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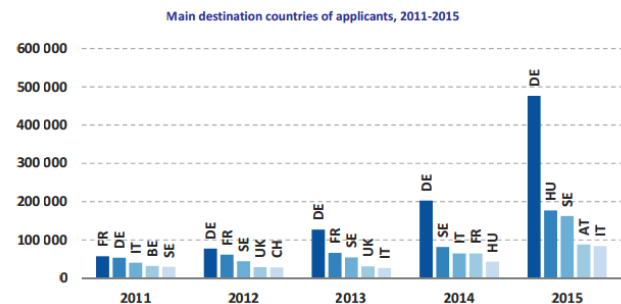
## Executive Summary

On 4 June 2013, EASO and Italy signed a Special Support Plan which provided for EASO special support to Italy, until the end of 2014, in a number of prioritized areas, such as data collection and analysis, Country of Origin Information (COI), Dublin system, reception system and emergency capacity, and training of independent judiciary. Anticipating the implementation of the new EU asylum package while facing large fluctuations in the number of arrivals of immigrants together with the need of keeping a high standard asylum and reception process, have motivated Italy to ask EASO for assistance in reinvigorating its asylum and reception systems.

On 11 March 2015, EASO and Italy signed Phase 2 of the Special Support Plan, continuing the operational support to the National Asylum Commission, building on the COI research capacity and providing for joint processing of pending cases in the Dublin procedure.

This tailor-made support to Italy was implemented over a period of 12 months. The support focused on long-term operational support for the Italian Territorial Commissions and Sections and National Asylum Committee in the field of: Country of Origin Information (COI) and administrative preparation of the asylum files; tackling of the existing backlog of pending cases in the Dublin procedure; and strengthening the capacity of reception measures (such as those for unaccompanied minors). Moreover, trainings provided by EASO intended to raise efficiency while maintaining and further developing the quality of refugees' status determination procedure (RSD) and increasing the capacity building of the COI Unit.

At the end of 2015, the number of persons awaiting a decision on their application for international protection in the EU+ passed the one million. The volume of pending applications more than doubled compared to the previous year. Italy was one of five main EU+ countries receiving most applications for international protection with 83 540 applications lodged in 2015. The migration flow towards Italy continued the year after, reaching 123 370 applications lodged in 2016. As a result of this considerable increase, the stock of pending cases in Italy (all instances) was of 61 155 cases by the end of December 2015 and of 99 920 cases by the end of December 2016.



Source: 2015 EASO Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU

With the unprecedented influx of applicants for international protection in 2015, a relocation programme<sup>1</sup> was agreed to support 'frontline' Member States – Italy and Greece. Due to this fact, the Special Support Plan was amended in September 2015. Some of the activities initially planned were postponed or changed; and the implementation phase was finally extended until the end of 2016.

It could be assumed that by December 2016 a significant improvement was made in several domains, especially when it concerns COI and the training management. More efforts are required however for the establishment of the reception system and the enhancement of the Dublin Unit, as well as the restructuring of the Territorial Commissions for the recognition of the international protection. To maintain the positive results of the 20 implemented activities, further support from EASO would be desirable in parallel with the implementation of ongoing structural changes in the Italian asylum and reception systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece, OJ L 239, 15.9.2015, p. 146–156. ( 6 ) Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece, OJ L 248, 24.9.2015, p. 80–94.

## 1. Background information

EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 2 (SSP to Italy Phase 2) was signed on 11 March 2015 by email correspondence between the Executive Director of EASO and the Head of Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration in the Italian Ministry of Interior. It was a continuation of the EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 1, in order to ensure sustainability of the good results achieved during 2013-2014 and to adequately address the challenges along the South Mediterranean migration route. It focused on three main areas, namely:

- Capacity building and COI for the National Asylum Commission (*hereinafter* referred to as 'NAC') and Territorial Commissions (*hereinafter* referred to as 'TCs') for the recognition of the international protection;
- Joint processing of the incoming and outgoing Dublin requests in the Italian Dublin Unit;
- Reception and unaccompanied minors (UAMs).

These areas were divided into **6 measures covering 24 activities**.

The initial plan was to deploy 74 Member State (MS) experts in support teams to Italy, to invite 5 MS experts as trainers in Malta and 117 Italian experts to professional development activities and study visits.

The main expected outcome was to ensure sustainability of the results achieved by the EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 1, which was implemented from June 2013 to December 2014.

Due to the enduring migration crises, which raised early after the signature of SSP to Italy Phase 2, and the related need to further increase the capacity to perform new duties linked to the relocation activities, the SSP Phase 2 was amended by EASO through an Addendum on 21 September 2015. EASO Executive Director decided to apply the flexibility clause in chapter 1.2 of the agreed text of EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 2 and to deploy Member States expertise under the specific measures EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 2 (Measures IT1, IT2 and IT3), until the end of 2015, confirming the introduction of EASO support with the pre-identification and management of asylum-seekers phases of the Hotspot approach.

Initially, the SSP to Italy Phase 2 was planned to end by 11 March 2016. However, because of the situation described above, it was necessary to postpone some activities; furthermore, as the substantial savings caused



by e.g. fewer deployments, changed priorities on the Italian side, were available, the SSP Phase 2 was prolonged until the end of 2016.

The above changes had an impact mostly on the activities under the measures IT1, IT2 and IT3.

The SPP to Italy Phase 2 targeted the following stakeholders:

- Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration (DCLI);
- National Asylum Commission (NAC);
- Territorial Commissions for the recognition of the international protection (TC);
- Prefectures.

