



# Slovenia operational plan 2022-2024

## Ex post evaluation report

Prepared by the EUAA's Quality Management and Evaluation Sector

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## Acronyms and definitions

Term	Definition
<b>CEAS</b>	Common European Asylum System
<b>COI</b>	Country of origin information
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUAA</b>	European Union Agency for Asylum
<b>MoI</b>	Ministry of the Interior
<b>QAT</b>	Quality assurance tool
<b>SOP</b>	Standard operating procedure
<b>TNA</b>	Training needs assessment
<b>TP</b>	Temporary protection
<b>TPD</b>	Temporary Protection Directive
<b>UAC</b>	Unaccompanied children
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



## Executive summary

The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)'s operational plan (OP) for Slovenia (2022-2024) was launched in response to increased migratory pressure on Slovenia's asylum and reception systems, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. The plan aimed to support Slovenia by enhancing its capacity in processing asylum applications, managing reception centres, and implementing the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). This evaluation assesses the implementation of the plan in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and added value.

The OP was generally effective, especially in providing asylum and reception support. It exceeded many targets, particularly in areas like interpretation services, workflow management, and capacity building. Training sessions reached a wide audience, especially police officers and asylum officials, who benefitted from workshops on vulnerability, quality assurance, and country of origin information (COI). The EUAA's tools on quality and vulnerability were considered useful and were adjusted in view of the national context. Reception support was highly effective, helping to manage overcrowded centres like the Asylum Home Vič, where the EUAA's assistance with interpretation and workflow processes was crucial. The plan also supported information provision and training for staff. The TPD component was less relevant than initially anticipated, as demand for support to beneficiaries of temporary protection was lower than expected.

In terms of efficiency, the OP faced challenges due to staffing issues, such as the turnover of experts and recruitment delays, which sometimes led to suspended activities. Despite this, the Agency adapted by delivering training online and maintaining a high level of output. Budget execution was efficient, with most of the planned budget consumed by mid-2024.

The OP was highly relevant to Slovenia's urgent needs in asylum and reception, though less so in the TPD area. Coherence between the EUAA and national authorities was mostly satisfactory, though differences in operational practices, particularly regarding vulnerability pre-identification, occasionally needed readjustment. Internally, the Agency's coordination ensured smooth operations despite management changes.

The OP provided significant added value by introducing structured workflows, enhancing training, and creating a national pool of trainers for future capacity building.

Horizontal considerations include simplifying complex tools, improving processes for recruitment of experts, and ensuring better coordination with other European Union actors to avoid duplication in training efforts. This evaluation makes the following recommendations:

1. Promote training opportunities beyond the OP 2022-2024. Examples include:
  - The national pool of trainers can enable follow-up training and capacity-building initiatives at country level;
  - In the long run, there is scope to integrate certain elements of the European asylum curriculum in the training programmes of the Slovenian police academy.



2. To consider taking forward nearly completed tasks through the Agency's permanent support mechanism to ensure continuity and effective implementation. Examples include:
  - Ensuring the consolidation of the selected achievements/deliverables of the OP;
  - More working procedures to support structured work in the reception settings;
  - Continue supporting a comprehensive national referral system and tackling trafficking in human beings.



## 1. Introduction: purpose and scope

In 2022, the Slovenian asylum and reception systems faced significant pressure due to a surge in border crossings, exacerbated by the Russian aggression in Ukraine. In response to this situation, Slovenia and the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) signed an operational plan (OP) which ran from 19 December 2022 until 30 June 2024, following an amendment in June 2023.

The primary purpose of this evaluation was to assess the results of the operational measures supporting Slovenia. The evaluation took place between July and September 2024 and was carried out by the Quality Management and Evaluation Sector in the Business Support and Security Unit of the Agency's Institutional and Horizontal Affairs Centre.

The evaluation exercise aimed to facilitate internal learning, knowledge management, transparency, and accountability within the Agency. It assessed the five standard evaluation criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and added value) in a balanced manner. The scope of the evaluation was limited to the performance of the Agency as defined by 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 2022-2024 for Slovenia included the following three operational measures.

#### **Measure 1:** Asylum support

- Result outcome: Support in the improvement of quality and procedures in the processing of asylum applications.
- Result output: Enhanced capacity of the Slovenian authorities to provide asylum conditions in line with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

This measure included support in enhancing the quality assurance mechanism at first instance, the creation of a national pool of trainers and roll-out at national level of the EUAA's training, on-the-job coaching and other relevant professional development activities, enhancing information provision to applicants of international protection, support in the identification and assessment of vulnerability in the registration process, study/exchange visits and provision of interpretation services.

#### **Measure 2:** Reception support

- Result outcome: Support in the improvement of reception conditions.
- Result output: Enhanced capacity of the Slovenian authorities to provide reception conditions in line with the CEAS.



This measure included support to the management and operation of reception facilities, in strengthening workflows and procedures, enhancement of communication and information provision to residents of reception facilities, identification and assessment of vulnerability, reception-related training, identification and promotion of best practices in the management of for unaccompanied children (UAC), study/exchange visits, support in establishing best practices for the wellbeing of reception personnel, and provision of interpretation services.

### **Measure 3:** Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) support

- Result outcome: Enhanced capacity of the Slovenian authorities to implement the TPD.
- Result output: Support in implementing the TPD.

This measure included support to the management and operation of the facilities in which temporary protection (TP) beneficiaries are accommodated, communication and information provision to beneficiaries of TP, and provision of interpretation services.

