project, as well as the participation of Tunisia and Morocco in the work of EASO and Frontex).EASO's internal procedures and tools allow for the support plans to be adapted to MS emerging needs. EASO has also foreseen the inclusion of a flexibility clause[2] in the support plans, as well as the possibility of formally amending the plan agreed by EASO and the beneficiary MS.Finally, EASO has achieved an effective matching capacity between experts' skills and tasks.

The involvement of civil society in the programming of EASO activities has increased and improved over timethrough the Consultative Forum and other forms of ad hoc consultations, relative to the drafting of the AWPs annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU and other documents. As evidenced by Consultative Forummeeting reports, the potential contribution of civil society to the drafting phase of the AWP has begun to receive greater attention**.** Whendrafting the 2014 AWP, EASO received specific contributions by a limited number of NGOs and International Organizations (15), but NGOs consider their involvement could be further enhanced.

1.3.2 Effectiveness

Overall, **the activities carried out by EASO in its first years of operation have enabled an effective implementation of its key tasks.** In order to implement itsactivities, the Agency has set up a functional organizational structure composed of three centres and an administration unit, tasked with implementing one or more support activities, as planned within the AWP. The operational objectives stated by the Regulation and identified within the intervention logic have been further articulated and detailed within EASO's AWPs for 2011-2012, 2013 and 2014.Considering the operational objectives detailed in each AWP and implemented by the Agency, the degreeof implementation of EASO's mandate is very high overall, although further effort is needed to provide effective support to the external dimension of CEAS.

Since its establishment, EASO has committed itself to implementing a very high number of **permanent support** activities and to achieving tangible results in different MS, including a common training curriculum, common quality process, country of origin information, interpretation, practical cooperation and specific programmes. Considering the different contexts in which EASO permanent support is implemented, **the Agency has achieved the majority of the expected results**.

EASO provides information and analytical support for both national and EU stakeholders. In particular, the Agency collects and exchanges information through three main channels: production and publication of reports; the Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS); and its website/web portal. The three main publications (i.e. AWP, Annual Activity Report, and Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union) have been regularly released since the establishment of the Agency. Overall, EASO has implemented all the activities requested by Article 9 of the EASO Regulation. The publication of documents has been carried out as foreseen in

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[2] The flexibility clause has been used in all support plans over the evaluation period, except for Luxembourg and Sweden

the AWPs, even if in some cases the Agency has not fully respected publication timelines. Interviews confirmed that **EASO is considered by MS and EU institutions as a qualified information broker.**

EASO's activities on special support are addressed to those MS who request the Agency's support and consist of tailor-made assistance and capacity building. During the evaluation period, EASO implemented four special support plans in Sweden, Italy, Cyprus and Bulgaria[3]and conducted a number of activities in the field of relocation. Overall**, working arrangements between EASO and the MS benefiting from special support have been respected**;however during the period evaluated,only part of relocation activities have been fully implemented due to the lack of political will from a majority of MS.

Over the evaluation period, EASO has implemented four operational plans, achieving most of the objectives and results planned. Overall, the working arrangements between EASO and MS have been respected and, when necessary, revised to take into account evolving needs.**EASO has achieved almost all the expected results foremergency support.**However, the Agency has at times overestimated the number of Asylum Support Teams (ASTs) to be deployed or included a number of measures far more extensive than those actually feasible in the receiving country. Consequently, **there is still some margin for improvement in the design and drafting of operational plans.**Moreover, **the procedure for the provision of ASTs could be revised** in order to increase their potential availability **and the selection process for experts and trainers could be fine-tuned** to overcome some difficulties experienced by MS in providing human resources.

EASO has demonstrated an adequate crisis response capacity. All MS support requests to EASO received during the evaluation period were fulfilled, including amendments to the support plans. Considering the modalitiesandconstraints of its response capacity, the Agency always answered MS requests in a timely manner.The EPS is considered an essential mechanism for providing tailored support actions and identifying emergency measures, such as the deployment of ASTs, in order to ensure that national asylum systems function properly.

1.3.3 Impacts

EASO established networking activities between various national administrations and contributed to their mutual knowledge. The Agency also prompted spontaneous sharing of information between national administrations and EU institutions. EASO is widely recognised as a platform that facilitates the exchangeof views, information and good practices. Furthermore, **EASO succeeded in positioning itself as the main source of information in the field of asylumfor MS and EU institutions**.

EASO contributed to deeper and more practical cooperation between MS, as demonstrated by their growing commitment to the deployment of trainers and experts. Indeed, MS have nearly nominated 500 experts to participate in operational plans, special support plans and joint processing[4]. It has consequently provided an effective response to demands for more practical cooperation and exchanges.

EASO achieved an increasing impact on public debate, notably through the media. Although havingproduced expertise for the convergence of national laws, practices and jurisprudence, **there is no substantial evidence yet of EASO's impact on the implementation of the EU acquis**. Nonetheless, EASO's activities, and in particular training, helped MS to achieve the medium- to long-term changes needed in their national asylum system for the progressive implementation of the CEAS. **Stakeholders acknowledge the powerful potential of EASO tofacilitate the convergence of national practices in the field of asylum.**

EASO contributed to the widespread recognition of the need for intra EU solidarity. A wide range of activities developed by the Agency have laid the ground for trust and cooperation, such as the project for intra-EU Relocation from Malta (EUREMA). EASO also raised awareness on the importance of mutual support, butthe lack ofpolitical will, both at the national and EU level, hampers the materialisation of relocation within the EU.

Finally,**third country support is widely considered as instrumental** in ensuring the implementation of a reliable CEAS, but there is no consensus on which countries should beprioritised or how much these activities should weigh in the Agency's budget.

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[3] In December 2014, after the evaluation period, EASO signed a special support plan for Bulgaria.

[4]This number excludes the numerous experts that were deployed without a call due to specific requirements or areas of expertise, and the

nominations based on bilateral communications with the NCPs.

1.3.4 Working practices

EASO's organisational structure is typical for an agency in its start-up phase. The Management Board is working towards the objectives outlined in the Agency's mandate and its functioning has improved over the years. The executive structure has faced issues typical of agencies in their start-up phase, such as limited resources and high turnover. Its organisational structure has been set up but EASO's internal communication and coordination processes are still in a development phase and need to be improved.

EASO's decision-making procedures are in line with its mandate, in that the distribution of powers and duties between the Management Board and the Executive Director are clearly defined and contribute to the fulfilment of EASO's objectives.

MS are actively involved in EASO's work on a number of fronts, particularly through working groups and networks, as well as contributions to and participation in the various support measures. They widely consider these as well-designed and efficient tools to foster cooperation. **Over the years, EASO carried out continuous and broad consultation with an increasing number of stakeholders,** undertaking several initiatives to gradually improve the process. EASO Consultative Forum meetings and activities have intensified since 2011 and additional ad hoc consultations have been pursued with civil society. Notwithstanding this, the perception of the effectiveness of EASO's consultation activities with civil society is mixed and some believe that the dialogue between EASO, NGOs and civil society representatives could be strengthened further.

EASO's external communication activities are being enhanced. EASO's website, reports, newsletter and infodays are considered satisfactory. National asylum stakeholders are generally aware of the EASO initiatives directly applicable to them, although more information is needed on the results of operational support.

1.3.5 Efficiency

Within the current context of austerity and pressure to limit EU spending, EASO has to ensure the cost effectiveness of its management. EASO's budget progressively increased in size between 2011 and 2014, **in line with the stage of the Agency's development**. EASO is expected to fulfil its mandate with relatively limited resources. The allocation of expenditure evolved over the years, with an **increasing proportion of costs allocated towards operational expenditures.**

The European Union's administrative requirements and budgetary conditions affect EASO's service provision. As an EU agency which is still considered in its start-up phase, it must ensure a minimum support structure for its administrative services to function properly. Yet, despite its limitations, EASO's staff and stakeholders believe that EASO is delivering efficiently.

EASO's work is heavily dependent on its internal HR capacity and skills, as well as on the efficient utilisation of national contributions. However, the number of experts available for operational cooperation is ultimately limited by the size and workload of national administrations.

EASO's budgetary planning and management procedures have improved, leading to resource allocation process improvements, such as the recent introduction of SMART indicators and KPIs. The need for further improvement in EASO's resource allocation process was identified as expenditure is not structured around the five main clusters of activity identified in AWPs.

1.3.6 EU Added Value & external coherence

The **new tools and additional support opportunities** for national administrations introduced by EASO, such as its training material, **brought added value to the work of national stakeholders**. Many feel better informed about national asylum situations, best practices and the latest trends and developments. Consequently, their level of readiness to face surges in asylum seekers has been enhanced. It is recognised that **MS would not have achieved similar progress without EASO** and that **EASO has proven more efficient than existing structures** in some fields.

The development of EASO and its development of activities have naturally generated duplications, as national authorities continue to implement some tasks which were taken up by the Agency. With the development of new legal requirements and deeper cooperation, the workload related to asylum and reception increased for national authorities, but EASO's requests are still considered useful and justified. Potential overlaps also persist with the activities of other JHA Agencies and networks, namely the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA),

theEuropean Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders(Frontex) and the European Migration Network (EMN). Areas of possible duplication include data collection related to asylum, training for national authorities and the sharing of best practices.

However, since its creation, **EASO has made an effort to clarify its field of intervention**. EASO elaborated working arrangements with four EU and international organisations: Frontex, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), FRA and the EU Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems (eu-LISA). It also made great strides towards improving coordination with national administrations. **Still, cooperation with the UNHCR and the EMN could be improved.**

1.4 Strategic and operational recommendations

The findings of the evaluation have resulted in the elaboration of a number of recommendations aimed at improving the functioning of EASO and further developing its added value to the CEAS.

In total, 9 recommendations were formulated by the evaluation team, which are divided into strategic and operational recommendations. Actions necessary for their implementation were also identified, as well as the recommended timeframe for implementation (short-term, less than 6 months; medium-term, up to 2 years and long-term, more than two years).

These recommendations stem from the evaluators' analysis and conclusions drawn on the evidence collected for the period (February 2011 to June 2014), but must also be interpreted in the light of the new tasks taken up by EASO following the adoption of the European Agenda on Migration (EAM) in 2015. The focus of this Evaluation is EASO's work between February 2011 to June 2014. However this report was finalized in the summer of 2015 certain developments were not taken completely into consideration.

Recommendation	Actions	Timing	Responsible parties
Strategic recommandations			
► **R1.** Foster political willingness for an update of EASO's mandate in order to cover relevant topics and to include all additional tasks deriving from the evolving legal and political framework	► Amend the EASO Regulation to include new tasks assigned to EASO and deriving from the evolving scenario in which the Agency operates	Long term	EASO, ED, MB, EC
	► Ensure the financial and operative sustainability of the revised mandate on the basis of an impact assessment	Medium term	EASO, ED, MB, EC
	► Reconsider the strategy on third country support	Medium term	EASO, ED, MB
► **R2.** Strengthen the involvement of civil society during the programming phase of EASO's activities	► Review and integrate the current composition of the Consultative Forum	Medium term	EASO
	► Strengthen the quality and efficiency effectiveness of the consultative process by introducing new communication channels for the consultation	Short term	EASO,
	► Test the viability of NGO participation in the delivery of support plans on a case by case basis	Short term	EASO, ED, MB
► **R3.** Better communicate upon the results and impacts of its activities	► Mandate external and independent evaluations of emergency and special support plans at the end of each phase	Medium term	EASO, ED, MB
	► Develop a reporting system on MS progress towards the implementation of the acquis	Medium term	EASO, ED
	► Reinforce communication on EASO's activities addressed to MS and civil society	Short term	EASO, ED
► **R4.** Further clarify the coordination with other EU agencies and international organisations, in particular EMN and UNHCR	► Streamline coordination with EMN	Long term	EASO, EMN, DG HOME
	► Streamline coordination with the UNHCR	Long term	EASO, UNHCR

Operational recommandations			
► **R5.** Improve the need assessment process of MS requesting EASO's support	► Enhance the capabilities of the Centre for Operational Support	Short term	EASO, ED
	► Develop additional quality skills assessment for experts and trainers	Medium term	EASO
	► Further involve MS beneficiaries support during the assessment phase	Short term	EASO
► **R6.** Streamline the solicitations experts sent out to MS in order to facilitate their participation	► Improve identification contact points within national administration	Medium term	EASO
	► Quantify contact points contribution in advance	Short term	EASO
	► Define the roles and responsibilities of national administrations when designing of the special support plans	Medium term	EASO
	► Organise regional practical cooperation activities	Short term	EASO
	► Increased use of electronic meetings	Short term	EASO
► **R7.** Revise the overall procedure for the provision of ASTs	► Include the possibility for the Agency to have in house capacity for experts and trainers within the EASO Regulation	Long term	EASO, EC
	► Amend the Management Board's decision that defines the profiles and the overall number of experts to be made available for the Asylum Support Teams (Asylum Intervention Pool)	Medium term	EASO, ED, MB
	► Adopt a new decision for the setting up of a shortlist of national experts and trainers to be deployed in extraordinary situations	Medium term	EASO
► **R8.** Increase the number, depth and usage of EASO internal communication flows and co-ordination processes	► Increase use of the Intranet for better information sharing	Short term	EASO
	► Create central coordination point for improved distribution of tasks	Short term	EASO
	► Improve staff involvement at different levels	Medium term	EASO
	► Outline roles of the different Centres and create cross-Centre activities	Short term	EASO
► **R9.** Speed up the implementation of the EASO performance appraisal procedure	► Complete the process for the introduction of performance appraisal system at EASO	Short term	EASO
	► EASO should step up particular internal evaluation processes	Medium term	EASO
	► EASO should further encourage the adoption of SMART indicators	Medium term	EASO

1 Context, objectives and methodology of the evaluation

1.1 Objectives and scope of the evaluation

Article 46 of the EASO Regulation (EU) 439/2010, establishes a legal obligation for an "independent external evaluation which shall cover EASO's impact on practical cooperation on asylum and on the CEAS".

In 2013, EASO was the subject of a **first internal evaluation** carried out by the European Commission, in compliance with the provisions included in the "Communication on enhanced intra-EU Solidarity in the field of asylum"[5]. This evaluation was focused on the impact of EASO on practical cooperation on asylum and on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), with the aimof suggesting a number of quick fix actions to be implemented and to help frame the scope of the external evaluation.

Starting from the findings identified by the European Commission, the overall objective of the **external evaluation** is to assess EASO's achievements from June 2011 to June 2014. By decision of the Steering group, the time scope was extended starting from February 2011, in order to cover the whole period since the Agency has been in operations. All activities implemented by EASO were covered, across all the EU MS.

The external evaluation was expected to address the following issues:

► Possible change to EASO's Working Practices

► Possible structural change to EASO without amending its legal framework

► Possible changes to EASO legal framework

► A further increase in practical cooperation amongst MS, in particular in the field of training, data collection, COI and operational support

In order to better analyse the implementation of EASO's mandate, the activities were assessed based on the five main clusters corresponding to the mission of the Agency (i.e. (i) permanent support, (ii) special support, (iii) emergency support, (iv) information and analysis support, (v) third-country support).

The outcome of the evaluation includes a set of recommendations providing reasonable options for EASO's improvement, as well as information on the main benefits, risks, problems, conditions and timing of the actions that could be adopted by the Agency in the coming future.

1.2 Intervention logic

In order to assess the causal links between EASO's activities and the results achieved, EASO's objectives had to be clearly identified. According to Article 1 of its founding Regulation, EASO was established:

► to improve the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (the CEAS);

► to strengthen practical cooperation among MS on asylum; and

► to provide and/or coordinate the provision of operational support to MS subject to particularpressure on their asylum and reception systems.

The intervention logic was thus developed based, first and foremost, on an in-depth analysis of EASO's founding Regulation. EASO's Annual Activity Reports and AWPs and other policy documents were also taken into account.

The strategic objective corresponds to the overarching goal identified by all relevant documents, to achieve a coherent implementation of the Common European Asylum System (the CEAS). The specific objectives are entirely based on the EASO Regulation 439/2010.The operational objectives were identified based on the detailed analysis of the mandate of EASO, as set forth in its founding Regulation, as well as a comparison of other relevant policy documents emerging over the last 3 years. Different colours were used to distinguish each

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[5] COM (2011) 835 final

objective based on its legal source.The activities correspond to the clusters identified by EASO in its reporting and planning documents.

Figure 1: EASO intervention logic
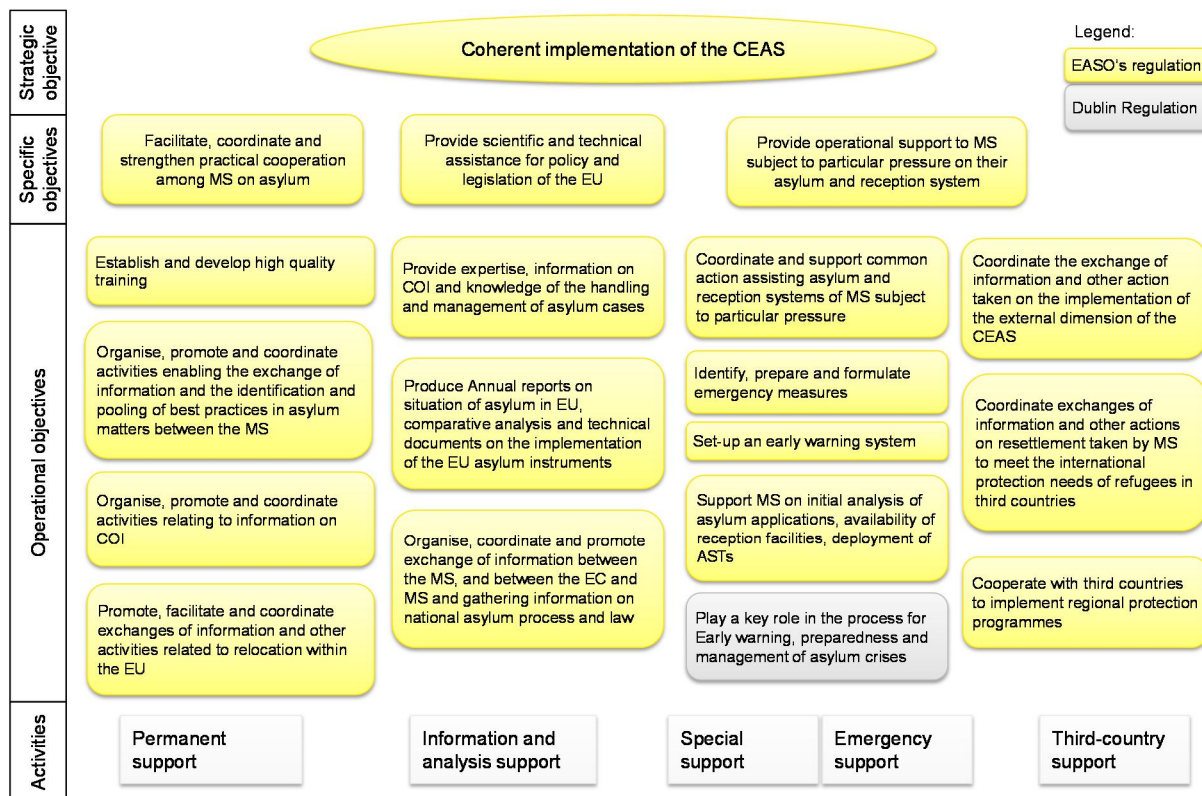
(Source: EY 2015)

As the intervention logic shows, EASO's operational objectives were extended, since the adoption of its founding Regulation, by the Dublin III Regulation. Article 33(1) of this Regulation, which envisages an Early Warning, Preparedness and Crisis Management Mechanism, states that EASO will serve to provide information to the EC concerning a risk of particular pressure on a national asylum system or problems in how it functions and support the European Commission in making recommendations to that MS.

In addition, EASO's role was reinforced or further detailed by the adoption and publication of other policy documents following the adopting of the founding Regulation. For instance:

► Concerning cooperation among MS:

■ The 2011 Communication on enhanced intra-EU solidarity asked EASO to "identify and disseminate best practice in aspects such as access to procedure, dealing with the most vulnerable applicants, sharing techniques and managing backlogs".

► On the provision of assistance to legislation and policy making by the EU:

■ The EU Action Plan on Migratory Pressures of 2012 indicated that EASO should "monitor the effects of current visa free regimes";

■ The 2011 Communication on enhanced intra-EU solidarity requested EASO to support the integration of international protection aspects in the work of Frontex, also in collaboration with the Fundamental Rights Agency;

■ Finally, Regulation 516/2014 expected EASO to assist the Commission in the monitoring of the effective implementation of resettlement operations supported by AMIF.

► In relation to third countries, the EU Action Plan on Migratory Pressures requested EASO to:

■ assess the "expected impact on migration and risks to EU's internal security before launching a visa liberalisation dialogue with third countries" (strategic priority area IV, challenge no 1, activity A);

■ "address, together with FRONTEX and EUROPOL, cross border crimes related to illegal

immigration" (strategic priority area I, challenge no 6, activity E); and

■ "assist asylum capacity in Western-Balkan countries" (strategic priority area I, challenge no 6, activity E).

Furthermore, with regard to third country support, the EASO Regulation providedthat "the Support Office may cooperate with competent authorities of third countries in technical matters, in particular with a view to promoting and assisting capacity building in the third countries' own asylum and reception systems and implementing regional protection programmes, and other actions relevant to durable solutions" (Article 7).

1.3 Evaluation approach

The evaluation questions, as validated in the inception phase, are addressed and answered one by one in the present report.

Table 1: Evaluation themes and questions

Evaluation theme	Evaluation question
Relevance & internal consistency	To what extent are the EASO's mandate and activities adequate to answer to the needs of the EU and its MS?
Effectiveness	To what extent has EASO achieved the objectives set forth by its founding regulation?
Impact	To what extent has EASO effectively contributed to the coherent implementation of the CEAS?
Working practices	To what extent are EASO working practices adequate to fulfil its mandate?
Efficiency	To what extent has EASO been efficient in implementing its mandate?
EU Added value & External coherence	To what extent has the creation of EASO provided added value to the European asylum policy?

A full overview of the evaluation framework is provided in Annex 1.

The evaluation approach consists of three main phases:

► Firstly, performing some **preliminary interviews and desk review** related to the evaluation exercise and defining the **evaluation framework and questioning,** on the basis of the evaluation objectives, criteria and questions suggested in the TOR, and agreeing with the Steering Committee upon the life cycles of the evaluation project;

► Secondly, **defining the tools for gathering primary data and performing specific data collection** activities to complete the study, which will generally consist of interviews with different stakeholders and launching EU-wide surveys;

► Thirdly, analysing the data and information collected and providing judgments, answering the evaluation questions, providing recommendations and finalising the evaluation report.

The Table below provides a summary of the stakeholder groups consulted as well as the tools used for consultation.

Stakeholder Groups	Interviews			E-survey	Direct observation
	Individual interviews	Group interviews	Case study interviews		
Management Board	31 - all except 3 countries				2
EASO	7	4 centres (42 people)			
EU institutions (DG HOME, European Parliament, Council)	4				
JHA agencies and EMN	4				

Stakeholder Groups	Interviews			E-survey	Direct observation
	Individual interviews	Group interviews	Case study interviews		
International organisations / NGOs	6				4
National stakeholders			France: 3 Germany: 3 Greece:4 Italy: 5 Bulgaria: 3 Sweden: 2	183 recipients 76 respondents	
EASO pool of experts				446 recipients 115 respondents	
Members of national courts				104 recipients 14 respondents	

The full data collection report is availablein Annex 2.

A continuous communication process with the Steering Committee and the main EASO actors was put in place, in order to enhance their understanding, ensure their contribution to the evaluation process and to reinforce the efficiency and effectiveness of the receipt and application of the evaluation results and recommendations.

EY

2 Relevance& internal consistency

Evaluation question: To what extent are the EASO's mandate and activities adequate to answer to the needs of the EU and its Member States?

Approach

This question seeks to understand whether EASO's mandate is relevant to address MS needs in the field of asylum and if the Agency has the capacity to take into account new and emerging needs in developing its activities. To answer this question, evaluators looked at the consistency between EASO's Regulation, including other legal and policy documents which affect the Agency's role, and national and EU stakeholders' needs. Specifically, evaluators assessed:

► the extent to which EASO's mission and tasks, as set out in its founding Regulation, are relevant to address MS' needs;

► the extent to which EASO takes into account the concrete needs expressed by MS and stakeholders in developing its work plan, strategies and activities;

► the ability of EASO to respectively revise the analysis of expressed MS' needs and adapt the activities planned to new emerging need;

► the level of correspondence between implemented activities and EASO's mandate, as laid down in its founding Regulation and other relevant legal documents

Main findings

► EASO's mission and tasks, as set out in its founding Regulation, are relevant to address MS needs;

► **EASO's mandate results are clear but it does not mention some emergingneeds** in the field of joint processing, integration, reception and return; these could be better covered by updating EASO Regulation.

► EASO takes well account of the concrete needs expressed by MS in developing its work plan, strategies and activities and proves to be able to revise and adapt planned activities to emerging needs.

► **The programming of EASO activities has become more participative over the years**, with the growing involvement of civil society representatives through the Consultative Forum meetings and other forms of consultation, such as e-consultation.

► **EASO's implemented activities correspond to its mandate**, as laid down in its founding Regulation and other relevant legal documents.

2.1 EASO's mission and tasks, as set out in its establishing Regulation, are relevant to address MS needs

2.1.1 EASO operates in a constantly evolving policy framework

EASO carried out its mandate in the context of a rapidly changing and evolving legal framework, which was established over the last two decades. Considering the evolution of the European asylum legislative framework,

several additional tasks enriched EASO's role over the evaluation period, in order to cover an increasing amount of MS needs. Indeed, taking into account the growing interest demonstrated by some national and EU stakeholders with regard to relevant issues such as joint processing, integration, reception and return, a further extension of the Agency's mandate to cover such topics has been proposed by EASO's officials and national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers.

The framework in which EASO operates is characterised by the coexistence of Regulation 439/2010 establishing EASO and of a number of legal and policy documents which contribute to defining the competencies, objectives and functioning of the Agency.

According to Regulation 439/2010, EASO's mandate is defined on three major duties, namely contributing to the implementation of the CEAS, supporting practical cooperation among MS on asylum and supporting MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems. Furthermore, EASO acts as a centre of expertise on asylum and provides scientific input for EU policymaking and legislation and gives support for the development of the external dimension of the CEAS.

As underlined in the new asylum package and within other policy documents on asylum, EASO is considered a key player in the implementation of the second phase of the CEAS.

Figure 2. Legislative framework of EASO mandate

EASO' MANDATE ACCORDING TO REGULATION 439/2010

- Help to Improve the implementation of the Common European Asylum System
- Strengthen practical cooperation among MS on asylum
- Provide and/or coordinate the provision of operational support to MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems

EASO' ROLE IN THE RECAST EU ASYLUM ACQUIS

- **Dublin III Regulation** 604/2013, provide information to the EC concerning a risk of particular pressure on a MS asylum system or problems in how it functions" and support the EC in making recommendations to that MS.
- **Qualification Directive** 2011/95/EU provide relevant and up-to-date data and information on Asylum to MS in examining asylum application;
- **Asylum Procedures Directive** 2013/32/EU deliver guidelines and up to date information to MS and provide proper and relevant training to the personnel of MS determining authority;
- **Reception Condition Directive** 2013/22/EU provide adequate support to MS' efforts in implementing the standards set in the second phase of the CEAS;

(Source: EY elaboration on EASO Regulation and on Asylum package)

The **recast of the EU asylum package**[6] reaffirmed the role of EASO in providing relevant data and information on asylum to MS, delivering proper and relevant training and supporting MS efforts in implementing the standard set in the second phase of CEAS. The provision of Article 33 (1) of the **Dublin III Regulation** (Regulation 604/2013) states that EASO "assists the Commission in making recommendations to those MS subject to particular pressure or experiencing problems in the functioning of the asylum system; invites and assists the MS to draw up a preventive action plan and, eventually, to draw up a crisis management action plan".

Other policy documents stressed or further detailed EASO's role within the asylum system. For instance, the "***Communication on Intra-EU Solidarity in the field of Asylum***", issued in December 2011, foresaw a coordination role for EASO in the definition of a mechanism for relocation which could in turn facilitate trailblazing by MS willing to engage in voluntary projects. Moreover, the "***Communication on the work of the Task Force Mediterranean***", issued in December 2013, identified a number of tasks and objectives which could in the end contribute to an extension and evolution of the EASO's mandate. Firstly, the Communication proposed that "EASO could be involved in a feasibility study on possible joint processing of protection claims outside of the EU without prejudice to the existing right of access to asylum procedures in the EU". Secondly, the Communication suggested that "EASO could run a pilot project with a MS to learn more about smuggling and trafficking routes". Thirdly,

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[6]With regard to the recast of EU asylum package, EASO, through its resources, is fully involved in providing "adequate support to MS' efforts in implementing the standards set in the second phase of the CEAS". More specifically: the Common procedures Directive 2013/32/EU states that EASO shall deliver guidelines and up to date information to MS (Recitals 10, 26, 39, 49) and provide proper and relevant training to the personnel of MS determining authority (Article 4.3).The Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU reaffirms the importance of EASO's role to provide relevant and up-to-date data and information on Asylum to MS in examining asylum application (Article 8 (2)).

"EASO's role in the field of identification and screening of asylum seekers in mixed flows should be strengthened in partnership with Frontex and in full compliance with the respective mandates of the Agencies". Finally, the Communication claimed that "EASO should play a coordination role in intra-EU relocation to make it faster and more efficient".

Besides what was enshrined in the founding Regulation, the evidence gathered through interviews with members of the Management Board confirms that the interpretation of EASO's mandate evolved over the years in light of the changing context in which the Agency operates.

In confirmation of the above mentioned instances and perspectives, the recent **mission letter of the EC President**, sent on 1 November 2014 to the new Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, stressed that "to ensure the full and consistent implementation of the Common European Asylum System" […] the Commission should "develop a strategy for improving our response to emergency situations" and "look at an extended role for the European Asylum Support Office, with a particular focus on working with and in third countries".

In light of the recently adopted **European Agenda on Migration** (EAM)[7], EASO assumed new tasks within the European policy context. Firstly, the EAM foresees EASO participation in the implementation of immediate actions, such as the setting up of a new "Hotspot" approach where, together with Frontex and Europol, the Agency will support frontline MS for the identification, fingerprinting and registration of incoming migrants. Secondly, the Agenda relies on EASO also for the implementation of some activities under the "Four Pillars to manage migration better", comprising an extensive package of actions (I "Reducing the incentives to irregular migration, II. "Border management: saving lives and securing external borders, III. Europe's duty to protect: a strong common asylum policy, IV. A new policy for legal migration) aimed at providing concrete and comprehensive responses to the challenges deriving from migration.

In particular, with regard to the second pillar, the Agenda calls for EASO's role in identifying risks trends and develop, under the supervision of Frontex and in collaboration with Europol, the EU Satellite Centre and the European Maritime Safety Agency, an effective situational picture useful for policy makers and those in charge of preparing effective responses at EU and national level. In addition, within the third pillar, the EAM requires EASO to support the EC in giving further guidance to MSs to improve standards on reception conditions and asylum procedures as well as to step up practical cooperation, developing a role as the clearing house of national COI, which would in the end encourage more uniform decision. The Agenda foresees other key measures such as training and a new network of reception authorities, useful for the creation of a pool of reception places to be used in case of emergency. EASO is also asked to support the EC in developing guidelines for maximising legislative provisions against abuses, allowing swift processing of unfounded asylum applications and eventually streamlining MS work for the assessment of asylum applications. Finally, EASO should assume a support role for the creation of a dedicated network of national Dublin Units.

2.1.2 EASO's mandate as set out by the establishing Regulation is perceived as clear and yet sufficiently flexible

According to the evidence gathered through interviews with relevant stakeholders at EU and national level, the mandate of EASO – as provided by Regulation 439/2010 - is perceived as sufficiently clear in terms of objectives and task.

Only a few interviewees considered that the mandate was rather generic on some topics. This led many respondents to wish for more detailed provisions in specific topics, as further specified in the paragraphs below.

At the same time, given that the mandate was considered extended and moderately generic, some interviewees perceived the legal basis as flexible and open to interpretation. The majority of interviewees believed that the EASO Regulation is sufficiently flexible in dealing with unforeseen needs.

Nonetheless, when referring to the Agency Regulation, some interviewees called for further flexibility, arguing that **EASO's ability to reply to the emerging needs seems to be limited by the topics covered by its Regulation.**

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[7] COM 2015/240, COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, "The European Agenda on Migration"

Indeed, as explained in Section 2.1.2, an increasing number of MS emerging needs could be better addressed through a formal extension of the Agency mandate.

2.1.3 Some emerging needs in the field of joint processing, integration, reception and return, are not explicitly covered by EASO's mandate

With regards to the relevance of EASO's mandate to MS needs, 58% of respondents to the e-survey could not identify any needs at national level which were not currently enough covered by the mandate. Nevertheless, 8% of respondents to the survey pointed out the existence of additional needs currently not adequately covered by EASO's mandate. According to the evidence gathered, EASO could extend its support to MS on issues related to the integration of beneficiaries of international protection by organising practical cooperation workshops, developing tools which draw upon best practices identified at national level. Respondents also claimed that EASO could further engage in the field of reception.

The Agency held four specific expert group meetings during 2013 concerning cooperation with members of courts and tribunals, which led to the adoption of EASO's framework on cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals and in 2014 this cooperation was further implemented and structured. Some respondents also suggested that EASO should further extend its communication and training activities addressing members of courts and tribunals. These should tackle the uniform application of the international protection status in all EU MS,including the examination of decisions (mainly of the administrative bodies of MS) which could be evaluated in order to assess the points of difference. This exercise could also contribute to a list of best practices as well as a list of practices to be avoided.

In order to promote the sharing of case law between EU MS, the importance of EASO support to MS in jurisprudence analysis was also stressed, in particular for the implementation of a case-law database on European and MS jurisprudence relating to the provisions of the EU asylum acquis, planned in the AWP for 2014 to promote a higher convergence at the EU level.

Figure 3: Existence of MS needs not covered by EASO mandate

- yes
- no
- no opinion
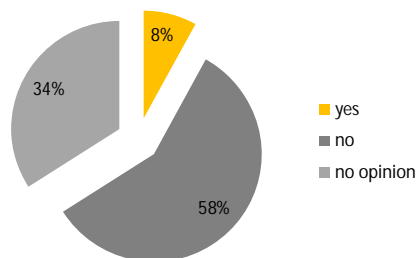
(Source: EY survey 2015, respondents: 160 National Stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, Experts and trainers)

Furthermore, interviews of Management Board members, EU stakeholders and a number of EASO officers also confirmed that most MS needs are covered by the EASO mandate as stated within its founding Regulation.

Nevertheless, some emerging needs were identified, arising from the evolution of the new asylum package and the deep changes in the international protection scenario, with an increasing number of applicants in the EU.

In fact, according to the evidence gathered, four topics, which are not currently mentioned in the EASO Regulation (e.g. return, integration and joint processing) or are covered in a rather generic way (e.g. reception), could potentially lead to an extension of the EASO Regulation:

► Joint processing

Joint processing is considered as a relevant area for the possible extension of EASO's mandate, which includes, among its objectives, the increase in practical cooperation among MS in asylum. Indeed, this topic can be considered as a key part of the process for achieving intra-EU solidarity. EASO has undertaken a number of pilot projects to test joint process opportunities in several areas, such as Dublin procedures, screening and referral of vulnerable groups. This initiative has received a high level of interest by stakeholders involved, although joint processing is still at the centre of an on-going debate at EU level. According to several interviewees, an update and renewal of EASO's mandate to the current activities being performed would be a very good initiative. The opinion of EASO's Executive Director on this issue is that "the concept of joint processing is promising even though there are some challenges, mainly due to national legislation. In this context, EASO has been able to test, together with MS

and Norway, the added value that practical cooperation in the field of joint processing can bring about. Trust and mutual recognition are key to the success of such initiatives"[8]

►   Integration

Secondly, even if there is no reference to integration in the founding Regulation, supporting integration is considered as an emerging need by MS, given that such an aspect of migration represents a very important part of the acquis, particularly regarding access to the labour market and healthcare.

►   Reception

Concerning reception of persons seeking international protection, for example, EASO is called to provide training on reception conditions (Article 6 (4)(f) of Regulation 439/2010) and is in charge of coordinating and supporting common actions assisting asylum and reception systems of MS subject to particular pressure (Article 8). The Directive on Reception Conditions (Directive 2013/33/EU) has, however, further involved EASO in providing adequate support to MS efforts in implementing the standards set out in the second phase of the CEAS. Moreover, according to the evidence gathered through interviews with relevant stakeholders, references relating to reception in the Regulation are not extensive and do not sufficiently represent the level of expectation in this area. As a matter of fact, there is an increasing demand of support in this topic, including the request to provide help to MS. Such support could include, according to some interviewees, operative measures and, possibly, financialsupport,even if this was not explicitly foreseen in the Regulation.

►   Return

Concerning return, it is worth mentioning that the asylum process can have two outcomes: (i) recognition of protection and therefore integration, or (ii) rejection of the application and subsequent return. Considering that 52% of applicants in the EU were rejected in 2014,[9] it can be argued that return represents a key issue and deserves special attention by European policy makers and officials. This has led the MB to debate EASO's mission as concerns this issues, which is currently not included in the Agency's mandate. In this respect, several interviewees recalled the importance of return, stressing that the Agency should take on an increasing role in this field.

2.2   EASO takes into account the concrete needs of MS in developing its work plan, strategies and activities

2.2.1 The procedures in place to identify MS needs arewell organised and increasingly involve civil society

MS needs are expressed to and identified by EASO through a wide analysis and consultation process aimed at planning the Agency's activities and responding to emerging needs accordingly.

EASO's activities are determined according to the needs expressed by MS and EU institutions and taking into account their requests. Every year, EASO's AWP identifies a number of objectives structured according to the S.M.A.R.T. principles. More specifically, according to Regulation 439/2010 (Article 29(1)(f)), EASO's AWP is adopted by the Management Board, composed by one member for each MS and two members of the EC, besides UNHCR and the four associated countries as no-voting members[10]. The document designs the priorities, objectives and activities to be performed by EASO in the following year in accordance with the assigned duties.

The process for the approval of the AWP can be defined as "bottom-up" given that, after the drafting of the AWP by the ED, the first step for the programming relies on ED consultation with the Consultative Forum and relevant partners (e.g. expert group, COI strategic network and reference group), which are called upon to make suggestions

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[8] See the article "Two realities: striking the balance", VISSER R., in CLEER Working Paper 2014/7, "The Common European Asylum System and human rights: enhancing protection in times of emergencies", The Hague

[9] Source: EASO Quarterly Asylum Report IV, 2014

[10]Denmark (EU MS), Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (associated countries).

on the AWP. Later on, the MB[11] discusses the document and sends a draft AWP to the Commission for its opinion. Finally, the AWP is adopted by the MB and sent to the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission by 30 September each year.

The MB members interviewed gave overall positive feedback on the procedure used for the approval of the AWP. By the same token, it can be concluded that MS' needs are fairly evaluated and collected by the Agency in order to plan its annual activities.

The involvement of civil society in the programming of EASO activities is improving over time. The process for the adoption of AWP also includes a consultation phase in which the Consultative Forum and relevant partners (e.g. JHA agencies) are called upon to make suggestions (Regulation 439/2010 Article 51(4)).

The Consultative Forum, set up in November 2011 soon after the establishment of EASO, comprises relevant civil society organisations and competent bodies operating in the field of asylum policy at local, regional, national, European or international level[12]. The consultative activities carried out by EASO with such stakeholders are aimed at enhancing the non-governmental point of view on specific country needs and provideevidence of Agency activities to third parties.

As evidenced by all CF meeting reports, the potential contribution of civil society to the drafting phase of the AWP has received increasing attention year after year. Since 2011, the Consultative Forum plenary has included a discussion for the drafting of the AWP for the next year, while from 2013 onwards specific meetings have been devoted exclusively to this activity. With a view to improving the consultation process, in the AWP 2014, EASO planned to deepen its relationship with civil society, exploring new areas of cooperation with selected organisations and establishing an e-consultation platform. In this perspective, EASO has developed a two way dialogue with civil society alongside its activities and, in 2014, organisations from civil society were consulted on key EASO documents, including the AWP 2015. As explained in EASO Annual General Report 2014, the Agency took into consideration all relevant input received from civil society.

A significant proportion of interviewees stated that in the first years of EASO operation, the civil society consultation process, even if planned and implemented in due time, didn't appear as satisfactory in terms of representativeness of the large number of NGOs and effectiveness of the proposed contributions. According to evidence gathered from national stakeholders, EASO is perceived to be more sensitive, over the evaluation period, towards the contributions of national authorities compared to those provided by NGOs.

On the draft of EASO AWP 2014, EASO received specific contributions by a limited number of NGO and international organisations (15). As a whole, 65 suggestions have been issued to EASO: 23% concerning general comments and 77% regarding specific topics (as COI, Quality Support, Training, Annual Report, Consultative forum etc.), showing a potential for contribution on a wide range of topics. Several contributions called for improvements in the civil society consultation process. In particular, the opportunity to comment on the Draft of the AWP was strongly requested. On this occasion, it was also underlined that more measures should be taken to allow stakeholders' contribution, especially where NGOs have specific knowledge to support EASO's programming.

In this perspective, some suggestions concerned the proposal to strengthen the quality and efficiency of the consultative process. For instance, a clarification of the method used to collect input from civil society and of the role and the modus operandi of EASO's Consultative forum were recommended. A CF examination of the procedural aspects of consultation was proposed by representatives of civil society, in order to find a way that would allow EASO to better identify relevant information for the WP drafting phase. The NGO's contribution for the analysis of the situation of asylum in the EU was also encouraged.

2.2.2 EASO is perceived as sufficiently able to take into account concrete MS' needs

Analysis of national stakeholders' perception confirms EASO's capacity to collect and take into account MS needs. Indeed, 70% of the surveyed national stakeholdersbelieve that EASO was able to adequately identify MS needs.

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[11] For more information on the functioning and composition of EASO's Management Board, see Section 5.1.1.

[12] The functioning and role of the Consultative Forum is further examined at Section 5.4.

Figure 4: EASO ability to adequately identify MS' needs
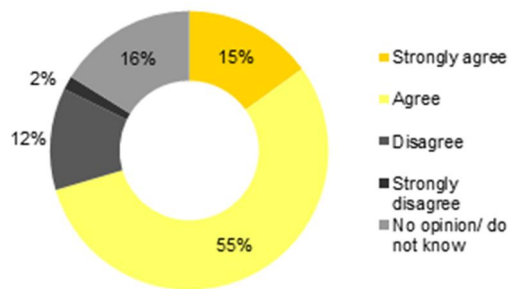
Figure 5: EASO' responsiveness to MS needs in the definition of its support activities
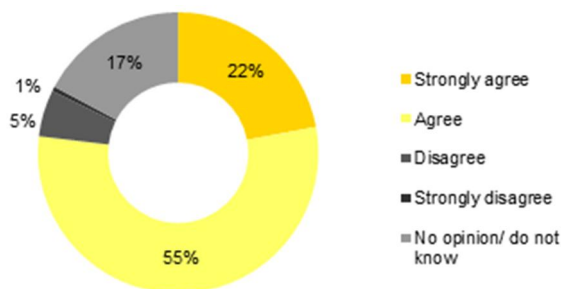
Figure 6: EASO' responsiveness to MS needs in the implementation of its support activities
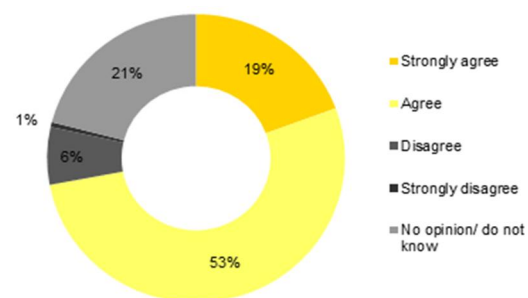
(Source: EY survey 2015, respondents: 186 national stakeholders)

As shown above, the majority of national stakeholders (77%) found that EASO's responsiveness to the needs of MS is also high in the definition of its support. The convergence of opinions in both respects points to an overall positive perception of national stakeholders regarding EASO's ability to take into account MS needs.

Finally, the activities implemented by EASO are also perceived by national stakeholders as responsive to MS needs, according to 72% of respondents.

In conclusion, EASO is generally perceived by national stakeholders as able to identify MS needs, to take them into account when programming its support activities and to implement them by adapting to possible emerging needs.

2.2.3 The implementation of EASO's operational support is perceived as consistent with MS needs

MB members from MS, having benefited from EASO's operational support, expressed a general appreciation of EASO's capacity to promptly react to national input and take into consideration national needs. In addition, they believe they have been efficiently involved in the drafting of the operating plan.

Nevertheless, according to some national stakeholders interviewed for the case studies, EASO encountered problems in implementing support plans in certain instances, for instance due to language difficulties and internal factors characterizing the MS beneficiary. Indeed, some MS officials encountered difficulties in using English as a working language and were not in a position to clearly explain national needs to experts deployed during the OP drafting phase. In light of the above mentioned difficulties related to the use of English as a working language, national stakeholders observed that the Agency could contract language services (e.g. interpreters in the hosting country, experts with knowledge of local language).

National stakeholders and experts have confirmed their positive perception of EASO's special and emergency support. In particular, 58% of national stakeholders rated the implementation of special and emergency support plans as satisfactory. Only 7% of national stakeholders interviewed defined the implementation of plans as rather limited, mainly due to linguistic barriers and a low budget for responding to migratory pressures.

Figure 7: Perception of national stakeholders and experts and trainers on EASO's implementation of special and emergency operating plans
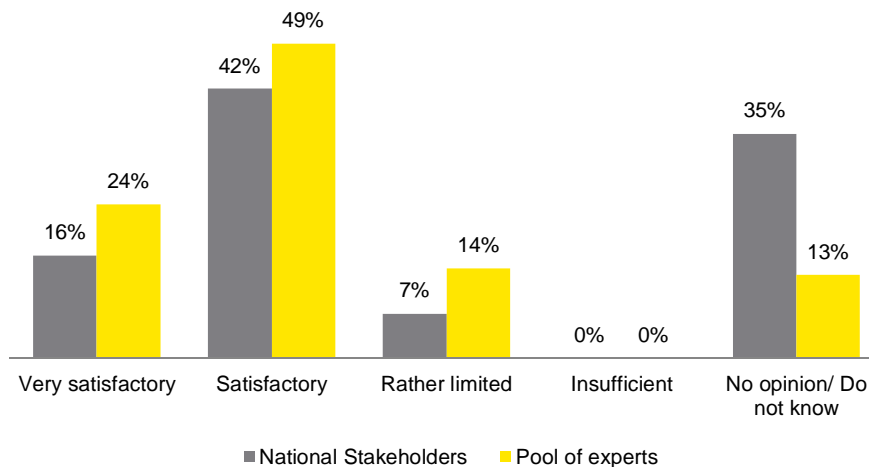
(Source: E-survey 2015, respondents: 74 national stakeholder and 71 experts)

Experts deployed by EASO confirmed the position expressed by national stakeholders: 73% of them rated the special and emergency support activities as satisfactory to very satisfactory. On the contrary, 14% of them defined the implementation of the plans as rather limited, with some experts stating that there could have been a better assessment of the MS needs so that the EASO operational plans and services could fully respond to them.

2.3 EASO is able to revise and adapt the activities planned to take into account emerging needs

2.3.1 EASO takes into account emerging MS and EU institution needs in the implementation of its activities

During its first years of operation, EASO has proven its adaptability to requestscoming from MS and the EC through several "emerging activities", which can be categorised as "MS requested activities", "EC requested activities" and "EASO-led activities". Such adaptability has guaranteed that EASO could fulfil its legal obligation to provide support to MS under particular migratory pressure. Indeed, even though they were not planned under the AWP and budget, such activities have been implemented by EASO and reported in its Annual Activity Report. Only in 2014 did EASO manage formal adjustments to its AWP, proving its capability to adapt according to new emerging needs.

EASO's activities are based on the yearly programming framework, which takes into account MS needs. However, considering the evolving context in which the Agency operates, the activities carried out should also consider new emerging needs coming from both EU and MS level.

EASO's capacity to adapt to emerging needs related to those activities, which were not foreseen in the AWP, should be categorized into three different groups of "emerging activities":

► Activities requested by MS

This group of activities refers to specific MS requests that were not foreseen in the AWP. For example, considering the 2012 AWP and Activity Report, EASO launched the Special support plan for Sweden and replied to the Italian request for special support. These two activities were not foreseen in the 2012 AWP. Another example is the operating plan for Bulgaria signed on 17 October 2013, which wasn't foreseen in the AWP 2013. These "emerging activities" are therefore evidence of the Agency's capacity to respond to MS emerging needs in line with its mission.

A complete analysis has been carried out concerning the operational support provided by the Agency to MS, specifically regarding the timing of EASO and responsiveness to the MS' requests.

► Activities requested by the EC

The EC requested activities refer to specific EC requests which affect EASO's duties. For instance, as indicated in the 2013 Activity Report, EASO conducted activities related to the Task Force Mediterranean, which were not foreseen in the AWP 2013. The so-called Task Force Mediterranean was set up immediately after the tragedy of 3 October 2013 off the coast of Lampedusa, providing evidence of the Agency's timely response. Another example is the adjustment made to the AWP 2014, which introduced a budgetary and staff increase due to the approval of an 18-month project funded by the EC[13].

Moreover, the activities implemented in 2013 relating to the Specific Programmes on unaccompanied minors (UAM) and on trafficking in human beings (THB) prove EASO's ability to reply to relevant tasks which are assigned to the Agency by other relevant legal and policy documents.

Furthermore, in addition to taking into account the task assigned by the Dublin III Regulation from 2012, EASO introduced in 2014 new related activities. The so-called "Preparedness for emergency support" activities are focused on developing a blueprint for the deployment of emergency support in line with the recast asylum package. EASO thus provided more attention to operational cooperation with other EU stakeholders (e.g. Frontex) and placed specific focus on effective access to the asylum procedures of persons in need of international protection.

► Activities proposed by EASO

"EASO-led activities" concern those activities which are the result of EASO's proactivity, in other words, the Agency's capacity to adapt to emerging needs without any external request for intervention. For example, EASO's specific programme in the field of cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals carried out in 2013, as described in the 2013 Activity Report, underlines EASO's proactive role as regards emerging needs not directly expressed. In fact, the open consultation launched in 2012 on the Agency's support and the role that second-instance decision-makers can play in the implementation of the CEAS inspired the adoption of EASO's specific program on cooperation with members of courts and tribunals, strengthening its commitment to ensure that its practical cooperation activities were undertaken with full respect for the independence of courts and tribunals.

As for the formalisation of the AWP revision, which were not revised over the period 2011-2013, EASO has demonstrated its capability to reconsider its activities according to new and different needs and also to integrate them in its programming procedure in 2014. Indeed, with the formal amendment of the AWP 2014 on 13 March 2014, the Budget and the Agency's activities have been modified in order to incorporate the workload resulting from the agreement with the EC for an 18-month project entitled "Promoting the participation of Jordan in the work of EASO as well as the participation of Tunisia and Morocco in the work of EASO and Frontex".

2.3.2 EASO's internal procedures and tools allow the support plans to adapt to MS' emerging needs

In order to cope with unforeseen needs or difficulties that might arise during the implementation of support activities, EASO has foreseen the inclusion of a flexibility clause in the support plans, as well as the possibility to formally amend the plan agreed by EASO and the MS beneficiary. The flexibility clause allows the Agency to adapt its planned activities to MS emerging needs in order to promptly react to the evolution of the migration context, while the amendment process enables the Agency to amend the operating and the special support plans, both in case of adjustments that affect the overall budget or not.