Chapter 3 of the EASO SSP to Italy Phase 2 describes the various measures to support the Italian authorities in the field of international protection and reception. Main support areas were the following:

**EASO Measure IT1:** Support Italian Territorial Commissions;

**EASO Measure IT2:** Support Italian Dublin Unit;

**EASO Measure IT3:** Strengthen the reception capacity, in particular with regard to UAMs;

**EASO Measure IT4:** Support the capacity building in the COI Unit;

**EASO Measure IT5:** Professional development activities and study visits;

**EASO Measure IT6:** Mid-term review and final evaluation of the implementation of the EASO Special Support Plan to Italy.

## 2. Evaluation of the Special Support Plan Phase 2

During 12 - 16 December 2016, EASO conducted a final evaluation of the EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 2 (implemented during March 2015 – December 2016) with the aim to assess the performance of the activities, as well as to identify key lessons learned and to propose practical recommendations for the follow-up actions. This Evaluation Report may constitute a basis for future EASO tailor-made plans to Italy, and at the same time, it can be used as an unbinding list of suggestions for the Italian authorities.

### 2.1. Evaluation criteria

The assessment of all five measures detailed in the EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 2 was assessed based on the following performance criteria:

- Relevance – the extent to which the objectives or results of the operational support remain consistent with beneficiaries' needs;
- Effectiveness – the extent to which the operational support achieved the expected results or achieved its objective;
- Efficiency – refers to sound management and value for money – how well the available resources (funds, expertise and time) were converted into the intended results in terms of quantity, quality, and timeliness;
- Impact – the extent to which the objective of the operational support have been achieved as intended; effects produced by the operational support, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally;
- Sustainability – whether the positive outcomes of the project and flow of benefits are like to continue after EASO support ends.

### 2.2. Methodology

The evaluation was carried out over a period of five calendar days (12 - 16 December 2016) in Rome, Italy by a team of five experts coming from four Member States, who were not involved in the practical application of any support measure of the SSP to Italy Phase 2, and with the support of Italian and EASO officials.

The Member States experts deployed by EASO for this evaluation worked in three groups:

AST 1 - assessing measures IT1, IT4 and IT5 – evaluators: Ms [REDACTED] (SK), Ms [REDACTED] (PL), and Mr [REDACTED] (RO);



AST 2 - assessing measure IT2 – evaluators: Ms [REDACTED] (NL) and Mr [REDACTED] (RO);

AST 3 - assessing measure IT3 – evaluators: Ms [REDACTED] (PL) and Ms [REDACTED] (SK).

Due to time constraints and to limited availability of Italian counterparts directly involved in the implementation of activities, the evaluation methodology relied on a mixture of data collection and analysis methods, including:

- **Desk review** – of background information and existing documentation (both quantitative and qualitative) related to the EASO Special Support Plan, including final reports of Member States experts who have participated in the implementation of different measures;
- **Key informant interviews** – with stakeholders having first-hand knowledge about the operations and its outputs to obtain more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the operations, including its successes and challenges and potential solutions (required means to verify or corroborate);
- **Focus group** – small group discussion to explore stakeholders assessment of the operations;
- **Discussion workshop** – to present the draft report to the main stakeholders to check the factual basis of the evaluation and to discuss the findings and recommendations.

### 3. Evaluation Findings and Recommendations

#### 3.1. EASO Support Measure IT1 - Support Italian Territorial Commissions

##### 3.1.1. Short description of context and activities

Capacity-building support under the measure IT1 aimed to increase the efficiency and quality of the Italian asylum procedure at the level of the TCs for the recognition of the international protection through the implementation of the following three activities:

1. Setting up a training plan for TCs with a focus on COI;
2. Organising a practical COI seminar;
3. Directly supporting the daily activities of TCs, e.g. preparation of the files and processing of the applications for international protection.

The first two activities related to COI were implemented in close connection with the activities under measure IT4 (Support the capacity building in COI) and measure IT5 (Professional development activities and study visits).

The following deliverables were expected at the end of the implementation of this measure:

1. A training plan for using COI in the Territorial Commissions and Sections, drafted in cooperation with the COI Unit in the National Asylum Commission;
2. One practical COI meeting for TCs;
3. Experts deployed directly to each TCs (*20 at that time*) to support the daily work;
4. Increase the capacity of the Italian asylum authorities and perform additional tasks in line with the Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 (this new objective was introduced by the Addendum signed on 21 September 2015).

##### 3.1.2. Results achieved and lessons learned

## Results

EASO deployed two experts to TC Verona and TC Roma under the activity 3 – capacity building. A preparatory meeting took place in Malta on 17 April 2015, in order to prepare for the mission statement of this activity and define a clear mandate of the expert's involvement in this support activity. Experts' role was defined to support the daily activity of the TCs in preparation of the files/processing of applications for international protection. Registration and case prioritisation, relevant COI checks and vulnerability assessment were defined as part of the practical support. Both experts were supporting TCs not only in their daily work by providing specific ad hoc advice and practical support, but also by bringing their experience and new ideas on how to increase the efficiency and quality of the Italian asylum system.

