



EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF EASO OPERATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

SUMMARY REPORT – RESETTLEMENT SUPPORT FACILITY
PILOT PROJECT IN TURKEY (APRIL 2019-APRIL 2021)

Ramboll Management Consulting

23rd April 2021

This summary report was prepared by:

Elif Çetin, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of International Relations

Yaşar University, Izmir/Turkey

And quality reviewed by:

Vanessa Ludden

Business Manager, Ramboll Management Consulting

Rajia Addo Faddaoui

Manager, Ramboll Management Consulting

Lara Jansen

Senior Consultant, Ramboll Management Consulting

Disclaimer: The information and views set out in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Asylum Support Office nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Disclaimers

This report includes non-validated operational data provided to the evaluators during data collection. Some data may differ from those presented in other reports because such data may have been updated through subsequent internal data reviews or validation exercises.

This report may include provisional data available at the time of production of the report. Some data may therefore differ from those in validated and official statistics subsequently submitted to Eurostat (in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2020/851 amending Regulation (EC) 862/2007) and published on the Eurostat website <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/migration-asylum/asylum>.

This page was added to the report on 31/08/2023



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Evaluation objectives and scope

This final evaluation of the European Asylum Support Office's (EASO) Resettlement Support Facility (RSF) Pilot Project in Turkey focuses on the time period covering the total duration of the RSF intervention, i.e. April 2019 to April 2021, and offers a retrospective, reflective and objective assessment of the RSF intervention's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and added value. It also seeks to determine the main parameters for replicating the RSF project in other geographical areas. The geographical scope thus covers Turkey and relevant EU+¹ countries that participated in the Pilot Project². The thematic scope, beyond the mandatory evaluation criteria outlined above, focuses on the potential added value of EASO support on resettlement based on the current pilot initiative as a test for a replicable model for European Union (EU) cooperation.

It is part of a broader evaluation exercise of five EASO operational interventions, involving planning and implementation of operational and capacity building programmes and projects in support of EU+ and third countries.

1.2 Background to the intervention

The EU+ countries resort to resettlement schemes as legal and safe channels for persons in need of international protection that can replace perilous and risky irregular migration. Since the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, EU+ countries have been resettling refugees from Turkey with increased intensity. In this context, **EASO set up a Pilot Project in April 2019 for the establishment of a Resettlement Support Facility as a 'one-stop-shop'** in support of EU+ countries' resettlement operations from Turkey for 24 months, until April 2021.

The overall objective of the Pilot Project is that **selected third-country persons in need of international protection can legally and safely arrive in the EU** in line with the EU resettlement pledges in 2018-2019 and 2020-2021.

The RSF project aims to achieve two main outcomes. The first outcome is the establishment of an EASO coordinated pilot for an EU-wide collaborative mechanism for resettlement of refugees in Turkey creating perspectives for added value and efficiencies. In addition, it aims at supporting EU+ countries to engage in increased technical collaboration and innovative practices on resettlement in Turkey. The activities are organised around the delivery by EASO of two complementary outcome-level indicators:

- A pilot EASO "one-stop-shop" infrastructure support facility progressively supporting selection and cultural orientation missions as part of the resettlement processes conducted by the interested EU+ countries.
- The delivery of an EASO technical cooperation platform on resettlement practices of the participating EU+ countries from Turkey and procedures between these countries.

The RSF Pilot Project is thus expected to enhance operational coordination of EU+ countries' resettlement operations from one dedicated facility, stimulating cooperation between them, supporting them in fulfilling their pledges, testing new practices to increase the effectiveness of the

¹ EU Member States and Associate Countries.

² Six EU+ countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland) are participating in the project. Support to Portugal has also been launched, but no operations have been implemented yet.

process, enhancing operational support to EU+ countries, increasing cost-efficiency and testing a replicable model of EU cooperation in the field of resettlement.