Considering the support plans implemented during the evaluation period, the flexibility clause has been used in all plans, except for Luxembourg and Sweden. The flexibility clause clarifies that, "given the nature of EASO's support measure which has to be timely, active and flexible, and to take into consideration availability of resources and experts and changing circumstances of the asylum and reception system in the MS, the foreseen calendar of the activities is just a forecast and may change. Any change will be subject to discussion of EASO and the Host State."

On the other hand, the Agency has agreed and signed six amendments with the competent national authorities involved in the support plans, giving evidence of EASO's ability to adapt the support plans' measures according to emerging MS needs. The emergency plan for Greece (phase I), for example, has been amended twice, six and eight

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[13]The grant agreement aims at implementing an 18-month project entitled: "Promoting the participation of Jordan in the work of EASO as well as the participation of Tunisia and Morocco in the work of EASO and Frontex".

months after its signature. The second phase has also been amended. The Special support plan for Italy has also been amended twice, whereas the Bulgarian emergency plan has been amended once.

The adaptability of the support plans has also been assessed through the perception of the personnel involved. As shown in Figure 8, most of the surveyed experts and trainers claimed that no unforeseen needs had arisen during the implementation phase (63% of respondents), which supports the conclusions that MS needs are well taken into account in the design of the support plans.

Figure 8: Experts and trainers' perception of EASO's capacity to respond to unforeseen needs arising during the implementation of the support plan
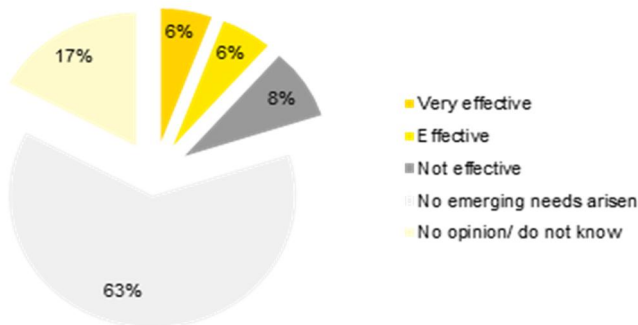
(Source: EY survey 2015, respondents: 35 experts and trainers)

Moreover, 12% of respondents had a positive perception of EASO's response capacity to cope with unforeseen needs, while 8% had a negative one. With regard to the negative evidence gathered, the respondents underlined some weakness of EASO's response system, such as the lack of time to respond to the unforeseen needs in an effective way and weak communication between the experts deployed on the field and the project manager / EASO staff.

Based on the survey, the emerging needs mainly concerned the interpretation and translation of documents. In Greece, the Agency has been described as proactive in proposing new measures (training, study visits, additional experts) and flexible in the complex situation prevailing in the country

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2.3.3 EASO has achieved an effective matching capacity between experts' skills and tasks

A final analysis refers to the selection of experts following the agreement on the Operating Plan between EASO and the MS. The Operating Plan provides the AST composition and tasks. As the selection for experts follows the agreement of the plan between EASO and the MS, it can be deduced that MS needs are taken into account when finding experts.

Figure 9: Experts and trainers perceptions of the adequacy of their skill with the mission (s) they were selected for
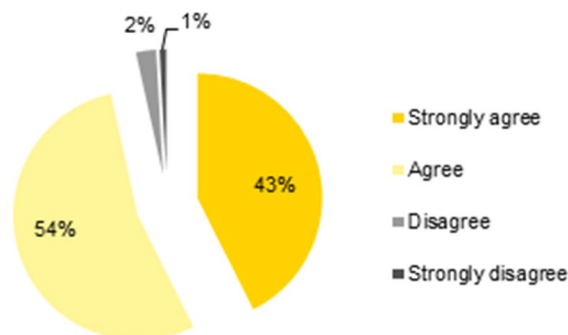
(Source: EY survey 2015, respondents: 115 experts and trainers)

In order to assess the perception of the experts involved in the Asylum Support Teams regarding the alignment of the selection procedure with MS needs, other evidence was gathered through the EY survey with the Pool of Experts and Trainers. Considering the question *"Would you say that your skills were adapted to the mission(s) you were selected for?"*, experts and trainers surveyed had an overall positive perception of the matching between their skills and the mission for which they were selected. More specifically, almost all the respondents (97%) had a positive perception of the matching between the experts' skills and the mission's requests. Therefore, their identification and selection procedure can be perceived as effective.

2.4 EASO's implemented activities correspond to its mandate

2.4.1 The task set out by other relevant legal and policy documents are in large part coherent with the Regulation, even if some duties result from a liberal interpretation

EASO's is defined by Regulation 439/2010, as well as of a number of subsequent legal and policy documents which further reinforce and define the Agency's tasks. EASO's mandate thus has to be interpreted in light of the changing regulatory framework.

The main operational objectives assigned to EASO from each legal and policy document can be categorised into four main topics. The following table shows the level of coherence among the operational objectives identified by relevant legal and policy documents and those set out in the Agency's founding Regulation, which have been summarised in the intervention logic in Section 1.2.

Figure 10: Operational objective in legal and policy documents and in the EASO Regulation

(Source: EY elaboration on EASO Regulation and on other relevant legal and policy documents as identified in the paragraph intervention logic)

More precisely, the first column of Figure 10 referring to the operational objectives assigned to the Agency by other legal and policy documents shows that:

► As far as cooperation among MS is concerned, most of the operational objectives are related to the exchange of information, best practices, COI and training activities, which are already included within the Regulation. Legal and policy documents approved after the establishment of EASO further identify specific targets to be addressed by the Agency, such as vulnerable groups (e.g. EU plan on Unaccompanied Minors and victims of trafficking in human being), which were already indirectly covered by the Regulation, and envisage a coordinating role of the Agency in relocation activities. The Agency's support to the joint processing of asylum applications, envisaged within the TFM, can also be considered as part of the EASO's mandate but is not directly covered by the Regulation.

► With regard to the implementation of the CEAS, which is one of the major duties within EASO's mandate, legal and policy documents highlight the key role of the Agency in the current asylum context and in the implementation of the recast asylum package. Indeed, EASO is asked to develop training activities for the relevant national competent authorities. Only the tasks assigned to the Agency by Article 33 of the Dublin III Regulation (2013), namely the promotion of information gathering analysis on the asylum system with MS in order to set-up an effective EASO Early Warning and Preparedness System in collaboration with the EC, extend EASO's operational objectives by envisaging an Early Warning, Preparedness and Crisis Management Mechanism. Within this framework, EASO is asked to "*provide information to the EC concerning a risk of particular pressure on a MS asylum system or problems in how it functions and support the EC in making recommendations to that MS*" (Article 33.1), going beyond what is provided by Article 9 of the founding Regulation concerning EPS, as already confirmed by the EC evaluation of EASO[14].

► Support to EU policy and inter-agency cooperation mainly refers to the Agency's activities concerning the implementation of the EU acquis and the cooperation with other EU Agencies operating in the field of asylum. The Regulation asks EASO to provide scientific and technical assistance in regard to the policy and legislation of the Union in all areas having a direct or indirect impact on asylum. Thus, considering that the operational objectives are related to certain areas of the EU Acquis (e.g. visa free regime and cross border crimes), which have an indirect impact on the asylum phenomenon, they can be considered as coherent with EASO's mandate as set out in the Regulation. Moreover, the operational objectives concerning inter-agency cooperation added by other relevant legal and policy documents further detail the cooperation framework already established by the Regulation (Article 52).

► Support to third countries encompasses activities which support the development of the external dimension of the CEAS, including capacity building measures in third countries, in line with the EASO Regulation.

Considering the above, it can be concluded that the operational objectives attributed to the Agency by other relevant policy and legal document show a high level of coherence with the Regulation.

2.4.1 EASO implemented activities are coherent with its mandate and, for the most part, directly covered by the Regulation

All the activities carried out by EASO during the evaluation period fall within its mandate, as set out by the Regulation and by other legal and policy documents.

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[14] COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT on the internal Evaluation of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). 16". The activities of the European Asylum Support Office in the field of data analysis and early warning have been developed following two different legal routes. On one side, the EASO founding Regulation foresaw the possibility for the Agency to work in the field of information gathering and analysis (Article 9). On the other hand, the legislative developments intervening with the adoption of the recast Dublin Regulation13 and in particular of its Article 33 which designs a mechanism for early warning and crisis management in the field of asylum, have prompted the Agency to further develop its initiatives in this field.

Table 2: EASO implemented actions in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 clustered for type of activities

EASO ACTIONS IN 2011	EASO ACTIONS IN 2012	EASO ACTION IN 2013	EASO ACTION IN 2014
Training activities	Training activities	Training activities	Training activities
Support to Quality of asylum processes and decisions	Support to Quality of asylum processes and decisions	Support to Quality of asylum processes and decisions	Support to Quality of asylum processes and decisions
Country of Origin Information	Country of Origin Information	Country of origin information	Country of Origin Information
Support the EU action plan for unaccompanied minors	EASO list of available languages	EASO list of available languages	EASO list of available languages
Support towards the EU action plan for the eradication of trafficking in human beings	EASO practical cooperation	EASO practical cooperation	EASO's cooperation with courts and tribunals
Establishment of Asylum Intervention Pool	Support the EU action plan for unaccompanied minors	Support the EU action plan for unaccompanied minors	EASO practical cooperation
	Support towards the EU action plan for the eradication of trafficking in human beings	Support towards the EU action plan for the eradication of trafficking in human beings	Support within the action plan for unaccompanied minors
Support to Greece	Tailor-made support and capacity building	Cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals	Support towards the EU action plan for the eradication of trafficking in human beings
Relocation	Relocation	Tailor-made support and capacity building	Reception systems and conditions
Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union	Establishment of Asylum Intervention Pool	Relocation	Support to Member States in special need
Early warning mechanism	Operating plan for Luxembourg	EASO support within the Task Force Mediterranean	Support relocation activities at EU and national level
Support to Resettlement activities	Operating plan for Greece	Operating plan for Greece	EASO documentation system
Support to the External dimension	Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union	Operating plan for Bulgaria	Establishment and maintenance of EASO's asylum intervention pool
	Early warning and preparedness system including the provision of art.33 of Dublin Regulation	Preparedness for emergency support	Support to Greece
	Support to Resettlement activities	Early warning and preparedness system including the provision of art.33 of Dublin Regulation	Support to Member States under particular pressure on their asylum system complementing the art.33 of the Dublin Regulation
	Support to the External dimension	Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union	Early warning and preparedness system including the provision of art.33 of Dublin Regulation
		Support to Resettlement activities	Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the EU
		Support to the External dimension and capacity building in third countries	Support to Resettlement activities
			Support to the external dimension

Activities directly covered by the Regulation
Activities indirectly covered by the Regulation falling within other legal and policy documents
Activities cross Regulation and other policy and legal documents

(Source: EY elaboration on Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union and on the Activities of the European Asylum Support Office for 2011, Annual Activity Report 2012, 2013, Internal Progress Report on AWP 2014 -January-September 2014)

As shown in Table 2, the majority of actions implemented by the Agency are directly covered by the EASO Regulation. The new operational objective assigned to the Agency by Article 33 of the Dublin III Regulation has been integrated as a complement to the already existing EASO EPS, which has been created pursuant to Article 9 of the Regulation. Because EASO's budget is not broken down by individual actions in the Annual Activity Reports, an assessment of the allocation of budget resources directly or indirectly falling within the Regulation could not be conducted.

With regard to the external dimension, EASO has carried out several activities. In the AWP for 2014 -following the signature of an ad-hoc grant agreement with the European Commission and the decision of the MB to approve the request to amend the Budget and the AWP 2014 in order to incorporate the amount of 984 461 35 € financed by DG Devco,[15] - EASO carried out capacity building activities in third countries, as envisaged by Article 7(1) of the Regulation. The abovementioned grant agreement concerned an 18-month project entitled: "Promoting the participation of Jordan in the work of EASO as well as the participation of Tunisia and Morocco in the work of EASO and Frontex".

PILOT PROJECT ON JOINT PROCESSING

Concerning the actions which are not directly covered by the Regulation, a pilot project on joint processing[16] was undertaken in 2014. This operation, foreseen within the special support activities, represents an additional task undertaken in the framework of the Task Force Mediterranean. From the 2014 WP analysis and from the evidence collected during the interviews with EASO staff, evaluators found that the Agency is heavily involved in coordinating this project. This also includes participation in SCIFA (Standing Committee on Immigration and Frontiers Affairs), the working group of the Council of the EU with representatives of all MS at policy level. On the basis of discussions held in SCIFA and the EASO MB, the Agency conducted a first generation of eight preliminary joint processing pilot projects with the involvement of 22 experts deployed from 12 MS and Norway over the period between June to

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[15] European Asylum Support Office, Amendment I to the EASO Budget 2014 (EASO/ED/2014/058), 17 March 2014

[16] Given that the pilot project on joint processing has been included in WP 2014 but has been implemented by EASO after the evaluation period, ending in June 2014, the analysis above could not include such EASO activity.

September 2014. EASO took a practical, gradual and bottom-up approach focusing on specific steps of the asylum process where support by MS and EASO experts could provide added value to the host country. The preliminary pilot project was aimed at providing concrete experience to MS working with each other at a practical level in the pre-interview stage within the parameters of the EU asylum acquis.

A deeper analysis of EASO's activities, by assessing to what extent they are covered in its founding Regulation, leads to conclude that theirlevel of coherence is extremely high[17].

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[17] For more details on the coherence analysis, please refer to Appendix 9.9.

3 Effectiveness

Evaluation question: To what extent has EASO achieved the objectives as set forth by its founding Regulation?

Approach

This question tackles EASO's ability to implement the duties enshrined in its founding Regulation and the extent to which EASO has achieved itsoperational objectives, as identified in the intervention logic. To answer this question, evaluators examined the coherence between EASO's activities and the Regulation and have assessed the correspondence between planned objectives and achieved outputs and results. Specifically, evaluators have assessed:

► the contribution of EASO's activities to the implementation of its mandate;

► the extent to which EASO has been successful in performing its activities and achieving its operational objectives in terms of providing support to MS (e.g. permanent, special, operational, third country, information and analysis support);

► the extent to whichEASO has been able to engage different stakeholders in its work, including non-state actors; and

► the degree to which external factors have influenced the effectiveness of the Agency and EASO's crisis response capacity.

Main findings

► Overall, the activities carried out by **EASO in its first years of operation have enabled an effective implementation of its major duties.** A further effort is needed by the Agency and MS for the support to the external dimension of CEAS.

► Considering the different contexts in which EASO permanent support is implemented, the Agency has achieved the majority of the expected results in an effective way.

► Overall, working arrangements between EASO and the MS beneficiaries concerning Special support have been duly respected.

► EASO has achieved almost all the expected results for emergency support, even if more effort is needed in drafting operational plans in terms of measures to be implemented and ASTs to be deployed.

► EASO has achieved all the objectives set forth on information and analysis support and is considered by MS and EU institutions as a qualified information broker.

► The procedure for the provision of ASTs could be revised in order to guarantee their availabilityand the selection process for experts and trainers could be further enhanced and fine-tuned so as to overcome some MS difficulties.

► EASO has developed an adequate response capacity to cope with emergency situations, encompassing both preventive and support measures.

3.1 EASO's activities effectively contributed to the implementation of its mandate

As established in Article 29 (1)(f) of its founding Regulation, EASO's MB adopts an AWP which translates the Agency's strategy into priorities, objectives and activities. Starting from 2012, all EASO's activities have been clustered in the following five main areas: (i) permanent support, (ii) information and analysis support, (iii) emergency support, (iv) special support and (v) third-country support. Each area pursues different objectives and types of activities, as shown in the table below.

Table 3: Categorisation of EASO activities

Area of activity	Permanent support	Information and analysis support	Emergency support	Special support	Third-country Support
Purpose	Supporting and stimulating the common quality of the asylum process through common training, common asylum training material, common quality and common country of origin information (COI)	Sharing and merging information and data, analyses and assessments at EU level, including common trend analyses and common assessments	Organizing solidarity for Member States subject to particular pressures by providing temporary support and assistance to repair or rebuild asylum and reception system	Providing tailor-made assistance, capacity building, relocation, specific support and special quality-control processes	Supporting the external dimension of the CEAS and partnerships with third countries to reach common solutions, including capacity building and regional protection programmes, and coordinating Member States' actions on resettlement
Type of activity	✓ EASO training ✓ QUALITY processes ✓ COI ✓ EASO practical cooperation ✓ Interpretation ✓ Specific programmes	✓ EASO documentation system ✓ Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU ✓ Early warning and preparedness system	✓ Asylum intervention pool ✓ Implementation of national emergency support plans ✓ Preparedness for emergency support	✓ Tailor-made support and capacity building ✓ Relocation	✓ Resettlement ✓ Third country support and external dimension

(Source: EY elaboration on AWP's 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014)

In order to implement such activities, the Agency has set up a functional organisation structure composed of three main Centres and one Unit tasked with implementing one or more support activities as planned within the AWP.

The operational objectives stated by the Regulation and identified within the intervention logic have been further articulated and detailed within EASO's AWPs for 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. Each AWP operational objective has been pursued through the five clustered areas of EASO support as identified within the intervention logic[18].

In its first year of activity, EASO focused its efforts primarily on permanent support, operational and information support and analysis support, meeting all the operational objectives envisaged in the Regulation and summarised within the intervention logic. In doing so, EASO achieved impressive results and developed a solid and effective structure for training, COI system, quality and EPS as further elaborated in Section 3.2. With regard to special and emergency support, the Agency has proven to be able to successfully assist asylum and reception systems of MS subject to particular migratory pressure (Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Sweden, Luxembourg and Cyprus).

More specifically,EASO has progressively developed its EPS in order to fulfil its duties under Article 33 of the Dublin Regulation, improving the reliability of data and allowing for the production of preparedness reports in order to provide an empirical underpinning to planning for operational support.

Finally, from an analysis of the implemented activities in the domain of third country support, it emerged that EASO has pursued almost every operational objective stated by the Regulation, such as taking part in several meetings of the external dimension and adopting the External Action Strategy, with the only exception being the direct

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[18] For a more detailed analysis on the implementation of EASO's operational objectives, please refer to Appendix 9.1.

implementation of regional protection programmes (RPP) due to budget constraints[19]. In this field, however, the Agency has cooperated with the EU Regional Development and Protection Programme covering Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon and is supporting the launch of the EU-Lebanon Dialogue. Furthermore, it can be noted that, in the domain of resettlement, the Agency has mainly focused on the organisation of and participation in practical cooperation and experts meetings. It has not yet developed common methodologies and tools as planned within the AWPs.

A significant limit in the Agency's action within the External dimension, also acknowledged by relevant EASO staff representatives, remains its link to broader foreign policy, for which the Agency is not competent.

Considering the operational objectives detailed in each AWP and implemented by the Agency through each area of support, the level of implementation of EASO's mandate is overall very high.

3.2 EASO been successful in performing almost all its activities and achieving its operational objectives

According to the documentary review of EASO's AWPs and Annual Activity Reports, the Agency has effectively implemented the majority of its support activities during the period under evaluation. National stakeholders have showed a rather high level of satisfaction with EASO's support, both in terms of usefulness and timeliness.

However, it can be noted that, due to the lack of key performance indicators over the period 2011-2013, a quantitative assessment of EASO's effectiveness could only be conducted for the last year falling within the scope of the present evaluation.

3.2.1 EASO has achieved the majority of the expected results concerning permanent support

Since its establishment, EASO has committed itself to implementing a very high number of permanent support activities and to achieving tangible results in different MS. Considering the ambitious nature of the Agency's permanent support activities and the different contexts in which such support is implemented, it can be concluded that EASO has achieved the majority of the expected results.

EASO permanent support activities are aimed at reaching and stimulating the common quality of the asylum process at European level. From February 2011 up to June 2014, EASO developed and expanded MS skills and capacities through several actions, such as:

► Common training, common asylum training material;

► Common quality process;

► Country of Origin Information;

► List of available languages Practical cooperation; and

► Specific programmes.

The following section focuses on the achievement of objectives for each type of permanent support provided by EASO, as indicated within the AWP. However, the flexible approach adopted by EASO in the definition and implementation of its AWP for 2011and the fact that "actions planned for 2011 have been defined by EASO in very general terms"[20], has prevented a comparative analysis of the results planned versus those achieved in 2011. In addition, the analysis of the results for 2012, 2013, 2014 has been by the lack of quantitative indicators were in AWPs in 2012 and 2013.

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[19] As indicated within the Annual Work Programme 2013,pag.19

[20] Work Programme 2011 European Asylum Support Office, page 4

EASOtraining

Pursuant to Article 6 of Regulation (EU) No 439/2010, EASO it tasked with the development of training sessions, tools and materials to be made available to all MS, aimed at providing common basis for asylum and migration services across the EU and practically supporting the implementation of CEAS.

In line with the Training strategy adopted in 2012, EASO follows a two-track approach for training activities: i) development of relevant training material; ii)organisation of regulartraining sessions based on a train-the-trainer system. The latter is a system used to produce a multiplier effect and, building on didactic activities in favour of national ETC trainers, to facilitate the implementation of ETC within national administrations. Through the train-the-trainer system, EASO sets up annual training plans for the provision of training to selected national trainers who will in turn organise and deliver training to their peers at the national level.

In January 2012, the European Asylum Curriculum[21] (EAC) Project was transferred to the Agency and modules developed within the framework of the EAC project now form a core activity of EASO's training portfolio. The ETC consists of specific training recommendations to facilitate a common understanding of EASO's training tools. An EASO Trainers Pool has been established during in 2012 and now counts over 103 trainers profile and 20 didactic profiles.

The ETC covers core aspects of the asylum procedure by means of 13 interactive modules[22] that follow a blended learning methodology, combining online e-learning and face-to-face sessions.

Results achieved in training activities

Starting from the fourth quarter of 2011 up to Q3 2014, EASO organised or facilitated 400 training sessions, including 46 train-the-trainers sessions (38 in Malta plus 8 train the trainer sessions in 4 regional training sessions). Overall during this period, EASO has trained more than 8 000 participants and around 471 trainers have participated in train-the-trainers sessions.

Figure 11: Train-the-trainer sessions planned and achieved by EASO in 2012, 2013, 2014

■ Number of train-the-trainer sessions planned by EASO (minimum value)
■ Number of train-the-trainer sessions planned by EASO (maximum value)
■ Number of train-the-trainer sessions delivered by EASO
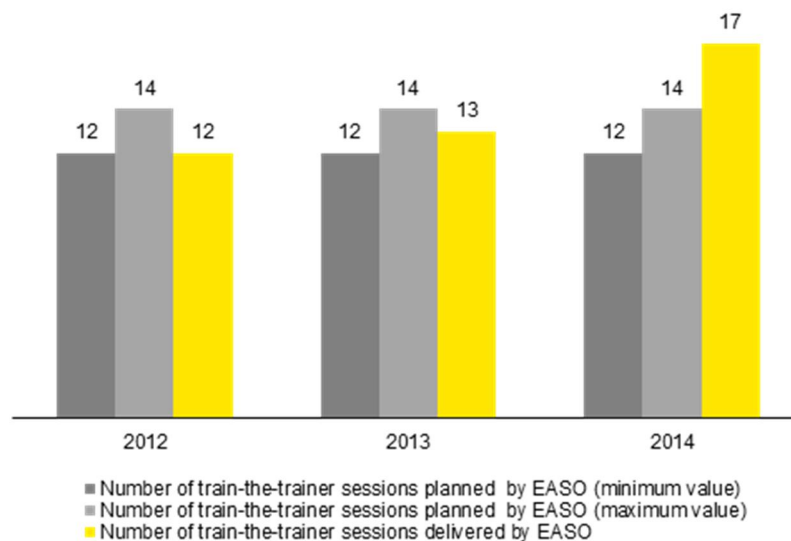
(Source: EASO Work programmes 2012, 2013, 2014; EASO Annual Activity Report 2012, EASO Annual Activity Report 2013; Annual General Report 2014)

As shown inFigure 11 in 2012, 2013 and 2014 EASO has delivered all the train-the-trainer sessions planned in the AWPs. Over the three years, EASO has always delivered the minimum number of sessions planned (12). If in 2012

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21 The European Asylum Curriculum (EAC) - initially established within the framework of GDISC, with the Swedish Migration Board as coordinating and managing body - is a system of common vocational training for asylum officers throughout the European Union based on commonly developed learning material.
22 The current EASO training modules are the following: 'Asylum procedures directive', 'CEAS', 'COI', 'Drafting and decision-making', 'Dublin Regulation', 'End of protection', 'Evidence assessment', 'Exclusion', 'Inclusion', 'International refugee law and human rights', 'Interviewing children', 'Interview techniques' and 'Interviewing vulnerable persons'. One new module called "Managers" has been developed in 2014 to supplement the EASO training curriculum, while the module on: 'Gender, gender identity and sexual orientation' are under development.

and 2013, the ceiling value (14) has not been reached, in 2014 EASO has exceeded the expectations of the AWPs[23].

Over the evaluation period, EASO has committed itself to update the training modules, introducing an 'Annual Updating Scheme' which implies that, if necessary and based on proper evaluation and quality review, all modules should be updated annually. From February 2011 up to June 2014 EASO has updated 19 modules and developed new modules such as: evidence assessment, interviewing vulnerable persons, inclusion, Dublin Regulation, Country of Origin Information, Drafting and Decision-Making (developed in 2011), Interview techniques and Common European Asylum System (developed in 2012), and a new module regarding the CEAS (developed in 2013). Modules for managers working in the field of asylum, on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, and on reception have been initiated in 2013 and further developed in 2014. As specified in the EASO Training strategy MS are invited to contribute to the development and updating of training modules through a specific request issued by EASO to MS. Moreover, before the module is finalized it is sent to reference group members, which includes representatives from civil society and are in charge of conducting the quality check of the updated or newly developed module.

Figure 12: training modules updates planned and achieved by EASO in 2012, 2013, 2014
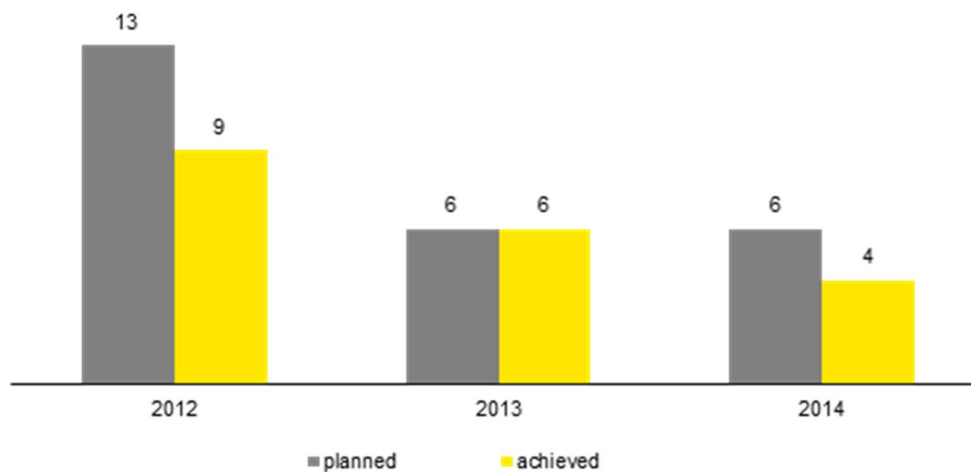
(Source: EASO AWPs 2012, 2013, 2014; EASO Annual Activity Report 2012, EASO Annual Activity Report 2013; Annual General Report 2014)

EASO has updated all the training modules planned for 2013, whereas in 2012 and 2014 the target number included within the AWPs has not been fully achieved by the Agency.

Moreover, starting from 2012, EASO provided MS with quality training materials and support with regard to organisation and delivery of training courses. In detail, EASO has developed training handbooks covering a wide range of theoretical and practical approaches and methodologies relevant for training of national officers, case workers and members of tribunals and courts, serving as a reference tool for those who have already completed the online and face-to-face sessions of the particular training module. EASO has drafted and developed all the training handbooks, as foreseen in the AWPs for 2012, 2013 and 2014. In addition, to the ETC and following the adoption of a Training Strategy in July 2012, EASO initiated the development of a system, the EASO training cockpit, to assist MS in setting up and monitoring national training targets as well as to develop training tools and EU-wide objectives. Indeed, the establishment of the EASO training cockpit is in line with the responsibility assigned to EASO in the Commission Communication of 2 December 2011 on enhanced intra-EU solidarity in the field of asylum, which envisaged the setting up of a quantitative target for asylum officials to be trained; as well as Union-wide objectives to measure the impact of training activities.The EASO training cockpit has been established in March 2013.Over the course of 2013, EASO redesigned the learning path in order to further adapt training activities to the needs and specificities of each potential target group, identifying five primary target groups: case officers, managers of asylum units, legal officers, COI researchers and reception officers.

In 2014 EASO drafted the Annual Training Report based on the training cockpit, which provides key figures on the progress in the implementation of the EASO Training Curriculum (ETC) and a compilation of EASO training country factsheets.

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[23]In addition to the 13 train-the trainers sessions delivered by EASO in Malta, in 2014 EASO has delivered4 regional training sessions across Europe: 1 session in Warsaw covering 2 train-the-trainer modules (Interview Techniques and Evidence Assessment) and addressed to 13 individuals; 1 session delivered in Vienna covering 2 train-the-trainer modules (Inclusion and CEAS) and addressed to 23 individuals trained; 1 session delivered in Brussels covering 3 train-the-trainer modules in French (Inclusion, Interview Techniques and Evidence Assessment) and addressed to 43 trainers, plus one session delivered in Rome

Concerning training, 44% of national stakeholders who benefited or had a role in the delivery of such activities agreed that training is useful for their everyday work (44%), provides relevant expertise (43%) and up to date information (41%).

Figure 13: Perception of national stakeholder on EASO's training activities
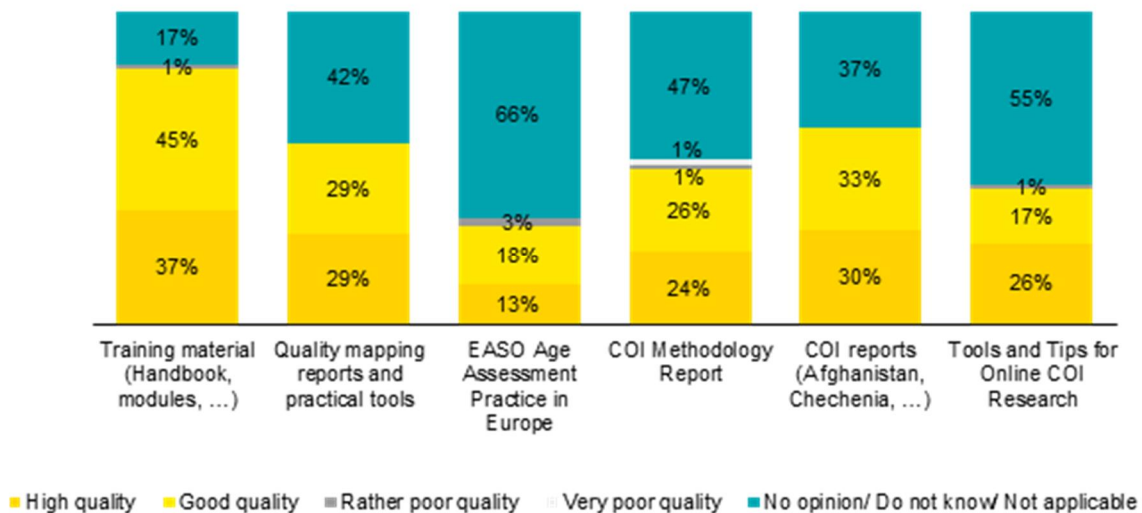
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 40 national stakeholders)

As part of the internal evaluation of EASO[24], the EC submitted a questionnaire in the field of training to national officials gathered in the EASO Training National Contact Point network as well as to UNHCR. In total, 15 replies were received in this field, and according to 71% of the consulted stakeholders, the process of creation and updating the training modules is managed in efficient and transparent manner, with 80 % of the respondents overall satisfied with the EASO training system.

Moreover, from responses to the EC questionnaire EASO training was defined as very effective, with 88% of respondents arguing that the Agency covers their administrative needs with regard to training, and 76% respondents who replied that it helped to train at the national level. Finally, 12 out of 15 respondents who provided the responses stated that they were using the EASO training modules regularly, and a significant majority of respondents (80%) considered that EASO training sessions expanded their knowledge.

According to EASO officials working in the field of training, the evaluation of feedback is one of the objectives and priorities for 2015. Indeed, the Agency is committed to enhance quality, launch the impact assessment evaluation and create a certification scheme to qualify training activities at the European level.

According to EASO Surveys conducted by EASO on all training participants over the period 2010-2013[25], the overall perception on training modules was positive (46% of modules defined "positive") and respondents appreciated both the online part and face to face sessions. On the other hand, some participants indicated that they needed more time to complete the online part while others maintained that more feedback from trainers could be very useful.

Quality of asylum processes and decisions

Quality activities support provided by EASO aim at achieving a common level of quality in asylum procedures as well as improving the quality of asylum decisions in the EU, which will eventually contribute to the full implementation of the CEAS.

To achieve this objective, EASO carries out a number of activities oriented at building the capacity of the asylum authorities responsible for examining and taking decisions on asylum applications at first instance and is committed to ensure the effective and sustainable functioning of national quality assurance mechanisms.

Following the 'Further Developing Asylum Quality in the EU' (FDQ)[26]" initiative - a project led by UNHCR ended in 2011 which inspired the Agency work in the field of quality, from 2011 to 2014 EASO has developed tools,

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[24] Commission staff working document, EC internal evaluation of EASO, March 2014, page 22

[25] For further information, please refer to Appendix 9.2.

[26] FDQ project has examined and developed in 2010–11 quality assurance mechanisms in the asylum procedures of selected Member States: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia. It has involved the assistance

techniques and methodologies that could be applied to examine, assess and develop a quality assurance system in national asylum procedures.

Quality Matrix

In order to facilitate the exchange of good practices, tools and expertise and to build on the efforts invested by Member States, the European Commission, UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders, EASO launched the Quality Matrix In 2012. The quality matrix is a results-oriented support initiative, undertaken in cooperation with the European Commission, which intends to cover comprehensively all areas of the CEAS, taking an up-to-date view of the situation in Member States. The results of the quality matrix are mainly used to publish quality matrix reports (for MS/UNHCR/COM only) and to develop a database of good practices and related quality/practical tools to be shared among all EU.

As part of the quality matrix mapping exercise, in the period 2012-2014 EASO collected and shared among Member States a list of projects and initiatives implemented across the EU, with the aim to build a comprehensive and permanent database of projects and initiatives which share the common goal of improving quality. The database covers different aspects of the CEAS and is organized by theme, such as quality of the procedure, minors, COI or reception conditions, amongst others. In 2013 the quality matrix focused on mapping the core aspects of 4 topics regarding the determining stage of the asylum procedures (i.e. personal interview, evidence assessment, eligibility and exclusion), while in 2014 the mapping exercise has been completed on 3 topics (access to procedure; identification of persons with special needs; special procedures).

Moreover, the quality matrix enables EASO to identify support needs and to develop accordingly relevant products and tools to assist MS in the effective implementation of high quality standards in their asylum processes.

During the Thematic meeting on "Eligibility" held on 24-25 September 2013, EASO informed participating States of its plans to focus on the development of quality tools (e.g. manuals, templates, checklists, etc.) in 2014. In the Agency's opinion, such tools could represent a way to capitalise the investment made by MS in the mapping phase of the quality matrix process. Therefore, from January to June 2014, EASO organised in Malta two thematic practical cooperation meetings on "Quality and Access to Procedure" and on "Quality and Identification of Persons with Special Needs", which gathered respectively 21 participants from 14 MS and 30 participants from 17 EU+ countries. Such meetings provided a chance for identifying and presenting quality tools and mechanisms to relevant national stakeholders. For instance, three particular practical tools on "Identification of Persons with Special Needs", (one from Belgium and two from UNHCR) have been shared among EASO and MS. Finally, in 2014, EASO organised eight Expert Groups meetings regarding personal interview (three workshops), evidence assessment (three workshops) and identification of Persons with Special Need (two workshops). Overall, the WG meetings have involved 16 experts.

According to the analysis of EASO's quality matrix, as well as the documentary review of the activities conducted in 2014, it can be concluded that EASO has achieved all the objectives set out in its planning documents during the period under evaluation[27].

Country of origin information

One of EASO's core activities on permanent support is Country of Origin Information (COI). Since the achievement of rapid, reliable and up-to-date information is central to any assessment on whether a person should benefit from international protection, EASO supports MS in the gathering and use of Country of Origin Information to achieve more objective, transparent and accurate origin information systems at national level. The main EASO activities in COI concern:

► management and further development of the EU's common COI portal;

► adoption of a common format and methodology;

► drafting of COI reports;

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of the asylum authorities of Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom who have provided good practice advice. UNHCR played a prominent role in those projects, as it did earlier with other quality initiatives projects.

[27] For further information, please refer to Appendix 9.3.

- ► organisation of practical cooperation workshops to share COI;

- ► Establishment of a COI network.

EASO activities in COI started in 2011 following the handover of the Country of Origin Information Portal by the European Commission and the setting up of a temporary Task Force and reference group aimed at structuring a Country of Origin Information Division with EASO. Moreover, specific expert groups were created to issue their expertise on methodology, practical cooperation, the COI common portal and knowledge management.

Building upon MS and expert groups' expertise, in 2012 EASO started its first COI-specific activities, drafting analytical COI reports such as the two reports: "Afghanistan: Taliban strategies — recruitment" published in July, and "Insurgent strategies: Intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans", published in December. The drafting of both reports included an extensive analysis of end users' needs and quality control through peer review. The following year, three specific COI networks on Pakistan, Somalia and Syria have been created together with a report entitled "Asylum applicants from the Western Balkans — Comparative analysis of trends, push-pull factors and responses" providing common information and analyses which may complement the activities on COI within EASO and at national level. In 2014, EASO published 2 COI reports on Somalia and on Chechnya.

Figure 14: COI reports planned and developed in 2012, 2013, 2014
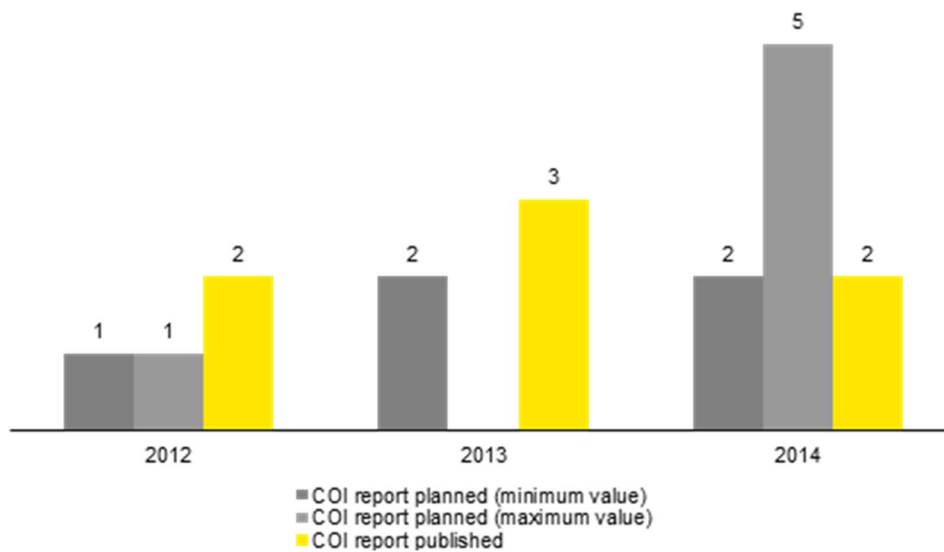
(Source: EASO Work programs 2012, 2013, 2014; EASO Annual Activity Report 2012, EASO Annual Activity Report 2013; EASO Annual General Report 2014)

As shown in Figure 14, overall EASO has developed and published all the COI reports foreseen and included in the AWPs. In 2012 and 2013 the Agency developed more COI reports than those initially programmed. COI reports developed in 2014 are in line with the minimum number expected but are not in line with the maximum planned value indicated in the AWP for 2014.

At the end of 2012 the Common COI Portal, designed by the European Commission as a single web-based entry point for MS to access COI, was eventually transferred to EASO which, being supported by the Expert group on the Common COI Portal, introduced new functionalities (e.g. notification system, hyperlinks, tree structure and front page for the upload area) and elaborated household rules for the use of the upload area. In 2013, EASO continued developing the COI portal facilitating the connection of further databases, and allowing MS which do not have web-based systems to upload and share COI documents into a local dedicated area called the 'upload area'.

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Results achieved with regard to EASO COI portal

In 2013, five national COI databases (Finland, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden) were connected to the overarching EASO COI portal, followed by 5 more databases in 2014.

Moreover, a network of national common portal administrators (NCPAs) was set up in February 2013 to ensure the existence of contact points between national users and EASO (for registrations, users' questions, technical issues, etc.), and provide training on the COI portal to their national users. Up today, 42 National COI Portal Administrators (NCPA) have been appointed by EASO. Overall, in 2013 around 2 108 COI-related documents were made available through the common European COI portal, whereas in 2014 16 100 documents have been linked, bringing the total number of accessible documents to more than 107 000. Approximately 300 documents are downloaded every month, with the most popular documents authored by EASO. According to the Agency monitoring of the portal, approximately 600 users access the COI portal with around 300 visits per month.

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As far as the COI network is concerned, from late 2012 EASO worked on the development of a proposal to adopt a COI network approach regarding EU-level COI, which has been approved by the EASO Management Board in February 2013 and eventually launched a few months later. The EASO COI network strategy is made up of the representatives of the strategic COI network - composed of COI heads of unit or experts responsible for COI from all MS, the associated countries, the European Commission and UNHCR, in charge of holding strategic discussions - and by a series of specific expert networks gathering COI experts from MS. Since April 2013, 7 COI specialist networks have been started, namely regarding Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and the Russian Federation. The tasks of these specialist networks, which as of December 2014 consisted of 115 participants, include: mapping the current COI products existing and planned at national level to avoid duplication of effort; information exchange on sources, bibliographies, planned fact-finding missions, etc.; and assessing the need for and producing EU-level COI based on the EASO COI report methodology.

Finally, in 2013 and 2014 EASO organised 11 country-specific practical cooperation seminars or workshops, focusing on COI, on policy or on a mix of both.

Stakeholders' perception on EASO training, COI and quality

The overall perception of national stakeholders on EASO permanent support activities (e.g. training, quality and Country of Origin Information) has been positive.

Figure 15: national stakeholders' perception of EASO permanent support
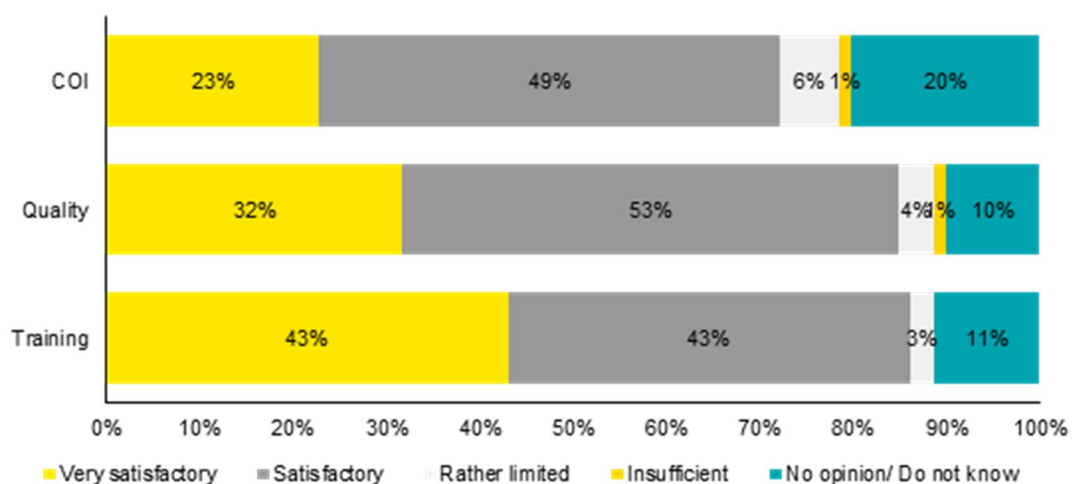
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 79 national stakeholders)

As shown in Figure 15, national stakeholders demonstrate their appreciation mostly of training activities (43% of the interviewee defined such activity as "very satisfactory"), followed by quality and COI support. None of the interviewees declared "insufficient" its level of satisfaction with regard to training, while approximately 50% of the survey respondents rated as "satisfactory" both training (43%), quality (53%) and COI (49%).

Finally, a survey addressed to national stakeholders shows that most of the respondents who has an opinion on such products perceive EASO's permanent support outputs as of "very good quality" and "good quality". In detail, training materials are described as of good quality by 45% of respondents and as of very good quality by 37% of

respondents, followed by COI reports (33% good quality, 30%very good quality) and by quality mapping reports and practical tools (29% good quality, 29% very good quality).

Figure 16: Perception of national stakeholder on the usefulness of EASO permanent support outputs
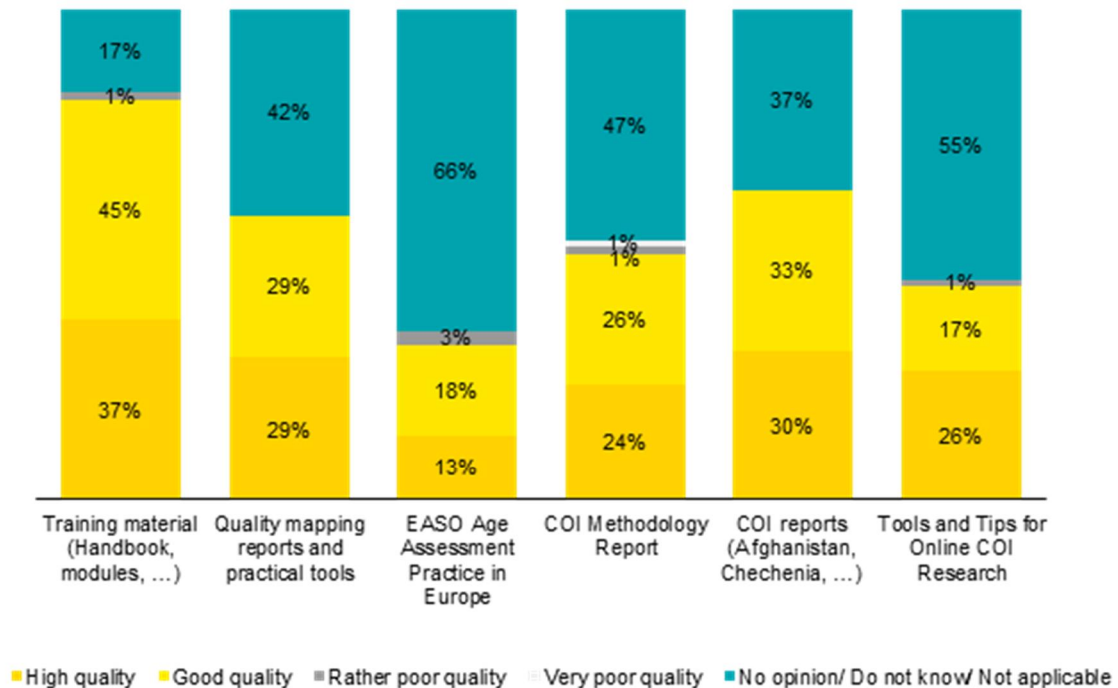
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 76 national stakeholders)

EASO list of available languages (LAL)

EASO activities regarding interpretation and list of available languages have been implemented in order to support immigration services that – due to special circumstances – are facing a lack of interpreters for certain languages.

Based on the experience of the GDISC Interpreters' Pool, EASO has established a list of available languages for direct translation within other MS. In 2012 EASO organised in Malta a meeting with the National Contact Points as focal points for interpretation matters (FPI NCP) while in 2013 EASO has updated the list, which comprises 264 languages generally available for direct translation from the named foreign language to the mother tongue of the named MS, and made it available to all MS. In 2014, EASO supported Cyprus with the use of the list to benefit from interpretation services of other MS.

Over the evaluation period, EASO has focused on a rather limited number of activities regarding LAL, which will further expand in 2015 according to the development of new technical solution to facilitate their use.

EASO practical cooperation

In order to play a relevant role in the asylum field and to concretely support MS and the European Commission, EASO has committed to take over the European Union network for asylum practitioners (EURASIL) further developing practical cooperation efforts. Following the recommendations issued by the Working Party on Practical Cooperation, EASO organised in March 2012 a Plenary Eurasil hand-over meeting in Brussels aimed at ensuring a smooth transition and transfer of methodologies, tools and activities between the organisation and the Agency.

EASO's practical cooperation measures could be considered as cross cutting activities which cover all areas of EASO's support, aimed at creating a system that can fulfil both short term needs (emergency support) and long-term support (special and permanent support).

The first practical cooperation meetings have been organised by EASO in June 2012. The meetings were intended to provide a common response to emerging situations linked to the Syrian crisis, gathering the participation of COI specialists and policy practitioners. During 2013, EASO continued with the implementation of practical cooperation

activities (country-specific, legal and thematic) and aligned such activities with the recast EU asylum package, in close cooperation with the European Commission.

According to the EASO 2014 Annual General Report,EASO organised approximately 20 practical cooperation meetings on a very high number of issues by the end of 2014 (e.g. unaccompanied minors quality-specific topics or aspects of the CEAS, conferences and workshops for members of courts and tribunals, trafficking in human beings, specific countries of origin, contingency planning in emergency situations, reception systems and conditions, joint processing, operational communication, EU funding, external dimension strategy, etc.). Such evidence confirms the prominent role which the Agency has progressively achieved on several topics and before a wide range of stakeholders.

EASO specific programmes

Following the approval of the European Commission's action plan on unaccompanied minors (2010–14), EASO has carried out, since 2012, a number of activities regarding UM and age assessment, involving a variety of stakeholders such as MS, the Commission, UNICEF, FRA, UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), members of courts and tribunals in the MS, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), ECRE, Save the Children, experts from civil society organisations, academics and medical practitioners.

During the evaluation period EASO has implemented a great part of the activities planned in the AWP regarding UM and age assessment, except for one publication on family tracing expected in 2014 that has been postponed to 2015. Such evidence confirms the effectiveness of EASO's specific programme[28].

EASO activities on trafficking in human beings (THB)

Following the adoption of the EU strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings 2012–16, EASO participated in several meetings in 2013 of the JHA agencies to promote the exchange of information and the coordination of operational activities.

In particular, as part of its activities to support the coherent and comprehensive implementation of the CEAS, EASO focused in 2013 on vulnerable persons within mixed migration flows through the implementation of two targeted train-the-trainer sessions for the module on interviewing vulnerable persons. The sessions were organised in April and October 2013. Moreover, EASO started the development in December 2013 of a new training module on 'Gender, gender identity and sexual orientation', in which the gender-specific phenomenon of trafficking in human beings has been addressed.

In 2014, EASO activities on THB have been further implemented and structured according to the KPI system. Although THB activities have been implemented in a limited time-frame, EASO has been able to accomplish all the objectives set out in 2013 and 2014 AWPs[29].

