Lithuania operational plan 2022-2023

Ex post evaluation report

Prepared by the EUAA's Quality Management and Evaluation Sector

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Acronyms and definitions

Term	Definition
AMIF	Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
EU+	EU Member States and associate countries
FRC	Foreigners Registration Centre (of the State Border Guard Service)
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
MoSSL	Ministry of Social Security and Labour
LRC	Lithuanian Red Cross
OP	Operational plan
RRC	Refugees Reception Centre (under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour)
SBGS	State Border Guard Service (of the Ministry of the Interior)
SNVA	Special needs and vulnerability assessment
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Executive summary

Lithuania experienced a high influx of arrivals from the border with Belarus starting mid-2021. This was the subject of a first operational plan (OP), which ran between July 2021 to June 2022. In view of the continued pressure on the reception system, a second OP was signed between Lithuania and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA or the Agency), running from July 2022 to June 2023. The main objective and scope of this evaluation was to assess the results of the Agency's support in Lithuania. It was conducted internally by the Agency and assessed effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and European Union (EU) added value.

This OP included two result outcomes (measures) providing reception and technical strategic support to the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MoSSL). The first measure focused on operational support (information provision, vulnerability workflows and interpretation) and capacity building (strengthening of operational tools and training), while the second focused on technical support to conceptualise, design and develop the new national reception agency under the MoSSL.

The OP took place in a rapidly changing environment, which saw a gradual reduction in the number of asylum seekers and shifting responsibilities at national level. The EUAA effectively provided most of the planned support, but faced delays in the creation of the new national reception agency. Despite some structural challenges, such as in deployment of experts, support was provided efficiently, resulting in improved workflows and smooth communication. The Agency's flexibility contributed to the relevance and added value of the activities. Structured communication flows with internal and external stakeholders supported the coherence of the OP. A continuous assessment of the support provided vis-à-vis the Agency's mandate is needed in view of the controversial legal framework in which the OP operates.

This evaluation makes the following recommendations based on the triangulation of findings.

1. Reassess the type of **support that the EUAA could provide in Lithuania** taking into account the controversial legal context;
2. Explore the **transfer of the Agency's interpretation support services** to existing or new interpretation contracts managed by national counterparts;
3. Prioritise the Agency's support to **national workflows and processes** and embed it in the capacity-building approach;
4. Ensure that the **implementation of OP preconditions** is realistic and agreed by all parties (e.g., dedicated meeting with clear action plan).

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1. Introduction: purpose and scope

Between mid-2021 and June 2022, more than 4 100[1] asylum applications were lodged in Lithuania. This was the subject of a first operational plan (OP) which ran from mid-July 2021 to June 2022. By June 2022, the pressure on the asylum and reception systems remained high with about 2 600 persons accommodated in the reception centres and 1 000 asylum applications at different stages of the asylum procedure. Recognising the need for a new reception agency with a modern institutional structure, the Lithuanian authorities requested additional support from the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA or the Agency) in the area of reception. In May 2022, following a needs assessment, Lithuania and the Agency agreed on a new OP that aimed to achieve the following main results:

1. Enhanced capacity of the Lithuanian authorities in managing reception centres;
2. Effectiveness and efficiency of the Lithuanian reception system is improved.

The primary purpose of this evaluation was to assess the results of the Agency's operational and technical support measures in Lithuania.

The evaluation exercise aimed to facilitate internal learning, knowledge management, transparency, and accountability within the Agency. It was conducted internally and assessed the five standard evaluation criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and added value) in a balanced manner. The evaluation placed particular emphasis on the efficiency of implementation, focusing on the timeliness, communication, and processes of the OP.

The scope of the evaluation was limited to the performance of the Agency as defined in the OP.

2. Intended results of the action

This chapter describes the intended results under the OP and the situation before the intervention as a point of comparison.

2.1. Description of the action and its intended results

The OP 2022-2023 for Lithuania included the following two operational measures.

Measure 1: Reception support

Result outcome: Enhance the capacity of the Lithuanian authorities in managing reception centres.
Result outputs:
1.0. Enhanced capacity of the State Border Guard Service (SBGS) under the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) to manage reception facilities.
1.1. Enhanced capacity of the Refugees Reception Centre (RRC) under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MoSSL) to manage dedicated reception facilities for vulnerable asylum seekers.

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[1] 4 180 requests between June 2021 and June 2022 (inclusive). See: EUROSTAT (accessed 03 July 2023).

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This measure included support in the development and implementation of information provision and vulnerability workflows, the strengthening of operational tools and procedures, the provision of reception-related training, and interpretation to the State Border Guard Service (SBGS) under the MoI and the RRCs under the MoSSL.