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

## 2.2. Points of comparison

Slovenia, traditionally a transit country for migrants, experienced an exponential growth in applications for international protection over the last decade. While there were 260 first-time applications in 2015, the figure increased tenfold to 2 800 by 2018 and further rose to 6 645 in 2022<sup>1</sup>. The majority of applicants were mainly nationals from Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Cuba, and Pakistan.

In 2022, the Slovenian asylum and reception systems were subject to disproportionate pressure due to the increased number of border crossings and those intending to request international protection. The same year, following the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the country granted TP to 7 480 persons including 2 660 children<sup>2</sup>.

The transient nature of the migration flows in Slovenia constituted an additional challenge. The majority of applicants absconded after lodging their application continuing their journey to neighbouring countries. This unpredictability and high turnover of residents strained the national reception system.

The Agency collaborated with four partners in the OP:

- The International Protection Procedures Division of the Migration Directorate of the Slovenian Ministry of the Interior (Moi) responsible for examining applications for international protection and competent to take decisions at first instance;

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat (accessed 27 September 2024):

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr\\_asyappctza/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza/default/table?lang=en).

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat (accessed 27 September 2024):

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr\\_asytpfm\\_custom\\_12994532/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpfm_custom_12994532/default/table?lang=en).



- The Slovenian police responsible for the preliminary procedure;
- The Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants responsible for the reception, accommodation, and integration of asylum seekers in Slovenia;
- The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities responsible for centres for social work supporting applicants<sup>3</sup>.

The main asylum reception centre is the Asylum Home Vič (Azilni dom) in Ljubljana, which has a capacity of 710 persons. It provides accommodation, basic necessities, and various services such as legal aid, psychological support, and integration programmes. There are also branches of the Asylum Home Vič in Logatec (for TP beneficiaries, families, women, and UAC) and Kotnikova which has capacities of respectively 400 and 90 persons. In addition, there were other locations for reception such as a dormitory in Postojna intended for UAC (capacity of 22 children) and different border police premises. TP beneficiaries were also accommodated in private accommodations, hotels, and student dormitories. The total national capacity was about 1 222 beds<sup>4</sup>.

Following the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the reception facilities were under increased pressure. In July 2022, about two-thirds of all persons under the reception system were TP beneficiaries and the remaining third of asylum applicants were awaiting a final decision on their case.

There were a number of non-governmental and international actors working on refugee matters in Slovenia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for example, engaged in advocacy, legal counselling, capacity building and education activities through partnerships with non-governmental organisations. It also supported the Slovenian Red Cross, providing psychosocial counselling, community outreach, and interpretation support.

During the period 2013-2022, 107 Slovenian officials participated in 233 EUAA training sessions through the Agency's permanent support, with annual participations fluctuating between 1 (2016) and 44 (2018).

In August 2022, the Slovenian authorities requested the EUAA's support in the field of vulnerability, asylum and reception procedures and accommodation capacity, as well as interpretation services. A rapid needs assessment proposed support in the field of asylum quality and procedures, identification of vulnerable persons and first-line reception conditions. It recommended the provision of institutional support through capacity building for national authorities, envisaging sustainable outcomes, and resulted in the signature of the OP.

### 3. Implementation of the action: current state of play

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

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<sup>3</sup> The Ministry was a partner during the original OP but not the amended one.

<sup>4</sup> <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/slovenia/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/#:~:text=The%20main%20reception%20facility%20is,accommodates%20up%20to%20710%20persons.>





Following Croatia's entry into the Schengen area in January 2023, migrant flow dynamics in the Western Balkans shifted, impacting Slovenia's asylum and migration management. The number of first-time asylum applications rose to 7 185 in 2023<sup>5</sup>, with most applicants being Moroccan nationals (80 %), followed by Algerians and Pakistanis. In the first half of 2024, the number of monthly applicants dropped from 600 in January 2024 to 275 in June 2024<sup>6</sup>. In addition, due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, TP was granted to 1 585 individuals, including 390 children in 2023<sup>7</sup>.

In the first quarter of 2023, the Agency focused on setting up the operation. Following the appointment of the coordinating officer and deployment of two EUAA personnel, a kick-off meeting took place mid-February 2023 with representatives of all four national partner organisations. Support began in February with the deployment of seven interpreters. The Agency deployed its first remunerated external expert in March 2023 and by June 2023, there were two measure coordinators, an operations assistant, seven experts and 11 interpreters. In June 2023, an amendment to the OP extended the Agency's support to Slovenia until 30 June 2024. Simultaneously, the EUAA changed its coordinating team transferring responsibilities from the EUAA's First Operational Response Unit to the Operational and Technical Assistance Unit. The Slovenian reception system remained under pressure, with the Asylum Home Vič remaining overcrowded despite a high abscondment rate<sup>8</sup>.

In the area of asylum (measure 1), the Agency prepared eight information products to support asylum procedures in 2023 (target: seven). These included three leaflets on Dublin procedures for adults and minors for the asylum authority and one leaflet on preliminary procedure to be used by the border police in March 2023. Between June and August 2023, two leaflets (adults and minors) and a poster with a QR code on the international protection procedure were developed. All these leaflets were translated with the support of the EUAA into 13 languages. Finally, a presentation on the registration procedure was translated into four languages.

