



External evaluation of the EUAA's Roadmap as an instrument for cooperation with third countries – learning from Western Balkan partnerships

Ex post horizontal evaluation report

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Acronyms and definitions

Term	Definition
C2	Training and Professional Development Centre
C3	Asylum Knowledge Centre
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
COI	Country of origin information
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EEAS	European External Action Service
EICU	European and International Cooperation Unit
EU	European Union
EU⁺	EU Member States and associate countries
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FTE	Full-time equivalent
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MARRI	Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative
SOP	Standard operating procedure
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



Executive summary

This report provides an evaluation of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) Roadmaps for Cooperation as a key instrument for the implementation of the Agency's cooperation with third countries. The evaluation sought to assess the performance of the framework, review whether it requires adaptation in view of the Agency's evolving cooperation with Western Balkan countries (and third countries more broadly), and consider the impact of the new EUAA Regulation on the Agency's support and cooperation with Western Balkan partners (and third countries more broadly), as well as the increasing demands from European Union (EU) Member States and associate countries (EU+) and partner countries alike for more practical and action-oriented cooperation approaches. It draws on a meta-analysis of the evaluations of four individual Roadmaps agreed with Western Balkan countries during the 2020-2022 period, as well as evidence collected at a more strategic, horizontal level.

The evaluation found that the **Roadmaps, as a framework for cooperation between the Agency and third countries, were not only highly relevant to meet the needs of national counterparts, but also as a broader framework that outlines long-term strategic priorities for cooperation.** This was particularly true for Western Balkan countries with an ambition to join the EU. The EUAA Regulation foresees the establishment of working arrangements, and while it could be relevant to establish these with countries that are farther advanced in the accession negotiation process for the sake of outlining the principles of cooperation (scope, purpose and nature), doing so must be considered in light of the number of stakeholders (i.e., European Commission, Management Board and the Western Balkan high-level authorities) who would need to be involved in the approval process and length of time this process can take. In any case, Roadmaps for cooperation should be retained as a medium-term work plan (i.e., two to three years) but could be complemented by longer-term strategic working arrangements.

The **individual Roadmaps differed in their effectiveness**, as their implementation was highly impacted by resource capacity constraints (for the Agency as well as the authorities), and external factors such as travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19¹ pandemic (travel bans were in place in all countries for the majority of the 24-month implementation period) and geopolitical changes such as elections and crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine. Overall, as a result of the Agency's support, the capacity of the authorities to manage asylum procedures increased, national legislation was further aligned with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), and in limited cases working practices were adapted in line with EU standards and good practices. Notably the peer-to-peer support to strengthen both institutional and individual capacities of the competent authorities through the development of various asylum and reception standard operating procedures (SOPs), informed by the dissemination of translated EUAA guides and tools as well as other capacity development activities (on-the-job coaching, training, workshops) played a role in this respect. In all countries, there is a need for continued practical, tailored support from the Agency to further align their practices and approaches to the CEAS and EU Member States' practices.

The approach taken to the implementation of the Roadmaps, which are coordinated by the Agency's European and International Cooperation Unit (EICU) and supported by experts from across the Agency, was appropriate. However, limitations relating to the efficiency of the support were identified. Significant resources were invested in internal coordination activities, including leading the

¹ Coronavirus disease 2019.



coordination of experts who did not have sufficient knowledge of the local context in partner countries, and delays were encountered due to the absence of clear prioritisation mechanisms. A general mismatch between the Agency's ambitions in the external dimension and the resources allocated to implement third country support more generally was identified as well; while the number and scope of Roadmaps increased, the resources allocated to their coordination and implementation did not.

The individual Roadmaps were coherent with and complemented by the Agency's activities at regional level, which produced efficiency gains for the Agency and should therefore be exploited as much as possible, without losing sight of the need to provide tailor-made support to individual countries as well. Where applicable, **the Agency also coordinated its efforts with international organisations to avoid duplications** and support partner third countries in a coherent and consistent manner. The Agency's **Third Country Cooperation Network supported alignment and the identification of potential synergies between the actions of the EUAA and EU Member States, though not to the desired extent**. While participating Member States were sufficiently informed about the Agency's activities in the region, there was limited transparency on the activities Member States are implementing bilaterally. As such, this network can be better exploited as a forum for exchange and coordination to facilitate more operational cooperation between EU Member States and partner third countries, to ensure a more transparent and coherent approach.

The key added value of the Agency's support, compared to other actors, is linked to its unique position as a centre of expertise on the CEAS, which makes it the most appropriate partner for third countries looking to align their own legislation and approaches to this framework. While EU+ countries could provide such support, the Agency pools experiences, expertise and good practices from different EU+ countries in a way that individual Member States could not.

On the basis of these findings, the evaluation puts forward four recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Further facilitate and encourage operational cooperation between Member States and Western Balkan countries

To further facilitate and encourage operational cooperation between EU Member States and third countries in the Roadmap framework, the Agency should clarify what 'facilitating operational cooperation' means and which types of activities it could entail, and subsequently promote what support can be offered in the framework of its Third Country Cooperation Network. Specifically, the Agency could consider setting up 'project databases' (where these do not exist already) to facilitate a coordinated Team Europe response, with the ultimate aim of involving Member States that are interested to deliver operational cooperation within the framework of the Roadmaps complementing the Agency's capacity development mandate.

Recommendation 2: Reconsider the format of the cooperation with partner third countries

In light of the new EUAA mandate, and the need to continue to reinforce practical support to Western Balkan countries, the Agency could consider retaining the Roadmap framework as a practical work plan for cooperation with third countries. Where deemed appropriate, e.g., in the case of countries at a more advanced stage in the EU accession process, the EUAA could consider supplementing the Roadmaps with high-level working arrangements as a strategic framework for cooperation.



Recommendation 3: Reconsider the approach to staffing the planning and implementation of the Roadmaps

In light of human resource constraints and the Agency's ambition to increase the scope of support to third countries, the Agency could consider reassessing the short, medium, and long-term capacities of the Agency's staff working on the Roadmaps in back-to-normal conditions following the COVID-19 pandemic, and potentially increasing the number of staff responsible for the management of the Roadmaps (identification, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). Additionally, the Agency could consider allocating expert staff profiles to implement the Roadmaps and/or prepare professional development plans for EICU staff to specialise in particular areas to increase their implementation capacity and avoid reliance on other centres, in light of the limited resources available. A physical presence in partner countries and the introduction of a clear system for prioritisation of tasks could also help minimise the mismatch between the activities planned and the implementation capacity of the Agency.

Recommendation 4: Clarify the Agency's new mandate and limitations to the types of support it can provide to third countries

In light of instances of confusion around the limits of the mandate of the Agency, it could consider clarifying the scope of the support that can be provided within the Agency's mandate to partner countries' authorities, as well as deciding on priorities for intervention in partner third countries in the framework of the new External Cooperation Strategy, in terms of topics to be covered and the format that the support should take.



1. Introduction: purpose and scope

This is the draft final report of the horizontal evaluation of the EUAA Roadmaps for cooperation as a key instrument for the implementation of the Agency's cooperation with third countries, as per its mandate (Article 35 of the [EUAA Regulation](#)²).

The objectives of this horizontal evaluation were to assess the framework of the Roadmaps as one of the Agency's main instruments to provide capacity development support, cooperate with partner third countries and facilitate EU+ operational cooperation; review whether the framework requires adaptation in view of the Agency's evolving cooperation with Western Balkan countries (and third countries more broadly), in line with the Agency's extended mandate; and consider the effect of the EUAA Regulation on the Agency's support and cooperation with Western Balkan countries (and third countries more broadly), as well as the increasing demands from EU+ and partner countries alike for more practical and action-oriented cooperation approaches.