Cooperation with members of courts and tribunals

During 2013, as part of the open consultation process among EASO and second-instance decision-makers, the Agency held four specific expert group meetings which led to the adoption of EASO's framework on cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals. Such framework defines the main areas of such cooperation and strengthens EASO's commitment to ensuring that its practical cooperation activities are undertaken with full respect for the independence of courts and tribunals. The following list summarises the activities carried out by EASO with regard to cooperation with members of tribunals and courts in 2013:

► 4 consultative meetings with judicial associations (on strategy, professional development, collection and dissemination of jurisprudence and capacity building in the context of EASO's operations)

► Setting up of a Network of European and national members of courts and tribunals

► Organisation of an advanced workshop on the implementation of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive[30]

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[28] For further detail, see Appendix 9.4.1

[29] For further detail, see Appendix 9.4.2.

► Delivery of 3 seminars for the Italian judiciary on COI on Nigeria, evidence assessment and credibility, and interview techniques

► Collection and dissemination of 100 European and national rulings on the interpretation of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive[31]

► Participation of EASO experts to 6 external capacity building events, including 2 TAIEX workshops for refugee law judges, the final conference of the CREDO project, the Association of European Administrative Judges (AEAJ) expert groups meeting and the IARLJ's European chapter conference.

In 2014, EASO's cooperation with members of courts and tribunals has been further implemented and structured according to the KPI system. During 2014 EASO has implemented a great part of the activities planned in theAWP, except for the organisation of a practical cooperation meeting, postponed to 2015, and for the distribution of support tools to members of tribunals and courts, which should occur slightly later than planned[32].

3.2.2 EASO special support activities have been implemented in line with the support plans agreed with the beneficiary MS

EASO's activities on special support are addressed to those MS who request the Agency's support and consist of tailor-made assistance and capacity building.

In particular, tailor-made support is implemented after an accurate assessment of the situation in the MS and following the drafting of a special support plan. Such support includes the deployment of EASO experts, specific training and other support measures. Capacity building activities focus instead on strengthening the areas which were critical when the request for special support was submitted by the MS. In addition, following the Commission communication on enhanced intra-EU solidarity in the field of asylum, EASO has implemented some activities in the field of relocation.

During the evaluation period, EASO has signed and implemented, in collaboration with MS beneficiaries, three special support plans addressed to Sweden, Italy, and Cyprus[33]and conducted a number of activities in the field of relocation.

Overall, Special support plans signed by EASO and beneficiary MSs have been duly respected, whereas due to the lack of political will from MS only part of relocation activities have been fully implemented.

Special support plan for Sweden

Following a request made by the Swedish Migration Board on 27 November 2012 and taking into account the indications from the EASO EPS, a Special Support Plan was signed by the EASO Executive Director and the Director General of the Swedish Migration Board on 21 December 2012.

The objective of the special support plan, which has been implemented in January and February 2013, was to offer specialised training to the Swedish asylum system newly hired personnel on relevant EASO training modules such as "International Refugee Law and Human Rights" and on "Inclusion".

According to the special support plan, three train-the-trainer sessions were planned and addressed to eight Swedish trainers by two experts (one EASO trainer and one Dutch trainer). Special support activities to Sweden were structured as follows:

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[30]Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast)

[31]Ibid.

[32] For further detail, see Appendix 9.4.3.

[33]Given that the special support plan for Cyprus has been signed on the 5th of June 2014, just before the end of the evaluation period, the effectiveness of such plan could not be assessed within the final evaluation report. Moreover, in December 2014, after the evaluation period, EASO has signed a special support plan for Bulgaria.

► One ETC course on-line for eight trainers on the module 'International Refugee Law and Human Rights' with the assistance of an EASO trainer coach provided before the transfer on the ETC IT – platform during December 2012;

► One ETC trainer course on-line for the same eight trainers in the module 'Inclusion' with the assistance of an EASO trainer coach, starting 16 January 2013;

► 'Face to face' seminars in Sweden for the eight trainers from 4 February to 8 February 2013. The face to face seminars have related to both the 'International Refugee Law and Human Rights' module and the 'Inclusion' module and have been completed by one didactics session for the two modules.

Overall, all the activities and indicators planned during the drafting phase of the Support Plan for Sweden have been implemented.

Special support plan for Italy

Following the request submitted by the Italian authorities on 7 December 2012, the first EASO Special Support Plan to Italy[34] was signed on 4 June 2013 by the Executive Director of EASO and the Head of the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration within the Italian Ministry of Interior. A first amendment to the EASO Special Support Plan to Italy introducing two additional measures was signed in September 2013, while a second amendment has been agreed and signed at the end of March 2014.

The objectives of the Special support plan were to improve and enhance the Italian asylum and reception system, to align such system with the recast EU asylum package and support Italy on COI, on the reinforcement of the Dublin system, on operational procedures for the emergency capacity and on further support for appeal instances.

Overall, the plan foresaw the implementation of 45 activities (including an expert team on evaluation of SSP) over 218 calendar days (from June 2013 to December 2014). The activities were structured across 9 measures (data collection and analytical capacity; country of origin information (COI) capacity; Dublin unit – capacity building; reception system; emergency capacity; independent training of the Italian school for the judiciary; training in interview techniques; professional development seminar and study visits for the senior management; final evaluation of the implementation of the special support plan) and they addressed a variety of stakeholders, such as: the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration – Central Directorate of Services for Immigration and Asylum; the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration – Central Directorate of Policies for Immigration and Asylum; Department of Public Security – Central Directorate of Immigration and Border Police - National Asylum Commission - Territorial Commissions for the recognition of International protection - Border Police - Police HQ – Prefectures - High School of Ministry of Interior - Italian School for the Judiciary- Civil judges and justices of the peace.

As far as experts are concerned, the Agency has deployed 25 experts in 2013 and 32 experts in 2014. According to the EASO Annual Activity Report 2013 and EASO Annual General Report 2014, support teams started implementing activities in September 2013, followed soon by a mapping exercise with regard to reception conditions and the need to consolidate the reception system quality standards took place in October 2013. A fact-finding mission and meeting on Italian data collection and analytical capacity, took place in early November 2013. In addition, during the last quarter of 2013COI support was given in three videoconference workshops for Italian asylum decision-makers, with particular focus on Mali, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal. EASO also supported Italy though a technical report on Dublin-related requirements with respect to infrastructure, staff and resources in the Ministry of the Interior, as well as a training plan on the DubliNet system, Dublin procedures and best handling of vulnerable cases. In November and December 2013 the Agency organized three thematic workshops on the management and practical implementation of the Dublin regulation procedures. Finally, Italy also benefited of three professional development seminars for Italian judges who deal with asylum-related cases, organised in Malta.

In 2014 EASO supported the professional development of the members of the Italian Territorial Commissions responsible for granting international protection and conducted a mapping exercise of the Italian asylum data system as well as a follow up to the mapping exercise of reception system in Italy. On this occasion, and on the basis of the requirements of the recast Reception Conditions Directive, EASO experts defined a set of quality standards and mechanisms for reception and drafted – in cooperation with Italian authorities - practical guidelines on how to improve current monitoring tools

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34 The second special support plan for Italy has been signed on March 2015 and is therefore not included in the evaluation.

Special support plan for Cyprus

At the end of May 2014 Cyprus requested EASO for Special Support to improve and enhance the Cypriot Asylum and Reception System. In particular, following an internal assessment conducted by the Cypriot Asylum and Reception Authorities, the MS noticed a need for support on training of staff, in the area of vulnerable groups, on advice on age assessment procedures, on enhancing the reception conditions, as well as in the field of data collection and analytical capacity (i.e. statistics and information technology). In addition, the request of special support referred to the adoption of the recast EU asylum acquis and the need to implement the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in a coherent way.

Considering the significant increase in the number of asylum applicants to Cyprus over the period 2013-2014, the high number of pending cases and the lengthening of the decision process - with 65% of the stock waiting for more than six months for the decision to be taken, EASO agreed to provide tailor-made support to Cyprus and signed on 3rd June 2014 a Special Support Plan with MS authorities. Overall, the plan foresaw the implementation of 28 activities structured in 7 main measures (e.g. Support the Cypriot Data Collection and Analytical Capacity, EASO tailor made workshops on introduction to international protection, Intra-institutional screening mechanism detecting persons with special needs, Support with development, implementation of relevant methodology and training in the field of age assessment, Support in the field of reception and open accommodation, Study visits of the Cypriot institutions in the field of asylum and reception to MS, Final evaluation of the implementation of the EASO Special Support Plan to Cyprus) over 590 calendar days and addresses a variety of stakeholders, such as the Asylum Service, Ministry of Interior, the Refugee Reviewing Authority, Social Welfare Services, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, Ministry of Health, Aliens and Immigration Service (AIS) of the Police, Ministry of Justice and Public Order, Civil Registry and Migration Department, Ministry of Interior, Kofinou local Council, as well as other MS and UNHCR.

For the implementation of the Special Support Plan for Cyprus EASO planned the deployment of 61 experts[35].

As shown in Figure 17, 71% of e-survey respondents described EASO special support activities as "targeting the right participants", "providing high quality content" and "well organized" whereas none of the respondents strongly disagreed on any of the options made available.

Figure 17: National stakeholders' perception of EASO special support activities
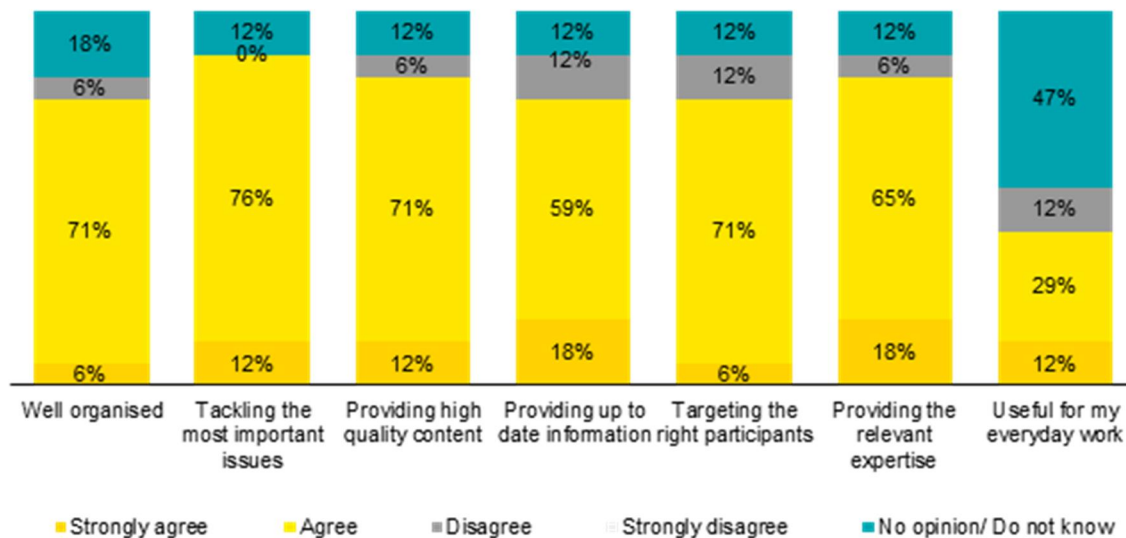
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 17 national stakeholders)

Relocation

EASO activities with regard to relocation started in 2012, following the March 2012 JHA "Council conclusions on a Common Framework for genuine and practical solidarity towards MS facing particular pressures on their asylum

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[35] Results achieved during EASO Special Support Plan for Cyprus are not included in this report, since the plan has been implemented just after the end of the evaluation period (June 2014).

systems, including through mixed migration flows". In this decision, the European Commission and EASO were asked to draft a report on intra-EU relocation measures from Malta (EUREMA phase I and II), including MS, associated countries, JHA Ministers, UNHCR and the IOM (project leaders).

In order to feed the report, EASO invited all EU MS, associated countries and project leaders to complete questionnaires, while a number of interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders and with relocated beneficiaries. The report summarising the findings on intra-EU relocation measures from Malta was presented to the European Commission in July 2012, to the EASO Management Board in September 2012, and to the ministerial lunch of the October 2012 JHA Council and subsequently to the European Parliament. EASO conducted follow-up surveys of the findings report in 2014, which was presented at the relocation forum in September.

Building on the fact-finding exercise on relocation activities from Malta, EASO organised two expert meetings in June and November 2013 - with the participation of the European Commission, MS, UNHCR and IOM – aimed at discussing practical and legislative aspects of a common relocation approach, the development of support material on how to translate the use of EU funding for relocation and the mapping of relocation best practices in MS, including internal organisation systems and reception and integration conditions. After the evaluation of the EUREMA project, EASO encountered a stand-still regarding the implementation of relocation related activities, mostly due to the lack of political will at the European level and to the unwillingness of MS to reach a common position on this point.Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that in light of the approval of the European Agenda on Migration 2015 - which foresees the possibility to relocate asylum seekers so that their distribution within the EU is done in a more solidary manner –the role of EASO with regard to relocation could be strengthened and extended in the coming years.

3.2.1 EASO achieved almost all the expected results on emergency support, even if more effort is needed concerning the design of measures to be implemented and ASTs to be deployed

Over the evaluation period, EASO has implemented four operational plans, achieving most of the objectives and results planned. Overall, the working arrangements between EASO and MS have been respected and, when necessary, they have been revised taking into account MS needs.

Nevertheless, following amendments of the operating plans or due to unpredictable factors, some of the objectives have been deleted or postponed, leading to a consequent reduction or transfer of some ASTs within the same operational plan. In some cases deliverables were not achieved as planned due to the fact that they were met by the authorities of the host country, or they could not be reached due to the unavailability of national/MS experts and staff within the host authorities.

Hence, it can be concluded that the Agency has either overestimated the number of ASTs to be deployed or included a number of measures far more extensive than those actually feasible in the host Stateduring the programming phase of operational plans.

In line with Article 1 (2) of the EASO Regulation, "the Support Office shall provide effective operational support to MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems". The provision of operational support by EASO has been conducted through the setting up of Asylum Intervention Pools (AIP) and the subsequent deployment of Asylum Support Teams.

Pursuant to Article 15 of the EASO Regulation, the AIP was set up by EASO in 2011 following the adoption of the Management Board decision no. 3, replaced by MB decision no.8 in 2012 and further updated in 2015[36]. The AIP gathers in one database the references of those national experts that could be deployed in MS where EASO operational support is needed. Further details with regard to the setting up of the AIP and its composition are given in the following Sections.

Following the request for operational support issued by Greece, Luxembourg and Bulgaria, EASO has adopted four operational support plans. More precisely, the Agency has implemented two operational plans in Greece (OP phase I signed on April 2011 and OP phase II signed on March 2013), one operational plan in Luxembourg (signed on

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36 European Asylum Support Office, Management Board decision no 3 on the profiles and the overall number of the experts to be made available for the asylum support teams (Asylum Intervention Pool); European Asylum Support Office, Management Board decision no 8 On the profiles and the overall number of the experts to be made available for the asylum support teams (Asylum Intervention Pool)

January 2012) and one operational plan in Bulgaria (signed on October 2013). Due to some unforeseen changes which occurred in the implementation phase, the Agency has deployed 106 out of 210 Asylum Support Teams planned[37]. The teams were in charge of implementing different measures, according to each support plan signed by the Agency and the MS beneficiary.

Figure 18: Number of ASTs planned and deployed in Luxembourg and Greece, Bulgaria
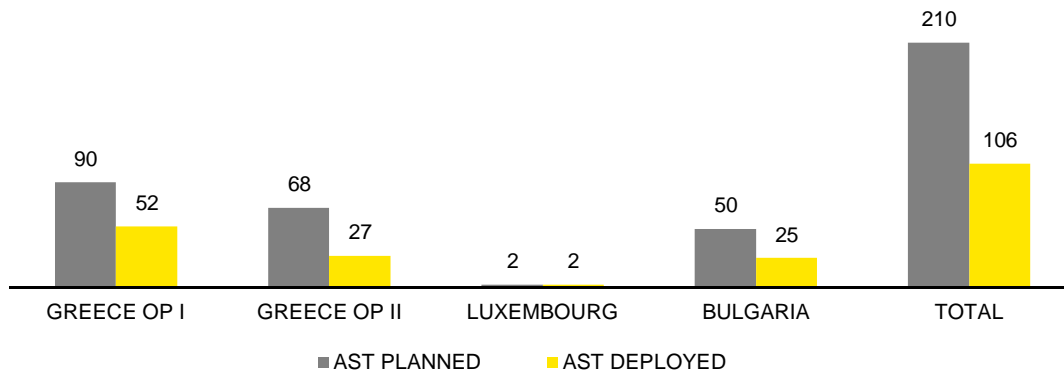
(Source: EASO operating plans and database «total overview of experts deployed»)

As shown in Figure 18, EASO has deployed less ASTs than planned for the operational support in Greece and Bulgaria, whereas for the Luxembourg OP, the number of ASTs planned and actually deployed correspond.

In this respect, according to the evaluation of the EASO Greece Operating Plan phase I – which has been amended twice on 26 September 2011 and 13 November 2012 - despite the fact that fewer ASTs have been deployed, the objectives have been generally met, with the exception of one measure regarding the reception of vulnerable categories. Indeed, given the transition of the responsibility for such target group from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare, the Greek government indicated not to have capacity available to receive and cooperate with the ASTs concerned. These ASTs have been, upon request, deployed through the First Reception Service. Overall, out of a total of 90 planned ASTs for Greece OP I, 15 ASTs were deployed in 2011, 37 ASTs were deployed in 2012, 2 ASTs were cancelled while 36 ASTs were postponed at the request of the Greek authorities. The reasons for the adjustment in the deployment of 38 AST were twofold: for the 2 cancelled ASTs, the planned deliverables were met by the Greek authorities, while the remaining 36 ASTs were rescheduled for Phase II either due to the fact that the deliverables were already fulfilled by other related ASTs or due to the unavailability of staff within the host authorities.

Concerning EASO emergency plan to Bulgaria, some of the expected activities and results could not be fully achieved by the Agency due to the lack of available National/MS experts[38] and to the occurrence of some unexpected factors, which eventually led to incomplete implementation of some measures and delays in others. Firstly, due to the lack of available trainers from EASO and Frontex, training on nationality establishment could not be implemented (measure 3.1 and 3.2). Secondly, due to the high workload, the implementation of national training sessions (based on EASO Train the trainers methodology) was postponed to a later stage in 2014 (measure 3.10 and 3.11). Thirdly, the request of State Agency for Refugees to receive guidance on practices of other MS in applying CJEU rulings could not be fully achieved by the EASO trainers during the implementation of the workshop, since this information is not publicly available (measure 3.16). In addition, assistance with interpretation of rare languages was not provided by EASO given that such support was financed by the European Commission as per the BG Annual Programme 2013 of the ERF Emergency Measures (Measure 6).

As far as EASO emergency support is concerned, most of the national stakeholders who responded to the survey described such activities as "tackling the most important issue" (59% of interviewee) and "providing relevant expertise" (55% of respondents). 31% of national stakeholders described EASO emergency support as "useful for

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[37] The assessment of the ASTs planned has been conducted according to the documentary review of: Evaluation of the EASO Greece Operating Plan phase I, EASO Operating Plan to Greece Phase II, Working Arrangement, EASO Operating plan for the deployment of asylum support teams to Luxembourg, EASO Operating Plan to Bulgaria - Working Arrangement. On the other hand, the assessment of the number of ASTs deployed has been conducted on the basis of Evaluation of the EASO Greece Operating Plan phase I and of the EASO database «total overview of experts deployed».

38 Emergency situations in Bulgaria required long-term deployments of experts to give strategic management advice and support in coordinating efforts from different stakeholders. Although this support was initially planned, it could not be implemented because of the lack of availability of experts for such long periods.

my everyday work", while 3% of respondents – mainly represented by national agencies in charge of asylum policy – disagreed on this point.

Figure 19: national stakeholders' perception of EASO emergency support activities
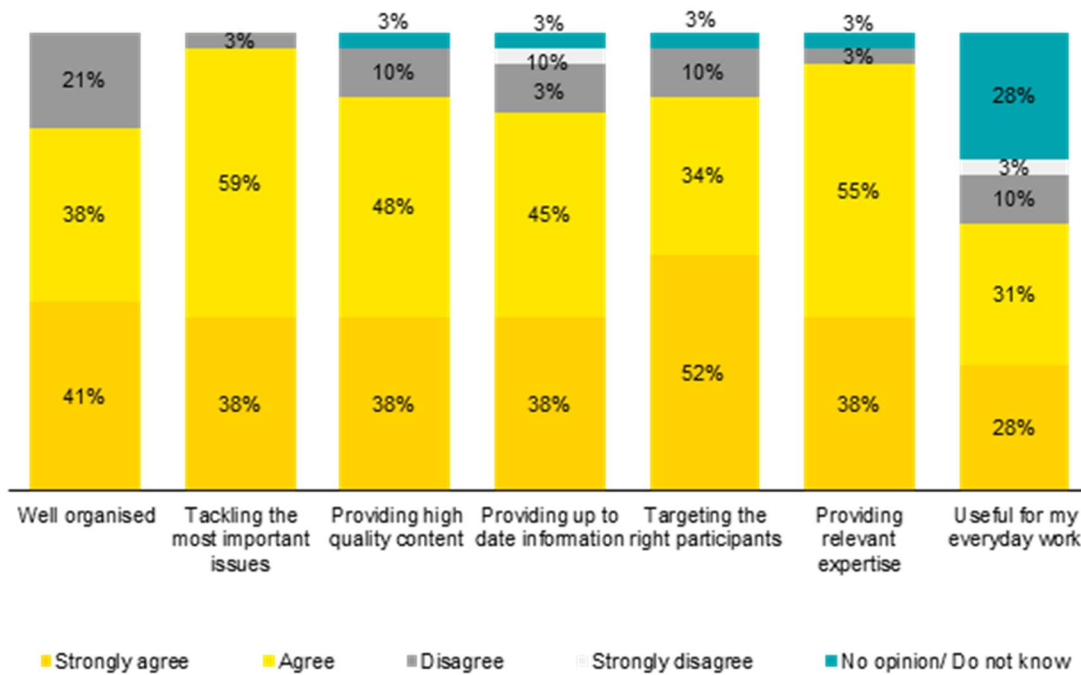
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 29 national stakeholders)

Opinions diverge on the time needed to identify and select expertsfor ASTs. Indeed, 35% of the surveyed national stakeholders judged it as being too short, while 30% of the respondents stated it was adequate. Some MS representatives at the MB instead reported that the processis handled by EASO in a timely manner.

Overall, 42% the national stakeholders rated the implementation of support plans (both special and emergency plans) as satisfactory, while none regarded it as insufficient. Nevertheless, the fact that a relatively high number of respondents (35%) said they have "no opinion" or "do not know" about this topic implies that there might be some knowledge gap with regard to EASO activities in this field, also because few MS benefited from the Agency support.

Figure 20: National stakeholders' perception on the timeliness of operational support
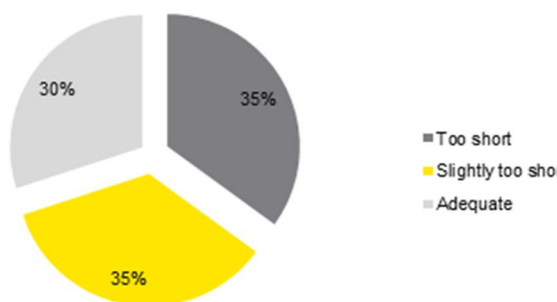
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 40 national stakeholders)

Figure 21: national stakeholders' level of satisfaction with EASO support
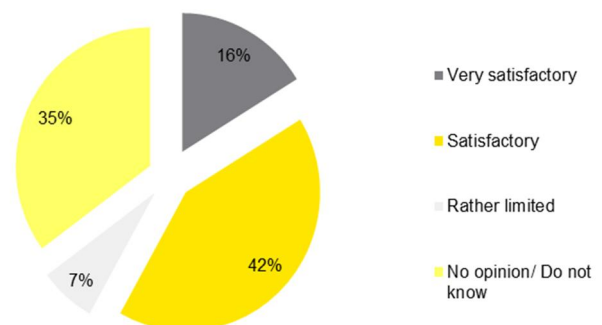
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 74 national stakeholders)

3.2.2 Over the evaluation period, EASO focused on the exchange of best practices for the implementation of third country support

Over the evaluation period, EASO implemented activities in the field of third country support, engaging non-EU MS and other relevant partners, mainly focusing on the exchange of best practices.

Third country Support by EASO comprises support for countries of origin, countries of transit, and countries of return to encourage synergies between migration and development.

Indeed, pursuant to Article 7 of the founding Regulation, EASO shall, "in agreement with the Commission, coordinate the exchange of information and other action taken on issues arising from the implementation of instruments and mechanisms relating to the external dimension of the CEAS" and "coordinate exchanges of information and other actions on resettlement taken by MS with a view to meeting the international protection needs of refugees in third countries and showing solidarity with their host countries".

Due to the limited budget and staff available, from 2011 up to 2014, EASO could only concentrate on small tasks concerning the external dimension of the CEAS and resettlement. Hence, the main activities carried out by the Agency during the evaluation period consisted in the organisation of, and participation to, meetings on the external dimension of the CEAS and resettlement and some capacity building activities in third countries.

As far as resettlement is concerned, EASO organised a seminar on EU resettlement policy and a practical cooperation meeting. EASO also took part in the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) organised by the UNHCR and followed the work done by the Core Group on the resettlement of Syrian refugees chaired by Sweden. Furthermore, a mapping of resettlement cycles in MS was carried out by the Agency. Finally, EASO has a seat in the European Resettlement Network (ERN) Steering Committee and has participated in numerous events of the ERN.

Concerning the external dimension of the CEAS, in 2013 EASO adopted the external action strategy and, together with Frontex, has been engaged in the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI) project. Such project is aimed at assessing and identifying the technical assistance needs of the neighbour countries (e.g. Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia) and the suitability of the existing EASO and Frontex tools for their possible adaptation. Activities foreseen in the project have included field visits, training, familiarisation visits, workshops, meetings, thematic seminars, and translations of selected EASO training modules, and other necessary documents and publications in Arabic and Turkish.

With regard to capacity building activities in third countries, EASO took part in several meetings within the EU mobility partnerships with Tunisia and Morocco and the "EU–Jordan dialogue on migration, mobility and security", participated in important core group meetings concerning the Syrian situation, and organised a practical cooperation meeting on resettlement and a practical cooperation expert meeting with the participation of MS, the Commission, UNHCR, IOM and other relevant partners.

All the main activities planned for 2014 have been implemented, while the due date has been slightly postponed for two out of four objectives set in the AWP[39]. Overall, although the strict budget constraints have impacted on EASO external dimension activities, the Agency has been able to anchor its objectives to such limited budget condition and achieve them accordingly.

Finally, according to the answers provided by national stakeholders through the e-survey, EASO activities with regard to third country support are regarded as providing "high added value" by 16% of

Figure 22: National stakeholders' perception of third country support

- It is part of its mandate — 47%
- It is necessary to gain visibility across the world — 21%
- It is of high added value — 16%
- It is not useful — 5%
- It is not part of its mandate — 11%

(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 76 national stakeholders)

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[39]A detailed analysis on the achievement of operational objectives is provided in Appendix 9.4.4.

the respondents, and as "necessary to gain visibility across the world" by 21% of the respondent, whereas only 5% of the interviewee described third country support as "not useful".

3.2.3 EASO has achieved expected results concerning information and analysis support and has gradually expanded its activities in this field

Over the evaluation period, EASO has implemented all the activities requested by art 9 of the Regulation, including the setting up of an EPS. The publication of documents and reports has been done annually, even if in some cases the Agency has slightly diverted from the due date of publication. Overall, EASO is considered by MS as a qualified information broker, but there is still some room for improvement in this area of activity.

EASO provides information and analysis support for all its stakeholders. In particular, the Agency collects and exchanges information through three main channels:

► production and publication of Reports;

► EPS; and

► EASO website/web portal.

The three main documents produced in the framework of the information and analysis activities (i.e. AWP, Annual Activity Report, and Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union) have been published since the establishment of the Agency. In addition, the Annual Activity Report was translated in all the 24 EU languages both in 2012 and 2013, while in 2011 it was translated in 22 EU languages. Since 2013 EASO Reports on the Situation of Asylum in the EU have been published quarterly, without missing any quarterly release.

Concerning information gathering and publications, the majority of national representatives claim that EASO is a qualified source of information and recognise the Agency as a primary information broker. Overall, national stakeholders interviewed argue that:

► As an EU agency, EASO is in a unique position to provide information on the current situation of asylum at national and EU level;

► Quality of information produced by EASO is rather high and reports are well structured and complete. However, some interviewee asked for more remarks and comments on figures and trend analysis, in order to better understand the content of the reports;

► EASO statistical information about the situation on asylum is used very widely, being the main source of information, albeit not the only one (e.g. national sources, Frontex publications are used as well by MS); and

► EASO could produce more comparative analysis or "asylum portfolios" within its report so as to present a clear picture of the procedures and practices used by MS when dealing with asylum applications. Ad hoc reports such as those on age assessment of UM are very welcomed and considered as a best practice by MS.

The following chart shows the perception of national stakeholders with regard to EASO outputs, including training materials, COI reports, quality mapping reports and EASO newsletters.

Figure 23: Perception of national stakeholders on the usefulness of EASO information and analysis outputs
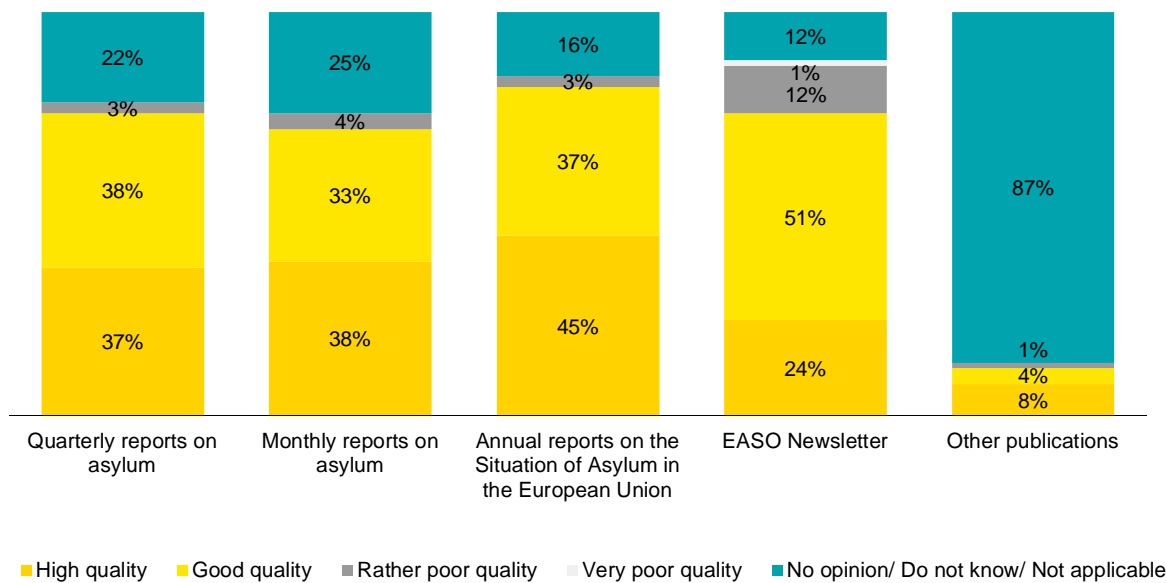
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 76 national stakeholders)

Overall, national stakeholders perceive the publication of the Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU as a document with a high quality (45%), followed by the monthly and quarterly reports on asylum (respectively defined with an high quality by 38% and 37% of respondents).

As planned within its AWPs, EASO proposed and set up in 2012 a step-by-step plan for increasing EASO's data collection and analysis capacity with regard to statistical indicators (both qualitative and quantitative) in the field of asylum. Building on its experience with quarterly and ad hoc analyses, and relying on the statistics produced by MS for Eurostat, the Agency has developed in 2013 its EPS in cooperation with the European Commission (DG Home Affairs and Eurostat), Frontex, UNHCR and other partners.

In setting up the EPS, EASO has foreseen three main phases to be followed:

► Performing a mapping of how national asylum systems function and how statistical data on asylum is reported to Eurostat;

► Deciding upon the most important and effective indicators that could provide a comprehensive overview of the practical functioning of the CEAS on useful timescales; and

► Setting up a Group for the Provision of Statistics (GPS) comprising experts nominated by MS to be their single points of contact responsible for the quality and timeliness of asylum statistics.

In April 2013 EASO organized the first meeting of the GPS, in which a proposal for a comprehensive set of 22 indicators was discussed. The latter aimed at providing data on the practical functioning of all the key aspects of the CEAS. In June 2013 EASO developed a questionnaire addressed to MS - in cooperation with other European bodies dealing with asylum data (i.e. DG Home Affairs, Eurostat, Frontex) - to ensure a common EU approach. Hence, during the summer of 2013, MS were asked to provide relevant information on their asylum system, gathering data and statistics from all the relevant national stakeholders. On the basis of the questionnaire, EASO drafted a report entitled "*EPS — Overview of statistical practice in Europe*".

In November 2013 EASO launched the Stage II of the EPS, building on current data-collection activities for EASO analytical products (monthlies and quarterlies). Stage II focuses on the first instance and envisages the collection of data under four indicators (applications, withdrawals, decisions and pending cases). A guide to the interpretation of indicator definitions was developed and sent to MS, and a training course and discussion meeting were held with GPS members to foster a common understanding. The monthly data collection started on 1 April 2014.

Overall, the activities implemented by EASO from 2011 up to June 2014 have fully achieved the objectives set out by its AWPs[40].

3.2.4 EASO has been actively involved in cooperation activities with EU institutions and bodies as well as other relevant international organisations

The EASO founding Regulation provides specific indications for cooperation among the Agency, other EU bodies and UNHCR.

Since early 2011 and pursuant to recital 11 of the Regulation, EASO and Frontex have cooperated in different fields, with Frontex sharing its expertise in setting up a new agency and giving its support to recruitment. The agencies cooperate in areas such as: Operational Support and setting up a pool of experts, data-sharing for an EPS, training, best practices for unaccompanied minors, trafficking and smuggling of human beings, Country of Origin Information, interpreters' list and the Consultative Forum. In September 2012, EASO and Frontex concluded a working arrangement. EASO also contributed to the establishment of the Frontex Consultative Forum and became a permanent member of this body, participating in its first meeting in December.

Moreover, since the establishment of EASO, several links have been established with the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) – as provided in recital 11 of the Regulation - in the following fields of cooperation: Operating Plan for Greece, training, best practices for unaccompanied minors, training, trafficking and smuggling of human beings and Consultative Forum. In the third quarter of 2012 preliminary discussions among the agencies where held to conclude a working arrangement, which was finally signed in June 2013.

Overall, the Agency has maintained close contact with the EU institutions – EU Commission, Parliament and Council – from the very first day of its activities. Moreover, bilateral and multilateral cooperation with EU agencies and bodies has gradually improved during years, with EASO joining in 2012 the EU agencies' coordination network and the Justice and Home Affairs agencies' network, composed of CEPOL, EASO, EIGE, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the European Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA), Frontex and FRA.

In addition, recital 10 of EASO's founding Regulation recognises a specific role for the UNHCR, as a non-voting member of the Management Board, an ex officio member of the Consultative Forum and a participant in several Working Parties. Since 2011, the UNHCR has cooperated with EASO in the implementation of the Operating Plan for Greece, providing support in the setting up of the asylum service, reception service and in the backlog management. In addition, the UNHCR together with important stakeholders in the asylum field (like ECRE, IRLJA, Odysseus Network, EU Commission) has collaborated with EASO for the content development of new ETC modules and to the yearly update of existing ones. Furthermore, the UNHCR is currently participating in the Country of Origin Information Reference Group to support EASO in the implementation of its various Country of Origin Information functions. Finally, the UNHCR and EASO discuss activities relating to the EC Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors, the EPS, Resettlement, Relocation, External Dimension, Regional Protection Programmes and capacity building. The first meetings for negotiating a framework working arrangement between EASO and UNHCR were convened in the fourth quarter of 2012, with the working arrangement signed in December 2013.

Furthermore, over the evaluation period EASO has gradually strengthened its relations with the European Migration Network (EMN). In particular, the EU bodies coordinate during the processes for the drafting of the respective annual reports on asylum and participate to several key meetings. In particular, since 2013 EASO has regularly participated in EMN Steering Board meetings and NCP meetings.

Finally, during the evaluation period EASO performed many of its activities in close contact with other relevant EU bodies, relevant international and intergovernmental organisations and fora working in the asylum field, such as the International Organization for Migration, the General Directors of Immigration Services Conference (GDISC), the IGC, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

The perception of EU and international institutions with regard to their level of engagement in EASO activities can be summed up as follows:

► on average, agencies and international organisations do not perceive a strong involvement in the data collection phase and analysis - which is done primarily at the national level - nor in the sharing of statistics

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[40] A deeper analysis on the objectives and results on information and analysis support is provided at Appendix 9.4.5.

tools and studies. In this respect, interviewees noted that a peer review of data collection and analysis and further collaboration in the implementation of the EPS could bring about some added value. On the other, cooperation on training and operational support are regarded as key areas of collaboration among EASO and EU and international stakeholders

► some agencies suggested to share more information with regard to its ongoing activities and initiatives, so to avoid duplication of tasks and create more synergies.

► overall, under the sponsorship of the EC and inside the JHA agency network, cooperation is increasing among EU agencies: best practices are shared on management, budgeting, HR and international relations management.

3.3 EASO has developed an adequate response capacity

3.3.1 EASO's response capacity encompasses both preventive and support measures

On the basis of the documentary review carried out, the procedures used to cope with emergency situations and MS requests have been effective. In fact, 100% of support requests to EASO in the evaluation period were fulfilled, including amendments to the support plans. Considering the timeliness of its response capacity, the Agency has always responded to MS requests in a timely way.

As stated in Article 2(2) of the EASO Regulation, EASO is asked toprovide effective operational support to the MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems.

More specifically, EASO:

► Coordinates and supports common action assisting asylum and reception system of MS subject to particular pressure which put in place extraordinary heavy and urgent demands on their asylum system and reception facilities – Article 8; and

► Supports the MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems, in coordinating actions aimed at:

  ▪ Facilitating an initial analysis of asylum applications under examination by the competent national authorities – Article 10;

  ▪ Ensuring that the appropriate reception facilities can be made available (emergency accommodation, transport and medical assistance) – Article 10; and

  ▪ Deploying the Asylum Support Teams – art. 10.

As operational objectives are related to unpredictable events, such as mass inflows and displaced persons, **EASO has put in place effective internal procedures and processes in order to cope with MS requests**.

These procedures can be clustered in two different categories:

► Preventive measures: EASO's EPS; and

► Support measures: special and emergency support.

Preventive measures: The EASO's EPS

The EPS is considered an essential mechanism for providing effective special support (tailored support actions) and identifying emergency measures, such as the deployment of ASTs, in order to ensure that national asylum systems function properly.

For example, the identification of the Swedish Migration Board's needs and the subsequent implementation of the Special support to Sweden relied also on the result of the evidences draw up from the EASO EPS.

The Early warning and Preparedness System

EASO started the creation of an EPS in 2012, developing analytical tools with the aim of detecting situations likely to give rise to particular asylum pressures. In 2013, EASO's proposal for the development of an EPS was approved by the MB, and a Group for the Provision of Statistics (GPS) was established. Furthermore, EASO sent a draft report entitled 'EPS — Overview of Statistical Practice in Europe' to MB and GPS members, with the aim to provide a first comprehensive overview of current practices regarding the collection of statistical data on asylum across the EU. At the end of 2013, the Stage II of the EPS was adopted, focusing on the first instance and on the data collection through 4 main indicators (applications, withdrawals, decisions and pending cases). EASO's role in EPS was strengthened by Article 33 (1) of the recast Dublin Regulation approved in June 2013, which envisages the strengthening of EASO's activities in providing information to the European Commission on the risks of particular pressure on individual national asylum systems. Furthermore, the EPS framework was strengthened by the new activities introduced in the APW 2014. Such activities were focused on the development of a blueprint for the deployment of the emergency support in line with the recast asylum package, paying more attention to operational cooperation with other EU stakeholders (e.g. Frontex) and with a special focus on the effective access of persons in need of international protection to the asylum procedures.

Support measures: Special and Emergency support

In order to implement the support measures, EASO has developed an effective framework of processes and procedures for Special support activities and Emergency support activities, which are characterized by different processes, both envisaging a "first step" request issued by MS, as represented in the figure below.

Figure 24: EASO Special and Emergency support procedures
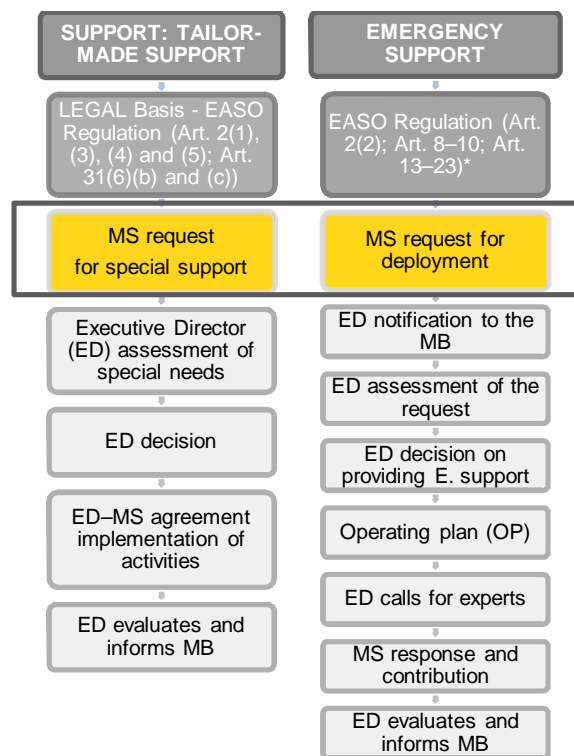
(Source: EY elaboration on the EASO Handbook)

As mentioned above, the process for requesting EASO support could be defined as a "Member States-led factor" process. In particular, those MS having to address specific needs in their asylum systemthrough capacity building and tailored support are entitled to request special support, whereas MS subject to particular pressure or in need of specific assistance by EASO are entitled to request emergency support and the deployment of Asylum Support Teams.

As shown in the following Table 4, during the evaluation period, seven requests for support plans were submitted to EASO. Three out of seven requests were addressed through Special Support plans, whereas four out of seven requests were addressed through the implementation of Operating Plans. EASO replied to all requests made by MS, giving evidence of a high level of responsiveness. In total, the Agency has signed four Operating plans (Luxembourg, Greece - phase I and II, Bulgaria), and three Special support plans for Italy and Sweden and Cyprus.

Table 4: Number of MS requests for support plans and of the amendments to support plans signed during the evaluation period

	MS request for support plans fulfilled	Amendments signed
Sweden	1	
Italy	1	2
Greece	2	3
Luxemburg	1	
Bulgaria	1	1
Cyprus	1	
TOTAL	7	6

(Source: EY elaboration on the special and operating support plans signed in the evaluation period)

As shown in the table above, during the evaluation period the Agency has agreed on six amendments, giving evidence of the Agency's capacity to respond to external factors and/or emerging needs. EASO's ability in reviewing the operating support plans during their implementation proves its capacity to take into consideration the variable circumstances of individual MS asylum and reception systems and to adjust the foreseen activities and their scheduling accordingly.

The effectiveness of such a process has also been confirmed by the perception of the experts and trainers which took part in the EY-survey.

Figure 25: Experts' and trainers' perception of the amendment process

Legend:
- Completely satisfied
- Satisfied
- Not entirely satisfied
- No opinion / do not know
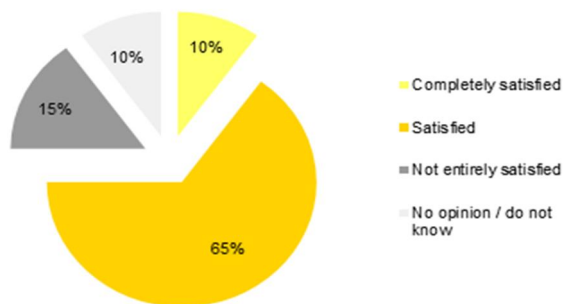
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 20 experts and trainers)

A sample of twenty experts and trainers was involved in the survey, 65% of whom were satisfied with the amendment process, while 10% of them were highly satisfied. None of the interviewees were completely unsatisfied with the amendment process. Overall, experts and trainers expressed a positive judgment on the amendment process that they had been involved in during the implementation of the operating support plans.

During the evaluation period, there were no detailed formal procedures to follow in order to manage amendments or adaptations of the operating plans as well as to define the roles and the responsibilities among the various stakeholders involved in the operating plan.

Having regard to this, it is worth pointing out that in February 2015, after the evaluation period, the Agency has drafted the manual "EASO procedure for amendments to operating plans and special support plans", which clarifies the procedures to be followed for amendments affecting and not affecting the budget. Moreover EASO already committed itself to further developing its capacity to react quickly to emergency situations by drafting three internal manuals to better define administrative processes, operational deployment and reimbursement of asylum team experts. More specifically, a harmonising guideline has already been introduced with the draft of the "Manual for the deployment of Asylum Support Teams and the participation in Special Support Measures" released in March 2014 by the EASO Centre of Operational Support with the aim to consolidate and harmonise the practices developed by the different project managers in charge of implementing the operating support plans.

Further findings on EASO crisis response capacity result from the evaluation of the timeliness of its response capacity to MS requests. Table 5summarise the timeframe in which MS requests for support measures, both special and emergency, have been submitted to and approved by the Agency.

Table 5: Timeliness and length of the process for the approval of MS request dates for Special and Emergency support by EASO for the evaluation period

Special support plans	2012			2013			2014		
	MS request	Special support plan approval	Special support plan signature	MS request	Special support plan approval	Special support plan signature	MS request	Special support plan approval	Special support plan signature
Sweden	27/11/2012	21/12/2012	21/12/2012						
Italy	07/12/2012	13/12/2013				04/06/2013			
Cyprus							26/05/2014	03/06/2014	05/06/2014
Emergency support plans	**2011**			**2012**			**2013**		
	MS request	Emergency operating plan approval	Emergency operating plan signature	MS request	Emergency operating plan approval	Emergency operating plan signature	MS request	Emergency operating plan approval	Emergency operating plan signature
Greece*	16/02/2011	n.a.	01/04/2011				28/01/2013	n.a.	07/03/2013
Luxemburg				10/01/2012	11/01/2012	26/01/2012			
Bulgaria							14/10/2013	16/10/2013	17/10/2013

*The basis for the deployments of asylum experts is the EASO OP for Greece, which was signed on 1 April 2011 and has a duration of two years. On 07/03/2013 Greece and EASO signed the OP Phase II (OPII) (01/04/2013-31/12/2014).
n.a. = the date is not available

(Source: EY elaboration on the operating and special support plans signed in the evaluation period)

As shown above, on the basis of the available data, it took EASO an average of three days after the request submission to decide to provide assistance to MS. EASO's response to MS requests, thus, was always timely. Furthermore, decisions concerning emergency support have been taken by the ED within the timeframe provided by Article 17 to 18 of the Regulation.

A further analysis has been conducted to assess the time occurred between MS requests and EASO's support.

Figure 26: Time interval between MS request and support plan signature date
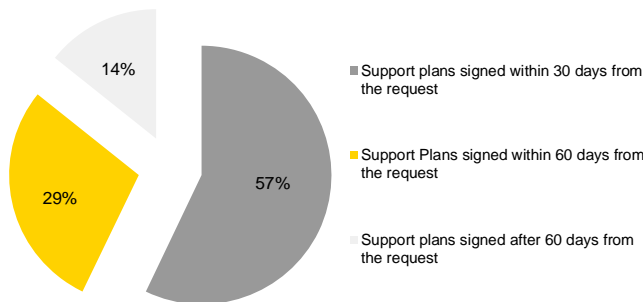
- Support plans signed within 30 days from the request
- Support Plans signed within 60 days from the request
- Support plans signed after 60 days from the request

14%
29%
57%

(Source: EY elaboration on the special and operating support plans signed in the evaluation period)

According to the figure above, 57% of the support plans were signed within 30 days from the MS request, 29% of the support plans were signed within 30-60 days from the request and 14% were signed 60 days after receiving the request.

The Special support to Italy was requested on December 7th 2012 for improving and enhancing the Italian asylum and reception system. EASO provided support for a great amount of activities, both (n.45) technical and operational, aimed to enhancing Italy's implementation of the CEAS instruments. The time-interval (180 days) between the Italian request and the signature of the Special support plan to Italy represents an exceptional case. As the EASO Executive Director decided to render special support to Italy on 13 December 2012, just 6 days after the Italian request, the delay in signing the plan may be ascribable to the negotiation phase.

3.3.2 The identification and selection process for experts and trainers is key to the provision of ASTs

In order to implement both special and emergency support measures in a timely manner and pursuant to Article 15 of the Regulation, EASO introduced in 2011 the Asylum Intervention Pool (AIP), made up of MS' experts that can be deployed to support MS dealing with significant migratory pressure.

As mentioned in section 5.3.1, the AIP was set up by EASO in February 2011 following the adoption of Management Board decision no. 3 replaced in November 2012 by Management Board decision no 8 on the Asylum Intervention Pool. The latter states that "the overall number of experts to be made available for the Asylum Intervention Pool [...] shall be not less than 100" and "profiles of the experts to be made available by MS via their

national expert pools for asylum support teams are determined on the basis of basic qualifications, core competences and other possible optional skills", specified in articles 2, 3 and 4.

As set out by the Regulation, **EASO relies on contributions from MS for the deployment of experts**. With this in mind, MS stakeholder responding to the e-survey indicated that they often find it hard to provide the Agency with their experts mainly due to a lack of internal human resources or experts meeting the technical expertise required.

This has been the case for the operational support to Bulgaria, where, as stated in the final evaluation report on Bulgaria *"could not be fully achieved due to lack of available experts to meet the requested needs in the particular period in which they were required. This led to incomplete implementation of some measures and delays in others. Furthermore, emergency situations in Bulgaria required long-term deployments of experts to give strategic management advice and support in coordinating efforts from different stakeholders. This support was planned for Bulgaria, but could not be implemented because of there were no such experts available for such long periods"*.

Overall, national contribution to the Asylum Intervention Pool and expert deployment is perceived as a constraint by MS facing extraordinary situations. Indeed, according to the evidence collected from the EASO MB, staff and stakeholders interviews, the Agency is perceived as too dependent on national contributions. Hence, the procedure for the provision of AST could be improved in this regard; in particular, it may consider enhancing its in-house capacity.

During years EASO has updated and kept open communication lines with the AIP national contact points (NCPs) on all matters pertaining to the asylum support teams and relating to the conditions of deployment of those teams.

Figure 27: meetings with AIP NCPs planned and organized in 2012, 2013, 2014
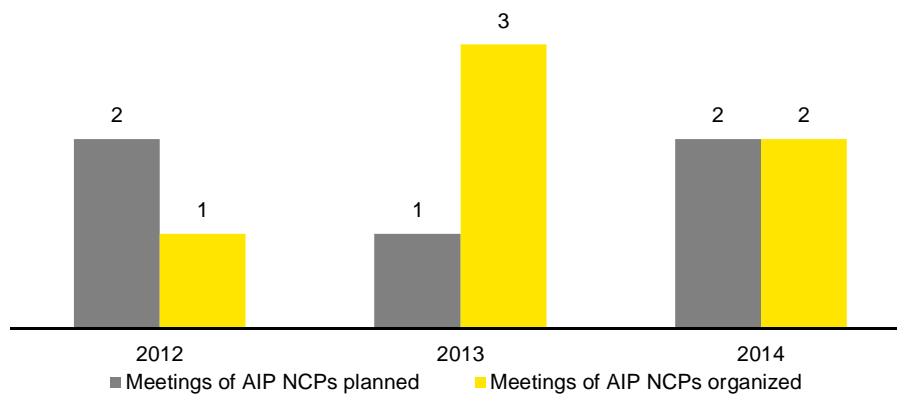
(Source: EASO)

As shown in Figure 27, during 2012, 2013, and 2014 EASO organised a number of meetings with AIP NCPs, which supported the development of the AIP, the participation of national experts in EASO Emergency and Special Support activities, the deployment procedures, the use of code of conduct and EASO technical equipment. The updating process takes place mainly during the meetings of AIP NCPs. Overall and in an aggregate form, more meetings than those initially foreseen were organised. On the other hand, in 2012 only one meeting out of the two foreseen actually took place.