Measure 2: Strategic technical support

Result outcome: Effectiveness and efficiency of the Lithuanian reception system is improved.
Result output (2.0):
2.0 Enhanced capacity of the MoSSL to strategically conceptualise, design and develop the new reception agency, including the articulation of the required institutional structures and processes. This measure included support on the provision of information on reception agencies and systems across the EU Member States and associate countries (EU+ countries), and organisation of strategic workshops on the conceptualisation of the institutional structure and processes of asylum seekers. It also foresaw support with technical expertise and capacity building, development of a human resources strategy, facilitating the participation in the EUAA's existing networks and *ad hoc* bilateral exchanges with EU+ reception authorities (e.g., exchange visits).

The intervention logic of the OP is presented in Annex 3 to this report.

2.2. Points of comparison

A first OP was signed and support was provided from mid-July 2021 until the end of June 2022 in the areas of asylum and reception. A first evaluation found that the Agency provided rapid and relevant reception support under this OP. This included over 6 200 information provision activities, over 990 vulnerability pre-screenings and training for over 150 individuals. The evaluation also stated that the Agency's support in the area of asylum was limited in terms of efficiency, added value and coherence. This was due to diverging working approaches. Some of the evaluation's proposed recommendations had the aim of:

1. Ensuring minimum conditions before starting new OPs;
2. Applying proportionality, diligence and a phased approach to OPs;
3. Offering flexible training solutions and learning paths;
4. Enhancing interpretation support.

The year 2022 saw an easing of pressure on the Lithuanian asylum system, where annual first-time asylum applications decreased by 74 % from the previous year (from 3 940 to 1 025)[2]. In the same year, there was a sharp increase in the number of persons arriving from Ukraine[3], with over 65 000 persons being granted temporary protection by the end of 2022[4]. These, however, fell under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and had a limited effect on the reception system. Unlike other

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[2] See EUROSTAT, accessed 25 April 2023: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00191/default/table?lang=en
[3] See EUROSTAT, accessed 15 May 2023.
[4] Over 76 000 persons from Ukraine have arrived since March 2022. See Lithuania State Data Agency, accessed 10 May 2023: https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ad9d4bc413454a53927cf36e3fa06355/

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EU Member States with OPs, Lithuania did not ask for additional support for the implementation of the TPD.

While asylum pressure reduced significantly, the reception system still had high occupancy numbers compared to previous years, which led to an expansion in accommodation facilities. By early 2022, this included three Foreigners Registration Centres (FRCs) (in Pabrade, Medininkai and Kybartai) managed by the SBGS[5], and two RRCs in Vilnius and Rukla, under the responsibility of the MoSSL. By the end of May 2022, over 2 500 asylum seekers were still hosted in reception centres[6].

A rapid needs assessment was conducted in close collaboration with the Lithuanian authorities in May 2022. It identified the need for continued support in the area of reception through information provision, vulnerability screening, training and interpretation. Moreover, Lithuania also expressed a need for strategic technical support. This was timely as the country prepared for the centralisation of reception services under the umbrella of a new reception agency managed by the MoSSL.

A new OP between Lithuania and the EUAA was signed to be implemented between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023.

3. Implementation of the action: current state of play

This chapter describes how the situation in Lithuania evolved over the duration of the OP and gives an overview of the main results achieved.

The OP 2022-2023 came into effect on 1 July 2022 following the end of the previous one. By then, the Agency's resources on the ground included deployed statutory staff, experts on vulnerability and information provision, and interpreters/cultural mediators.

In the field of **reception support (measure 1),** the aim of the Agency was to enhance the capacity of the SBGS under the MoI and the RRCs under the MoSSL in managing reception centres. The planned activities included training sessions, information provision and vulnerability procedures.

During July 2022, the Lithuanian government began issuing permits allowing the temporary release of asylum seekers from reception centres leading to a high rate of abscondment. According to the Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC), out of the more than 4 000 asylum seekers that arrived in 2021, only a few hundred remained by the end of 2022.[7] By March 2023, there were only 151 residents accommodated in RRCs and FRCs, representing a 93 % decrease from the beginning of the OP.[8] In the case of MoSSL centres, there were only 106 non-Ukrainian residents in total by May 2023: 42 in the Naujininkai RRC

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[5] Under the responsibility of the MoI.
[6] Médicins Sans Frontières, May 2022. See: https://www.msf.org/prolonged-detention-over-2500-migrants-lithuania-must-end-now. According to EUROSTAT (accessed 24 May 2023), by the end of June 2022 there were also 615 pending asylum applications.
[7] See: https://redcross.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/LRC-Monitoring-Report-2022.pdf
[8] Internal monitoring data further supported by the LRC, that reported that only a few hundred remained in the centres by the end of 2022. See: https://redcross.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/LRC-Monitoring-Report-2022.pdf

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and 64 in the Rukla RRC.[9] The two largest nationalities in Naujininkai were Belarusians (38 %) and Tajikistanis (24 %), whereas in Rukla they were Iraqis (25 %) and Russians (27 %).