In 2023, the Agency prepared 11 quality assurance-related products and events (annual target: nine). Five of those were completed by June 2023: a quality assurance tool (QAT) workshop, a country of origin information (COI) briefing on Russia, a COI query on Burundi, a joint workshop with Bulgaria on 'military service themes' (attended by seven Slovenian asylum officers), and a quality feedback report. The report concerned the Agency's assessment of a total of 24 cases (48 interview transcripts and decisions; target: 40). In July 2023, the Agency delivered a workshop on COI research practices and the horizontal COI helpdesk and working instructions for remunerated external experts on Dublin case processing. In November 2023, the Slovenian officials participated in two online events: a medical COI briefing on Bangladesh and a COI briefing on Afghanistan. In December 2023, a workshop on the findings of the quality feedback report and a COI on-the-job coaching mission took place in Ljubljana.

In July 2023, the Agency deployed two experts to assist with the processing of outgoing (take back/take charge) Dublin cases. The intervention was larger than initially expected, with a total of 1 679 outgoing

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<sup>5</sup> Eurostat (accessed 27 September 2024):

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr\\_asyappctza/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat (accessed 27 September 2024):

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr\\_asyappctzm\\_custom\\_12007415/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctzm_custom_12007415/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat (accessed 27 September 2024):

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr\\_asytpfm\\_custom\\_12974848/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpfm_custom_12974848/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>8</sup> [https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUAA\\_Operational\\_Plan\\_to\\_Slovenia\\_2022-2024\\_Amendment\\_1.pdf](https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUAA_Operational_Plan_to_Slovenia_2022-2024_Amendment_1.pdf)



cases supported in 2023, more than fivefold the initial target of 300. Moreover, the experts supported Eurodac-related activities as well.

In 2023, the Agency delivered training to 33 out of an annual target of 69 asylum officials (48 %). High numbers of participation and satisfaction rates (between 85 % and 97 %) were registered in the following sessions:

- 'Introduction to vulnerability' in March, gathering 19 asylum participants (100 % of target);
- 'Working with an interpreter' in April, completed by 19 participants out of 21 enrolled;
- 'Interviewing children' in April-May (nine participants);
- 'Communication with children in asylum processes' in May (tailor-made; ten participants, including two non-governmental organisation representatives).

The planned training on 'Evidence assessment' was postponed to 2024 at the authority's request. Four training modules were translated into Slovene in 2023, namely 'Introduction to communication for asylum and reception practitioners', 'Introduction to vulnerability', 'Interviewing vulnerable persons' and 'Trafficking in human beings'.

In 2023, 20 participations from the Slovenian police force were registered on five EUAA training sessions aiming to develop the pool of national trainers in seven European asylum curriculum modules<sup>9</sup>.

In the area of reception (measure 2), the Agency supported the Asylum Home Vič and Kotnikova in Ljubljana with four to six interpreters as of February 2023. The EUAA also deployed experts in the Asylum Home Vič and its branch in Logatec. A sharp increase in arrivals in the third quarter of 2023 significantly strained the Asylum Home Vič, which operated at three to five times its capacity. The activities were further disrupted by the resignation of two EUAA experts, prompting the deployment of three temporary workers from Greece. Until their suspension in September 2023, the Agency supported 127 vulnerability pre-identification interviews (73 % of the 175 target). Moreover, information sessions started in June 2023 and by the end of the year, twice the planned number of sessions were conducted (4 419; target: 2 200, primarily with Moroccans, Afghans, Syrians, and Algerians).

In terms of tools and standard operating procedures (SOPs) in reception, the Agency delivered three of the six planned deliverables for 2023 (50 %). These initially included the information provision checklist and workflow for the Asylum Home Vič and a fast-screening tool, its guidance, a data collection tool, as well as SOPs on vulnerability pre-identification. In August 2023, the Agency developed work instructions for interpreters. In addition, the EUAA supported the production of two technical specification reports which were approved in 2024: one including site planning recommendations for a potentially new UAC centre, and the other intended for the existing sites of Logatec and Asylum Home Vič with the view of increasing reception capacity and improving reception conditions.

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<sup>9</sup> These modules were: 'Trafficking in human beings', 'Applicants with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics', 'Becoming an EUAA trainer and assessor', 'Dublin III Regulation', 'Interviewing vulnerable persons', 'Introduction to coaching', and 'Victims of gender-based violence'.



71 out of an annual target of 94 reception officials (75 %) participated in training in reception in 2023. These included:

- ‘Introduction to communication for asylum practitioners’ in March, completed by eight reception officials out of 19 enrolled (42 %);
- Two face-to-face sessions on ‘Gender and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics in the reception context’ in May gathered 23 participants;
- ‘Working with an interpreter’ in April, completed by 16 participants (seven of whom were EUAA reception experts and two MoI officials);
- ‘Introduction to vulnerability’, completed by 13 participants (including both MoI officials and reception personnel).

Most sessions delivered in 2023 to reception personnel received high satisfaction rates (from 84 % to 100 %), except for the ‘Introduction to vulnerability’ (71 %) and ‘Working with an interpreter’ (79 %).

In November 2023, a training needs assessment (TNA) was carried out, resulting in a report and a proposed training plan for 2024. In April and May 2023, the Agency facilitated two two-day study visits: one to Austria on reception with seven participants, and one to Italy on asylum with six participants (annual target: two).

In the area of TP (measure 3), the Agency deployed two interpreters in February 2023 to the main reception centres in Logatec and Postojna to assist TP beneficiaries. Interpretation support continued throughout 2023 in the former. Additionally, the Agency occasionally provided support to other centres, including the Bežigrad office (not a reception site), Mirna Pec, Debeli Rtič, and Postojna.

