



EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF EASO OPERATIONAL INTERVENTIONS IN 2020

FINAL REPORT – HORIZONTAL EVALUATION

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ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

ADM	Alternative Deployment Mechanisms
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AWAS	Authority for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (Malta)
BIA	Best Interest Assessment
C1	Operational Support Centre of EASO
C2	Training and Professional Development Centre of EASO
C3	Asylum Knowledge Centre of EASO
CAS	Cypriot Asylum Service
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
COI	Country of Origin
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DARS	Data Analysis and Research Sector (part of C3)
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
DPS	Department of Public Security, authority in Italy responsible for registration of asylum applicants via local Police Immigration offices (Questure)
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EMAS	Emergency Assistance grant scheme of the AMIF
EU	European Union
EU+	EU Member States and Associate Countries
EXO	Executive Office of EASO
GAS	Greek Asylum Service
ICMC	International Catholic Migration Commission (contractor for the RSF)
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPA	International Protection Agency (Malta)
IPAC	International Protection Administrative Court (Cyprus)
IT	Information technology

KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LDPS	Legal Affairs and Data Protection Sector (part of EXO)
MRS	Management Response Sheet
ODC	Operational Data Collection
OP	Operating Plan
PMES	Programming, Monitoring and Evaluation Sector (part of C1)
QAT	Quality Assurance Tool
QMS	Quality management system
RICs	Reception and Identification Centres
RIS	Reception and Identification Service (Greece)
RSF	Resettlement Support Facility
SIPROIMI	System of Protection for Beneficiaries of Protection and Unaccompanied Minors (Italy)
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SPD	Single Programming Document
SR	Strategic Recommendation
SUA	Single Asylum System - <i>Sistema Unico Asilo</i> (Italy)
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
UAMs	Unaccompanied Minors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2020, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) achieved a great deal despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19¹ pandemic. **EASO's support was highly relevant and timely**, and appreciated by the host Member States for not only being of high quality and responding to their needs, but also readjusting flexibly to any new challenges arising during the year.

- **EASO was highly successful in flexibly responding to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.** It implemented **innovative approaches** to remote interviewing and

¹ Coronavirus disease 2019.

processing of applications² and incentivised authorities to do the same, resulting in significant achievements such as the clearing of backlog in pending cases in Greece and Malta and the ability to continue processing resettlement cases at the Resettlement Support Facility (RSF) in Turkey. EASO also managed to resume training activities by switching to remote and/or hybrid training courses.

- **EASO supported the registration of more than 30,000 applicants for international protection³** and contributed to improvements in registration procedures through the introduction of templates, standard operating procedures, and quality management tools. Notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily halted registration activities, and the restrictive nature of temporary workers legislation that slowed down the rate at which registrations could be conducted, EASO was responsible for almost 40% of all registrations carried out across the four host Member States.
- EASO's support to **first instance status determination reached unprecedentedly high levels** in 2020 with 19,895 (+104% from 2019) interviews conducted and 17,562 (+98% from 2019) concluding remarks on international protection⁴. This was achieved despite the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily putting a stop to all face-to-face interviews, which later resumed but at a lesser pace due to social distancing requirements. An important milestone in this context is the reduction of the backlog in cases pending at first instance in Greece. With unprecedentedly low arrivals of new applicants for international protection and high productivity resulting from the implementation of the embedded model, EASO and the Greek Asylum Authority were able to more than double the number of interviews conducted and opinions drafted in 2020 compared to 2019 and reduce the median duration of the process, resulting in a reduction in backlog of 34% compared to 2019. EASO flexibly reallocated resources such that when the backlog on one island was cleared, those caseworkers could work on cases from other islands. Moreover, on the mainland, the introduction of seven new reception sites through Project North helped reduce the backlog by lessening interview waiting times and mitigating the previous issue of lack of working space to conduct interviews.
- **EASO successfully supported Greece, Cyprus and Italy with the processing of cases at second instance** by preparing case files, providing judicial and Country of Origin (COI) research, and building capacity for the relevant authorities. There was a clear need for support in this area because of a lack of institutional capacity on the side of authorities in these Member States. That being said, there is room for streamlining approaches and more systematic sharing of information between EASO and judges and the research officers employed by the relevant authorities. **EASO was heavily involved in ad hoc disembarkations and voluntary relocation**, playing a key role in Greece by supporting two new EU voluntary relocation schemes initiated for unaccompanied minors (UAMs), vulnerable families as well as beneficiaries of international protection; and in Italy by registering 42% of the persons who disembarked from the boats in the 21 disembarkation events⁵.
- EASO made **progress towards improving its intervention logic on reception**, culminating in the publication of EASO's comprehensive reception strategy in March 2021. In Cyprus and Malta, the support to reception in 2020 was centred around vulnerability assessments, including through social work and the piloting of a new referral tool for vulnerable cases in Malta, which laid the foundation for appropriate treatment of vulnerable persons.

² EASO published practical recommendations on conducting remote/online registrations in June 2020 on the basis of thematic meetings held by the EASO Asylum Processes Network; and practical recommendations on conducting remote personal interviews on the basis of thematic meetings held by the EASO Asylum Processes Network in May 2020.

³ [REDACTED]

⁴ [REDACTED]

⁵ Persons not registered by EASO were either UAMs, people not applying for international protection, persons registered by the national authorities because they were not willing to participate in the voluntary relocation, or absconded persons.

- The **RSF model was a great success** that set a basis for future EASO interventions in the external dimension and provided a model for coordination and cooperation between Member States. The facility **supported the processing of 2,319 cases for selection purposes**, and would have resettled many more than 506 of them if COVID-19 had not put a halt to international travel, showing clear EU added value.

There are, however, some **challenges** beyond COVID-19 that have been affecting EASO's ability to effectively and efficiently deliver its operational support in recent years, that persisted throughout 2020.

- Local labour laws limiting the deployment of temporary workers, paired with limited nominations of experts by the EU+⁶ countries, resulted in **human resource constraints** for EASO. The lack of flexible deployment mechanisms impacted EASO's ability to quickly scale up and down operations as necessary to respond to emergency situations and to improve efficiency through longer-term deployments. That said, EASO has been working on a solution through complementary Alternative Deployment Mechanisms that should improve the situation in 2021 and beyond.
- The effectiveness of capacity building and quality standard development support is limited by the **capacity and readiness of relevant authorities to absorb EASO's support**. The overall sustainability⁷ of EASO's interventions seems to be relatively low because authorities remain reliant on EASO's support. This is in part due to the short term nature of operational support, which makes it difficult to put in place a mechanism to ensure the sustainability of results, and might disincentivise authorities from putting in the time and effort required to make the best use of EASO's support and tools to build their own capacity.
- Despite significant progress since 2018 with the introduction of a **comprehensive fidelity monitoring and reporting framework**, there is scope to harmonise the approach to developing indicators for a core set of activities to enhance comparability of results across operations, and to better coordinate with authorities to set targets that are realistic.

Overall, EASO made significant progress in recent years, including 2020, and managed to mitigate many of the challenges posed to its operational support. Based on the experiences gained during 2020, there are concrete recommendations for 2021 and beyond:

Recommendation 1: Introduce different modus operandi to strengthen the continuity and predictability of resources in operations. The efforts made as part of the Complementary Deployment Mechanism Project should be finalised as soon as possible.

Recommendation 2: Avoid ambiguity by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of key EASO staff in operations from the start-up phase. Irrespective of the type of operation, certain positions (measure coordinator, field coordinators, etc.) are essential and need to be filled to ensure the implementation of the operation.

Recommendation 3: Consider moving to multi-annual operational programming, at least in Member States where the imminent need for support has stabilised but there is a need for capacity building. Moving to multi-annual operational programming in cases where a more sustainable, capacity-building approach is preferable, including a clear roadmap for phasing out in the related plans, might increase ownership and buy-in of local authorities, thus improving sustainability.

⁶ EU Member States and Associate Countries.

⁷ Sustainability in this context refers to the degree to which the relevant authorities are able to continue operations at the same level and quality without EASO's support, i.e. once the Agency withdraws its support because the host Member State is no longer under particular pressure.

Recommendation 4: Continue to prioritise and invest in training and coaching activities.

Training should be embedded in the design of the operating plan (OP) from the start to ensure it is tailored to the needs, can be implemented more promptly and maximises the impact, while keeping in mind the importance of being able to adapt to changing needs over the course of the year.

Recommendation 5: Explore the legal feasibility of accommodating teleworking and remote processes where relevant.

Although there are cases in which in-person registrations or interviews are preferable, remote processes can be continued beyond the pandemic, and could have significant positive implications for the effectiveness and efficiency of operational support.

Recommendation 6: Consider streamlining the approach to defining certain core indicators to measure progress, when considering the same type of activity in different operational interventions.

Although measures are designed to meet the needs of host Member States and are very specific to their national contexts, EASO could agree on a core set of indicators for given core activity types against which to gather comparable data in different national contexts. These can then be supplemented with a more extensive set of variable indicators that are specific to the context of the host Member State.

Recommendation 7: Improve the usefulness and accuracy of the monitoring process by setting targets in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and, where relevant and logistically feasible, jointly monitoring their achievements.

Jointly establishing targets with authorities will ensure that targets are relevant, feasible and achievable, and that there is a common understanding and interpretation between EASO and authorities of the intended results. Interventions could also be jointly monitored with authorities where appropriate and logistically feasible (e.g. for smaller operations), to enhance coordination and eliminate possible overlaps or inconsistencies in data collected.

Recommendation 8: Adapt the evaluation cycle to make results more useful to EASO.

To be most useful to EASO, OP evaluations should be concluded as soon as possible after the end of the OP, and cover aspects that were particularly striking during that year, or are of particular interest to EASO to focus on in more depth, rather than covering all Better Regulation evaluation criteria in detail every year. Alternatively, EASO could consider tendering the evaluation out earlier in the year, enabling evaluators to become more familiar with the OP and EASO's processes more broadly, which could positively impact the subsequent depth of analysis.

Recommendation 9: Consider conducting an evaluation of EASO as an Agency.