The state of emergency, launched following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022[10], remained in force in the border areas throughout the OP. This further limited the irregular entry of migrants and contributed to a reduction in numbers. In August 2022, the Medininkai FRC was closed earlier than expected, while the Rukla RRC and the Naujininkai RRC began supporting Ukrainian arrivals from September 2022 onwards. The Kybartai FRC closed in February 2023 while the Pabrade FRC remained operational.

Three months into implementation, the Agency redefined the support foreseen under measure 1 in view of the decreasing numbers. Vulnerability pre-screening procedures were implemented in the Medininkai FRC until its closure in August 2022 and from then onwards, vulnerability pre-screenings only took place in Pabrade. In the last four months of 2022, a monthly average of 16 vulnerability pre-screenings took place[11], while just under 13[12] were conducted on average in the first three months of 2023. By the end of March 2023, no pre-screenings were needed in Pabrade.

Similarly, the information desk was implemented in Medininkai until August 2022, in Rukla until September 2022, and in Pabrade and Naujininkai until May 2023. In the first three months of 2023, there were on average 17 and 24 information requests in the Pabrade FRC and in the Naujininkai RRC respectively. In April and May 2023, requests dropped to 12 and 15, respectively, in Naujininkai, and to five and zero, respectively, in Pabrade. By early June 2023, the information desk support was suspended.

The Agency supported five reception centres with the deployment of trained interpreters. The Kybartai FRC was the only centre where support was limited only to interpretation due to the detention-like conditions.[13] The Agency provided support until its closure in February 2023.

Overall, eleven training sessions were organised between July 2022 and June 2023.[14] These were activities addressed to the SBGS, the MoI, the MoSSL, EUAA personnel and interpreters. The sessions covered, amongst others, topics on reception (Reception of vulnerable persons), vulnerability (Introduction to vulnerability) and communication (Communication with and provision of information to asylum seekers). 154 individuals in total were trained through 197 participations. The activities had

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[9] Statistics shared by the RRCs.

[10] Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT), 24 February 2022. See: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1624004/lithuania-declares-state-of-emergency-calls-for-sanctions-on-belarus-as-russia-attacks-ukraine. A first state of emergency had been declared on 10 November 2021 following the influx of migrants from Belarus and was extended until 5 January 2022. See: https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35403&p_k=2&p_t=278831

[11] These refer to 16, 17, 24, and 8 prescreenings between September and December 2022.

[12] A total of 38 were conducted, averaging 12.6 % per month.

[13] 2023 Fundamental Rights Agency report. See: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2023-asylum-migration-progress-challenges_en.pdf

[14] Three activities were delivered between April and June but validated data are not available at the time of writing (10 July 2023).

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an average satisfaction rate of 96 %[15]; in 2023, the achievement of learning outcomes was given the lowest score (88 %) and the trainers the highest (97 %).[16]

By June 2023 the Agency had achieved most of the intended outputs.[17] The OP planned vulnerability prescreenings in the Medininkai FRC and the Pabrade FRC, where support was provided and finalised by August 2022 and April 2023, respectively. The Agency foresaw the provision of information desk support in the Rukla RRC, the Naujininkai RRC and the Pabrade FRC. By early June 2023, the RRCs had taken over the information desk activity and the Pabrade FRC suspended it due to limited demand and a lack of personnel.

The EUAA was supporting the Pabrade FRC, the Rukla RRC and the Naujininkai RRC with 16 interpreters by early June 2023.

Under measure 2, five main **strategic technical support** activities were foreseen pending the establishment of the new reception agency under the MoSSL:

1. Desk research and relevant material on reception agencies and systems across the EU+ countries;
2. Strategic workshops on conceptualising the institutional structure and processes related to the reception of asylum seekers in Lithuania;
3. Technical expertise and capacity building on organisational development and its role within the national reception system;
4. Development of a human resources strategy through workshop(s) on the European Sectoral Qualification Framework for asylum and reception officials;
5. Facilitating liaison with reception authorities of other EU+ countries through the EUAA reception network and *ad hoc* bilateral exchanges (e.g., exchange visit(s) and/or deployment of Member State expert(s).

In practice, the adoption of legislation on the new reception agency, a key precondition for the measure, did not materialise. The Agency organised, however, a number of activities.

In July 2022, it convened a high-level kick-off workshop in response to the interest in EU Member State practices. The event, based on existing in-house knowledge and previous exercises in Cyprus and Spain, supported the conceptualisation of new institutional structures and processes for the new reception agency. This resulted in a small deviation from the agreed implementation plan, which saw the desk research as the first step.