According to the evidence gathered during the interview with EASO's Centre for Operational Support, during the selection phase the Agency does not follow a formal procedure for the quality assessment of national experts' skills. As a matter of fact, experts and trainers who responded to the survey question regarding the adequacy of the skills assessment process presented divergent opinions on this topic.

Figure 28: Experts and trainers perception about the adequacy of skill assessment phase in the identification and selection procedure
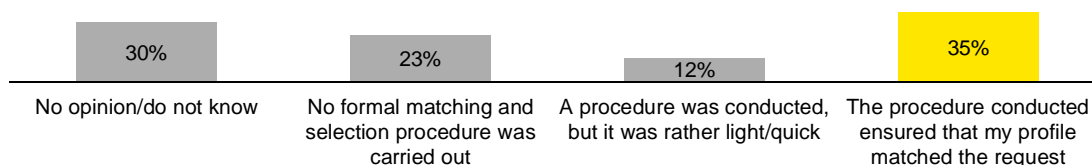
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 115 from Pool of Experts and Trainers)

It is worth pointing out that only 35% of survey respondents stated that the selection procedure ensured the matching between the expert competencies and the profile requested, whereas 23% of the interviewees stated that any formal matching and selection procedure were carried out. 12% of interviewees (12%) indicated that "a procedure was conducted, but it was rather light/quick" while the remaining 30% had no opinion in this regard.

Figure 29: Experts and Trainers perceptions of the adequacy of their skill with the mission(s) they were selected for
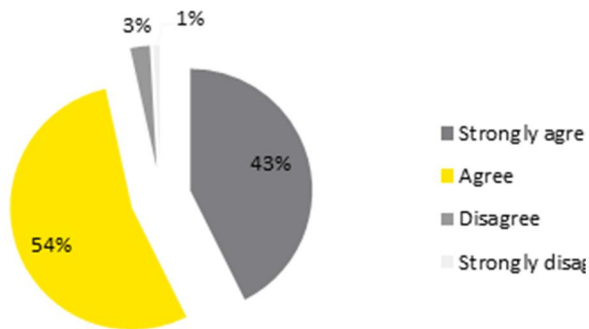
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 115 from Pool of Experts and Trainers)

Nonetheless, expert profiles are most of the time coherent with the mission and the activities established within the operational plan, as showed in Figure 29.

As showed in Figure 30 below, from a procedural point of view, the majority of survey respondents (30%) strongly agreed on the fact that the call for experts launched by EASO provides sufficient information on "the overall objective of the evaluation" while fewer respondents (22%) strongly agreed that such call for experts provides information on the time actually needed to accomplish the task (man/days).

Figure 30: Experts and trainers perception on the completeness of EASO's call for experts
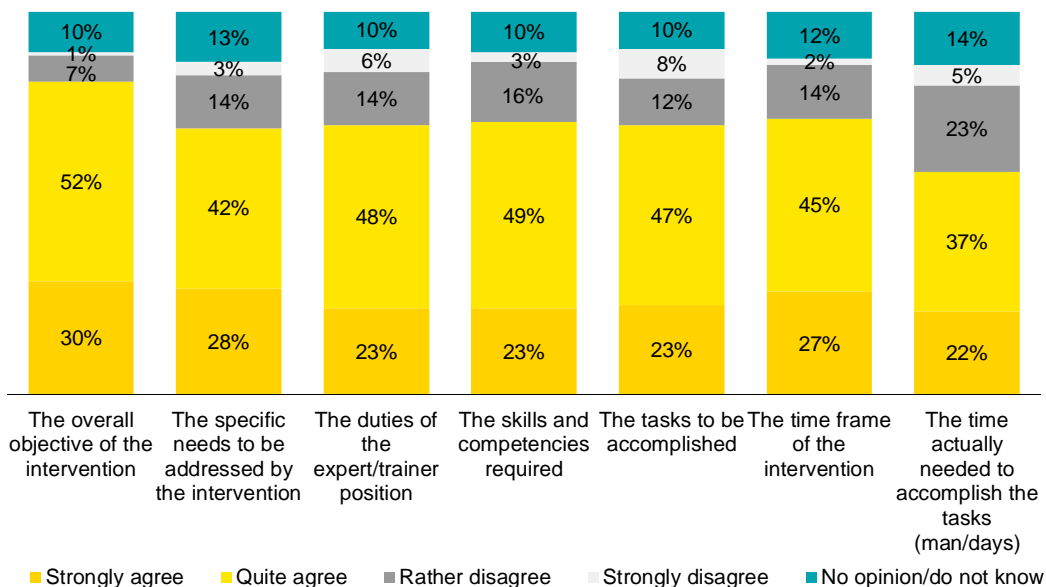
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 115 from Pool of Experts and Trainers)

In addition, the selection process of experts to be deployed in AST might be slowed down due to some internal and or external difficulties.

Figure 31: difficulties encountered by MS in the identification and selection of experts
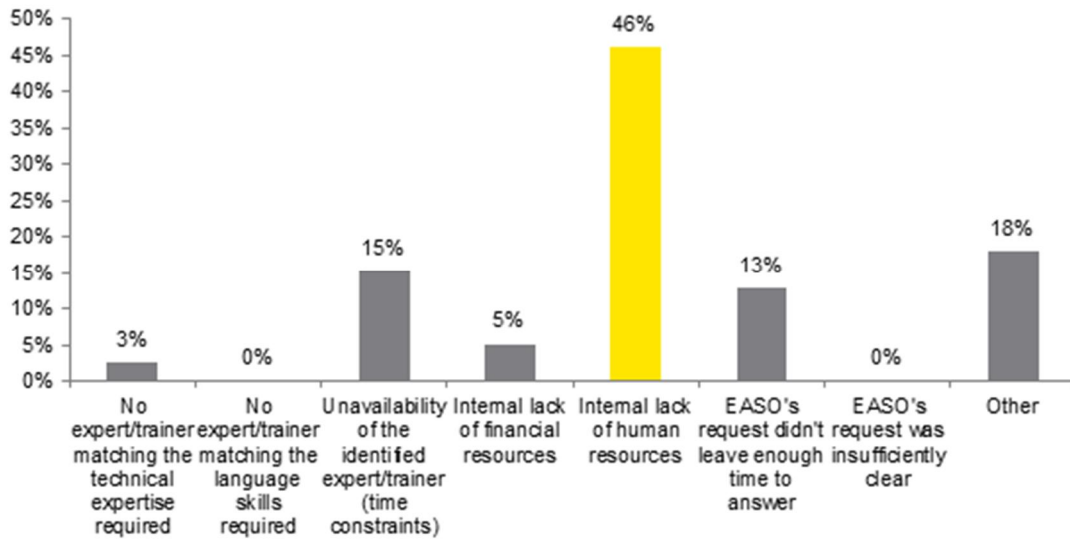
(Source: EY survey 2015, respondents: 39 national stakeholders)

As shown above, the majority of national authorities responding to the survey indicated that the largest difficulty in the identification and selection of experts should be attributed to an internal lack of human resources (46% of respondents), whereas very few respondents (3%) found that no expert matched the technical expertise required.

With regard to the timing of the identification and selection process, experts and trainers interviewed mostly agreed that the time allowed for the identification and selection procedure was adequate (54% of respondents).

Figure 32: Experts opinion on the timing of the identification and selection process
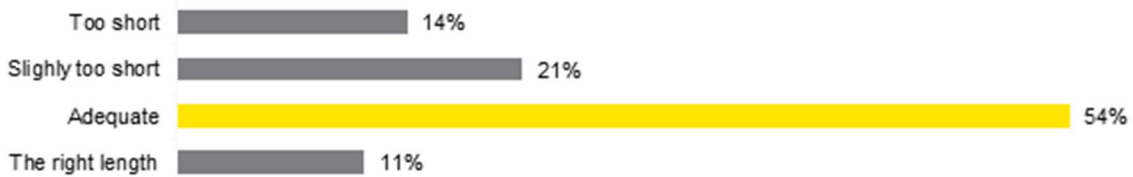
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 115 from Pool of Experts and Trainers)

4 Impacts

> Evaluation question: To what extent has EASO effectively contributed to the coherent implementation of the CEAS?

Approach

The achievement of impacts is analysed with respect to the specific objectives identified in the intervention logic, namely:

- ► Facilitate, coordinate and strengthen practical cooperation among MS on asylum,
- ► Provide scientific and technical assistance in regard to the policy and legislation of the Union in all areas having a direct or indirect impact on asylum,
- ► Provide operational support to MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception system.

Through the above, EASO's contribution to the strategic objective of a coherent implementation of the CEAS isalso assessed. The extent to which EASO has increased the capacity and willingness of national competent authorities to work together is analysed as well.

Main findings

- ► **EASO** has allowed national administration members to meet their peers and share information. It has spurred spontaneous information sharing across national authorities and **has succeeded in positioning itself as the main source of information in the field of asylumfor MS and EU institutions alike**.

- ► **EASO has contributed to deeper and more practical cooperation between MS**, as illustrated by their growing commitment to the deployment of trainers and experts. It has thus provided an effective response to MS demand for more practical cooperation and exchanges.

- ► Even though EASO produced expertise for the convergence of national jurisprudence and fostered the coherence of national law, **there is not yet substantial evidence of EASO's impact on the implementation of the EU acquis**. Nonetheless, EASO's activities, and in particular training, helped MS to achieve the medium to long-term changes needed in their national asylum system for the progressive implementation of the CEAS.

- ► **EASO contributed to the widespread recognition of the need for intra EU solidarity**. EASO raised awareness on the importance of mutual support, but the lack of political will, both at national and EU level, hampers the materialisation of relocation.

- ► Finally, third country support is widely considered as instrumental in ensuring the implementation of a reliable CEAS, but there is no consensus as to what extent these activities should weigh on the Agency's budget.

4.1   National stakeholders recognise the results achieved by EASO in its first years of operation

As provided in Regulation 439/2010, the Agency's mandate focuses on three major duties, namely (i) contributing to the implementation of the CEAS, (ii) supporting practical cooperation between MS on asylum and (iii) supporting MS that are subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems (e.g. by establishing an EPS, coordinating teams of experts to assist MS in managing asylum applications and in putting in place appropriate reception facilities).

Over 80% of the surveyed national stakeholders agreed that, over the past four years, EASO contributed to the implementation of its three major duties as envisaged in the Regulation.

Figure 33: National stakeholders' perception of the results achieved by EASO over the past four years within its three major duties as set out by Regulation
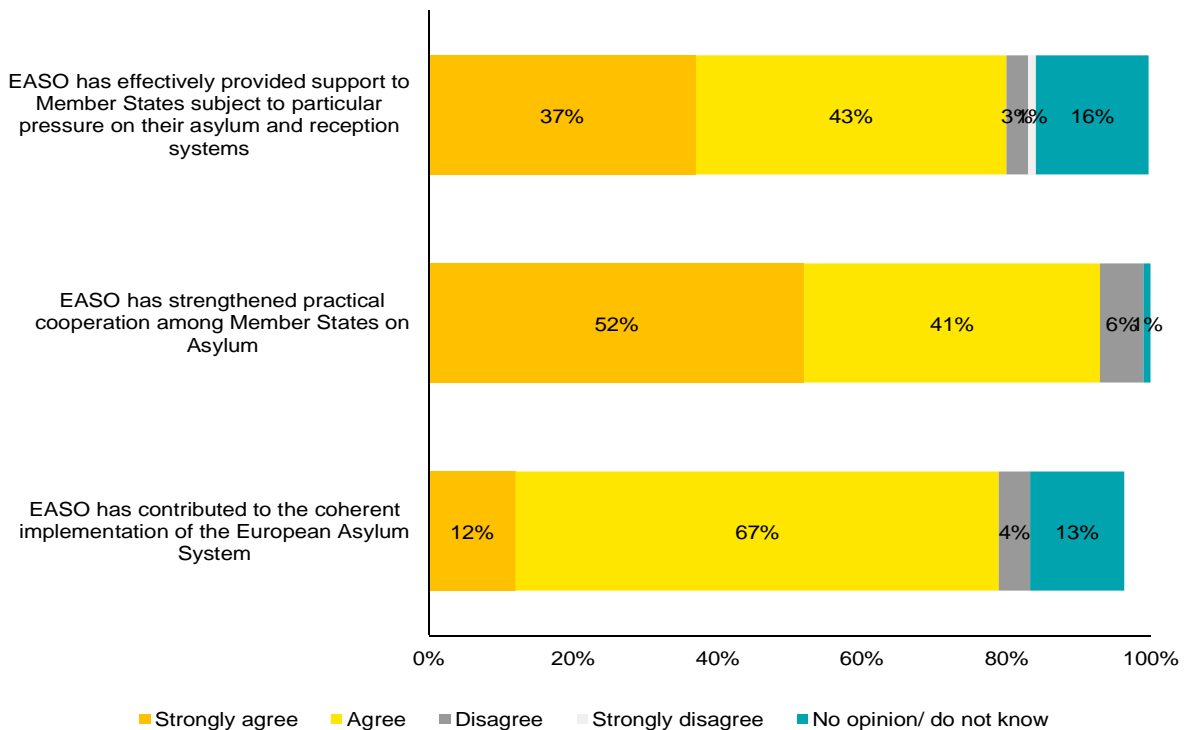
(Source: EY survey 2015, respondents: 79 national stakeholders)

4.2   EASO effectively contributed to increasing practical cooperation between MS

According to Article 2 of its founding regulation, the Agency shall facilitate, coordinate and strengthen practical cooperation among MS in the field of asylum and help to improve the implementation of the CEAS.

In our understanding, and according to the intervention logic presented above, the impact of EASO on MS cooperation is achieved through a series of subsequent and necessary steps:

► Mutual knowledge, meaning that national asylum authorities representatives, policy-makers and practitioners meet on a regular basis and are consequently able to identify counterparts from other MS and develop knowledge of the national system of other MS;

► Exchange of information and good practices between EASO and MS and between MS themselves; and

► Operational cooperation, which entails intense cooperation on practical matters and the deployment of trainers and experts.

To appreciate EASO's contribution to the achievement of practical cooperation amongst MS, each of the above mentioned steps must be examined separately.

4.2.1 EASO has spurred the development of mutual knowledge

Mutual knowledge can be understood as the knowledge EASO has acquired about national asylum systems on the one hand, and the knowledge national competent authorities have developed about EASO's activities on the other hand. It includes the ability of EASO officersto identify the relevant interlocutors on national level, and the fact that the national competent authorities are acquainted with EASO officers, whilst it also covers national competent authorities' knowledge of their counterparts and the national systems in other MS.

EASO aims to gather stakeholders from all MS, whether they are judges, experts or civil servants. Whilst networking occurred prior to the creation of EASO, it used to be limited to the level of national policy makers. EASO strengthened and extended this networking by allowing other executive officers and decision makers within national asylum systems to meet one another.

Firstly, mutual knowledge and recognition between EASO and national representatives was assessed. The evaluation found that the latter have become familiar with EU officials and activities, while the Agency has gained privileged access to information on the national level. Many stakeholders reported that EASO's meetings not only allow them to exchange with EASO staff and to familiarise themselves with the Agency's work, but also provide a unique opportunity to meet a wider range of peers from across the EU.

Indeed, some interviewees mentioned that through their attendance at EASO's meetings, they were able to identify correspondents in other national administrations, which did not occur prior to the Agency's establishment. By extending the range of actors involved in inter-state cooperation on asylum matters, EASO paved the way for the rise of spontaneous exchanges and coordination on a more operational level. Around 20% of the surveyed national stakeholders believe that the exchanges of information were only possible due to contacts initiated through EASO.

4.2.2 EASO has effectively increased the exchange of information and good practices

Several Articles of EASO's founding regulation provide that the Agency shall organise, coordinate and promote the exchange of information between the national authorities competent for asylum matters and between the Commission and the national authorities concerning the implementation of all relevant instruments of the asylum acquis of the Union[41].

4.2.2.1 EASO has spurred the exchange of information between MS

Asylum-related matters, together with migration issues, have always been an utmost concern for European policy-makers. Given the inter-state nature of both policies, MS have long acknowledged the need for some degree of coordination. Informal networks have gradually emerged, such as the EURASIL network (European Union Network for asylum practitioners), that exists within the European Commission since 2002. The General Directors of Immigration Services Conference (GDISC) was also initiated by the Dutch government in 2004 during their EU Presidency to facilitate practical cooperation between Immigration Services in Europe. The same year, the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA) was established by the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER) to prepare the work of the Council of the European Union, following the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam. Its role was confirmed during the review of COREPER's working structure in the JHA area before the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

These illustrate that MS were in need of a platform to improve practical cooperation and to allow the exchange of experiences and best practices, long before the establishment of EASO. The creation of the Agency therefore

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[41]Article 4, 9 and 11.

provided an answer to those needs. Indeed, EASO is widely recognised as a platform that allows exchanging views, information and good practices. About 70% of the national stakeholders taking part in the survey believe that EASO increased data and best practices exchange with other MS. This was also confirmed by the surveyed representatives of national Courts and Tribunals.

EASO organises several meetings (see section 5.3, page 69) that bring together stakeholders from all MS and associated countries, thus creating a unique opportunity for them to meet and share information about their national specificities. It should be noted that, although this wide network of national stakeholders is initiated and actively fostered by EASO, MS contribution is provided on a voluntary basis. No obligation or compensation is foreseen for attending EASO's working groups and other meetings, with the exception of travel expenses and accommodation fees that are covered by EASO. The effort undertaken by national administrations to be present at EASO's events, though sometimes perceived as a burden, can thus be entirely attributed to their voluntary willingness. As a consequence, the level of participation achieved is, in itself, an indicator of EASO's capacity to stimulate voluntary cooperation between MS (Figure 36, page 52).

The European Commission is one of EASO's Management Board Members. Representatives of the Directorate-General Home Affairs accordingly attend Management Board meetings. They are also invited at meetings of EASO and the Consultative Forum. Consequently, EASO's meetings are a unique opportunity not only for representatives of national asylum services but also for members of the national judiciary to meet amongst themselves and discuss with the European Commission. The survey confirmed that EASO has contributed to the exchange of information between MS.

4.2.2.2 EASO actively promotes the sharing of information amongst EU institutions

Most MS provide EASO with statistical data on asylum related matters (cf. effectiveness) that is instrumental in drafting EASO's reports and documents. Most Management Board members testified that their country communicates national data to EASO as far as COI is concerned. Nonetheless, some countries seem to have difficulty providing accurate data to EASO because their national tools are not developed enough to comply with EASO's requirements. For instance, some Management Board Members outlined that their country is not ready to take part in the "stage III" of EPS yet. Consequently, EASO's role inevitably depends on MS capacity (cf. effectiveness). It also depends on their willingness to cooperate and share information.

EASO's information output is not only used by the authorities on the national level, but also by several EU institutions, agencies and stakeholders. Members of the European Parliament rely on EASO to provide adequate information in terms of asylum. EASO is sometimes asked to intervene in parliamentary hearings in addition to the compulsory presentation of its annual report before the Parliament. Members of the European Parliament also quote EASO in speeches on a regular basis and data from EASO is often used in political debates at EU level. EASO's information is also of use for the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council that is made up of EU justice and home affairs ministers. Furthermore, Joint Contact committee meetings on the acquis are chaired by both the EC and EASO and their frequency has steadily increased over time.

EASO provides data that is widely accepted amongst policy-makers. The interviewed members of European Parliament considered that EASO's data is widely recognised as a reliable source. Having a unique source to refer to in the European Parliament's debates allows avoiding lively discussions on the quality of data and helps to increase the debates' quality. According to the survey, 56% of the national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers deem that EASO produced expertise for policy and legislation at national level. 69% also believe that EASO produced expertise for policy and legislation at EU level (Figure 38, page 55). In this respect, information produced by EASO is used and taken into account for policy making by EU institutions.

The European Commission also refers to EASO's reports in its own communications and reports to the European Parliament and the Council since 2012. For instance, reference was made to EASO in the 4th and 5th Annual Reports on Immigration and Asylum and in the Mid-term report on the implementation of the Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors.

EASO's information output is also used by other EU agencies. According to the working arrangement signed in 2012 between FRONTEX and EASO, the two Agencies shall exchange best practices and methodologies on data collection and exchange, as well as on information-gathering and the production and sharing of statistics and analyses. For instance, FRONTEX issues several publications (risk analysis, training, operations and research), which rely on EASO as far as asylum-related data is concerned. Explicit reference to data produced by EASO is

made in the Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2015 and in the Annual Risk Analysis 2015, as well as in several 2014 publications.

Closer cooperation was also pursued with the EMN. Joint activity reports are issued by both entities and EASO participates in EMN Steering Board meetings. EASO has also joined other initiatives organised by EMN on relevant fields (notably the Working group on Asylum and Migration Glossary and the Return and Reintegration Experts' Group).

On the whole, EASO succeeded in positioning itself as the main source of information in the field of asylum within the EU and stands out as a reference point for all actors involved. Allowing better sharing of information between MS naturally facilitated a higher level of cooperation. Indirectly, ensuring that every MS can benefit from the same information allowed them to be on the same page, paving the way for fruitful cooperation in the future, whether this is initiated by EASO or on a voluntary basis.

4.2.3 EASO has encouraged operational cooperation

4.2.3.1 EASO has increased the intensity and the quality of operational cooperation

Most stakeholders acknowledge that EASO has largely spurred cooperation between MS. As outlined above, almost 70% of surveyed national stakeholders believe that the exchange of best practices increased since the Agency was founded. The majority of the surveyed experts and trainers believe the exchange of information and cooperation between MS positively increased since the creation of EASO (Figure 34). This is also the case for the members of Courts and Tribunals. Only a few maintain that the progress in terms of cooperation can't be attributed to EASO.

Figure 34: Has EASO improved the cooperation and the exchange of information between MS?
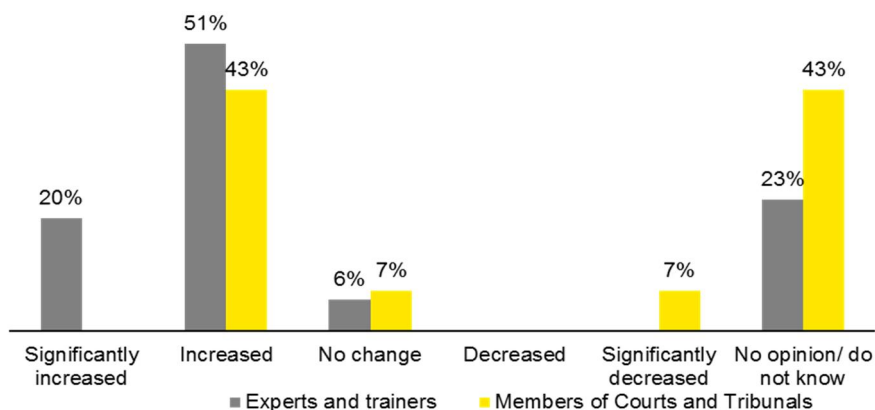
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 90 experts and trainers and 14 members of Courts and Tribunals)

Significant progress was achieved in the field of operational cooperation. Most of the surveyed national stakeholders, experts and trainers and members from Courts and Tribunals are positive that EASO has strengthened practical cooperation on asylum over the past four years (Figure 35), with 89% either agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Figure 35: Has EASO strengthened practical cooperation among MS on asylum?
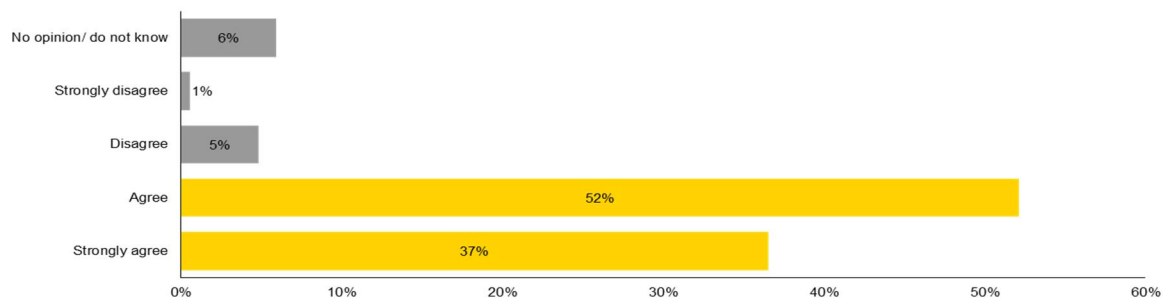
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 186 national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers)

EASO not only increased cooperation between MS but also improved the quality of their cooperation. Before the creation of EASO, coordination mainly occurred at the political level, between representatives of national policy makers within the SCIFA. As previously mentioned, EASO provided a platform for senior level cooperation on operational and practical issues between the national administrations in charge of the asylum and reception system. This has greatly contributed to the emergence of a deeper and more practical cooperation.

EASO managed to involve an adequate level of representation from MS in its activities. High-level national policy makers are already networking in other fora, such as SCIFA. EASO targeted executives and practitioners at the more operational level. The training activities, in particular, are addressed to a wider range of stakeholders on the field, situated at different levels of the asylum process. Nonetheless, the Management Board sees the participation of decision makers at national level, with a concrete and substantial influence on the national asylum and reception system. It hosts senior level discussions tackling both administrative and strategic matters, and very specific points such as the recognition rates and the Dublin Regulation.

4.2.3.2 MS increasingly contribute to the deployment of trainers and experts

According to MB members, most MS have contributed to the ASTs by sending experts and trainers. Most experts have participated in EASO's training activities (Figure 36). MS have nearly nominated 500 experts to participate in operational plans, special support plans and joint processing[42]. This shows the importance attributed to these activities and the progress made in cooperation within activities. Some Management Board members also believe that deploying experts has in turn made cooperation more likely between MS.

Figure 36: Frequency of experts' and trainers' interventions for EASO.
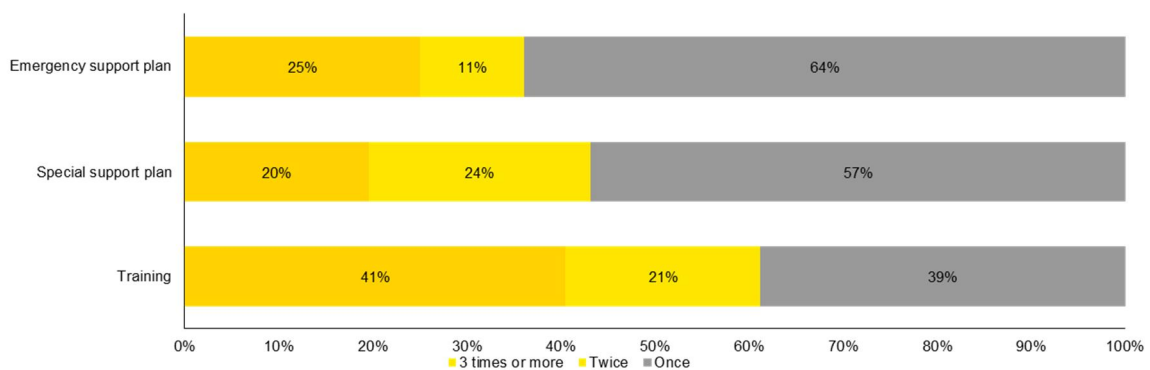
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 169 experts and trainers)

In order to cater to the requests of MS under migratory pressures, EASO must dispose of a sufficient number of experts, including through the Asylum Intervention Pool (AIP) that can be deployed in a timely manner. Several Management Board Members agree that EASO should have its own in-house expertise, knowledge and experts in order to reinforce the system and allow more efficient support.

Various MS have not been able to participate in trainer and expert deployments. In most instances, the asylum pressure on their respective national administrations is too high to make internal resources available for deployment in EASO's support. Some even argue that they do not have sufficient resource to send experts at their own expense, until such time as EASO will reimburse them. In other cases, the language barrier appears to be the main obstacle, since national staff does not have the language skills required to be part of ASTs.

But a minority of national interviewees also partially holds EASO responsible for the system's weaknesses. Some Management Board members believe that improvement is needed in the system of identification of relevant experts and in the organisation of their deployment. As a matter of fact, with the rise of MS requests, far beyond what was initially foreseen at the creation of EASO, the Agency's human and financial resources appear nowadays to be thinly stretched and insufficient to cover all the undertaken activities (see section 6).

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[42]This number excludes the numerous experts that were deployed without a call due to specific requirements or areas of expertise, and the nominations based on bilateral communications with the NCPs.

4.3 EASO has fostered the convergence of national practices in the field of asylum, but evidence is still lacking on the implementation of the EU acquis

One of the purposes of EASO enshrined in its founding Regulation is to 'provide scientific and technical assistance in regard to the policy and legislation of the Union in all areas having a direct or indirect impact on asylum'. In this section, we will examine EASO's contribution to the convergence of national legislation, national jurisprudence and national working practices.

4.3.1 MS practices are gradually converging, thanks to EASO's widely appreciated outputs

EASO developed several tools that are used on a regular basis by most MS. The interviewed national stakeholders recognise the training material and quality mapping and matrix as particularly useful. Overall, training material is the most appreciated tool. It has been estimated that 6 500 overall can be trained[43]. In the course of the year 2013, 2 111 asylum officers were trained under the ETC, both at national level and at the EASO headquarters. A total of 154 training sessions were also organised in 2013[44].

In addition to training sessions, the materials provided are welcomed. For example, many Management Board Members recognise the quality of monthly trends analysis and of COI reports. According to EASO's staff, the monthly trend analysis was a huge success. All MS now comply with reporting, thus proving their interest. As a result, important information is available in only two weeks for national administrations to use.

EASO made a particular effort to organise train-the-trainers seminars, not only in Malta but also across Europe. In total, 38 train-the-trainers sessions were delivered in Malta plus 3 regional sessions in Warsaw, Vienna and Brussels. Many national stakeholders testified that their countries were involved in the train-the-trainers seminars and that further training was organised at national level following those sessions. This allowed several countries' nationals to collaborate, whether they are experts, trainers or trainees. According to several national representatives, this paved the way for further cooperation and contributed to the convergence of national practices. (see effectiveness. 7.3.1)

More broadly, stakeholders acknowledge the powerful potential of EASO in facilitating the convergence of national practices in the field of asylum. A majority of national stakeholders think that EASO's information and analysis activity and emergency support have helped their country achieve the medium to long term changes needed in their national asylum system towards the implementation of the CEAS (Figure 37).

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[43] Interview with EASO representative

[44] EASO Activity Report 2013

Figure 37: Has EASO's information and analysis and emergency support helped MS to achieve the medium and long term changes needed in national asylum systems towards the implementation of the CEAS?
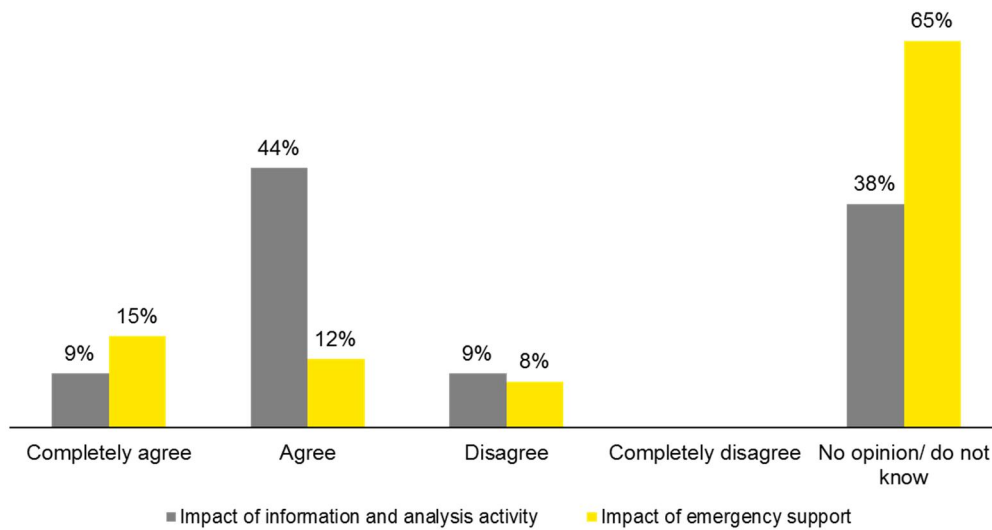
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 92 national stakeholders)

They also indicate that EASO's information and analysis support mainly increased the exchange of good practices, which could bring about convergence of MS practices. Indeed, these practices have been converging in certain areas. For instance, recognition rates for several nationalities are increasingly similar across the European Union. Table 6 below presents the standard deviation in total positive first instance decisions, by countries of origin. This measure quantifies the gap between MS recognition rates for each nationality selected. Results show that the standard deviation has decreased over the 2008-2014 period, which means that recognition rates have actually converged.

Between 2012 and 2015, EASO has published COI reports on nationals of every country of origin selected. Although the net impactof EASO's outputs cannot be estimated, since they have only recently been issued, this could be reassessed in the following years.

Table 6: Standard deviation on the ratios of total positive first instance decisions

Selected countries of origin	Number of MS having granted asylum to the corresponding nationality every year between 2008 and 2014	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Progress between 2008 and 2014
Afghanistan	19	24%	25%	24%	24%	25%	25%	24%	0%
Albania	14	15%	18%	15%	20%	16%	16%	13%	-2%
Bosnia	12	22%	17%	15%	15%	19%	12%	21%	-1%
Eritrea	14	34%	35%	29%	31%	31%	28%	21%	-14%
FYROM	9	34%	16%	4%	12%	1%	20%	23%	-11%
Kosovo	2	0%	20%	6%	33%	22%	17%	5%	5%
Russia	17	25%	25%	20%	19%	24%	12%	16%	-8%
Serbia	13	24%	18%	8%	13%	20%	14%	15%	-9%
Somalia	16	27%	30%	27%	27%	26%	25%	24%	-3%

(Source: EY analysis based on data provided by EASO)

Furthermore, national representatives widely recognise that EASO contributed to achieve the medium and long term changes needed in national asylum systems for the implementation of the CEAS.

Interviews revealed that representatives from some larger and older MS feel they do not benefit as much from EASO's contribution as smaller and more recent MS. They often maintain that their asylum systems are already well structured and efficient. By the same token, they consider that good quality data collection and analysis is secured in their countries. Smaller states' representatives, instead, recognise that EASO has provided them with information they wouldn't have access to otherwise. Amongst the surveyed stakeholders, those who believe EASO contributed

the most to achieving medium to long term changes needed in national asylum systems towards the implementation of the CEAS are indeed from Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Malta, Poland and Greece.

However, EASO has proven more efficient than any MS' asylum system alone in terms of data collection. Some stakeholders consulted indicated that EASO benefits from dedicated research and analysis teams that all MS do not have the resources to put in place. The actual convergence in national practices will continue to take time. Several MB members and many representatives from NGOs assert that national practices are still very different at present.

4.3.1 There is not yet substantial evidence of EASO's impact on the implementation of the EU acquis

According to the survey results, 56% of the national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers deem that EASO has produced expertise for legislation at national level. Up to 69% believe EASO has also produced expertise for legislation at EU level (Figure 38).

Figure 38: EASO has produced expertise for policy and legislation
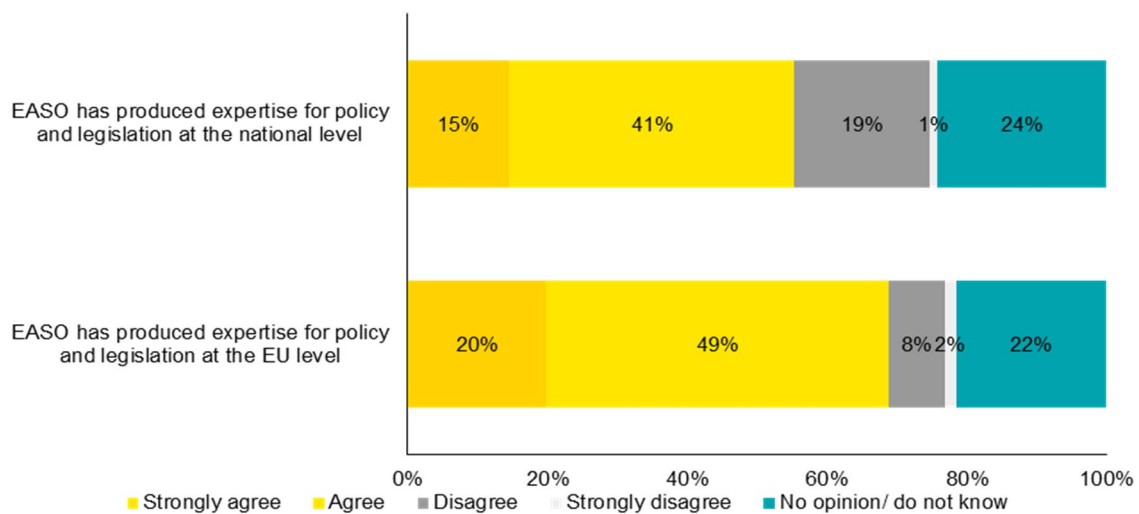
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 186 national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers)

Still, very few interviewees noticed an actual impact of EASO either on the implementation of the EU acquis or on national legislation. There is little evidence of the specific role of EASO in this regard. The majority of national stakeholders found it difficult to appreciate the medium to long term impact of EASO's support as far as the EU asylum acquis is concerned, mainly due to its recent creation. However, EASO had an increasing impact on public debate, notably through the media. The total number of articles published on EASO has risen from 197 in 2011 to 770 in 2014. This progress can directly be attributed to EASO, since most articles are due to the agency's initiative and releases. In 2014, more than 52% of the articles on EASO were published on EASO's initiative.

The expertise produced by EASO is not yet perceived as directly contributing to the convergence of national jurisprudence. Still, national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers widely recognise that the information produced by EASO could contribute to similar judiciary practices across the EU. Firstly, some Management Board members consider that the information and training provided by EASO are very useful for the transposition of EU legislation into national legislation and for the establishment of best practices. Secondly, EASO may help judges to arbitrate in a dispute by providing relevant and precise information. Indeed, a majority of member of Courts and Tribunals feel that knowing more about EASO's activity could be helpful for their work (Figure 39). Interviews with some representatives of the national judiciary system have confirmed that information produced by EASO helps them justify their decisions. For instance, thanks to COI, judges have better knowledge of the risk asylum seekers run if they are sent back to their country of origin. Moreover, as EASO is widely recognised as a reliable source of information, the data produced by EASO can be used as evidence.

Interviews showed that there is some reticence on the part of members of the judiciary in some MS to rely on the support provided by EASO, due to concerns that reliance on information from an EU Agency could jeopardise their right to independence. However, members of the judiciary generally recognise the benefits of EASO.

Figure 39: Could knowing more about EASO's activity be helpful?
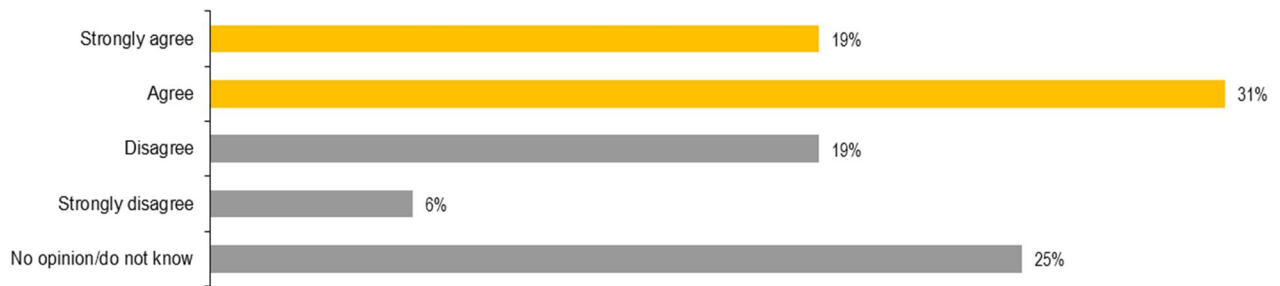
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 16 members of Courts and Tribunals)

4.4 EASO has contributed to the widespread recognition of the need for intra EU solidarity, in particular in the form of mutual support

According to Article 5 of EASO's founding regulation, "For Member States which are faced with specific and disproportionate pressures on their asylum and reception systems, due in particular to their geographical or demographic situation, the Support Office should support the development of solidarity within the Union to promote a better relocation of beneficiaries of international protection between Member States, while ensuring that asylum and reception systems are not abused." For the purpose of the evaluation, solidarity is based on a wider interpretation than just intra-EU relocation of asylum seekers. It includes, more broadly, mutual support in the field of asylum.

Most Management Board members consider that EASO contributed to increasing national propensity towards intra EU solidarity. A wide range of activities developed by EASO laid the ground for trust and cooperation (see section 4.2.1). Some initiatives such as the project for intra-EU Relocation from Malta (EUREMA) have particularly enhanced intra-EU solidarity. This operation was co-funded by the EU under the ERF 2007-2013 in order to implement the principle of solidarity among states, identify resettlement solutions for people in need and improve the situation for those who remain in Malta. It has been seen as a tool to facilitate the relocation process and share experience and best practice between the 20 states involved by some Management Board members.

MS are bound by common interest as far as asylum is concerned and they are increasingly aware of it due to the work of EASO. Consequently, they devote more and more human and information resources to help MS under pressure. For example, in June 2012, the Asylum Intervention Pool already included 345 experts from 21 MS. In 2013, training materials were developed and updated by EASO with the assistance of knowledgeable and experienced teams of experts drawn from a pool of over 180 experts from 16 MS. The same year, a total of 25 experts were deployed to Italy in 10 asylum support teams in order to support the implementation of the special support plan. In addition, 49 experts were deployed within 25 asylum support teams in Bulgaria and Greece. In total, 74 experts were deployed within 35 asylum support teams.

4.4.1 Over the evaluation period, the figures in terms of intra-EU relocation were negligible, mainly due to the lack of political will

Despite an accrued propensity towards solidarity, internal relocation remains a subject of conflict between MS. Mediterranean countries have repeatedly called for a redistribution of asylum-seekers within the EU. A first intra-EU relocation programme was set up for this purpose for Malta (EUREMA I and II), based on the voluntary contribution

of other MS. The results of the EUREMA project are generally considered as rather modest[45]. A total of 255 relocation places were pledged by the ten participating MS[46]. However, only 227 persons were eventually relocated to six of the pledging states[47]. Seven MS[48] pledged a total of 91 places under EUREMA II[49]. The main receiving States were Germany, France and the United Kingdom.

A further eight MS collectively pledged to receive 233 refugees via bilateral agreements with Malta[50]. According to the European Resettlement Network, some European resettlement countries allocated places for intra-EU relocation from within their annual resettlement quota, providing long-term protection for refugees from Malta while also reducing the overall number of places available for refugees resettled from outside the EU.

Most of the surveyed national stakeholders consider that EASO's added-value in the field of relocation and resettlement has been weak (Figure 40). Still, EASO has been depending on the political will of MS, which has not proven particularly strong as far as resettlement is concerned.

Figure 40: What has been the added value of EASO within your national administration in terms the field of resettlement and relocation
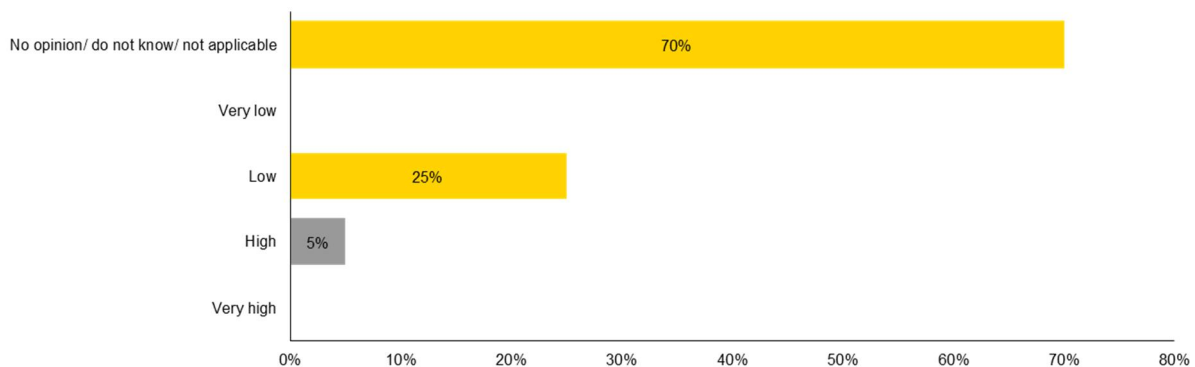
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 20 national stakeholders)

Some Management Board Members and representatives of civil society involved in the evaluation widely recognised EASO's influence in encouraging solidarity between MS. The recent migratory crisis has obviously confirmedthe pivotal role of EASO on intra EU relocation.

4.5 National representatives show diverging views on EASO's third country support, the impact of which still remains to be proven

47% of the national stakeholders that took part in the survey deem that third-country support is part of EASO's mandate. 21% also think that it is necessary to gain visibility across the world, and thus are favourable to third country support activities. Finally, 16% believe that those activities are of high added value (Figure 41). Most Management Board members agree that third-country support would be useful to manage asylum-seekers movements and improve the CEAS, through the provision of information and training to third countries in order to increase the knowledge base on the asylum system.

Many of the interviewed national stakeholders agree, in principle, with the idea that helping third-countries is instrumental in ensuring the implementation of a reliable CEAS, since it could contribute to strengthening asylum and reception capacity in third countries in order to better protect asylum seekers. It could also allow the facilitation

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[45]Source: EASO fact finding report on intra-EU relocation activities from Malta, July 2012

[46] France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the UK

[47] France , Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia and the UK

[48] Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia

[49] Source: Presentation by Mark Camilleri, EASO Policy and Inter-institutional Relations Coordinator

[50]Ibidem.

of the resettlement of refugees from third countries to the EU, and cooperating with third countries in matters connected with EASO's duties and activities.

Figure 41: How would you describe the implementation of EASO's third country support activity?
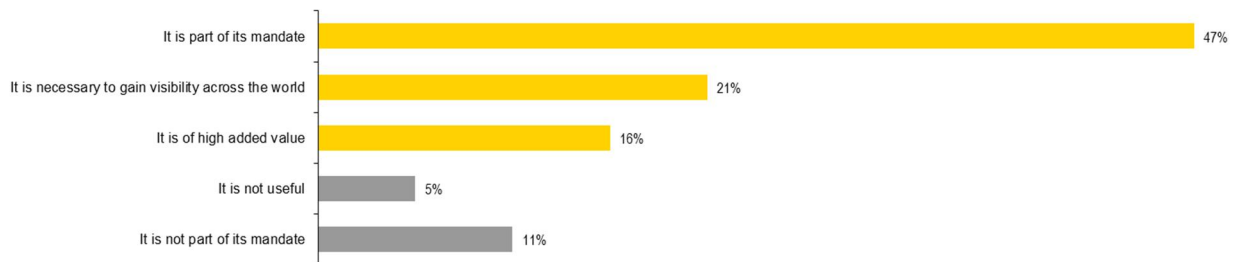
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 20 national stakeholders)

However, there is no consensus on third-country support amongst MS. Firstly, MS priorities are divergent on which countries should be supported first. Although the geographical prioritiies are already identified in EASO's External Action Strategy, national representatives are mostly concerned with certain countries depending on their location,typically neighbouring or sending countries that have a clear influence on their national asylum situation. Moreover, the majority thinks that EU countries should be the priority of EASO's actions.

Secondly, a significant number of national representatives are reluctant to allocate part of EASO's budget to third-country support, given that it is rather limited compared with the overall objectives set out in the founding Regulation. For instance, third-country support is the last cluster of activities to which national stakeholders would dedicate EASO's time and resources. The pool of experts and trainers share the same views, even though they acknowledge third country support is part of the Agency's mandate. Some national representatives consider third-country support as only a subsidiary objective that EASO should tackle only when it has fulfilled what it has been created for implementing the CEAS in the EU.

However, most Management Board Members believe EASO should take a step forward on the issue of resettlement. Most of the national stakeholders that have taken part in the survey deemed that EASO's added-value in the field of resettlement has been weak (Figure 40) and this situation does not satisfy national representatives. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, 21% of national stakeholders think that it is necessary to gain visibility across the world (Figure 41). Some EASO staff said that EASO is limited by its small resources. For example, UNHCR's resettlement unit is far better equipped (in terms of human and financial resources) than the Centre for Operational Support (COS).There is consequently a divergence of opinion regarding the opportunity of EASO's activities in the field of third-county support.

This divergence in opinion may explain why the impact of third-country support remains to be proven. According to the survey, some national stakeholders believe third-country support has encouraged MS collaboration, even though a lot of them have no opinion on the matter. Opinions do not concur on third-country support's impact on the situation in the country itself (

Figure 42).

Figure 42: Has EASO's third country support encouraged MS collaboration and improved the situation in third countries?
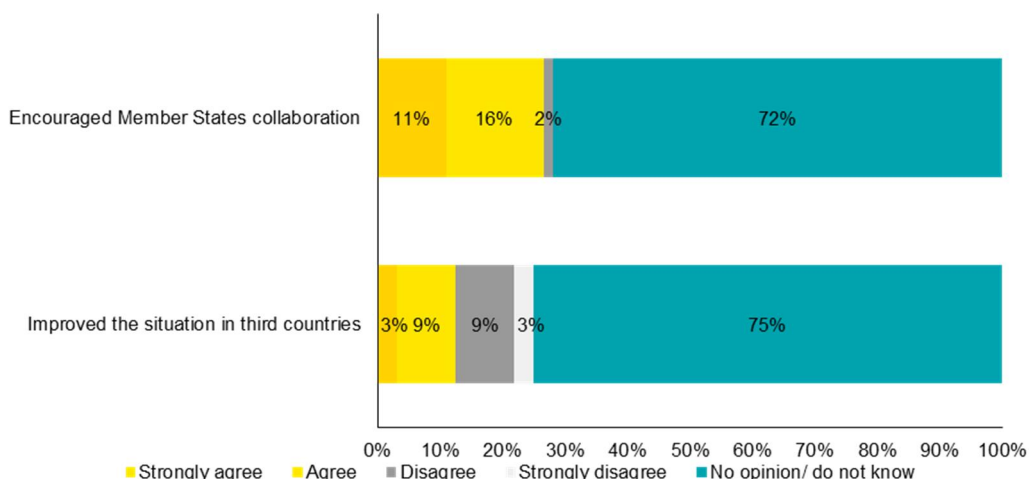
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 64 national stakeholders)

5 Working practices

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<u>Evaluation question:</u> To what extent are EASO working practices adequate to fulfil its mandate?

</div>

Approach

This section presents the results of the evaluation relating to EASO's working practices. EASO's working practices can refer to both the different forms of cooperation with its various stakeholders and to its own internal procedures. The scope of this question covers the internal functioning and organisation of EASO, including:

► EASO's governance and management structure

► Internal organisational procedures and tools

► Internal knowledge management and external communication

In relation to this evaluation question, the three sub-questions to be covered include:

► Is EASO's governance and management structure appropriate for carrying out the agency's duties?

► Are the organisational procedures of EASO adequate in order to implement its mandate?