As of January 2024, 1 367 persons were hosted in the national reception facilities, exceeding the national capacity of 1 222<sup>10</sup>. In particular the Asylum Home Vič in Ljubljana was under pressure exceeding its capacity of 710 persons with 940 residents (exclusively single men)<sup>11</sup>. The Logatec Branch Facility hosted 328 asylum seekers and TP beneficiaries, especially women, families and children. The Agency deployed 11 remunerated external experts in January 2024 and nine from February until June 2024. There were between 12 and 16 interpreters per month in 2024.

In 2024 in the area of asylum (measure 1), the Agency delivered seven quality assurance-related tools (target: three). Four tools were prepared in January 2024: one digital and one paper tool for the identification of special needs/vulnerabilities during lodging; a user guidance document, and a consent form. However, the digital tool was considered to be time consuming to use and was not adopted. The Agency delivered an online quality workshop on religious claims and a COI briefing on Burundi in April 2024, a country guidance workshop on Syria in May 2024 and another one on Afghanistan in June 2024. The Agency facilitated two two-day study visits to Norway on digitalisation (for asylum) and Cyprus to see the modular units (for reception) in April and May 2024 respectively. Support to the Dublin unit continued throughout 2024 with a total of 987 outgoing requests (target: 900).

<sup>10</sup> <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/slovenia/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/slovenia/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/#:~:text=The%20main%20reception%20facility%20is,accommodates%20up%20to%20710%20persons.>



In terms of training on asylum, 754 participations were registered in 2024 for training modules, including 'Evidence assessment', 'Gender, gender identity and sexual orientation', 'Identification of Dublin cases', and 'Interviewing vulnerable persons'. The vast majority of participations (737 or 98 %) were in 'Introduction to vulnerability', a mandatory training for the police force. The average satisfaction rate of these sessions was 62 %.

On reception (measure 2), nine operational tools were prepared in 2024 (target: two). These included two work instructions for reception personnel deployed in Vič and Logatec in the first quarter, and four checklists for information provision in Logatec, one presentation on information provision in Vič, one operational data collection tool for the Info Desk in Vič, and a guideline document for the tool in the second quarter. Moreover, the Agency delivered a proposal for the layout of the new reception centre in Obrezje (one technical specification report related to site planning).

In 2024, the Agency conducted 17 of the 40 planned vulnerability pre-identification interviews. The activity remained suspended in the Asylum Home Vič and, as of March 2024, it was also suspended in Logatec. At the request of the national counterpart, other activities such as information provision for new arrivals were given priority. The EUAA conducted 3 069 information provision sessions, lower than the target of 3 700 (83 %), mainly due to a change in nationalities and a lower number of registrations.

92 national officials participated in training modules and other tailor-made sessions in the area of reception in 2024. These included training on 'Health, safety and security in reception' (32 participations), 'Assessment of reception conditions (ARC) tool in practice', 'Professional wellbeing', as well as tailor-made sessions on vulnerability in reception in Slovenia.

In 2024, five asylum and reception officials participated in the 'Becoming an EUAA trainer and assessor (BETA)' training. Additionally, six participations were recorded in three sessions in view of developing the pool of national trainers: 'Victims of gender-based violence' (three reception officials), 'Trafficking in human beings' (two reception officials), and 'Gender, gender identity and sexual orientation' (one asylum official).

In the area of TP (measure 3), no deliverables were planned nor achieved in 2024.

The OP and its amendment included operational preconditions to ensure that:

- Office space and necessary equipment were available to the EUAA;
- The TPD was transposed into the national legislation;
- Quarterly measure steering committee meetings were held;
- A two-way data sharing procedure was established;
- National authorities were responsible for securing all permits necessary for the provision of support;
- Personnel from relevant authorities would participate in training activities.

For the most part, these preconditions were met.



## 4. Evaluation findings

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, and focus group discussions.

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

The Slovenia OP set out three result areas in the fields of asylum, reception, and TP. The Agency was generally effective, often surpassing targets and providing essential support despite significant challenges.

In the field of **asylum**, the OP delivered most of the planned training and capacity-building activities. The Agency reached 768 learners (834 participations) in 42 training sessions. 750 of these participations came from the Slovenian police force who attended 26 mandatory online sessions, some of which concluded soon after the OP ended. Training activities involving asylum and reception officials generally attracted between 8 and 19 persons, due to the smaller size of the administrations and the need to ensure business as usual during the training. There were also lower levels of completion and satisfaction for the online training modules. Although most training activities recorded a relatively high attendance rate, the online vulnerability training sessions for the police had completion rates ranging from 27 % to 81 %. This may be due to the mandatory nature of the training sessions, their preference for face-to-face modalities, as well as IT incompatibilities. Collaborations with the Slovenian training police academy did not materialise, despite their important potential. The Agency sought to enhance alignment with national needs and practices by undertaking a TNA and a dedicated training plan. 12 persons completed five training sessions aiming to support the development of a national pool of trainers on different subjects. This may ensure future national follow-up capacity-building efforts in the medium to long term. There was collaboration with the UNHCR under some capacity-building activities, such as the co-delivery of a training session. The two study visits to Italy and Norway enhanced EU-wide exchange of practices in the field of the CEAS.