In September 2022, the Agency coordinated an online presentation on the assessment of reception conditions tool to MoI and MoSSL personnel. In December 2022, a workshop on the findings of the desk research took place. This included presentations by representatives from Austria, Finland, Czech Republic, and France, as well as the participation of the MoSSL, the LRC, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration. In January 2023, a study visit to the Central Agency for Reception of Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands took place

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[15] The notion 'satisfaction rates' represents the aggregated percentage of the highest two scores in the five-point scale ('strongly agree' and 'agree') reported in the training session feedback forms.
[16] This refers to training activities conducted in the first three months of 2023.
[17] Following the revision to the results framework (including targets) in use since October 2022.

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in collaboration with the EUAA Reception Network. In February 2023, the Agency organised a workshop on vulnerability procedures to support the finalisation of a draft bye-law on the subject. Moreover, the EUAA supported social workers deployed in MoSSL centres with a workshop on the EUAA's special needs and vulnerability assessment (SNVA) tool in view of the potential transfer of responsibilities to the Ministry by mid-2023. The MoSSL agreed to incorporate the EUAA's SNVA tool in their national operating procedures, making them one of the first in Europe to intend doing so.

Despite the above, progress in the area of strategic technical support was below target as of June 2023. No activities related to the human resources strategy took place. There were also delays in the delivery of an additional thematic workshop to further conceptualise the structure of the new reception agency.

The OP stated as operational preconditions the need for regular communication, office space, data sharing, access to permits and databases. Most of these were fulfilled (taking into account contextual parameters) with the exception of the adoption of legislation for the establishment of a new reception agency (see above).

On 25 April 2023, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on the State Border and its Protection, which allow border guards to turn back migrants who cross the country irregularly under a state of emergency[18]. On 23 May 2023, the government endorsed the proposed draft amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners needed for the reorganisation of the reception system submitted by the MoI. The draft legislation was submitted to the Parliament for consideration and adoption[19].

In line with the OP, the Agency planned to deploy up to 12 information providers, 12 reception assistants (vulnerability) and up to 50 interpreters/cultural mediators under measure 1. Two organisational development experts and one business analysis expert were planned under measure 2. In practice, deployments only took place under measure 1. These included five deployed experts between July and October 2022, which were reduced to three between November 2022 and January 2023. The number of interpreters fell from 45 in July 2022 to 19 in May 2023. Between February and March 2023, there were three deployed experts, which were reduced to one from April onwards. By June, there were only interpreters deployed in the centres. By early June 2023, the Agency was in the process of recruiting five additional experts to be deployed on a part-time basis to support the MoSSL working group on the reorganisation of the reception system and the creation of the new reception agency. The local OP coordination was ensured by two deployed statutory staff.

4. Evaluation findings

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[18] Articles 1, 2, 4, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 23 and 26 of the Law on the State Border and its Protection of 25 April 2023 No. XIV-1891, see: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/ff701250e35a11eda305cb3bdf2af4d8?jfwid=-27t3gws3l

[19] See: https://vrm.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/migrantu-priemimu-ir-apgyvendinimu-rupinsis-speciali-agentura. The Seimas held the first reading of the draft on 1 June 2023 and decided to appoint four committees to review the draft. The second reading is planned to take place before December 2023. The draft law is expected to be voted and adopted during the third reading in 2024.

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Building on the above, this chapter provides an analysis of the evaluation questions. It triangulates evidence from different data sources such as desk research, interviews, direct observation, and focus group discussions.

4.1. To what extent was the action successful and why?

This OP took place in a rapidly changing environment, where the number of asylum seekers was declining and there were shifting responsibilities at national level. The support provided under reception (measure 1) was similar to the activities in the previous OP, while the strategic technical support (measure 2) was new. The lack of targeted result indicators in the OP limits the extent to which effectiveness can be adequately assessed. The activities in the OP are not all adequately reflected in the Agency's internal results framework.

Chapter 3 highlights that the Agency **effectively** implemented most of the planned work (at output level) under reception (measure 1). The lower number of reception centre residents was matched with a lower volume of support. The agency reduced its presence to three reception centres (initially five). By early June 2023, Agency deployments consisted of 16 interpreters and two coordinating staff[20], whereas the OP had indicatively planned up to 24 experts and 50 interpreters.

Support to information provision gradually reduced and was also taken up as a good practice by national authorities in certain centres (e.g., the Naujininkai RRC). The EUAA's activities were, however, limited in scope and volume. In the Pabrade FRC, for example, the number of monthly information desk requests reduced from an average of 17 in the first three months of 2023 to zero in May 2023. This activity was also limited to collecting queries rather than providing information, as the scope of many requests exceeded the mandate of the Agency.

The 11 training sessions were delivered with high satisfaction rates and included additional subjects (e.g., module on communications with persons who experienced traumatic events). Participant feedback expressed the potential of adding even more practical examples to the training activities. Despite the positive feedback received on the training activities, there is limited evidence on the extent to which the training content has been put into practice. The timing of this evaluation is also a limiting factor for this.