In line with the [European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines](#), the evaluation assessed the **relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and EU added value** of the 2020-2022 Roadmaps framework. It evaluates the Roadmaps as a framework for cooperation in broader terms, assessing their key achievements and challenges and covering internal and external processes. The evaluation sought to answer the following priority questions:

1. To what extent are the Roadmaps still **relevant** to the authorities in partner third countries and EU Member States and how has their relevance evolved over time? (Relevance);
2. What were the **key achievements and good practices/challenges** observed in/across the Roadmaps in 2020-2022? What are the lessons learned for the future? (Effectiveness);
3. To what extent was the **allocation of resources** to the (individual) Roadmaps appropriate considering their scope and complexity? (Efficiency);
4. How well were Roadmaps **coordinated** internally and with external stakeholders? (Coherence);
5. To what extent and how do the Roadmaps **add value** compared to the work of other international partners? (EU added value).

The starting point for the evaluation was a meta-analysis of the results from the evaluations of four individual Roadmaps (with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia, during the 2020-2022 period). This analysis was supplemented with horizontal desk research and interviews specifically covering questions of relevance to the horizontal evaluation, namely with EUAA staff, the European Commission (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) and Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations), three EU Member State representatives and international organisations (see Annex 1 for an overview of the methodology). The collected data were compiled and triangulated where possible in order to draw conclusions and lessons learned from the implementation of the interventions, as well as recommendations for possible realignment of the Roadmap framework in the future.

² Regulation (EU) 2021/2303 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2021 on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation (EU) No 439/2010.



2. Intended results of the action

Legal framework

The [EUAA Regulation](#) lays down the Agency's mandate in relation to its engagement with third countries. The Regulation states that the Agency shall 'facilitate and encourage operational cooperation between Member States and third countries', within the framework of the Union's external policy, including with regard to the protection of fundamental rights, and in cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Article 35). It also foresees the deployment of liaison officers in third countries whose migration and asylum management practices comply with human rights standards. The Regulation establishes that priority for deployment of liaison officers should be given to countries of origin or transit (Article 36³). This Regulation entered into force on 19 January 2022. Prior to that, the Agency's mandate for cooperation with third countries was slightly more limited, namely to 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; or to cooperate with the 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 (Article 7 of the [European Asylum Support Office \(EASO\) Regulation](#)⁴), including through working arrangements (Article 49(2) of the [EASO Regulation](#)).

Under the previous mandate, the Agency established its [External Cooperation Strategy](#) in 2019, which defines in more detail the framework within which it develops its work related to the external dimension of the CEAS. The strategy focuses on three main objectives:

- contributing to establishing and/or strengthening asylum and reception systems as well as protection-sensitive migration management in third countries in order to better protect asylum seekers and refugees;
- facilitating EU+ countries' efforts in providing access to the EU for persons in need of international protection with focus on resettlement and other legal pathways to international protection; and
- facilitating the exchange of information and experiences related to the external dimension of the CEAS between EU+ countries⁵.

In light of the entry into force of the Agency's new mandate in January 2022, as well as geopolitical changes in recent years, a need to update the strategy was identified. At the time of writing (October 2022), the strategy was undergoing revision.

Roadmaps for cooperation with partner third countries

The Roadmaps for cooperation are one of the main instruments the Agency uses to implement its external actions. Roadmaps are tailored to the capacity development needs and interests in a given

³ The tasks of the liaison officers include establishing and maintaining contacts with the competent authorities of the third country to which they are deployed with a view to gathering information, contributing to the establishment of protection-sensitive migration management and, as appropriate, facilitating access to legal pathways to the Union for persons in need of protection, including by means of resettlement.

⁴ Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 establishing a European Asylum Support Office.

⁵ EASO External Cooperation Strategy (2019).



third country, and the Agency's ability to respond and deliver. The overall objective of the Roadmaps is to enhance the protection space for asylum applicants and refugees in line with the CEAS and EU Member States' practices by strengthening the asylum and reception systems in given third countries.

The Agency has been delivering capacity development support to the Western Balkan region since 2014 and reinforced its engagement through the participation in two phases of the EU-funded project 'Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey' (2016-2021), funded by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). The migrant and asylum management crisis of 2015-2016 propelled the EU to further engage in intergovernmental and transnational cooperation with third countries. The Western Balkan region particularly gained importance in this approach, as due to its geopolitical location it became a focal point of the migrant transitory route (the so-called Balkan Route)⁶. Against this backdrop, during the first phase of the IPA project, Roadmaps for Serbia and North Macedonia (2017-2019) were signed. During the second phase, four Roadmaps were agreed upon between the Agency and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia (2020-2022). Moreover, two new Roadmaps were agreed with Montenegro (2022-2023) and Kosovo* (2022-2024) but these fall outside the scope of this evaluation study.

3. Evaluation findings

To what extent are the Roadmaps still relevant to authorities in partner third countries and EU Member States and how has their relevance evolved over time? (Relevance)

Relevance of the structure and format of the Roadmaps

The Roadmaps with the Western Balkan countries were cooperation agreements that essentially comprised a work plan for a two-year period. They all followed the same structure of three pillars (i.e., legislation, asylum procedures and practices, and reception procedures and practice), in line with the priorities of the IPA regional project, with some variation depending on the particular needs of authorities⁷. Following a recommendation of the Agency's internal evaluation of the first two Roadmaps with North Macedonia and Serbia for the 2017-2019 period, their structure and content was improved. As a result, **the Roadmaps for the 2020-2022 period were clearer in their structure, and more focused in the activities they foresaw to reach concrete outputs and outcomes**, which did not only facilitate their implementation for the Agency, but also provided a point of reference and means to monitor progress for the authorities. This more structured approach to the Roadmaps also facilitated the monitoring of their implementation by EUAA staff. Indeed, the EUAA made use of result

⁶ EUIDEAS (2022), [Policy Paper – External Differentiated Integration in Justice and Home Affairs: Participation of the Western Balkan Countries in EU Agencies](#), page 5.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

⁷ All four Roadmaps followed the three-pillar structure, but they differed in the number of outcomes objectives within those pillars. The Roadmap for Albania contained five outcomes; for Bosnia and Herzegovina three outcomes, for North Macedonia four outcomes, and for Serbia seven outcomes.



frameworks with indicators referring to specific activities, outputs and outcomes, though room for improvement in terms of their consistent and periodic updating was identified in this evaluation⁸.

While they provided a clear structure and intervention logic, the Roadmaps were also designed to be relatively open-ended. They did not place strict constraints in terms of exact timelines or activities to be implemented, e.g., specific training modules. This left a certain degree of flexibility in their design, which was highly relevant and appreciated by the authorities in all four countries, in light of the volatile nature of migration sphere and unforeseen challenges that may arise (as proved by the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine as well as the COVID-19 pandemic)⁹. If the content of the Roadmaps had been more rigid, adjusting the foreseen activities would have required the design process (needs assessment and approvals at different levels within the Agency as well as with the authorities) to be repeated, which would have required additional time investments. Such flexibility is important when engaging with third countries who are not (yet) legally bound by the CEAS, and where a strong working relationship based on mutual trust is important to see results.

Beyond outlining a work plan, the **Roadmaps were used to provide a broader strategic framework for cooperation with partner countries.** Some of the activities and outcome objectives of the Roadmaps, notably those related to legislative or institutional change, take time to materialise. They were nevertheless included in the Roadmaps to contextualise the shorter-term goals of the cooperation, and incentivise both signatory parties to adhere to their commitments. One example concerned the envisaged support to the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities for reception management, which was to be implemented under the condition that responsibilities for reception management would be transferred from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to the authorities, which did not occur. Including this type of support in the Roadmap served to signal longer-term intentions.

