



Roadmap for cooperation between the EUAA and North Macedonia (2025 -2027)



Roadmap for Cooperation between the EUAA and North Macedonia

(January 2025 – December 2027)

**Strengthening the asylum and reception systems
in line with the Common European Asylum System
and EU standards**



Manuscript completed in January/2025

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The development and implementation of the Roadmap for Cooperation between EUAA – North Macedonia (2025-2027): strengthening the asylum and reception systems in line with the CEAS and EU standards is supported through the “EU Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans”, a project funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of EUAA, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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I. List of Abbreviations

Term	Definition
APD (recast)	Asylum procedures directive — Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast)
ARC	Assessment of Reception Conditions
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
EU MS	EU Member States
EU+	EU Member States and Associated Countries
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPSN	Identification of Persons with Special Needs
MSPDY	Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth
SNVA	Special Needs and Vulnerability Assessment
SOM	Senior Official's Meeting
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
UAM	Unaccompanied Minors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees





II. Introduction and Background

The overall objective of the “Roadmap for Cooperation between the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and North Macedonia (2025 - 2027): strengthening the asylum and reception systems in line with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and European Union standards” (hereinafter: EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap) is to enhance the protection space for applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection by strengthening the asylum and reception system in North Macedonia in line with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and European Union Member States’ practices.

The EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap identifies priority areas where the EUAA support to North Macedonia’s authorities has an added value and, where relevant, has a direct impact on the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the European Commission annual North Macedonia Report¹ and in the framework of the accession negotiations related to Chapter 24: “Justice, Freedom and Security”. Furthermore, this Roadmap contributes to an increased harmonisation of asylum and reception systems at a regional level.

The EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap has been developed jointly among the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth of North Macedonia and the EUAA. The relevant authorities have been included in the design of activities in line with their responsibilities within the asylum and reception system of North Macedonia. Implementation is likewise planned in cooperation with all relevant institutions, according to their responsibilities. Some activities include the possibility of having a broader scope in terms of stakeholders.

The implementation period of the EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap is 36 months from its endorsement by both sides. During the implementation phase, the EUAA and North Macedonia’s authorities agree to an open two-way communication to ensure smooth implementation of the EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap. The EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap can be revised, if need arises, upon agreement of the EUAA and the relevant North Macedonia authorities. The revision shall be confirmed in writing by the EUAA, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth of North Macedonia.

The development and implementation of the EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap is co-financed through the EU funded programme “Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans” and EUAA’s own budget.

The **EU Pact on Migration and Asylum**, which was adopted in May 2024, is a set of new rules managing migration and establishing a common asylum system at EU level. Most of the legislation under the Pact will enter into application after a two-year transitional period, a timeframe that largely overlaps with the reference period of this Roadmap. As the Pact will considerably reform the CEAS, and as preparations for its application progress, the implementation of this Roadmap will also take these developments into account as appropriate.

¹ European Commission SWD (2023) 693 final, North Macedonia 2023 Report, 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2023_en





III. Methodology

a) Needs Assessment and Rationale for the Intervention

The EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap, is a collaborative effort between North Macedonia authorities and the EUAA, building upon the evaluation² of the second-generation Roadmap and discussions on priorities and needs identified during the Senior Officials Meeting (in March 2023). The North Macedonia authorities and the EUAA have involved all relevant authorities in the identification of areas for cooperation, aligning with their responsibilities within the asylum and reception systems in North Macedonia. The Roadmap determines the anticipated outcomes and outputs to be realised during its implementation period. It also presents a set of indicative activities designed to contribute to the achievement of the agreed-upon outcomes and outputs.

The Roadmap contributes to the EU accession process and accession negotiations, aiming to develop comprehensive asylum and reception systems in accordance with international and European standards. Considerations have been made regarding the recommendations outlined in the European Commission's annual North Macedonia Report for Chapter 24: "Justice, Freedom, and Security." It contributes to addressing elements that require attention as the country progresses on its European integration path.