Interviewees reported that the support provided for strengthening tools and workflows was one of the most effective activities. A good practice is the training on the SNVA and identification of persons with special needs (IPSN) tool, which the RRCs began using in June 2023.

Some of the training activities carried out in the previous OP continued, following a request for a new target group. This allowed the use of material that had been translated under the previous OP to be used again, enhancing efficiency. Examples are the sessions on Information provision and communication with asylum seekers, Reception, and Reception of vulnerable persons (Block A).
The activities under technical support (measure 2) were not all implemented as planned, yet those that were may be an investment in the mid-term (result outcome level). A number of workshops were organised but certain activities, such as the human resources strategy, did not take place as planned.

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[20] One plan coordinator and one measure coordinator.

This was due to delays in the amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners, which were needed for the reorganisation of the reception system. As listed in chapter 3, the OP foresaw the adoption of legislation on the new national reception agency as an operational precondition. The Agency's support under measure 2 continued despite this not materialising.

Similar to the previous OP, **efficiency** was limited by various challenges:

- Slow mobilisation of experts and high personnel turnover: four out of the six deployed external remunerated experts resigned before completing their assignments. The reasons cited for this were unattractive and challenging working conditions as well as personal reasons;
- Delays by the EUAA in delivering the results of the Pabrade residents survey to the SBGS;
- Interpreters: inefficiencies included the limited uptake[21] of interpreters by some stakeholders and the unavailability of languages;
- Challenging work environment for EUAA personnel and reduced interest in EUAA activities by camp residents;
- Administrative hurdles, such as those encountered in the procurement of an office space and processing times for the reimbursement of training participants.

The planned budget for the OP was 2 126 602 EUR. By June 2023, internal financial monitoring data indicated an estimated budget consumption of 84 %. Since the volume of activities and deployed personnel was lower than planned, the cost efficiency seemed limited. For example, the OP foresaw the deployment of up to 27 experts and up to 50 interpreters but in practice, these averaged three and 27 per month respectively. The low number of persons in reception facilities in Lithuania also challenges cost-efficiency considerations for an OP that focuses on results in reception. However, the limited data on the relative cost (direct and indirect) of each output hampers a thorough cost-efficiency analysis.

In terms of **coherence**, the Agency collaborated closely with the LRC through the information desk activity in the Naujininkai RRC, through the forwarding of legal queries. A successful thematic meeting on gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse was co-delivered with the UNHCR in November 2022. It included participants from the MoSSL and the World Health Organisation. In the area of training, the UNHCR, the LRC and the SBGS training school also provided activities. The evaluation did not find any overlaps since the subjects differed from those of the EUAA (e.g., asylum or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexual and queer persons). Although the UNHCR also organises study visits (e.g., reception visit in Sweden), no overlaps were identified. This is partially due to the nature of support (conceptual versus practical expertise). The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), and the EU Delegation are present in Lithuania but there were no joint activities.

The MoSSL is the managing authority of the 2021-2027 Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) national program, which focuses on three priority areas: the Common European Asylum System, integration, and returns.[22] The first priority area includes translation services, training, legal assistance,

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[21] This evaluation recognises that the uptake of interpreters by counterparts increased progressively throughout the implementation period but nonetheless raised efficiency concerns.
[22] See: https://pmif.lt/upload/tinymce/21-27/programos%20derinimas/sfc2021-PRG-2021LT65AMPR001-1-2.pdf

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infrastructure development, and health services. The complementarity of AMIF-funded projects and the EUAA's activities is ensured through effective communication with the MoSSL. AMIF-funded interpretation services are available to the Migration Department during the asylum procedure, while the EUAA provided interpretation in reception facilities. Similar to the UNHCR, training on asylum is also provided under AMIF.

In terms of policy coherence, the amendments to the Law on the State Border[23], which entered into force on 3 May 2023, were strongly criticised by the Council of Europe[24], the UNHCR[25] and other civil society organisations[26]. The Fundamental Rights Agency expressed continued concerns following the ruling of the Court of Justice of the EU [27]. By June 2023, the EUAA did not have an escalation mechanism in place. The continued deployment of interpreters (e.g., in the detention building of the Pabrade FRC) is an element for careful consideration in view of the Agency's mandate[28].

Priority question: To what extent are the EUAA's counterparts satisfied with the communication, timeliness and processes of the OP?

In general, the Agency's counterparts expressed satisfaction with the support provided. One key highlight was the flexibility shown in adapting to needs. The ability to quickly scale down or up, involving the operationalisation of technical support, ensured adaptability and readiness. Under technical support (measure 2), experts in finance and legislation are in the process of being recruited to join MoSSL's working group on the new reception agency, despite this not being planned. Similarly, additional training activities on vulnerability and conflict management were also delivered under reception (measure 1) due to newly identified needs. Overall, interviewees noted an improvement in the efficiency of processes and highlighted the benefits stemming from the structured communication between actors.