The Agency provided the planned quality support in the field of asylum. The QAT was used to conduct assessments of asylum interviews and decisions. The collaboration was meaningful although challenging due to differences between the EUAA's methodology and national practice in conducting interviews and drafting decisions. The QAT was at times perceived as not adequately flexible when considering the national regulatory context; in response, the Agency made efforts to adjust to local needs and made recommendations focusing on convergence. The Agency continued its quality assurance efforts and development of operational tools, although some activities, like vulnerability pre-identification, were put on hold already at the end of 2023 and also in 2024. In addition, the Agency delivered effectively in areas where new needs emerged such as on Dublin processing and digitalisation. In the area of vulnerability pre-identification, there were differing perspectives, with the authorities preferring a less complex approach than the one the Agency provided. A form for identifying vulnerabilities was prepared and initially used but was later simplified in line with contextual needs. There were less than foreseen vulnerability identification interviews as these were considered too time consuming. Some of their components however were integrated into other personal interviews.



In the field of **reception**, despite a challenging environment with overcrowded facilities and staff turnover, the Agency provided most of the planned support in reception centres. The Asylum Home Vič was particularly strained, operating at multiple times its capacity. The Agency provided more training sessions and information provision sessions than planned. It delivered the SOPs, exchange visits to Austria and Cyprus and technical specification reports as planned.

The OP generated 266 participations in 53 training sessions on reception-related matters. The average number of participants (ranging from 1 to 14 per session) was low due to the small size of the administration. Moreover, the pre-deployment induction training sessions were delivered to just between 1 and 7 persons per session. Initially, the sessions on reception had a lower completion rate (average of 70 %), but this rate increased to 96 % as of September 2023. The participants preferred in-person over online training sessions. Most training activities received very positive feedback, with the exception of the fully online session on 'Introduction to vulnerability', where the satisfaction was lower. This is overall consistent with the preference for sessions involving a face-to-face component, which was noted across the administration. At times, the training could have been more instrumental if workflows and procedures were already in place.

In terms of coherence, there was scope for better alignment with other similar training programmes. There was for example training on trafficking by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency with the same title but different content. There were also some technical issues with accessing the EUAA's online training during the implementation of the fully automated sessions, in particular for the police, as national officials were more accustomed to using their internal training platform.

At the beginning of the OP, there were diverging practices between national staff and the Agency's experts. With few written operating procedures available, there was a need for better alignment of the support with national practices. The role of an interpreter, for example, in the national context was much more flexible than in the understanding of the EUAA's experts. Also, the time needed to complete an EUAA pre-identification of vulnerabilities was disproportionate with the time available for other national procedures.

The Agency's support to TP was limited to reception with the occasional provision of interpretation in 2023. There were no deliverables in 2024.

As of the second quarter of 2023, the EUAA mobilised between 7 and 10 experts and between 7 and 17 interpreters on a monthly basis. These were coordinated by 2 to 4 statutory staff. These were slightly below the maximum numbers projected in the OP (up to 16 experts and 22 interpreters). Efficiency was sometimes hindered by factors like overcrowded facilities and staff resignations, leading to suspended activities and unmet targets in some areas.

There were inefficiencies and incoherences due to several challenges such as:

- The difficulty to find and retain staff combined with the strenuous expert deployment procedure;
- Some of the Agency's reception experts were less experienced than national staff. This led to their expertise being questioned at times, especially when actions were not in line with national practices;



- This being a new operation, there were start-up cooperation mechanisms to be developed and insufficient awareness of local regulations and standards;
- The national administration was at times under high pressure and was unable to release all staff to attend the various capacity-building activities.

Despite the abovementioned challenges, the Agency remained efficient in the delivery of outputs.

Table 1. Budget OP Slovenia (source: non-validated internal monitoring data)

	Budget forecast 2023-2024	% of allocated budget	Budget consumption 2023-2024	% of consumed budget	Consumption rate 2023-2024
Measure 1	€ 103,719	6%	€ 104,695	6%	101%
Measure 2	€ 1,180,958	70%	€ 1,166,158	71%	99%
Measure 3	€ 52,486	3%	€ 57,486	3%	110%
Other OP direct costs	€ 348,351	21%	€ 316,311	19%	91%
<b>Total OP budget</b>	<b>€ 1,685,514</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>€ 1,644,650</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>98%</b>

The planned budget of the OP was about EUR 1 686 000 (EUR 1 069 000 in 2023 and EUR 617 000 in 2024). By June 2024, internal financial monitoring data indicated an estimated budget consumption of 98 %, most of it (71 %) for measure 2. The consumption rate was in line with plans but was adjusted periodically and therefore not useful for our analysis.

In terms of external coherence, the OP’s main counterparts were the Slovenian authorities, while collaboration with other stakeholders was limited. There were areas of overlap with the UNHCR in terms of information material and training, but these were tackled with coordination and joint activities.

Overall, the OP ensured good internal coordination and coherence among the Agency’s actors involved, such as the Training and Professional Development Centre, the Asylum Knowledge Centre, and the Security Sector. Regular internal EUAA coordination meetings facilitated alignment, in particular during the first part of the OP. However, the internal handover of the operation highlighted a need to uphold effective practices throughout the entire lifecycle of the OP. There was confusion on a possible extension, leading to mixed expectations, in particular in relation to expert and interpreter contract extensions.

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

The Agency generated added value by introducing structured workflows in reception centres. This smoothed flow management. Collaborating national asylum instances reported spin-off effects such as better inter-agency information sharing and reliability. Additionally, the introduction of interpretation services, which were not available before the Agency’s involvement, brought considerable benefits.