2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the EASO RSF Pilot Project was conducted through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a detailed analysis of the results of the intervention. The methodology used consisted of desk research and in-depth interviews conducted with the EASO RSF staff and deployed experts; authorities from participating EU+ countries; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) staff, and a focus group, which was organised to conclude and validate the fieldwork.

A number of factors posed limitations to the evidence base for this evaluation. First of all, due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, all the interviews had to be conducted via videoconference, which was a limitation because face-to-face interviews tend to allow for a more personal connection. Another limitation was related to the fact that it was not possible to receive a response from all the national authorities contacted. It would have been beneficial to gather insights from all of those EU+ countries' relevant authorities. Thirdly, due to the restrictions emanating from the on-going global pandemic, no field visits/observations could take place. Such field visits/direct observations could have provided insights into the day-to-day operations of the RSF, including work processes and any inefficiencies related to them. In addition, field visits/observations could have provided insights on the satisfaction of end beneficiaries with the intervention.

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The findings of the evaluation of the RSF intervention are based on all the information gathered and analysed from primary and secondary sources of evidence. This includes results from the review of monitoring data and existing evidence, and interviews with EASO staff and authorities, UNHCR, ICMC and the focus group. The findings are presented along the key evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value, impact and sustainability of the intervention.

3.1 Relevance

All interviewed stakeholders remarked that **RSF was established at the right time** and helped EU+ countries meet their resettlement pledges. The EU+ countries' authorities noted that RSF carries a lot of potential for enhancing channels of communication and exchanges between different EU+ countries, and, in that sense, it can help foster a change/shift in EU+ countries perspectives on the implementation of the resettlement process. Therefore, even though RSF is not a policy designing actor – a responsibility that primarily belongs to EU+ countries – it can have an indirect impact on the process, thus making it highly relevant with respect to the EU policy environment for international protection in the long run.

Through its very design, **RSF is a relevant intervention** since it emerged as the outcome of EASO's consultation with the EU+ countries regarding the kind of support tool they would prefer to resort to while realising their resettlement pledges. The relevance of the RSF is further improved by the broad menu of services it offers; this structure enables EU+ countries to benefit from RSF in accordance with their particular operational needs and priorities.

3.2 Effectiveness

3.2.1 Legal and safe resettlement of refugees

The overall aim of the RSF Pilot Project is to contribute to the **legal and safe resettlement** of third-country persons in need of protection in the EU+ from Turkey. In this regard, a target of 1,500 resettled refugees was set for the period May 2019 – October 2020. Internal target setting was ambitious, aiming at resettling 600 refugees in the first semester (i.e. May-October 2019); 200 in the second semester (i.e. November 2019-April 2020), and 700 in the third semester (i.e. May-October 2020). In 2020, **1,017 refugees were processed via the RSF**. However, due to travel restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, not all of these refugees could travel and be resettled in EU+ countries. As a result, by the end of October 2020 (latest available data), **506 refugees had been resettled**, a number that was already reached by January 2020 and not changed thereafter. Therefore, it is assumed that in the absence of the COVID-19 pandemic, RSF would probably have had a good chance of reaching the target.

Due to the **COVID-19 pandemic**, no selection missions or cultural orientation sessions took place at all between April and August 2020, and travelling to Turkey for a mission was still restricted for the majority of EU+ countries at the time of writing. Moreover, some resettlement missions that had already been planned had to be postponed, mainly due to EU+ countries' decisions stemming from them not being ready to receive refugees.

In an attempt to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a shift towards **remote missions** starting in August 2020. During remote missions, the number of refugees that could be processed face-to-face on the same day went down, due to the introduction of new COVID-19 pandemic-related rules and restrictions by Turkish authorities, such as on the maximum number of people that could be in the RSF building at the same time. Interviewing only the main candidate (rather than family members as well) and/or remote processing were used as alternative means to process refugees.

Given that remote missions are still a relatively recent phenomena, it might be too early to reach a conclusive decision on the effectiveness of remote missions. In particular, EU+ countries may have increased reluctance towards using remote processing when they face more complex refugee claims and also when they may not have familiarity with the particular case load, which heightens security-related concerns of the participating countries causing them to conduct face-to-face interviews instead.