EASO has not undergone an evaluation since 2015. This evaluation identified some areas for improvement in the coordination between EASO's centres to maximise the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of operational support. As a concrete assessment of the functioning of the Agency and its parts is beyond the scope of this assessment, conducting an evaluation of the Agency more broadly would be advisable.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents a horizontal evaluation of five EASO operational support interventions, namely:

- The Pilot Project on an EU Resettlement Support Facility (RSF) in Turkey (April 2019-April 2021)
- The EASO-Cyprus Operating Plan 2020
- The EASO-Greece Operating Plan 2020
- The EASO-Italy Operating Plan 2020
- The EASO-Malta Operating Plan 2020

In addition to the individual evaluations of each of these interventions delivered separately, this report draws on the key trends and differences across countries and interventions, and reviews the work EASO has undertaken in the follow up to the strategic recommendations of the evaluation of its operational interventions in 2019. It also takes a closer look at the context in which EASO operates and the challenges and opportunities this brings about, in order to formulate new strategic recommendations EASO can use to improve its operational support in 2021 and beyond.

2. CONTEXT

EU Member States subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems can request EASO's operational support in mitigating those pressures and managing their asylum and reception systems. EASO has been providing this type of support since 2011 on the basis of operating plans that are signed with the national authorities and developed in partnership with international organisations such as UNHCR and IOM. In 2020, EASO had four such **operational support interventions** in place – for Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Malta. This operational support can cover a range of actions in support of national asylum and reception systems, depending on the needs of the host Member State. Each intervention has a different focus, depending on the situation in the country, the needs of the authorities, and to some degree the extent to which EASO has provided support in preceding years.

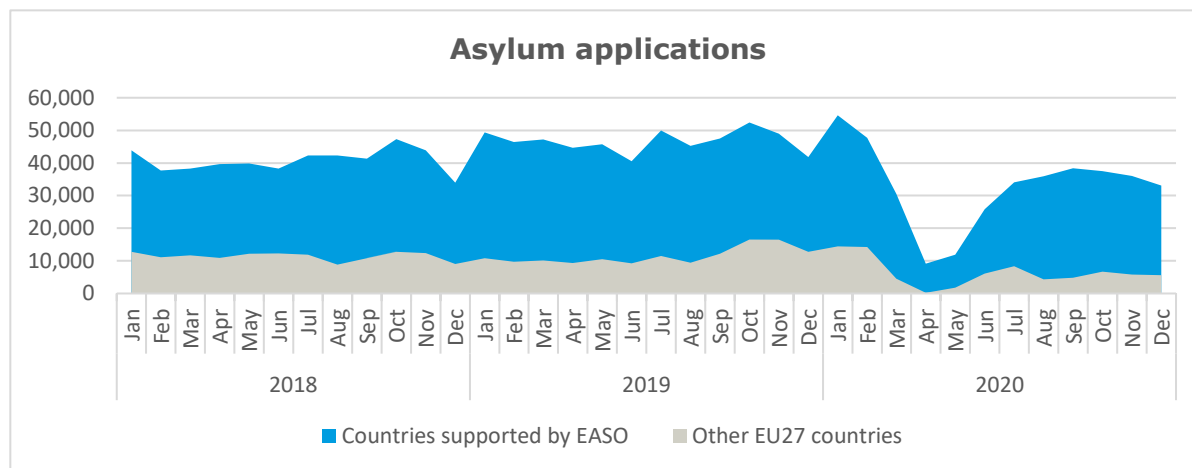
In addition to the four operating plans, EASO launched a **Pilot Project in Turkey to establish a Resettlement Support Facility (RSF)** to support EU+ Member States implement their commitments to international solidarity and contribute to the creation of durable solutions for persons in need of international protection. The RSF offers a one-stop-shop approach, supported and coordinated by EASO, where EU+ countries can carry out their resettlement missions and share experiences without having to plan and manage the processes on their own.

Beyond its operational support, EASO also acts as an independent centre of expertise on asylum; organises EU-wide analyses and assessments of asylum data; facilitates and stimulates joint action; and ensures consistency across the EU within the asylum field. As such, EASO provides permanent support to Member States through the development and provision of common training to support enhancement of quality and harmonisation in the area of asylum, and facilitates the exchange of information among Member States, allowing for the identification and sharing of good practices, quality tools and mechanisms, as well as specific initiatives. These activities are closely linked to the operational support interventions.

The year 2020 was a special one for migration and asylum due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Worldwide lockdowns, movement restrictions and health requirements significantly reduced the influx of asylum seekers in the EU (see Figure 1), dropping to a low of 9,325 applications lodged in April 2020, compared to a monthly average of 58,227 during 2019. In addition, the pandemic

hindered EASO and national authorities in carrying out their work, as described in the remainder of this report.

Figure 1. Applications for international protection, EU27, 2018-2020⁸



3. FINDINGS

EASO's operational support in 2020 can broadly be divided into of the following categories:

- Supporting first-instance determination through the processing of applications for international protection (registrations, interviews, drafting of decisions);
- Supporting second instance determination by helping the relevant authorities in charge of legal proceedings (preparing case files, essays);
- Supporting authorities with the reception of applicants for international protection in line with CEAS reception standards⁹;
- Supporting Member States with the relocation and resettlement process;
- Providing training, workshops, guidance, workflows, templates and tools to build capacity of local authorities and improve the overall quality and functioning of the asylum and reception systems.

In what follows, we present the key achievements of EASO's operational interventions in relation to these aspects, as well as challenges encountered across the board, drawing upon good practice examples and lessons to be learned for future interventions. Overall, despite considerable challenges faced, EASO produced significant outputs, although there is room for improvement. The methodology used to draw these conclusions is presented in Annex 1.

3.1 Key achievements

In general terms, it is worth mentioning that **EASO adopted a new organisational structure in November 2019 that took effect from 1st January 2020**. The new structure saw the creation of three dedicated competence centres – the Operational Support Centre (C1) that is in charge of

⁸ Eurostat, Asylum and first-time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex - monthly data (rounded) (migr_asyappctzm). Data extracted on 26th April 2021.

⁹ EASO's reception standards, covering topics such as infrastructure, sanitation, food provision, information provision, counselling and the training of staff, were jointly developed by EU+ countries. They build upon and further elaborate key elements of the recast Reception Conditions Directive and represent a commonly agreed EU-level reference for the design, development and operation of reception centres, in line with European values of human dignity.

operations, the Training and Professional Development Centre (C2) which designs, provides and coordinates training activities, and the Asylum Knowledge Centre (C3) which is concerned with research, analysis, thematic cooperation and the development of tools. The internal restructuring of EASO mirrors the priority areas of the Agency as a true hub of knowledge and expertise on asylum; intensifying its training and professional development for asylum experts; and strengthening EASO's operational role. It is a structure carefully modelled to enable the Agency to deliver its support in the most effective and efficient manner building on the skills and expertise of its staff¹⁰. As the present evaluation is concerned with EASO's operational interventions, it is concerned with the work of C1, as well as drawing on good practices and lessons learned from C2 and C3.

3.1.1 Registration of applications for international protection

During 2020, **EASO supported the registration of more than 30,000 applicants for international protection**¹¹. If EASO were an EU+ country, it would rank fifth in terms of the number of registrations performed¹². In Malta, EASO carried out registrations for 88% of all asylum applicants in 2020; in Cyprus 75%, in Greece 41% and in Italy 25%. This is representative of the focus of each OP in 2020 – support to the Italian and Greek authorities was more focused on capacity building and/or quality management than on the day-to-day registration activities. In Malta and Cyprus, where a much higher share of all registrations was carried out by EASO, this support was considered highly relevant and necessary because of capacity issues¹³. Notwithstanding challenges faced by EASO, e.g. in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (see section 3.2.1) and the restrictive nature of temporary workers legislation in Cyprus (see section 3.2.3), that slowed down the rate at which registrations could be conducted or reduced the caseworkers available to carry them out and led to underachievement of the targets set for 2020¹⁴, the Agency was responsible for almost 40% of all registrations carried out across the four host Member States.

In addition to supporting Member States in managing their registration processes, **EASO significantly contributed to improvements in registration procedures**. In Italy, for instance, a central standardised tool for scheduling of registrations was put in place, training activities reached a higher-than-expected¹⁵ number of *Questure* (local authorities responsible for registrations), and the quality and completeness of registrations carried out by the *Questure* exceeded expectations¹⁶. In Malta, a new template (incorporating the three previous forms to avoid duplication of information) to simplify the procedure for the registration process was introduced by May 2020. In Cyprus, on the other hand, although registration assistants were trained by EASO, the intention to revise SOPs on registration and referrals and to implement a comprehensive registration system for the *Pournara* first-line reception centre were not fulfilled because the centre

¹⁰ EASO Single Programming Document: Multi-annual Programming 2021-2023, Work Programme 2021, page 4.

¹¹ [REDACTED]

¹² [REDACTED]

¹³ In Malta, for example, stakeholders specifically noted that without EASO's support on registration, the national asylum system would have barely been able to function.

¹⁴ The targets that were set for registration across the four OPs were not met in any of the host Member States. In Italy, for instance, the target was set at 6,000 registrations, with the achievement coming up short by only 47. The difference is more noteworthy in Cyprus where the 5,317 actual registrations are quite far below the envisaged target of 8,400, or in Malta where on average 169 registrations were carried out per month rather than the targeted 560 per month (in this case, only a target for productivity was set, rather than targets for absolute numbers). In Greece, no targets for registrations were established. This divergence in targets in itself constitutes a challenge (see section 3.2.4) that makes it difficult to conclude on the achievements in 2020.

¹⁵ The target for coaching missions to improve the quality and completeness of registrations was set at 12 *Questure*, while 13 of them were actually involved in these missions by October 2020.

¹⁶ Based on spot checks of a sample of registrations, 75% of the registrations met the quality and completeness requirements, compared to a target of 50%.

was closed in March 2020 and not reopened until 2021, thus EASO was forcibly absent from the centre so limited progress could be made. In Cyprus as well as in Italy, EASO's contribution in this respect has been limited by the administrative capacity of the relevant local authorities (see section 3.2.2).