While historically there were moderate participations in the EUAA's training activities by Slovenian staff (average of 23 per year), the OP generated 957 participations (or 87 % of the 1 100 total participations) and considerably increased the Slovenian pool of national trainers in modules of the EAC. Thus, together with the TNA, the Agency established training and capacity building as a means for institutional development. In particular, training for junior national staff and the session on evidence assessment in cooperation with the UNHCR were considered as highlights. The participation in training indicates enhanced knowledge in areas such as vulnerability, trafficking in human beings, and gender-based violence. The EUAA organised a set of pilot training sessions on safety and security, which were delivered with the support of the Security Sector and were well received.

The national counterparts expressed their appreciation for support on information provision, support to the Dublin unit, and the development of SOPs and work instructions. The support on quality was challenging but innovative, involving key national actors. Through on-site support in reception, new practices and working approaches were introduced which could be taken over by the authorities.

During implementation, the Agency contributed with elements on quality, COI, and digitalisation. Stakeholders reported that the information provision material produced was valuable and could be used beyond the OP's duration. Also, the study visit to Norway sparked significant interest from the Slovenian stakeholders in adopting advanced digitalisation practices to modernise their current paper-based processes.

The TP component had limited added value, with interpretation services for Ukrainians being the primary contribution. It however was a 'stand-by' measure in case support was needed.

The Agency's support in Slovenia was intended to be temporary. Mixed expectations about an extension beyond June 2024 limited the time available for a comprehensive handover. For example, the Agency introduced additional working standards in reception centres that are difficult to sustain with the available limited national resources and quota systems.

### 4.3. Is the action relevant?

Slovenia was confronted with extraordinary pressure on its asylum and reception system in mid-2022. In addition to the influx of persons fleeing Ukraine, it also received over 5 000 asylum applications, which were 2 and 20 times the figure it recorded in 2018 and 2015 respectively. The Agency's 2022 rapid needs assessment focused on asylum quality and procedures, vulnerable persons and first-line reception conditions. In addition, the needs assessment was updated three times and was complemented with a dedicated TNA mid-2023. From this perspective, the EUAA placed a high priority to ensure that needs were met.

In practice, the OP responded to the capacity building needs of the Slovenian authorities but was also limited due to:

- The absorption capacity of the Slovenian counterparts in view of their small size and availability, as business as usual needed to be ensured during capacity-building activities;
- The unpredictable nature of the Slovenian irregular migration patterns being a transit country subject to fluctuating external push and pull factors, and subject to high abscondment;





- Different perceptions on the needs for quality elements in view of their additional costs.

Reception support, where most resources were deployed, emerged as the core component of the OP. The Agency identified key areas for intervention, including workflow descriptions, SOPs, and work instructions that were later adopted by the reception authority to strengthen their internal frameworks. The information brochures were informative and – depending on the respondent – adapted to the audience. Efforts to increase reception capacity, such as planning for new reception centres and container setups, were not achieved during the OP.

The study visits were very well received, but it was difficult to replicate practices of larger countries in the context of a smaller administration. The national authorities very much appreciated the interpretation support. There was however scope to provide a more diverse range of third country languages as relay interpretation practices were not as effective. Training and capacity building were also highly appreciated, but the authorities had limited time/availability to ensure full participation in training sessions. They also were not keen on online training due to the limitations that come with it.

There was progressively less urgent need for the EUAA's support in the field of asylum processing. The TP measure focused primarily on interpretation and was eventually integrated into reception activities. While it could be considered as a stand-by element, it demonstrated low relevance as a separate measure in the OP and its amendments.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusions

In response to disproportionate pressure, Slovenia and the EUAA signed an OP which ran from December 2022 until June 2024. The OP set out three result areas in the fields of asylum, reception, and TP. It was initiated in response to an increased influx of migrants due, in part, to Croatia joining the Schengen area and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, leading to a rise in asylum and TP applications. The OP was particularly **relevant** in the field of reception, in view of the many needs on the ground, but also provided meaningful support and capacity building in the field of asylum. The intended support on TP was ultimately not needed during the amended OP implementation and therefore this result area was not relevant.

The OP was highly **effective** in the field of reception, often surpassing targets and providing essential support. The Agency provided amongst others interpretation, capacity building and workflow management support. The Agency's support in the field of asylum was meaningful and was in particular successful in the field of Dublin support and quality assurance. The capacity-building activities were effective and included training on evidence assessment, as well as country guidance and COI briefings. Support on TP was limited to the provision of an interpreter. The OP acted as an accelerator for capacity building in many areas, surpassing training participation levels of previous years.

The **efficiency** of implementation of the OP was challenged due to staffing limitations, such as expert recruitment challenges and staff turnover. This, at times, led to the suspension of foreseen activities. Additional inefficiencies stemmed from small-group training sessions, varying experience levels among



experts, and the need to develop new cooperation mechanisms. Despite these issues, the Agency remained efficient by adapting training schedules, using webinars and online sessions, and delivering most outputs efficiently.

In terms of **coherence**, there was very good coordination between the EUAA and the Slovenian authorities, enhanced by the hosting of the EUAA team on the Mol’s premises. At times, there was need to realign the EUAA’s support to ensure that it was in line with national expectations and understanding. Also, some of the EUAA’s guidance tools on quality and vulnerability were found to be too time consuming and detailed for the national context. During implementation of the OP, there was a fruitful collaboration with the UNHCR on information material and training. Internally, implementation benefitted from contributions of different Agency actors. The handover between sectors was smooth but not as efficient as envisaged.