As such, the Roadmaps in part fulfilled the purpose foreseen for the ‘working arrangements’ which the EUAA may establish. Working arrangements would be a more formal, long-term, high-level agreement as they require approval from the Agency’s Management Board and the European Commission. They could, in theory, be used to complement the Roadmaps which serve as a more detailed work plan for a shorter (two to three year) time period. The formal nature of working arrangements means that they take time to negotiate and conclude, though they could also signal to the countries with whom they are signed that they are moving along in the accession process, thereby potentially providing an incentive to seek further alignment with the CEAS. Thus, the relevance of establishing working arrangements, based on the accession status of the partner countries and foresights related to their continued motivation to work with the EUAA, should be carefully considered on an *ad hoc* basis. Such working arrangements would be less relevant for third countries without a credible path towards EU accession.

⁸ It should be noted that the Roadmaps are not operational in nature, and thus do not warrant the same periodicity of monitoring as the Agency’s operational support might, for example. Operational support covers activities that are easy to measure and monitor on a daily basis, i.e., how many activities (e.g., registrations, personal interviews, decisions) each case officer implements. This is different for the Roadmaps which provide more strategic support which is contingent on the speed at which the authorities carry out their side of the work. For example, comments on draft legislation can only be provided by the EUAA once a draft has been prepared and shared by the authorities, which could take several months in between activities.

⁹ Examples of *ad hoc* activities implemented to respond to these unforeseen challenges include a workshop for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina on registration to help manage large influxes of Afghan asylum applicants; guidance and support for the development of SOPs on remote procedures in North Macedonia which helped the country continue processing asylum applications in spite of social distancing measures imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Relevance of the content of the Roadmaps

The **relevance of the content of the individual Roadmaps, at least when first endorsed, was ensured by the thorough needs assessments carried out prior to their development**¹⁰. The involvement of EU Member State experts, especially those from countries that are geopolitically close to the Western Balkan region, speak the same languages or have provided support in the past, enabled better contextualisation of the challenges in-country¹¹. International organisations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and IOM that have been supporting the countries for a longer period of time provided valuable insights based on prior experiences working with the authorities, and the involvement of the European Commission ensured alignment with the EU's enlargement priorities and needs. Taken together, the participatory approach enabled a thorough assessment of needs, based not only on what the authorities considered important to address but also the knowledge of other stakeholders active in the region, which was a view shared by stakeholders across all four countries. This facilitated buy-in from the authorities in the Western Balkan countries as they felt a sense of ownership over the Roadmap and the priority areas of intervention it outlined. While needs change over time, the EUAA was able to swiftly address such changes through *ad hoc* activities, due to the flexible nature of the Roadmaps explained above. As a result, the Roadmaps were all relevant to meet the needs of the authorities¹².

The provision of **support to strengthen asylum legislation in line with the CEAS (pillar 1) was relevant across all four countries, and adapted to the needs of the partner countries**. As of 2020, the European Commission's 'Chapter 24 Reports'¹³, which outline the progress made by (potential) accession countries in their accession process, found the countries' legal frameworks in the field of asylum to be largely aligned with the EU acquis. Nonetheless, according to the reports, gaps remained in all four countries and further adaptation of different aspects of their legal frameworks was needed.

Relatedly, **support to contribute to effective asylum procedures (pillar 2) was highly relevant in light of the transitory nature of the Western Balkan region and the need to improve their processing capacities in view of their potential accession to the EU**. The Western Balkan countries are primarily countries of transit, as suggested by the relatively low number of asylum applications as compared to the declarations of intention to apply for asylum (see Figure 1). While there are stark differences between countries¹⁴, the trend holds true for the region as a whole. This led to a need for support not

¹⁰ Prior to the design of a Roadmap, a needs assessment is carried out jointly by the Agency and national authorities, in consultation with other relevant stakeholders (e.g., the European Commission, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, as relevant) to identify priority areas of intervention.

¹¹ For instance, the involvement of an expert from Croatia in the needs assessment of the first iteration of the Serbian Roadmap (and, more recently, the first Roadmap with Montenegro) led to higher engagement from the authorities due to the shared language and geopolitical similarities between the countries. Involving such experts also made the needs assessment process more efficient because there was less need to brief them on the local context beforehand.

¹² New needs tend to emerge during the implementation period, because the field of migration and asylum is volatile and susceptible to unforeseen changes, as evidenced by the recent crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine. As such, crises and the impact they have on Western Balkan countries cannot be pre-empted, they do not affect the relevance of the content of the Roadmaps.

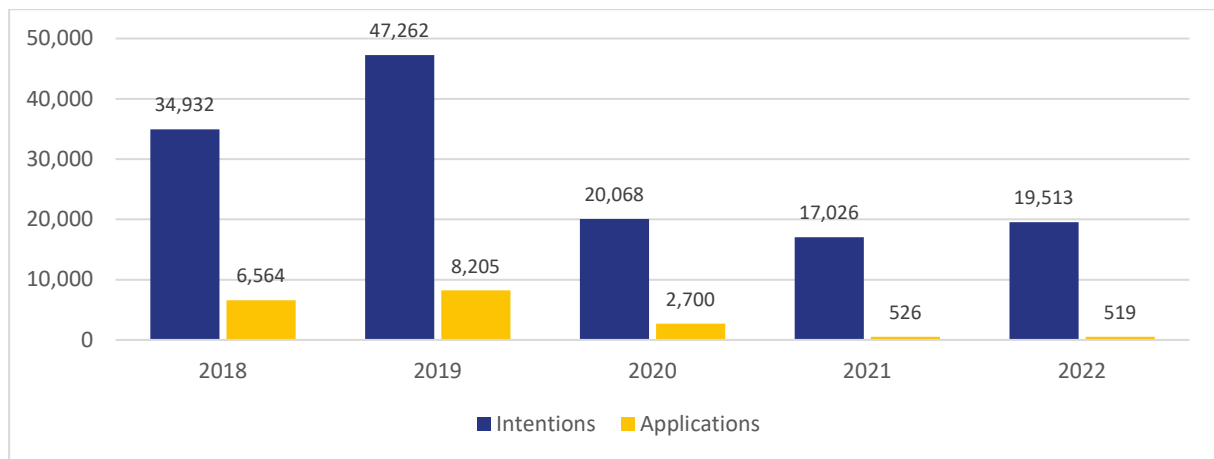
¹³ Commission Staff Working Documents Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy: [Albania 2022 Report](#); [Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022 Report](#); [North Macedonia 2022 Report](#); [Serbia 2022 Report](#).

¹⁴ The difference between intentions and applications was the largest in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with an average difference of around 20,000 during the 2018-2020 period. This was followed by Serbia, with an average difference of around 7800 during



only with asylum processing, but also with ensuring adequate access to procedures and early identification of potential vulnerable cases and minors. Additionally, supporting the enhancement of asylum structures in the region in line with the CEAS and EU practices is highly relevant in light of the progressive enlargement of the EU and the possibility that Western Balkan countries become receiving countries in the future. According to the Commission’s Chapter 24 reports, there was a need for improvement in the implementation of asylum procedures and enforcement capacity of the authorities, who were hindered by insufficient capacity and resources in terms of staff and facilities, which made capacity building support and guidance/tools to support the daily work of asylum officials in these fields highly relevant.