3.1.2 Processing of asylum applications at first instance

During 2020, in Greece, Cyprus and Malta combined, EASO's support to first instance status determination reached unprecedentedly high levels with 19,895 (+104% from 2019) interviews conducted and 17,562 (+98% from 2019) concluding remarks on international protection¹⁷. If EASO were an EU+ country, it would rank sixth in terms of the number of first instance decisions issued. With no prejudice to the official first-instance decisions, which remain under the full responsibility of the host Member State, EASO's support corresponded to 26% of first instance decisions issued in Cyprus, Greece, and Malta¹⁸. However, most targets set for interviews and opinions were not actually met, largely because the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to all face-to-face interviews, which later resumed but at a lesser pace due to social distancing requirements (i.e. more space being required so fewer people can be interviewed in the same timespan).

Moreover, **there was not necessarily a reduction in the backlog in cases pending at first instance**¹⁹, except in Greece²⁰ (see Box 1). That being said, trends in the backlog at first instance were also affected by factors beyond EASO's intervention – in Greece, the result was positive in part because of the reduced arrivals due to COVID-19 movement restrictions (see Box 1). In Cyprus and Malta, the limited capacity in terms of human resources of the local authorities, who have to review and validate all concluding remarks prepared by EASO before a case can be finalised, acted as a hindrance to the reduction in backlog. In particular, their limited human resources to follow up on opinions led to significant delays in the clearance of cases²¹.

Box 1. Good practice example – clearing of first instance backlog in Greece

Greece performed particularly well in clearing the backlog at first instance during 2020 (a reduction of 34% compared to 2019), reducing it to a total of 57,347 cases pending at the end of 2020²². EASO more than doubled the number of interviews conducted and opinions drafted in 2020 compared to 2019 and reduced the median duration of the process. There are several key reasons for this:

- In February 2020, EASO and the Greek authorities commonly agreed on implementing a new “**embedded model**” in Greece – an operating model whereby Greek-speaking experts on contract, who are supplied by their employer to be deployed as asylum support team members, are embedded within the structure of the respective national authorities. The embedded model improved productivity and led to a reduction of the backlog, mainly through the setting of common targets with the Greek Asylum Service (GAS).
- The clearing of the backlog was aided by the **COVID-19 pandemic**. Significantly fewer new asylum applicants arrived, and the resources could thus be allocated to the clearing of pending cases. In

¹⁷ [REDACTED]

¹⁸ [REDACTED]

¹⁹ EASO's support in 2020 was more about stabilising the backlog and ensuring it did not escalate beyond proportions.

²⁰ Even in Greece, if considering only EASO's support, the net result of registrations (16,619) performed and concluding remarks issued (16,468), the net result would be to add 151 cases to the backlog. However, combined with the efforts of the authorities, the backlog in Greece was successfully reduced during 2020.

²¹ By means of example, as reported in EASO's operational analysis for Cyprus from March 2021, it took EASO personnel about 11 days to draft the concluding remark and submit it to the CAS, then almost two more months were required to review the recommendations and then finalise the case.

²² [REDACTED]

fact, when the backlog on one island was cleared, cases from other islands were assigned to caseworkers on that island, to ensure continuity of the work.

- Another key factor that helped clear the backlog was **Project North**, a pilot project launched in September 2020 that set up asylum clusters in seven reception sites in Northern Greece to which asylum support teams were deployed to conduct interviews and draft opinions closer to where asylum seekers themselves were located, thus reducing interview waiting times and mitigating the previous issue of lack of working space to conduct interviews.
- What also played a role was the introduction of a **new law for international protection** that shortened the deadlines and the application processing times.

3.1.3 Management of reception and quality standards in line with the CEAS

One of the key areas in which **EASO invested at strategic level is reception**. During 2020, following a recommendation from the evaluation of operational interventions in 2019 to improve the intervention logic on reception, EASO developed a comprehensive reception strategy, adopted by its Management Board on 18 March 2021²³. As such strategies take time to implement, its results will need to be evaluated in the future, although one can assume that it will strengthen the coherence of EASO's approach to reception and improve the reception training offer (new training modules are being designed in the framework of the comprehensive reception strategy).

At operational level, **EASO's support to reception differed between countries**. In Greece and Cyprus, the focus was on improving reception conditions and improving authorities' capacity to implement these in line with CEAS standards; the Malta OP 2020 specifically focused on referrals for vulnerable cases; and in Italy the support was limited to supporting the quality management and monitoring of the reception system. EASO's support to reception was notably successful in Cyprus and Malta. In Cyprus, the EASO team assisted nearly half of the residents at the *Kofinou* centre and provided support on social work, informational services, counselling, and a workflow for medical and legal referrals of vulnerable cases, as well as providing training and capacity building and coordination support. However, none of the foreseen activities at the *Pournara* centre could be implemented due to delays in the establishment of the *Pournara* safe zone (a prerequisite for EASO's support). In Greece, embedded staff supported the implementation of reception procedures related to child protection/unaccompanied minors, vulnerability assessment and special reception needs, communication and information provision, which was highly necessary given that Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) were operating above maximum capacity at the start of 2020 and were in urgent need of decongestion²⁴. The embedded staff also supported the capacity-building of the Greek authorities to take over the management of reception sites in the mainland for the first time²⁵. In Malta, EASO shifted its response to reception towards providing more of a social response with qualified social workers deployed in AWAS. The support resulted in the development of a range of tools (i.e. a Referral Form, a Vulnerability Assessment Tool, a Screening Tool for residents who have not registered their application yet, a Dry Screening Tool to prioritise cases of registered applicants that need to be assessed, and a recording tool to keep track of the stage of each referral and whether a case was finalised). However, actual achievements are difficult to measure given that the support started towards the end of 2020.

²³ EASO (2021), EASO Strategy on Reception. Available at: https://easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/EASO_Strategy_on_Reception_0.pdf.

²⁴ An issue that was further aggravated with the destruction of the *Moria* refugee camp by a fire in September 2020.

²⁵ With the support of EASO, Reception authorities took over 32 camps during 2020. As noted by interviewed authorities in Greece, EASO's support to the new camp managers (through embedded reception assistants) was very important, as it would not have been possible for the RIS to operate without their support.

3.1.4 Processing of appeals cases and reduction of backlog at second instance

During 2020, **EASO supported Greece, Italy and Cyprus with the reduction of backlog at second instance** by preparing case files, providing judicial and COI research, and building capacity for the relevant authorities. In total, EASO supported the preparation of files on cases at second instance for 10,027 persons in Italy, 3,402 persons in Greece, and 114 files in Cyprus²⁶. In Malta, no such support was provided, although the evaluation of the Malta OP 2020 found that there are capacity issues at second instance and the country might benefit from EASO's support on this aspect²⁷, but EASO staff indicated that this cannot be provided until a certain prerequisite level of capacity among authorities is reached²⁸.

This **support was more successful in some countries than others**. In Greece, the backlog was significantly reduced by 76% from 14,547 in December 2019 to 3,548 in December 2020. In Cyprus, although improvements were achieved in terms of productivity and quality through EASO's support in research and preparation/closure of files that was critical to the functioning of the International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC), the backlog at second instance actually increased by 34% from a baseline of 750 at the end of 2019, to 1,003 pending cases by December 2020. This was due to several factors, including the fact that the support started with a delay, the planned Member State expert could not be deployed, and IPAC judges and research officers did not participate in EASO's capacity training. In Cyprus and Italy alike, there reportedly was a lack of systematic sharing of information between EASO and judges and the research officers employed by the relevant authorities. That being said, more than 15,000 files were processed in Italy, pointing to a high degree of productivity.

3.1.5 Support to relocation and the Dublin procedure

Relocation activities were included in the OPs for Greece, Italy and Malta, albeit in different forms. In Greece, a specific measure on relocation was added in May 2020, while support to the Dublin procedure was also offered throughout the year, in the form of helping the Dublin Unit process outgoing requests. In Malta, the OP aimed at enhancing the capacity of the Dublin Unit through the deployment of Dublin experts and technical support to the Unit towards addressing the burden placed on it by an increase in ad hoc disembarkations. In Italy, EASO was heavily involved in ad hoc disembarkations and voluntary relocations based on the SOPs agreed during 2019²⁹.

Overall, **support to Dublin Units and relocation activities was very successful**. In Malta, the measure on support to the Dublin Unit was the most effective and efficient one of the OP, supporting a total of 507 applicants with Dublin activities. In Greece, EASO played a key role in two new EU voluntary relocation schemes initiated in 2020 for UAMs, vulnerable families as well as beneficiaries of international protection by supporting both the Greek authorities and the European Commission. In this context, 4,627 interviews were conducted, 3,352 persons were matched to partner Member States and 1,852 transfers had already been implemented by the end of the year (see Box 2). In Italy, EASO registered 42% of the persons who disembarked from the boats in the 21 disembarkation events (1,516 out of 3,597 persons); persons not registered by EASO were either UAMs, people not applying for international protection, persons registered by the national

²⁶ Figures are derived from EASO's 2020 Operational Overview Reports for the three individual interventions.

²⁷ Based on interviews with stakeholders consulted in the framework of the evaluation of Malta OP 2020.

²⁸ Based on an interview with an EASO staff member.

²⁹ EASO supported Italian authorities with 21 disembarkation events, 2 of which started in the last week of 2019. At the end of 2020 there were 6 events ongoing, of which 4 were closed by the end of February 2021.

authorities because they were not willing to participate in the voluntary relocation, or absconded persons³⁰.

Box 2. Good practice example – relocation from Greece

In May 2020, a new measure on relocation was added to the Greece OP 2020, to enhance the capacity of the Greek Authorities to manage and implement relocation from Greece under the common agreed procedure with participating Member States. The measure focused on UAMs, vulnerable families with minors and vulnerable beneficiaries of international protection. The addition of this measure in the course of 2020 showed that **EASO can flexibly respond to the needs of authorities**. Through collaboration between C1 and C3, EASO promptly developed the necessary tools (Matching tool, Relocation Best Interest Assessment – BIA template, Relocation Dublin template, SOPs for Relocation of beneficiaries of International Protection), reallocated resources, organised training and led the coordination between authorities and stakeholders to implement the measure. EASO conducted more than 4,621 interviews, almost all of which (4,438) resulted in a final assessment. The **process was very efficient**³¹, with a median of one day between the interview and the assessment, four days between the assessment and the matching of the applicant, and seven days between matching and the outgoing request. By December 2020, a total of 1,852 transfers had taken place.