3.2.2 An EASO coordinated, EU-wide, collaborative pilot mechanism for resettlement

At results level, the key objective was to **establish a one-stop-shop infrastructure**, coordinated by EASO, used by interested EU+ countries to facilitate the resettlement of refugees from Turkey in a more effective and efficient way. In this respect, the targets were achieved: the one-stop-shop facility was established, and six EU+ countries participated in the Pilot Project, without having to plan and manage the processes on their own.

That being said, some of the interviewed stakeholders argued that the fact that there are multiple players involved in the resettlement processes, such as RSF, UNHCR, EU+ countries and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), sometimes makes it unclear who refugees should be consulting about their cases.

Regarding the extent to which RSF has become an **EU-wide collaborative mechanism**, even though RSF enables EU+ countries to share their best practices with each other, it is not yet in the shape of a single platform where EU+ countries can find all the relevant information regarding their operational needs. RSF is in the process of developing a digital information platform, which is

planned to go online by the end of March 2021, and that may help strengthen the one-stop-shop concept.

In practice, EU+ countries were able to use the RSF to carry out selection missions, medical assessments and cultural orientation missions. However, not all the output-level targets set for these activities were fully achieved. A total of 1,449 (out of the foreseen 1,500) refugees were supported through selection missions, which arguably is quite close to the set target even though there were certain setbacks due to the pandemic; no medical assessments were conducted (compared to 300 foreseen); and only 508 refugees were supported through cultural orientation sessions (compared to 1,200 foreseen). Only the Netherlands and Belgium opted for conducting their cultural orientation remotely. The Netherlands decided to follow a completely digital approach by predominantly using Facebook as a platform, where refugees could take part in cultural orientation from their homes and there was no need for them to be supported via the RSF, while Belgium followed a hybrid approach where refugees needed to be in RSF premises for a two-hour cultural orientation session.

The **main explanation for the gap between the targeted numbers and the achieved results is the COVID-19 pandemic**. Furthermore, the EU+ countries who started with remote processing were limited to Switzerland and Belgium, which also had a considerable impact on curtailing the chances for reaching the targets.

3.2.3 Technical collaboration and innovative practices from resettlement in Turkey

In addition to supporting EU+ countries in fulfilling their resettlement pledges through the establishment of a one-stop-shop facility, the RSF Pilot Project also sought to **increase technical collaboration and innovative practices among EU+ countries**. Documented collaborative practices between EU+ countries with EASO's support exceeded the target (five achieved versus three targeted). At the outcome level, the monitoring documents refer to satisfactory shadowing and information sharing experiences of EU+ countries.

There are several documented cases of evidence of innovations in EU+ countries' resettlement practices linked to project support (e.g. the Swiss remote selection mission in August 2020; the Belgian remote Pre-departure Orientation (PDO) in September 2020; gathering of refugees' documentation from UNHCR prior to the missions).

3.3 Efficiency

Regarding the cost-efficiency of the RSF intervention, there is mixed evidence. **Detailed information on the average cost per person per resettlement process is not available** because when EU+ countries take part in operational interventions carried out by other stakeholders, they are bound by confidentiality clauses and as a result cannot share any data on costs. However, the RSF offers services to Member States EU+ countries free of charge, and since it is based on the one-stop-shop approach, it can be considered as contributing to time and efficiency gains in procuring and purchasing the resettlement services.

What is clear is that a **majority of the relevant stakeholders have the impression that RSF is a cost-efficient intervention**. In particular, several national authorities indicated that they welcome RSF from a cost-efficiency point of view since IOM services are expensive and difficult to monitor. So, from the point of EU+ countries, RSF offered 'transparency' and it was easier to keep track of where the money was spent when compared with some previous experiences with other stakeholders operating in the field of resettlement.