Figure 1. Intentions vs applications in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia, 2018-2020



Source: Contractor based on [UNHCR asylum statistics](#).

The **support provided to contribute to effective reception systems (pillar 3) was relevant**, but several factors severely hindered the implementation of planned activities. For example, the restrictions derived from the COVID-19 pandemic had a strong impact on the provision of support in the area of reception, both because reception management had to be adapted to the new context, and because it made it more difficult to coordinate with the various stakeholders. There were also instances where support was not provided because it was not requested by national authorities or the authorities were not able to meet the preconditions for the support to be delivered. These challenges could not have been foreseen at the time of the needs assessments. The provision of support in the reception sphere continues to be a priority according to Chapter 24 reports¹⁵, which seems to suggest continued relevance of EUAA’s support in this area. Clarification is needed, however, on which types of support the Agency can provide in this field, because there were **misunderstandings concerning the mandate**

the 2018-2020 period. In Albania, the number of intentions and applications was almost the same during the period, and in North Macedonia zero intentions were recorded each year so the number of applications was consistently higher.

¹⁵ [Albania 2022 Report](#), p. 47-48; [Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022 Report](#), p. 37, 47-48; [North Macedonia 2022 Report](#), p. 45-46; [Serbia 2022 Report](#), p. 61-61.



of the Agency and the support it could provide to national authorities, even in countries with second iterations of Roadmaps¹⁶.

What were the key achievements and good practices/challenges observed in/across the Roadmaps in 2020-2022? What are the lessons learned for the future? (Effectiveness)

In broad lines, the Roadmaps included three types of support to the Western Balkan countries: capacity building support through participation of authorities in the EUAA's core training modules and train-the-trainer sessions; practical support through the dissemination of EUAA guidance and tools to support the effective and efficient implementation of asylum and reception legislation; and institutional support activities to adapt processes and ways of working or aligning approaches with the CEAS.

Overall, the Roadmaps were **moderately successful in achieving their intended outcomes**, though their implementation and achievements differed significantly across countries¹⁷. The 2020-2022 period was subject to several unforeseen challenges which impacted the delivery of support, such as travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the staff's ability to reach the Western Balkans; and crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine, which affected migratory flows as well as the resource capacity of the Agency. At the same time, capacity building and the adaptation of legislation and institutional practices take time, especially in light of resource limitations on the side of the authorities. As such, long-term outcomes did not necessarily materialise in the two-year timeframe that was allocated to the Roadmaps, especially for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Roadmaps were the first of their kind. The subsequent sections assess the effectiveness of the Roadmaps in relation to each of their three pillars.

Contributing to the strengthening of asylum legislation, institutions and systems (pillar 1)

The Roadmaps contributed to bringing countries closer to CEAS standards, through legislative support and exposure to EU Member States' practices. The Agency contributed to revisions of asylum legislation in countries with a first generation of Roadmaps (i.e., Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania)¹⁸, and supported the implementation of the asylum law in Serbia, through the refinement of a monitoring and evaluation system, building on the progress made during the first iteration of the Roadmap (2018-2020). Similarly, support concerning the implementation of the asylum law in North Macedonia was planned, however, COVID-19-related restrictions hindered the implementation of the face-to-face activities envisaged in this regard.

¹⁶ In Serbia, support with the implementation of a contingency plan could not be implemented because of a misinterpretation of the Agency's mandate by the authorities – they requested the deployment of an expert, which the Agency could not provide. In North Macedonia, there was misalignment in what was planned in the Roadmap for support on developing protocols on health and safety in reception centres, which could not materialise as the Agency decided it fell outside of its mandate, after the Roadmap had already been signed.

¹⁷ In Albania, out of the 26 planned activities, 16 were fully implemented (61%); in Bosnia and Herzegovina out of 20 activities planned in the Roadmap (subject to the authorities requesting support), five were fully implemented (25%); in North Macedonia, out of the 18 planned deliverables, 12 were delivered (67%) and in Serbia out of the 27 planned activities, 13 (48%) were fully implemented.

¹⁸ The Agency carried out a revision of the asylum law in Bosnia and Herzegovina and supported the revision of the asylum legislation as well as provided guidance and legal support on drafting related secondary legislation/by-laws in Albania.



The **delivery of capacity building support played a key role in this respect**. National authorities, most notably in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁹, were quite active and eager to engage in the train-the-trainer sessions delivered by the Agency, as shown by their high participation rates. The case of Serbia was particularly successful, as staff trained as trainers during the first iteration of the Roadmap were able to start rolling out training at national level. National rollouts constitute a multiplier effect of the EUAA's training, because they enable training that is more adapted to the local context to be implemented in a way that is more efficient for the Agency, and ultimately contribute to the sustainability of the support as authorities become more independent. Compared to other third countries/regions where the train-the-trainer methodology is employed (e.g., Turkey), the Western Balkan region was at the time of writing broadly speaking the most advanced, according to EUAA staff.

Despite the observed progress, the authorities need more support for **the practical implementation of the legislation in line with EU practices and standards**. On the one hand, the implementation of certain related activities (e.g., development and roll-out of SOPs and workflows) was hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic as this impacted the frequency of missions and thus reduced the speed at which foreseen activities could be implemented. On the other hand, the Western Balkan countries tended not to assign sufficient human and financial resources to the management of their asylum and reception systems, which led to small administrations being overburdened and needing to prioritise their daily work, rather than invest in improving their practices. As a result, there were many cases in which foreseen activities could not be delivered by the Agency because the necessary preconditions for support were not met by the authorities.

Contributing to effective asylum procedures (pillar 2)

The **Roadmaps contributed to the strengthening of the asylum procedures in the Western Balkan region through the provision of support tailored to the specific needs of the countries** (see section on relevance of the content of the Roadmaps above)²⁰. Key achievements in this respect included the adoption of SOPs on examination and registration in North Macedonia and the enhancement of the country of origin information (COI) expertise in Serbia. However, there is room to accelerate the provision of support concerning the identification, assessment and response to unaccompanied minors, including the adoption of a rights-compliant age assessment procedure across all four countries. Shortcomings in this area were largely beyond the control of the Agency, as they stemmed from resource capacities, COVID-19-related travel restrictions (travel bans were in place for the majority of the 24-month implementation period in all four countries), and the fact that it takes time to observe changes in procedures, as already explained. In some cases, the Agency was able to mitigate the challenges, e.g., by shifting to online meetings or finding solutions to travel to the region in spite of the burdens this imposed on them²¹. Because of their efforts, the Roadmaps managed to provide

¹⁹ National officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina attended nine train-the-trainer modules while Serbian authorities attended 11 modules.

²⁰ In Albania, under the second pillar, emphasis was placed on access to procedures, including the identification of persons with special needs, and reinforced examination of asylum applications in line with the CEAS and EU standards; in Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasis was placed on effective procedures of identification, assessment and response to unaccompanied minors; in North Macedonia, on increased quality of asylum decisions in line with the CEAS and EU Member States' practices and in Serbia, on access to procedures, effective identification and assessment of persons with special needs and COI.

²¹ Traveling to the Western Balkan region, where all countries were on the 'red list', required prior approval from the Maltese Health Ministry and from the Agency's Executive Director. It also required the staff that travelled to quarantine for 14 days in a 'green corridor' country at their own expense, and put themselves at risk of infection by travelling. Despite this, Roadmap coordinators travelled to the region several times to ensure continuity in communication and implementation of the Roadmaps.



guidance to countries, through the provision of materials and capacity building support, albeit to a lesser degree than they would have in the absence of the pandemic.