4.2. How did the Agency make a difference through the action?

The Agency's activities in the area of capacity building (measure 1) brought significant added value, with interpretation and operational activities having a lower effect. The activities organised in preparation for the new national reception agency (measure 2) may convey results in the medium to longer term.

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[23] See: https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35403&p_k=2&p_t=284594

[24] See: https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/lithuania-human-rights-should-be-at-the-centre-of-the-parliamentary-debate-on-migration-and-asylum

[25] UNHCR observations on the draft amendments to the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Legal Status of Aliens (No XIVP-2385) and the draft amendments to the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the State Border and its Protection (No XIVP-2383), 20 March 2023. See: https://www.refworld.org/docid/6419b0ee4.html

[26] See: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1964825/groups-criticise-lithuania-s-migrant-pushback-law-saying-it-mimics-hungary?fbclid=IwAR1MEFSnMv2pZBwX5cXBZXjqOgGK7vxsI3aDPGnLHQ9iHGB8yDPHGXAlKng

[27] The Court of Justice of the EU ruled that Lithuanian laws, which prevent irregular migrants from applying for asylum and allow for mass detention, violate EU law. Court of Justice of the EU, JUDGMENT of 2 February 2022. See: https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=261930&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=2012979, for summary see: https://caselaw.euaa.europa.eu/pages/viewcaselaw.aspx?CaseLawID=2597

[28] In September and October 2022, residents in the Pabrade FRC were relocated to the detention building within the same facility, which resulted in the EUAA no longer being able to support those residents.

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Under measure 1 (reception) the Agency ensured continuity of interpretation services, despite the availability of local contracts. The reportedly challenging national contracting processes for interpretation services could have resulted in limited or no interpretation in reception if the Agency were not present. The training support provided tangible added value, with additional needs triggering requests for training on vulnerability procedures. These sessions were most beneficial for new national recruits. The establishment by national counterparts of the information desk and the SNVA tool in the Naujininkai and the Rukla RRC, may lead to sustainability of the support received. This is further supported by the completion by four national staff members of the 'Becoming an EUAA trainer and assessor' module. On the latter, national counterparts shared plans to target actors who typically do not have access to the EUAA's training, such as local municipalities, which would further enhance the sustainability of the support.

The gradual reduction of reception residents, however, limited the added value of some of the support initially foreseen. In this regard, information provision and vulnerability pre-screening had limited added value.

The support provided under measure 2 (strategic technical support) had a more confined effect. The workshops and exchange visits organised were beneficial to national counterparts, but they are deliverables which may have longer-term added value. While there are a few concrete examples, such as improved vulnerability practices and interest in enhancing workflows and tools, the added value of the technical and quality-driven support is difficult to measure at this stage.

4.3.   Is the action relevant?

The gradual transition from operational support towards technical support and capacity building was relevant from a longer-term perspective taking into account the changing context. The Agency provided training initiatives in a flexible manner in view of the evolving needs. These covered vulnerability related matters and soft skills (e.g., conflict management and mediation), and had a stronger interest than anticipated. The strengthening of tools and workflows was also a highly relevant area of support. In particular, the implementation of the SNVA tool was aligned with the practical needs of the partners. Related activities include the sharing of guidance on age assessment and the workshop on gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

The gradual decrease of residents in reception centres had an impact on the relevance of many of the operational support activities (measure 1). By May 2023, the Naujininkai RRC hosted approximately 40 third-country nationals, the Rukla RRC had around 60, and about 100 stayed in the Pabrade FRC.[29] As of June 2023, Agency deployments in the centres were limited to interpretation support.

The delays in the draft amendments[30] on the new national reception agency (measure 2) raise concerns about the readiness of the counterparts and seem to indicate that the activities foreseen in the OP were ambitious. While the needs were evolving, there was an increased demand for technical

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[29] Data shared by national authorities during interviews. The text does not refer to a specific number as capacity varies weekly.
[30] To the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners. See: https://vrm.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/migrantu-priemimu-ir-apgyvendinimu-rupinsis-speciali-agentura

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support on workflows and processes to be provided alongside capacity building. This would have needed the involvement of management staff from the national authorities.

The evaluation acknowledges that the assessment of needs and priority areas is a collaborative process based on specific requests for support. Despite the significant inflow of persons fleeing Ukraine, for example, the OP did not include support on reception for temporary protection beneficiaries. While this evaluation acknowledges the inherent limitations in this area, there is room for synergies and complementarities.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The implementation of the OP occurred in a rapidly changing environment, with decreasing numbers of asylum seekers and evolving responsibilities within the national reception system. In response, the Agency gradually adjusted its support from operational to more technical support activities. This approach aimed to enhance the sustainability of the OP by prioritising capacity building rather than personnel deployment.