3.4 Coherence, EU-Added Value, Impact and Sustainability

In terms of RSF's **coherence with wider EU goals**, the RSF project supports the European Commission European Agenda on Migration, and it also coherent with the Commission's Proposal for a Regulation on a Union Resettlement Framework. In addition, the RSF intervention is **also coherent with the actions of other relevant agencies with similar objectives** in the field of resettlement, such as IOM and UNHCR.

On **EU added value**, the majority of the interviewed stakeholders indicated that selection missions became much easier to conduct through the support the RSF provides to EU+ countries regarding the setting up of missions and arranging transportation support. Moreover, participating EU+ countries do not have to do things bilaterally anymore. The RSF appears to generate an added value also by creating a community of shared practices, since EU+ countries coordinate in the way they conduct their resettlement missions and share good practices with each other.

Within this context, the main **impact** of the RSF intervention involves making the whole resettlement process much easier and more manageable for EU+ countries, and thereby helping them solidify their commitments in relation to resettlement.

The RSF is **sustainable**, especially in the short- and medium-run. It offers a mechanism for legal and safe resettlement of refugees from Turkey to the EU+ countries, which is likely to remain a priority route for resettling refugees. The platform offered by RSF to EU+ countries for the exchange of good practices, experiences and challenges paves the way for sustaining collaboration among them in the field of resettlement. Likewise, the use of remote modalities of resettlement seeks to encourage countries to resort to innovative means in their resettlement processes and cultural orientation missions, whose effects can be sustained in the short- and medium-run, especially if more and more EU+ countries start viewing remote processing as effective and efficient. However, any change that may happen in the political priorities of the EU+ countries towards resettlement (e.g. following national elections, lessened focus on Turkey as a country for resettlement) could re-define the scope for sustaining the RSF intervention and its effects, thus potentially threatening the long-term sustainability of the RSF.

3.5 Cross-cutting results and other evaluation questions

The **severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** on the RSF Pilot Project in terms of the capacity of EASO's team to plan for activities and financial forecast is worth noting. The pandemic hindered in-person interviews and cultural orientations, which instead had to move (partially) online; and social distancing measures severely decreased the RSF's overall processing capacity. Before the pandemic (between May 2019 and March 2020), ten missions took place, processing a total of 940 persons and resettling approximately 506 of them. During the COVID-19 pandemic (between April 2020 and March 2021), ten missions took place, processing a total of 742 individuals through remote missions, but resettling none. Some missions were cancelled and delayed/postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic and it took time to put together the proposal regarding the conduct of remote processing and what would be necessary in the office space, and also within the context of travel restrictions. Since there was very little activity during six months following the detection of the first known COVID-19 cases in EU+ countries and Turkey in March, RSF was extended for six months beyond the originally planned time frame.

Moreover, the pandemic imposed restraints on all actors involved in the resettlement process. In October 2020, UNHCR faced challenges with capacity due to the COVID-19 pandemic-induced situation and they struggled to produce submissions (maximum 50% capacity compared to normal times). The Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) in Turkey – the public institution established under the Ministry of Interior responsible for immigration and asylum issues – on which the UNHCR depends for referrals, also worked at very limited capacity. Despite the challenges posed

by the COVID-19 pandemic, different stakeholders noted that the RSF and all the involved stakeholders, including EU+ countries, did everything possible to ensure that resettlement missions would not be completely put on hold.

As regards the **replicability of the RSF model**, the Pilot Project carries the potential to be replicated elsewhere. Interviewed EU+ countries' authorities emphasised that before going ahead, there should be clear evidence that there would be enough demand for it, with a sufficient number of EU+ countries wanting to participate. EASO has already conducted consultations with EU+ countries to gauge their interest, which point to appreciation of the RSF facility and a positive view on replicating it elsewhere. Aside from the notion of sufficient participation, interviewed stakeholders highlighted several preconditions that should be met to ensure successful replication of the RSF Pilot Project.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 General conclusions

The table below presents the scoring of the achievements of each key evaluation criteria of the EASO-RSF Pilot Project in Turkey.