From 30 April to 30 June 2015, one Member state expert (UK) was deployed to TC in Verona with the aim to support the daily activity of the TC in preparation of the files and processing of applications for international protection; more specifically case prioritisation, relevant COI checks and vulnerability assessment. For the same support, another Member state expert (BE) was deployed to TC in Rome from 14 April to 12 June 2015. Both experts were deployed based on their specific professional competencies (excellent knowledge of the international protection procedure, interview techniques and vulnerability assessment, specialisation in COI) and good knowledge of the Italian language to interact with the hosting authorities. During their deployment, they provided several trainings for up to 20 employees per session, more concretely:

- 1 COI specific training and region of origin assessment on Mali in TC Rome (06/05/2015);
- 1 training on Interviewing techniques, vulnerability and mentality in TC Rome (25 - 27/05/2015);
- 1 COI related meeting, including interview techniques in TC Verona (29/05/2015).

*N.B. For trainings, see also measure IT4.*

In terms of relevant COI checks, a daily support in administration (e.g. gathering and arranging of available COI reports in TCs) coaching and advising, including drafting of supporting guides, was provided regularly during the deployment of both experts in TC Rome and TC Verona, in total for 60 days each expert.

The deployed Member States experts produced different type of guidelines, such as:

- Presentazione "EASO Mali";
- "Mali – COI in italiano e domande su Gao" (Mali – COI in Italian and questions on Gao);
- Presentazione "EASO audizioni – tecniche, vulnerabilità e mentalità";
- Presentazione "Importanza dell'informazione sui paesi di origine (COI) e del suo utilizzo" (presentation on the importance of COI and its use);
- Progetto questionario : "Linee guida", "Questionario";

- “Domande su opinione politica e religione” (questions on political opinion);
- “Domande sulla religione/conversion” (questions on religion/conversions) ;
- Organizzazione dei fascicoli.

*N.B. Detailed information may be found in the Final Reports of the deployed experts.*

A training plan solely focusing on COI was not drafted. However it is a part of a general annual training plan as described in the measure IT5.

In terms of vulnerability assessment, the deployed experts supported the members of the TCs in understanding the particularities of identifying and interviewing vulnerable persons, during three different training sessions. The focus was on interview techniques, mentality and vulnerability. Around fifteen people attended. The result was positively welcomed and debates spontaneously emerged.

In terms of preparation of the files and processing of applications for international protection, the deployed experts supported the members of the TCs to prepare the interviews in an appropriate manner in order to improve both quality and quantity of the process. Support was given to set up a systematic structure in the paper files and the experts drafted proposals for a more efficient use based on the Member States best practices. The experts prepared lists of standard questions to be addressed in the interviews, covering topics like political opinions / events, sexual identity assessment, as well as religious beliefs / conversions. The latter proved to be particularly helpful for interviews where claims of conversion from Islam to Christianity or from Sunni to Shia Muslims were made as well as to deal with the numerous claims including a religious component. As a result, there are now more focused interviews and interviewers with a better understanding of such issues.

A crucial need for preparation of interviews and case prioritisation was identified. Given that basic information on the reasons for applying for international protection was systematically missing in the registration papers filled in by the Questura (the so-called “C3 form”), in close cooperation with Prefetto Trovato (Head of NAC) and local UNHCR representative, EASO expert developed a project to address this critical topic. A questionnaire and specific guidelines were drafted and a sample of asylum seekers was selected. The expert carried out pre-interviews with them and the results of those interviews were presented to the examiners in charge of the actual asylum procedure. The final goal was to help them preparing both questions and COI before the interview. The ultimate aim of this pilot project was to use its conclusions, in order to support the implementation of basic questions upon registration.

As regards the specific tasks on registration of applications for international protection in view of the relocation process, EASO deployed experts to Lampedusa, Villa Sikania, Rome and Milano from September

2015. EASO launched specific requests to the Member States based on their pledges to the call for experts, asking for specific availability of experts to be deployed in Italy. Mention is made that a new implementation partner for this specific activity was identified, namely the local Questura in charge with the registration of applications for international protection, paving the way for EASO to support the so-called Hotspot approach in the European Agenda for Migration.

### *Lessons learned*

- The key beneficiaries of all activities under the measure IT1 were members of TCs. Each TC is chaired by a deputy prefect and is composed of a representative of the local police headquarter, a representative of the municipality and a representative of UNHCR. While in 2005 there were only 7 TCs in Italy, the number of TCs increased from 20 to 40 during 2015 and up to 48 TCs in 2017. Some new TCs may be still established because of the continuing migration flows. A persisting challenge is a high level of rotation within TCs, especially in regards representative of the local police headquarter, as well as a fact that not all TCs members are dealing only with asylum issues. This has a considerable impact on a workflow and it requires permanent trainings of newcomers. The evaluation teams learnt that there is an ongoing process at the high level of the Italian authorities aimed to address these challenges.
- Three activities under this measure, as envisaged in the initial support plan, were sometimes overlapping during the implementation, e.g. practical COI meeting (activity 2) was provided directly by the deployed experts in TCs (activity 3). The main drive seemed to be the intention to use the knowledge and capacity of both experts at the maximum.
- Due to the fact that both TCs (in Verona and in Rome) were confronted with very similar challenges (e.g. lack of information contained in the applicants' files which should be a part of the registration papers (C3 form) filled in by the police (Questura), such as the grounds of application; untranslated documents, both deployed experts were closely cooperating.

This collaboration was very effective and resulted in several common products, more precisely:

- A lists of core questions (e.g. on political opinions, religious beliefs and sexual identity) which should be asked during the pre-interviews at the level of the Questura; and then the answer included into the so-called C3 was drafted (so called Progetto questionario: "Linee guida" "Questionario");
- The outcomes and documents from the COI trainings in TC Rome were shared with TC Verona and vice versa, thus avoiding duplication.
- The evaluation team learned during the interviews held with the Head of the National Asylum Commission prefetto [REDACTED], the staff members of NAC, as well directly from the Head of Territorial Commission Rome that, in general, the relevant stakeholders have received very well the support

provided by EASO deployed experts. Guidance, advice and coaching prior, during and after interviews proved to be very effective methods of providing support. References to EASO practical guides and EU Member States best practices were made, which positively influenced the understanding for further development of the Common European Asylum System.