In terms of **effectiveness**, the Agency provided operational support (measure 1) through 11 training sessions.[31] In addition, it provided interpretation services, vulnerability support, and an information desk – to varying degrees – in five reception centres. However, as the centres closed or shifted their focus to support arrivals from Ukraine, the volume of support registered was much lower than initially planned. Strategic technical support (measure 2) was less effective due to the delays with the creation of the new national reception agency. In hindsight, the OP planning may have been ambitious on this measure. A number of exchanges and capacity building activities took place which may bear their fruits in the long term.

Despite some structural challenges, such as the slow resource mobilisation, changing needs and logistical challenges, the Agency was relatively **efficient**. This evaluation notes an improvement in the efficiency of processes and communication compared to the previous OP. The cost efficiency of the reception support, however, remains fair in view of the limited number of residents and the lower than planned deployments.

The flexibility demonstrated despite the changing context contributed to the OP's **relevance** and **added value**. Through capacity building, the Agency was instrumental in preparing new national recruits and facilitating innovative national practices. The support for the creation of a new national agency may be more relevant and of increased added value in the long term.

The presence of field support and the local coordination team ensured **coherence** with external stakeholders throughout the OP. Structured communication flows enabled the Agency to identify emerging needs and explore collaborative opportunities with international organisations.

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[31] The numbers provided do not reflect the full amount of training delivered under the OP given that Q2 2023 was ongoing at the time of writing and the data were therefore not included.

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The OP took place in a controversial legal context. The Agency will need to continue to assess its operational support vis-à-vis its role in view of its mandate and determine the benefit and added value of providing further support.

Table 1 provides an overview of the evaluation team's assessment of the evaluation criteria by result, based on their analysis and the triangulation of available data sources.

Table 1. Evaluation criteria by measure

	Reception support (LT1)	Strategic technical support (LT2)
Relevance	Good	Good
Effectiveness	Good	Good/Fair
Efficiency	Good/Fair	Good
Coherence	Good/Fair	Good
EU added value	Good	Good

5.2. Good practices and lessons learnt

This evaluation identified several **good practices**, which merit to be continued or replicated:

- The flexibility of the Agency to accommodate the frequently changing needs in the Member State;
- The structured communication with the different counterparts through monthly and/or biweekly meetings, which ensured a quick adaption to the changing context;
- The cluster approach covering administration and finance activities ensured efficiency and coherence in the approach;
- The sharing of tools and practices that can be taken over by national counterparts (e.g., SNVA tool and information desk) proved beneficial to the sustainability of the OP;
- The completion of the 'Becoming an EUAA trainer and assessor module' by four national staff provides prospects for the future contribution by Lithuanian trainers to the EUAA's national training sessions.

This exercise has also identified a number of **challenges**. Internal challenges include delays in mobilising resources and high turnover, as well as limitations to the interpretation framework contract. External challenges include the controversial legal context and delays in the planned new reception agency.

This evaluation identified a number of (internal) horizontal challenges (and recommendations), which are beyond the scope of the Lithuania OP. These should be taken on board in future horizontal assessments and include the need for:

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- Speeding up the rollout of the escalation mechanism[32] at Agency level;
- Exploring the feasibility (legal and operational) of providing interpretation through permanent support (outside of the framework of an OP);
- Optimising cross-Agency workflows and collaborations. This can be done by mapping the lifecycle of an OP and identifying where the Agency's centres can achieve synergies;
- Exploring avenues (e.g., increased presence/support from headquarters) to improve employment conditions of staff deployed on long-term mission;
- Better balancing of operational vis-à-vis permanent support in view of the volume of requested activities. This will guide considerations on efficiency, feasibility and proportionality before and during new OPs;
- Enhancing the data collection of the results of training activities, allowing better understanding of their effectiveness, relevance and added value.

5.3. Recommendations

This evaluation makes the following recommendations based on the triangulation of findings.

1. Reassess the type of **support that the EUAA could provide in Lithuania** taking into account the controversial legal context.

2. Explore the **transfer of the Agency's interpretation support services** to existing or new interpretation contracts managed by national counterparts.

3. Prioritise the Agency's support to **national workflows and processes** and embed it in the capacity-building approach.

4. Ensure that the **implementation of OP preconditions** is realistic and agreed by all parties (e.g., dedicated meeting with clear action plan).

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[32] In the context of Article 18(6)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/2303 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2021 on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation EU No 439/2010, (OJ L 468, 301.12.2021, p.1).

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Annex 1: Methodology and analytical models used

The aim of this exercise was to answer the following evaluation questions, covering the European Commission's Better Regulation standard criteria, in addition to one priority question.

Criteria	Questions to be answered
Relevance	How well was the action in line with stakeholders' needs and the Agency's objectives?
Effectiveness	Did the OP achieve what was planned?
Efficiency	To what extent are the costs (including inputs and human resources) of the support justified given the results? *Priority question:* To what extent are the Agency's counterparts satisfied with the communication, timelines, and processes of the OP?
Coherence	To what extent is the operation coherent internally and externally?
EU added value	What is the added value resulting from the operation, compared to what could have been expected from Lithuania acting solely?