► To what extent are EASO internal knowledge sharing and internal and external communications effective?

The adequacy of EASO's working practices is covered in this section by providing an analysis of the internal functioning and organisation of EASO and also the different forms of cooperation by its various stakeholders, mainly providing an analysis of the following:

► The organisation and functioning of the Management Board and how it fulfils its role as a steering and supervisory body

► The effectiveness of the involvement of MS through working groups and

► The effective decision making process through the structure of EASO's administration, including the frequency of communication between EASO's centres and the Executive Director and whether this enables the efficient sharing of information

Main findings

► **EASO's organisational structure is typical for an agency in start-up phase,** and its Executive structure has been facing issues typical of agencies in start-up phase. An example of this are EASO's internal communication and co-ordination processes which are still in development phase and need to be improved. However, stakeholders have indicated overall satisfaction with the organisational setup and functioning of EASO's organisational structure.

► **EASO's decision making procedures are in line with its mandate**, whereby the distribution of powers and duties between the Management Board and the Executive Director are clearly defined and contribute to the fulfilment of EASO's objectives. Also, priorities and objectives in EASO's Multi-Annual Work Programme (MAWP) and the AWP are consistent.

► **MS are actively involved in EASO's work on a number of fronts**, especially through working groups and networks, as well as contributions and participation in the various support initiatives.These are widely considered as positive by all stakeholders. On the other hand, perception of the effectiveness of EASO's consultation with civil society is mixed.

► **EASO's external communication activities are being enhanced** and national asylum stakeholders are generally aware of the EASO initiatives directly applicable to them.Over the years EASO has carried out a continuous and broad consultation with an increasing number of stakeholders, undertaking several consultation measures and gradually improving the process.

5.1 EASO's internal structure is typical for an agency in its start-up phase

As a regulatory EU decentralised agency having its own governance structure, EASO acts within the policies and institutional framework of the EU. In this context, the political responsibility for the area of asylum lies with the European Commissioner responsible for Home Affairs and thus strong cooperation links exist with the European Commission on all EASO activities.

EASO's internal structure will be analysed through the following sub sections:

- ► the Management Board and its functioning,
- ► EASO'sexecutive structure and in particular the role of the Executive Director,
- ► EASO's organisational structure, the Centres and their composition,
- ► Internal communication flows at EASO.

EASO's current structure is still being defined and the Agency is flexible in that it has not yet settled into a best established structure. The Agency is working within a 'logical' structure according to current needs; however it has not yet reached its final architecture as stemming from the Regulation. The recent introduction of EASO Centre Team Leaders shows that has now reached a level of maturity whereby a second layer of management is needed.

This governance process has also improved over the first few years as suggestions for amendments to the governance structure have also been taken on board. This notwithstanding, there is still the perception that existing working practices continue to result in a high level of bureaucracy and administrative burden on staff, which is common within EU agencies. Although this is expected, the resulting cost of resources is high and has also led to EASO being understaffed and facing a staff turnover rate which is internally acknowledged as high.

5.1.1 The quality of Management Board meetings has improved over the first few years

EASO's structure comprises a Management Board and an Executive Director. The Management Board is the governing and planning body of EASO. Its key functions include the appointment of the Executive Director, the adoption of statutory documents, such as the AWPs and annual reports, and the adoption of the budget. Furthermore, the Management Board has the overall responsibility for ensuring that EASO performs effectively its duties.

The MB is EASO's planning and monitoring body. It is composed of one voting member for each MS except Denmark, two voting members for the Commission, as well as of one UNHCR non-voting representative. Denmark and the associated countries and Frontex are normally invited as observers to the Board's meetings. As stated in the EASO founding Regulation, the Management Board adopts the Agency's AWP and budget, as well as many of the documents it publishes, such as the Annual Activity Report, the Annual report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU, guidelines and operating manuals. Eventually it establishes and can modify EASO's internal structure; it notably appoints and exercises authority over the Executive Director.

In line with Article 17 of the founding Regulation(EU) No 439/2010 establishing EASO, the main functions of the Management Board are as follows:

> The Management Board should, where possible, consist of the operational heads of the Member States' asylum administrations or their representatives. It should be given the necessary powers, in particular to establish the budget, verify its execution, adopt the appropriate financial rules, establish transparent working procedures for decision-making by the Support Office, adopt the annual report on the situation of asylum in the Union and technical documents on the implementation of the Union's asylum instruments, and appoint an Executive Director and, if appropriate, an Executive Committee. Given its expertise in the field of asylum, the UNHCR should be represented by a non-voting member of the Management Board so that it is fully involved in the work of the Support Office.

There are varied perceptions among stakeholders in relation to the organisation and functioning of the Management Board. The majority of Management Board members share the opinion that the functioning of the Management Board has improved over the years and noted that suggestions forwarded during the Management Board meeting are subsequently undertaken by EASO. The Board is considered to be working in line with its mission and towards the objectives outlined in the Agency's mandate.

5.1.2 EASO's executive structure is playing an effective rolealthough there is room for development in some areas

The Executive Director is independent in the performance of his tasks, is the legal representative of the Agency and is responsible for the administrative management of EASO and for the implementation of the AWP and the decisions of the Management Board. The Executive Director is supported by the Heads of centres, the Accounting Officer and an Executive Office. The Executive Office is made up of a Policy and Interinstitutional Relations Coordinator, a Legal Officer, a Communications Officer, two executive support officers andan executive support assistant.

Many stakeholders interviewed commented on the adequacy of EASO's executive structure. They largely highlighted that it is facing a number of issues encountered by agencies at start-up phase such as limited resources and high turnover which are possibly linked to the fact that EASO is a new agency.

Also, the general feedback received from the Management Board interviews is that the Executive Director's tasks are in line with the Agency's duties.

EASO staff members have clearly shown that the Executive Director participates and has a very active role in the administrative, management and implementation of the AWP. The concentration of decision making however may cause certain delays, with a suggestion put forward to mitigate this through the introduction of a Deputy Executive Director within the organisation.

Moreover, internal procedures for handling MS concerns/enquiries can also be established and documented further to ensure such requests are efficiently considered and followed up.

The Executive Office (policy and interinstitutional relations coordinator, communication and legal officer) is seen to provide adequate support to the Executive Director to carry out his tasks. The main function is to assist the Executive Director in the implementation of EASO's AWP and other initiatives.

Also, the need to improve the effectiveness of communication between the Centres and the Executive Director (including the Executive Office), and among the different centres themselves was again highlighted.

Aside from the Management meetings, feedback and approval for new/ongoing initiatives is sought by Head of Units (HoUs) on a one to one basis. Once such high level approval is given, the HoUs seem to generally enjoy a high level of operational independence in their day to day work.

5.1.3 EASO's organisational structure has been set, though it is still considered in start up phase

Currently EASO is composed of four centres, namely:

- ► General Affairs and Administration Unit (GAAU);
- ► Centre for Information, Documentation and Analysis (CIDA);
- ► Centre for Operational Support (COS);
- ► Centre for Training, Quality and Expertise (CTQE).

Figure 43: EASO's Organisational Structure
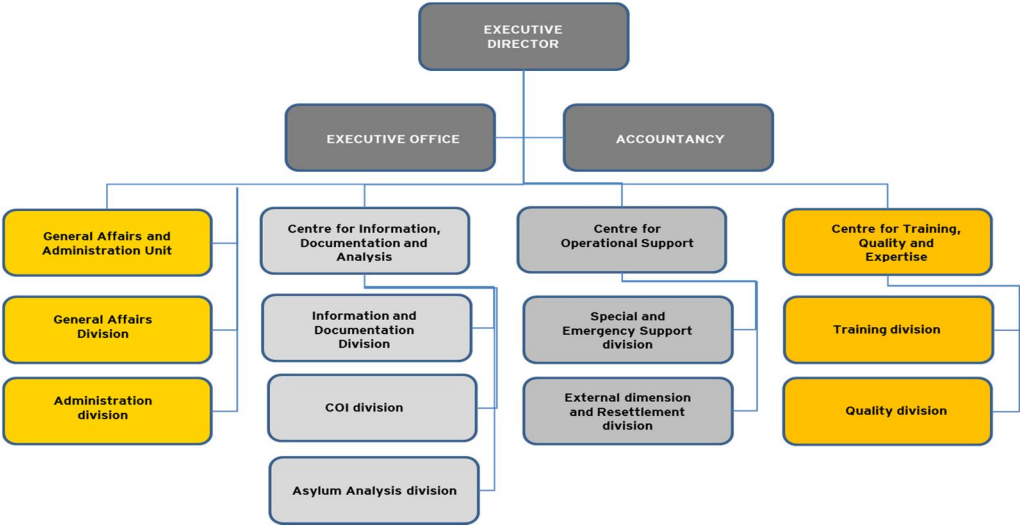
(Source: EASO)

Table 7below outlines the roles and responsibilities of the different EASO Centres[51]. EASO documents give a high level description of the relevant activities for internal control such as the following:

► Mission and values

► Human Resources

► Planning and Risk Management Processes

► Operations and Control Activities

► Information and Financial reporting

► Evaluation and Audit

Table 7: EASO centres and horizontal units

Executive Office	Operational	Administrative
Executive Office	**Centre for Operational Support (COS)**	**General Affairs and Administration Unit (GAAU)**
►Strategy& Policy Cooridnation	► Special and Emergency Support division	**General Affairs division**
► Planning, Action and Work Program	►External dimension and resettlement division	► ICT and Web Services o Data Protection
►Legal affairs	**Centre for Training, Quality and Expertise**	►Security
►Communication and Press	► Training division	► Logistics and Facilities
► Institutional Affairs and EASO Liaison	►Quality division	► Mission Management
►Central EASO Contact Point	**Centre for Information, Documentation and Analysis**	► Events
►Secretariat of the Management Board	► Information and Documentation division	►ICT and Web Services / Data Protection
► Secretariat of the Consultative Forum	► Country of Origin Information (COI) division (COI-portal, Country reports, expert networks, etc.)	**Administration division**
Accountancy, Internal audit and Control	► Asylum Analysis division (asylum-analysis, trend-analysis; early warning reports; annual asylum reports)	►Finance and Budget
		►Procurement and Contracts
		► Human Resources

(Source: EASO Multi-Annual staff policy plan 2014-2016)

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[51] The Executive Director's decision in July 2012, provides a high level description on the "The internal control standards for effective management" of EASO

The roles of the middle management / Heads of Unit are described in a Management Board decision[52], which sets out at a high level the implementation rules for HR.However not much detail is provided on the respective Centre's role.

The role and responsibility of Head of Unit/Centre shall include the following:

► Issue guidelines for policies and actions to his/her centre on the basis of the mission statement and EASO AWP. He/she shall define the AWP of the centre, coordinate work within the centre and with other centres and represent the centre at important meetings;

► Act as the main channel for the exchange of information between senior management and the various members of the centre; and

► Be directly responsible for the management of the human resources of the centre and, where appropriate, its financial resources.

The job descriptions of all staff at EASO are detailed in the EASO's book of job descriptions. This refers to the detailed roles of each post and current staff holding each job position at EASO

The latest Final Audit Report on Implementation of Support Plans in EASO[53] also concluded that there is insufficient definition in roles and responsibilities between COS, CIDA and CTQE. One example is the non-defined role and responsibility of CIDA and CTQE in the planning and implementation of support plans. In this regard, the 2014 IAS final report recommends that EASO establishes a cooperation framework between COS, CIDA and CTQE, laying down their roles and responsibilities in the planning and implementation of support plans.

It is clear that the focus of the organisation to date has been in providing information to external stakeholders, rather than to its internal ones. The lack of certain written procedures is also explained by EASO's reliance on 'standard' European Commission/other Agency procedures and practices, especially in the field of HR.

In fact, feedback received during staff workshops held at EASO indicates that policies are still being written, and communication channels still have room for improvement within the Agency. Interviews with the members of the Executive Office confirmed that detailed internal procedures are in the process of being documented.

5.1.4 EASO's internal communication and co-ordination processes are still developing

Internal communication enables management and staff to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and efficiently. EASO developed and finalised its initial Communication Strategy in 2012 dealing with both external and internal communication activities, and this was followed by an updated Communications plan in 2014.

Although no specific standalone strategy solely for internal communication was prepared, the 2014 Communications Plan included the following vis-à-vis internal knowledge management:"Keeping EASO staff informed: With regard to internal communications, EASO staff shall be well-informed on the activities and mission of the agency so that they can act as EASO ambassadors. EASO staff shall also be kept up to date on developments in the areas of asylum and immigration in the EU.[54]"

Although procedures / tools enabling internal information sharing between centres were limited over the evaluation period (and have been recently augmented with an intranet system), a number of internal communication activities were held in 2014. These are outlined in Table 8: Internal Communication Activities in 2014, which maps progress on the various internal knowledge management indicators over the year.

Table 8: Internal Communication Activities in 2014

Internal Communications Activities for 2014				
Event	**Target Audience**	**Indicators**		**Actual activities held**
Internal press extracts and press monitoring	EASO staff	Daily press extracts made and distributed Daily press monitoring	✔	Daily press extracts issued and EASO articles are archived.

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[52] EASO (2012) Management Board Decision No. 11 issued in July 2012.

[53] Final Audit Report on Implementation of Support Plans in EASO issued in July 2014.

[54] EASO (2014), EASO Communication Plan, pg.5

Brown bag lunches	EASO staff	Organising 10 brown bag lunches	✔	8 brown bag lunches/events held.
Implementation and management of SharePoint	EASO staff	Assistance in the design, and management of the communication and information function of share point	✔	SharePoint Intranet Portal launched on 26 November 6 core Portal content sites operational: News, Event Calendar, Contact List, Documents section, Common Links section, My Links section.
Notifications to staff	EASO staff	At least 24 notification emails to EASO staff	✘	No information found on progress
Full implementation of EASO's visual identity	EASO staff	One internal seminar/talk on the use of EASO's visual identity. Inform all newcomers on EASO communication rules and tools.	✘	Constant monitoring.
Issue "week ahead" information for EASO Staff	EASO staff	Number of week ahead issued	✔	A week ahead email with information to staff is made and delivered on a weekly basis since March.

(Source: EASO communication strategy 2014 and Progress report 2014)

Staff interviews indicated that there has been recent improvement in the internal information flows through the recently introduced Sharepoint and IT document tracking and management system.

It seems that no formal mechanism exists to share information amongst Centres on common tasks which are the joint responsibility of different Centres or overlap between the different Centres. A recommendation for improved information sharing would be the establishment and circulation of lists with tasks shared between the different Centres.

Theformal (documented) internal co-ordination meetings being held are between Management Team Members (MTMs) and Senior Thematic Meeting (STMs) and meetings betweenthe Executive Director and the Heads of Centre either as a group or on a bilateral basis. SMTs are held to discuss cross cutting measures between representatives from different centres concerned with the particular theme.

No evidence of other internal coordination meetings has been provided to the evaluation team, although some Heads of Unit have claimed having meetings with their own Centre 'Team Leaders'. Moreover, aside from the activity or progress reports, no reports for the improvement of internal knowledge sharing and internal procedures seem to have been prepared.

The different Centres have their own strategic plans and working methods, depending on the nature of operational / support activity functions of the respective centre. Because of lack of internal coordination, the risk of duplication is real. The Commission's internal evaluation on EASO[55] also stressed that the various initiatives taken by the threecentresshould be coordinated further.

From the staff interviewed, it transpires that the weekly HoUs meetings are not held frequently enough due to the unavailability of certain HoUs (who are often away due to EASO related work). This is exacerbated by the non-existence of deputy HoUs.

In some instances, similar requests have been sent to MS by different Centres. These seem to have been the case primarily in the initial stages of the Agency, when the different Centres were trying to start off various initiatives at the same time. As the organisation stabilises and matures further, and roles and responsibilities across Centres become clearer, these occurrences are expected to be reduced. Although there has been an increase in communication activity, scope exists for additional efforts to increase cross-Centre work-related communication.

EASO staff members put forward a number of suggestions on improving communication and collaboration with other Centres and Management. These can be grouped under two main headings as follows:

► Staff-management consultation procedures;

► Communication channels

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[55] European Commission (2014), Commission staff working document on the internal evaluation of the European Asylum Support Offices (EASO)

As indicated previously, the only 'formal' cross-centre meetings which are currently held are the weekly meetings between the Heads of Unit, STMs and the Executive Director (and members of the Executive Office depending on the items being discussed). We are not aware of any written procedure governing intra-centre consultation procedures.

Suggestions for additional meetings put forward by staff included:

►   Thematic management and thematic staff meetings for staff from different Centres working on the same thematic area;

►   Update staff meetings on developments within EASO, possibly once a month;

►   Topical management and staff meetings on common cross-centre topics to share, plan and discuss practical cooperation and reduce duplication between Centres;

►   Informal meetings between staff and heads of unit, with staff being given the opportunity to have a more open discussion with other Centres.

Each meeting category could have a nominated 'champion' (i.e. reference point) through whom any new or additional requests for meetings are channelled.

Communication channels

A number of staff members across the different Centres highlighted being unaware of certain staff policies and gaps or non-existent communication channels both within, but also between, the different Centres. Some also contend that despite the existence of bottom up communication flows, decisions are taken at the top and not necessarily communicated downwards to all staff.

Some highlighted concerns on lack of consistency in work organisation and different working conditions between different Centres which may create gaps in inter-Centre collaboration. The lack of formal communication channels probably also contributes to this state of affairs.

Suggestions put forward by staff members to tackle these elements include:

►   Creation and circulation of an internal communication plan clearly outlining the different Centres' roles and responsibilities;

►   Provision of more detailed HR policies outlining staff policies in various areas including leave and special leave entitlements, usage of mobiles etc.;

►   Improved IT solutions contributing to better communication between Centres, includingproviding information on EASO's achievements/ information on a number of topics (similar to a newsletter) through the intranet.

It was noted that EASO is already in the process of taking on board some of the above measures on board as a way to improve internal communication within the agency.

5.2   EASO's decision making procedures are in line with its mandate

EASO's decision making process is analysed through:

►   The distribution of powers and duties between the Management Board and the Executive Director

►   The alignment of objectives in the MAWP and the AWP

A high level review of the annual activity reports produced by EASO shows that EASO's procedures are in line with achieving the objectives as set out in its mandate.

The Commission introduced the 'Roadmap on the follow-up to the Common Approach on EU decentralised agencies' ('the Roadmap'), inviting all involved parties to take on board this common approach. The Commission's main objectives as set out in the Roadmap include:

► Achieving a *more balanced governance,* streamlining of management boards

► **Enhancing** the agencies' **efficiency and accountability**

► Introducing *greater coherence* in the way they function, seeking *synergies between agencies* and the possibility of merging some of them

(Source: Roadmap on the follow-up to the Common Approach on EU decentralised agencies)

The above refer to the Commission's main objectives for the implementation of the Common Approach and form a basis for EU decentralised agencies as good practice in organisational structure, guiding future horizontal initiatives and reforms of individual EU agencies[56]. Additionally, the table belowoutlines the steps being taken by the Agency vis-à-vis the Commission's guidelines as set out in the Commission's Roadmap.

Table 9: Commission's Roadmap guidelines as implemented at EASO

Good practice on organisation structure in agencies: Commission's Roadmap guidelines as implemented at EASO		
Commission's Guidance	**Status of implementation by EASO**	
Systematically devise MAWP	✔	MAWP 2014-2016 established by EASO
Better apply ABB/ABM management tools and to develop sound key peformance indicators (both for the agency and its Director)	✔	Work in progress
Agencies' accountability should also be improved	✔	Work in progress
Agencies will also be expected to be more transparent on some of their activities, notably concerning their international relations. The Common Approach recalls that agencies have to work within their mandate and the institutional framework, and that they cannot be seen as representing the EU	✔	Work in progress
Greater coherance	✔	Work in progress

(Source: Commission's Roadmap guidelines)

5.2.1 The distribution of powers and duties between the Management Board and the Executive Director is clearly defined and contributes to the fulfilment of EASO's objectives

The Management Board and the Executive Director are entitled to decide on and to implement a number of key tasks assigned to the Agency. The decision process conducted by the management of EASO is detailed as follows:

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[56]European Commission (2012), the Commission Roadmap on the follow-up to the Common Approach on EU decentralised agencies

Figure 44: Executive Director / Management Board Decision Process
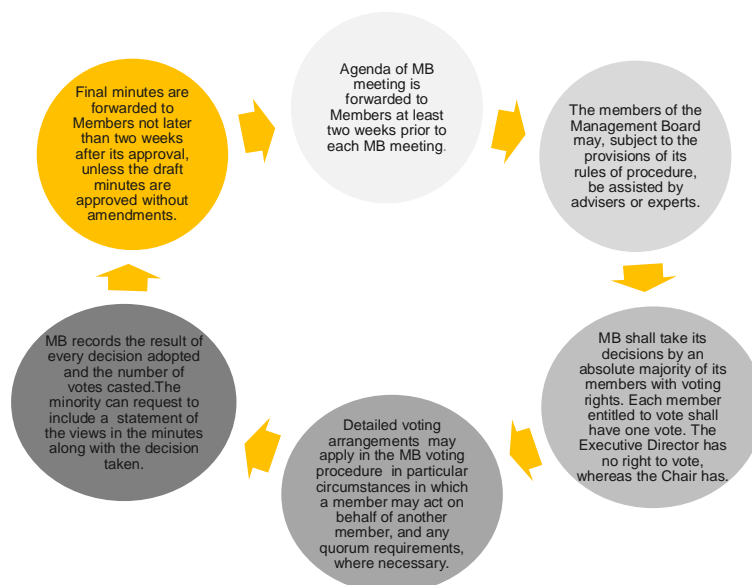
(Source: Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 of 19 May 2010 establishing EASO)

Generally, the division of labour between Management Board planning and monitoring by the Board and the Executive Director is clear and the roles are clearly defined.

EASO Management Board members generally believe that the Executive Director prepares the Management Board and gives the possibility for its Members to contribute actively towards leading EASO in the right direction. The Executive Director and Management Board are key parts in the structure and the Executive Director is accountable to the Management Board, involves the Management Board and keeps it up to speed on the key issues. The Executive Director also participates quite actively in the discussions and decisions of the Management Board, on both strategic and operational levels.

5.2.2 Priorities and objectives in EASOs MAWP and the AWPs are consistent

EASO's objectives and priorities are determined annually and laid out in its AWP. Once adopted by the MB, the Executive Director is responsible for its implementation. We understand that the independence of the Executive Director in the implementation of the AWP, as well as the knowledge and information sharing systems should create the right conditions for achieving the established goals and priorities.

EASO's MAWP 2014-2016 is the Agency's first mid-term strategic plan. It highlights its vision for the period and translating its mission into priorities and objectives. The MAWP, that was adopted in late 2013, is in line with the Common Approach on EU decentralised Agencies and its roadmap which calls for multi-annual activity planning linked with multiannual resource planning, particularly with regard to budgetary and human resources. In this regard, EASO follows a comprehensive approach concerning planning and thus the MAWP sets the framework inspiring the AWP, the EASO Multi-Annual Staff policy plan 2014-2016 and the EASO annual Establishment Plans and estimates for revenue and expenditure during this period. The MAWP will be updated on a yearly basis.

The MAWP enables the Executive Director to perform his duties within this strategic framework while retaining the necessary flexibility to respond to changing contexts and circumstances while implementing the priorities and objectives set in the MAWP.

The MAWP ensures transparency of EASO's priorities and activities in the mid-term perspective vis-à-vis EU MS, EU institutions and citizens.

The common over-arching objectives of EASO arising from the MAWP are:

► The practical and technical support to MS and the EU institutions

> ► The Operational support to MS with specific needs or subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems, including the coordination of asylum support teams made up of national asylum expert

> ► The Scientific input for EU policymaking and legislation in all areas having a direct or indirect impact on asylum[57]

The second phase of the EU asylum acquis provides the legal basis for greater harmonisation and sets higher quality standards to ensure uniform statuses, high common conditions of protection and common features in asylum procedures for those in need of international protection. Furthermore, the period 2014-2016 will set the new multiannual programme in the field of Justice and Home Affairs, which will lead the policies actions in this area. Finally, the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 (MFF), which includes the new Asylum and Migration Fund, will be fully implemented.

In order to achieve a coherent implementation of the CEAS, EASO is assigned to promote common practices which lead to a situation where similar cases are given treatment resulting in a similar outcome. EASO supports MS in the implementation process through advanced practical cooperation measures and evidence based policy input.

A comparative analysis of EASO's objectives according to its planning documentation shows that the priorities and objectives of EASO as set out in its strategic MAWP 2014 -2016 are in line with those set out in its founding Regulation[58].

The MAWP was adopted following a period of input and consultation. Management Board members are generally satisfied with the participative process and discussions on the annual work plan before it is submitted for approval. EASO takes into account the main concerns of the Management Board put forward through the working groups.

They also believe that the (draft) AWP is disseminated early enough for MS to be able to consider and react accordingly. This is because the preparation of the AWPs commences months ahead of its approval and implementation and collaboration from MS is requested at an early stage. This is considered as a positive measure and generates sufficient understanding of the contents of these plans. However, they also believe that since field of asylum is constantly changing, the AWP should be flexible in terms of the changing factors which may affect EASO's priorities.

Some believe that although the procedure for the definition of the AWP can be rather complex, it is well defined. During Management Board meetings a very intense and good discussion is dedicated to the AWP.

The governance and the internal structure for the implementation of the AWP are also believed to be adequate. Lack of internal national capacity to adequately participate in the drawing up of the AWP (and other EASO publications) is again highlighted. Although these documents are considered as satisfactory tools, a number of MS lack the capacity to be involved in EASO's requests for contribution of information due to lack of personnel.

A comparison of EASO's objectives set in the MAWP shows that they are thoroughly consistent withthose adopted by each of the subsequent AWP for 2011-2014[59].

5.3 MS are actively involved in EASO's work on a number of fronts

As part of its mandate, EASO may set up working groups composed of experts from national competent authorities operating in the field of asylum, including judges. The Commission and UNHCR representatives may attend all or part of the meetings of EASO's working groups, depending on the nature of the issues under discussion. The working groups may invite anyone whose opinion may be of interest to attend meetings, including representatives of civil society working in the field of asylum.

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[57] (Source: EASO multi-annual work programme 2014 -2016)

[58] The comparative analysis of EASO's objectives according to the Regulation vs Multi-annual work programme (MAWP) is available at Appendix 9.5

[59] The full comparative analysis of EASO's objectives according to MAWP and each of the AWP for 2011 – 2014 is presented at Appendix 9.6.

Since the 2014 – 2016 MAWP is the first Multi-Annual Programme, this exercise is only possible for the 2014 AWP.

EASO's working groups / practical cooperation activities are detailed by the following:

► Challenges in setting up working groups; and

► Stakeholders perception on MS involvement

5.3.1 MS involvement through working groups and networks is widely considered positive

Working groups or practical cooperation networks can be set up by EASO in order to:

► Conduct analysis of information on countries of origin of asylum seekers

► Consult on technical documents on the implementation of the asylum instruments of the Union, including guidelines and operating manuals

The practical cooperation concept and methodology was consolidated in 2013 by a specific working group after two years of EASO operations. In 2013 EASO organised around 40 practical cooperation activities, while in 2014 the number of practical cooperation activities increased to around 56. These meetings can be country-specific, legal and thematic. Additionally, EASO has set up a series of specific working groups and networks on several topics. They allow for a concrete contribution from national experts to EASO's activities[60].

When comparing against the objectives set by EASO for the working parties / practical cooperation meetings for 2014, it can be seen that EASO met (and surpassed) the number of meetings planned for 2014. Sometimes more meetings than planned were organised with the aim of increasing MS contributions through working groups and networks.

The number of participants in meetings is high on average. For a number of meetings, 22 participants attended from a total of 28 MS and associated countries, i.e. an average of up to 78% representation. Occasionally, participation from relevant stakeholders and civil society was also possible.

5.3.2 National representatives are generally satisfied with the working groups

The level of satisfaction achieved by EASO during practical cooperation meetings is high, with most being at over 85%. Typically, the EASO Quality Matrix Meeting on Dublin Procedure achieved a satisfaction rating of 84.4%. The satisfaction ratings by participants in other CTQE meetings are outlined in Figure 45below.

Figure 45: Satisfaction of (non-EASO) participants in various CTQE meetings
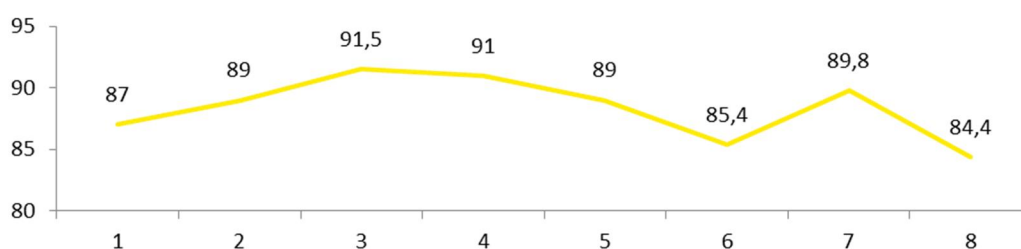
(Source: EASO 2015[61])

In addition over 92%of the COI specialist network members believe that membership brings an added value to their work and over 94% have more contact with COI experts within the EU than before[62].

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[60]A detailed list of working groups / practical cooperation meetings set up by EASO and their meetings frequency is provided in Appendix 9.8

[61] EASO (2015), Evaluation of EASO Quality Matrix Meeting on Dublin Procedure

[62] COI Specialist Network Questionnaire results (2015), (pg.1)

Figure 46: Frequency of participation in meetings organised by EASO
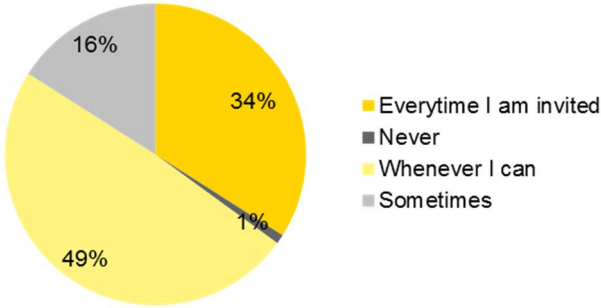
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 80 national stakeholders)

One third of national stakeholders participate in EASO meetings every time they are invited. This shows that they appreciate the usefulness of these meetings.

Figure 47 outlines the very high level of satisfaction by different participants on the meetings organised by EASO. Up to 96% of respondents to the survey commissioned as part of this evaluation agree that the meetings were well organised and 95% believe they provided up-to-date information.

Figure 47: Level of satisfaction with meeting participation in EASO
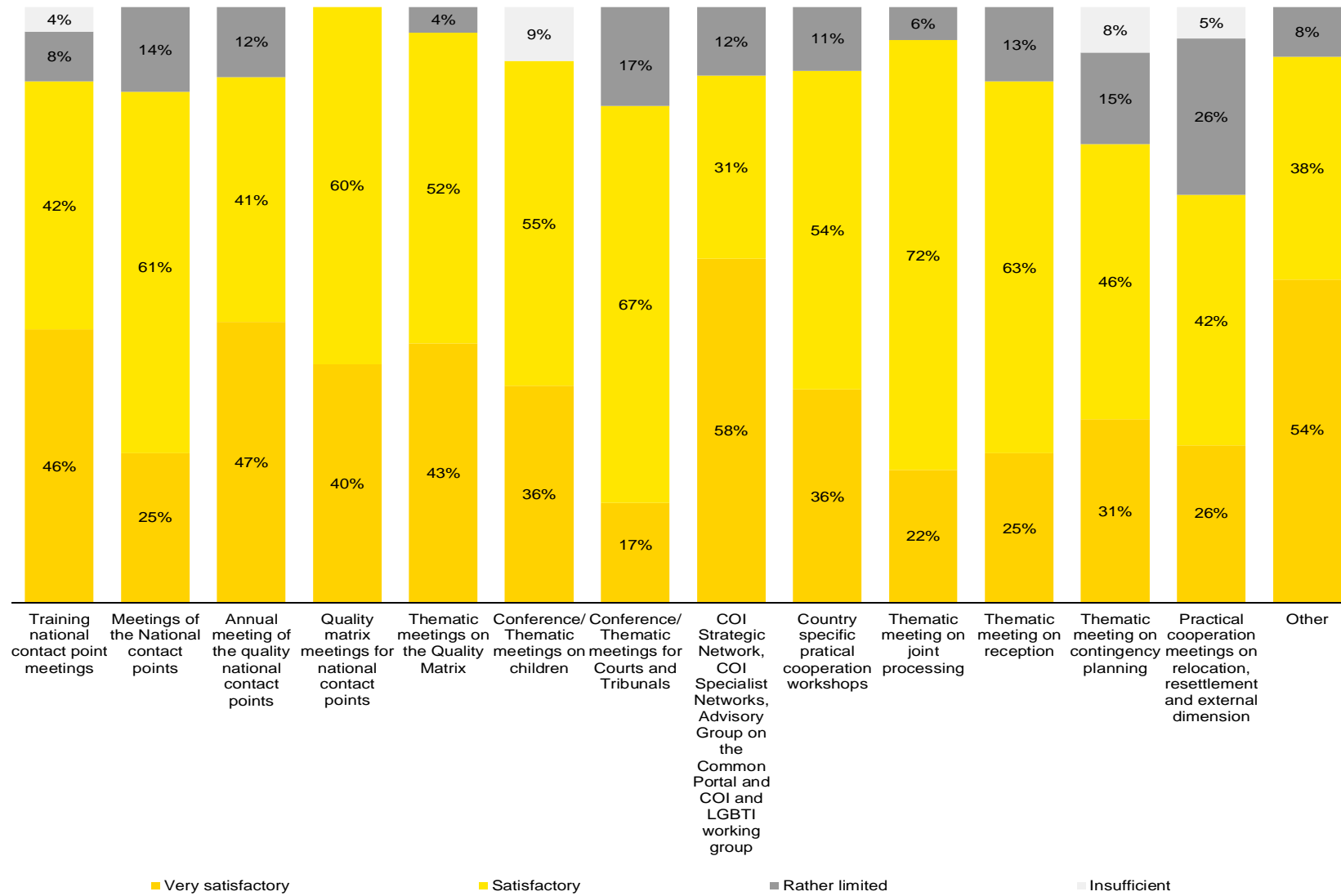
(Source: EY National Stakeholders Survey 2015, respondents: 28 national stakeholders)

MS generally believe that EASO's internal organisational structure is adequate to implement the AWP, and is able set up and manage the working groups. Interviews with national stakeholders found that they consider these groupings as an effective way for EASO to promote cooperation at various levels. The possibility to participate in all EASO activities is considered to be positive, especially in the working groups and other EASO meetings as well as other EASO networks.

Generally, stakeholders interviewed were satisfied with the work carried out during the thematic meetings and working groups, which are considered as an efficient tool to foster cooperation in various areas. MS stakeholders also consider EASO's cooperation with key players such as other JHA agencies (and the UNHCR) as positive. A majority of stakeholders believe that civil society (including NGOs, think tanks, country experts, academics, etc.) could also potentially be more involved as active participants and providers of practical expertise in certain areas. On the other hand, it is noted that national stakeholders agree that this third-party participation need not be opened for all practical cooperation activities.

A broad range of working groupsresponsible for different issues have been set up. This has helped foster team work within the framework of improving EASO's work. To cite a particular example, when referring to the COI practical cooperation and methodology working group, respondents noted that it did take some time to create a suitable structure and to determine a standard COI approach. This is again understandable in view of the lack of similar structures in these areas beforehand. However the structure has now been set up and the annual COI practical cooperation meeting in this area has assisted the enhancement of practical COI cooperation, both formally but even on an informal basis.

On the other hand, some national stakeholders pointed out that the proliferation of various forms of practical cooperation activities has led to too many networks and working groups. They also contend that some of the newer ones are very specific and are not necessarily applicable to all national contexts. The current (and projected) number of groupings also causes some strains, especially on small administrations with few available human resources and an ongoing workload. In this case, the same individuals are being repeatedly involved in a number of time consuming tasks/requests and invited to participate and contribute to different working groups. This could cause difficulties for the EASO centres to set up and manage the working groups, and will inevitably be reflected in lower meeting participation and overall contribution rates by MS.

This increase in working groups has led some to suggest the potential some scope for the merging and concentration of some of them, i.e. a reversal of what has been seen to date since EASO's creation. This also points to a process where cooperation structures are created in the set up phase of an Agency, and which will reach a point of consolidation, with either already existing structures, or variants of them being used to tackle new needs. This is because these practical cooperation activities have (in these first few years of EASO's existence) created a series of networks and contacts between EASO and national competent authorities, which can be utilised to create additional practical cooperation activities and specialised networks.This will potentially not be the case if EASO's mandate is significantly widened or changed to include areas which were previously completely outside its remit.

EASO geographical location is also sometimes cited as an additional challenge due to the travelling time required from certain countries. Increased regional sessions or sessions in Brussels are seen as possible ways of mitigating against this. As noted also in section 5.2.3, this led to the organisation of three regional training sessions in 2014 in Warsaw, Vienna and Brussels, as well as several others in Brussels, and also one in Italy.

Ultimately, although in general expressing themselves to be satisfied with the overall practical cooperation meetings, participants called for:

- ► Increased forward notice for meetings and for receipt of meeting documentation

- ► Rationalisation of certain meetings, including more back to back ones

- ► More central meeting location

- ► Increased use of electronic forms of meetings

- ► More time for discussion, with less presentations by EASO representatives.

5.4 Over the years, EASO has significantly strengthened and broadened consultations with civil society

In line with Article 31 (6) (j) and Article 51 of the Regulation, in the first year of operation EASO set up a Consultative Forum. The Consultative Forum (CF) constitutes a mechanism for the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge between EASO, civil society organisations and relevant bodies operating in the field of asylum. The Consultative Forum is regarded by the Agency as a continuous two way dialogue between EASO and civil society.

In September 2012, the Agency adopted a Consultative Forum Operational Plan, which clearly defines the scope of the CF, the composition and the selection criteria for the various consultation processes as well as the methods and frequency of consultations. The following table summarises information fromthe four plenary meetings of the Consultative Forum that took place between 2011 and 2014.

Table 10: Consultative Forum plenary meetings 2011-2014

Year	Plenary Meeting	Date	Participants	Members
2011	✓	15 December 2011	75	45
2012	✓	26 November 2012	75	55
2013	✓	27-28 November 2013	80	60
2014	✓	11-12 December 2014	100	72

Key: ✓Activity conducted as planned; ✘Activity not conducted as planned
(Source: EASO Work programmes 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, Annual Reports on the Situation of Asylum in the EU 2011, 2012, 2013, Consultative Forum reports 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014)

Since 2011, the plenary meeting has taken place regularly every year during the fourth quarter. Therefore, it can be considered that EASO duly fulfilled its duty to organize the yearly plenary meetings.

The CF includes civil society organisations and relevant competent bodies operating in the field of asylum policy at local, regional, national, European or international level, such as IGOs, NGOs, Academics, Members of the tribunals and courts. Moreover, the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) is an ex-officio member of the EASO Consultative Forum.

Over the evaluation period, attendance has increasedfrom 75 to 100 participants, corresponding to an increase of 33%. Moreover, the number of organisation members of the Consultative Forum constantly rose over time. In 2011, around 45 organisations were members of the Consultative Forum, while 72 organisations are counted in 2014. Hence, the membership of the Consultative Forum has grown by 60% since 2011.

The vast majority of the 72 organisations composing the Consultative Forum in 2014 are NGOs, representing more than half of the total participants, followed by associations. Four other categories of organisations compose fairly evenly the remaining share, being ecumenical organisations, EU or MS Bodies, International Organisations, Networks and Forums.

5.4.1 EASO Consultative Forum meetings and activities have intensified since 2011

The contents of Consultative Forum meetings have substantially grown year by year, with the agendas becoming more and more detailed and complete in their structure. This could reflect the expansion of EASO's business overall. Evidence gathered through the interviews with Management Board members show that the plenary meeting and consultations activities carried out by EASO within the CF are considered as sufficient and that, overall, national authorities do not perceive a further involvement of civil society as necessary.

For every Consultative Forum plenary meeting, an Agenda that summarises the content of the event has been drafted by EASO. All the Agendas were published on the EASO website.

In 2011 and 2012 the CF plenary took place during a single day, while in 2013 and 2014 it was structured over two consecutive days. The contents of the meetings have substantially grown year after year, and the relative agendas have become more detailed accordingly. As a result, it can be concluded that such changes reflect the expansion of EASO's scope of activities overall. Moreover, over the first years of EASO operations, the issues addressed during the meeting concerned mainly the drafting of programming documents to be released by the Agency and addressed core support activities carried out by EASO. On the other hand, the Agenda of CF in 2013 and 2014 was focused both on EASO support activities and on specific issues regarding the implementation and the external dimension of CEAS. To some extent, such evidence reflects the progressive expansion of EASO activities over the evaluation period.

As a further development to the 'open consultations' page on the EASO website, the Agency committed itself to developing an e-consultation platform during the fourth quarter of 2014. According to EASO, the platform should be used "for web consultations and other communication matters with civil society"[63]. Nevertheless, according to the internal progress report on the implementation of the WP2014, by December 2014 the Agency held online consultations using email, while the e-consultation platform was tested only for the plenary meeting.

In the 2014 edition of the CF, some innovative elements were introduced by EASO with regard to the stakeholder engagement process.

Firstly, the 2014 CF was held in Brussels, gathering far more participants than the previous plenary meeting held in Malta. Indeed, many national and European stakeholders interviewed found that reaching the EASO premises sometimes represented an obstacle for the full participation in EASO's activities. Secondly, for the first time since the establishment of the Consultative Forum, the plenary meeting was structured according to content-related thematic workshops, enabling participants to express their point of view on different concepts and issues. An open discussion on the 2015 WP was held among EASO's Executive Director and the CF plenary meeting participants. The ED also discussed the role of EASO with regard to resettlement and the adoption of a common European resettlement approach.

In general, representatives of the Management Board are satisfied with the CF activities. Indeed, many agreed that the CF is an effective tool for promoting the involvement of civil society in EASO's activities. However, they also perceive a lack of collaborative spirit by the side of civil society organisations and that sometimes the debate is not constructive. As a consequence, the majority of Management Board members indicated that there is no need for a further involvement of civil society organisations in EASO's work at the national level.

5.4.2 Besides the annual plenary meetings, additional consultations have been pursued with civil society

EASO regularly consults registered Consultative Forum members through expert meetings, workshops, seminars, questionnaires, interviews and specific consultations using IT tools. In order to ensure the broadest possible outreach and that all organisations are able to contribute in a cost-effective manner, EASO tries to use online consultation whenever possible.

EASO seeks consultation with civil society members in the implementation of certain outputs and before certain reports are made public. An open call for observationsis made to CF members on the following EASO outputs:

► Annual Reports on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union;

► Annual Activity Reports;

► Focused consultation to members of court and tribunal on the chapter on the implementation of article 15c of the Qualification Directive (QD); and

► AWPs.

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[63] EASO Work Programme 2014, page 39.

EASO has been developing a two way dialogue with civil society alongside its activities during 2014, whereby EASO reported having received 100 contributions from civil society organisations, whilst 70 organisations have been consulted. Among the different measures of consultation, EASO organised and offered the opportunity to members of civil society to participate in, discuss challenges and share experiences in workshops, training material, quality tools and COI reports.

Consultative Forum members were also invited by the Executive Director via an open call for input published on the EASO website in 2014 to provide information about work that they carried out throughout the year which in their view contributed to the implementation of the CEAS, at a local, regional, national or European level.

Apart from consultation on EASO's AWP, civil society is also invited to provide input to the annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU. In the 2013 annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU, 15 responses were received from members of civil society.

Consultations with civil society are also held through the training and quality reference groups, including representatives from UNHCR, ECRE, Odysseus network, IARLJ (up until 2014) and other ad hoc members. These groups are heavily involved in the development and updating of training material and practical tools and are consulted at a minimum twice per development/update cycle for each product. In addition, CTQE organises once a year an "Annual Reference Group" meeting to discuss and coordinate theirwork plan and processes with its members.

Also, consultation with civil society is sought by invitation to EASO meetings and conferences with respect to activities such as those related to children,trafficking of human beings and country of origin information

Although the NGO representatives acknowledged the usefulness of this consultation process, some parts of civil society expressed an interest in also being involved at the drafting stage of reports (such as the AWP) rather than solely when the process is at an early stage (i.e. in the prior consultation process). Some also expressed willingness to be invited to participate in thematic meetings such is an example as 'the official COI strategic meeting'. Moreover, few members of the CFinterviewed at the 2014 plenary meeting seemed to be aware of ongoing consultation with EASO or ad hoc surveys.

Understandably, NGO expectations for additional involvement in the consultation process should be balanced with EASO's operational responsibilities and requirements, and challenges on the ground. When requested to comment on the degree of civil society involvement, Management Board representatives highlighted their disagreement with involving the NGOs more than is currently the case.

5.4.3 EU stakeholders have divergent opinions with regard to EASO consultative activities

Overall, EU stakeholders have expressed differing points of view with regard to the Consultative Forum and its functioning.

On the one hand, representatives of the EU agencies and bodies which have been interviewed claimed that, overall, the Consultative Forum is effective both in terms of consultation and in terms of working methods. The main evidence gathered during the interviews with EU bodies can be summarized as follows:

► from 2011 EASO has dramatically improved its capacity to engage civil society organisations and NGOs in consultative activities and today the Agency has reached a fairly good level of cooperation with such stakeholders.

► through the CF EASO has been able to address and communicate with a large segment of civil society.

► the CF still needs to be integrated more with practical daily work carried out by EASO and its stakeholders and should focus less on theoretical issues. The setting up of 3 thematic areas has been a very good improvement to facilitate continuous exchange of information and follow up of the participants to the Forum.

On the other hand, the majority of NGOs interviewed pointed out that, although the Consultative Forum and plenary meetings enhance practical cooperation, the dialogue between EASO, NGOs and civil society representatives could be strengthened further.The following suggestions were gathered during the interviews:

- ► more frequent CF meetings – at least two per year – could be organized, giving more time to the thematic workshops rather than to the plenary session.

- ► the Agenda of the CF could be more focused on the results achieved by EASO, so that civil society can be aware of what has been done by the Agency over the year. A fine-tuning of the Q&A session could be useful in this sense.

- ► more attention could be given to EASO communication and reporting activities, for instance throughintroducinga follow-up mechanism for the thematic workshops. The same should apply for anyfollow up to stakeholders' comments on the AWP and other EASO tools.

- ► circulating a list of the members to the CF could be useful for participants, fostering the exchange of expertise and useful discussions also after the CF plenary meeting.

- ► the increased usage of informal communication channels apart from the formal ones (e.g. e-mails, formal letters, etc.) could help the Agency createa continuous dialogue with its stakeholders.

5.5 EASO's external communication activities are being enhanced

EASO's communication strategy outlines its communication goals, target audiences to be reached, key messages, and the communication channels to be used, including participating in events, developing relations with the media, arranging interviews, participation in and organisation of seminars and conferences, organising visits to EASO premises and activities by target groups, presentations and exhibitions of EASO's work and activities, EASO publications and translations, EASO's monthly newsletter, press releases, and daily press extracts.

In addition to the communication and consultation with civil society, EASO has a key information role vis-à-vis national stakeholders. The level of awareness of EASO and its types of support of relevant stakeholders in the field of asylum is an important indicator of the effectiveness of EASO's external communication strategy.

Knowledge of EASO and its activities among stakeholders in the field of asylum can also be boosted through the usage of EASO tools, which will help these stakeholders in their operations as well as through initiatives organised on the national level. For the purposes of this evaluation, national stakeholders in the field of asylum include the National Contact Points, including thematic ones, Members of national Courts and Tribunals and EASO's pool of experts and trainers.

In fact, the Commission's internal evaluation showed that: "a vast majority of the respondents (civil society organisations and national competent authorities) was in the position to identify the key message that EASO envisage in the communication strategy[64]"

Also, two surveys conducted by EASO[65]showedthat the satisfaction rates on EASO's communication media by users are quite high:

- ► 88 % of surveyed respondents expressed that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with EASO's website

- ► 85 % of the surveyed persons were either satisfied or very satisfied with the layout and content of the newsletter

For the first time in 2014, a series of EASO national Infodays were organised in all MS. These activities were seen as a way of bringing EASO closer to national stakeholders, which was one of the main recommendations emanating from the ECA internal evaluation report on EASO in 2014. Most Management Boardinterviewees indicated having participated or contributed to the EASO national Infodays held in their respective countries. These were generally

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[64]European Commission (2014), Commission staff working document on the internal evaluation of the European Asylum Support Offices (EASO) pg. 30

[65]EASO (2015), (internal) progress report

events targeting national stakeholders (such as civil administration and NGOs) rather than at the general public. Comments on the effectiveness of these events proved to be quite positive. Additionally, national contact points were identified as an important multiplier of information ofEASO's initiatives in liaison with communication officials at national levels. In this respect, one of EASO's priority activities in 2014 was to organise information and networking meetings for press officers in charge of home affairs issues in national competent authorities. In this respect, EASO's communications sent and spread via the enhanced network; useful information and contacts shared and exchanged.

The number of mentions in the international (EU and non-EU press) has constantly increased in practically all categories tracked by EASO. In 2012 EASO was mentioned 127 times in the international press. This increased significantly to 770 mentions in 2014, reflecting an additional international interest and awareness of EASO's activities.

5.5.1 National stakeholders are generally aware of EASO initiatives that are directly applicable to them

As can be seen from Figure 48 below, knowledge amongst stakeholders of EASO and its activities is very much dependent on the nature of the individual EASO activity. Up to 89% agreed that EASO has strengthened practical cooperation among MS in the field of asylum, and 75% believe it has effectively provided support for MS under particular pressure. Whereas only 6% had no opinion (or did not know) whether EASO strengthened practical cooperation among MS in the field of asylum, 24% were unable to comment as to whether EASO has produced expertise for policy and legislation at the national level. The highest level of unawareness was in response to the questions whether EASO has somehow assisted in the convergence of national law and/or jurisprudence in the field.

Figure 48: Knowledge of EASO and its activities amongst national stakeholders in the field of asylum
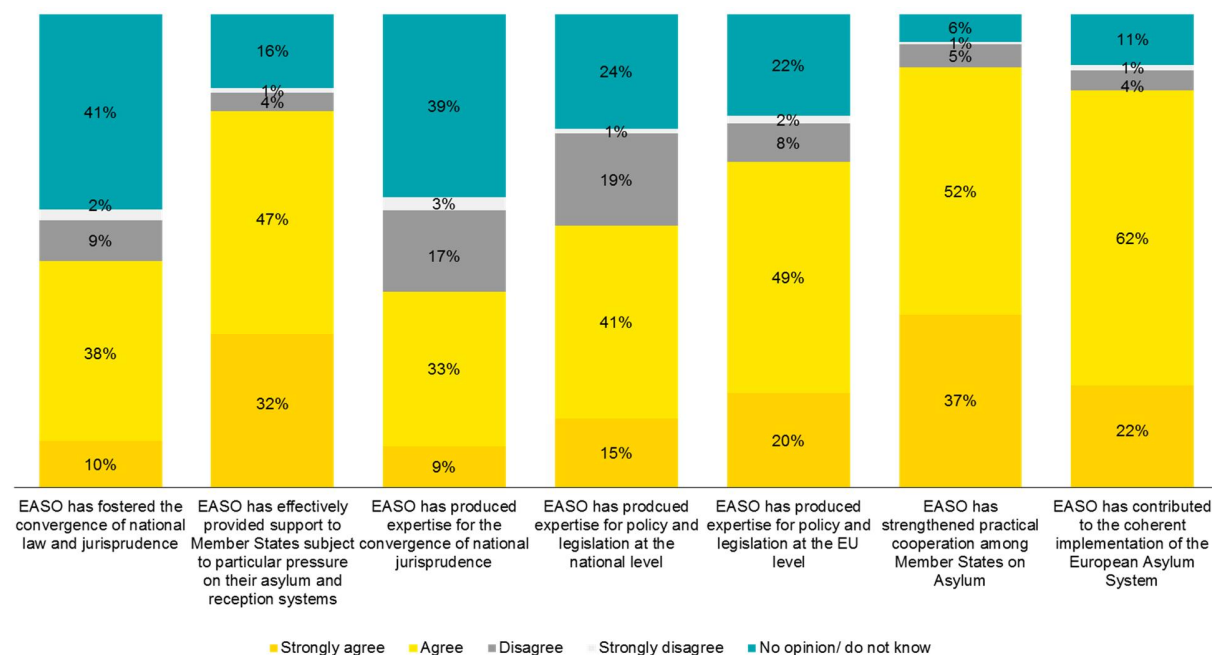
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 186 respondents)

National stakeholders' perception on the effectiveness of EASO's external communication strategy is rather ambivalent. Whereas nearly a quarter of the survey respondents were unable to pass judgment on this, 63% consider EASO's communication strategy to be adequate.