3.1.6 Resettlement from Turkey to the EU+

In April 2019, EASO launched a Pilot Project to provide operational support in the external dimension for resettlement from Turkey to EU+ countries. The **RSF was highly successful** in that it established a one-stop-shop facility in Istanbul for participating EU+ countries to carry out their resettlement activities. The support is provided free of charge and, by centralising the administrative and logistic operations, a one-stop-shop facility like the RSF arguably is more cost-efficient³² than a situation in which all Member States are left to their own devices. Out of the total of 13 EU+ countries resettling out of Turkey in the pilot period 2019–2021, a total of six³³ participated in the Pilot Project, and they all showed high satisfaction with the process³⁴. The fact that a feasibility study has started for an RSF-like concept in Lebanon following requests by EU Member States further evidences the relevance of the approach.

Through the RSF, **EASO supported the processing of 2,319 cases for selection purposes**³⁵. Only 506 of them could actually be resettled due to the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. If the resettlements would have continued at the same pace as they had prior to March 2020, it is highly likely that the target of 1,500 resettlements would have been exceeded given the high number of processed cases. Although processing activities stopped altogether for a few months (March 2020-July 2020), EASO introduced options for remote processing and hybrid solutions that allowed work to continue, albeit at a slower pace.

³⁰ [REDACTED]

³¹ The successful completion of the procedure and the high percentage of corresponding recommended relocations to assessment indicate increased effectiveness especially in the level of quality of interviews which is a direct result of the quality of tools developed and training delivered to staff deployed for this sub-measure.

³² Unfortunately, no assessment of cost-efficiency improvements can be made because no data on costs prior to the RSF are available. Member States undertaking resettlement activities previously had contracts with IOM for this purpose, and are bound by non-disclosure agreements that make it impossible to obtain and compare costs.

³³ Belgium, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland, Sweden. Portugal showed interest initially, but no missions took place during the April 2019-April 2021 period.

³⁴ Based on satisfaction surveys carried out by EASO at the mid-term stage and interviews with authorities in participating countries conducted for this evaluation.

³⁵ Based on EASO's own monitoring data on the RSF. 789 cases were processed in 2019, 1,168 cases in 2020, and 362 cases in 2021.

Box 3. Good practice example – RSF Turkey as model for cooperation

Aside from the considerable achievements in terms of cases processed for resettlement, the **RSF is also a good example of cooperation and coordination between Member States**. Having in place a facility where all participating Member States can carry out their resettlement missions provided the opportunity for them to exchange experiences and good practices through regular meetings. An example is the *RSF Pilot Strategizing Planning Committee* meeting in October 2019 involving several participating countries and other stakeholders (ICMC, UNHCR, IOM), where their feedback on the RSF was shared and ideas on how to enhance cooperation among EU+ countries and test innovations were discussed. There were also instances in which representatives from one Member State observed missions carried out by another to learn from their approach. Coordination between Member States takes place at a strategic level as well (e.g. ad hoc meetings on COVID-19 during 2020, see section 3.2.1) but is something that can potentially be capitalised on more in the future.

3.2 Key challenges

As apparent in the previous section, there were a lot of factors, mostly external to EASO's support, that impacted operations.

3.2.1 COVID-19 pandemic

From March 2020 onwards, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted EU+ countries to implement a range of emergency measures including lockdowns, quarantine, and travel restrictions. This **inevitably impacted the work of national asylum and reception authorities** and led to the temporary suspension of a range of services. For example, registration and interview activities were postponed because face-to-face contact was restricted in all countries; relocation and resettlement activities were put on hold due to travel restrictions; and resources needed to be invested in ensuring safe and sanitary situations in reception centres. The key challenge to EASO's support in this regard is that the Agency had to adapt to the rules and requirements of local health authorities in the host Member States, which are country-dependent and thus not aligned across the EU, but also that travel restrictions made it difficult to deploy and retain Member State experts.

As part of its mandate to act as a centre of expertise on asylum and provide technical and practical support to Member States to help them protect persons in need, **EASO took action to help Member States mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on their asylum systems**. The Agency conducted analyses on asylum trends and COVID-19³⁶, and organised practical, ad hoc meetings of their network of experts from Member States to share how they dealt with the pandemic, focusing on approaches to e.g. remote interviewing. This enabled the sharing of experiences and challenges, but also good practices that resulted in the development of a set of recommendations that could subsequently be used at operational level. In May 2020, EASO published practical recommendations on conducting remote personal interviews³⁷ on the basis of best practice examples shared by EU+ Member States during practical cooperation meetings and a COVID-19 survey organised by the Agency. In June 2020, EASO published practical recommendations on conducting remote/online registrations³⁸ on the basis of thematic meetings held by the EASO Asylum Processes Network. The Agency was also able to resume its training activities (e.g. training of new staff) by switching to remote and/or hybrid training courses.

³⁶ EASO Special Report: Asylum Trends and COVID-19, April 2020 (issue 1) and June 2020 (issue 2).

³⁷ EASO (2020), Practical recommendations on conducting the personal interview remotely, EASO Practical Guide Series, May 2020.

³⁸ EASO (2020), Practical recommendations on conducting remote/online registration (lodging), EASO Practical Guide Series, June 2020.

In addition, **EASO also offered operational support in the four host Member States to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and at the RSF in Turkey.** For example:

- In **Greece**, the asylum support teams began conducting interviews remotely (around 1,500³⁹) and drafted opinions through teleworking. Importantly, the use of technology also provided the opportunity for EASO to reallocate cases between the asylum support teams on the islands⁴⁰, thus increasing the efficiency of deployed staff. The need to adapt working arrangements due to COVID-19 has given rise to good practices, such as the development of shared folders in Chios and Samos, resulting in efficient and safe sharing of information between EASO and GAS.
- In **Malta**, caseworkers, registration officers and interpreters started teleworking and focused on drafting evaluation reports and administrative tasks while activities were suspended. Remote interviews and remote registrations were started at Safi Barracks in May and June 2020 respectively, all with caseworkers/registration officers and applicants being in different containers or rooms and communicating remotely, with interpreters joining the calls.
- In **Italy**, a tool for data collection on reception and for the management of COVID-19 related issues in SIPROIMI⁴¹ projects was developed, and meetings between local stakeholders were held online instead. In cooperation with UNHCR, EASO also developed a SOP on remote registration, though the tool has not yet been fully taken on board by the authorities (but should be in 2021).
- In **Cyprus**, several new workflows were tested by EASO. Resumption of operations required significant adaptation of the working environment (e.g. digitalisation of files, virtual meetings and interviews, online training, etc.), the introduction of new technologies and the establishment of a range of new security, occupational health and safety protocols and procedures to address COVID-19 issues. Despite staffing having been largely affected by the pandemic, significant steps were undertaken to ensure continuity of operations in terms of administrative tasks, follow-up on activities, and communication and support to coordination with various stakeholders.
- At the **RSF**, Member States had the option to conduct their selection missions via a hybrid approach whereby only the refugee was present at the RSF, for example, or undertake them fully remotely⁴².

Overall, **EASO was highly successful in flexibly responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic**, especially considering the fact that the various national rules were constantly changing, requiring EASO to be reactive, and unable to take one coordinated or harmonised approach across all operations. That being said, the **degree to which EASO's solutions were successful is dependent on the context and capacity of local authorities**. In Italy, for example, while the judiciary is used to working digitally and thus work on clearing second instance backlog could be continued, the remote registration of applicants could not be fully institutionalised by the Ministry of Interior because of a lack of experience with remote work and IT systems. In Cyprus, although

³⁹ [REDACTED]

⁴⁰ For example, in Lesvos it was decided that as of April, the team would take over cases from Samos, Corinth and Crete for opinion writing, since it has cleared up its backlog. This reorganisation of the activities among the islands and sharing the conduct of interviews through teleworking accelerated the management of the backlog of interviews and drafting opinions.

⁴¹ System of Protection for Beneficiaries of Protection and Unaccompanied Minors (*Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e minori stranieri non accompagnati*). SIPROIMI is a publicly funded network of local authorities and NGOs which accommodates unaccompanied children, also under some conditions after the coming of age, beneficiaries of international protection and people who have obtained some other residence permits for specific reasons.

⁴² It should be noted that although the RSF offered such solutions, participating countries showed reluctance in shifting to such innovative practices. From August 2020 onwards, (partly) remote missions were carried out, but only by Switzerland (in August, October and November) and Belgium (in December). There is scope to continue some elements of remote processing in the future according to EASO, although many Member States are still reluctant to do so, notably for more complex cases.

EASO's workflow is fully digitalised, authorities still require physical copies of decisions before they can close a case, which is always inefficient but was further aggravated by the pandemic.

3.2.2 Capacity and reliance of authorities

By design, **EASO provides support to Member States 'under particular pressure'**, thus its operational support is intended to relieve the immediate pressure faced by these countries, and to some extent also to build a certain level of capacity among local authorities to be able to manage their asylum and reception system once the situation stabilised and EASO withdraws its support. Thus, some actions are *de facto* emergency or surge responses, e.g. when the Agency supports a Member State with disembarkations, registrations of applicants for international protection, or conducting personal interviews to mitigate large backlogs in applications; while other actions aim to build capacity among local authorities to carry out the work themselves, by putting in place new workflows and procedures, tools for quality management, etc. There is a certain degree of evolution over time in EASO's operational support – EASO intervenes to meet the immediate needs of authorities, but when the pressure stabilises (e.g. the backlogs are reduced), it can add significant value by training local staff, introducing new ways of working, introducing quality standards and generally building the capacity of local authorities from the ground up. The effectiveness of this capacity building and quality standard development support, however, is limited by the capacity and readiness of relevant authorities to absorb EASO's support.