Efforts have been invested in coordinating with international stakeholders to identify synergies and prevent overlap with existing initiatives in North Macedonia, besides FRONTEX, also with UNHCR, and IOM, as well as relevant projects financed by the European Commission services and EU Member States. Where opportunities for synergies were identified, a collaborative approach with national authorities and international stakeholders has been agreed upon to enhance the outcomes of the Roadmap.

b) Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to ensure that the implementation of the EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap is monitored and that the agreed outputs are reached, the EUAA and the North Macedonia authorities will systematically collect data and information on the implementation of the EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap. The North Macedonia authorities and the EUAA will draw-up reports on the progress of the roadmap implementation at the end of each year. This will allow the relevant North Macedonia authorities and the EUAA to monitor and evaluate the progress in reaching the specified outcomes.

At the conclusion or towards the end of the implementation period of the EUAA – North Macedonia Roadmap, an evaluation of the EUAA's implementation of the roadmap may be conducted. In that case, the North Macedonia authorities will be required to cooperate with the evaluators by sharing, amongst others, monitoring data and information, and participating in interviews, workshops or other means for collecting feedback. The final evaluation report will be shared with the national authorities and will be made publicly available by the EUAA. An updated needs assessment exercise will be conducted at the same time to assess revised needs, with a view to further cooperation.

Regular updates and coordination meetings will facilitate the adjustment of Roadmap activities and implementation to achieve the agreed results and impact.

² <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/external-evaluation-euaas-roadmap-cooperation-north-macedonia>





IV. General Pre-conditions/Assumptions

- o All relevant stakeholders from both EUAA and North Macedonia are committed to participate actively in the agreed activities and to implement the agreed commitments in line with the envisaged timeline;
- o The EUAA and North Macedonia are committed to adjusting the implementation to leverage the experience and knowledge gained from the activities carried out;
- o The EUAA and North Macedonia are committed to maintaining open, two-way communication at the technical level, within the capacity constraints of relevant human resources;
- o Both the EUAA and North Macedonia have allocated sufficient financial and human resources to ensure effective and timely implementation.