- However, as underlined during the interviews and in the final reports of deployed experts, in some TCs the language barrier (English) has been a challenge for the implementation of the support measures. It was also one of the reasons why the expert deployed to Verona was later transferred to NAC in Rome, where he was very much involved in the further establishment of the COI Unit (see measure IT4). Due regard should be given to the fact that the implementation of the remaining support component of measure IT1 could not be achieved because of the lack of available expertise in the Member States matching the strong language requirement by the hosting authorities. In this context, EASO launched a specific call for experts mentioning the need for 20 experts in Local Territorial Commissions and Sections. In total 2 MS (BE, UK) replied to this call for experts (measure IT1), nominating 4 experts. Only 2 experts could be deployed.

### 3.1.3. Evaluation criteria

Measure IT 1: Support Italian Territorial Commissions	
<b>Relevance</b>	A high level of rotation within TCs, especially when it concerns the representative of the local police headquarter remains a challenge. It is directly linked with the persisting need for further training of newcomers, including COI, in order to perform a high quality asylum procedure.
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<p>Only 2 out of 20 experts were deployed directly to TCs, namely to TC Roma and Verona. However, those two experts provided significant support behind the tasks required in the deployment, what was very much welcome by Italian stakeholders.</p> <p>Several COI meetings and trainings, and different types of documents, were provided and produced during the implementation.</p> <p>Even though a specific training plan focused only on COI (activity 1) was not drafted, it seems that such plan was no longer deemed necessary, as a general training plan prepared at the level of NAC exists (see measure IT4).</p>
<b>Impact</b>	It is certain that the performance of two deployed experts, including the provision of trainings and guides, helped to streamline the workflow at two TCs and contributed to

	<p>higher asylum procedure quality. While some proposals might not be easily implemented in the existing system, e.g. pre-interviews, they may present thoughts for further considerations.</p> <p>The fact that this support was provided only at two TCs is however a weak point.</p>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>It is evident that only by the reinforcement of the TCs in the term of staff or by their further specialisation solely on asylum issues, will it be possible to stabilize workflow within the TCs. To continue the training of TCs staff is eminent. In this context, the existence of the Italian National Contact point for trainings within the NAC, who is in charge of trainings coordination, is crucial. However, a close cooperation and exchange of the needs between TCs and NAC is necessary in order to maintain efficiency while providing trainings (see measure IT5)</p>

#### 3.1.4. Key recommendations

The need for further capacity building support at the level of TCs is well-known. So far the deployment via EASO was very limited – only 2 out of 20 TCs (at that time) were supported. Thus, it is recommended:

Short-term recommendations:

- To deploy Member States experts to each TCs, e.g. in the setup of mid-term deployments, with the aim to support TCs on a daily basis. However, language should be taken into the consideration and therefore the preference should be given to Italian-speaking experts in order to achieve expected results.

Medium and long-term recommendations:

- Reinforcement of TCs, either by increasing members assigned with specific asylum related tasks or by specialisations only on asylum issues;
- Continuing capacity building by different trainings, e.g. on top countries of origin, interview techniques etc. (see also measure IT4).

#### 3.1.5. Conclusions

The support given to the Territorial Commissions was in line with the expectations detailed in the Special Support Plan Phase 2 only to some extent. Two out of 20 TCs (at that time) received the support. While assessing the activities conducted in those two TCs, it could be said, that the objectives were reached, except

for the training plan focused on COI, which was however incorporated in a general training plan (see measure IT5).

The feedback received from the Italian stakeholders was very positive. In order to use the momentum and lessons learnt, to maintain and further promote the positive results, EASO support should be extended to other TCs, taking into the consideration language related challenges. From the longer perspective, the ongoing discussion on the composition of the TCs, if later implemented, could become a real solution for a sustainable high quality procedure for international protection in Italy.

## **3.2. EASO Support Measure IT 2 - Support Italian Dublin Unit**

### **3.2.1. Short description of context and activities**

EASO and Italy have practiced the joint processing of Dublin-related case already in June 2014. Training and practical skills were further developed during the implementation of the SSP Phase 1. In July 2015, the new Eurodac Regulation came into force. Furthermore, the backlog of cases continued to be a burden for the Italian Mol. The activities envisaged under this measure aimed to the following deliverables:

1. To enhance the capacity of the Dublin Unit to tackle pending cases;
2. To put in place a harmonized procedure while dealing with the Dublin files;
3. To jointly process pending Dublin cases, eventually in cooperation with UNHCR;
4. To increase the capacity of the Italian Dublin Unit and perform additional tasks in line with the Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 (this new objective was introduced by the Addendum signed on 21 September 2015).

It was expected that deployed expert teams would work together with the colleagues in the Italian Dublin Unit for a limited period and jointly process the incoming and outgoing Dublin requests. Furthermore, EASO experts, in close cooperation with the Italian Dublin Unit, were assigned to explore the possible alternative patterns of the overhead activity of the unit, in order to streamline the whole process and to enhance the relevant results. The changes necessary to deliver the new EPS indicators according to the proposed timeframe were considered. All complex aspects (i.e. processing of judicial reviews, drafting of reports, analysis of EU and national documents, drafting of projects) were supposed to be taken into account in addition to the processing of the Dublin cases.