As such, the **overall sustainability⁴³ of EASO's interventions seems to be relatively low – authorities remain highly reliant on EASO's support** and limited structures or mechanisms have been put in place to ensure continuity of the work at the same level of quality were EASO to withdraw its support. For instance, in Italy, the self-assessment quality tool provided by EASO was not fully taken on board because it was not considered a priority by the Department of Public Security (DPS). In Malta, although authorities have shown great openness to EASO's support, the small size and limited human resources of the public administration make it difficult to fully absorb it. One example of a positive development in this regard, however, is that with the International Protection Agency (IPA) having recently been established, new procedures and standards could be introduced from the start, which positively affected the adoption of EASO's guidelines and workflows in Malta.

Part of the problem is that **there is no definition of what constitutes 'particular pressure'** and the threshold for EASO to intervene. EASO responds to the needs of authorities in this respect and does this well (as apparent by the gradual expansion of support in Malta, and the first ever OP with Spain that was signed for 2021, for instance). However, the support is offered for only one year at a time, albeit based on multi-annual roadmaps, which on the one hand makes it difficult to put in place a mechanism to ensure the sustainability of results, and on the other might disincentivise authorities from putting in the time and effort required to make the best use of EASO's support and tools to build their own capacity. Moreover, trying to balance EASO's mission and ensure sustainability in the political context within which it operates is challenging - asylum and reception are a politically sensitive topic and EASO has a role to play in terms of showing **solidarity** towards those Member States at the border of the EU that are faced with migratory pressures.

That being said, the **embedded model in Greece is a positive example** in this case – it established better coordination, including through the establishment of a Steering Committee structure to jointly establish monitoring indicators, and the authorities have become much more independent, e.g. taking over the management of mainland reception sites previously managed by

⁴³ Sustainability in this context refers to the degree to which the relevant authorities are able to continue operations at the same level and quality without EASO's support, i.e. once the Agency withdraws its support because the Host Member State is no longer under particular pressure.

IOM and adopting EASO's procedure of having in place team leaders. Such an approach, built on the integrated approach to the implementation of the Plan through the embedding of deployed experts within the authorities' structures, thus has the potential to create a higher degree of ownership than a direct management approach to operations.

3.2.3 Contracts and human resources

EASO in part relies on experts from EU Member States to contribute their knowledge, expertise, and best practices, and deploys such experts to work in the countries requiring operational support. This process is vulnerable and heavily susceptible to Member States' capacity to deliver staff⁴⁴. This became all the more apparent during the COVID-19 crisis, when **many Member State experts were repatriated** to their home countries, and even after the situation stabilised somewhat, were largely unwilling (or unable) to relocate to one of the host Member States. The lack of flexible deployment mechanisms impacts the ability of the Agency to quickly scale up and down operations as necessary in line with its mandate to respond quickly to emergency situations, to ensure business continuity of its operations and improve efficiency through longer-term deployments. However, alternative deployments of staff from EASO's side are largely limited by its Founding Regulation⁴⁵.

More importantly, however, in some countries there are **restrictions to the deployment of temporary workers**, based on Member States' transposition of the Posted Workers Directive⁴⁶. In some countries, notably Cyprus and Italy, the maximum duration for temporary deployment is quite limited, to 12 months and 36 months respectively, without the possibility of renewal. This impacts EASO's operations because it results in high turnovers and a loss of know-how and experience. As this was already an issue in 2019 and highlighted in the strategic recommendations of the OP 2019 evaluation, EASO sought extensive external legal advice on the relevant European and national legal frameworks that apply in respect of deployment of human resources and will proceed within these frameworks to find a **solution through complementary Alternative Deployment Mechanisms** (ADM) in 2021 and beyond.

That being said, **at operational level there were a few more specific constraints** as well. Most importantly, there was not always clarity in the roles and responsibilities of EASO's seconded or embedded staff. In Cyprus, for example, EASO's support through seconding research officers to CAS was challenged by a lack of understanding of the roles of the research officers by the judges, requiring clear terms of reference and templates to be developed to create a common understanding of EASO's support, mandate and limitations, which can have an impact on the efficiency of operations because it requires additional work. In Italy, external stakeholders remarked that some of the deployed staff was too junior and inexperienced to possibly bring about real change, notably when it comes to the coordination between stakeholders in a landscape as complex as Italy's. In Greece, although the embedded model was by and large considered a positive development, it raised some questions about transparency of requirements for recruiting staff, and roles and responsibilities in regard to the checking of EASO's work from the authorities' perspective.

3.2.4 Monitoring, reporting and evaluation

There has been a **considerable improvement in the degree to which EASO monitors its operational support** – as recently as 2018 there was no structured framework with indicators and targets for outputs and outcomes. In 2020, three out of four OPs had a validated Results Framework

⁴⁴ This was already identified as an issue in the 2019 evaluation, and was also explained by EASO in an interview.

⁴⁵ REGULATION (EU) No 439/2010 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 19 May 2010 establishing a European Asylum Support Office.

⁴⁶ DIRECTIVE (EU) 2018/957 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 28 June 2018 amending Directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services.

in place, and all of them had a database in which monthly progress against targets was monitored. Common KPIs related to human resources and finances were also monitored. This greatly improves the feasibility of evaluating EASO's operational support, in a way that can inform future interventions. However, there are several issues with the way in which the monitoring, reporting and evaluation process is set up, stemming from the fact that it was only recently established and had to be built from the ground up. Such systems take time to be fully ironed out, but good practices and areas for improvement are nevertheless worth highlighting.

In Malta and Italy, interviews with authorities pointed towards inconsistencies or at least miscommunication in terms of the targets set and indicators being measured, with authorities either not being aware of what EASO was measuring, or collecting information themselves that was not comparable to EASO's statistics. In the case of Malta, the issue is being mitigated through a move to joint monitoring in the OP 2021. A good practice example in this context is the embedded model in Greece, where EASO and authorities jointly set targets for the outputs expected from the OP 2020 (and, to some extent, longer-term results as well⁴⁷), through Steering Committee meetings. Joint target setting has the potential to increase ownership among the authorities as it ensures there is coordination in what results are being measured, and that the targets are properly adapted to the context and what is achievable not only by EASO but also by the authorities⁴⁸.

Relatedly, there is a **lack of harmonisation in the indicators used**⁴⁹. For instance, some countries have more indicators on productivity and e.g. the share of registrations done by EASO compared to the total, while others consider absolute numbers⁵⁰; and some OPs have much more extensive indicators than others. This is the result of the bottom-up approach and the fact that each context is different – not only in terms of the activities undertaken in a given country, but also what the authorities want to place emphasis on. As such, it would not be possible to completely streamline the use of indicators, though some degree of a coordinated approach (e.g. a core set of indicators and a larger set of adaptable ones) and guidance in terms of *how* indicators are established and phrased would be beneficial in that it would allow for a more consistent evaluation of achievements and comparison across interventions.

Finally, it is worth noting that the regular monitoring of implementation of OPs is based on data collected by EASO monitoring officers on the ground, which is **readily available and timely but is not necessarily robust** as it has not been validated. It is important that this function is maintained, as there is a need for daily/weekly/monthly monitoring of operational support. However, EASO's Asylum Knowledge Centre (C3) later validates some of the monitoring data⁵¹ with additional or more up-to-date information collected through Operational Data Collection (ODC), and there were some discrepancies during 2020. Although not major, and not a problem for the day-to-day monitoring of operations, the accuracy of data is crucial for evaluating achievements post hoc. On the monitoring data that is relevant to the regular monitoring of the OP as well as EASO's

⁴⁷ Notably in relation to measure 2 on enhancing the capacity of national reception authorities (RIS) to manage and operate the National Reception System, towards the implementation of the minimum EU reception standards, where targets are set for 2021 and 2022 respectively.

⁴⁸ In the case of Malta, there was a target set for clearing a backlog of 2,000 cases, on the basis of experiences in other countries and prior knowledge of EASO's productivity. This target was later identified as being much too high in the Maltese context. This should be avoided in the future, e.g. by setting targets jointly and monitoring achievements jointly with authorities, as foreseen for 2021.

⁴⁹ This is evident from the review of Results Frameworks / results indicators databases of all the interventions, but was also underlined by EASO's Asylum Knowledge Centre (C3), who are tasked with analysis of the data.

⁵⁰ This can create issues because, for example, if there is a target to clear the backlog by 30%, this does not take into consideration the influx of new asylum seekers – if that is particularly high, the backlog will be cleared much slower, even if the same number of cases are processed. Considering the asylum context is so volatile, these issues require careful consideration and contextualisation.

⁵¹ Data that relates to the outputs of EASO's experts (registration, first instance, Dublin, relocation, etc.), but not on more strategic measures or aspects related to e.g. capacity building.

cross-cutting analyses, more systematic coordination between the relevant operations team and C3 might improve efficiency. A good practice example in this respect is Greece, where C1 provides the data to DARS who curates it and makes it available in dashboards, thus satisfying the monitoring needs of the country teams and ensuring the data is validated.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In general terms, EASO made considerable progress towards the fulfilment of the strategic recommendations outlined in the evaluation of the 2019 OPs in Greece, Italy and Cyprus. Nevertheless, many issues encountered at that time still prevail today – either because the changes implemented in response to these were only recently implemented and thus progress cannot yet be measured, or because of aspects largely outside of EASO's control. The progress made towards achievement of the strategic recommendations and a short commentary from the evaluators is presented in Annex 3.

EASO's operational support during 2020 was highly relevant. By design, the OPs are adapted to the needs of local authorities because they are established in response to their request for support based on an agreed methodology, and they include a flexibility clause that enables amendments on the basis of changing needs, which is crucial in an unpredictable context such as that of asylum and migration. This is evidenced by the different foci of the OPs that are adapted to the context in-country and the capacity needs of authorities, and the fact that several 2020 OPs were amended to include new measures (e.g. in the case of Greece and Italy).

In general terms, **EASO's operational support in 2020 was highly effective, despite the significant challenges** posed by external factors, such as the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and strict rules related to deployment of temporary workers. Where achievements were below target or key challenges were encountered, these were largely (though not exclusively) the result of external factors beyond EASO's control.