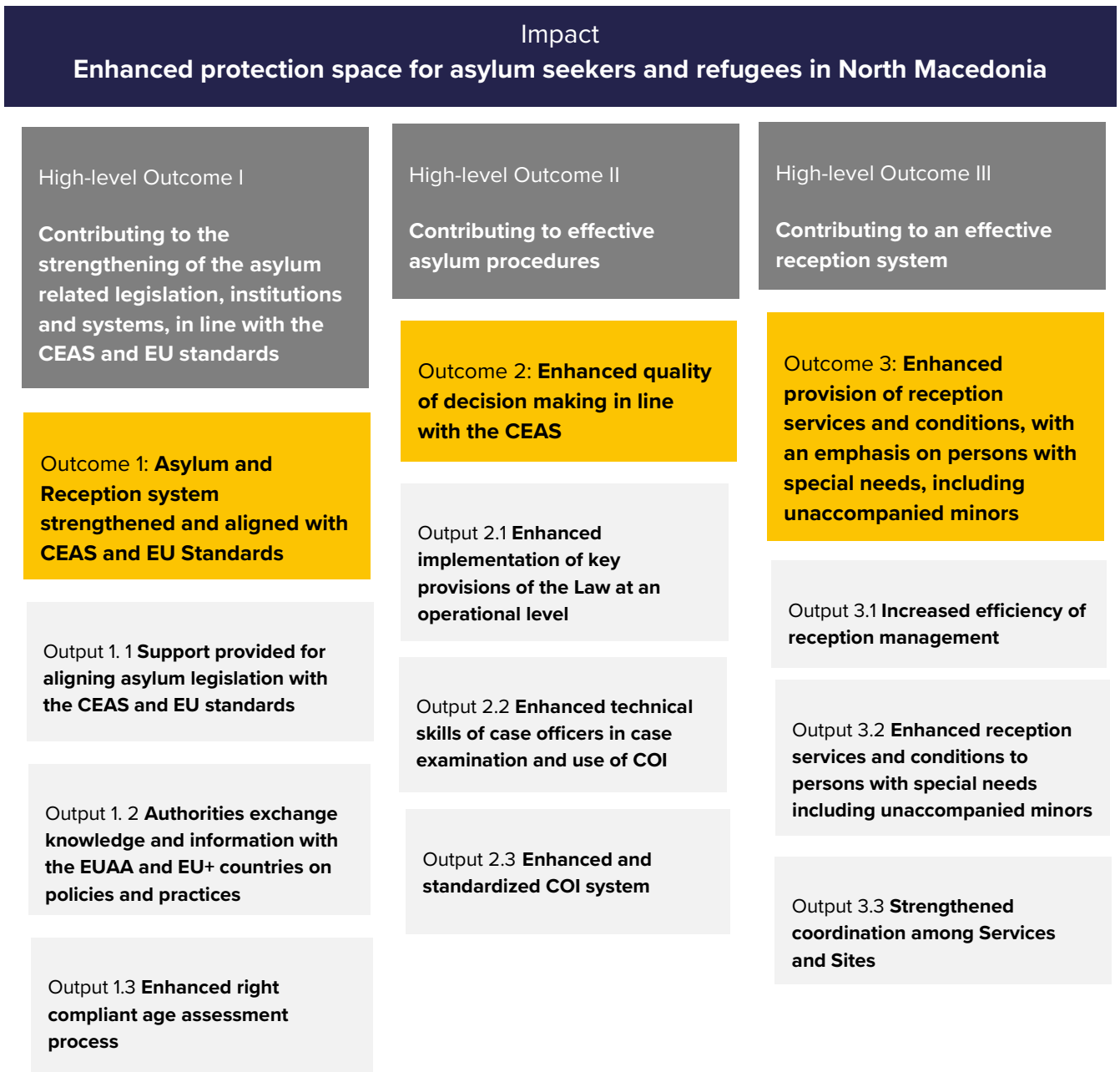
V. Summary

The overall objective of the “Roadmap for Cooperation between the EUAA and North Macedonia (2025 – 2027): strengthening the asylum and reception systems in line with the CEAS and European Union standards” is to enhance the protection space for applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection in North Macedonia in line with the CEAS and EU standards. Based on the evaluation of the previous Roadmap, joint prioritised needs assessment and technical formulation efforts, and with commitment secured from the EUAA and the North Macedonia authorities, the Roadmap will pursue the following high-level outcomes (1) strengthening of asylum related legislation, institutions, and systems in line with the CEAS and EU standards, (2) establishing effective asylum procedures and (3) an effective reception system in North Macedonia. The intervention logic is summarised through the following diagram tree and further elaborated in Section VI with a description of indicative activities that will contribute to the achievement of the agreed outcomes and outputs.





VI. Areas of Priority and Activities





I. Contributing to the strengthening of the asylum related legislation, institutions and systems, in line with the CEAS and EU standards

1. Asylum and Reception system strengthened and aligned with CEAS and EU Standards	
Outputs (expected results)	<p>Output 1.1. Support provided for aligning asylum legislation with the CEAS and EU standards</p> <p>Output 1.2 Authorities exchange knowledge and information with the EUAA and EU+ countries on policies and practices</p> <p>Output 1.3 Enhanced right compliance age assessment process for North Macedonia</p>
Responsible Authorities/Target groups	<p>Ministry of Interior</p> <p>Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth</p>
Description and assessment of the situation/ EUAA added value	<p>The Law on International and Temporary Protection adopted in April 2018, is largely aligned with the EU acquis, though gaps remain in its implementation. The current legislation lacks provisions for alternatives to detention. The law provides for family reunification, with refugees granted immediate access, while those under subsidiary protection must wait two years. Given that subsidiary protection is now the predominant form of protection, including for unaccompanied minors, these delays impact the right to family unity and may contravene the principle of the best interests of the child.</p> <p>To address these issues, national authorities plan to review the legislative framework in 2025 to ensure full alignment with the EU acquis. This review aims to close existing gaps, particularly in protections for vulnerable groups. The EUAA can support this process by providing recommendations, as identified during the Senior Officials Meeting in Malta in 2023. As the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum will considerably reform the CEAS, and as preparations for its application progress, the implementation of this Roadmap will also take these developments into account as appropriate. The authorities' efforts to align with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and consider potential amendments in line with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum can be further strengthened through exposure to best practices from EU Member States. This can be achieved via peer-to-peer learning initiatives and study visits, providing valuable insights and practical experience to support the implementation of reforms</p>
Pre-condition(s)/ Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorities should ensure the availability of adequate and committed human resources.