All stakeholders agreed that Western Balkan countries **would benefit from the provision of more practical and tailored support** (e.g., on-the-job coaching, practical support with SOPs, workflows). According to some EUAA staff, following the delivery of capacity building activities, the next step to effectively improve the asylum procedures in Western Balkan countries is to step up the provision of support and explore the possibility of facilitating operational cooperation. However, there is a lack of a common approach concerning the scope of support that the Agency should provide to third countries, as they are not (yet) legally bound by the CEAS. This is in line with the views of EU and international stakeholders who believed that the EUAA could have a larger impact in the region if it were physically present. The possibility of deploying liaison officers (as per Article 36 of the EUAA Regulation) was being explored by the Agency at the time of writing (November 2022).

Contributing to an effective reception system (pillar 3)

The **effectiveness of the Roadmap to support the strengthening of effective reception systems and conditions in the Western Balkan region was more limited** than the achievements in the field of reception because it was highly contingent on the context and the institutional set-up of the partner countries.

As mentioned previously, the Roadmaps included **preconditions for the provision of support** from the EUAA. If these were not met, the support simply was not mobilised; this is clear from the design stage of the Roadmaps. As already mentioned, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the precondition to the EUAA providing support on improving reception conditions was made contingent on the authorities taking over full legal responsibility for all reception centres and requesting support from the Agency, and this was not the case. Similarly, in Albania support that was foreseen in relation to rolling out national contingency plans on reception required the endorsement of such plans by the relevant authorities, which was not achieved either. In both cases, the limitations were not within the control of the Agency.

The case of **Serbia was different as more progress on reception was made**²². On the one hand, progress in the area of reception in Serbia is explained by the country's advanced status in the EU accession negotiations process and its long-standing relationship with the Agency. What also played a role was Serbia's involvement as an observer of the Agency's Network of Reception Authorities, which enabled the authorities to gain insights into EU+ countries' practices more widely in the field of reception, beyond the experiences from Member State experts involved in implementing the Roadmap and good practice examples outlined in the Agency's guidance documents.

To what extent was the allocation of resources to the (individual) Roadmaps appropriate considering their scope and complexity? (Efficiency)

The **Roadmaps are bilateral cooperation instrument between the EUAA and national authorities**. The formulation and implementation of the Roadmaps was funded through a **combination of funds** from

²² Except in relation to contingency planning, due to the misalignment in interpretation of the Agency's mandate, as explained in the section on the relevance of the content of the Roadmaps.



the core budget of the Agency²³, and the project '[Regional Support to Protection-sensitive migration management in the Western Balkan and Turkey](#)' which allocated € 1,475,500 to help advance the EUAA's cooperation in the Western Balkan region and Turkey overall, without allocating specific shares to individual partner countries. The contribution from the Agency's core budget to the Roadmaps is difficult to enumerate and attempting to do so is not within the scope of this evaluation. Rather, it was secured and updated on a rolling basis in the Roadmaps' implementation plans, which meant that additional resources could be reallocated on a needs basis, taking into account both the absorption capacities of the authorities and the evolving 'in-house' capacities of the Agency.

In terms of **human resources**, the management and implementation of the Roadmaps²⁴ is the responsibility of the Western Balkan team of the EICU, which reports directly to the Executive Director as of January 2022. Besides the team leader, all the Western Balkan team is financed externally through the IPA project. A project coordinator was designated to manage the project financed by the Commission, as well as the horizontal and regional project activities and budget while, in the case of the Roadmaps with the countries evaluated, two project officers were responsible for coordinating and implementing the bilateral cooperation portfolio of the project. Each of these two project officers was the focal point for three countries where the Agency has Roadmaps in the region. In other words, 0.25 full-time equivalent (FTE) was available for the preparation, implementation, coordination and monitoring of each Roadmap. They were supported by one officer responsible for horizontal administrative tasks for all Roadmaps with Western Balkan countries. The implementation of the Roadmaps was further supported by the Agency's in-house expert staff²⁵. Within the Training and Professional Development Centre (C2), there was one focal point on training for all work in the external dimension. In the Asylum Knowledge Centre (C3), focal points (one in the asylum processes sector and one in the reception sector) were assigned to provide support on specific third countries (also beyond the Western Balkan region). Support from these experts from the EUAA's centres accounted for up to 0.5 FTE on average during the implementation period of the Roadmaps, considering expert staff had a wide portfolio of other activities to work on (e.g., development of practical guides and tools, implementation of training for EU+ countries, supporting operations, etc.).

This **set-up reportedly placed considerable human resource constraints on the Agency**. On the coordination side, there was an increase from two Roadmaps in 2017-2019 to six Roadmaps in 2022, without a change in the number of coordination staff²⁶. At the same time, the Roadmaps expanded in scope, to include institutional cooperation, legal review, information exchange, and support with the development of SOPs and coordination with/between authorities, thus requiring further engagement and additional capacity from coordinators. For supporting thematic staff from C3, there was reportedly no formal system in place for the prioritisation of tasks, and work on the Roadmaps was often delayed because work related to EU Member States needed to be prioritised in view of the Agency's mandate.

An additional factor that hindered the effective and efficient implementation of the Roadmaps was the COVID-19 pandemic (see also corresponding sections on effectiveness and efficiency in this report). Due to travel restrictions, activities that required the physical presence of experts (e.g., for on-

²³ The Agency's own contribution concerned budget resources allocated for its external dimension priorities and in-house developed tools, guidance products and thematic expert support.

²⁴ This includes preparation of events, chairing of meetings, organising logistics, leading cooperation and communication with national counterparts and monitoring the implementation of all activities.

²⁵ Staff from the Agency's C2 for the planning and provision of training, and C3 sectors for asylum processes and reception on topical matters.

²⁶ There was a decrease in FTE for coordination of 75% between 2017 and 2022.



the-job coaching) needed to be postponed. The fact that there were human resource constraints in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic which hindered the implementation of certain foreseen activities highlights a pressing need to resolve this issue. If not, there could be a reputational risk for the Agency stemming from over-promising on activities which cannot be implemented in the foreseen timeframe. These efficiency challenges are expected to be partly mitigated with the IPA III project (2022-2025), which will expand the Western Balkan team to up to ten project staff, including reception and asylum experts.

At the same time, the **COVID-19 pandemic and its associated travel restrictions unintentionally created efficiency gains** for the Agency. With several meetings and training activities being moved online, and travel to the region being limited to smaller groups of staff or only the Roadmap coordinators, the Agency saved time and money²⁷. The experience from Serbia, where online training increased participation rates, and from Albania, where the Roadmap coordinator travelled to deliver presentations on two of the Agency's tools by themselves (instead of with colleagues from other centres), show that there is room to consider conducting some activities online and/or adopt hybrid modalities. Nevertheless, there are certain activities that require the physical presence of experts which should continue to be delivered in person now that the pandemic has stabilised.

How well were Roadmaps coordinated internally and with external stakeholders? (Coherence)

Coherence and coordination within the Agency

There was general **acknowledgment across the Agency of the efforts made by the Western Balkan team to deliver the envisaged support, particularly in a resource-constrained context** (which the whole Agency was affected by). All consulted staff within the Agency reported that intra-Agency cooperation worked smoothly. They reported that cooperation across centres and sectors in the delivery support to authorities in partner third countries improved following the reorganisation of the Agency and the use of focal points within C2 and C3.