Table 1. Scoring of achievements of the RSF intervention

	Very good	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory
Relevance	✓			
Effectiveness		✓		
Efficiency		✓		
Coherence		✓		
EU added value		✓		
Impact		✓		
Sustainability		✓		

Overall, the **relevance** of the RSF intervention is considered **very good**. Both countries that are relatively new and inexperienced in the resettlement field and those that have a more long-standing tradition of resettlement have benefitted from the RSF experience, thus making the Pilot Project relevant across the board.

Overall, the **effectiveness** is considered **good**. The project has successfully supported EU+ countries in their efforts to achieve legal and safe resettlement of refugees from Turkey. In addition, RSF has been an effective EU-wide collaborative mechanism. All the national authorities interviewed found regular meetings taking place within the RSF framework useful and helpful in terms of sharing good practices with other EU+ countries and learning from their experiences. It was noted, however, that the number of EU+ countries using the RSF so far reached 7 of the 13 EU+ countries resettling out of Turkey in the period 2019 - 2020 and that involvement of some other EU+ countries may

increase the overall effectiveness of the RSF by broadening the pool of experiences that would be shared across different EU+ countries. For that purpose, EASO has been reaching out to EU+ countries that are not yet participating in the RSF Pilot Project. Moreover, RSF fostered innovative practices, such as remote missions.

The **efficiency** of the RSF project is considered **good**. RSF offers services to EU+ countries free of charge, and since it is based on the one-shop-stop approach, it can be considered as contributing to time and efficiency gains in procuring and purchasing the resettlement services. Yet, there is also lack of data on cost per person per resettlement process, which could have increased the robustness of this conclusion. This particular shortcoming related to the data emanates from the fact that a number of EU+ countries are bound by confidentiality clauses in the contracts they sign within the context of other operational interventions, thus obstructing them from making the data that would be needed to conduct a robust cost-efficiency assessment available.

The overall **coherence** of the RSF intervention is **good**. The stakeholders consider the RSF intervention as coherent with the activities carried out by other relevant agencies, such as IOM and UNHCR.

The **EU added value** and the **impact** of the intervention are also considered **good** overall. Many of the EU+ countries authorities emphasised that conducting resettlement missions was much easier and more manageable with the help of the logistical and operational support provided by the RSF. In this sense, the RSF generates the impact of helping EU+ countries solidify their resettlement commitments.

Finally, the **sustainability** of the RSF is **good**. In the short- and medium-run, the chances for RSF's sustainability are considered quite solid. In the long run, however, changes in political priorities could intervene with the project's sustainability. If EU+ countries' priorities change, they may stop resettling refugees from Turkey, although migration issues being high on the political agendas of the EU+ countries may also be translated into increased efforts for enhancing resettlement practices as a tool for legal entry. The same applies to EU political priorities, which hinge on EU-Turkey relations that may be volatile. Finally, the political positioning taken by the new United States (US) administration in 2021 towards resettlements from the MENA region potentially plays a role. Given that EASO uses the ICMC building, which is shared with the US, a significant increase in resettlements carried out by the US could emerge as a factor that may influence the prospects for RSF's long-term sustainability. Yet, for the time being, there are no clear indications of a heightened interest on the side of the current US administration to resettle from the MENA region in larger numbers. The risk around this particular factor is thus not considered remarkably high. The **COVID-19 pandemic** imposed some limitations on the capacity of RSF to plan activities and carry out financial forecasts. Yet, RSF circumvented this challenge, at least to a certain extent, by creating the option of remote missions as an innovative tool.

The prospects for the **replicability** of the intervention are considered **good**, as long as some pre-conditions are met. Apart from the need for the presence of high resettlement needs and a sufficient number of EU+ countries indicating willingness to resettle, a great majority of the stakeholders underlined the advantage of the specific structure and knowledge and expertise of the actors involved in the RSF intervention. The importance of having a service provider that has a sense of how to operate within a resettlement environment, and is capable of providing both the physical infrastructure, as well as the know-how and intellectual and knowledge-based capacity in support of the RSF initiative was stressed, while the wider EASO expertise in the field was also welcomed.