- EASO showed **flexibility** in its response to the pandemic by implementing **innovative approaches** to e.g. remote interviewing and processing of applications and incentivising authorities to do the same. This resulted in significant achievements such as the clearing of backlog in pending cases in Greece and Malta and the ability to continue processing resettlement cases at the RSF.
- EASO produced a wealth of **new tools, workflows, procedures and standards** that were largely taken on board by the authorities. Where they were not, this was largely beyond EASO's control, i.e. because of a lack of absorption capacity or willingness among authorities.
- The move towards more joint management through the **embedded model** in Greece has had positive implications for effectiveness and efficiency of operations, increased ownership and independence of authorities and thus will likely be sustainable in the long run.
- A lot of support was provided in **vulnerability assessments** (notably in Malta and Cyprus), including through the piloting of a new referral tool for vulnerable cases in Malta. This laid the foundation for appropriate treatment of vulnerable persons.
- The **RSF model was a great success** despite COVID-19 setbacks and set a basis for future EASO interventions in the external dimension, as well as providing a model for coordination and cooperation between Member States.

It is **difficult to conclude on the efficiency of EASO's operational support** because most OPs do not measure productivity. However, improvements were made compared to 2019 in terms of productivity (e.g. considerable increases in the number of interviews conducted and opinions drafted compared to 2019 in Greece because of the embedded model; increased productivity in drafting evaluation in Malta due to the adoption of an Evaluation Template), and lessons learned

from the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to cost savings in the future (e.g. remote processing of asylum applications or resettlement cases can reduce costs related to travel and minimise burdens for asylum seekers/refugees).

The **long-term impact and sustainability of EASO's operational support is hindered** by the high degree of dependency by national authorities, although steps have been taken to reduce this in some cases, notably with the move to an embedded model in Greece.

4.1 SWOT

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to EASO's operational support are summarised in the below table.

<p>Strengths:</p> <p><i>Flexibility</i> – EASO is able to flexibly adapt to unforeseen challenges (e.g. COVID-19) and changes in the needs of host Member States, by amending OPs, reallocating human and financial resources, and adapting procedures, training, etc.</p> <p><i>Commitment and dedication of staff</i> – Across all operations, EASO's support is highly appreciated for its quality and professionalism, and high degree of dedication of EASO personnel.</p> <p><i>Relevance</i> – OPs are drawn up in collaboration with host Member States, which by design makes them appropriate to meet their needs. The flexibility to adapt OPs further reinforces the high degree of relevance of operations.</p> <p><i>Innovation</i> – EASO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic led to the establishment of new procedures, ways of working, online training, etc.</p> <p><i>Embedded model</i> – the embedded model used in Greece improved ownership among stakeholders, which in the long run should improve the sustainability of the achieved results by building capacity at grassroots level.</p>	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <p><i>Planning</i> – OPs are drafted for one year at a time, which is appropriate for emergency response interventions but less so for more strategic interventions that focus on capacity building and quality management. Multi-annual operational programming could improve the sustainability of interventions.</p> <p><i>Indicators</i> – there is limited harmonisation in the indicators used to monitor and measure performance in different OPs (stemming from different national contexts). Some degree of consistency, e.g. in core indicators, would facilitate a horizontal analysis of performance across different OPs.</p> <p><i>Target setting</i> – sometimes operational targets are set seemingly randomly or in a way that is not entirely feasible within the local context. The approach to setting targets may need to be revisited for all targets to be realistic to achieve.</p>
<p>Opportunities:</p> <p><i>Innovation</i> – lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic (new ways of working, digital trainings etc.), can improve efficiency. EASO can further capitalise on efforts made, such as the recommendations for remote interviewing and remote registrations, that could help build capacity among host Member State authorities to enable them to implement such approaches.</p> <p><i>Replicability</i> – there is potential for new approaches (e.g. embedded model, RSF model, new types of support) to be reproduced in other countries/contexts. This would be facilitated through increased coordination and cooperation within EASO.</p>	<p>Threats:</p> <p><i>Human resource issues</i> – EASO relies heavily on temporary personnel. This is challenged by local labour laws related to temporary workers, leading to high turnover rates which in turn threatens not only the quality of work (due to loss of knowledge) but also the efficiency of operations (due to the need for constant recruitment and training of new staff). Although EASO has explored ADM, no long-term solution has been found as the Agency has to conform with relevant laws in the Host Member States.</p> <p><i>Political context</i> – EASO's work is vulnerable to changes in the political agenda (at EU level, but also national level and international level).</p>

Reliance of authorities – the high degree of flexibility of EASO’s operational support can lead to requests for changes to OPs that were not foreseen at the planning stage and can lead to a lack of ownership among authorities. Ensuring a balance between fulfilling EASO’s mandate and trying to introduce mechanisms to ensure sustainability in the long run is difficult given the politically charged context and need to show EU solidarity.

4.2 Lessons learned and recommendations

It is clear from the findings presented above that EASO has made significant progress during recent years, including 2020, and managed to mitigate many of the challenges posed to its operational support. EASO should continue its support to Member States under particular pressure, and maintain its flexible approach to operational support, which was a decisive factor in ensuring business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic which lasted almost all of 2020 and is still ongoing in 2021. Based on the experiences gained during 2020, there are a few key lessons to be learned in terms of what EASO does well that should be continued, however, there are a few more concrete recommendations for change to be made as well, as presented below.

Human resources and staffing

Lesson learned: During 2020, across all operations, EASO was challenged by a lack of availability of experts to carry out operational tasks. Not in the least because of the COVID-19 pandemic, planned deployments often could not be fulfilled, e.g. because experts could not be deployed or had to be repatriated. Issues related to the availability of suitable candidates and long selection and training procedures also played a role. Although EASO made efforts in recent years (2019-2020) to deploy temporary workers for operations, their deployment is hindered by local labour laws in host Member States. The deployment of Member State experts has reduced significantly over time because of limited nominations, yet they are still important to fill specific ad hoc gaps that cannot easily be filled by temporary workers (e.g. because they are of a short-term nature and would be more efficiently addressed by a Member State expert, or because their deployment is less administratively burdensome than the deployment of temporary workers).

Recommendation 1: Introduce different *modus operandi* to strengthen the continuity and predictability of resources in operations.⁵²

To maximise EASO’s effectiveness and impact, solutions to ensure the continuity and predictability of resources in operations need to be found as quickly as possible. Thus, the efforts made in recent years (as part of the Complementary Deployment Mechanism Project), also following the recommendations of the OP 2019 evaluation, should be finalised as soon as possible.

Recommendation 2: Avoid ambiguity by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of key EASO staff in operations from the start-up phase.

A clear management structure is important to ensure that the mandatory roles for an operation are covered, especially at the start of an operation or measure. Irrespective of the type of operation, certain positions (measure coordinator, field coordinators, etc.) are essential and these need to be

⁵² Linked to SR1 of the 2019 evaluation which recommended that EASO consider different *modus operandi* to strengthen the continuity and stability of resources (including human resources) for the intervention.

filled to ensure the implementation of the operation. Clearly defining roles and responsibilities in the OP and the EASO Operations Manual would limit the degree to which they can be misinterpreted, which in turn can increase efficiency because caseworkers can focus on their most important tasks and no time needs to be wasted on clarifying their responsibilities.

Programming

Lesson learned: EASO's operational support is designed to support Member States under particular pressure. On the one hand, this means providing emergency support in the case of large influxes of arrivals of applicants for international protection, but on the other EASO also seeks to build capacity among local authorities to manage their asylum and reception systems in line with EU standards. Annual OPs might not be the best vehicle to implement the latter, as few of EASO's support initiatives have a one-year timeline. The embedded model approach in Greece seems to have worked well, as it improved productivity and coordination between EASO and authorities, although it is too soon to assess whether it had any impacts on the quality of work or sustainability of results (e.g. in terms of the authorities actually taking on EASO's approaches and building up their capacity to continue work in case EASO were to withdraw its operational support). Such an approach may work well in other countries as well, provided that they have reached a stage where operational support can go beyond mere emergency mitigation and towards more capacity building.

Recommendation 3: Consider moving to multi-annual operational programming, at least in Member States where the imminent need for support has stabilised but there is a need for capacity building.

Real capacity building and improvement of operational processes takes time and would be better tackled through multi-annual operational programming. Moving to multi-annual operational programming in cases where a more sustainable, capacity-building approach is preferable, and including a clear roadmap for phasing out in the related plans (e.g. by making reference to the exit strategy outlined in the multi-annual roadmaps), might increase ownership and buy-in of local authorities, which in turn might improve the sustainability of operational interventions. One-year operational planning could be employed in emergency situations in the strictest sense only (comparable to AMIF EMAS). Once a host Member State has reached a certain level of capacity and is no longer under particular pressure, AMIF could also be used for more structural support⁵³.

Recommendation 4: Continue to prioritise and invest in training and coaching activities.

Continue to invest in training and coaching activities, and importantly, train-the-trainer programmes, which play an important role in capacity building. Training should be embedded in the design of the OP from the start to ensure it is tailored to the needs, can be implemented more promptly and maximises the impact, while keeping in mind the importance of being able to adapt to changing needs over the course of the year. Formalising the involvement of the Training and Professional Development Centre in conducting a training needs assessment during the design phase of an OP in cases where this makes sense, as was done in the case of Spain in 2021, would be a good practice to follow in this respect. The impact of conducting a training needs assessment (as part of the comprehensive needs assessment EASO always conducts) is likely to ensure closer alignment between training needs and the actual training offer, and should enable EASO to be better prepared to offer the necessary training. The actual impact of this approach should be evaluated at

⁵³ The AMIF can fund certain actions related to capacity building of authorities, support with monitoring of the asylum and reception system, etc. Once there is no more need for EASO to provide operational support, a Member State still has the option of using AMIF funding for certain activities. The key difference is that the AMIF cannot fund the deployment of staff like EASO can; and that the AMIF is implemented through shared management, so although it offers a mechanism to show solidarity to EU Member States, it is not directly managed by the EU.

the end of 2021, on which basis a decision should be taken on whether or not this approach should be streamlined.

