

Support is our mission



Evaluations in the EUAA

Supporting the evolving mandate
of the Agency for a decade



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Evaluations in the EUAA

October 2024



Foreword by the Executive Director, Nina Gregori



The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) has over the years consolidated its role as a leader for the uniform implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in the Member States of the European Union and associate countries (EU+ countries). By means of various initiatives, it has contributed to convergence of international protection practices across the Union. Moreover, it has coordinated and strengthened practical cooperation and information exchange amongst EU+ countries and beyond.

The year 2024 marks 10 years since the Agency embraced evaluations as a means for organisational adaptation and learning.

Its evaluations have been moulded and have grown and matured with the evolving mandate of the Agency and the experience gained from external events. Since 2014, the EUAA has conducted or commissioned over 70 evaluations, with a progressive increase in their numbers and quality in recent years. This anniversary is an opportunity to take stock of the good practices and lessons that were learnt in the past 10 years and look ahead as new opportunities emerge from the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

01.

The European Union's decision to create the Agency was guided by a dedicated evaluation (2005-2010)



The CEAS was launched in 1999, in line with the policy orientations in the [Tampere European Council](#). In 2005, the European Council expressed the **need for an evaluation** with a view to setting up a European support office to facilitate Member States' cooperation on CEAS matters. An impact assessment that compared alternative options led to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) being established in 2010.

What are evaluations in the Union context?

The European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines define an evaluation as an evidence-based assessment of the extent to which an intervention:

- is effective in fulfilling expectations and meeting its objectives;
- is efficient in terms of cost-effectiveness and proportionality of actual costs to benefits;
- is relevant to current and emerging needs;
- is coherent, and
- has added value.



02.

The first evaluations – assessing the relevance of the Agency’s initial activities (2011-2014)



Following the setting up of its governance structures in 2011, the Agency responded to Member States’ **first requests for support** with operating plans and special support plans for Greece (2011), Luxembourg (2012), Sweden (2012), Bulgaria (2013), Italy (2013) and Cyprus (2014). In 2014, it undertook the first two internal evaluations of the implementation of the operating plans for Greece and Bulgaria. These

evaluations were vital for internal learning as they drew lessons from the Agency’s first operations. They provided assurance that the support measures were relevant and in line with the needs of the Member States. In the case of Greece, for example, the evaluation recommended that support on capacity building and the clearing of the backlog of asylum cases be prioritised. In the context of Bulgaria, the evaluation identified a need for more tailor-made support and preparation of interventions.

In 2014, the European Commission concluded in an internal evaluation that the Agency was on track in its different activity areas. An external evaluation of the Agency was commissioned in 2015, to which EASO responded with a follow-up action plan. These two evaluations influenced the [EU Communication of 2016](#) calling for a new mandate for EASO as part of a wider reform of the CEAS.

How are evaluations conducted in the EUAA?

Evaluations can be conducted:

- Internally: by the Agency’s staff or Member State experts;
- Externally: by external experts or contracted evaluators

There is also the possibility for these to be implemented in a hybrid manner.



03.

The European migration crisis - amplifying the magnitude of the Agency's support (2015-2018)