	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National authorities committed to development of the right compliance age assessment process and a Working Group on Age Assessment is established
Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation of managers, officials in newly developed training products on the Pact on Migration and Asylum. Expert advice on the CEAS, and support the review of national legislative proposals, with consideration for possible amendments in line with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum Translation of relevant EUAA Practical Guides, tools Authorities informed on EU Member States' discussions and practices related to Reception and Asylum through participation in specific EUAA thematic networks Expert assistance in developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), instruments, and tools for age assessment
Description of the activities	<p>Output 1.1. Support provided for aligning asylum legislation with the CEAS and EU standards</p> <p><i>Activity 1.1.1. Participation in EUAA trainings/webinars on relevant parts of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum to help officials gain an understanding of the new legal frameworks and their practical implications, in the context of the EUAA regional training plan</i></p> <p><i>Activity 1.1.2. Expert advice on the CEAS, and support the review of national legislative proposals, complementing Commission and EU Delegation-led initiatives, with consideration for possible amendments in line with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum</i></p> <p><i>Activity 1.1.3. Translation of relevant EUAA Practical Guides, tools</i></p> <p>Output 1.2 Authorities exchange knowledge and information with the EUAA and EU+ countries on policies and practices</p> <p><i>Activity 1.2.1. Participation in specific EUAA thematic networks and other exchange opportunities with EU+ countries (e.g., peer-to-peer learning, study visits) to gain insights into best practices and policies in asylum and reception management.</i></p> <p>Output 1.3 Enhanced right compliant age assessment process</p> <p><i>Activity 1.3.1. Follow-up support providing expert assistance in developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), instruments, and tools for age assessment.</i></p>
Synergies	EUAA expert advice on the CEAS will complement Commission and EU Delegations-led initiatives (e.g. TAIEX)





II. Contributing to effective asylum procedures

2. Enhanced quality of decision making in line with the CEAS	
Output (expected results)	<p>Output 2.1 Enhanced implementation of key provisions of the Law at an operational level</p> <p>Output 2.2 Enhanced technical skills of case officers in case examination and use of COI</p> <p>Output 2.3 Enhanced and standardised COI system</p>
Responsible Authorities/ target group	Ministry of Interior
Description and assessment of the situation/ EUAA added value	<p>The Asylum Sector within the Ministry of the Interior remains the primary authority responsible for overseeing asylum procedures.</p> <p>The second-generation Roadmap delivered significant progress, building upon the foundational work of its first phase. Key achievements included the translation and dissemination of practical guides on Personal Interviews, Evidence Assessment, Qualification for International Protection, and Exclusion, alongside expert support and on-the-job coaching. These initiatives enabled the authorities to adopt and implement Standard Operating Procedures on registration and examination of asylum applications, which are now integral to the day-to-day functioning of the Asylum Sector. After one year of implementation of the SOPs, they have enhanced the consistency and quality of asylum claim registrations. Feedback from the asylum sector staff also indicated that these structured guidelines significantly increased both confidence and efficiency in decision-making processes.</p> <p>However, as highlighted in the latest EC report³, challenges remain. The implementation of asylum procedures is not yet fully aligned with EU acquis, and concerns persist regarding the quality and timeliness of asylum decisions. Procedures frequently extend beyond the time limits set by the APD, with some cases lasting several years. Strengthening the administrative capacity, particularly in the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, remains a challenge, as it is essential for ensuring high-quality processing. A high proportion of those granted subsidiary protection are vulnerable, including unaccompanied minors, but decisions often rely on humanitarian grounds rather than a thorough assessment of individual merits.</p> <p>Improving the efficiency and quality of personal interviews and decision-making was identified as a key priority during the 2023 SOM between the</p>

³ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2023_en





	<p>EUAA and North Macedonia. To address this, the EUAA can develop legal guidance on the five Convention grounds, as well as create, translate, and disseminate tools and practical guides to assist caseworkers in case examinations. This would be supported by on-the-job coaching, workshops, and study visits to selected EU Member States. Additionally, the Agency can strengthen COI functions by enhancing COI filing systems, delivering thematic workshops, revising Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in line with the upcoming 2025 legislative review, and facilitating regional exchanges. Together, these efforts aim to improve decision-making efficiency and ensure greater alignment with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).</p>
<p>Pre-conditions(s)/ Assumptions</p>	<p>National authorities committed to enhancing the decision-making process at first instance and their COI system</p>
<p>Deliverables</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a legal guidance on the five Convention grounds, • Support in development or revision of existing SOPs such as on registration and examination in view of the upcoming review of the legislative framework in 2025 • Delivery of thematic workshops or exchanges on legal or procedural aspects in agreement and identified with the authorities. • On the job coaching in an EU Member State or with EUAA expert(s) for enhancing case officers' technical skills on case examination • Participation in EUAA trainings in accordance with EUAA regional training plan and the authorities' needs. • Enhance COI-related technical skills, in line with EUAA COI methodology with participation in workshops or study visits to selected EUMS • Strengthening of COI and Country Guidance capacities through participation in regional workshops and/or COI country briefings • Enhanced COI filing system
<p>Description of the activities and indicative timeline</p>	<p>Output 2.1 Enhanced implementation of key provisions of the Law at an operational level</p> <p><i>Activity 2.1.1. Development of tools to support case officers in their daily tasks, including legal guidance on the five Convention grounds.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.1.2 Support in development or revision of existing SOPs such as the revision of the SOPs on registration and examination, to assess usability and support to identify possible updates in view of the upcoming review of the legislative framework in 2025 by the national authorities</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.1.3. Thematic workshops on specific legal or procedural aspects identified and agreed with the authorities.</i></p> <p>Output 2.2 Enhanced technical skills of case officers in case examination and use of COI</p> <p><i>Activity 2.2.1 On-the-job coaching with EUAA expert(s) or with an EU Member State, focusing on enhancing skills in interview</i></p>





	<p><i>techniques, evidence assessment, decision making, and COI basic research and preparation.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.2.2 Participation in EUAA trainings, in line with the needs of the Sector for Asylum and in accordance with the EUAA regional training plan for Western Balkans, including participation in EUAA Trainers' curriculum session</i></p> <p>Output 2.3 Enhanced and standardised COI system</p> <p><i>Activity 2.3.1 Workshop(s) on EUAA COI Methodology.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.3.2 Coaching/Expert support or study visits on best practices in management of COI</i></p> <p><i>Activity 2.3.3 Participation in regional activities, including Country Guidance workshops and COI country briefings</i></p>
Synergies	Explore collaboration with UNHCR in planned series of workshops on legal guidance or in the development of the legal guidance on the five grounds

III. Contributing to an effective reception system

<h2>3. Enhanced provision of reception services and conditions, with an emphasis on persons with special needs, including unaccompanied minors</h2>	
Expected results (outputs)	<p>Output 3.1 Increased efficiency of reception management</p> <p>Output 3.2 Enhanced reception services and conditions to persons with special needs including unaccompanied minors</p> <p>Output 3.3 Strengthened coordination among Services and Sites</p>
Responsible Authorities/Target Groups	Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth





<p>Description and assessment of the situation/ added value EUAA</p>	<p>The Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics, and Youth (MSPDY), along with the Vizbegovo Reception Center for Asylum Seekers and the Centre for Social Work—both managed by the MSPDY—remain the key partners for reception cooperation under the Roadmap. The reception center operates with 14 staff members and can house up to 150 individuals. While minimum reception conditions are met, there are areas where staffing levels, coordination mechanisms and support for individuals with special needs, particularly unaccompanied minors, could be strengthened to enhance effectiveness.</p> <p>A field visit to the asylum reception center in Vizbegovo in February 2024 provided valuable insights into these challenges and helped shape targeted interventions aimed at improving reception services, particularly for individuals with special needs. The findings from this visit, along with insights from a needs assessment survey that was developed to capture the specific needs and the challenges faced by the Western Balkan counterparts in reception management, feedback from a Training Needs Assessment exercise, and further discussions and consultations between the EUAA and the MSPDY, have informed the priority cooperation areas under the current Roadmap.</p> <p>Improving reception conditions has been one of the priority areas in the EUAA-North Macedonia Roadmap for Cooperation. Although the Practical Guidance on Reception Conditions for Unaccompanied Children was translated and disseminated in Macedonia, its full implementation was hindered by COVID-19-related travel restrictions and human resource limitations at the EU Agency. Despite these challenges, initial groundwork was laid, with one expert from the EUAA Asylum Knowledge Center assigned to support activities related to reception.</p> <p>Capacity development activities under this Roadmap will build on the support already provided and address identified areas for improvement in North Macedonia’s reception system. This includes exploring opportunities for further capacity-building initiatives, strengthening the overall management of the reception system, and enhancing the management of vulnerabilities and persons with special needs.</p>
<p>Pre-conditions(s)</p>	<p>National authorities committed to enhancing the standards for reception conditions in line with the EU and EUAA standards on reception conditions, while ensuring adequate human resources available.</p>
<p>Deliverables</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development and implementation of general reception protocols, workflows or standard operating procedures for prioritised thematic areas • Support with the implementation and use of the Assessment of Reception Conditions (ARC) tool • Introduction and support in the implementation of EUAA Vulnerability toolkit (IPSN, SNVA, Referral and the Vulnerability Pre-Identification tool)





	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and translation of the EUAA Guidance on Vulnerability in Asylum and Reception; Operational standards and indicators • Reception officers to participate in EUAA Training, in line with the EUAA regional training plan and the authorities' needs. • Support the development a comprehensive referral system to address the needs of individuals with special requirements, including in order to ensure 24/7 health care provision and services
<p>Description of the activities</p>	<p>Output 3.1 Increased efficiency of reception management</p> <p><i>Activity 3.1.1. Support the development of general reception protocols, workflows or standard operating procedures for prioritised thematic areas, followed by necessary workshops, on the job coaching or mentoring.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 3.1.2. Support with the implementation of the Assessment of Reception Conditions (ARC) tool in order to provide qualitative assessment and monitoring of CEAS</i></p> <p>Output 3.2 Enhanced reception services for persons with special needs, including unaccompanied minors.</p> <p><i>Activity 3.2.1 Introduction of the EUAA vulnerability toolkit (IPSN, SNVA, Referral, and the Vulnerability Pre-Identification tool), and of the EUAA Guidance on Vulnerability in Asylum and Reception, followed by support in implementation at the national level through workshops and/or on-the-job coaching sessions.</i></p> <p><i>Activity 3.2.2 Participation in EUAA trainings, in line with the EUAA regional training plan for Western Balkans and the needs of the national authorities</i></p> <p>Output 3.3 Strengthened coordination among Sites and Services</p> <p><i>Activity 3.3.1 Support the development of a comprehensive referral system to address the needs of individuals with special requirements, - including unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers residing outside institutional accommodation-, including in order to ensure 24/7 health care provision and services</i></p>
<p>Synergies</p>	



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