Innovative approaches and new ways of working

Lesson learned: During 2020, not in the least because of the COVID-19 pandemic that introduced unprecedented challenges to EASO's operational support, the Agency undertook a range of operational and cross-cutting activities. To some degree, these have been very beneficial (e.g. teleworking and remote processing ensuring business continuity), but it is too soon to tell the actual impact of these changes, so they warrant further assessment by EASO.

Recommendation 5: Explore the legal feasibility of accommodating teleworking and remote processes where relevant.

The experiences gained as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, notably in relation to teleworking and remote registration, interviewing, etc., could be replicated. Although there are cases in which in-person registrations or interviews are preferable, many of these remote processes can be continued even beyond the pandemic. One could imagine a situation in which a caseworker or interpreter is located in a different country to the applicant, for instance. This can have significant implications for the effectiveness and efficiency of operational support – quality might improve if there is a larger pool of more experienced experts and temporary workers to choose from and costs associated with travel or relocation would be curbed. To achieve this, EASO could consider reviewing its framework contracts, e.g. allowing services to be procured from throughout the EU rather than in a specific country.

Monitoring

Lesson learned: In recent years (since 2018), EASO has considerably improved its approach to the monitoring of operational support. The Agency has established Results Frameworks for most OPs and extensive Fidelity Monitoring plans defining the roles and responsibilities of its staff for monitoring data related to the progress towards targets and intended objectives set for operations, as well as related to the process, e.g. monitoring spending, human resources, and risks that emerge during the implementation of the OPs. The establishment of these monitoring structures improved transparency and accountability, as well as facilitating the evaluation of operations post hoc. That being said, there is room for improvement in this area. There were instances (e.g. in Italy, Malta) where there reportedly was a lack of knowledge among authorities in terms of the targets and indicators used by EASO to measure progress, or a mismatch in the data being collected by each.

Recommendation 6: Consider streamlining the approach to defining certain core indicators to measure progress, when considering the same type of activity in different operational interventions.

To counteract the limited comparability in achievements of different OPs (which hinders the cross-country evaluation of EASO's operational activities), EASO should consider streamlining the indicators defined in the Results Framework to measure progress when they concern the same activity. Although measures are designed to meet the needs of host Member States and are very specific to their national contexts, the indicators used to measure achievements pertaining to specific core activities can be streamlined. For example, in some Results Frameworks, the output indicators refer to absolute numbers (e.g. number of registrations carried out by EASO registration assistants), while in others they relate to productivity (e.g. number of registrations per registration assistant per month) and others to ratios (share of EASO registration assistants' registrations compared to total registrations). All are useful in their own right, but they measure different things

and so are not comparable. It would thus be preferable to decide on a core set of indicators for given activity types, in coordination between C1 and C3, against which comparable data can be gathered in different national contexts. These can then be supplemented with a more extensive set of variable indicators that are specific to the context of the host Member State.

Recommendation 7: Improve the usefulness and accuracy of the monitoring process by setting targets in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and, where relevant and logistically feasible, jointly monitoring their achievements.

Building on the good practice in Greece in the context of the embedded model, where targets were set in coordination with authorities, EASO should encourage this approach in other countries as well. Jointly establishing targets with authorities at the planning stage (using EASO's own experience with this process from previous operational interventions and contextual knowledge and forecasting on asylum flows) will ensure that targets are relevant, feasible and achievable, and that there is a common understanding and interpretation between EASO and authorities of the intended results and how they are measured. EASO staff in the PMES and C3 should also be consulted as part of this target setting process.

Interventions could also be jointly monitored with authorities where appropriate and logistically feasible (e.g. for smaller operations). Joint monitoring, e.g. as foreseen as part of the Malta OP 2021, would enhance coordination among EASO and the national authorities, eliminate possible overlaps or inconsistencies in data collected, and enable a better common understanding of the challenges encountered and the proper distribution of resources.

Evaluation procedures

Lessons learned: Although not distinctly covered as part of the evaluation exercise, there are a few lessons to be learned from the evaluation process of the OPs. EASO has a legal obligation to evaluate and report on its operational results on an annual basis, but for the evaluation of an OP to be most relevant and useful to EASO, it is worth focusing on aspects of specific interest to the Agency (as was done as part of this assignment). Results should be available to EASO as soon as possible to ensure timely integration into the next year's planning; this can be facilitated by ensuring there is sufficient time allowed for preparatory work to be carried out and that accurate data is available in a timely manner. Moreover, there are inconsistencies in EASO's monitoring data when compared with the validated data used for internal reporting that might benefit from better coordination with a view to facilitating the evaluation process.

Recommendation 8: Adapt the evaluation cycle to make results more useful to EASO.

To be most useful to EASO, OP evaluations should be concluded as soon as possible after the end of the OP, and cover aspects that were particularly striking during that year or are of particular interest to EASO to focus on in more depth. This could include, for instance, new approaches or strategies such as EASO's comprehensive reception strategy that was adopted in March 2021. EASO could consider limiting the scope of the annual OP evaluations to focus on key changes, challenges or achievements and/or topics of particular interest, and conduct a more thorough evaluation that covers all Better Regulation evaluation criteria in more detail every three to four years.

Alternatively, EASO could consider tendering the evaluation out earlier in the year (e.g. in August or September of the year to be evaluated). This would enable external evaluators to become more familiar with the OP and EASO's processes more broadly, which could positively impact the subsequent depth of analysis. Gaps in e.g. monitoring data could then be filled as and when the data become available. Such an adjustment would not need to have any budgetary implications for EASO.

Recommendation 9: Consider conducting an evaluation of EASO as an Agency.

EASO underwent an evaluation in 2015 but has not been evaluated since then. While EASO underwent organisational change in 2020 and the Agency has been seeking to develop a coordinated approach by building on the key strengths of each Centre to offer the best possible support to EU Member States, fieldwork conducted during the evaluation of EASO's operational support activities pointed to areas for improvement in the coordination between EASO's centres. As a concrete assessment of the functioning of the Agency and its parts is beyond the scope of this assessment, conducting an evaluation of the Agency more broadly would be advisable, to assess the workings of the Agency and potentially identify ways to further improve internal working modalities. Such an evaluation could help improve workflows within EASO, uncover how a more integrated approach can be achieved, and identify areas for improvement. This could have a positive impact on operations because they rely on the proper functioning of all of EASO's Centres and units.

Annex 1 Evaluation methodology

Each of the five operational support interventions mentioned above was evaluated on its effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, EU added value, impact and sustainability. In this horizontal report, we highlight the key commonalities and differences between the operations, noting any lessons that might be learned from the experience in one country that are also relevant to others. In addition, we uncover the work EASO undertook more broadly, behind the scenes of operational support, especially in follow-up to the strategic recommendations of the evaluation of 2019 operations (see Annex 3).

Methods

The main sources of evidence used for this report include the evaluation reports (and underlying data) for each operation, a review of relevant statistics and documentation pertaining to EASO's activities more broadly, and key informant interviews.

Desk research

Aside from the secondary review of operation-specific evaluation reports and their underlying data, this horizontal report made use of documentation pertaining to EASO's activities more broadly, at strategic level. Sources of evidence include training statistics, Quarterly Analytical Briefs, Annual and Semi-Annual Trend Analysis Reports, and EASO's Special Report on Asylum Trends and COVID-19. The evaluation report from 2019 and the associated Management Response Sheet (MRS) detailing how its strategic recommendations were followed up on was a key source of evidence for the evaluation of progress made in 2020 as well. A reference list is included in Annex 2.

In-depth interviews

At EASO, we spoke with several staff, including at the executive level; staff from the Operational Support Centre (C1 – in charge of operations); the Training and Professional Development Centre (C2 – in charge of designing, organising and facilitating training activities); and the Asylum Knowledge Centre (C3 – in charge of research and data analysis and thematic cooperation between Member States). These interviews served a dual purpose to (1) better understand what EASO does, notably how the work of C2 and C3 interacts with EASO's operations; and (2) to uncover the work undertaken in 2020 to fulfil the strategic recommendations of the 2019 evaluation.

An interview with DG HOME staff was held to discuss in more depth the working relationship between EASO and DG HOME, the constraints placed on EASO by its nature as a decentralised agency of the EU, and the key achievements and challenges at operational level during 2020.

Limitations to the robustness of the evidence base

The **main limitation to the analysis presented in this report is rooted in the COVID-19 pandemic**. This unprecedented and unexpected global health crisis temporarily halted EASO's work across all operations and required the Agency to rethink its ways of working. Meanwhile, objectives and targets were set before the pandemic started, meaning that their achievement was hindered by the pandemic and all the restrictions it brought about. What is more, these circumstances make it very challenging to make any meaningful comparisons between achievements in 2020 and previous years. Thus, all results need to be interpreted with this caveat in mind.

Similarly, there are **limits to the degree to which different operational interventions can be compared** to one another. As already mentioned, each intervention has its own area(s) of focus, depending on the context and the needs of authorities in host Member States. The number of incoming asylum seekers and pending applications vary significantly between large countries like Greece and Italy to small islands like Cyprus and Malta, as does the capacity of local authorities and their political priorities. Therefore, the outputs of each intervention are different, and one registration in one country cannot reliably be compared to one registration in another.