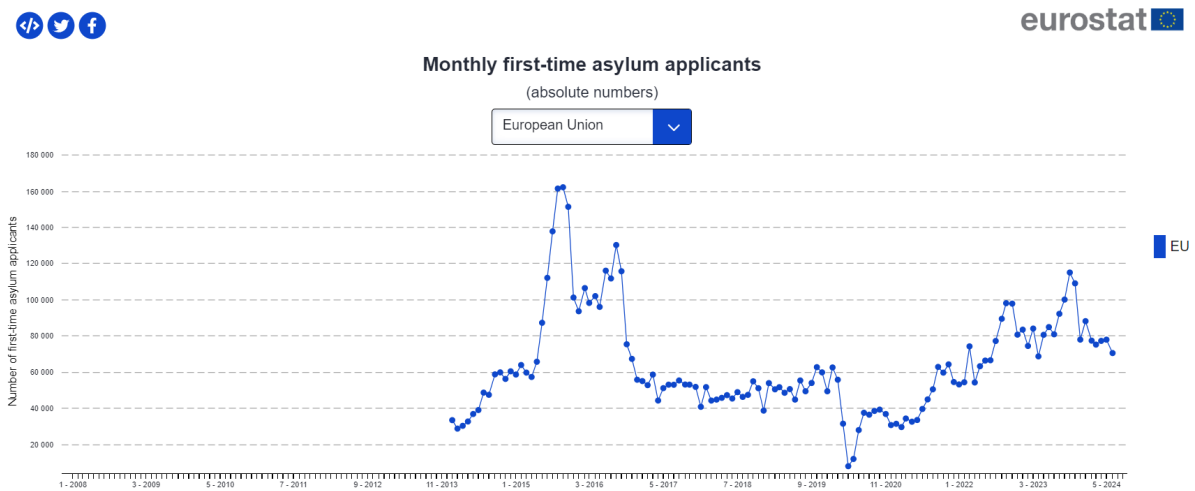


Chart: Monthly first-time asylum applicants (Source: [Eurostat](#))

Following an escalation of events in the Middle East and Africa, in 2015 about 1.3 million refugees and migrants requested asylum in EU+ countries. The arrivals put pressure on these countries' international protection and reception systems. The Agency was called upon to support the European southern border countries as they faced **disproportionate pressure** and strengthened its operational activities in Cyprus, Greece, and Italy, as well as in Bulgaria. During this period, the volume of the Agency's activities increased exponentially. Its budget grew from 16 million

EUR in 2015 to 53 million EUR in 2016 and 97 million EUR in 2018, reflecting the **increased demand for operational support**.

The evaluations of the implementation of operating plans were instrumental in contributing to the accountability and transparency on the use of these public funds. The evaluations recommended more efficient and coherent procedures and deployment modalities. They also guided a transition from activity-based to results-based management, which contributed to increased effectiveness and EU added value.

04.

Consolidation and review of the Agency's flagship products (2018-2021)



The global **COVID-19 pandemic** challenged international protection systems. Common mitigation measures during the public health emergency included travel restrictions, lockdowns, business restrictions and closures, and workplace hazard controls. Notwithstanding the restrictions, the Agency continued providing support and training to Member States during this challenging period and introduced digital methods to facilitate business continuity and boost efficiency. Learning from these experiences, the Agency has initiated innovative research **to evaluate the quality** of online asylum determination interviews.

As the Agency grew over the years, it developed in close collaboration with EU Member States a **European asylum curriculum** that drove an exponential increase in training participation from more than 1 000 to well over 10 000 between 2012 and 2018. In 2017, the Agency commissioned an external evaluation that noted that the curriculum improved the knowledge of EU asylum law and standards and infused a European perspective into officials' daily work. The curriculum was viewed by stakeholders as well designed, fit for purpose and effective. The evaluation's recommendations were taken onboard in the Training and Learning Strategy (2019¹), which placed a strong focus on the adaptation of a quality assurance framework.

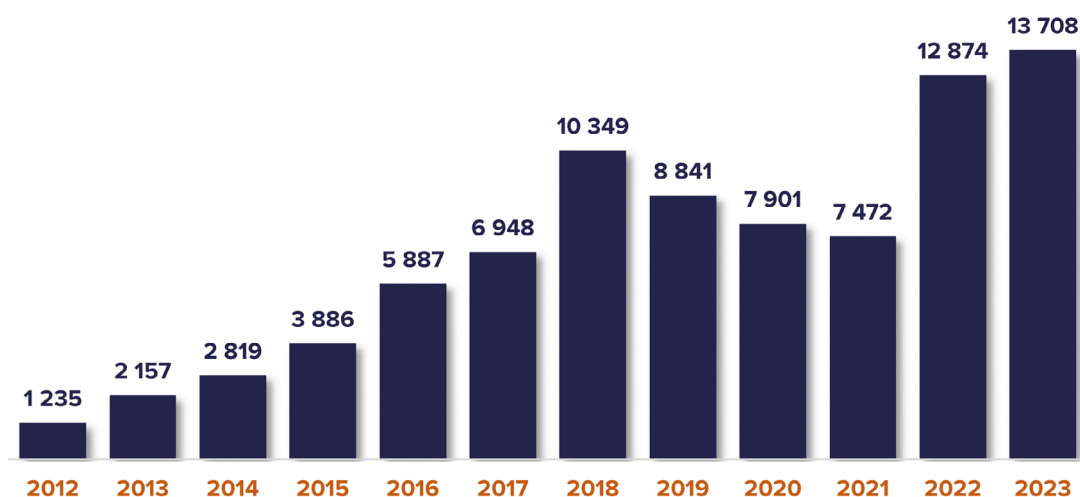


Table: Number of participants in European asylum curriculum training from 2012 to 2023.