Aside the joint processing, the following deliverables were expected at the end of the implementation of this measure:



1. An evaluation report of the operational results of the first phase of the joint processing;
2. Training on the implementation of the Eurodac Regulation, especially concerning data transmission, subject to the prior agreement with the Police Department of the Ministry of Interior;
3. A technical handbook, describing the procedure in the framework of the Italian system, as well as clearly setting out the different technical steps of the procedure in compliance with the overall Italian ICT system (Vestanet and DubliNet).

### 3.2.2. Results achieved and lessons learned

#### Results

The achieved results during the implementation of the support measure IT2 were the following:

- Joint processing missions for Dublin cases – accomplished.

During the period from 21.04.2015 to 21.05.2015, four experts jointly processed cases together with the caseworkers from the Italian Dublin unit.

Joint processing missions have again been implemented in the period 06.10.2015 to 18.12.2015. According to information provided by EASO expert coordinator, in total 11 experts have been deployed to the Dublin Unit Italy in Rome, during in total 384 days. In this period 4681 Dublin cases have been registered, 1121 rejection and acceptance sent, 651 outgoing cases analysed and notified to different Questura, 42 relocation submissions prepared to be sent, 55 relocation submissions sent, and 219 relocation decisions were issued.

- An evaluation report of the operational results of the first phase of the joint processing was drafted by the earlier mentioned four experts on 01.06.2015;
- Joint processing missions for Dublin cases continued after the Addendum and an evaluation report was drafted on 23.12.2015;
- The Handbook has been drafted and translated into Italian.

During 21.04.2015 to 21.05.2015, EASO deployed experts drafted a Handbook describing the Italian Dublin and DubliNet procedures. The Handbook has been revised in March 2016, since it is a “living document”. The Handbook has been partially translated into Italian. It is currently in use in the Dublin Unit Italy and new employees are trained on the basis of this book, as mentioned in the interviews with the Head of the Italian Dublin Unit and the senior coordination employees.

- A study visit to the Netherlands was conducted.

The training on Eurodac Regulation was replaced by a Study visit to the Netherlands which the Head of the Italian Dublin Unit and one employee from the same unit attended. Information collected during the study visit has been shared internally in the Italian Dublin Unit, with several occasions of the team meetings.

### *Lessons learned*

Summary of main lessons learned:

- The support of EASO experts has been needed for suitable periods of time. It was very effective and efficient, especially to reduce Dublin cases backlog, but also to deal with relocation cases from October 2015, in the incipient phase.
- The support of an EASO long-term expert, coordinator for AST Dublin, was helpful, as concerns complex cases and assurance of a good communication between EASO experts and the Italian Dublin Unit. There is still a need for further improvement of communication between the Italian Dublin Unit, the Forensic Police, the Dublin Unit in the Police Dept. and the Police (Questura), for an even better processing of Dublin cases within the time limits prescribed by the Regulation.
- A modernization of the databases used by the different stakeholders might improve the communication, regarding quality and velocity of data communication.
- The knowledge gathered during the study visit to the Netherlands has not reached all parties that are involved in Dublin and Eurodac procedure.
- Although the following does not fall in the evaluation period, it is considered of great importance, therefore it is mentioned here: currently, in the Dublin Unit Italy a considerable problem stems from the fact that a large number of Relocation files received in the Dublin Unit are not complete. Missing documents make it impossible to send Relocation requests. Capacity in the Dublin Unit is used for checking the files completeness. If the Questura would send the cases only when they are complete, the workflow in the Dublin Unit Italy could be much more efficiently processed.
- Regarding the Hotspot Relocation Plan, a concrete point was raised during this evaluation: in the Italian Dublin Unit, it was mentioned that EASO experts deployed in Hotspots are not always sufficiently experienced in identifying -Dublin and Relocation cases. This should be a point of attention and followed up in the coming Plan.
- UNHCR is providing trainings to the Questura on access to asylum procedure, registration of asylum claims and assessing best interest of the child principle. However, the Dublin Unit staff are not present during these sessions neither as trainers nor as trainees. Nevertheless, contacts are maintained between UNHCR and the Dublin Unit.

### 3.2.3. Evaluation criteria

<b>Measure IT 2: <i>Support Italian Dublin Unit</i></b>	
<b>Relevance</b>	<p>EASO support addressed an existing need in Italy in processing Dublin cases. Additional or complementary measures need to be put in place, such as: continuing the deployment of experts, for processing Dublin cases but also for training purposes, especially designed for the Questura.</p> <p>For the support to be relevant in the near future, with priority, the deployment of experts should continue for relocation cases, until the end of September 2017 (end of implementation of the two Council Decisions 1523/2015 and 1602/2015).</p>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<p>Joint processing has helped to reduce the backlog of Dublin cases, but also to conduct relocation cases, at an incipient phase.</p> <p>The manual (Handbook) helped to train new employees and to harmonize work procedures.</p> <p>The study visit helped raising awareness about other MS asylum systems and may be an incentive for proposing changes in the Italian system.</p> <p>Italian officials expressed their positive feedback about EASO support.</p> <p>The presence of an EASO expert coordinator has contributed to better communication between experts and local personnel of the Italian Dublin Unit.</p>
<b>Impact</b>	<p>A positive impact of the joint processing activities was that the backlog of the Italian Dublin Unit has been reduced.</p> <p>The Italians officials perceive the participation of different experts from many MS as a positive impact, resulting in a better knowledge of the Italian asylum system and the challenges that they are facing.</p> <p>The support did not contribute to a change of the situation concerning fast and effective communication regarding data between the Police, the Forensic Police and the Dublin Unit.</p>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>The positive outcomes of the project and flow of benefits may continue after EASO support ends, in a long term perspective, if some conditions are met, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gradually increase of human and financial resources;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the training of other stakeholders involved in Dublin procedures, conducted in a continuous program;</li> <li>• improvement of the communication;</li> <li>• assuring uniformity in work procedures between different stakeholders involved in migration and asylum, including international organisations and NGOs.</li> </ul>
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### 3.2.4. Key recommendations