The evaluation took into account good practices and lessons learnt, including those identified in the evaluation of the previous OP. Special attention was paid to the efficiency of the Agency's response in regard to communication, timelines and processes.

To answer the above questions, the evaluation team used a mixed-method approach covering the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data sources. These included desk review analysis, individual and group interviews, and direct observation. The evaluation team undertook a mission to Vilnius (and Pabrade) from 30 May to 2 June 2023, where face-to-face interviews and site visits were conducted. 22 individuals were interviewed by the evaluation team.

Environmental and social impacts were not addressed in this report.

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Annex 2: Evaluation matrix

Sub-questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Sources of evidence
Relevance: How well was the action in line with stakeholders' needs and the Agency's objectives?			
Optional prompt question: What activities were most beneficial and why?	Priority areas identified by needs assessment	Comparison needs assessment and OP priority areas with implemented areas	Needs assessment, OP, monitoring and reporting tools, interviews
Effectiveness: Did the OP achieve what was planned?			
Optional prompt question: Were deliverables (workflows and tools) as expected? If not, what are solutions/alternatives to achieve better results? *For Immigration Offices:* Did they see a change in the quality of workflows performed by reception authorities?	Results indicators	Comparison planned targets vs achieved	Results monitoring database
Efficiency: To what extent are the costs (including inputs and human resources) of the support justified given the results?			
Priority question: To what extent are the Agency's counterparts satisfied with the communication, timelines, and processes of the OP?	Output and input indicator values	Relationship achieved outputs vs inputs Qualitative challenges (processes and related indicators)	Qualitative and quantitative monitoring data, financial records, nature of underlying processes needed to achieve the planned results, interviews
Coherence: To what extent is the operation coherent internally and externally?			
	Nature of activities and coordination processes	Level of coordination and synergies with other national	Monitoring data; planning documents; interviews

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		actors/internal Agency actors	
EU added value: What is the added value resulting from the operation, compared to what could have been expected from Lithuania acting solely?			
For Immigration Offices: How is the Agency's support viewed and perceived? Which activities were most beneficial according to them?	Existence of elements of EUAA added value	Number and level of added value elements related to financial, technical and material support	Monitoring data; planning documents; interviews

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Annex 3: Intervention logic

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Needs/problems

Continued pressure on the country's asylum and reception capacities; the need for support in reception of asylum seekers

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Expected objectives

As per Member State request: improved national reception capacity with the perspective of designing a new reception agency with a modern institutional structure

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Result impact

Provision of effective operational, technical and emergency support in line with the Agency's mandate to enable Lithuania to strengthen its reception capacities for asylum seekers

Result outcomes

1. Enhanced capacity of the Lithuanian authorities in managing reception centres
2. Effectiveness and efficiency of the Lithuanian reception system is improved

Result outputs

1.0 Enhanced capacity of the SBGS to manage reception facilities

1.1 Enhanced capacity of the RRC to manage dedicated reception facilities for vulnerable asylum seekers

2. Enhanced capacity of the MSSL to strategically conceptualise, design and develop the new national reception agency, including the articulation of the required institutional structures and processes

Activities

Support under output 1:

- The development and implementation of information provision, vulnerability workflows and interpretation;
- Strengthening workflows and procedures, including improvement of operational tools;
- Reception-related training to relevant national partners.

Support under output 2:

- Desk research and relevant material and an overview of different set-ups of reception agencies and systems across the EU+ countries;
- Conceptualising the institutional structure and processes, through the organisation of strategic workshop(s), including a kick-off meeting;
- Organisational development through technical expertise and capacity building (advice in setting up organisational structure, decision making, communication and reporting lines) and its role within the national reception system;
- Development of a HR strategy by organising workshop(s) on the European Sectoral Qualification Framework for asylum and reception officials and the related development of organigrams;
- Facilitating liaison with reception authorities of other EU+ countries, by enhancing the participation to EUAA existing networks (in particular Reception Network and Vulnerability

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Network) and organising *ad hoc* bilateral exchanges, including through exchange visit(s) and/or deployment of Member State expert(s).

Inputs
For LT 1.0-1.1: Information providers (up to 12), reception assistants (vulnerability) (up to 12), interpreters/cultural mediators (up to 50)
For LT 2.0: Organisational development expert (up to 2), business analysis expert (up to 1)
Horizontal support could include *inter alia* provision of equipment, works, services, communication/promotional material, costs for training/meetings/workshops, infrastructure costs, IT equipment, office supplies and others

External factors
Migratory pressure following irregular migration through the border of Belarus, national and international laws, policies and practices; availability of financial and human resources; Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic; actions by national counterparts, international and non-governmental organisations

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