1- Updated in 2022.

Over the years, the Agency also gained recognition of its role as a European centre of knowledge and expertise on asylum matters. Amongst its flagship products were the **practical guidelines on CEAS asylum and reception matters** based on inputs from networks of Member States' content experts and practitioners. A 2018 evaluation confirmed the relevance of the quality tools in most EU+ countries. It made practical recommendations to make these tools more user-centric and of higher impact.

The Agency promoted capacity development in third countries, which was consolidated in its first external cooperation strategy (2019²). In 2019, it piloted a **resettlement support**

facility for EU+ countries that is based in Istanbul. This innovative project was designed, reviewed and validated by consecutive evaluation reviews. The Agency also developed a **roadmap approach** with partner third countries. Since 2019, the Agency evaluated the implementation of roadmaps agreed with, amongst others, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Türkiye. A 2022 horizontal evaluation report took note of good practices and lessons learnt from the roadmap approach. It made recommendations for improved cooperation with partner countries.

05.

From EASO to EUAA - a stronger mandate supported by a centralised evaluation function (2022 to today)



EASO was transformed into the EUAA on 19 January 2022. This change reflected an expanded mandate to support Member States implementing the CEAS. Examples include a fundamental rights approach, a Member States monitoring mechanism and an enhanced Consultative Forum. In 2023, over 1.1 million applications for international protection were lodged in 29 EU+ countries, an increase of 18 % compared to the previous year and the highest number since 2016³. This was due to humanitarian crises in Eastern Europe, the Middle

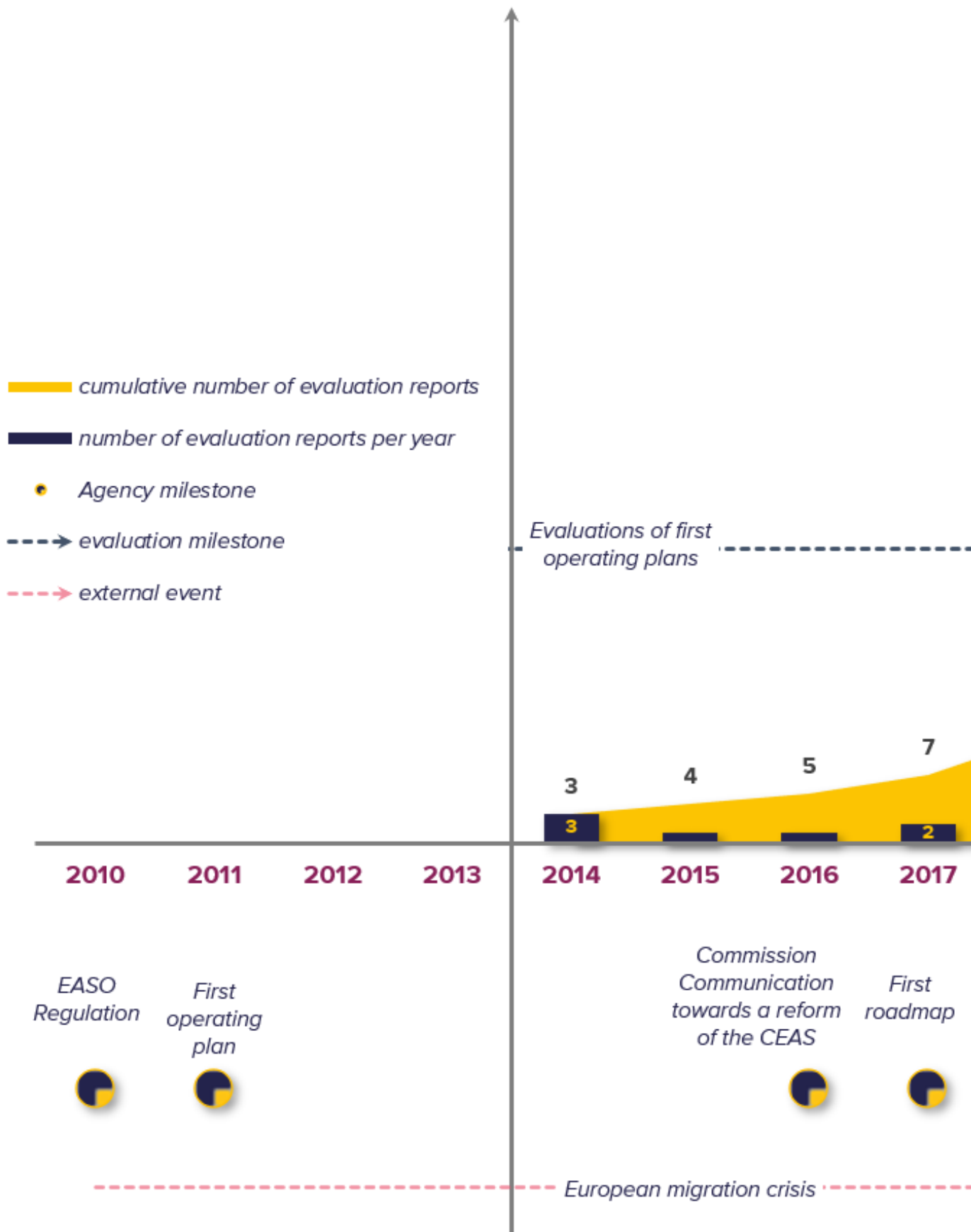
East, Central Africa, and Central America. The Agency's budget increased accordingly, from EUR 140 million in 2021 to EUR 176 million in 2022 and an expected EUR 165 million in 2024⁴.