The Agency’s involvement in Slovenia provided **added value** by introducing structured workflows and interpretation services in reception centres. This improved information sharing and coordination between national asylum authorities. The Agency facilitated 1 100 training participations. It established a pool of Slovenian trainers, promoting training and capacity building as a tool for institutional development.

Table 2. Evaluation criteria by result<sup>12</sup>

	Result areas		
	Asylum	Reception	TPD
Relevance	Good	Very good	Insufficient
Effectiveness	Good	Very good	Fair
Efficiency	Good	Good	Fair
Coherence	Good	Fair/Good	Fair
EU added value	Good	Very good	Fair

## 5.2. Good practices and lessons learnt

The implementation of the OP allowed for the following **good practices** to emerge which could be continued or replicated in similar operations:

- The information exchange between the Agency and its partners was a significant strength, facilitating smooth communication and collaboration;
- The flexibility of the OP to support in new areas, particularly the Dublin unit, COI, and digitalisation;
- The deployment of measure coordinators who were content experts in their field facilitated targeted support;
- The positive feedback on the work of the deployed interpreters in reception centres by the national authorities;

<sup>12</sup> The five evaluation criteria were rated using a four-point scale (insufficient, fair, good, very good). These ratings are judgements based on the triangulation of different information sources, such as interviews and internal data.



- The hosting of the EUAA's asylum support team on Slovenian premises facilitated regular communication and coordination;
- The integration of the EUAA's experts within the authorities contributed to enhanced networking and collaboration between these authorities on training;
- Training material and tools were progressively integrated into national working systems, ensuring easy access and introducing a crucial sustainability element;
- Having a training focal point within the police allowed for increased participation in relevant training;
- The support was tailored to the local context where the smaller size of the Slovenian authorities allowed for opportunities for visible and meaningful progress to emerge;
- The targeted support with capacity building allowed many actors in Slovenia to be trained on CEAS-related matters.

Moreover, several **lessons learnt** were highlighted:

- The timeline of the Slovenia OP, initially for six months but then extended to 18 months with possible extensions, was challenging for planning and contracting reasons.
- The Agency, new to Slovenia, needed time to understand national practices and modus operandi, which needed adjustment and working arrangements;
- The Agency had difficulties mobilising experts and deployments were limited by short-term statutory employment contracts;
- After about six months, implementation of the Slovenia OP was transferred from the EUAA's First Operational Response Unit to the Operational and Technical Assistance Unit involving a handover process, a reorganisation of project management, additional needs assessments, new coordination arrangements and a change of result indicators. The short duration of the OP meant that the changes brought about by the handover were not proportional;
- The QAT was valuable for identifying areas of improvement, but it was difficult for the authorities to incorporate its use within their already overwhelming regular duties. The Agency made adjustments to optimise the tool's effectiveness to the context, but this did not lead to longer-term national use.

In addition to context-specific conclusions and lessons learnt, the evaluation identified a number of **horizontal considerations** (and recommendations), which are beyond the scope of the Slovenia OP. These should be taken on board in future horizontal assessments and include the need for:

- Reconsideration of the OP implementation handover procedure to ensure consistency and enhance coherence and efficiency. While efficiency losses were limited in the handover for Slovenia (some of the staff on the ground continued), there is no clear logic to justify the need for these handovers for smaller, short-term OPs;
- Explore the possibility to make the EUAA's products (e.g., the vulnerability tool) more user-friendly, less time consuming, and easily adaptable to the national regulatory context;
- Tailor support proportionate to the local context, leveraging resources and capacities available within the Member State. This is particularly relevant when introducing new or additional working methods. It will not only ensure more sustainable outcomes but also enhance the ownership and long-term effectiveness of the initiatives undertaken;



- Considering the nature of the participants' jobs, offer more flexible training options, such as on-demand sessions or shorter modules, to improve attendance and engagement;
- To ensure better preparedness of experts in operational settings, there is a need to align training of the EUAA's experts with national procedures. When there are no clear working procedures in place, it is important to establish these as early as possible.

This evaluation also highlights considerations already identified in previous evaluations. These include:

- The need to strengthen the Agency's preparedness for the start-up of new operations including their procurement architecture. The Agency could either foresee sufficient time from the outset of short-term OPs or restrict their scope to a limited set of specific tasks;
- The need to ensure internal clarity to the extent possible on the exit process to avoid mixed messages close to closure;
- Seeking alternative arrangements to avoid relay interpretation practices;
- Further identifying ways to deploy EUAA personnel rapidly in operations. The Agency needs to find ways of making the remunerated external expert selection process leaner to facilitate operational needs.

### 5.3. Recommendations

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

1. Promote training opportunities beyond the OP 2022-2024. Examples include:
  - The national pool of trainers can enable national follow-up training and capacity-building initiatives;
  - In the long run, there is scope to integrate certain elements of the European asylum curriculum in the training programmes of the Slovenian police academy.
2. To consider taking forward nearly completed tasks through the Agency's permanent support mechanism to ensure continuity and effective implementation. Examples include:
  - Ensuring the consolidation of the selected achievements/deliverables of the OP;
  - More working procedures to support structured work in the reception settings;
  - Continue supporting a comprehensive national referral system and tackling trafficking in human beings.



## 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.

Criteria	Questions
<b>Relevance</b>	To what extent was the action in line with stakeholders’ needs and the Agency’s objectives?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Did the OP achieve what was planned? Were there any (unexpected) factors that influenced the results?
<b>Efficiency</b>	To what extent are the costs (including inputs and human resources) of the support justified given the results?
<b>Coherence</b>	To what extent is the operation coherent internally and externally?
<b>EU added value</b>	What is the added value resulting from the operation, compared to what could have been expected from Slovenia acting solely?