Figure 49: Awareness of external stakeholders on EASO's activities

	EASO is independent in the implementation of its work	EASO is able to adequately identify Member States' needs	EASO is responsive to the needs of the Member States in the definition of its support activities	EASO is responsive to Member State needs in its implementation of its support activities	EASO is transparent in its operating procedures and methods	EASO's outputs are of high quality	EASO has developed an adequate external communication strategy
No opinion/ do not know	18%	16%	17%	21%	23%	10%	23%
Strongly disagree	1%		1%	1%		1%	
Disagree	10%	2%	5%	6%	3%	8%	2%
		12%			12%		12%
Agree	55%	55%	55%	53%	40%	57%	46%
Strongly agree	17%	15%	22%	19%	22%	24%	17%

■ Strongly agree   ■ Agree   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly disagree   ■ No opinion/ do not know

(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 186 respondents)

According to survey results, national stakeholders show high levels of satisfaction and usage of EASO's communication efforts and tools, as outlined in Figure 50 below.

Figure 50: Quality of EASO communication tools

	Annual reports on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union	Quarterly reports on asylum	Monthly reports on asylum	EASO Newsletter	Other publications
No opinion/ Do not know/ Not applicable	20%	24%	25%	19%	81%
Very poor quality				1%	
Rather poor quality	4%	2%	4%	9%	1%
Good quality	43%	44%	34%	50%	11%
High quality	34%	30%	38%	21%	7%

■ High quality   ■ Good quality
■ Rather poor quality   ■ Very poor quality
■ No opinion/ Do not know/ Not applicable

(Source: EY Survey 2015; respondents: 169 respondents)

Close to three quarters of respondents believe the annual reports, quarterly asylum reports, monthly asylum reports and EASO newsletter, to be of good to high quality. This shows high levels of awareness and satisfaction amongst the stakeholders these communication tools are meant to target.

With regards to their usefulness, up to 67% of respondents consider the EASO newsletter to be useful, while the quarterly reports are considered to be useful by 71% of these national stakeholders. The effectiveness chapter outlines the results of this question in further detail.

5.5.2 More information is needed on the results of operational support

Several Management Board members call for more information on the performance and results of EASO's operational support.Based on the survey results, 62% national stakeholders deem that sufficient information has been provided by EASO onemergency support plans.This is not the case for special support plans, where about 70% respondents deemed they didn't receive sufficient information from EASO on the progress made during implementation.

EASO has recently developed monitoring tools for the progress of support plans. They were used for the first time during EASO's intervention in Bulgaria. However, indicators of the Logical framework do not measure impacts yet, because EASO does not have the necessary resources. On the whole, it seems that communication on the impact of support plans could be improved. The views of national representatives diverge on the impact of EASO's support and this might stem from the fact that there is no reliable data on the matter.

6 Efficiency

Evaluation question: To what extent has EASO been efficient in implementing its mandate?

Approach

The notion of efficiency refers to the way resources (including funds, time and staff) are managed and organised to harness results and achieve objectives at the best cost. The following section attempts to explore the following:

► the extent to which EASO has been efficient in the implementation of its mandate, which is also tied to the analysis of the extent to which EASO implemented its mandate in an effective way (this is developed in the evaluation question on effectiveness);

► EASO's approach to the allocation of its resources, mainly the budget allocation and its staff, and how these have been managed throughout the stages of development of the agency.

Main findings

► **EASO's Budget reflects the agency's stage of development**, with the total budget increasing yearly. The allocation of expenditure has changed over the years, with an increasing proportion of costs allocated towards operational expenditures.

► **The European Union's administrative requirements and budgetary conditions affect EASO's service provision.** As an EU agency which is still considered to be in a start-up phase, it must have a minimum support structure for its administrative services to function properly. Yet, despite its limitations, EASO's staff and stakeholders believe that EASO is delivering efficiently

► **EASO's work is heavily dependent on its internal HR capacity and skills, as well as on the efficient utilisation of its external MS resources**. However, the number of experts available for operational cooperation is limited by MS due to low levels of capacity and national workloads.

► **EASO's budgetary planning and management procedures have improved,** witnessing resource allocation process improvements such as the more recent introduction of SMART indicators and KPIs. Scope exists for further improvements in EASO's resource allocation process as expenditure is not concentrated on the five main clusters of activity indicated in its AWPs.

6.1 EASO's budget reflects the agency's stage of development

Figure 51: Establishment of EASO's budget
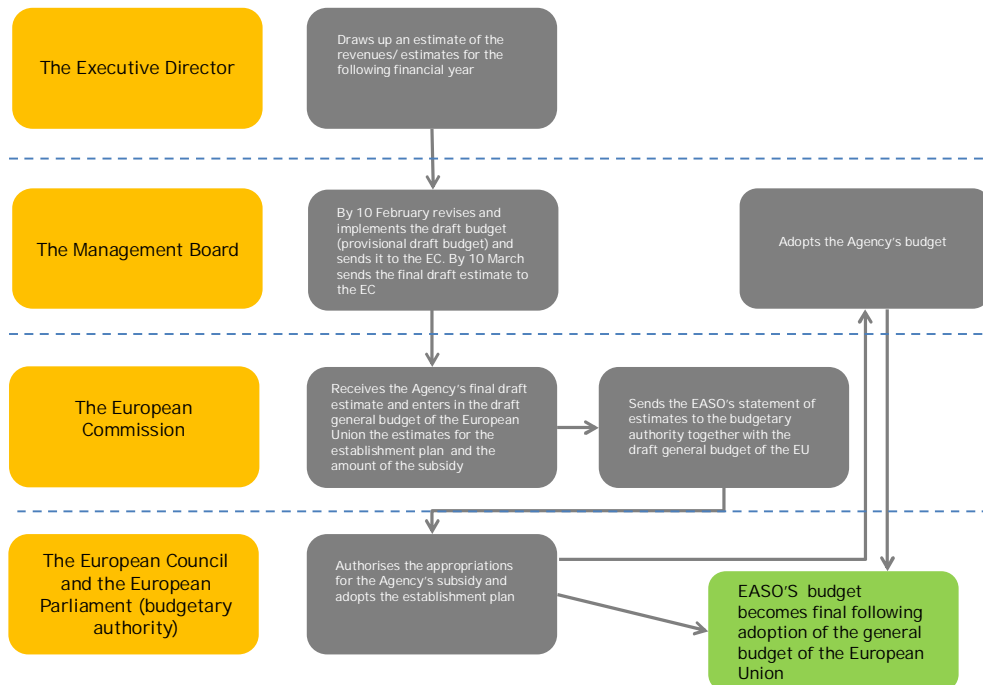
(Source: EASO)

In accordance with Article 33 of the EASO founding Regulation, the revenues and resources of EASO consist mainly of:

► A contribution from the general budget of the European Union;

► Any voluntary contributions from the MS;

► Charges for publications and any services provided by EASO; and

► A contribution from the associated countries.

The expenditure of EASO is divided into three titles as follows:

► Title 1: Staff expenditure;

► Title 2: Infrastructure and operating expenditure; and

► Title 3: Operational expenditure.

In September 2012, EASO received financial autonomy, establishing its independent legal personality; with its budgets being published separately. However EASO's governance and budgeting are still under the scrutiny of the EU Budget, since the main revenue stream of EASO is the subsidy received from the EU budget.

As outlined in various Commission publications, the context of budgetary austerity at national level and pressure to limit EU spending increased the pressure on EASO to demonstrate the effectiveness of its spending. The implementation of a results-oriented approach emphasises the accountability of the Executive Director for the results, impact and performance of EASO. Hence any evolution in budgetary fixed costs (whether overall or by task/activity) will need to be matched (or surpassed) by evolution in the numbers of staff to ensure an improvement in the agency's cost-effectiveness (or efficiency).

6.1.1 The overall budget has increased yearly as a consequence of the Agency's development

EASO's budget has progressively increased in size between 2011 and 2015. The total budget almost doubled over the years, going from 8 million € in 2011[66] to 15.8 million € in 2015[67].In particular, operational expenditure increased from 2.4 million € in 2011 to 6.5 million € in 2015, whereas staff costs increased from 3.5 million € in 2011 to 5.8 million € in 2015.

These increases are in line with the stage of the Agency's development. The Commission also acknowledges that up till 2014, the agency is considered to be in its start-up phase[68], and that steady increases in its budget expenditures in all areas is expected to be partially justified by this stage of development. Table 11 gives an indication of the budget breakdown over the years, including the projected budget for 2015.

Table 11: EASO's Budgets 2011-2015

EASO's Budgets (€)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Revenue					
EU Contribution	8 000 000	10 000 000	10 500 000	14 656 000	15448 360
Other revenue	0	0	0	1 007 974	498 486
Total revenue	**8 000 000**	**10 000 000**	**10 500 000**	**15 663 974**	**15 994846**
Expenditure					
Title 1: Staff expenditure	3 540 000	3 362 750	5 044 000	6 243 000	5 891 360
Title 2: Infrastructure and operating expenditure	2 025 000	2 716 750	1 956 000	2 732 194	3 384 833
Title 3: Operational expenditure	2 435 000	3 921 000	5 000 000	6 027 000	6 502 025
Support for CEAS implementation	*2 435 000*	*550 000*	*800 000*	*380 000*	*514 000*
Support for MS practical cooperation	*0*	*1 975 000*	*2 800 000*	*3 450 000*	*3 152 000*
Support for MS under particular pressure	*0*	*1 326 000*	*1 250 000*	*2 047 000*	*2 686 025*
Cooperation with partners and stakeholders	*0*	*70 000*	*150 000*	*150 000*	*150 000*
Title 4: ENP Countries	0	0	0	661 780	166 628
Total expenditure	**8 000 000**	**10 000 000**	**12 000 000**	**15 663 974**	**15 994 846**

(Source: EASO Budgets 2011 - 2015)

The EU contribution budget for 2015 amounts to 15.4 million € which is a slight increase from the 14.6 million € allocated in 2014[69]. The EU contribution hence amounts to just over 96% of EASO's revenues.

Total staff expenditure is expected to decrease in 2015 when compared to 2014, whereas the total rental of building and associated costs is expected to increase (mainly as a result of a projected increase in building rental costs and ICT equipment). Operational expenditures are expected to increase slightly from just over 6 million € in 2014 to around 6.5 million € in 2015.

6.1.2 EASO's allocation of expenditures has evolved over the years, with an increasing proportion on operational expenditures

Similarly to all EU agencies, EASO is expected to use its budget and deploy its staff in a manner that should enable it to fulfil its mandate at a lesser cost. It also needs to understand where the Agency still needs to improve its cost efficiency and implement measures to improve this.

EASO continuously monitors the consumption of budgetary commitments through:

► Monthly reports on budget execution.

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[66] EASO (2013), Budget 2011-2012

[67] EASO (2015), Statement of Revenues and Expenditures 2015, Amendment 2/2015
[68] European Commission (2013), Programming of human and financial resources for decentralised agencies COM (2013) 519 final, (pg14)
[69] EASO (2014), Statement of revenues and expenditures of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Budget Amendment 2/2014

► Mid-year budget review exercises to assess the possible need for amendments to the budget and/or transfers within the budget.

These reports allow various ratios to be calculated which outline whether EASO is becoming increasingly cost-effective, or efficient, in its service delivery. These include parameters such as fixed costs evolution over staff member evolution and rate of operational expenditure increase over staff costs increase.

Figure 52: EASO Budgetary and Fixed Costs Evolution
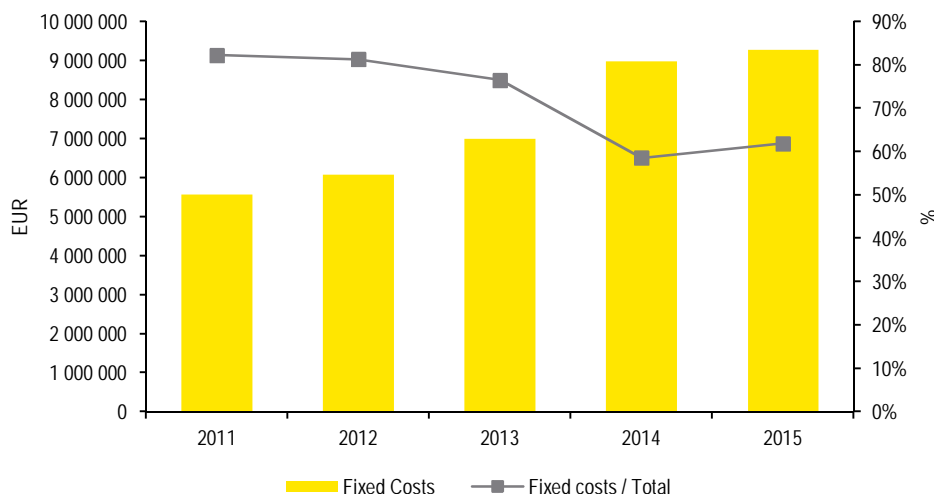
(Source: EASO)

As can be seen from the chart above, EASO's fixed costs (including staff, infrastructure and operating costs[70]) consistently form a large proportion of EASO's budget, although operational expenditures are gaining more and more weight both in absolute and relative terms.

Concurrently, EASO's fixed costs as a percentage of total costs decreased between 2012 and 2014. This points towards efficiency gains as the fixed costs proportionate weight has become smaller. Staff and infrastructure expenditure (e.g. salaries and allowances, rental of building, expenditure on ICT, administrative expenses etc.) also increased in size. This is also in line with the increase in EASO's size over the period 2011 – 2015. However, the staff and infrastructure's proportion of the total costs also witnessed a decrease over the period 2013 - 2014.[71] This again points towards increasing amounts/proportions of available budgets being used in areas directly assisting MS as opposed to increasing the allocation of budgets towards costs of a fixed nature.

Both fixed costs and staff head count increased over the period 2011 – 2014. More precisely, if fixed costs grew by 110%, the staff evolution reached up to 121%. However, since the increase in fixed costs over the period is at a lesser rate than the rate of personnel increase, it can be deduced that the rate of fixed costs per staff member went down between 2011 and 2013 and remained relatively constant following 2014. This could also be an indication of an improvement in cost-efficiency.

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[70] Fixed costs include staff expenditure, as well as infrastructure and operating expenditures such as rental of buildings and associated costs, ICT and administrative expenditures.

[71] EASO (2013), Statement of revenue and expenditure of the European Asylum Support Office for the financial year 2013, Amendment 1/2013

EASO (2014), Annual Activity Report 2013

Figure 53: EASO's Fixed Costs/ Staff Head Count for 2011-2015
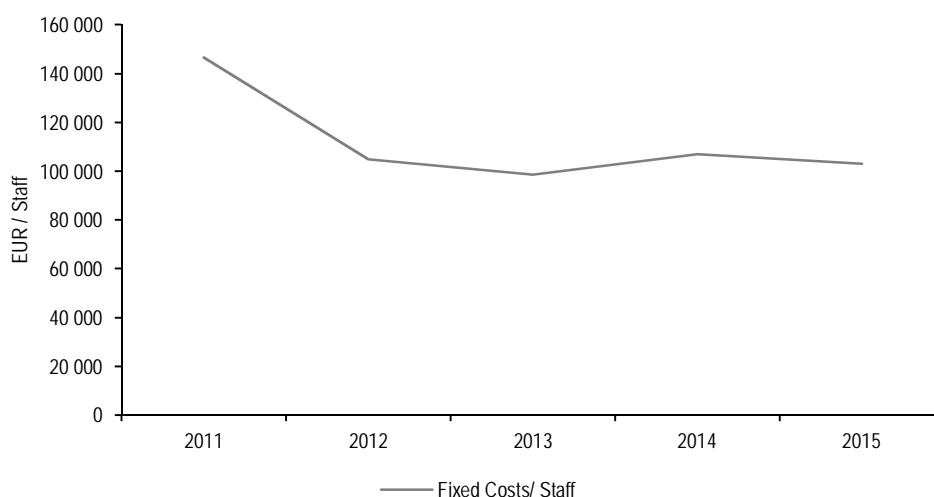
(Source: EASO)

On the other hand, a yearly breakdown of the Fixed Cost / Staff head count movements (Figure 53) shows a more mixed picture. Whereas fixed costs per staff member were on a constant decrease up till 2013, it witnessed a slight increase in the last year under review (2014). Infrastructure and operating costs increased by 40% between 2013 and 2014. This is mainly a consequence of the doubling of rental and administrative expenditure over the previous year (in line with the provisions of the premises rental agreement between EASO and the Government of Malta). Over the same year, staff numbers increased from 71 to 84, meaning an increase of just over 18%[72].

The continued movement in this cost-efficiency parameter is hence dependent on the movements in projected fixed costs, which are projected to increase by 3% in 2015 while staff increases of 7% over the same year. Hence, as per the projected budget, this efficiency parameter is expected to improve again in 2015 as the staff head count increases at a faster pace than fixed costs.

6.1.3 EASO's budgetary planning procedures have improved

Budgetary planning, both as a means to an end, and as an end itself, is considered to be a marker of efficiency. As highlighted earlier, between 2012 – 2014, EASO's actual expenditure did not reach the full budgetary provisions. More precisely, total expenditures represented 78% of the adopted global budget in 2012 (7.8 million €), but reached 87% in 2013 (10.5 million €), despite the increase in the adopted global budget. In 2014, the actual expenditure was 85% of the adopted budget.

Figure 54: Comparison between Adopted and Executed Budget
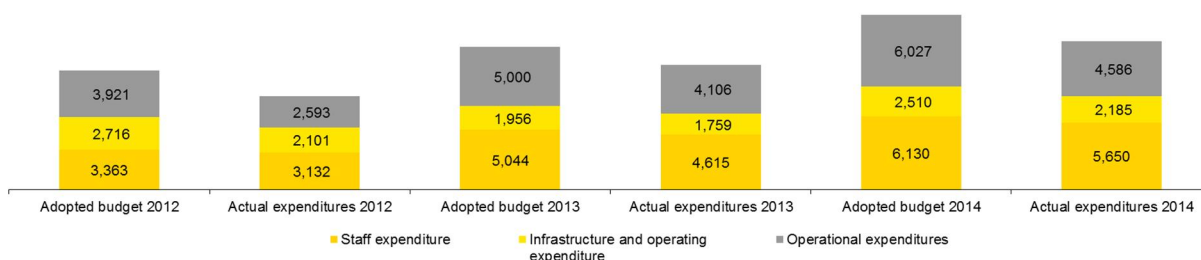
(Source: EASO annual working programmes, annual activity reports and provisional accounts)

Infrastructure and operating costs remain for both years the least-financed centre in relative terms, although it achieved a much higher ratio of 90% of the adopted budget in 2013. In 2014, this fell slightly to 87% of the adopted budget for infrastructure and operating expenditure. Staff expenditure, represents the cost centre for

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[72] The increase in staff members allocated to EASO in the third quarter of 2015 was not known when this report was drafted.

which the highest ratio of actual expenditures of the available funds is achieved, where the ratio of consumed budget on the available funds remained constant, reaching 93% in 2012, 91% in 2013 and 92% in 2014. Hence budget consumption for the latter increased over the years. The ratio of actual expenditures of the adopted budget for operating activities fluctuated between the three years from 66% in 2012, 82% in 2013 and 76% in 2014.

Consequently the discrepancy between adopted and executed budgets mainly lies in the way EASO's resources are used to finance its fixed costs. This fact tends to underline EASO's efficiency in the management of its funds while using almost its entire budget for the implementation of its different support activities[73].

The ECA, when commenting on the 2013 accounts, highlights that the Agency had overestimated its budgetary needs for 2013 by 13% (2012: 32%) and only 10.4 million € of the 12 million € budget were actually committed[74]. Moreover they noted that appropriations carried over amounted to 2.5 million € or 24% (which in 2012 amounted to 65%) of total committed appropriations. The ECA also acknowledged that while there continues to remain scope for improved budgetary planning, both the overestimation of budgetary needs and the carry-overs of committed appropriations were significantly lower than the previous year (2012).

This analysis by the ECA as well as publicly available information shows an improvement in the budgetary planning process between 2012 and 2013 (i.e. the year in which the Agency achieved financial independence).

In all years, staff expenditure remains by far the biggest cost item although their weight both in absolute and relative terms is declining. As a matter of fact staff expenditure represented a little less than half of EASO's total budget in 2013, while it reached up to 43% in 2012. EASO's budget for 2014 indicates that staff expenditure witnessed a further percentage decrease to 39% of total expenditure in 2014.

As discussed in the following section, the proportion of EASO's administrative costs over total expenditure is a reflection of its size and current stage of development.

The comparison between the budget execution in 2012 and 2013 therefore reveals a significant decrease in the weight of EASO's fixed costs: staff, infrastructure and operating expenditures went from 81% (2012) to 76% (2013) to 59% in 2014 of the total budget. This trend, however, is not due to the evolution of personnel costs in absolute terms – as the latter increased by 50% over the two years – but is actually explained by the strong increase in EASO's operational activities. Indeed the latter's consumed budget skyrocketed over the period, increasing more than twofold from one year to the other. As a consequence, its relative weight also increased, going from a quarter to more than a third of EASO's total budget. This increase in operational expenditure is considered to be justified by the stage of the Agency's development phase and its progressive rise to full capacity. Since expenditure on operational activities is an indicator of the amount of services/support being provided, as indicated earlier, this also means an improvement in EASO cost-effectiveness (or efficiency) over the period in question.
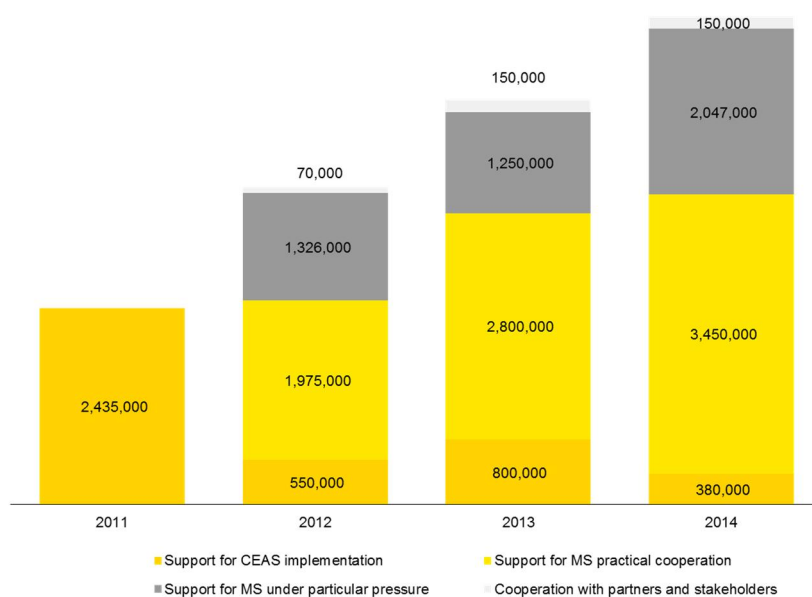
It remains to be seen how these parameters will develop as the Agency stabilises and becomes mature.

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[73] EASO (2014), Annual Activity report for 2013

[74] ECA (2014), Report on the annual accounts of the European Asylum Support Office for the financial year 2013

Figure 55: EASO's Budget Execution for Operational Activities in 2012-2014

(Source: EASO)

The strong increase in EASO's budget for operational activities is mainly due to the evolution of EASO's expenditure in its support activities for practical cooperation. Indeed, among EASO's different activities, support for practical cooperation became by far the most important cost centre in 2013 and increased even further in 2014. However, the costs' portion for the support provided by EASO to MS under particular pressure has also increased in importance over the years.

6.2 The EU's administrative requirements and budgetary conditions affect EASO's activities

As mentioned earlier, the European Union places various administrative requirements and budgetary conditions on its decentralised agencies. These act as the framework within which the agencies, like EASO, must operate but can also act as limiting factors in certain instances.

The Multi-Annual Staff Policy plan for 2011-2013 shows that the European Commission allocated 7 posts (or 10% of the total) less than what was requested by EASO[75], leading to EASO claiming a potential 'ripple effect' on EASO's planned growth.The resources made available to EASO necessitated the re-dimensioning of targets for certain initiatives in EASO's first years of existence. Besides affecting targets, the redeployment of resources in view of budgetary constraints is also acknowledged by EASO in its latest multi-annual staff policy plan[76]. Since the evalution covers the period till June 2014, the increase in budget and staff allocations proposed in the third quarter of 2015 are not featured in this analysis.

On the other hand, as foreseen in the Commission Roadmap[77], the Commission is actively looking at ways to expand the level and scope of the support activities entrusted to the decentralised agencies, in areas such as staff management, accounting and finance. The intention is to assist these agencies to reduce their administrative costs and to enable them to produce their expected outputs. This requires a revision of the Framework Financial Regulation and better equipping the agencies with streamlined reporting and financial management tools[78]. Since

[75] EASO (2011), Multiannual Staff Policy plan 2011 – 2013, (pg. 7)

[76] EASO (2011), Multiannual Staff Policy plan 2011 – 2013, (pg. 17)

[77] European Commission 2012, Commission Roadmap on the follow-up to the Common Approach on decentralized Agencies

[78] COM (2013) 519 final, Programming of human and financial resources for decentralised agencies, (pg.18,19)

administration and support currently accounts for a significant proportion of total EASO headcount and of costs, this could be an important development and will assist EASO in improving its efficiency. Although less than what EASO requested, the planned Roadmap increase in EASO head-count over the coming years (totaling six new members of staff) would still contribute to assisting EASO in its service offer.

6.2.1 As an agency still considered in its start-up phase, EASO must have a minimum structure for its administrative services to function properly

Overall, as demonstrated in other evaluations of decentralised Agencies, there is a clear tendency for the share of administrative staff to be in reverse proportionality to the size of the Agency. Thus, the largest Agencies tend to have the lowest share of administrative staff, and vice-versa.

The increase in head count size, especially above a certain threshold (sometimes considered to be around 100), is not necessarily met by a counterpart or similar increase in administrative support.

To cite just one example of this, another decentralised Agency in the JHA sphere is FRONTEX. This Agency, with which EASO interacts frequently, was established in 2005. It grew from a total staff of 72 in 2006 to 132 in 2007 with its administrative staff remaining at 29 full-time equivalents (FTEs) throughout this period. Hence the share of administrative staff went from 40% in 2006 to 22% in 2007. More recent figures show that this proportion is now around 29%.

Allowance must be made for different staff definitions, roles, stage of development and modus operandi of the specific agencies. In fact, EASO being an EU agency still considered in start up phase, must have a minimum structure for its administrative services to function properly and most of the administrative posts serve operational needs directly such as the ICT function mainly supporting the implementation of the tools, applications and equipment run by the operations.

The heavy reliance on national external expertise (other than SNEs) through ASTs etc., and EASO's focus on a number of thematic, training, quality and other report typologies, might also play a large part on the fact that the Agency's administration and support function is significant in relation to its size. This is because such experts participating in any form of meeting or in various other EASO pan-EU initiatives being taken, require significant administrative and other support (but will not be listed as staff members of the actual Agency).

On the other hand, as will be seen further in the report, the reliance on such external experts could mean significant cost-savings for the Agency as compared to having to recruit such resources directly. The current and projected restrictions (as noted earlier, the analysis is based on the information available in early to mid-2015) in EASO's establishment plan also have a role in limiting the number (and grades) of employees that can be taken on board. This will mean that administrative support will continue to be a significant proportion of EASO's human resource pool, unless EASO changes its method of encouraging practical cooperation, developing tools/modules and providing services.

6.2.2 EASO's staff and stakeholders believe that EASO is delivering efficiently, despite its limitations

EASO acknowledges the budgetary constraints placed upon it by the EU and has allocated resources taking 'strictly into account the needs to fully implement the activities for the start-up phase of the Agency'[79]. EASO's resources are allocated taking carefully into consideration the main budgetary principles of sound financial management, in particular in regard to effectiveness, efficiency and economy.

However, as already noted, while EASO requested a budget of 12 million € and a staff allocation of 68 persons for 2012, the Commission allocated 10million € and 61 persons. This was claimed by EASO to 'have implications on the level of ambition that EASO would be able to set for 2012[80].

Moreover the EASO staff plan also indicates that the aforementioned budget constraints in the first years meant that the Agency was unable to fulfil all the tasks as assigned by the EASO founding Regulation. This was

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[79] EASO (2014), EASO Staff plan 2014 – 2016, (pg.17)

[80] EASO (2011), 2011 – 2014 Staff plan, (pg.11)

explained by staff interviewed. It is also believed that although budget and funds are available, certain Units do not have enough staff to implement all the tasks. An example of this is the new IDS system, where EASO has only been able to work on certain areas due to staff limitations. Another area where this applies is the area of return, which although within EASO's mandate, has been put on the backburner due to a lack in financial and human resources.

EASO staff generally believes that EASO needs to be bigger (in staff and financial resources) to have an impact as current lack of resources limits the Agency's functions.

Administration support staff members also believe that the persistent lack of human resources (due to a lack of numbers and also vacant posts due to staff turnover), especially in support functions like IT, HR, and procurement, may have also contributed to EASO not being able to deliver within initially targeted timeframes. The presence of additional administrative support would allow non-support staff members to focus more on technical aspects of their jobs.

They are also aware that the increase in staff numbers over the years has not kept pace with the increase in operational expenditure. They contend that this leads to increased pressure to deliver with (relatively) less resources. In their opinion, the increase in staffing (especially in roles which were to date carried out by one person such as external communication and budgeting) should be a priority, rather than any further increase in operational budgets.

On the appropriateness of the allocation of resources by EASO, some stakeholders were of the opinion that with the constant increase in work and priorities, EASO could potentially focus on 2-3 key priorities and invest in those priorities rather than in the multitude of areas being tackled by EASO, which is currently the case.

Others have also commented that EASO is developing in-house tools and materials in line with providing support, and that this process can be time consuming. Although this adds to the work load of the Units, it also helps build expertise within them. However these processes are added to the Unit's daily work. They put forward their wish for EASO to be more efficient by involving external consultants/specialists in this process rather than having EASO's staff working on both day to day tasks and also developing new material.

According to stakeholders, who have been asked to comment on the reasonableness of the agency's workload and resource allocation, the general opinion was that the total amount of resources at EASO's disposal is considered as not always adequate to fulfil its objectives and challenges, suggesting a perceived need to increase the authority Agency's size and financial resources.

MS members also called for more flexibility in EASO's budget and establishment plan. This would allow EASO to deal better with unexpected workload or new tasks, coming from newly adopted regulations or emerging solutions. For them, both the Agency and the MS are doing the most they can with the resources they have, even if they sometimes struggle to obtain sufficient resources. They also contend that additional resources will always be useful.

EASO is itself claiming that 'in line with the Agency's objectives and the implementation of the responsibilities foreseen in the EASO founding Regulation, it is expected that from 2014, EASO can take up its full tasks. The gradual growth of EASO staff in 2015 and 2016 will assist the Agency to meet its objectives[81].

6.2.3 EASO's work is heavily dependent on its internal HR capacity and skills, as well as on the efficient utilisation of MS resources

EASO's two multi-annual staff plans (for the periods 2011- 2013 and 2014 - 2016) outline the different employment categories that EASO employs. EASO's staff are not Permanent Officials but fall under three 'temporary' categories, namely

- ► Temporary Agents;
- ► Contract Agents;
- ► Seconded National Experts (SNEs).

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[81] EASO (2011) 2014 – 2016 Staff plan, (pg.14)

Temporary Agents on long-term employment are employed to carry out its technical and administrative and management tasks of a permanent or long term nature. These include those directly related to the implementation of EASO's core activities as defined in its founding Regulation and tasks related to the management and functioning of EASO aimed at providing technical and administrative support to its core business. Temporary agents are generally recruited at certain levels in order to permit a long term career development'. Temporary agents can also be employed by short-term employment contracts.

In the case of Contract Agents, the decision to recruit a Contract Agent is decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the justification of the short/long-term requirement and proper justification from the requesting Unit. The justification can be:

- ► Specific project
- ► Temporary peaks of workload
- ► Uncertainty about a need for a Temporary Agent
- ► Waiting for Temporary Agent to be recruited [82]

Contract Agents can be employed on both short and long-term employment contracts and have been used to hire technical experts in asylum related domains as well as support staff.

EASO also engages seconded national experts (SNEs) to benefit from their high level of expertise and up-to-date knowledge, particularly in areas where such expertise is not readily available or only temporarily necessary for EASO tasks. SNEs are also considered to have a particularly important role in the start-up up phase of Agencies as they provide the expertise needed for the Agency to commence operations.

SNEs bring specific expertise to EASO where needed in a cost–effective and flexible manner (as EASO's staff costs for a FTE temporary agent or contract agent are higher), but are also more likely to leave EASO at the end of their tenure. This means a loss to the Agency of their skills and experience and of continuity and the need to bring in a replacement if the need for the specific skills set remains. EASO employed 12 SNEs in 2011 and plan to employ 15 SNEs in 2015.

The quality of its human resource complement is a very important part of EASO. As outlined in the 2011 staff plan, the tasks that EASO has been "mandated to carry out by the legislator are ambitious and require highly trained staff that can be retained. Therefore for some posts, EASO would need to recruit at higher grades to attract high quality experts and coordinators. More specialised staff would be recruited in 2012 and 2013"[83].

"In view of the high and immediate demands from the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, EASO must be able to attract highly qualified staff"[84]. With this in mind, EASO aimed to offer higher recruitment grades in order to ensure recruitment of high quality and attract potential candidates.

However, it seems that a number of factors are contributing to the challenges in recruitment that EASO has been facing in its initial years. This has led to the numbers of employees being '6 less than what was made available to EASO'[85].

In particular, the establishment plan which governs the number and grades of EASO human resources limits the number of staff, especially at certain grades and the attractiveness of the positions. EASO claimed that a number of grades at which the Union is allowing EASO to recruit are lower than similar positions in other decentralised agencies. However, the work expected of the individuals is the same as that required in other agencies.

Moreover the correction coefficients used by the EU to aim for equality of purchasing power of salaries of EU officials and Contract Agents in different countries also results in individuals in the same grades in different countries having significantly different packages. This can also contribute to making EASO posts in Malta relatively unattractive (where this coefficient stands at 84% when compared to the Brussels 100%), especially for individuals whose skills can easily be utilised in other Agencies or in institutions such the European Commission. Finally the lack of certain procedures or systems (linked to the Agency's start-up phase) when compared to other more established Agencies was also claimed to be unattractive to certain potential or existing Agency employees.

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[82] EASO Staff Plan (2014-2016), (Pg.19)

[83] EASO (2011), Staff plan 2011, (Pg. 3)

[84] EASO (2011) Staff plan 2011, (Pg. 12)

[85] ECA (2014), Audit report 2013

These factors have been hampering EASO's recruitment efforts and leading to relatively high levels of turnover as employees move on to higher pay for the same work. This has led to the Agency's Units to prioritise certain areas over others (due to lack of resources) and focus primarily on day to day operations. Due to a lack of human resources, developing certain systems may be less of a priority area than others. Hence the the introduction of certain IT communication tools and the full implementation of a performance appraisal system might have become less of a priority over others.

EASO needs to ensure that it has a sufficient internal capacity to continue to provide the backbone of coordination and support to MS. These include the possibility for additional (unplanned) requests for assistance or additional initiatives requested by MS.

Notwithstanding these internal capacity considerations, EASO places a large emphasis on the utilisation of national experts in a variety of ways. Aside from the SNEs referred to above, the establishment, development and proper functioning of EASO's working groups/networks (ex. COI, EPS, Thematic groups etc.) is considered to be a highly efficient way of providing the services that MS require.

According to the evaluation carried out by Ramboll on a number of EU decentralised Agencies, the key factor determining cost-effectiveness in decentralised agencies' work is the presence of highly specialised and connected experts. In line with this, is EASO's emphasis on the creation and development of such networks of specialised individuals in its various initiatives. Closeness and mutual trust amongst the working group or network members is considered to be very important. A number of respondents also reiterated that the various forms of meetings with varied MS representatives present are helping to promote this. There are various instances of rapidly developing contacts and information sharing between the individuals in these networks. This is expected to assist EASO to carry out its work in a more efficient way, as these networks mature further.

Since these working groups and networks are made up primarily of experts from the MS, rather than on EASO's payroll, they further assists the cost-effectiveness of this method of operation. These experts are consulted whenever needed.

It is acknowledged that the initial effort and costs to build (and eventually maintain) the expert networks which enable the agency to respond quickly to MS is considered to be heavy[86]. However the result in other agencies has been shown to be ultimately more efficient. This is the road that EASO has adopted with its focus on encouraging MS participation and contribution in all its programmes, initiatives and support plans whether in the identification of ASTs, as well as the development of training, quality, information and data exchange activities.

EASO is also supporting regional cooperation and the sharing of information through training initiatives from which more than one MS could potentially benefit. Additionally, EASO supported the organisation of training activities at a regional level with the aim of reducing organisational costs and promoting regional cooperation[87] – these have led to regional training sessions in Brussels and Warsaw, amongst others. These training sessions also improve EASO's efficiency in view of their increased cost-effectiveness. Similarly, EASO's focus on train the trainer initiatives mean that EASO will benefit from a multiplier effect as additional training sessions are organised in the different MS.

It was estimated by EASO that the 673 train the trainer participants have themselves trained over 6600 additional asylum officials[88]. To cite a specific country example, Sweden's 6 EASO trained trainers (as part of Sweden's Support plan) had already trained close to 200 caseworkers by the end of 2013 and intend to train all 500 Swedish members of staff. EASO spent just under 8 000 € on direct costs related to training these 6 officials in Sweden[89].

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[86]Ramboll (2009), Evaluation of the EU decentralised agencies in 2009, Final Report Volume II, (pg.101)

[87] EASO (2012), Training Strategy, (pg.7)

[88] EASO (2015), Training Cockpit report update: 1st Quarter 2015

[89] EASO internal memo: Evaluation of EASI Special Support plan to Sweden

6.2.4 The number of experts available for operational cooperation is limited by MS due to lack of human resources

Any changes in MS' willingness and availability to contribute to EASO support tasks will effect EASO's ability to provide the required support. As indicated previously, a number of national stakeholders indicated having faced particular challenges in meeting EASO's requests for experts. This is particularly relevant for both smaller administrations as well as for those facing particular migratory pressures on their asylum and reception systems. This led to the non-availability of experts to join ASTs in response to certain EASO requests (for instance for some calls in Bulgaria).

The presence of SNEs within EASO may in certain instances contribute to lessen this reality, as EASO relied on these SNEs rather than short-term experts based in MS.

The number of experts made available by MS is primarily made up of Seconded national experts for asylum cooperation (who are sent to operate from EASO for specific periods of time) as well as the experts and trainers who are in contact with EASO intermittently as the need arises and who (aside from short stints in EASO for specific meetings or in other MS) usually operate primarily from their home country.

The pool of external experts and trainers (i.e. those which operate normally from their respective MS) were requested to indicate how often they intervene with EASO. This is expected to give an indication of the amount of resources that MS are making available to EASO, which in itself is an indication of their willingness to contribute through their experts. In this respect, around 14% of the experts and trainers are in contact with EASO on a daily basis and just under 40% several times per month. This gives an indication of the amount of resources being made available. Over one in four respondents indicated that they are in contact with EASO several times a year.

Figure 56: Frequency of contact with EASO
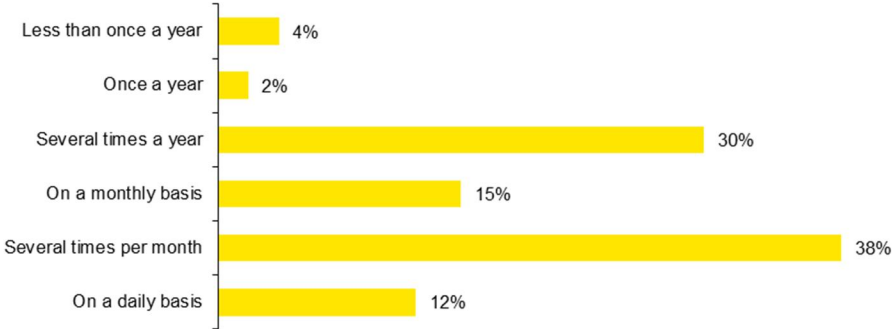
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 108 national stakeholders)

A very high satisfaction rate was also registered by these experts with 98% being satisfied with the frequency of their contacts and 88% with their quality. Such high figures should help maintain and increase such levels of contact and interaction between the experts and EASO. As already show,n this is seen to be a very important component of EASO's work, and especially of its ability to respond to external factors and emergency situations.

Another indication of the resources that MS currently make available to EASO is the number of participants in the various activities. The figures below are compiled from various EASO reports and outline the main key figures related to the MS participation in various EASO CTQE initiatives over the years90. The availability of information led to a focus on CTQE related initiatives.

EASO estimated that every trainer trained in the EASO curriculum eventually trains around 11.5 asylum officials.

The various CTQE activities are very heavily dependent on the availability of MS support. Hence the level of willingness of MS to contribute their own resources, primarily through providing trainers, didactic experts or participants in the contact and reference groups, is an important indication of EASO's service provision efficiency to date and the chances of it providing such services more efficiently in the future. The number of participants in the actual training sessions is also an important indicator of MS willingness (need) to participate in EASO-led initiatives.

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90 At the time of the preparation of this evaluation report, statistics on participation by Member States was only available vis-à-vis CTQE activities.

Figure 57 below outlines the contribution by the different MS to the trainer/expert pool over 2013 and 2014. It is clear that certain countries provide significant resources to these EASO initiatives which are not directly related to their geographical or administration size.

Figure 57: Train the trainers & experts* by MS between 2013 and 2014
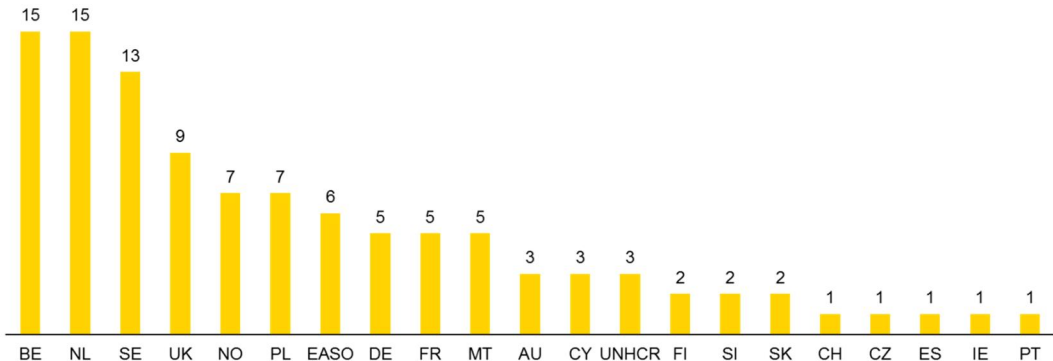
(Source: EASO) *Includes train – the trainer session participants, didactic experts and updating experts

The increased instances of translation of various ETC modules and training materials into languages other than English (including Bulgarian, Czech, German, Hungarian, Italian and Romanian) will also increase their applicability to different national contexts and their usage. This will improve the relevance and efficiency of EASO's products and services.

In reaction to external factors, MS must not only be willing to contribute expert resources, but must also have the ability to contribute the required resources. The evaluation found that national competent authorities were not always able to supply all the competencies required (including in technical expertise and/or language skills). This is clearly shown by respondents to the national stakeholders e-survey who identified the reasons why they encountered difficulties to appoint trainers in response to EASO's requests (as well as by MB members as highlighted later).

The internal lack of human resources and unavailability of the identified trainer due to time constraints were the two most cited difficulties. An additional 9% believed they were not given enough time by EASO to respond to their request. Around 16% in total were not able to match either the technical expertise (10%) or language skills (6%) required. Figure 58 shows a mixture of difficulties in both the supply side (by the national stakeholder or the trainer themselves) as well as from the demand side (EASO) of the equation. Clearly both need to match in order to find an adequately skilled and available trainer to be used by EASO.

Figure 58: Difficulties encountered in appointing trainers
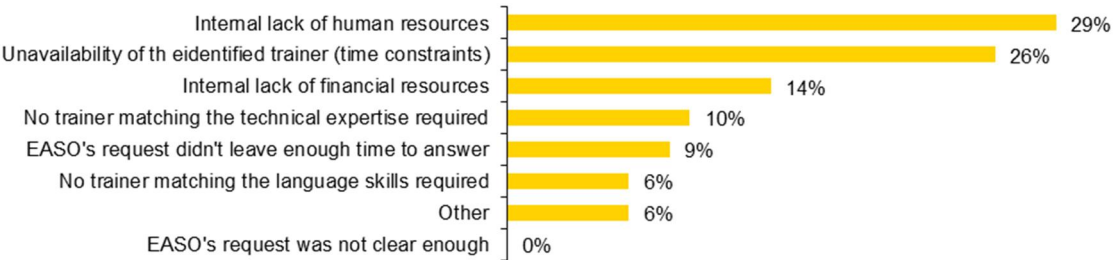
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 93 national stakeholders)

6.3 Improvements in EASO's budget management

6.3.1 Expenditure is not structured around the five clusters of activity identified in the AWPs

When reporting on the assigned budget, EASO's expenditure on operational activities is divided into the following categories:

► Support for the CEAS implementation;

► Support for MS practical cooperation;

► Support for MS under particular pressure; and

► Cooperation with partners and stakeholders.

EASO's consumed budget is therefore not currently broken down according to the five clusters of activities (permanent, special, emergency, information and third country support) adopted in EASO's AWPs.

Since EASO's five clusters of activities do not correspond to the agency's operational cost centres identified in the analytical accounting system, a direct comparison cannot be made between its operational objectives (as outlined in its AWPs) and actual expenditure. However a high level evaluation of the cost-effectiveness implications of overall movements in EASO's expenditure over the years can still be carried out, as outlined in the forthcoming sections.

Figure 59 gives an indication of the expenditure split for the years 2012 -14 in the categories indicated.

Figure 59: EASO's Allocation of Expenditure in 2012-2014
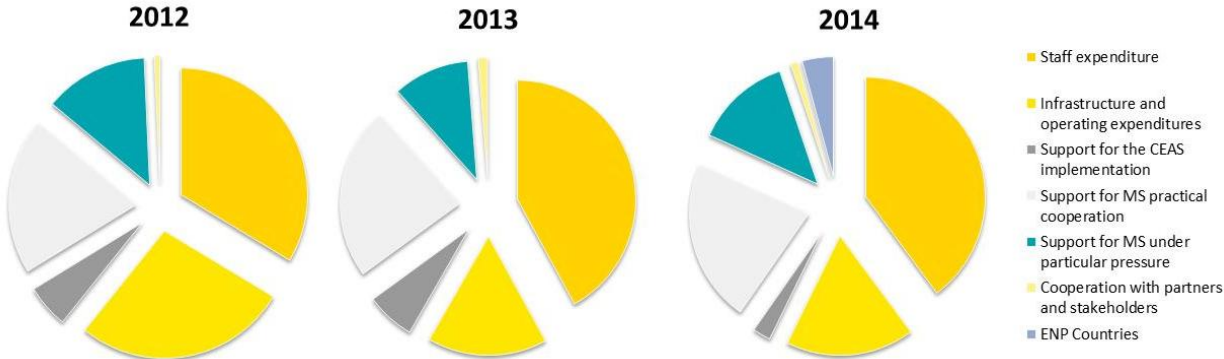
(Source: EASO annual activity reports 2012 – 2013; Budget 2014)

EASO's resources allocated to the support of the implementation of CEAS (i.e. annual report on asylum, early warning and data analysis and information and documentation system related expenditures) witnessed an increase over the period. On the other hand, EASO's budget for the remaining activities (support for MS under particular pressure and cooperation with partners and stakeholders) remained quite stable over the same period.

Figure 60: Comparison between 2012 – 2014 Budget distributions among EASO's Activities
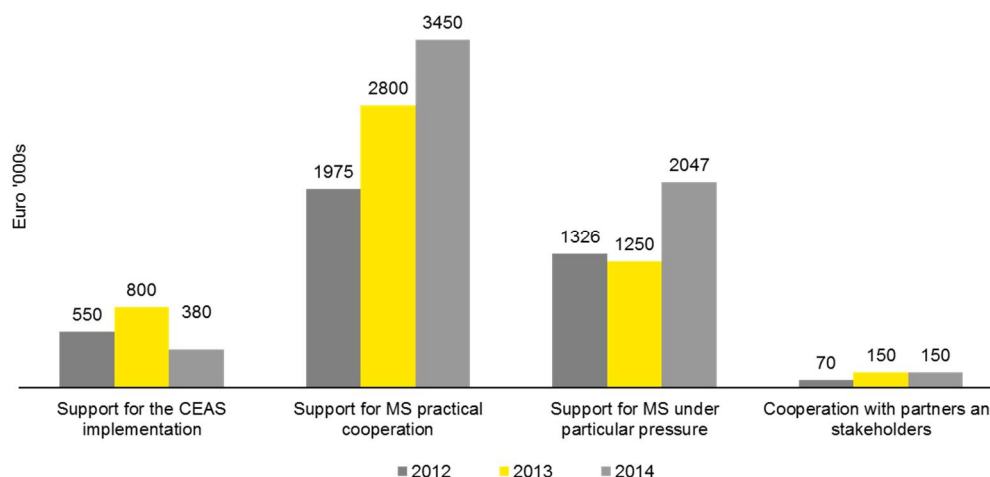
When considering the quality of resources allocation relating to objectives and activity evolution, stakeholders generally believed that quality of output is high because of the methodology and utilisation of in-house and external expertise on the different topics. On the other hand, some were also concerned that the small size of staff (such as in COS) limits their availability and presence on the ground, especially where support is needed.

However, despite the relatively limited resources, EASO is generally considered to be quite efficient by stakeholders when considering the objectives and activities carried out and the resources it has available.

As indicated in section 5.2, European-mandated HR and financial resource restrictions are considered (by staff members) to hamper the work that EASO can effectively and realistically carry out. Certain centres (ex. COI, CIDA and certain parts of the GAAU unit such as HR and IT support) claim that the availability of higher grades (and additional financial resources) would enable EASO to attract and retain higher numbers of more specialised human resources. This would ultimately lead to more and better work/services for MS.

6.3.2 EASO has achieved improvements in its resource allocation process

EASO undertook efforts to improve its resource allocation aimed at delivering outcomes at increasingly lower costs. The historic use of performance budgeting in agencies such as EASO is regarded as a means to increase flexibility to changing needs and priorities. Performance budgeting is seen as a budgetary tool to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of resource allocation.