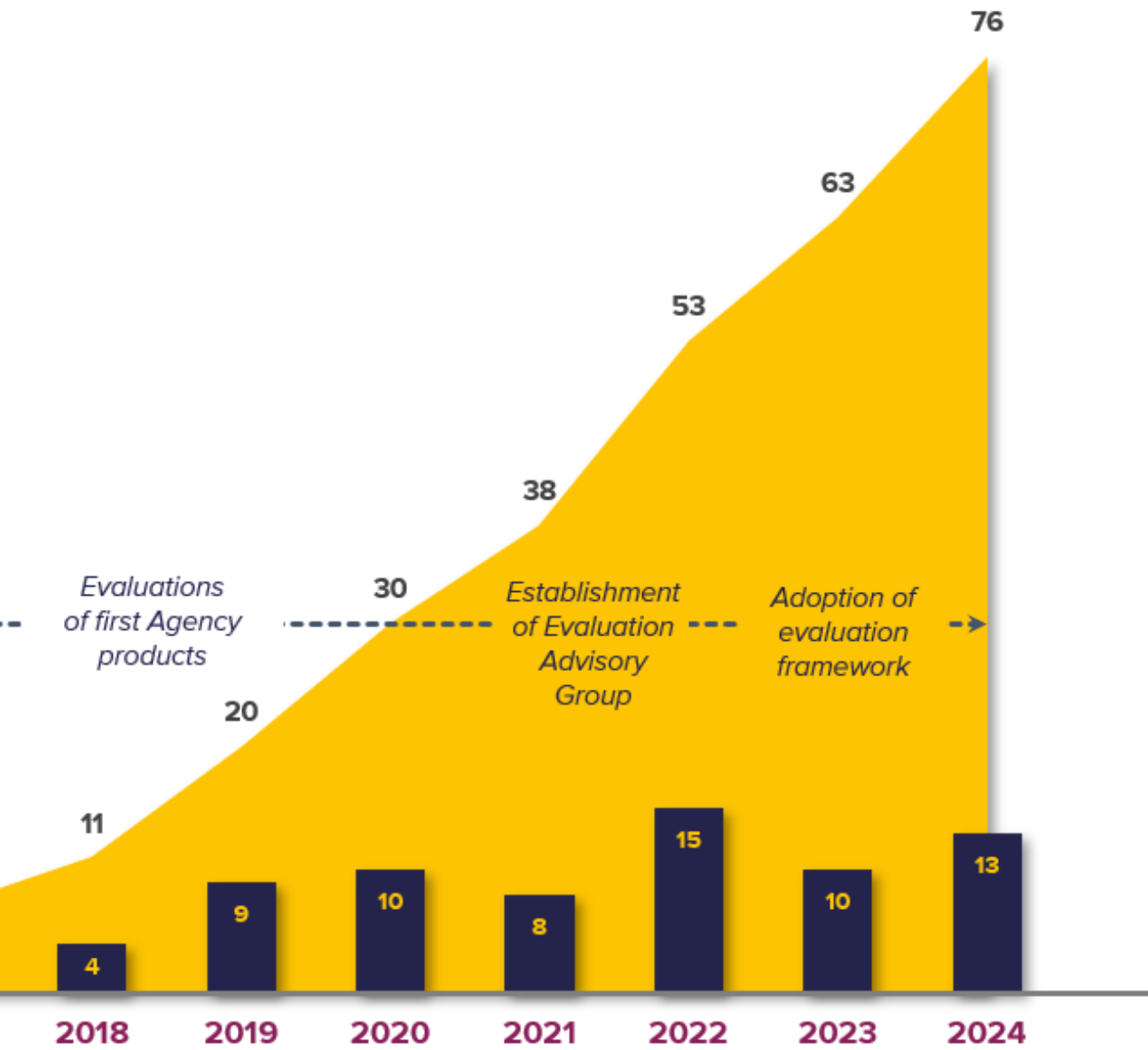
Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, many Member States have been under increased migratory pressure and requested additional support from the Agency. In response, new as well as amendments to **operational plans**, were agreed with Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain. The implementation of these plans was