Short-term recommendations:

- Further support to Dublin Unit Italy with relocation cases and, when possible, with Dublin cases backlog;
- Deployment of EASO experts experienced in Dublin procedures (preferably Italian speakers) to major Police Units (Questure) in Italy to act as coordinators for identifying Dublin/relocation cases, giving advice and guidance and acting as an interface with the Dublin Unit Italy. An alternative could be the EASO's experts roving team, with flexibility to move from one Questura to another to perform the above mentioned tasks.

Medium and long-term recommendations:

- Increasing staff of the Dublin Unit Italy to enable them to expand their activities to training sessions (together with the Forensic Police) all over Italy to Police Questure, in order to increase awareness about Dublin procedure, improve gathering of information and the application of Eurodac Regulation;
- Instructions/Guidelines/Training manual for all Police Questure in Italy covering both criteria for identifying Dublin cases in the registration procedure of applicants for international protection and Eurodac Regulation. Technical improvements in VESTANET are required to allow for a more efficient gathering of information for Dublin cases;
- Following and participating in UNHCR training programs regarding Dublin procedure.

### 3.2.5. Conclusions

The support given to the Dublin Italy in accordance to the Special Support Plan has met the needs expressed by Italian officials. The deliverables have been accomplished, except for the training on Eurodac Regulation;

this has not been provided to all stakeholders involved in the Dublin procedure. The impact is positive and the Italian counterpart positively received the results. In the short run, further EASO support will be needed. For sustainability after EASO will end support, some additional measures need to be taken by the Italian officials, especially increasing the personnel of the Italian Dublin Unit.

### **3.3. EASO Support Measure IT 3 - Strengthening the reception capacity, in particular with regard to unaccompanied minors**

#### **3.3.1. Short description of context and activities**

The “*Operational National Plan to face the exceptional flow of third country nationals*” of 10 July 2014 underlines the need for a more structured system for the reception of unaccompanied minors. The SSP Phase 2 aimed to support the Italian Ministry of Interior in the implementation of its plan, in particular with regard to the reception of unaccompanied minors.

Four activities, including translation into Italian of EASO Quality tool on identification of vulnerable persons and EASO Training Module on Reception were envisaged in the SSP Phase 2. More precisely, the following deliverables were planned:

1. Counselling to the management responsible for reception, namely of UAMs and separated children, including on issues such as age and status assessment and family tracing; training needs identified and training agenda agreed;
2. Training sessions organised for staff of reception centres in order to ensure a tailor-made approach to minors in reception;
3. Support given in setting up a national mechanism for age assessment of UAM;
4. Support given in setting up a national mechanism for ensuring the best interest of the child, family tracing and reunification while being accommodated in the SPRAR network.

Based on the information provided by EASO Plan coordinator and the Italian stakeholders, as well as taking into account the materials and reports related to the implementation of the Plan provided by EASO, none of the activities under Measure IT3 were implemented so far.

#### **3.3.2. Result achieved and lessons learned**

## Results

No activities under the Measure IT 3 were implemented from March 2015 to December 2016.

As presented by the EASO Plan coordinator, the reason was the increased migration pressure on Italy, which influenced a change of priorities in area of protection and reception. As a result, the priority of the EASO support was given to the Hotspot - Relocation Operation Plan, which was signed in December 2015. This latter does not include support activities for the reception of asylum seekers.

In the Addendum signed on 21 September 2015, EASO explained that responding to the specific request of the Italian Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration (DCLI) on the need to further increase the capacity of various executive units under the coordination of the DCLI, as per the 'Hotspot' Approach in Italy and the relocation procedure, in line with the Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015, the Executive Director of EASO decided to apply the flexibility clause in chapter 1.2 of the agreed text of EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 2. EASO decided to deploy Member States expertise under the specific measures EASO Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 2 (Measures IT1, IT2 and IT3), until the end of 2015, confirming the introduction of EASO support with this pre-identification and management of asylum-seekers phases of the Hotspot approach. As no activities have been engaged up to September 2015 under support measure IT3, due to the changed needs on the Italian side (activities not relevant anymore), the allocation of resources for supporting capacity building was shifted for the Hotspot approach implementation in 2015.

Moreover the reasons mentioned by one of IT stakeholders was the lack of legal framework setting up the national mechanism of age assessment and putting in place the procedure of identification of the best interest of the child. While steps were undertaken to amend the law, the legislation process has not been finalised yet. For this reason, it was not possible to receive EASO support in this area.

Nevertheless, there are no documents available for experts to confirm this verbal statement. Additionally, the Italian stakeholders did not explain clearly the reason for suspending the support under the Measure IT3.

Only one of the interviewed Italian representatives mentioned that EASO proposed to perform some of the activities from Measure IT3 in December 2016, which was too late for the Italian side.