This was the primary form of budgeting process adopted by EASO to date. As indicated earlier, this led to EASO's budget being built around its main 'mandate' functions rather than around its five main activities with the ultimate purpose of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of actions undertaken.

By connecting funding and results, performance budgeting encourages the budgetary authority to think about such processes in broader terms and to take into account how well resources are used when prioritising expenditure. It also enhances financial accountability to citizens and monitoring bodies, as it allows better management and evaluation.

On the other hand, the implementation of Activity Based Budgeting (ABB) in other European decentralised agencies (such as CEDEFOP) has been shown to help improve efficiency (and transparency) levels[91].

These experiences have led the Commission to encourage its decentralised agencies to move towards the introduction of ABB. In this respect, the introduction of basic elements of activity-based planning and budgeting to support the annual planning process and the monitoring of the actual performance of human resources' was considered to be one of the desirable recommendations aimed at EASO by the IAS in 2013[92]. The previously

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[91]Ramboll (2009), Evaluation of the EU decentralised agencies in 2009, Final Report Volume III Agency level findings (pg. 107)

[92] European Commission (2013), Annual report to the Discharge Authority on internal audits carried out in 2013

mentioned Ramboll report further highlights about half of the agencies (existing at the time) had implemented an activity based management system linking budget and actual expenditures with outputs and (in certain instances) with objectives[93].

6.3.3 EASO has started introducing SMART indicators and KPIs

The Commission has been pushing for agencies (including EASO) to define objectives as clearly and as precisely as possible in a SMART way, in line with the applicable Financial Regulations[94]. This allows the efficiency and effectiveness of each of EASO's activities (programmes or functions) to be determined better through the establishment of objectives, indicators and milestones or targets. Any identified objectives describe the outcome that the activity/programme seeks to achieve.

The AWPs have become more detailed and moved towards identification of SMART performance indicators since the drawing up and implementation of the 2013 and 2014 WPs. This will facilitate the monitoring of progress of SMART Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the various activity areas. In this respect the internal EASO (draft) Progress report for 2014 maps the performance of the different activities and initiatives against these KPIs. An analysis of the Progress report shows that many of the planned initiatives were undertaken fully, with some even surpassing specific benchmarks.

On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that certain EASO Units, such as COS, are also more exposed to the immediate aftermath of requests for 'quick' support than others (such as CTQE). Although steps have been taken to try to mitigate this (through for instance the development of the EPS or training and capacity building initiatives), this is a reality which cannot be completely avoided since no forecasting capacity has yet been developed at EASO level. Hence determining specific KPI indicators will also prove to be more challenging for certain EASO Units than others.

The Internal Audit Service (IAS) goes even further by recommending that such SMART objectives, supported by KPIs should also be set for each of the support plans[95]. A look at one of the most recent support plans, namely the Special Support Plan for Bulgaria agreed at the end of 2014, shows that the deliverables under each of the planned measures are more specific than those outlined in previous ones.

From an HR point of view, the establishment of "individual annual (SMART) objectives, aligned with EASO's objectives, for all staff members, forming the base for the yearly performance evaluation[96]" is another IAS recommendation. Although still to be implemented, the performance appraisal system for 2014 was considered to be at an advanced stage when this evaluation was being concluded.

However, the budget in EASO is still not apportioned by cluster of activities, which limits further analysis in this respect. Interviews held with EASO indicate mixed views with regards to the implementation of such activity based budgeting.

6.3.4 A number of other factors affect the efficiency of EASO's delivery

A number of other factors were identified in other evaluations as important for the EU's decentralised agencies to provide efficient services[97]. These include location, communication, mobilisation of national partners, standardisation, flexible allocation of resources and task sharing with MS and international bodies. The measures/initiatives that are being taken (or planned) by EASO in these areas, should lead to increasingly efficient outputs. Some of these measures are listed below. EASO has been adopting measures in these areas, in an effort to ensure that its operations become more efficient. These are outlined in Table 12 below.

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[93]Ramboll (2009), Evaluation of the EU decentralised agencies in 2009, Final Report Volume III Agency level findings, (pg.105)

[94] The Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities (as

well as the Financial Regulation for the bodies having legal personality)

[95] Internal Audit Service (2014), Final Audit report on implementation of support plans in EASO, (pg.5)

[96] Internal Audit Service (2014), Final Audit report on implementation of support plans in EASO

[97]Ramboll (2009), Evaluation of the EU decentralised agencies in 2009, Final Report Volume III Agency level findings, (pg. 104)

Table 12: Factors and EASO planned/implemented measures

Factors affecting agencies	EASO relevance	EASO planned/implemented measures
Location	Travel cost and time to EASO's Malta office often cited as a limiting factor for increased MS & stakeholders participation/contribution to EASO initiatives	Set up of regional training sessions and centrally located activities (Consultation Forum, Press Conferences etc.)
Communication	The nature of the area covered by EASO, as well as the heavy reliance on MS contributions makes communication	Increase in internal and external information and communication activities, with events in different MS and Press conferences in Brussels, linking with MS databases
Mobilization of national partners	EASO needs national partners to provide services in the different MS	Increased consultation with national partners in all stages and processes
Standardization	MS have developed different methodologies to deal with asylum applications	Migration definitions and data gathering methodology for EPS, Development of COI products, quality products, training and development of EAS
Flexible allocation of resources	EASO needs to respond quickly to MS needs	Quick reaction and setting up in reaction to MS requests, creation of emergency support measures, updating of budgets, plans and operations
Task sharing with MS and international bodies	EASO relies heavily on national experts' contribution at all levels and on cooperation with various international bodies	Set up and increase in NCP networks, practical cooperation working parties, other, increased consultation at all stages, development of AIP Aside from ongoing involvements of MS, Increase in cooperation on various fronts with UNHCR, FRA and other organisations

The Commission itself indicates that 'just like all the other EU institutions and bodies, agencies will need to improve their efficiency, and their workforces will need to be redeployed, where appropriate, in particular from coordination and support functions to operational activities'[98].

It is envisaged that certain tasks will be executed with less resources at EASO as a result of additional efficiency gains.

Although steps have been taken to try to mitigate for this (through for instance the development of the EPS or training and capacity building initiatives), this is a reality which cannot be completely avoided since no forecasting capacity has yet been developed at EASO level. Hence determining specific KPI indicators will also prove to be more challenging for certain EASO Centres than others.

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[98] European Commission (2013), Programming of human and financial resources for decentralised agencies, COM (2013) 519 final, (pg.18)

7 EU Added Value & external coherence

> _**Evaluation question:** To what extent has the creation of EASO provided added value to the European asylum policy, without duplicating the existing?_

Approach

According to the principle of subsidiarity, the added value of EASO's intervention mainly lies in ensuring harmonisation and co-ordination at European level. Most tasks carried out by EASO are new and did not exist before its creation, though, in a limited number of cases, some kind of predecessor activity was incorporated into the agency (e.g. the COI portal, EAC and EURASIL). Under this question, we undertake to assess the added value brought about by the creation of EASO for:

► **EU-level stakeholders**: EU policy making institutions, EU agencies and bodies, European Court of Justice and European Court of Human Rights, Civil society organisations at the EU level, members of the Consultative Forum

► **National stakeholders**: EASO national contact points, national asylum authorities, courts and tribunals, NGOs at national level

► **External stakeholders**: International organisations (e.g. UNHCR, IRC, IGC), third countries mentioned in the EASO external action strategy (e.g. Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia).

The question of external coherence has been identified to complement those set forth by the terms of reference. A number of other instruments are in fact dealing with asylum and migration issues, such as the JHA agencies and international organisations. In particular, the complementarity with the scope of intervention of Frontex, EMN and UNHCR shall be examined.

Main findings

► **EASO has contributed to an increased workload for national administrations.** The workload related to asylum and reception has increased due to legal requirements and deeper cooperation. In return, **EASO has brought additional outputs, such as training material.**

► The relationship between EASO and its national and EU stakeholders are considered organised and mostly satisfactory.

► Despite the number of players in the JHA field, EASO has proven useful. It has worked to implement optimal coordination, but it could still be improved.

7.1 EASO has created added value for MS

7.1.1 EASO created new tools, such as its training material,and additional supportfor national administrations

According to the national stakeholders that took part in the survey, EASO's information and analysis created added value to their work in many ways: 74% of them particularly appreciate EASO' aggregating and harmonising national data at EU level while 65% also underline that EASO has allowed the release of analysis of data from different supranational sources. Moreover, 68% believe that EASO gives assurance that quality data is provided. The quality of data issued by EASO is unanimously recognised by all Management Board members. Many NGO representatives also share this view. Finally, 78% are positive EASO has helped create new comparative information at European level (Figure 61). The opinions of Management Board members, and EU agencies' and NGOs' representatives concur on that matter.

Specifically, Annual Reports on the situation of Asylum in the EU and COI reports are praised for the usefulness and quality.

Figure 61: The value added from EASO's information and analysis support mainly lies in:
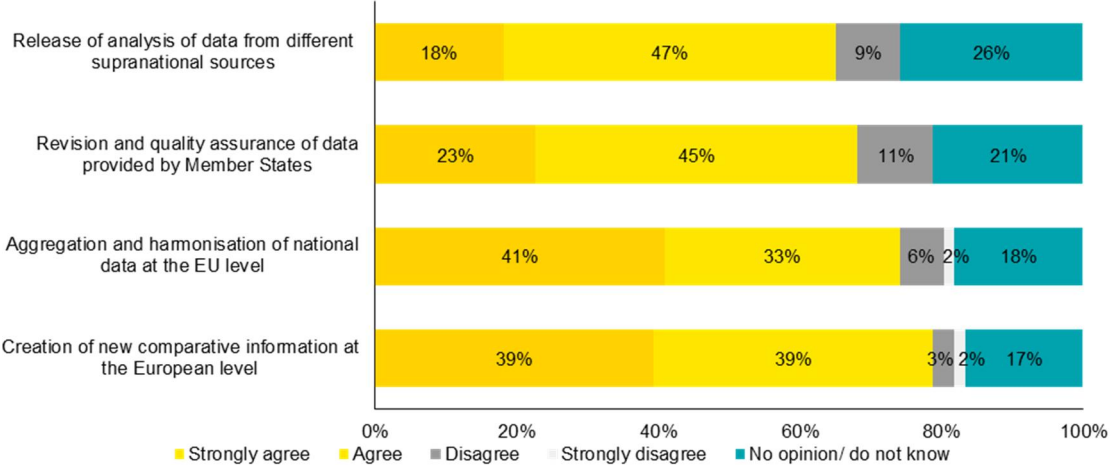
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 66 national stakeholders)

EASO additionally supplied high quality training, which is recognised as quite unique. 28% of the experts and trainers that took part in the survey are convinced no similar training is available. 66% believe participants could have used other trainings, but these would have either lacked the European dimension, or been more expensive (Figure 62).

Figure 62: Had EASO's training not been offered, would participants have found another similar training at the national or international level?
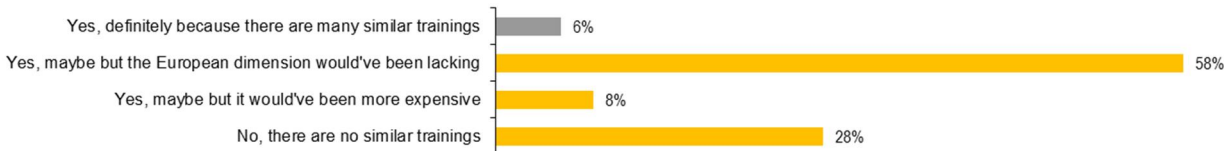
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 36 experts and trainers)

Moreover, EASO's training has many advantages: it is updated with respect to the European, international and national legislation and practice according to a large majority of experts and trainers (Figure 63). It is also

straightforward (57%), easily understandable and transferable (60%). Last, it is operational enough for participants to use it in their daily work (39%).

Figure 63: Would you say the material produced by EASO is?
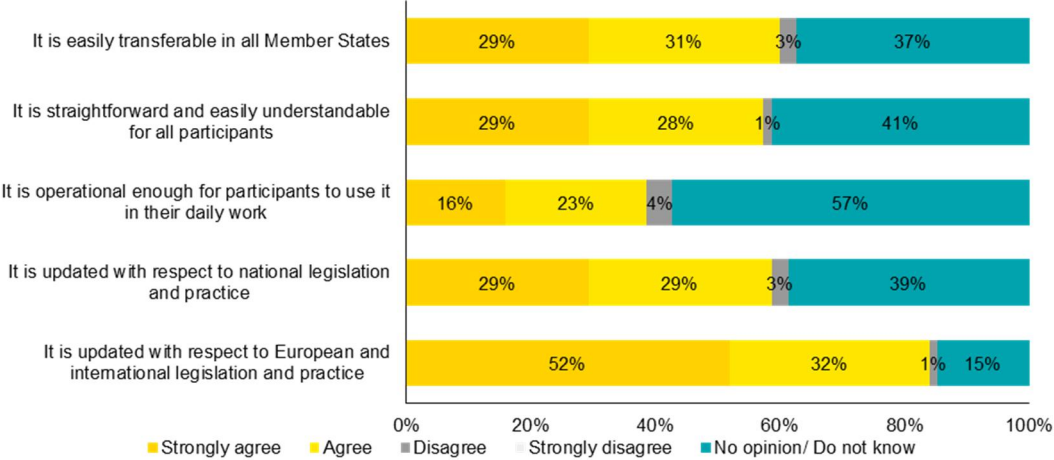
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 75 experts and trainers)

The information created by EASO can't be isolated from the cooperation the Agency has spurred between MS. By increasing the exchange of information and good practices, EASO encouraged operational cooperation with and between MS (as already mentioned in section 4.2.2). 67% of the national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers from the survey deem that EASO will bring added value to the coherent implementation of the CEAS in the next three years. 55% considered that this would probably, in turn, reinforce practical cooperation on asylum (Figure 64).

Figure 64: Will EASO add value in the following fields in the next 3 years?
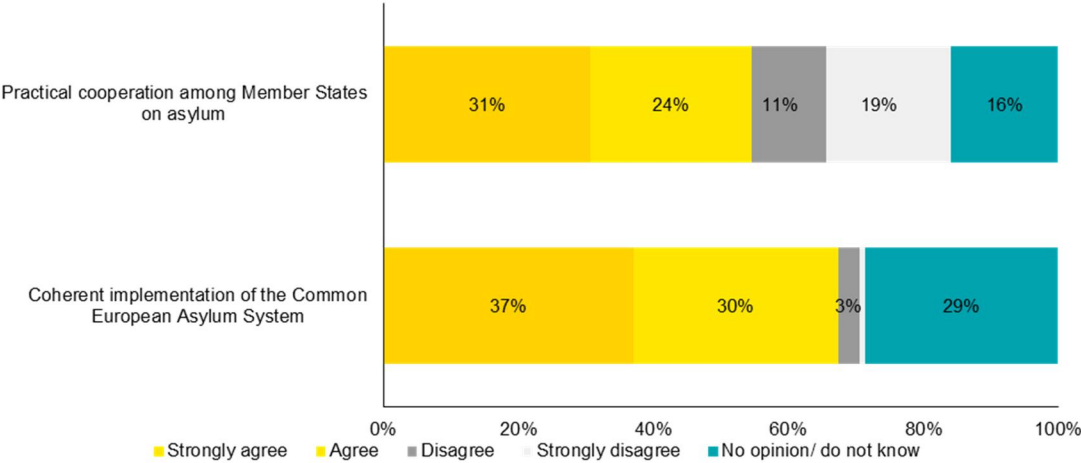
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 186 national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers)

7.1.1 Although the workload on MS increased due to legal requirements and deeper cooperation, EASO's requests are generally considered useful and justified

Stricter requirements have been introduced by the new asylum package

According to many Management Board members, EASO increased the workload at a national level. Attendance to Management Board and practical cooperation meetings, increased information demands and additional analysis to report upon created more work for national administrations. However, EASO aims at taking up part of national administrations' workload, and the circumstantial workload increase that emerged may be fast absorbed by EASO and MS cooperation.

The Dublin III Regulation increased the workload weighing on national administrations, by reducing the time-frame for a Dublin transfer, introducing the possibility for each asylum seeker to appeal against such transfer and the obligation to detain migrants where there is "significant risk of absconding", and finally by increasing the provisions to help asylum seekers under 18, especially unaccompanied minors.

Consequently, EASO support may also have led to additional work for national authorities. According to some Management Board members, EASO support sometimes induced a reorganisation of national asylum systems. For instance, EASO contributed to the implementation of the new asylum package in Italy by providing a series of recommendations and training with respect to the application of the new Dublin III Regulation.

MS also willingly increased their commitment to deeper and wider cooperation

MS are increasingly involved in EASO's activities, for example by sending an increased number of experts (see section 4.3.1). National administrations spontaneously undertook efforts to be present at EASO's events. These activities and events account for additional work for national asylum systems. In most cases, no additional staff were recruited; with the workload thus automatically rising.

Therefore, while it appears that national workload increased due to supplementary constraints imposed on them (e.g. evolution of the Dublin Regulation), it also increased due to the willingness of MS to be increasingly involved in EASO's activities as they are convinced of the added value of cooperation at EU level in relation to asylum.

Nonetheless, EASO's requests are generally considered useful and justified

Most Management Board members consider the constraints caused by the creation of EASO to be worthwhile due to the associated improvement of the asylum system and response. Some believe that EASO helped improve the efficiency of national work. Indeed, training improved the preparation of national civil servants. Many feel better informed about the asylum situation on the national level, best practices, challenges and solutions, as well as latest trends and developments. Consequently, their level of readiness to face a surge in asylum seekers has been enhanced. Moreover, according to the survey, this general opinion translated into time and/or savings in 30% of the cases[99].

Nevertheless, the added value of the Agency depends on the MS in question. Some national representatives consider that the burden imposed by EASO's activities currently outweighs its advantages. This is typically the opinion of representatives whose country has provided but not yet required support. However, a majority believe that final judgment cannot yet be drawn and remain convinced that EASO will eventually be largely beneficial to MS, and more broadly to the CEAS. EASO may even be able to bring a great deal to MS, but it appears to be hindered by the flaws of its own communication system. This is confirmed by the fact that the majority of members of Courts and Tribunals think that knowing more about EASO's activity could be helpful for their work (Figure 39, page 56).

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[99]Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 64 national stakeholders "Has any activity of your national administration become more time or cost efficient as a result of EASO's work?" Answers: 31% Yes and 69% No.

7.1.2 MS would not have achieved similar progress without EASO

Some stakeholders feel that EASO's support plans have helped MS to achieve progress. 27% of the surveyed national stakeholders consider that EASO's emergency support helped their country achieve the expected medium to long term changes needed in their national asylum system in order to implement the revised EU asylum acquis (Figure 37, page 54). Indeed, according to the pool of experts and trainers that participated in the survey, had EASO's support plan not been implemented, the supported country would not have achieved similar progress towards the implementation of the CEAS in their area of intervention (Figure 65).

Figure 65: Had EASO's support plans not been implemented, the supported country would have achieved similar progress towards the implementation of the CEAS.
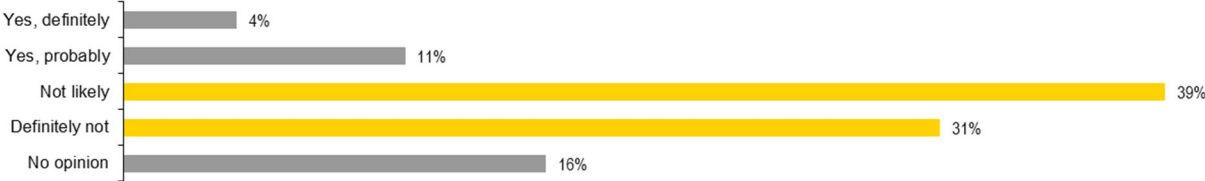
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 95 experts and trainers)

However, others believe the ability of EASO to provide operational support is largely overestimated. In particular, special support plans impact is criticised. Changes noticed on the field could not be exclusively attributed to EASO.

Even though the impact of EASO's support could probably be improved, it is important to note that the impact of an intervention highly depends on the political will of the MS concerned. Several NGOs representatives testified that national authorities are often reluctant to call for support, as it would disclose the flaws of their national asylum system.

Furthermore, EASO will certainly enhance its added value to MS subject to particular migratory pressure. 79% of the national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers that have participated in the survey believe they will see such progress in the next 3 years (Figure 66).

Figure 66: Will EASO bring added value to MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems in the next 3 years?
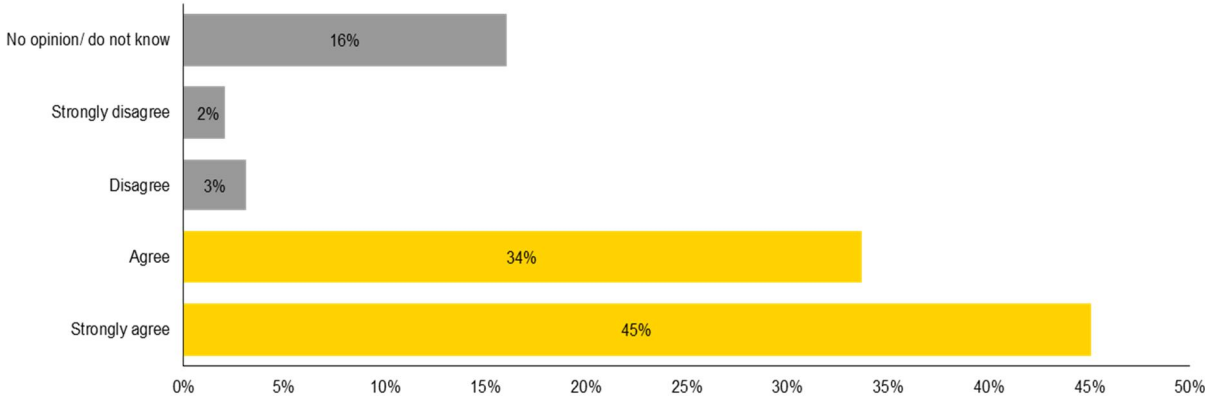
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 193 national stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers)

7.1.3 Due to the activity of national administrations, duplicatons persist

The rise of EASO and the development of its activities predictably generated duplications, as national authorities continue implementing some tasks which were since taken up by the Agency. Indeed, 65% of the surveyed national stakeholders deem that duplications remain between the activity of national administrations and that of EASO (Figure 67).

Figure 67: Do duplications remain between the activity of your national administration and the tasks carried out by EASO?

(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 20 national stakeholders)

The following areas were identified where possible overlapping exists between EASO and national administrations: COI analys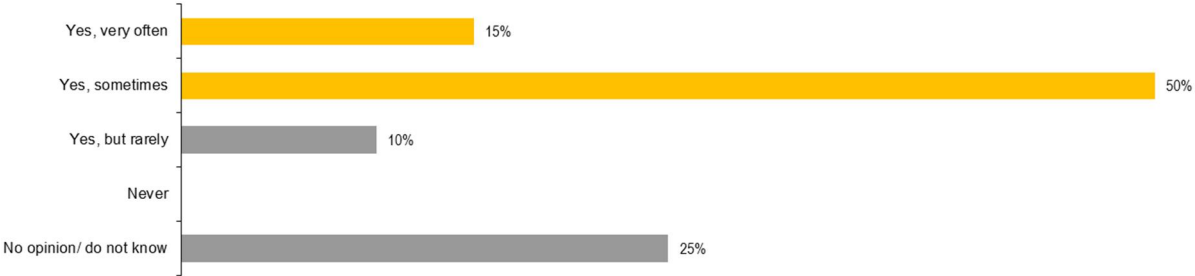is and reports on specific countries depending on the MS, Statistical analysis and reporting, and training. Resettlement and the analysis of case law were also mentioned by survey respondents, although EASO has not been very active in these fields yet.

This is, to some degree understandable, considering that EASO's mandate is to support the MS, not to do their work. Respondents also recognise that, although they might cover the same perimeter, many EASO products break new ground on analysis of the situation of asylum in the EU.

7.2 EASO has managed to develop an organised and satisfactory cooperation with national and EU stakeholders

Cooperation with EU institutions

As already detailed in Section 5.4.4, EASO was actively involved in cooperation with EU institutions since the beginning of its mandate. Stakeholders consulted consider that this cooperation with EU institutions is highly satisfactory and will continue. Examples are provided in the aforementioned section.

Cooperation with national representatives

Most national stakeholders participating in the survey were in contact with EASO since 2010. An overwhelming 87% were involved with EASO for more than 3 years now (Figure 68). EASO was able to get in touch with national stakeholders very quickly after its creation and to leverage on long standing relations since then.

Figure 68: Year of national stakeholders' first contact with EASO.

Contacts between EASO and national representatives were very frequent ever since. 73% estimate that they are able to exchange with EASO at least once a month (Figure 69). As a result, 98% of them are satisfied with the frequency of contacts with EASO (Figure 70).

Figure 69: Frequency of contacts national stakeholders' contacts with EASO.
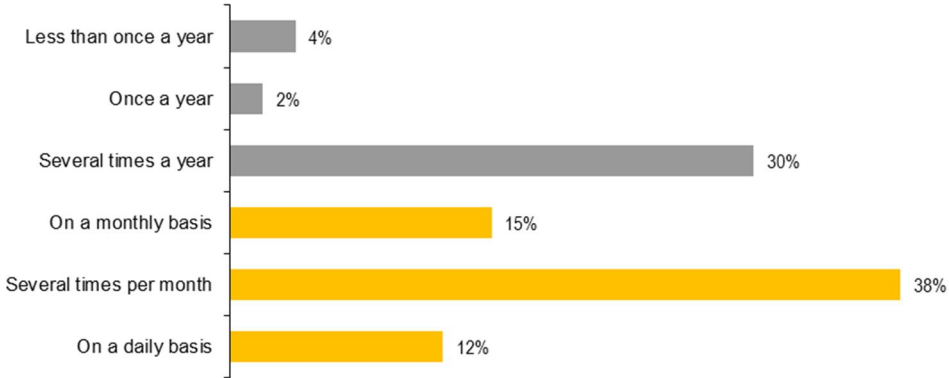
National stakeholders, members of Courts and Tribunals, experts and trainers are not only happy with the frequency of their contacts with EASO, they are generally very satisfied with the quality of these contacts. Although some signs of fatigue may have been registered due to the increased solicitations received from the Agency, survey results show that the quality and frequency of contacts is highly appreciated. 89% of respondents deem the quality of their contacts with EASO is either satisfactory or very satisfactory (Figure 70).

Figure 70: Appreciation of the quality and the frequency of national stakeholders' contacts with EASO.
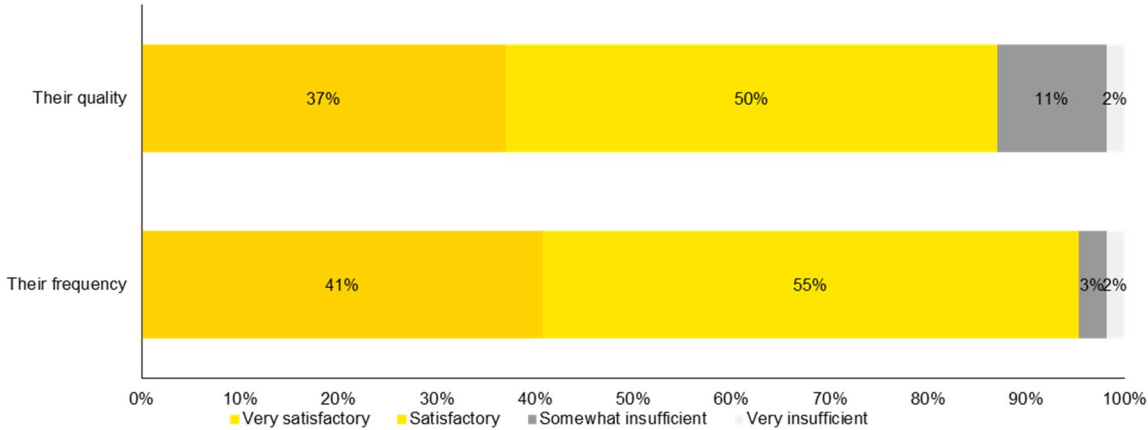
At a more operational level, the communication and coordination between EASO and national administration during the implementation of support plans is also satisfying. The roles and responsibilities between EASO's team and national administrations were clearly identified in the implementation of the special and emergency support according to more than half of the surveyed national stakeholders. 54% deem the involvement of their national

administration in the design and drafting of emergency support to be good, even though opinions do not concur on the emergency support.

Figure 71: Were the roles and responsibilities between EASO's team and your national administration clearly identified in the implementation of the support plans?
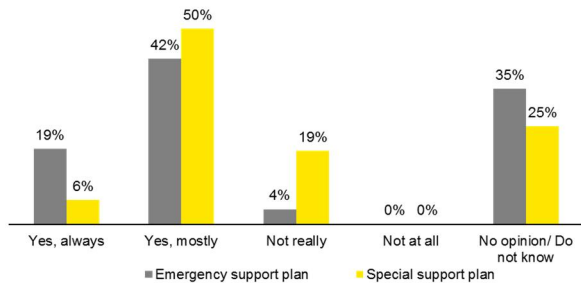
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 26 national stakeholders)

Figure 72: Has the involvement of your national administration in the design and drafting of the support plans been satisfactory?
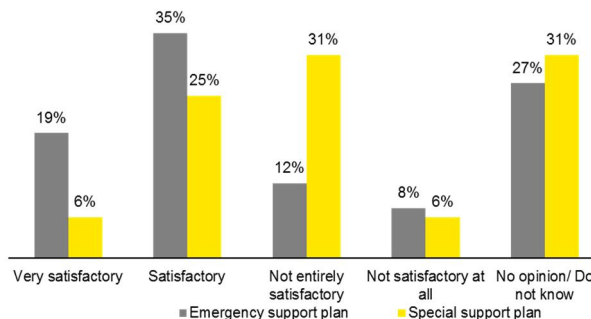
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 26 national stakeholders)

Experts and trainers are equally satisfied with the cooperation and communication with the national authorities supported by EASO. 58% deemed that national authorities from the supported country responded adequately to their questions. 63% believe communication with national authorities in the supported country was frequent enough (Figure 73). They are also positive that EASO has provided them with enough information on cooperation and communication with the national authorities (Figure 74).

Figure 73: Experts and trainers' opinion on communication and cooperation with supported MS
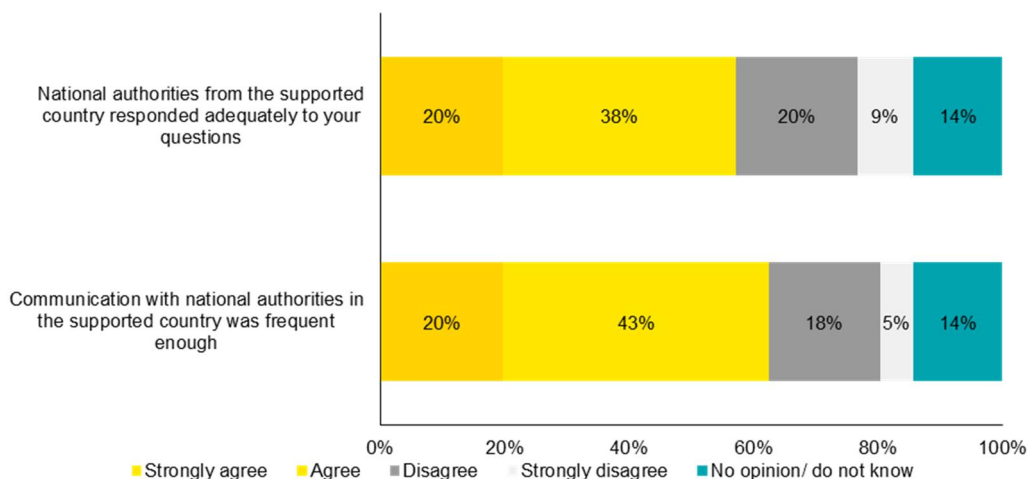
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 56 experts and trainers)

Figure 74: Experts and trainers' opinion on information provided by EASO on communication and cooperation with supported MS during deployment.
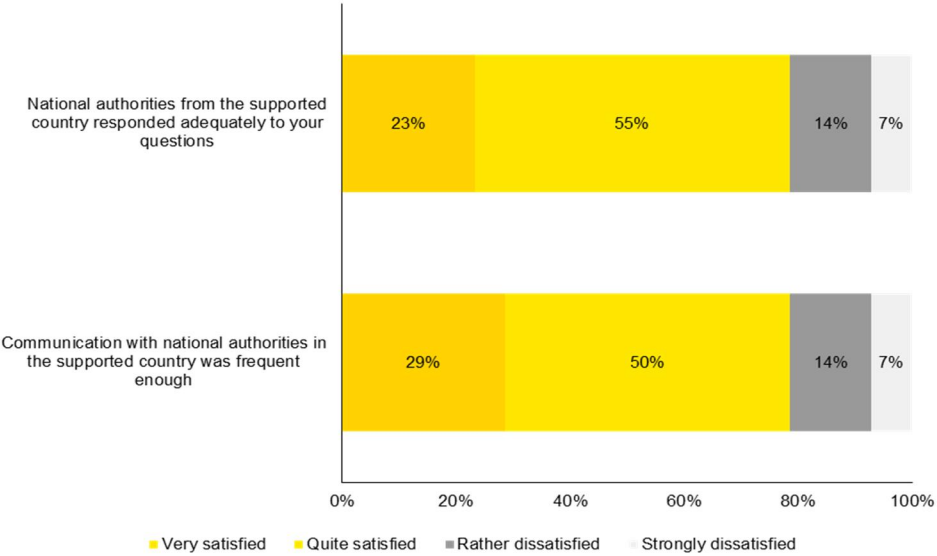
(Source: EY Survey 2015, respondents: 56 experts and trainers)

To conclude, evidence shows that EASO's coordination with MS is highly satisfactory.

7.3 EASO has filled a gap in the field of EU migration and asylum policy, but overlaps with other instruments remain

7.3.1 A great number of players exist in the JHA field

The European Union has set up a number of decentralised agencies to carry out specific legal, technical or scientific tasks within the European Union. The EU regulatory agencies are independent, and have their own legal personality. They provide added value by facilitating the implementation of policies, enhancing dialogue and helping share information and expertise. EU agencies also provide practical support to MS and EU institutions.

The density of agencies in the JHA field and the necessity to closely coordinate their intervention was already highlighted in the 2009 Evaluation of the EU decentralised agencies system, which intervened before the creation of EASO: "With many agencies working in related areas there are naturally a significant number of interfaces between agencies that may be complementary or overlapping, coherent (even synergetic) or counterproductive."[100]

The JHA agencies established a network, in 2006, to foster bilateral and multilateral cooperation and synergies in areas of common interest, such as strategic and operational work, external relations or training. As from 1 January 2014, EASO took over the Chair of the network.

In addition to EU Agencies, other networks exist at EU level. The European Migration Network, for example, created for the exchange of information on policy developments at national level on issues relating to migration and asylum has also played a role in the collection of data relating to the asylum process.

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[100]"Evaluation of the EU decentralised agencies in 2009 - Final Report Volume II - Conclusions at SystemLevel", December 2009

The evidence collected indicates that EASO's competencies can mostly be compared with those of Frontex, FRA and EMN, which are all involved in migration related activities to a certain extent. Figure 75 portrays their respective field of intervention, showing where some activities are similar and might overlap.

Figure 75 : Overview of the competencies of relevant JHA agencies and networks
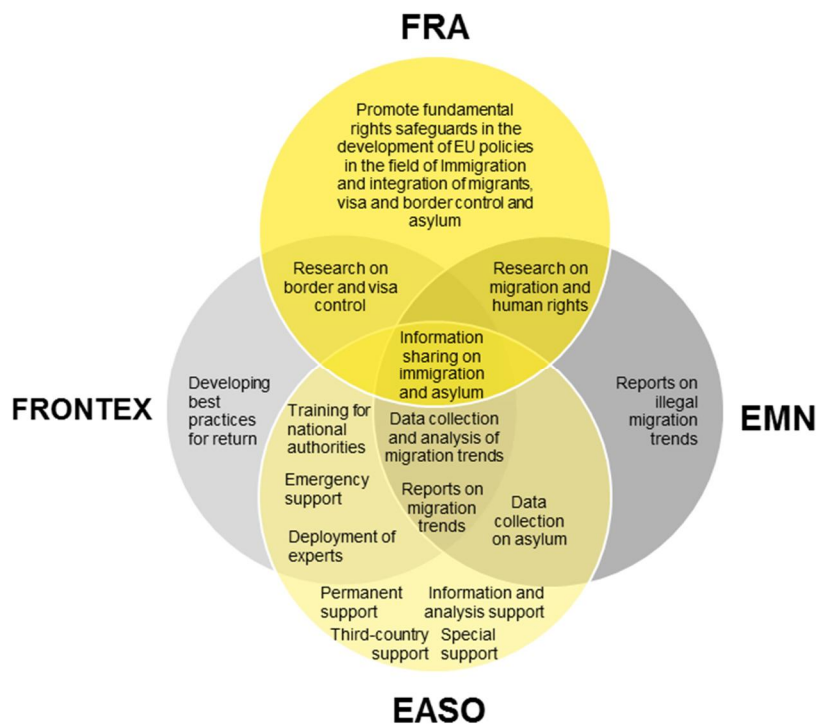
(Source: Office of the European Union, The EU justice and home affairs agencies)

A deeper analysis of the potential overlaps existing in EASO, FRA, FRONTEX and EMN activities' shows that:

► The four entities (EASO, FRA, FRONTEX and EMN) work to improve information sharing on immigration and asylum across the European Union, but their approaches somewhat diverge:

  ▪ FRA focuses on making fundamental rights a reality by undertaking comparative research across a range of thematic areas in the context of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;

  ▪ EASO contributes to the coherent implementation of the CEAS by facilitating, coordinating and strengthening practical cooperation among MS on the many aspects of asylum;

  ▪ FRONTEX focuses on the management of the EU external borders, it deals specifically with pressure and controls at the European borders; and

  ▪ EMN adopts a wider approach and provides information on migration and asylum topics to policy makers and the general public.

► The two JHA agencies (EASO and FRONTEX) and the European Migration Network are in charge of data collection and analysis, as far as migration is concerned. They also issue studies and reports on migration trends:

  ▪ EASO published on the situation of asylum in the EU and on the countries of origin of migrants;

  ▪ FRONTEX conducts research on best practices in the field of border controls and elaborates reports on migration risks and illegal border crossing. It relies on EASO as far as asylum related data is concerned; and

  ▪ EMN publishes information reports on the situation of migrations and asylum.

► Both EASO and EMN collect data on asylum. However, EASO exclusively focuses on asylum whereas EMN also tackles the subject of legal and illegal immigration in general.

► Concerning the coordination with Frontex, it should be highlighted that:

- FRONTEX training curricula targets border guards, while EASO focuses on asylum officials, managers, legal officers and the judiciary;

- EASO provides emergency support to repair or rebuild the asylum and reception systems of MS subject to particular pressures, whereas FRONTEX coordinates the rapid deployment of European Border Guard Teams in MS subject to particular pressures; and

- Both agencies are developing experience on return.

7.3.2 Since its creation, EASO has made an effort to clarify its field of intervention

EASO elaborated working arrangements with four EU and international organisations: FRONTEX, UNHCR, FRA and EU-Lisa. These arrangements aim at establishing a more structured cooperation framework on relevant areas of common work, creating synergies and fostering coherence between the different actions pursued by EASO and the other organisations[101].

The working arrangement with FRONTEX was the first to be signed. A number of EU policy documents, including the Stockholm Programme and a range of Council Conclusions and Commission Communications had long stressed the importance of genuine and practical solidarity towards MS facing particular pressures on their asylum and border management systems and underlined the need for ever closer cooperation between the two EU Agencies.

Cooperation between EASO and FRONTEX is often considered prolific. Most Management Board members find it natural for FRONTEX and EASO to cooperate. FRONTEX attends Management Board meetings. Cooperation with FRA is also valued. However, the majority of Management Board members believe duplication cannot be totally avoided, since the mandates of all the JHA agencies are very similar.

EASO also works with many other organisations such as the Council of Europe. Generally, stakeholders recognise the quality of the cooperation between EASO and international organisations. Some Management Board members think the main added value of this cooperation is the work on asylum experts achieved together.

7.3.3 Coordination with other organisations could be improved

In some fields, EASO has proven more efficient than existing structures. Some Management Board members testified that EASO's monthly reports on early warning statistics are much more up to date than the EUROSTAT statistics. Most national stakeholders that took part in our survey also deemed that EASO is able to provide data faster than EUROSTAT.

Still, a number of Management Board members underlined the risk of duplication. In particular, the European Migration Network (EMN) was mentioned by five Management Board members: some are afraid it does not coordinate with EASO despite the fact they cover similar fields; others believe that the asylum functions of EMN are now covered by EASO and the two entitiess should consequently optimise their coordination.

According to several Management Board members, EASO and UNHCR have been in competition since the beginning. The situation has improved; good dialogue has been developed, notably through the implementation of the working agreements. The two organisations have worked closely together especially in Greece but also in Hungary and Italy. Nonetheless, it seems that mutual knowledge and cooperation could be taken one step further.

EASO is mandated to coordinate all stakeholders and MS in case of emergency. However, UNHCR and EASO have both conducted their own interventions in MS under specific pressure and some temporary measures have overlapped, according to some UNHCR's representatives. Moreover, some national authorities prefer using the UNHCR training and standards.

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[101] The main areas of cooperation between EASO and other organisations, according to the working arrangements are analysed in Appendix 9.7.

However, both sides seem to be willing to help each other. UNHCR as a nonvoting Member of the EASO Management Board and as member of the EASO Consultative Forum has been very active in EASO's activities and has cooperated with EASO on a wide range of issues. The working arrangement has further strengthened this cooperation. EASO and UNHCR say they are ready to work together on many issues, including the implementation of the article 33 of the Dublin Regulation.

Lines of coordination have de facto emerged in their respective scope of intervention. The case of Bulgaria has showed that, being already present on the field, UNHCR can deploy a more immediate response in urgent cases, whereas EASO has, by its mandate, to wait for a request from the national authorities before intervening and remains dependent on the availability of national experts. Another example is contingency planning, an activity highly appreciated by national representatives, which EASO is increasingly developing, but that is not tackled by UNHCR.

Potential overlapping also appears with the General Directors of Immigration Services Conference (GDISC). Indeed, GDISC aims at being a network to "Initiate, co-ordinate and improve practical co-operation between Immigration Services responsible for the implementation of migration and asylum issues in Europe". It is also willing to be a platform for exchanging experiences, best practices and building up networks of experts. Consequently, EASO and GDISC are both designed to facilitate cooperation, specifically in the field of asylum.

8 Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this section were elaborated on the basis of the findings highlighted in the previous sections. This section is organised in line with the structure of the report and all recommendations are accompanied by a short discussion clearly linking them to the underlying findings and providing any other necessary information. Recommendations are further divided into the main recommendation and operational actions, which provide guidance on implementing the latter. **In total, 9 recommendations were formulated by the evaluation team.**

The recommendations were divided into strategic and operational ones. Actions leading to their implementation were also identified and their time horizon (short term, less than 6 months; medium, up to 2 years and long term, if beyond) is proposed in the table below. The responsible parties were identified as the main initiators behind each action, but also as the key stakeholder in their successful implementation.

Recommendation	Actions	Timing	Responsible parties
Strategic recommendations			
► **R1.**Foster political willingness for an update of EASO's mandate in order to cover relevant topics and to include all additional tasks deriving from the evolving legal and political framework	► Amendment of the EASO Regulation to include new tasks assigned to EASO and deriving from the evolving scenario in which the Agency operates	Long term, up to 5 years	EASO, ED, MB, EC
	► Ensure the financial and operative sustainability of the revised mandate on the basis of an impact assessment	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO, ED, MB, EC
	► Reconsider the strategy on third country support	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO, ED, MB
► **R2.**Strengthen the involvement of civil society during the programming phase of EASO's activities	► Review and integrate the current composition of the Consultative Forum	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO
	► Strengthen the quality and efficiency effectiveness of the consultative process by introducing new communication channels for the consultation	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO,
	► Test the viability of NGO participation in the delivery of support plans on a case by case basis	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO, ED, MB
► **R3.**Better communicate upon the results and impacts of its activities	► Mandate external and independent evaluations of emergency and special support plans at the end of each phase	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO, ED, MB
	► Develop a reporting system on MS progress towards the implementation of the acquis	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO, ED
	► Reinforce communication on EASO's activities addressed to MS and civil society	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO, ED
► **R4.**Further clarify the coordination with other EU agencies	► Streamline coordination with EMN	Long term, up to 5 years	EASO, EMN, DG HOME

and international organisations, in particular EMN and UNHCR	► Streamline coordination with the UNHCR	Long term, up to 5 years	EASO, UNHCR
Operational recommandations			
► **R5.**Improve the need assessment process of MS requesting EASO's support	► Enhance the capabilities of the Centre for Operational Support	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO, ED
	► Develop additional quality skills assessment for experts and trainers	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO
	► Further involve MS beneficiaries support during the assessment phase	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO
► **R6.**Streamline the experts sent out to MS in order to facilitate their participation	► Improve identification contact points within national administration	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO
	► Quantify contact points contribution in advance	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO
	► Define the roles and responsibilities of national administrations when designing of the special support plans	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO
	► Organise regional practical cooperation activities	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO
	► Increase use of electronic meetings	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO
► **R7.**Revise the overall procedure for the provision of ASTs	► Include the possibility for the Agency to have in house capacity for experts and trainers within EASO Regulation	Long term, up to 5 years	EASO, EC
	► Amend the Management Board's that defines the profiles and the overall number of experts to be made available for the Asylum Support Teams (Asylum Intervention Pool)	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO, ED, MB
	► Adopt a new decision for the setting up of a shortlist of national experts and trainers to be deployed in extraordinary situations	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO
► **R8.**Increase the number, depth and usage of EASO internal communication flows and co-ordination processes	► Increase use of the Intranet for better information sharing	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO
	► Create central coordination point for improved distribution of tasks	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO
	► Improve staff involvement at different levels	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO
	► Outline roles of the different Centres and create cross-Centre activities	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO
► **R9.**Speed up the implementation of the EASO performance appraisal procedure	► Complete the introduction of performance appraisal system at EASO	Short term, less than 6 months	EASO
	► Step up particular internal evaluation processes	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO
	► Further encourage the adoption of SMART indicators	Medium term, up to 2 years	EASO

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8.1 Strategic recommendations

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

The evaluation found that the mandate of EASO – as provided by Regulation 439/2010 - is perceived as clear in terms of objectives and tasks by national and European stakeholders. Given that the mandate was defined as moderately generic, evaluators found that the legal basis is overall perceived as rather flexible and open to interpretation and that the current mandate responds adequately to most of the MS needs. Nevertheless, according to the evaluation exercise both based on documentary review conducted on legal and policy documents and on evidence collected during interviews with EASO's officials and national and EU stakeholders, evaluators found that a number of issues and tasks could be better addressed by updating the EASO's mandate.

According to the documentary review conducted on EU policy documents and on the recast legal framework on asylum, adopted after the establishment of EASO, a number of new tasks were assigned to the Agency, complementing those enshrined in the founding Regulation and deemed as necessary to fully implement the CEAS and provide effective responses to increasing migratory pressures. Such evolution of the tasks assigned to EASO is having an impact on the Agency's functioning, in terms of both operational and financial organisation.

In addition, interviews with national and EU stakeholders shed light on various MS emerging needs which are not covered by the mandate (e.g. integration), are not currently mentioned within the EASO Regulation (e.g. return and joint processing) or which are mentioned within the Regulation but could be further assistedthrough the Agency's work (e.g. reception). Provided there is sufficient political willingness at national and EU levels, EASO's mandate as enshrined in the Regulation could be updated to cover better the abovementioned MS needs.

Moreover, the agency should reconsider some part of its strategyon third country support, given the lack of consensus regarding the Agency's activities in this field.

Amend the EASO Regulation to include new tasks assigned to EASO and deriving from the evolving scenario in which the Agency operates

The Agency's mandate could be updated with the new asylum legal framework, key policy documents and stakeholders' perception on EASO's mandate in mind, also in light of the increasing involvement of the Agency in the European Migration Agenda. This would imply a formal amendment to the Regulation in order to meet the new tasks assigned to EASO and to eventually cover relevant topics which are not explicitly mentioned within the regulation (i.e. return, integration).

Ensure the financial and operative sustainability of the revised mandate on the basis of an impact assessment

The above mentioned amendment of EASO's Regulation will imply the inclusion of new tasks for the Agency, which should be carried out while ensuring the fulfilment of its mission. Hence, it is necessary to assess the organisational and financial impact that may arise from such an update, possibly through an impact assessment. Such analysis will allow the alignment between the Agency's budget and organisational structure andthe set of tasks assigned to it. This will eventually lead to the definition of a work plan and of a roadmap in which the EC, the Agency and the MS should take active part.

Reconsider the strategy on third country support

It is widely recognised that helping third-countries is instrumental in ensuring the implementation of a reliable CEAS, since it could contribute to strengthening asylum and reception capacity in third countries in order to better

protect asylum seekers. It could also allow the facilitation of the resettlement of refugees from third countries to the EU, and increase cooperation with third countries in matters connected with EASO's duties and activities. On the other hand it is clear that there is no consensus on third-country support amongst MS. National authorities agree neither on the list of countries that should be supported nor on the use of EASO's budget for third-country support.

To reconcile stakeholders, EASO should provide more information on the impact of its actions in the field. It should also better define its goals. This would allow evidence-based negotiations within the framework of the Management Board.

EASO should make sure there is evidence of the impact of the actions implemented. For this reason, the Agency should report more and better upon the results of actions taken up to date. Valid data could help decision making during Management Board meetings and provide reasonable assurance that EASO's budget is efficiently allocated. A precise reporting procedure should be formalised.

Within the framework of the annual and multi-annual WP, EASO should better define the objectives and activities to be implemented, which are still not clearly acknowledged by stakeholders at the EU and national level.

Finally, EASO should secure full support from the Management Board before pursuing further action in this field.

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

The involvement of civil society over the programming phase of EASO's activities should be further strengthened and sustained, overtaking formal aspects of consultation and building on progress made by EASO over its first years of operation.

Evaluators found that a significant proportion of interviewees belonging to civil society and NGOs are not entirely satisfied with the consultation process undertaken by EASO with regard to the programming period, mainly due to some rigidities and formal aspects of the process. In particular, according to many interviewees the consultation process with civil society over the first years of EASO's operation, even if planned and implemented on time, did not appear satisfactory in terms of representativeness of NGOs involved and channels of consultations adopted.

The Agency should guarantee an adequate representativeness of civil society actors belonging to all MS and active in each EASO area of intervention and follow up more closely the results of consultation with NGOs and civil society.

Review and integrate the current composition of the Consultative Forum

EASO should assess the current membership of the Consultative Forum and review the parameters for its composition in order to guarantee a fair level of representativeness of its actors in terms of geographic location and competencies with regard to EASO activities (e.g. training, data collection, COI and operational support).

The evaluation concluded that in order to improve the consultation process with civil society representatives, EASO could reform the composition and setting up of the CF, introducing in the Consultative Forum Operational Plan thresholds of representativeness for members so that they could reflect the activities implemented by the Agency (e.g. training, COI, information and analysis, etc.) and their geographic belonging within the EU. This reform would ensure that specific national needs and contributions are taken into account within the Agency's consultation and programming phase as well as during the drafting of the annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU. To give an example of how the reform of the EASO Consultative Forum Register (ECFR) could work, the Agency could require that for each MS there should be a number of actors (e.g. civil society representatives, academics, NGOs) with specific expertise in the support area in which the Agency operates. This action could boost significantly the discussion within the CF and also lead, in the mid-term, to an improvement of practical cooperation amongst MS in the field of training, data collection, COI and operational support.

Strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the consultative process by introducing new communication channels for the consultation

The Agency should strengthen the quality and efficiency of the consultative process by adopting a less formal way of collecting contributions by civil society (e.g. social collaboration through the e-consultation platform, organisation of national conferences or special training session at national level, etc.) and establishing a more open and complex dialogue during the drafting phase of the AWP.

Whilst the evaluation highlighted that year after year EASO gave an increasing attention to the potential contribution of civil society in the Agency activities, a further effort should be put by the Agency to increasecivil society involvement within the consultation process and in analysing and capitalising inputs related to the drafting phase of the AWP. This will help overcome rigidities deriving from formal communication channels (e.g. email). Such an approach would allow EASO to increase the effectiveness of the civil society consultation process and to better identify relevant information and activities for the AWP drafting phase according to the priorities assigned by civil society and NGOs to them.

No specific risks were identified in implementing these actions, apart from the fact that the Agency should be able to deal with a potentially largernumber of contributions sent by civil society, leading to a higher workload.

Test the viability of NGO participation in the delivery of support plans on a case by case basis

NGO participation in the delivery of support plans could be fruitful. It is crucial that the viability of such involvement is assessed on a case by case basis. EASO should first ensure that they reach an agreement with the host MS. Furthermore, a strict selection process should be elaborated. It could rely on the principles of the selection of experts and trainers. It should ensure that staff involved is sufficiently trained and knowledgeable. Additionally, it should make sure that NGO staff will fully collaborate with the national administration and that they will fulfil their role of independent expert.

This action could reinforce EASO's capacity to provide special and emergency support, without depending nearly completely on the availability of experts from national authorities. The inherent risk of enlisting NGO representatives is obviously their political acceptability with the receiving administration and potential conflicts within the ASTs. In order to mitigate this risk, a particularly careful selection process would thus have to be implemented, testing not only the individual's competencies, but also their political standing and their commitment to the measures to be implemented. Finally, during the design phase, a prior check with the receiving MS on the opportunity to call upon civil society representatives would be mandatory.Their approval of the selected profiles before deployment will also be needed.

3 Better communicate upon the results and impacts of implemented activities

EASO developed several tools that are used on a regular basis by most MS. It also provided support that is believed to have helped countries achieve the changes needed in national asylum system towards the implementation of the CEAS. The powerful potential of EASO to facilitate the convergence of national practices in the field of asylum is widely recognised.However, there is insufficient evidence of EASO's actual impact on the implementation of the CEAS. Consequently, some argue that it has been weak and challenge the relevance of EASO's activities.

Activities such as the national Infodays held on 2014were seen as a way of bringing EASO closer to national stakeholders, which was one of the main recommendations emanating from the EASO European Commission internal evaluation report. These Info days focussed exclusively on main MS stakeholders such as administrations and caseworkers. Therefore, although EASO is taking steps towards improving external communication activities as a result of this recommendation, it may be worthwhile to consider attempting to make EASO's work and activities more widely known to other stakeholders as well as the general public.

The evaluation found EASO's consultation with civil society to be generally satisfactory, as EASO endeavours to involve civil society ever more widely. Although such involvement will always be ultimately conditioned by national practices and structures vis-à-vis consulting with civil society, EASO should seek to continue to increasingly consult civil society wherever possible.

Mandate external and independent evaluations of emergency and special support plans at the end of each phase

EASO should be able to provide reliable data on the impact of the support plans implemented in order to prove their added-value. This could be attained through independent external evaluations of emergency and support plans. These could be assessed at the end of each phase to allow close monitoring.

EASO's Management Board should be informed of the evaluation results as soon as possible. Results should be discussed and analysed within the framework of Management Board meetings to identify the strengths and weaknesses of planning and allow constant progress.

Evaluation reports should be subsequently published to ensure maximum transparency Evaluation reports should include an executive summary that is clear enough to be understood by the general public.

Develop a reporting system on MS progress towards the implementation of the acquis

EASO should report on the progress of MS progress towards the implementation of the acquis, in relation to the activities it has set in place. That will help to demonstrate the actual impact of EASO. For that matter, it is particularly important that EASO does not rely exclusively on MS auto evaluation of reception and asylum facilities.

Reinforce communication on EASO's activities addressed to MS and civil society

Making MS and stakeholders further informed aware of EASO's activities in asylum can be boosted through the increased usage of already existing EASO tools. This could include more information being provided to stakeholders on the work being carried out and the different EASO reports such as the practical guide series, Training & Quality reports, COI reports etc.

More activities for the general public may be organised throughout the year, as well as more informal activities such as workshops, information events etc. Infodays may be improved by encouraging small administrations to collaborate and possible organise common Infodays (potentially as a Road show) on a multi-country and regional basis.

The process of external communication with different stakeholders including civil society may also be facilitated by having reports issued in particular languages as soon as they are complete (rather than wait for the document to be translated into all EU official languages as is currently the case). This would make documents available faster. The legal obligation to publish in all official languages to assist potential users who may wish to use their national language would be expected to remain anyway.

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

The European Migration Network (EMN) provides information on migration and asylum topics to policy makers and the general public. Consequently, part of EMN activity is very close to that of EASO. Both EMN and EASO collect data on asylum and issue information reports on the situation of asylum.

Over the evaluation period, EMN and EASO have gradually strengthened their relations. In 2014 EASO regularly participated in EMN Steering Board meetings and NCP meetings. Joint activity reports were issued by the two Agencies and EASO participates in EMN Steering Board meetings.

However, the evaluation concluded that duplication may remain. Many of the asylum functions of EMN are now covered by EASO and the two entities should optimise their coordination.

Streamline coordinationwith EMN

EASO and EMN should jointly define their respective scope of intervention, in order to prevent any overlapping of their activities. In the field of data collection and analysis of legal migration within the EU, EASO and EMN should make clear what the remits of each organisation is. On the whole, better coordination between EASO and EMN should be ensured through a formalised communication process.

Even though EMN is not an Agency, an agreement could be reached and formalised to streamline the existing channels of cooperation and provide a framework for developing closer ties and mutual support in future. The arrangement could foresee the creation of a common quick response system to MS requests and clearly determine what the share of responsibilities and areas of competence of EASO and EMN should be.

Streamline coordination with the UNHCR

As provided by the working arrangement between EASO and the UNHCR, "cooperation plans outlining concrete activities and timelines for implementation" could be designed and implemented. The two organisations could explore cooperation, coordination and participation in special support plan delivery on a case by case basis, in accordance with their working arrangement.

In countries where the UNHCR is already operational and has the means to respond very quickly to MS requests, interventions could be synchronised. In particular, experts from each organisation could exchange and coordinate their actions.

8.2   Operational recommendations

5   **Improve the need assessment process of MS requesting EASO's support**

The Centre for Operational Support should improve the need assessment process of MS requesting EASO's support when designing support plans.This will lead to the drafting of sustainable support plans in terms of measures to be implemented and capacity of the host State to receive and collaborate with ASTs deployed.

The evaluation found that, in some cases, EASO drafted very ambitious operational plans which were not fully implemented. Such scenarios occurred either due to the lack of internal resources in the host country or to the fact that some measures were covered by national administrations or different ASTs than those initially planned, consequently leading to the deletion or temporal shift of such measures. Eventually, this situation implied a reduction or transfer of some ASTs.

Whilst this does not seem to have a significant impact on the overall effectiveness of EASO support plans, it affects the capacity of the Agency to design plans coherent with MS needs and tends to allocate more ASTs and resources than those actually needed.

Enhance the capabilities of the Centre for Operational Support

During the drafting phase of the OP and the Working arrangement, the COS should focus on effectively assessing MS needs and its absorption capacity in terms of measures to be implemented and ASTs to be received. In particular, an in-depth analysis of the number of measures to be implemented by a dedicated AST and of those actions that could be implemented by other "cross-cutting" ASTs would avoid the risk of introducing overlapping measures and exceeding experts and trainers within the same plan. In addition, before reaching an agreement on the number of ASTs to be deployed, the COS should ask the MS beneficiary to conduct an analysis of its capacity

to receive experts and trainers within the host administrations. This could help EASO avoid revising or amending the support plan during the plan's implementation.

Despite the difficulties encountered by the COS and other centres involved in the implementation of support plans to Greece and Bulgaria, evaluators noted a good capacity in reaching the objectives set in the plan, mostly as a result of the adaptability of ASTs and their capability to implement different measures.

No specific risks were identified in implementing this action.

Develop additional quality and skills assessment for experts and trainers

The COS could introduce an additional quality and skills assessment for experts and trainers to be deployed in support plans. By doing so, EASO will have experts and trainers with different profiles and to be deployed both in dedicated and "cross-cutting" ASTs.

An additional quality skills assessment from the COS could verify if experts' profiles identified by MS are in line with criteria included in Articles 2, 3 and 4 of decision no. 8 of the Management Board and, crucially, if their skills are adequate for the mission they were selected for. This would imply that, if an expert profile responds to more than one category of experts as included in Article 3 of decision no 8[102], this resource could be deployed in cross-cutting ASTs. In addition, more details could be included within the call for experts in order to provide MS and experts with a more detailed framework on the tasks to be accomplished within the support plan, the time needed and the duties of the expert and trainer.

When implementing this action, risks may arise in terms of the lengthening of the procedure for the selection for experts and trainers as well as in terms of a higher workload for the COS centre in charge of conducting the quality and skills assessment.

Further involve MS beneficiaries support during the assessment phase

During the assessment phase and before drafting support plans, EASO should further involve MS beneficiaries of operational support in order to conduct a more in-depth internal evaluation of the capacity of host administrations to receive measures and collaborate with incoming ASTs. This could reduce the risk of including unsustainable number of measures and teams within the support plans.

Despite the proactive involvement of MS during the drafting phase of operational plans, the support plans to Greece and Bulgaria foresaw a number of measures and ASTs which exceeded the reception capacity of the MS beneficiary.

No specific risks were identified in implementing this action.

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[102]EASO decision no. 8 of the Management Board, Article 3: In addition to the basic qualifications as laid down in Article 3, the experts to be made available for the Asylum Intervention Pool shall possess precise core competences and belong to at least one of the following categories: a) Experts on registration and screening for the identification of international protection needs in case of mixed migratory flows; b) Experts on Country of Origin Information; c) Experts on language analysis; d) Experts on quality management of asylum systems; e) Experts on backlog management (at first and second instances); f) Experts on asylum applicants in need of special procedural guarantees; g) Experts on unaccompanied minors; h) Experts on medical needs in asylum procedures; i) Trainers, including for "train-the-trainers" methodology; j) Trainers on the European Asylum Curriculum; k) Experts on the development of reception systems and management of reception facilities; l) Experts on the development and management of detention centres; m) Experts on emergency situations, including shelter, transport and medical assistance; n) Experts on return procedures; o) Experts on EU acquis in the field of asylum and migration; p) Experts on the application of information and communication technology in the asylum and migration field; q) Experts on financial and budget management; r) Experts on the management of EU funds; s) Senior level experts on the general management of asylum systems; t) Experts on analysis, methodologies and statistics; Article 4: In addition to the basic qualifications laid down in Article 3 and the core competences laid down in Article 4, other optional skills may be specified by EASO and/or the sending Member State. Optional skills may be specified if considered to be particularly useful for the purpose of determining the composition of a specific asylum support team.

6   Streamline the experts sent out to MS in order to facilitate their participation

The evaluation showed that EASO already actively involves MS through a variety of practical cooperation networks. MS showed generally high levels of satisfaction with the organisation and overall concept of all the practical cooperation meetings, and the networking and cooperation amongst participants and MS administrations that these bring about. It is also clear that some MS participate much more actively in these initiatives than others.

The creation of EASO contributed to an increased workload for national administrations. Defining more precisely the roles and responsibilities of every one will help to avoid duplication. Furthermore, the evaluation found that NCP management could be improved. The latter is not yet very structured.

The evaluation showed that the establishment, development and proper functioning of EASO's working groups /networks (ex. COI, EPS, Thematic groups etc.) is a highly efficient way of providing the services that MS require. Although too many Working Groups may cause logistical challenges for certain MS, especially those with smaller administrations,this method of cooperation should continue to be encouraged.

Improve identification contact points within national administration

EASO should identify NCPs according to a set of defined thematic areas, create a single database and circulate it to all members.

Quantify contact points contribution in advance

In as far as possible, EASO should quantify ahead the contribution expected for participation in a given network or group

Define the roles and responsibilities of national administrations when designing the special support plans

The roles and responsibilities of national administrations in the design of special support plans should be more precisely defined.

Organise regional practical cooperation activities

The EASO office's geographical location is considered to be a challenge for some administrations due to the travelling time required to get to the EASO premises. An increase in regional sessions or sessions in Brussels are seen as possible ways of mitigating against this consideration and could potentially lead to improved MS participation.

Increase use of electronic meetings

The use of videoconferencing or other forms of electronic meeting tools (where possible) may be utilised to increase MS participation to practical cooperation activities.

7 Revise the overall procedure for the provision of ASTs

In order to guarantee the immediate availability of ASTs in case of emergency situations, EASO should revise the overall procedure for the provision of ASTs, including the selection process for experts and trainers, and foresee in house resources so as to overcome MS difficulties in identification and provision of experts to the Agency.

The evaluation found that the fact that EASO relies on MS contribution for the deployment of experts in support plans might affect the crisis response capacity of the Agency. Indeed, MS often find it difficult to provide the Agency with the experts needed, mainly due to an internal lack of human resources or to the unavailability of the expert required over the time-frame of the support plan.

Include the possibility for the Agency to have in house capacity for experts and trainers within the EASO Regulation

The EASO Regulation could be amended in order to include the possibility for the Agency to have a team of in house experts and trainers to be deployed in support activities.

As established by Article 15.2 of the EASO Regulation[103], and Article 16,1[104], MS contribute to the Asylum Intervention Pool via a national expert pool and retain autonomy regarding the selection of the number and the profiles of the experts (national pool) and the duration of their deployment.

In light of the difficulties encountered by MS in providing experts to the Agency, a revision of the Regulation could foresee the possibility for EASO to dispose of internal experts and trainers, to be immediately available for the Agency "on demand". In order to guarantee immediate support even in the case of emergency and extraordinary situations, such "in house capacity" could represent for instance 50% of the current AIP, which, according to article 5 of decision no 8 of the Management board "shall be not less than 100".

Amend the Management Board's decision that defines the profiles and the overall number of experts to be made available for the Asylum Support Teams (Asylum Intervention Pool)

The Management Board could amend decision no 8 on the Asylum Intervention Pool with a new decision establishing that the Asylum Intervention Pool should be composed of EASO experts and trainers (50%) and national experts and trainers (50%).

An amendment of decision no 8 of the MB could mitigate the risks deriving from the dependence of the Agency to MS experts and consequently improve EASO crisis response capacity. With this new decision, the MB could enforce a new mechanism for experts and trainers selection, based on both EASO and MS contributions. The latter could be formalised according to the call for experts procedure, currently in place. Such mechanisms would guarantee the Agency a fair level of control on ASTs set up and composition as well as some form of independence from MS internal difficulties.

Considering the possible impacts deriving from the setting up of an "in house" capacity of the Agency within the legal basis and consequently on the internal decision when implementing the actions described above risks may arise especially in terms of budget sustainability possibly affecting the Agency's ability to perform its duties if an increase of EASO annual budget doesn't occur.

Adopt a new decision for the setting up of a shortlist of national experts and trainers to be deployed in extraordinary situations

The Management Board could adopt a new decision regarding the selection of experts and trainers to be deployed on very short notice (e.g. 1 week) due to extraordinary situations (e.g. existence of new emerging needs during the implementation of support plan, submission of several support requests by MS during the same period). With such a decision, EASO could put in place a new mechanism for national experts' and trainers' provision in those MS facing extraordinary pressures and which require the Agency support. This mechanism could foresee that MS which are not beneficiary of EASO operational support should provide the Agency with a shortlist of experts immediately available for deployment.

In order to provide the Agency with a pool of experts always available and ready to be deployed in case of extraordinary situations, EASO could require MS to set up a shortlist of national experts and trainers including at least 7 out of 20 categories of experts as defined by art 3 of decision no 8 of the Management Board. This criterion would guarantee that in the case of extraordinary situations, the Agency would be able to deploy the profile needed in a very short period of time.

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[103] EASO Regulation, art 15,2 "Member States shall contribute to the Asylum Intervention Pool via a national expert pool on the basis of defined profiles and propose experts corresponding to the required profiles"
[104] EASO Regulation, art 16,1 "the home Member State shall retain its autonomy as regards the selection of the number and the profiles of the experts (national pool) and the duration of their deployment".

This action might bring about some risks related to MS political willingness to provide experts to be deployed at very short notice. In addition, some MS with small administrations might not dispose of a sufficient number of experts to include in the shortlist, hence limiting the Agency's capacity to deploy experts and trainers in extraordinary situations.

8   Increase the number, depth and usage of EASO internal communication flows and co-ordination processes

The evaluation witnessed efforts to improve internal EASO communication flows, especially with regard to an increase in staff 'social' activities and the setting up of the intranet. However, it also transpired that vertical and horizontal intra-EASO communication at various levels remains relatively weak. This resulted in Centres being unaware of other Centres' work, lack of information for staff members on management decisions taken, and of similar requests being sent to MS by different Centres. The roles of the respective Centres are not clearly outlined in detailand therefore other Centres may not be aware of the responsibilities of others.

Increase use of the Intranet for better information sharing

Information sharing can be facilitated further through the encouragement of the increased use of the intranet portal as the primary (and first choice) information sharing tool and data repository amongst all levels of staff members at EASO.

Create central coordination point for improved distribution of tasks

A central coordination point (such as a member of staff or centre) could be established through which all requests for MS are channelled (this could potentially form part of the Executive Director's office). This would facilitate the tracking of requests and information received by MS and remove duplication. More detailed processes for the allocation/division of tasks across Centres need also to be determined, drawn up and communicated.

Improve Staff involvement at different levels

Encourage additional staff participation in all discussion and decision making fora, including the EASO management meetings, and possibly even (as observers to) the Management Board meetings. Such participation may also play an increasingly important part of the job responsibilities given to Team Leaders who can also be tasked with sharing information with members of EASO staff.

Outline roles of the different Centres and create cross-Centre activities

Internal cross-Centre staff workshops / activities/ information sharing initiatives may be organised to enhance cross Centre relationships and further improve coordination and collaboration between them.

9   Speed up the implementation of the EASO performance appraisal procedure

The evaluation found that a formal performance appraisal procedure expected within any organisation, including agencies such as EASO, although at an advanced stage, has still not yet been fully implemented and the end of the period covered by this Evaluation. The delay in implementation of the appraisal system occurred for a variety of reasons, including the period over which the post of Head of Administration was vacant, and other vacancies and lack of staff in the HR support centre. This led to various HR related processesand improvements within EASO being delayed and delays in the complete implementation of the performance related system. Its results, from both a financial and professional development point of view, are awaited by EASO staff members.

Although steps were taken to adopt SMART performance indicators, further efforts are needed to create them at an individual level and to communicate them with EASO staff.

Complete the introduction of performance appraisal system at EASO

The current cycle of performance reviews of staff should be given priority and completed as soon as possible to allow staff to be adequately rewarded for their work within EASO.

Linked to this is the need for EASO to look into the establishment of individual annual (SMART) objectives, aligned with EASO's objectives, for all staff members as part of the base used for any yearly performance.

Step up particular internal evaluation processes

By increasing the internal evaluation of different EASO processes/initiatives/efforts, such as those identified through the European Commission internal evaluation of EASO, the Agency would be in a position to better assess and focus on the weak areas that need to be improved.

Further encourage the adoption of SMART indicators

EASO should further encourage the adoption of SMART indicators within the MS support plans and also communicate performance indicators with EASO staff. This will contribute to the improved evaluation of the support plans and their updating.

9 Appendixes

9.1 Implementation of EASO's operational objectives

● Very high ◐ High ◖ Medium ◔ Low ○ Very low

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE SET OUT BY EASO MANDATE AS IDENTIFIED WITHIN THE INTERVENTION LOGIC	SYNTHESIS OF EASO OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AS DETAILED WITHIN EASO AWPs 2011,2012,2013 and 2014	AREA AND TYPE OF ACTIVITY CARRIED OUT TO IMPLEMENT THE AWPs OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES	LEVEL OF TRANSPOSITION OF EASO's MANDATE THROUGH AWPs OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES
Organise, promote and coordinate activities enabling the exchange of information and the identification and pooling of best practices in asylum matters between MS, including information on national asylum process and law	• Organise practical cooperation activities, in order to discuss and take action on various issues of EU-wide relevance in the field of asylum (e.g. on policy, interpretation of EU asylum acquis, situations in countries of origin, best practices, emergency flows, etc.) • Promote quality mapping exercise, by mapping procedures, identifying, sharing and contributing to the establishment of best practices • Coordinate MS and the European Commission to identify priority areas and develop forms, templates, handbooks and guidelines that gather and consolidate existing expertise and best practices including the organisation of thematic meetings on quality in asylum procedures with specific experts • Support MS in the process of establishing and developing quality processes and facilitate the exchange of information and good practices	**PERMANENT SUPPORT** • PRACTICAL COOPERATION • QUALITY ACTITVITIES	●
Provide expertise, in particular in relation to interpreting services, and knowledge of the handling and management of asylum cases	• Contribute to the development of tools, techniques, methodologies and good practices to improve the quality of decision-making throughout the EU • Assist MS to improve the quality of their asylum processes by developing and sharing practical tools, based on needs' analysis providing expertise on quality procedures and quality methodology. • Provide support to courts and tribunals through the joint preparation of professional development materials, the stimulation of dialogue among European and national courts and tribunals as well as the organisation of advanced workshops for European and national courts and tribunals operators.	**PERMANENT SUPPORT** • QUALITY ACTIVITIES • INTERPRETATION • SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES	●

	• Consolidate EASO's cooperation with European and national courts and tribunals including a conference with European and national courts and tribunals to launch its activities and publish the first EASO professional development materials • Redefine the practice of the Interpreters' Pool by transforming them into a list of available languages • Provide the necessary arrangements if specific languages are needed for asylum interviews in emergency situations and identify new secure and cost-effective technologies for long-distance interpretation services • Support the EU ACTION plan on UM and to the EU plan for the eradication of THB		
Establish and develop high quality training	• Develop a training strategy in order to enhance the capacity and quality of the European asylum process as well as to strengthen practical cooperation among the European asylum/immigration systems ensuring the quality of decision-making in individual asylum cases • Develop a European Asylum Curriculum (ETC) consistent to the EASO training strategy including the ETC Expert Pool • Develop high-quality common asylum trainings across the EU through the development and the dissemination of common European learning materials and the organisation of common European training sessions for EASO trainers as well as the organisation of training sessions on special support and emergency support programmes	**PERMANENT SUPPORT** • TRAINING ACTIVITIES	●
Organise, promote and coordinate activities relating to information on countries of origin (COI)	• Take over and developing EURASIL activities, the COI Portal, the ETC and the Interpreters Pool • Provide a common level of country of origin information (COI) across the EU and regular COI reports through further development of the COI portal and COI reports • Set up and coordinate specific COI networks, including national experts, on countries of origin of interest at the EU level. The COI networks will map the existing COI products and may produce COI materials (e.g. reports, factsheets) in accordance with the EASO COI methodology • Organize COI practical cooperation workshops and conference • Further develop the EU COI capacity under the parameters of feasibility, effectiveness and harmonisation	**PERMANENT SUPPORT** • COI ACTIVITIES, • PRACTICAL COOPERATION	●

Produce Annual reports on situation of asylum in EU, comparative analysis and technical documents on the implementation of the EU asylum instruments	• Publish the annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU and provide translation into all EU official languages. • Develop a documentation system on the organisation of the national asylum systems, as well as on national and European factual, legal and case-law developments in line with the recast asylum package including the first steps towards the establishment of a case-law database	**INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS SUPPORT** • EASO ANNUAL REPORT, • EASO DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM	●
Coordinate the exchange of information and other action taken on the implementation of instruments the external dimension of the CEAS, with a view to promoting and assisting capacity building in the third countries' own asylum and reception systems and implementing regional protection programmes **Coordinate exchanges of information and other actions on resettlement taken by MS to meet the international protection needs of refugees in third countries**	• Provide capacity building in neighbour countries with migratory flows towards the EU • Organise experts meetings (MS, European Commission, UNHCR, IOM and other relevant partners) • Draft EASO external dimension strategy and include it in the MAWP 2014–16 • Organise exchange of information and best practices and define methodologies and tools for the European coordinating dimension of resettlement • Define methodologies and tools for EASO support to the implementation of the joint EU resettlement programme • Exercise a coordinating role in exchanging information and other actions on resettlement taken by MS in cooperation with UNHCR and IOM • Develop methodologies and tools to strengthen MS' ability to resettle refugees	**THIRD COUNTRY SUPPORT** • CAPACITY BUILDING • PRACTICAL COOPERATION ON EXTERNAL DIMENSION AND ON RESETTLEMENT	◔
Promote, facilitate and coordinate exchanges of information and other activities related to relocation within the Union	• Support possible relocation projects agreed at the EU level (Supporting role in the possible extension of the relocation project with Malta) • Promote, facilitate and coordinate the exchange of information and best practices on intra-EU relocation also by developing special methodologies and tools • Organise expert meetings (MS, European Commission, UNHCR, International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and other relevant partners)	**SPECIAL SUPPORT** • PRACTICAL COOPERATION ON RELOCATION	●

Identify, prepare and formulate emergency measures by assessing the needs of MS subject to particular pressure **Coordinate and support common action assisting asylum and reception systems of MS subject to particular pressure** **Support MS on initial analysis of asylum applications, availability of reception facilities, deployment of ASTs**	• Provide tailored support and capacity building in Sweden, Italy and others MS in need of special support as for their asylum and reception systems • Further develop EASO special support measures targeted to MS with specific needs related to the implementation of the revised EU asylum acquis (tailored assistance, capacity building, relocation, specific support and special quality control process). • Provide capacity-building activities for strengthening critical areas in the concerned MS, in view of the implementation of the recast asylum package of the CEAS. • Develop pilot projects on activities related to joint processing of asylum applications. • Provide operational emergency support as for Greece's and Bulgaria's asylum systems • Deploy ASTs in Luxembourg in line with the EASO operating plan for Luxembourg • Organise AIP NCP's meeting • Set up the Asylum Intervention Pool and, upon request, mobilise the Asylum Support Teams • Ensure the practicability of the AIP by clearly defining and updating experts' profiles in a specific database. • Develop a blueprint for the deployment of future emergency support by EASO to MS under particular pressure in line with the recast asylum package • Study EU and international best practices and tools for the deployment of experts	**SPECIAL AND EMERGENCY SUPPORT** • TAILOR MADE SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING • ASYLUM INTERVENTION POOL • EMERGENCY SUPPORT
Set-up an early warning system **Play a key role in the process for EPS management of asylum crises according to the art.33 of Dublin Regulation**	• Develop a tailored EPS on asylum and provide asylum trend analysis and risk scenarios • Set up of a National Contact Point system for data and analysis in cooperation with all stakeholders • Develop a functioning data collection and analysis system by interacting with the Group for the Provision of Statistics (GPS) and use the network to gather feedback and suggestions for improvement • Set up and develop an EPS which fully supports and feeds in to the 'mechanism for early warning, preparedness and crisis management' referred to in Article 33 of the recast Dublin regulation • Develop a comprehensive operational procedures and methodologies for emergency support complementing those procedures and methodologies identified for the application of the Article 33 mechanism of the Dublin III regulation	**INFORMATION ,ANALYSIS AND EMERGENCY SUPPORT** • EPS, • PREPAREDNESS FOR EMERGENCY SUPPORT

(Source: EY elaboration on AWP's 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union and on the Activities of the European Asylum Support Office for 2011, Annual Activity Report 2012, 2013, Internal Progress Report on AWP 2014 -January-September 2014)

9.2 Trainers' feedback on EASO training modules 2010-2013

N	Training modules	Number of answers	Overall Perception	Relevant comments and suggestions (if any)
	via national training			
1	International Refugee Law and Human Rights Module	60 answers	Rather Satisfied	Participants complained they have not received enough feedback from trainer(s) and the deadlines were not realistic due to the workload in their respective job.
2	Dublin Regulation Module	32 answers	Positive	Trainers praised for their professionalism and face-to-face session.
3	Inclusion Module	154 answers	Rather Positive	Content of the online module moderately appreciated. 40% of respondents stated that the deadlines were not realistic.
4	Exclusion Module	4 answers	Rather Positive	Participants were satisfied with the face-to-face session but argued that the deadlines were not realistic due to the workload in their respective job.
5	End of Protection Module	10 answers	Moderately Positive	33% of the participants stated that the course did not meet their expectations and the same proportion did not believe that the course would have a positive impact on their daily work.
6	Country of Origin Information Module	138 answers	Well Satisfied	Trainees expected more feedback from their trainer regarding their online training and their face-to-face session. Deadlines were realistic but required time insufficient due to trainees' workload.
7	Interview Techniques Module	3 answer	Positive	Structure of the online module and online learning site highly appreciated. Content of the online module and of the face-to-face sessions appreciated.
8	Interviewing Children Module	6 answers	Positive	Participants appreciated face-to-face session and trainer's work, while being moderately satisfied with the online learning site, the content and structure of the online module.
9	Interviewing Vulnerable Persons Module	190 answers	Rather Positive	Participants were satisfied with the trainers and argued that feedback from their trainers was moderately sufficient.
10	Evidence Assessment Module	51 answers	Rather Positive	Online learning site appreciated and time requirement were defined sufficient and with realistic deadlines.
	via train the trainers sessions			
11	Drafting and decision making module	6 answers	Positive	Few respondents were aware of ETC and for half of them; the latter was not being implemented in the caseworkers' training program in their country.

N	Training modules	Number of answers	Overall Perception	Relevant comments and suggestions (if any)
12	International Refugee Law and Human Rights Module	3 answers	Highly Satisfied	Online module contents, platform tools, training session, training manual and face-to-face session quite appreciated. Disappointment with the didactics sessions.
13	Introduction to EU Asylum Law and Policy Module	7 answer	Positive	EASO training manuals were appreciated by trainers.
14	Common European Asylum System November-December 2013	8 answers	Very Positive	Face-to-face session well-appreciated. Didactics session appreciated. Platform tools training session appreciated.
15	Dublin Regulation Module	14 answers	Well Appreciated	Trainer manuals were highly appreciated and trainers praised for the face to face session. Almost half of the participants stated that the deadlines were not realistic.
16	Inclusion Module	33 answers	Positive	Online learning site, content and the structure of the online module, training manual and didactic session were overall appreciated. Participants were satisfied with trainers and face-to-face session.
17	End of Protection Module	5 answers	Positive	The EASO training manual and the didactics session was well-appreciated. The majority stated that the time requirement indicated was not sufficient and they also thought that was not really realistic for a caseworker of their country to take this amount of time for this kind of training. 3 out of 5 needed more than 30 hours to complete the whole online module.
18	Asylum Procedure Directive	2 answers	Na	NA
19	Country of Origin Information Module	19 answers	Satisfied	Participants were satisfied with the online learning site, the content and the structure of the online module. However, the didactics session seemed to be a little bit disappointing, especially the presentation of didactics which seemed not enough linked to the content of the module and not enough focused on the right issues and practical situations.
20	Interview Techniques Module	39 answers	Positive	The participants stated they gained sufficient knowledge, the course would have a positive impact on their daily work and they would recommend this EASO Training module to their colleagues.
21	Interviewing Children Module	7 answers	Positive	The participants stated the course met their expectations and would have an impact on their daily work. The participants were divided about the pace in the session and in the tutorials. 57% participants needed more than 21 hours to complete the whole online module and 71% participants used their spare time to complete it.

N	Training modules	Number of answers	Overall Perception	Relevant comments and suggestions (if any)
22	Interview Vulnerable Persons Module	23 answers	Positive	The participants stated the deadlines were moderately realistic. For half of them, the time requirement indicated in the module was not sufficient as 87% of the participants used their spare time to complete the e-learning
23	Evidence Assessment Module	20 answers	Very Positive	The main negative point was about ETC in the participants' country, of which 55% stated that the ETC was not being implemented in the caseworkers' training program in their country.
24	Drafting and Decision Making Module	6 answers	Positive	According to the participants' answers their managers and their colleagues did not really know about ETC and for half of them, the latter was not being implemented in the caseworkers' training program in their country.

(Source: EASO Survey 2010-2013)

9.3 Analysis of activities planned and achieved by EASO with regard to quality

Quality	Indicators planned in the WP 2014	Indicators achieved in 2014
Organise EASO thematic practical cooperation meetings on quality-specific topics or aspects of the CEAS	3	3
Organisation of EASO practical cooperation workshops for experts to support the development of quality-related tools to assist MS in the implementation of the CEAS	6	8
Publication of quality processes tools	up to 2	1
Map the current practices, quality tools, mechanisms, projects and initiatives in MS on topics related to the CEAS.	3	3
Organise an annual meeting of the Quality National Contact Points	1	1

(Source: EASO Work Programme 2014 and internal progress report on the implementation of the Work programme 2014-January- December)

9.4 Analysis of the objectives and activities planned and carried out by the Agency

9.4.1 Activities planned and achieved by EASO with regard to UM

	Activities and objectives planned in the AWP	Activities and results achieved
2012	▪ Set-up EASO information sharing and monitoring on UM.	✓Submission of questionnaire for MS on current policy and practice relating to age assessment and unaccompanied minors;
		✓Start wider consultation with relevant experts from civil society (academics, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, medical practitioners), members of courts and tribunals in the MS, the Commission and other EU agencies.
	▪ Start developing best practices regarding reception conditions, asylum procedures and integration of UM.	×No specific information on this point found in Annual Activity Report
	▪ Deliver technical documentation on age assessment. Start developing training activities and handbook on age assessment.	✓Definition of the scope and content of the handbook on age assessment
		✓ Presentation of a draft framework of content to be included in the handbook
	▪ Set-up expert groups on age assessment (5-10 members) with 4 meetings in 2012.	×No specific information on this point found in Annual Activity Report
	▪ Organize 4 expert meetings (MS, EC, UNHCR, and other relevant partners) on UM, best practices and age assessment.	✓Organisation of 4 expert meetings on age assessment
		✓Creation of an annual conference on activities relating to unaccompanied minors and the establishment of a network of experts

	Activities and objectives planned in the AWP	Activities and results achieved
2013	▪ Continue developing EASO's information sharing and monitoring on UM to support MS in the gathering and exchange of information on UM and family tracing	✓Development of researches on family tracing ✓An annual practical cooperation conference on unaccompanied minors organized.
	▪ Deliver a handbook on age assessment and review outcomes from meetings on UM and age assessment, including: • reviewing outcomes from meetings on UM and age assessment • delivering a handbook on age assessment	✓EASO publication on age assessment, which provides an overview of practices across the EU regarding age assessment, aimed at supporting policy officers in developing age assessment processes and procedures in line with the CEAS

	Activities planned in the AWP	Activities and results achieved
	▪ Review EASO training and modules related to UM, including: • updating the 'Interviewing children' module; • reviewing other EASO training/modules related to UM	✓Review and update of 'Interviewing children' module
	▪ Work with the European Commission, MS, UNHCR and other interested parties to develop good practices relating to reception conditions and asylum procedures.	✗No specific information on this point found in Annual Activity Report
	▪ Support MS in developing family tracing practices	✓ Organisation of four practical cooperation expert meetings on family tracing, aimed at identifying the key issues, challenges and good practices available
	▪ Work closely with the COI, training, quality and operational support centres to ensure measures relating to the EU Action Plan on unaccompanied minors are addressed within the core functions of EASO in an ongoing fashion according to business needs	✓ Mainstreaming of children related issues both within and outside CTQE. Update of the "Interviewing Children" training module and quality mapping of MS practices in relation to children specific issues. Development of UM specific COI products such as the "Child notices" in cooperation with UNICEF and other stakeholders and presentation of children specific data and indicators from the EPS in several thematic meetings on children organised by CTQE. Focus on specific measures regarding children in asylum procedures within most of the Operating Plans (for instance CY, BG, EL).

	Activities and objectives planned in the AWP	Activities and results achieved
2014	▪ Evaluate and update the age assessment handbook. (Q1-Q2)	✓ Adoption of a concept note on evaluation; ✓ Launch of the survey for feedback on the publication; ✓First evaluation implemented as part of the upcoming meeting on Age Assessment in September 2014.
	▪ Develop and publish a document on family tracing (Q1-Q4)	✓ Concept note presented to MS and relevant stakeholders in September 2014; ✓ Consultation of national experts consulted during the Annual Conference (December 2014); ✗Publication in 2015
	▪ Organise up to four EASO thematic practical cooperation expert meetings on unaccompanied minors (Q1-Q4)	✓ Organisation of 4 meetings on Family Tracing (March 2014); Best Interests of the Child within the Scope of International Protection (May 2014); Age Assessment (September 2014): Dublin Regulation -Family Tracing and Best Interests (September 2014)

Key: ✓**Activity conducted as planned;** ✗**Activity not conducted as planned**

9.4.2 THB objective and activities achieved during 2014

Objectives for 2014	Activities and results achieved in 2014
▪ Participate in JHA coordination activities and other cooperation activities to prevent and fight against THB (Q1-Q4)	✓ Participation in 2 inter-Agency meetings coordinated by the COM in May and September 2014 ✓Coordination of a report on "Joint Activities" developed by the JHA Agencies from October 2012 to October 2014 to address THB. The report has been annexed to the COM "Mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Strategy towards the eradication of THB 2012-2016" and presented during the 8th Anti-Trafficking day (18 October) ✓ Coordination of a complementary report on individual actions developed by JHA Agencies from October 2012 to October 2014 to address THB ✓ Collaboration in the update of CEPOL's curriculum on THB
▪ Organise an EASO practical cooperation expert meeting with national representatives and the European Commission on trafficking in human beings.	✓ Organisation of 1 expert meeting in March with the representatives from 14 MS, Norway, Switzerland, and 9 relevant stakeholders from civil society

Key: ✓Activity conducted as planned; ✗Activity not conducted as planned

9.4.3 Objectives and results achieved with regard to cooperation with members of tribunals and courts

Objectives for 2014	Activities and results achieved in 2014
▪ Adoption of EASO's concept paper on the provision of support to national courts and tribunals.	✓ Concept note and tentative agenda adopted and presented to CJEU; ✓Engagement of CJEU, ECtHR, Norway, Switzerland and 19 MS; ✓ Adoption of a note on approach to cooperation with courts and tribunals
▪ organize an EASO practical cooperation conference for members of courts and tribunals	✗On the advice from the CJEU, this Action was postponed to 2015
▪ organize up to three EASO practical cooperation expert meetings on the development of EASO's support for members of tribunals and courts	✓Three expert meetings on the development of professional materials on the implementation of Article 15 (c) held on 28-29 April, 5-6 June and 18-19 September
▪ Develop and distribute up to two support tools available to members of courts and tribunals.	✓Development of the tool "Article 15 (c) QD – A Judicial Analysis" ✓ Development and revision of the Guidance Note for Facilitators on Article 15 (c) QD – a Judicial Analysis ✗These tools have been used as the basis for a facilitators' workshop held in December 2014, which represented a pilot session for the use of these

materials. Tools have been distributed to the public in
Q1 2015.

Key: ✓Activity conducted as planned; ✗Activity not conducted as planned

9.4.4 Third-country support activities and results achieved in 2014

Objectives for 2014	Activities and results achieved in 2014
Organise an EASO practical cooperation workshop on elements concerning the EASO's external dimension strategy.	✓1 External Dimension Coordination Meeting (May; 17 participants)
Start the implementation of the EASO external dimension strategy as embedded in the MAWP 2014–16, particularly through the ENP project with Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco.	✓1 ENPI Project Kick Off Meeting held (May; 33 participants); 1 External Dimension network for communication with MS, EC, EEAS, relevant EU JHA agencies and IOs set up.
Support capacity building in EU neighbouring third countries' asylum and reception systems, in particular their capacity to provide effective protection.	✓1 Workshop for the newly established External Dimension Network planned for November
Implement the ENP project with Tunisia, Morocco	✓8 activities implemented (i.e. 3 field visits in MA/JO/TN, 1 kick-off meeting, 1 needs assessment in JO, 2 Workshops in MA on accelerated procedure at the airport and appeals procedure, 1 Study visit on asylum and reception for TN in SE).

Key: ✓Activity conducted as planned; ✗Activity not conducted as planned

9.4.5 Information and analysis objectives and results achieved in 2014

Objectives for 2014	Activities and results achieved in 2014	Due Time	Achieved on time
Gather regular data from MS within the general EASO documentation system.	✓Fully 30 EU+ countries providing data; Monthly timeframe	Q1-Q4	✓

Produce regular reports (monthly and quarterly).	✓ 9 Monthlies published; 2 Quarterlies published; 8 contributions to EASO newsletter on Latest Asylum Trends; Monthly and quarterly timeframe	Q1-Q4	✓
Produce ad hoc reports.	✓7 ad hoc reports issued	Q1-Q4	✓
Organise two GPS meetings.	✓1 meeting held (25 participants registered)	Q2-Q4	✓
Coordinate with other key stakeholders in activities related to EPS.	✓ 3 activities developed; 1 Advisory group meeting on Dublin; 1 participation in Eurostat Expert Groups on Migration statistics; 1 meeting of intra-EU institutional partners for GPS	Q1-Q4	✓

Key: ✓Activity conducted as planned; ✗Activity not conducted as planned

9.5 Comparative analysis of EASO's objectives according to the Regulation vs MAWP

Source of Information	Strategic objectives	Specific objectives	Operational objectives
EASO Regulation	Help to Improve the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS)	1. Facilitate, coordinate and strengthen practical cooperation among Member States on the many aspects of asylum and help to improve the implementation of the CEAS, including support in the external dimension - art.2 (1)	1.1 Organise, promote and coordinate activities enabling the exchange of information and the identification and pooling of best practices in asylum matters between the Member States – art.3
439/2010			1.2 Organise, promote and coordinate activities relating to information on countries of origin (COI) – art.4
			1.3 Promote, facilitate and coordinate exchanges of information and other activities related to relocation within the Union – art.5
			1.4 Establish and develop high quality training – which includes the identification of key principles and best practices with a view to greater convergence of administrative methods and decisions and legal practice - available to members of all national administrations and courts and tribunals, and national services responsible for asylum matters in the Member States – art.6
			1.5 Coordinate the exchange of information and other action taken on issues arising from the implementation of instruments and mechanisms relating to the external dimension of the CEAS and other actions on resettlement taken by Member States – art. 7
	Strengthen practical cooperation among Member States on asylum	2. Provide effective operational support to Member States subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems – art.2 (2)	2.1. Coordinate and support common action assisting asylum and reception systems of Member States subject to particular pressure which places exceptionally heavy and urgent demands on their reception facilities and asylum systems - art.8
			2.2. Identify, prepare and formulate emergency measures by assessing the needs of Member States subject to particular pressure through information provided by Member States UNHCR and other relevant organisations – art.9 (1)

Source of Information	Strategic objectives	Specific objectives	Operational objectives
			2.3. Set-up an early warning system - art.9 (3)
			2.4. Support Member States subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems, in coordinating actions aiming at - art.10
			(a) facilitate an initial analysis of asylum applications under examination by the competent national authorities;
			(b) ensure that appropriate reception facilities can be made available (in particular emergency accommodation, transport and medical assistance);
			(c) deploy Asylum Support Teams (AST)
	Provide and/or coordinate the provision of operational support to MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems– (art. 1)	3. Provide scientific and technical assistance in regard to the policy and legislation of the Union in all areas having a direct or indirect impact on asylum - art.2 (3)	3.1. Provide expertise, in particular in relation to interpreting services, information on COI and knowledge of the handling and management of asylum cases – art.14
			3.2. Improve the quality, consistency and effectiveness of CEAS through Annual reports on situation of asylum in EU, comparative analysis and technical documents on the implementation of the EU asylum instruments - art.12
MAWP 2014-2016		1. Practical and technical support to Member states and the EU institutions	- Strengthening the role of common training and professional development in the field of asylum
			- Improving the quality of asylum processes and decisions
	To contribute to the implementation and development of the CEAS by providing support and facilitating, coordinating and strengthening practical cooperation among MS as an independent centre of expertise on asylum	2. Operational support to Member states with specific needs and to MS subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems, including the coordination of asylum support teams made up of national asylum expert	- Producing more common Country of Origin Information (COI)
			- Fostering advanced practical cooperation
			- Supporting better identification of vulnerable persons
			- Promoting EU-wide information , documentation and Early warning, preparedness and crisis management systems
			- Providing effective operational support
			- Promoting adequate reception conditions and integration
			- Developing joint processing

Source of Information	Strategic objectives	Specific objectives	Operational objectives
		3. Scientific input for EU policymaking and legislation in all areas having a direct or indirect impact on asylum	- Fostering synergies between migration and asylum policies, including on return
			- Supporting the external dimension of the CEAS

(Source: EASO multi-annual work programme 2014 -2016)

9.6   Comparative Analysis of EASO's objectives contained in the MAWP and each of the AWPs for 2011 – 2014

MAWP 2014-2016	AWP	AWP	AWP
Operational objectives	**2014**	**2015**	**Draft 2016**
Strengthening the role of common training and professional development in the field of asylum	Supporting Member State implementation of the recast asylum package through training, practical cooperation activities, COI and quality reports	Strengthening the role of common training and professional development in the field of asylum	Strengthening the role of common training and professional development in the field of asylum
Improving the quality of asylum processes and decisions	Further developing EASO's EPS	Improving the quality of asylum processes and decisions	Improving the quality of asylum processes and decisions
Producing more common Country of Origin Information (COI)	Providing operational support to Greece in line with the operating plan phase II and special support to Italy	Producing more common Country of Origin Information (COI)	Producing more common Country of Origin Information (COI)
Fostering advanced practical cooperation		Developing joint processing	Developing joint processing
Supporting better identification of vulnerable persons		Stimulating judicial dialogue in the field of asylum	Stimulating judicial dialogue in the field of asylum
Promoting EU-wide information, documentation and Early warning, preparedness and crisis management systems		Supporting better identification of vulnerable persons	Supporting better identification of vulnerable persons
Providing effective operational support		Collecting and exchanging accurate and up to date information and documentation on the functioning of the CEAS and further developing an EPS to provide analysis of trends	Collecting and exchanging accurate and up to date information and documentation on the functioning of the CEAS and further developing an EPS to provide analysis of trends

MAWP 2014-2016	AWP	AWP	AWP
Operational objectives	**2014**	**2015**	**Draft 2016**
Promoting adequate reception conditions and integration		Providing timely and comprehensive operational support to Member States	Providing timely and comprehensive operational support to Member States
Developing joint processing		Promoting adequate reception conditions and integration measures	Promoting adequate reception conditions and integration measures
Fostering synergies between migration and asylum policies, including on return		Fostering synergies between migration and asylum practices, including on return of failed asylum seekers	Fostering synergies between migration and asylum practices, including on return of failed asylum seekers
Supporting the external dimension of the CEAS		Supporting the external dimension of the CEAS	Supporting the external dimension of the CEAS

9.7   Main areas of cooperation between EASO and other organisations

Organisation	Date of signature	Main areas of cooperation
FRONTEX	26 September 2012	• Assessments and operational responses when assisting Member States, especially regarding the deployment of European Border Guard Teams and/or Asylum Support Teams • Methods to better identify those in need of international protection in the context of mixed migration flows • Exchanging information on the profiles and compositions of expert pools • Sharing best practices on the functioning of expert pools • Exploring the possibilities for establishing common or mixed teams of border management and asylum experts • Exchanging best practices and methodologies on data collection and exchange, as well as on information-gathering • Production and sharing of statistics and analyses • Engagement in establishing and implementing specific mechanisms for joint Third Country Monitoring • Holding consultations on the development of training materials • Developing training strategies and plans and exploring the possibilities for mutual participation in training activities
UNHCR	13 December 2013	• Training and professional development • Exchanging best practices and expertise on quality initiatives and projects • Country of Origin Information (COI) • Data and information gathering and analysis • Identifying vulnerable persons • Resettlement and relocation activities
FRA	11 June 2013	• Sharing draft AWP • Consultations on matters of common interest • Consultation activities with civil society representatives • Quality initiatives and projects, tools and indicators for the application of high standards across the EU in the field of fundamental rights and international protection • Protection of vulnerable groups
EU-Lisa	4 November 2014	• Exchanging information and statistics • Collaboration in ICT related matters, such as providing assistance and expertise • Training provided to Member States • Including development of training material and delivery of training, • including e-learning • Strategic and administrative matters

*(Source: Working Arrangements between EASO and the organisation mentioned)*

9.8 Overview of EASO practical cooperation networks

Overview of EASO professional networks		
Centre	**Name of the group**	**Frequency of meeting**
Executive Office (EXO)	Media Multipliers	Yearly
	Management Board Members	3 times a year
	EASO Contact Point	Ongoing
	Consultative Forum	Ongoing
Centre for information, documentation and analysis (CIDA)	COI portal national administrator	Yearly
	COI portal advisory group	Yearly min + on need
	COI Portal connected countries working level experts group	Ad hoc
	StratNet	Twice a year
	Group of Provision of Statistics	Regularly (min twice a year)
	Iran network	Yearly
	Iraq network	Yearly
	Afghanistan network	Yearly
	Russian Federation network	Yearly
	Pakistan network	Yearly
	Eritrea network	Yearly
	Somalia network	Yearly
Centre for Training, quality and expertise (CTQE)	Training NCPs	Twice a year
	Quality NCPs	Twice a year
	Members of the Courts and Tribunals	Yearly
	Different reference experts groups for the development of training material and quality tools	Regularly on need
Centre for operational support (COS)	AIP NCP	At least twice a year
	External Dimension network	At least twice a year

(Source: Internal EASO progress report on the implementation of the work programme 2014 issued for the calendar year 2014)

9.9 Coherence index of EASO's activities with its Regulation

Considering a scale of coherence with 1 meaning that the activities are directly covered by the Regulation, 0,8 that the activities are cross-cutting the Regulation and other relevant legal and policy document and 0,5 that the activities are indirectly covered by Regulation, the following trend has been identified:
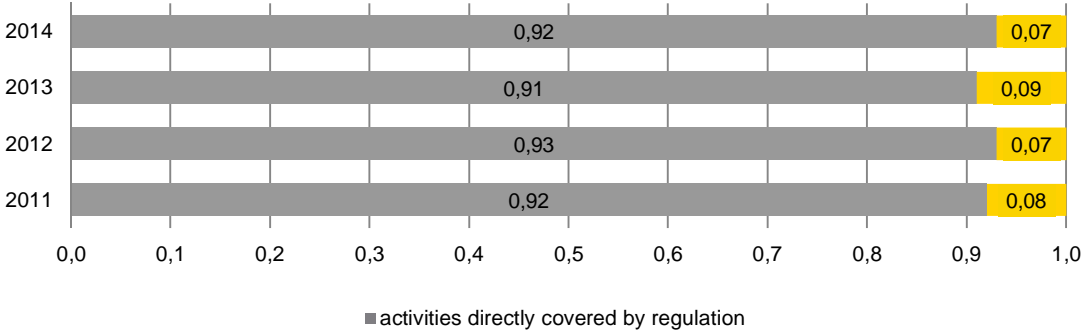
activities directly covered by regulation

With an average of 0,92, the level of coherence of EASO's activities with the Regulation can be defined as extremely high.