2 - Updated in 2023.

3 - [See EUAA Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2023](#)

4 - [SPD 2024-2026](#).





EUAA Regulation

Pact on Migration and Asylum



COVID-19 pandemic → *Russian invasion of Ukraine* →

subjected to evaluations that made country-specific and horizontal recommendations. For the first time in 2024, the Agency completed a **meta-evaluation** focusing on horizontal operational matters, building on findings of 18 operational plan evaluations and three horizontal reports covering operational and technical support between 2019 and 2023.

With the perspective of an enlarged mandate of its **Management Board** under the 2022 Regulation, the Agency commissioned an evaluation that proposed ways to optimise the functioning of the Board and prepare for the future. The evaluation triggered the transformation of the Management Board's Preparatory Group into an Executive Board. It also proposed alternative rotation mechanisms, thereby promoting increased participation of all Management Board members.

In the context of an enlarged mandate under the Agency's new Regulation, the **country of origin and country guidance** products were the subject of a dedicated evaluation in 2022. This exercise underlined the added value of these flagship products in view of their reliability, methodology and collective development process as well as their potential for harmonisation in the EU+ countries. The evaluation recognised the value of training and made recommendations to enhance the products' use, its impact and set the foundations for a dedicated monitoring, evaluation and learning framework.

The **EUAA Founding Regulation** institutionalised the conduct of evaluations by making these mandatory at the end of each operational plan. In anticipation

of this change, the Agency centralised and strengthened the independence of its evaluation function and established an Evaluation Advisory Group with representatives from all of the Agency's centres to advise senior management on evaluation-related matters. It also set out an **evaluation framework**, which harmonised internal evaluation standards and approaches within the Agency. Since 2021, all evaluation follow-up actions are monitored and reported on a six-monthly basis. To ensure transparency and accountability, the Agency is publishing its evaluation reports on its website and is retroactively publishing past reports.



06.

The future of evaluations in the EUAA



Evaluations have undoubtedly supported the Agency in its evolving mandate over the last decade.

The agreement in 2024 of the legislative changes under the **Pact on Migration and Asylum** is driving a major reform of the CEAS. It foresees, under the different legal instruments, **new priorities and roles** for the Agency. These will need to draw lessons from their first years of functioning and may, when ready, benefit from evaluation opportunities.

Moving forward, emerging trends are expected to redefine the nature of evaluations:

- Evaluations in the future will be more **data driven**. The Agency is trialling impact evaluations to enhance the accuracy of its findings. These approaches will allow quantification of quality-related

aspects of the CEAS. In addition, artificial intelligence may facilitate the aggregation and analysis of big data.

- **Links between corporate planning and evaluation** could be optimised to future-proof evaluations by embedding foresight and ex ante approaches. In this context, the right balance needs to be found to ensure minimum evaluation standards on one hand and support planning processes in a timely way on the other hand.
- Evaluation activities have created a rich **knowledge base** of the Agency's interventions and a reference for institutional memory and learning. This knowledge can be leveraged through subsequent meta-evaluations or be articulated through thematic work undertaken by the Agency or by partner organisations.

As the Agency looks back at its achievements in the area of evaluations it cannot but look ahead at the contribution that evaluations will continue to make to support the Agency in delivering its mandate.



Contribution by the Deputy Executive Director, Mikael Ribbenvik Cassar



As we celebrate 10 years of evaluations in the EUAA, we should recall the important role that they play in contributing to assurance of the Agency's internal control systems. Evaluations are enshrined in our Founding Regulation as well as our Financial Regulation and feature in the Agency's single programming documents and consolidated annual activity reports. They complement audits by providing an additional perspective of the integrity of our business operations.