Therefore, the evaluation of this measure could not take place. For that reason, experts concentrated their work on being acquainted with the reception system, with a special focus on the reception of unaccompanied minors, in order to identify the needs and potential areas of support to the Italian system. Based on interviews with Italian stakeholders, recommendations for future EASO support activities are presented in the report.

### *Lessons learned*

In order to face the increasing flow of UAMs arriving in Italy recorded in the last few years, a new reception system dedicated to minor has been set up in Italy. As of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, the distinction between UAMs and asylum seeking UAMs was gradually overcome, in order to ensure the former wider guarantees. A Special Unit – “Struttura di missione per l’accoglienza dei MSNA” – of the DLCI was established by a Decree of the Minister of Interior (Decree of 29 July 2014, then Decree of 31 July 2015 extended until 29 July 2016), so as to coordinate the setting up of first-assistance reception centers dedicated to UAMs. For this purpose, the Unit has launched calls for tenders under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) emergency measure "Improvement of the Italian territory capacity to accommodate unaccompanied minors" for setting up of specialised centers (maximum of 2 per region) for UAMs throughout Italy to increase the number of facilities within the SPRAR System. Two public notices on 23 December 2014 and 1 April 2015 were launched, which allowed setting up new 737 reception places for UAMs in 15 reception centers located in 9 regions (Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, Liguria, Puglia, Sicily, Tuscany), dedicated to unaccompanied minors from landing or traced on the ground after landing events. The contracts for reception activities in these centers were initially set up until 17 December 2015, but they were extended until 22 February 2016 by the European Commission. Further extension of these activities until 22 August 2016 was granted from the national AMIF resources. As a result of such an extension, currently there are 640 active reception places for UAMs distributed among 13 centers in 7 regions.

As for the secondary level reception, the Ministry of Interior, since the second half of 2014, was responsible for the provision of additional places, numbering 214, in the SPRAR network projects dedicated to children. Subsequently, the capacity of seats in SPRAR network was further expanded with the issuance of a notice (on 27 April 2015) which allowed the activation, from 1 December 2015 until 31 December 2016, of 1010 new places dedicated to minors. In addition to the Ministry, as of 1 January 2015, the National Fund for the reception of unaccompanied minors financially supports the municipalities for the welcome given to minors.<sup>2</sup>

In parallel with the available funding, Italy has approved the Legislative Decree no.142/2015, where art.19, para 1 regulated the reception of unaccompanied minors. In this sense, an agreement with the Minister of Economy and Finance establishing the terms of acceptance and structural standards in government shelters for UAMS was agreed. A call for tender for the creation of the government reception centers for UAMs (a delicate phase of transition to the new system), has been published. The initiative is financed with ordinary

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/verso-un-nuovo-sistema-accoglienza>

resources of the AMIF. To allow the transit of minors from the first to the second host, a new SPRAR tender was also published.

The main challenges in area of reception with special focus on unaccompanied minors have been the following:

- Adaptation of the reception system to the new high numbers – the law amendments are not sufficient;
- As arrivals of UAMs in the Hotspots are regularly reported, the reception capacity for unaccompanied minors, especially on the second level in SPRAR, needs to adequately increase;

The need to improve coordination among all actors involved, especially MSNA, Ministry of Justice, local authorities responsible for legal guardianship and local NGOs.

- Observations and suggestions obtained during the interviews with the stakeholdersThe state of implementation of identification of best interest of child.

Operational guidelines on how to identify the best interest of each child exist and were prepared by UNHCR in cooperation with IT administration. The legislation process is ongoing. UNHCR is conducting targeted trainings on this topic for first line reception centres staff.

- The state of implementation of national mechanism on age assessment.

There is no standardised procedure/mechanism regulated by law on how the age of a migrant child should be assessed. There are some references in Circular No. 17272/7. The amendments to the law on age assessment are prepared and the legislation process is ongoing. Currently, the procedures vary depending on the region. Therefore, the different systems should be mapped to identify best practices to be shared and exchanged. Also some good practices from another countries having the most arrivals by the sea could be identified and shared with Italians.

- Identification of vulnerabilities

With regard to vulnerable groups among asylum seekers, attention is mostly paid to unaccompanied minors. There is also a strong need expressed by some Italian stakeholders to improve the identification of different vulnerable groups, e.g.: victims of human trafficking or LGBT.

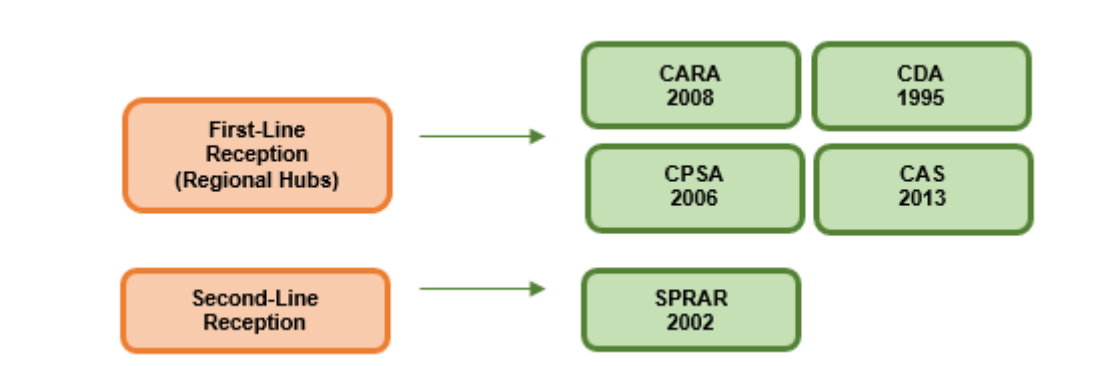
- The Ministry of Labour, based on previous good experience in cooperation with EASO in 2015, expressed the will to receive further support from EASO side such as: assistance in creating a database on unaccompanied minors, which can be a starting point of the distribution mechanism of minors in Italy, expanding the website, creating an application for mobiles phones with most relevant information on protection and reception.