The evaluation took into account good practices and lessons learnt, including those identified in the evaluations of the previous OPs. Special attention was paid to the efficiency and added value of the Agency’s support.

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 and individual and group interviews. The evaluation team interviewed 16 individuals.

The evaluation encountered some limitations linked to its remote execution. Environmental and social impacts were not addressed in this report.



## Annex 2: Evaluation matrix

Questions and sub-questions	Indicators/descriptors	Norms/judgement criteria	Sources of evidence
<b>Relevance:</b> 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 national authorities	Comparison needs assessment and OP priority areas with implemented areas	Needs assessment, OP, monitoring and reporting tools, interviews
<b>Effectiveness:</b> 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?	Results indicators	Comparison planned targets vs achieved	Monitoring data
<b>Efficiency:</b> To what extent are the costs (including inputs and human resources) of the support justified given the results?			
	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
<b>Coherence:</b> To what extent is the operation coherent internally and externally?			
	Nature of activities and coordination processes	Level of coordination and synergies with other national actors/internal Agency's actors	Monitoring data; planning documents; interviews; mapping undertaken in needs assessment
<b>EU added value:</b> What is the added value resulting from the operation, compared to what could have been expected from Slovenia acting solely?			
	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



## Annex 3: Intervention logic

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Needs/problems</b></p> <p>Increased pressure on the country’s asylum and reception capacities, in particular following the Russian aggression in Ukraine</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Expected objectives</b></p> <p>The Slovenian authorities requested the EUAA’s support in the field of vulnerability, asylum and reception procedures and accommodation capacity, as well as interpretation services</p>
<b>Result impact</b>	
Provision of effective operational and technical support in line with the Agency’s mandate to enable Slovenia to strengthen its capacity in asylum, reception and TP	
<b>Result outcome</b>	
<p>1.1. Enhanced capacity of the Slovenian authorities to provide asylum conditions in line with the CEAS</p> <p>2.1. Enhanced capacity of the Slovenian authorities to provide reception conditions in line with the CEAS</p> <p>3.1. Enhanced capacity of the Slovenian authorities to implement the TPD</p>	
<b>Result outputs</b>	
<p>1.1. Support in the improvement of quality and procedures in the processing of asylum applications</p> <p>2.1. Support in the improvement of reception conditions</p> <p>3.1. Support in implementing the TPD</p>	
<b>Activities</b>	
<p>Actions under output 1.1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support to the Migration Directorate in enhancing the quality assurance mechanism at first instance;</li> <li>• Enhancement of the internal capacity of the Migration Directorate, with the creation of a national pool of trainers in the EUAA’s modules through participation in training sessions aiming to support the development of a national pool of trainers;</li> <li>• Enhancement of the capacity of the Migration Directorate and border police, via the roll-out at national level of the EUAA’s training, on-the-job coaching, and other relevant professional development activities focusing indicatively on core modules, registration, interviewing vulnerable persons and foundation modules. Other modules may be added on the basis of needs identified in the course of implementation;</li> <li>• Support in the enhancement of information provision to applicants of international protection including through the development of information provision material (QR) including through the establishment of a mobile team if needed;</li> <li>• Support in the identification and assessment of vulnerability in the registration process;</li> <li>• Study/exchange visits to identify best practices;</li> <li>• Provision of interpretation services.</li> </ul>	



Actions under output 2.1.

- Support in the management and operation of reception facilities through the deployment of reception personnel;
- Support to the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants in strengthening workflows and procedures, especially on identification of vulnerabilities, and including improvement of operational tools;
- Support in the enhancement of the communication and information provision to residents of reception facilities including through the development of information material;
- Support in the identification and assessment of vulnerability;
- Provide support to the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants with reception-related training focusing on identification, assessment, referral and case management of vulnerable persons, in line with national SOPs, procedures and the relevant EUAA's toolbox;
- Provision of targeted training to national reception personnel and relevant entities on specific modules of the EAC;
- Support in identifying and promoting best practices in the management of UAC facilities;
- Study/exchange visits to identify best practices in managing arrival processes and best practices in managing UAC facilities;
- Support in the establishment of best practices for the wellbeing of reception personnel;
- Provision of interpretation services.

Actions under output 3.1:

- Provision of interpretation support;
- Support to the management and operation of the facilities in which TP beneficiaries are accommodated through deployment of reception personnel;
- Support in communication and information provision to beneficiaries of TP, including through the development of agreed content.

**Inputs**

Indicative resources – Deployment of asylum support teams:

Under 1.1:

Asylum quality assurance experts: up to 2

Training experts/training support officers: up to 3

Interpreters: up to 10

Under 2.1:

Reception experts: up to 8

Counselling expert: up to 1

Interpreters: up to 10

Under 3.1:





Reception experts: up to 2

Interpreters: up to 2

Equipment, material, and operational support:

Conditional on an agreement between the EUAA and the Slovenian authorities and subject to budget availability for the present OP material and operational support by the Agency could include inter alia provision of equipment, works, services, communication/promotional material, costs for training activities/meetings/workshops, infrastructure costs, IT equipment, office supplies and others where required for the joint EUAA and national authorities' activities.

#### **External factors**

Migratory pressure, Russian aggression in Ukraine; national and international laws, policies and practices; availability of financial and human resources; actions by national counterparts, international and non-governmental organisations.