In my different roles in the EUAA across the years, I have witnessed first-hand how evaluations contribute to better governance, transparency,

and accountability. As we celebrate this milestone, it is essential to recognise the increasing importance of evaluations in contributing to the Agency's efficiency and compliance. Looking forward, I see opportunities for synergies between the Agency's evaluations and the monitoring role in providing a more complete picture of CEAS implementation and compliance by the Agency and the Member States.



Contributions from the Heads of Centre

Georgios Raskos

Head of the Operational Support Centre



➤ Over the past decade, evaluations within the EUAA have provided the centre with useful recommendations that improve operational results. As our scope expanded to include temporary protection, relocation, and structural support in asylum and reception, evaluations have helped guide more complex interventions.

Evaluations now form part of an enhanced process management system, centred on a clear intervention logic, which allows for better planning, monitoring, and execution of operations. This integration has allowed us to become more adaptive and efficient

in real time, enhancing our collaboration with Member States.

Looking ahead, the demand for targeted support will require more agile and flexible evaluations. These evaluations must be tailored to the specific size and scope of operations to ensure continued relevance. By focusing on streamlined and adaptive processes, we will be better equipped to meet future challenges and deliver effective, results-driven interventions.





Rachelle Cortis

Head of the Training and Professional Development Centre



➤ Evaluations of the EUAA’s training have been instrumental in enhancing its effectiveness. By systematically fostering a culture of continual improvement, evaluations have ensured that our training remains responsive to the changing needs of learners throughout Europe, taking into account the diversity of their duties and tasks. The evaluations of the operational plans in force during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine highlighted the instrumental role

of our training in the agency’s response, with training in areas ranging from temporary protection and information provision to trafficking in human beings and the reception of vulnerable persons, culminating in over 1,200 individuals being trained on temporary protection in 2022 alone.

Looking to the future, we are excited to realise the potential of evaluations in the context of our transition to the EUAA Academy, delivering high-quality training that is accredited in line with the European Qualifications Framework.



Ward Lutin

Head of the Asylum Knowledge Centre



The EUAA's evaluations have served as a vehicle to improve work processes within the Agency's Asylum Knowledge Centre. They nurtured synergies with all strands of the Agency in the provision of coherent support to the Member States. Evaluations of the EUAA's practical guidance and tools and country information and guidance products provided a valuable evidence base for strengthening of the collaboration within the

Agency's networks, which continue to be the main instrument for identifying and responding to needs at national level, fostering practical cooperation and information exchange and achieving more convergence. Lessons learned on the relevance, use and efficiency of our products led to further maturation of the Agency's approaches to provision of situational awareness and forecasting asylum and reception in the EU+, as well as improved conceptualisation of effective CEAS-related guidance and the delivery thereof to national administrations.

Looking to the future, evaluations can play a vital role in the Asylum Knowledge Centre's support to Member States in the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum.



Mark Camilleri

Head of the Institutional and Horizontal Affairs Centre



Evaluations have been pivotal for the Institutional and Horizontal Affairs Centre, particularly in shaping the EUAA's governance. They were at the heart of the decision to establish the Agency and were instrumental to prepare its 2022 reform. Evaluations have also played a critical role in supporting the Management Board and laying the groundwork for the new Executive Board, which has strengthened governance and decision-making processes.

The Agency's evaluation function within our centre steers evaluations

as a core element of institutional learning through the creation of a knowledge hub, preserving institutional memory, ensuring transparency and informing strategic planning. Specifically, within our centre the evaluation of roadmaps agreed between the EUAA and third countries have been instrumental in refining external cooperation.

Looking ahead, we will focus on fostering internal learning and feedback, particularly with the Agency's expanded responsibilities under its new regulation and the 2024 Pact on Migration and Asylum. This will be crucial for adapting to new governance functions and ensuring continued institutional growth.



Pascal Deleu

Head of the Administration Centre



Evaluations provide valuable insights and opportunities for continuous improvement, allowing all centres to enhance their processes and deliver better outcomes. The Administration Centre, as the backbone of the Agency, plays a crucial role in implementing follow-up actions recommended in evaluation reports that have a far-reaching impact on the business in

the other centres, be it through procurement, contracting, and management of facilities and of financial and human resources.

We look forward to utilising evaluations in the future in order to provide further benefit for our organisation through further improvement and adaptation of our processes and services that are essential for the efficient and effective conduct of our Agency's activities.



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