However, there was a **mismatch between the ambition of the Agency to provide support to the Western Balkan countries (and third countries more broadly)²⁸ and their understanding of what it takes to prepare, launch and implement Roadmaps in practice**. According to EUAA staff, there were often mismatches between the activities proposed at the design stage and the capacities of different centres to actually deliver that support. In addition, staff from the EICU reportedly spent a significant share of their time on internal coordination and briefing expert colleagues, whose work primarily concerns the provision of support to EU Member States, so they did not necessarily have in-depth knowledge of the Western Balkan context²⁹. This caused inefficiencies which could be mitigated if topical experts were to be assigned specifically to working on tasks of the EICU, as they could build up their knowledge and experience in a way that better suits the needs of the Western Balkan countries (and other third countries) specifically. As the core mandate of the EUAA is to provide support and information to EU Member States, and the Agency is limited in the number of posts assigned to it by DG HOME, assigning appropriate human resources to the EICU to work exclusively on cooperation with

²⁷ And marginally reduced its carbon footprint, though an assessment of the magnitude of this effect was not carried out as it was not in scope of this evaluation.

²⁸ As per objectives outlined in the Agency's programming documents.

²⁹ Roadmap coordinators estimated that around half of their time was spent on internal coordination, which includes briefing colleagues as well as coordinating with the Corporate Management Centre on administrative matters (e.g., related to procurement and logistics).



third countries is difficult to justify. At the time of writing (November 2022) only one statutory (non-project) staff member was assigned to advance the Agency's cooperation with the Western Balkans. As already mentioned, these issues are expected to be mitigated to some extent under IPA III, through the recruitment of additional (thematic) experts to the Western Balkan team, as well as efforts to build thematic capacity of EICU staff. This should free up experts from other centres to focus their efforts on other tasks and ensure the Agency does not over-promise on what it can deliver.

Beyond the bilateral support provided to the four Western Balkan countries in scope of this evaluation, the Agency also provided support at regional level, either for a subset of the countries (e.g., joint workshop on registration of applicants for the authorities in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina), or for the region as a whole (e.g., workshops on age assessment or COI methodology). Part of this regional support, notably in relation to training, was delivered through the framework of the Agency's cooperation with the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) partnership³⁰. Taking a regional approach to activities of relevance to more than one country or the region as a whole (sometimes also extending to Turkey) was more efficient for the Agency as it limited the need for travel and logistical coordination (e.g., booking of venues and interpretation services). Such **regional support should be exploited as much as possible for the sake of efficiency gains**, where it is considered appropriate to achieve the desired outcomes in more than one country, though it needs to be balanced with the need to provide tailor-made support to individual countries as well.

Coherence and coordination with EU bodies and Member State authorities

By virtue of being embedded in the IPA project and supporting the Western Balkan countries in their accession process, the **Roadmaps were coherent with and supported the achievement of the goals of the EU in the Western Balkan region**. All of the Agency's actions to support third countries are developed and implemented in consultation and close cooperation with the European Commission, the EEAS and the European Union Justice and Home Affairs agencies and their networks. The Agency concluded a working arrangement for cooperation on external action with DG HOME in 2018, and with the EEAS in 2021 to facilitate this cooperation³¹.

The EUAA also set up a dedicated Working Group on the Western Balkans under the framework of the Third Country Cooperation Network, which brings together Member States with a particular interest in supporting countries in the Western Balkan region in the field of asylum, reception and migration. The Working Group is used to discuss cooperation, draw synergies between the work of the Agency, EU Member States and other EU services and plan joint support actions aimed at advancing asylum and reception cooperation in the region. During the 2020-2022 period, four Working Group meetings were held, which offered a forum for communication on the different actors' activities. This, in turn, **helped ensure there were no unnecessary duplications in efforts, in support of a Team Europe approach in the Western Balkan region**.

Despite this positive result, **there is scope to use the Roadmaps as a framework to facilitate and encourage operational cooperation between EU Member States and the Western Balkan countries**

³⁰ MARRI is a regional intergovernmental body established in 2004 which brings together representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The mandate of MARRI is to promote closer regional cooperation and a common, comprehensive and harmonised approach in the areas of migration, asylum, border control, visa regime, integration and return of refugees within the ambition to reach international and European standards in these areas.

³¹ EUAA website, [partners – international stakeholders](#).



(as foreseen in Article 35(1) of the [EUAA Regulation](#)). As the Agency's mandate does not allow for operational support to third countries directly, cooperating with Member States in this respect could fill certain gaps. For example, if a Member State has a particular interest in supporting a country in the region, they could do so by being more involved in the implementation of the Roadmaps, through deployment of expertise in relation to some of the activities (already taking place), or even as part of a national led initiative that is embedded in the Roadmap framework. As explained by EUAA staff, this has been done in other third countries before³².

To facilitate these kinds of synergies, a stronger role for the Western Balkan Working Group could be envisaged. According to the EUAA and consulted Member States, the Working Group is engaged in the drafting of Roadmaps to provide feedback, mobilise EU experts to support the needs assessment and formulation exercises and is periodically updated on the status of implementation. However, it was suggested that the meetings focus more on what the EUAA is doing rather than what projects Member States already implement or would like to implement in the region. Better, two-way information flow and more transparency on efforts could help maximise coherence between existing activities, but also provide a basis to discuss potential future actions and how to coordinate them. This would be beneficial to all actors concerned: the Agency and Member States could pool resources (thus potentially creating efficiency gains), and thereby deliver the most relevant and appropriate support to authorities in the Western Balkan region in a way they may not have been able to on their own.

Coherence and coordination with other stakeholders

In addition to the gaps in the EUAA's mandate that can be filled by EU Member States, international organisations such as IOM and UNHCR could provide operational and technical support that is not possible for the Agency to provide. Whenever possible, the Agency **made efforts to ensure that synergies were exploited and duplications in efforts avoided**, for instance by providing capacity building jointly (e.g., in Albania on access to procedure and vulnerabilities through roundtable events organised jointly with UNHCR), or by avoiding providing support in areas where other actors are involved (e.g., in Bosnia and Herzegovina where IOM is involved in reception management). Such **synergies and avoidance of duplication were ensured from an early stage**, by consulting with relevant organisations during the design phase of the Roadmaps, as evidenced by the fact that all Roadmaps outlined potential synergies based on ongoing or planned projects of other actors. The degree to which such synergies actually materialised differed between countries, as it depended on the type and scope of the support being provided, but also on traditions (how involved certain organisations are and for how long) and interpersonal relationships. In some cases, authorities reported a preference to work with the EUAA rather than international organisations because of their potential future accession to the EU, which is another reason why joint actions were sometimes avoided.

To what extent and how do Roadmaps add value compared to the work of other international partners? (Coherence/EU added value)

The key added value of the EUAA is related to the accession process of the Western Balkan countries. As part of the accession process, countries who are interested in joining the EU need to satisfy the

³² For example, for the Middle East and North Africa region, voluntary financial contributions from Member States were used to support the implementation of the Roadmaps. In the case of Turkey, the Agency coordinated with the authorities in the Netherlands to be more involved in providing expert support.



'Copenhagen criteria'³³ and are required to adapt their administrative and institutional infrastructures and to bring their national legislation in line with the EU acquis. Chapter 24 of the acquis relates to justice, freedom and security, which asylum and reception legislation falls under. At the time of writing, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia were 'candidate countries' in the process of 'transposing' (or integrating) EU legislation into national law³⁴. The EUAA is best placed to support the accession process of (potential) candidate countries in the field of asylum and reception because of its status as the EU's centre of expertise on asylum that is tasked with facilitating and improving the functioning of the CEAS. As explained in the section on effectiveness, the **Roadmaps contributed to bringing countries closer to CEAS rules and standards**, through legislative support, capacity building activities and exposure to EU Member States' practices. This added value was more pronounced in the field of asylum than in the field of reception, because more work could be implemented. There is potential for the EUAA to have high EU added value in this field, however, by supporting alignment of reception conditions with the CEAS and EU standards, so continued support for building and operating effective reception systems which account for vulnerabilities is needed.