Annex 2 List of documents consulted

Bearing Point, External evaluation of the implementation of Operating Plan 2019 (OP2019) of EASO intervention in Greece, Italy and Cyprus, 2020

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EASO, Annual Trend Analysis Reports, 2018, 2019 and 2020

EASO, Asylum Report, 2020

EASO, COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems, Issues 1, 2 and 3, 2020

EASO, Management Response Sheet on the strategic recommendations of the 2019 evaluation

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EASO, Operational Evaluation User Guide, 2020

EASO, Operating Plans (with Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Italy), 2020

EASO, RSF Project Description, 2019

EASO, Semi-Annual Trend Analysis Reports, 2019 and 2020

EASO, Special Report – Asylum Trends and COVID-19, issue 1 and 2

EASO, Weekly Overviews, 2020

Eurostat, Asylum and Dublin Statistics, 2021

Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation (EU) No 439/2010, COM/2016/0271 final - 2016/0131 (COD)

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

Regulation (EU) No 516/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, amending Council Decision 2008/381/EC and repealing Decisions No 573/2007/EC and No 575/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Decision 2007/435/EC

Annex 3 Status follow-up of the 2020 External Evaluation strategic recommendations

Management Response Sheet

Date of EASO's response: 15/05/2020
Concerning: C1 –Operational Support Centre

Recommendation of the Evaluation	Approval by EASO	Proposed Action/Response	Urgency/ Timing/ Actors	Response status	Evaluator's commentary
SR1: Consider different modus operandi to strengthen the continuity and stability of resources (including human resources) for the intervention.	Fully	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Already in process – EASO Project Board established to address this comprehensively to 'future proof' EASO in terms of human resource planning (taking into account EU and national legal requirements). EASO has already sought specific and comprehensive external legal advice on the relevant European and national legal frameworks that apply in respect of deployment of human resources and will proceed within these frameworks EASO is progressing in its recruitment plan with regards to staff, in alignment with the new organogram. 	High 2020 Project Board, EXO (LDPS)	<p>Taking into consideration the very comprehensive internal and external legal advice on the relevant legal frameworks regarding deployment of human resources, EASO developed different options and scenarios for Alternative Deployment Mechanisms (ADM) throughout 2020</p> <p>Consultation and approval process with the Commission and EASO Management Board ongoing</p> <p>A new Executive Director Decision on Recruitment of staff (Standard Operating Procedure) was issued on 15 December 2020</p>	EASO sought out legal analysis and developed scenarios for alternative deployment of experts. However, issues around human resources persist. These are largely outside of EASO's control, as the Agency is bound by its Founding Regulation.

Recommendation of the Evaluation	Approval by EASO	Proposed Action/Response	Urgency/ Timing/ Actors	Response status	Evaluator's commentary
SR2: Align and enhance the contents and structure of strategic planning documents (multi-annual roadmap, OP, etc.)	Fully	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EASO aims- under a three-year approach which started in 2018 – to embed a comprehensive project management methodology across all its multi-annual roadmaps, operating plans and special project plans and to align these with SPD processes. This is therefore an already agreed deliverable in 2020 The country-specific multi-annual roadmaps will progressively become joint planning instruments with the national authorities allowing EASO to highlight the phase of intervention (e.g. emergency, entry, exit and sustainability strategies towards phasing out) 	High. Year end 2020 C1, EXO	<p>Established Needs Assessment methodology was applied for a third year in a row in preparation of 2021 Operating Plans</p> <p>A new User Guide on Design & Planning for operations was developed and tried out during the preparation of the 2021 Operating Plans</p> <p>A new User Guide on Evaluation was finalised by the end of the 2020 – completing the key chapter of EASO's Operations Manual</p> <p>Objectives and outputs of operations, as well as key performance indicators, and horizontal functions within the Centre were reviewed and better aligned with SPD documents</p> <p>Country-specific multiannual roadmaps are not yet implemented in all countries; joint planning</p>	EASO took several steps to expand on and streamline strategic planning documents ⁵⁴ . However, there is a lack of harmonisation across OPs that could benefit from some degree of streamlining, though they can never be fully harmonised due to the importance of EASO's support being tailored to the context in which it operates (pressure placed on authorities, their level of maturity, etc.).

⁵⁴ E.g. development of the Evaluation User Guide at the end of 2020, development of a User Guide on Design and Planning for operations that was used to prepare the 2021 OPs; review of common key performance indicators.

Recommendation of the Evaluation	Approval by EASO	Proposed Action/Response	Urgency/ Timing/ Actors	Response status	Evaluator's commentary
				with national authorities intensified across the board (enhanced by Covid-19 response needs)	
SR3: Advance the level of maturity of results-based planning, implementation and monitoring.	Partially	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C1 is already working to achieve this as a process which is part of the three-year plan on PM methodology and alignment mentioned under SR2 In this context specific efforts include working towards core indicators based on common monitoring criteria per result area, systematic fidelity monitoring with established reporting and feedback mechanisms and progressing towards activity-based budgeting as part of the methodology noted above in SR2 and where appropriate. 	High. Continuous 2018 - 2020	<p>See under SR2 for development of User Guides on Design & Planning and Evaluation (Operations Manual)</p> <p>Fidelity monitoring framework (reporting and feedback mechanisms) developed in 2019 was implemented in 2020</p> <p>A review of the monitoring system took place at the end of 2020; findings and recommendations are being reflected in 2021 monitoring plans</p> <p>Measure-based budgets are in place, reflecting the split per type of cost and per type of measure of budget allocations for operational activities led by operations on the ground (i.e. excludes support provided by C2 and C3, which is monitored</p>	The results-based planning has improved significantly in recent years, and the availability and measurement of indicators is very relevant for evaluation purposes. However, the process seems overly complex involving several levels, and might benefit from a more streamlined and harmonised approach (without losing track of country-specific contexts).

Recommendation of the Evaluation	Approval by EASO	Proposed Action/Response	Urgency/ Timing/ Actors	Response status	Evaluator's commentary
				<p>within their own budget framework)</p> <p>Progress towards activity-based budgeting requires significant change to how the whole agency works – from organisational to functional structure. C1 management reviewed this extensively and deprioritised it in the context of the Centres outcomes focused PM Methodological framework.</p>	
SR4: Harmonise the implementation of quality management in operations with those of national authorities and investigate how productivity and efficiency considerations can be better embedded as quality requirements	Partially C1 teams engage directly with national authorities but cannot be responsible for or be the architects of a national QMS embedding productivity, efficiency in quality arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As there are many facets of the quality approach, there is continuous dialogue between EASO and authorities, but evaluations need to recognise our limited role. As C1, productivity is horizontally addressed across all operations. C1 aims at providing enhanced support to national authorities on quality through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue and support for development of working instructions, workflows and related procedures; Capacity building; Targeted pilots (examples: team leaders in Greece; support to establishment of quality self-assessment tool for registration 	<p>High</p> <p>Continuous, 2020 – and beyond</p> <p>C1, C3, National authorities</p>	<p>Dialogue with national authorities on defining the approach on quality remains an important element of the partnership</p> <p>Initiatives/pilots carried out in Italy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> delivered the self-assessment monitoring tools to be used by the Department of Public Security (DPS) to support quality and standardisation of procedures at the registration phase. 	<p>Considerable progress was made in this regard, e.g. with the development of new quality tools, more emphasis on training and coaching. However, the degree to which these are taken on by the national authorities is largely beyond EASO's control as it depends on their willingness, capacity and context (e.g. whether they are managing an emergency or can think more about the long-term perspective). The</p>

Recommendation of the Evaluation	Approval by EASO	Proposed Action/Response	Urgency/ Timing/ Actors	Response status	Evaluator's commentary
		<p>authorities and of quality monitoring tools on reception system in Italy as well as support to the development of SUA- integrated asylum IT system – to increase efficiency of the Italian asylum system)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C1 aims to increasingly align its internal productivity actions more closely with that of the national authorities by exploring improvements in target setting internally and constant joint planning with national authorities; 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaching missions planned to <i>Prefettura</i> in 2020 were cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak and postponed to 2021. But EASO supported the relevant authority in the refinement of sustainable national financial and legal workflows related to the management of the reception system, developed a data collection tool and a vademecum on procedures and best practices for UAM • in support of the SUA, EASO deployed a dedicated technical team to ensure project management support to the development of SUA (Phase 1). The finalisation of SUA – Phase 1 has been postponed to mid-2021 <p>In 2021: pilot in Greece with Quality Feedback Reports which intend to</p>	<p>embedded model in Greece is a good example of how this can work well, but is not feasible in all countries (yet).</p>

Recommendation of the Evaluation	Approval by EASO	Proposed Action/Response	Urgency/ Timing/ Actors	Response status	Evaluator's commentary
				<p>highlight identified good practices and possible shortcomings related to quality with the use of the Quality Assurance Tool (QAT)</p> <p>Alignment of internal productivity/target setting with that of the national authorities increased across all operations but fine-tuning of target setting criteria ongoing</p>	
SR5: Improve the intervention logic where it isn't sufficiently clear	Fully Accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An EASO reception strategy is being developed, as an inclusive exercise, in order to better define and inform the operational intervention logic on reception. A similar exercise will be undertaken for EASO's work on asylum processes 	High 2020	<p>An EASO-wide Reception Strategy was drafted in 2020 and closely coordinated between different EASO Centres (C1-C2-C3); for adoption by MB in March 2021</p> <p>Operational Knowledge Centre (C3) initiated work on a similar intervention logic/strategic exercise for various asylum processes; consultation phase in early 2021</p>	A new reception strategy was developed during 2020, outlining where and how EASO can intervene in reception. The effect of this new strategy on operations should be evaluated in 2021.

Recommendation of the Evaluation	Approval by EASO	Proposed Action/Response	Urgency/ Timing/ Actors	Response status	Evaluator's commentary
SR6: Further enhance the sustainability and impact of capacity-building	Fully accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated training focal points are deployed in the country offices to follow-up to training activities The Training Plans prepared per each Operating Plans in 2020 map training needs of various target groups and propose training paths for various profiles Competency based training, on-the-job training and coaching are reinforced to enhance more sustainable results Train the trainers for national officials and support to national sessions by the trained national officials have been inserted in the Italy OP2020, as well as provision of support to central authorities for various capacity-building activities vis-a-vis their local offices on quality (coaching missions, helpdesk...). The integrated reporting on training to be provided by the Training and Professional Development Centre in close cooperation with the regional offices 	2020 High	<p>Training focal points deployed</p> <p>Training plans in place</p> <p>Training implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competency based training, on-the-job training and coaching have been reinforced Implementation of train-the-trainer national authorities and overall training/coaching <p>Detailed data with breakdowns per type are available from the Training and Professional Development Centre (C2) – see next point on integrated reporting</p> <p>Integrated reporting has been established through the Training and Professional Development Centre (C2) in cooperation with C1 and C3/data analysis and research sector</p>	A lot of work was done on improving training activities (including coaching, on-the-job training and train-the-trainer programmes) during 2020 to enhance capacity. However, the degree to which this is absorbed is largely dependent on the willingness and capacity of authorities. The involvement of C2 in the planning of the new OP 2021 with Spain might prove to be a good practice – its impact should be evaluated in 2021.