4.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Ensure better and more regular communication and information sharing among the EU+ countries and the other stakeholders. Better and more regular

communication and information sharing between the EU+ countries and the other stakeholders regarding certain minimum preparation times can help improve the mission preparation phase by improving the balance between different EU+ countries expectations, needs and timelines. Furthermore, as the needs of EU+ countries participating in the RSF intervention tend to change quite often, it is considered important that EASO looks into the possibility of improving the existing standardised forms and templates, and add new ones if necessary. In addition, EU+ countries can be encouraged further to communicate as promptly as possible regarding any changes in numbers of refugees to be resettled, even though resettlement operations have a dynamic nature and are sometimes subject to changes.

Recommendation 2: Keep investing in communication with all involved stakeholders, including partners and contractors. There is room to further improve the lines of communication between all involved stakeholders, including partners and contractors. For refugees, it is not always entirely clear with whom they should get in touch in order to gather information about their cases. The way communication goes back and forth among different stakeholders may create certain challenges for achieving an EASO coordinated, EU-wide collaboration to the full extent. More efficient information sharing mechanisms should be created which will help RSF to turn into a more effective platform in terms of fostering cooperation among participating countries.

Recommendation 3: Consider different modalities within Turkey to increase flexibility and improve cost-efficiency. Since RSF premises are located in Istanbul, those refugees living outside of Istanbul sometimes have to travel long distances, which would require them to receive DGMM's approval first, and then their accommodation and travel have to be arranged. In addition, if refugees contract COVID-19 during their stay in Istanbul and require two weeks of quarantine in Istanbul, EASO is expected to cover this financially which represents a significant and unexpected cost to the service³. Different modalities within Turkey could be considered to help improve the RSF's logistical flexibility and cost-efficiency. These different modalities can involve implementing RSF in other parts of Turkey with relatively large concentration of refugees and/or encouraging the use of remote processing.

Recommendation 4: Investigate the potential to replicate the RSF model elsewhere outside of Turkey by checking that the parameters necessary for ensuring successful replicability are present. Since RSF is a beneficial project offering EU added value to the participating countries, EASO should try to build on the success of the RSF intervention, and look to understand whether there is a need among sufficient number of EU+ countries for it to be replicated and also in what form it is replicable elsewhere. While doing so, it should also take into consideration certain pre-conditions for a successful replication of the project, such as the presence of high resettlement needs and meaningful number of EU+ countries indicating willingness to resettle, the availability of secured budgetary capacity, and the procurement of contractors who have the necessary know-how/expertise.

Recommendation 5: Invest in building awareness around the use of remote processing where this makes sense. EASO should invest in building awareness around the use of remote processing where this makes sense, and put forward the experiences of countries that have already used remote modalities and get them to share these experiences. Even though using remote modalities may not always be possible or preferable, encouraging the participating countries to use remote processes can contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the RSF model. Especially if a significantly large pool of experts and temporary workers with sufficient expertise can be accumulated, this can help to improve the quality of remote missions, and encourage further EU+ countries to welcome the option of remote processing. Furthermore, remote processing would also

³ [REDACTED]

cut down the costs involved in travel or relocation; a point that EASO could further emphasise in its communication with the participating countries while planning resettlement missions.

Recommendation 6: Remind EU+ countries the full extent of the EASO's menu of services.

EU+ countries should be reminded of the full extent of the EASO's menu of services and awareness should be built around the already existing EASO capacity to conduct medical screenings.

Recommendation 7: Continuously monitor projections over numbers of refugees to be resettled. Given that there is still high uncertainty among EU+ countries participating in the RSF project and some have indefinitely postponed their missions to Turkey (e.g. the Netherlands), continuous monitoring of the projections over numbers of refugees to be resettled is recommended, in order to ensure that the set targets can be realistically achieved.