Such support could not be provided by other actors, or at least not to the same extent. International stakeholders (e.g., IOM, UNHCR) provide support in line with international standards, which the CEAS complies with but in some cases goes beyond. EU+ countries can provide information and good practice examples from their own perspectives bilaterally, but the added value of the EUAA was that it pooled experiences and good practices from different EU+ countries that authorities in the Western Balkan region could learn from. The Agency's experience and expertise with the development and dissemination/implementation of training and practical guidance and tools supported this process in a way bilateral support could not.

The **added value of the Agency's Roadmaps with third countries without a credible path to EU accession is somewhat more limited.** While the Agency's guides, tools, training modules and other products provide relevant information and good practice examples that could be applied by any third country, their core function is to support EU Member States in their application of the CEAS. Consequently, the products are tailored to the CEAS rules, which are not necessarily applicable in third countries that are farther removed from the EU. This is especially the case because the Agency cannot provide operational support, which is needed in countries whose asylum and reception systems are under pressure, or countries where no such systems exist and need to be established.

³³ The accession criteria, or Copenhagen criteria (after the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 which defined them), are the essential conditions all candidate countries must satisfy to become an EU Member State. EU membership requires that a candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

³⁴ Albania was awarded candidate status in 2014, and the negotiation process began in July 2022. North Macedonia was awarded candidate status in 2004, and the negotiation process began in July 2022. Serbia was granted EU candidate status in 2012 and the negotiation process began in 2014. Montenegro is currently at an advanced stage in the negotiation process as well (the process started in June 2012). Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are currently considered potential accession countries. Serbia is the most advanced in the negotiation process amongst the four countries in scope of this evaluation.



4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1. Conclusions

To what extent are the Roadmaps still relevant to authorities in partner third countries and EU Member States and how has their relevance evolved over time? (Relevance)

The **Roadmaps, as a framework for cooperation between the Agency and the Western Balkan countries, were highly relevant to national authorities**, particularly in light of their accession journey and need to align with the EU acquis. Their design, including the three-pillar approach (i.e., legislation, asylum procedures and practices, and reception procedures and practices) was highly relevant to accommodate the needs of authorities and give response to key priority areas based on their accession stage. There is scope to increase the involvement of EU Member States within the Roadmap framework, however, to fill gaps not addressed by the Agency's mandate (see conclusions on coherence below).

The **Roadmap framework as such continues to be fit-for-purpose and appropriate in light of recent changes to the Agency's mandate**. It may be beneficial to supplement the Roadmaps with formalised working arrangements in certain cases (e.g., for countries more advanced in the accession process), if the Agency considers the effort of establishing working arrangements to be proportionate to the benefits they would bring.

What were the key achievements and good practices/challenges observed in/across the Roadmaps in 2020-2022? What are the lessons learned for the future? (Effectiveness)

In broad lines, **the Agency's support in the area of asylum was the most effective across all four countries**. The capacity of authorities to manage asylum procedures increased, national legislation was further aligned with the CEAS, and in limited cases working practices were adapted in line with EU standards and good practices. Notably the dissemination of translated guides and tools played a role in this respect. Train-the-trainer modules also played a role and have the ability to multiply the Agency's training efforts through national or regional rollouts in the future. In all countries, there is a need for continued practical, tailored support from the Agency to further align their practices and approaches to the CEAS.

The **effectiveness of the Roadmap to support the strengthening of effective reception systems and conditions** was somewhat more limited due to it being highly contingent on the context and the institutional setup of the countries. Participation of Serbia in the Agency's Network of Reception Authorities effectively contributed to learning and the enhancement of reception systems in line with the CEAS, which is a good practice that could be considered for other countries in the region.

The **Roadmaps were significantly impacted by factors that were largely beyond the control of the Agency** (capacity constraints on national authorities' side, COVID-19-related travel restrictions, geopolitical changes, and national institutional setups). This, paired with the fact that institutional change takes time, requires further investments into cooperation with the Western Balkan countries in the future.

To what extent was the allocation of resources to the (individual) Roadmaps appropriate considering their scope and complexity? (Efficiency)

The financial resources available through the IPA regional project were sufficient to implement the Roadmaps. However, the cooperation was significantly impacted by **human resource constraints on the Agency's side and inefficiencies derived from the institutional setup of cooperation for the implementation of the Roadmaps** (see also conclusion on coherence below). There was a mismatch between the increase in the number and scope of Roadmaps and the stagnation in human resources assigned to implement them, and there was no formal mechanism in place to facilitate prioritisation of tasks of different centres, often to the detriment of the work in the external dimension.

How well were Roadmaps coordinated internally and with external stakeholders? (Coherence)

The **coordination between the EICU and other parts of the Agency was smooth and reportedly improved in recent years** through the assignment of focal points in other centres, supporting the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the support provided to third countries. However, staff within these centres was primarily tasked with supporting EU Member States and thus was not always aware of the context in the Western Balkan countries, which required significant resource investments for management and coordination on the part of Roadmap coordinators. Moreover, there was a mismatch between what was proposed at the design stage of the Roadmaps and the available resources of the supporting centres to actually deliver on this. This mismatch was apparent at the level of the Agency as a whole – while there seems to be an ambition to keep increasing the number of third countries supported, and the scope of that support, there was a stagnation in the number of staff assigned to carry out the work due to a perceived misunderstanding of how resource-intensive work in the external dimension is.

The individual Roadmaps were coherent with and complemented by the Agency's activities at regional level. Regional activities produced efficiency gains for the Agency and should therefore be exploited as much as possible in situations where it is considered appropriate to achieve the desired outcomes in more than one country. However, regional activities need to be balanced with the need to provide tailor-made support to individual countries as well.

As concerns coherence and coordination with EU Member States, **the Agency's Third Country Cooperation Network supported alignment and the identification of potential synergies and joint support actions, though not to the desired extent.** While participating Member States were sufficiently informed about the Agency's activities in the region, there was limited transparency on the activities Member States are implementing bilaterally. As such, this network can be better exploited as a forum for exchange and coordination to facilitate more operational cooperation (which the Agency itself cannot provide) between EU Member States and partner third countries, to ensure a true Team Europe approach.

Where applicable, **the Agency also coordinated its efforts with international organisations to avoid duplications** and support partner third countries in a coherent and consistent manner.

To what extent and how do Roadmaps add value compared to the work of other international partners? (Coherence/EU added value)

The **key added value of the EUAA was related to the accession process of the Western Balkan countries**, as the Agency is best placed to support third country authorities in aligning their legislation and practices with the CEAS on the basis of good practice examples from different EU⁺ countries. Such support could not be provided by other actors, or at least not to the same extent. International organisations provide support in line with international standards, which the CEAS complies with but in some cases goes beyond. EU⁺ countries can provide information and good practice examples from their own perspectives bilaterally, but the added value of the EUAA was that it pooled experiences and good practices from different EU⁺ countries that the authorities in the Western Balkan region could learn from.

The **added value of the Agency's Roadmaps with third countries without a credible path to EU accession is somewhat more limited**. While the Agency's guides, tools, training modules and other products provide relevant information and good practice examples that could be applied by any third country, their core function is to support EU Member States in their application of the CEAS. Consequently, the products are tailored to the CEAS rules, which are not necessarily applicable in third countries that are farther removed from the EU.

4.2. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Further facilitate and encourage operational cooperation between Member States and Western Balkan countries

To further facilitate and encourage operational cooperation between EU Member States and Western Balkan countries in the Roadmap framework, as foreseen in its mandate, the Agency could consider:

- agreeing internally and with the European Commission what 'facilitating operational cooperation' entails and what role the EUAA should have in this;
- clarifying to third countries and EU Member States, e.g., through the new External Cooperation Strategy, what 'facilitating operational cooperation' means and which types of activities it could entail;
- facilitating information flow, coordination, joint implementation, and coherence amongst and between respective EU Member State competent authorities and EU services (from programming and financing, to policy and delivery of operational and capacity development support) in the framework of the Third Country Cooperation Network;
- establishing a 'project database' of EU Member States' activities in third countries to increase transparency and information sharing, where such project databases do not exist already;
- involving Member States that participate in the Third Country Cooperation Network geographical working groups from an early stage in the Roadmap design;
- encouraging Member States with an interest in the region to contribute to the delivery of support to fill gaps the Agency cannot fill, e.g., for the provision of material support or specific national-led initiatives within the Roadmaps.



Recommendation 2: Reconsider the format of the cooperation with partner third countries

In light of the new EUAA mandate, and the need to continue to reinforce practical support to Western Balkan countries, the evaluation recommends that the Agency consider:

- retaining and expanding the timeframe of the Roadmap framework as a medium-term work plan for strategic cooperation with third countries to better reflect the challenges associated with bringing about institutional change in partner countries;
- establishing working arrangements with countries further along in the EU accession process, as a strategic framework to complement the more practical nature of the Roadmaps as work plans;
- exploring possibilities to involve third countries with a credible path to accession in EUAA practitioners' networks, e.g., as observers.

Recommendation 3: Reconsider the approach to staffing the planning and implementation of the Roadmaps

In light of human resource constraints and the Agency's ambition to increase the scope of support to third countries, the Agency could consider:

- reassessing the short, medium, and long-term capacities of the Agency's staff working on the Roadmaps in back-to-normal conditions following the COVID-19 pandemic;
- increasing the FTEs available for management and coordination of the Roadmaps, e.g., to at least 0.5 FTE per Roadmap;
- introducing a clear prioritisation system to allow for the most relevant activities to be carried out to minimise the impact of insufficient capacity in supporting centres/sectors;
- embedding expert staff with knowledge of the context (and ideally also languages) of the local context in third countries and/or training Roadmap coordinators on thematic issues, to alleviate some of the pressure placed on C2 and C3 experts, while ensuring close coordination with those centres to avoid working in silos;
- increasing the physical presence of the EUAA in partner third countries as this will ensure closer interaction with the authorities and other organisations on the ground.

Recommendation 4: Clarify the Agency's new mandate and limitations to the types of support it can provide to third countries

In light of instances of confusion around the limits of the mandate of the Agency, it could consider:

- providing further clarity to authorities in partner third countries on the scope of the support that can be provided within the Agency's mandate, e.g., through development of a catalogue of services and/or organisation of a regional presentation and Q&A session, especially after clarity is reached on the EUAA's role in 'facilitating operational cooperation' (see recommendation 1);
- clarifying, in the External Cooperation Strategy (undergoing revision at the time of writing), the Agency's priorities for intervention in partner third countries, in terms of topics to be covered and the format of support (bilateral or regional).



Annex 1: Methodology and analytical models used

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach, combining the use of existing sources of evidence with primary data collection, notably through interviews.

Desk research included the 2020-2022 Roadmaps with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and North Macedonia and their respective evaluation, legislative provisions (i.e., [2021/2303 Regulation](#) establishing the European Union Agency for Asylum and the [231/2014 IPA II Regulation](#)), relevant reports by the European Commission (notably 'Chapter 24' reports) and the Agency's [External Cooperation Strategy \(2019\)](#). One limitation to the evaluation was the lack of granular data on costs pertaining to specific outcomes and activities. Another challenge was that the Roadmaps were not consistently monitored in the same way.

In terms of **interviews**, the evaluation made use of evidence collected through a total of 16 interviews. Some of the interviews were carried out as group interviews, so a total of 21 stakeholders were consulted across all 16 interviews. The stakeholders consulted include relevant staff members from the EUAA, EU Member States, EU institutions and international organisations.

The primary and secondary evidence collected underwent a process of **triangulation and synthesis**, with a view to derive robust, evidence-based answers to the evaluation questions, and formulate conclusions and lessons learned for the future on that basis.

The conclusions and lessons learned, as well as recommendations resulting from them, will be validated with the Agency personnel after the submission of the draft report to ensure they are valid and appropriate, and workable given any contextual constraints faced by the Agency and/or other stakeholders.



Annex 2: Evaluation matrix

Table 1. Evaluation matrix

Evaluation criterion	Operationalised questions	Interviews	Desk research
<p>Relevance: How relevant were the Roadmaps to authorities in the Western Balkan countries and EU Member States, in light of changes in needs and expectations?</p>	<p>How, in general terms, did the EUAA perform in 2020-2021 in view of providing support to the authorities in the Western Balkans?</p> <p>What mechanisms are in place/employed by the Agency to ensure that the Roadmaps address the needs of the authorities? Were these appropriate and sufficient? Why or why not?</p> <p>To what extent was the format and scope of the Roadmaps appropriate to meet the needs of the authorities and provide support in an effective and efficient manner?</p> <p>What lessons can be learned for the future, in light of the new EUAA's mandate?</p>	✓	✓
<p>Effectiveness: What were the key achievements and good practices/challenges observed in/across the Roadmaps in 2020-2022? What are the lessons learned for the future?</p>	<p>Which common achievements/innovations/opportunities were observed across different countries? What factors explain these achievements/innovations/opportunities? To what extent were they the result of the EUAA's actions compared to other (external) factors?</p> <p>Which common challenges/threats were observed across different countries? What factors explain these challenges/threats? To what extent were they the result of the EUAA's actions compared to other (external) factors?</p> <p>What are the prerequisites or conditions for the support to be successful? Does this differ per country? Why and how?</p> <p>What lessons can be learned for the future, in light of the new EUAA's mandate?</p>	✓	✓
<p>Efficiency: To what extent was the allocation of financial and human resources to the (individual) Roadmaps</p>	<p>What resources (human and financial) were invested in the Roadmaps? Were they proportionate to the achieved results?</p>	✓	✓



Evaluation criterion	Operationalised questions	Interviews	Desk research
appropriate considering their scope and complexity?	To what extent and how could the efficiency of the Roadmap framework be improved? What lessons can be learned for the future, in light of the new EUAA mandate?		
Coherence: How well were Roadmaps coordinated (internally and with external stakeholders)?	How well were Roadmaps coordinated (internally and with external stakeholders)? What factors explain good or bad practices in this context? How did the Roadmaps fit into the broader framework of support to Western Balkan countries/the EUAA's external dimension actions?	✓	✓
EU added value: To what extent and how did the Western Balkan Roadmaps add value compared to the work of other international partners (e.g., IOM, UNHCR, ...)?	To what extent did the Roadmaps add value compared to other EU initiatives? Were they complementary to other sources of support (e.g., via IPA) or was there unnecessary overlap or duplication? Is there room for simplification/further alignment with IPA processes/indicators/reporting? To what extent did the Roadmaps add value compared to initiatives of international organisations? Were they complementary to other sources of support or was there unnecessary overlap or duplication? What was the added value of the Roadmaps compared to support from international actors? Was there EU added value resulting from EUAA's support? What lessons can be learned for the future? Are there any lessons to be learned from the external coordination support in other countries/regions?	✓	✓