- Based on the experts research, it is recommended to include broader group of recipients of the training than the staff of MOI and the first reception centres (e.g., SPRAR, municipalities).
- The UNHCR is to provide the trainings on the best interest of a child for the staff working in first line reception centres (AMIF centres). While EASO planned to give trainings on best interest of the child, according to the information obtained by experts, the MOI prefers UNHCR to deal with this issue.

### *General description of Italian reception system*

In Italy, there is no unified reception system. The reception system is divided in a first line reception and a second line reception.



Source: AIDA Asylum Information Database, <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/italy/reception-conditions/short-overview-italian-reception-system>

Upon arrival, the adult asylum seekers and migrants may be placed in the following first reception centres:

- Centres for Accommodation of Asylum Seekers (**CARA**). CARA were established in 2008 and replaced previous identification centres;
- Accommodation Centres (**CDA**), created in 1995 for general purposes of accommodation of migrants and also used for asylum seekers;
- First Aid and Reception Centres (**CPSA**), created in 2006 for the purposes of first aid and identification before persons are transferred to other centres;
- Emergency Reception Centres (**CAS**), introduced in October 2013 upon the launch of the *Mare Nostrum* Operation in response to the increasing influx of sea arrivals in Italy.

At the same time, temporary reception centres have also been established for persons returned to Italy under the Dublin Regulation through specific projects.

The first reception is guaranteed in the governmental accommodation centres in order to carry out the necessary operations to define the legal position of the foreigner concerned. It is also guaranteed in the

temporary facilities, specifically set up by the Prefect upon the arrival of a great influx of refugees, due to unavailability of places in the first and second level accommodation centres. Indeed, accommodation in temporary reception structures is limited to the time strictly necessary for the transfer of the applicant in the first or second reception centres.

According to the Italian Roadmap the first reception centres (CARA/CDA and CPSA) are turning into Regional Hubs, which are reception structures where the applicants will formalize their asylum requests through the form C3. Generally, the asylum seekers can stay in these centres for a period ranging from 7 to 30 days and thus ensure a fast turnover of guests.

Second-line reception is mainly provided under the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). The SPRAR, established in 2002, is a publicly funded network of local authorities and NGOs, which accommodates asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. It is formed by small reception structures where assistance and integration services are provided. In contrast to the large-scale buildings provided in CARA, CDA, CPSA and CAS, SPRAR is composed of smaller-scale decentralised projects.

SPRAR should accommodate those destitute asylum seekers that have already formalised their applications. However, in practice due to significant increase in number of immigrants arriving to Italy who apply for asylum, there are not enough places in first line reception centres and asylum seekers/migrants are transferred to SPRAR centres also before the applications are formalised.

#### The specifics of unaccompanied minors' reception system

The responsibilities of Italian authorities on minors are spread. The main reference document for the reception system is article 19 of 142/2015 law.

**Ministry of Labour**, and particularly the Division responsible for integration policies of migrants and protection of UAM, is responsible for the overall monitoring of foreign minors present in Italy, for family tracing activities, assisted voluntary return, decision over a possible conversion of a permit of stay for minor age into a new permit of stay for study / work for minors turning 18. (Source: <http://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Pagine/default.aspx>)

The Ministry of Labour produces a monthly and quarterly report on unaccompanied minors available on <http://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/studi-e-statistiche/Documents/Report%20di%20monitoraggio%20MSNA%2031%20agosto%202016.pdf>.

Report published in October with info on nationalities and age. According to this report **15,883** minors were present in Italy at the end of October. (Source: <http://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Documents/Report-MSNA-31102016.pdf> )

Since 2014 the **Ministry of Interior**, Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration, and particularly the *Struttura di Missione for the reception of UAMs*, is responsible for the management of the first line reception foreseen under art. 19 of decree 142/2015, under the authority of the Ministry of Interior.

As previously mentioned, since then 13 highly specialised structures for around 630 places were made available under AMIF emergency assistance up to August 2016, when the projects were finished.

The plan till the end of 2016 is to have 21 projects financed from AMIF fund with the capacity of 922 places for unaccompanied minors. Most of the centres are operating already. One centre cannot have an accommodation capacity of more than 50 places however; one building according to most of the regional laws can be up to 30 places. In some of the regions the capacity of one building cannot exceed 8 places.

The services provided in the “AMIF centres” are complex and insure a range of full-day activities. The standards in all centres are the same, which is ensured by the criteria set up in the call for tender.

The first reception centres provide, according to law, accommodation only for first 60 days.

The Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration is also responsible for the second level SPRAR reception system (<http://www.sprar.it/>), destined to asylum seekers but open to all minors irrespective of their legal status. Currently, around 2000 places are available for UAMs in this type of facilities. A new call is being organised by the Ministry of Interior under AMIF funding for additional 2000 places.

The system of SPRAR centres has a capacity of 2000 centres with a total of circa 25 000 places. As mentioned above 2000 are dedicated to unaccompanied minors. The minors can stay there until they reach 18 years old.

The centres are financed by Ministry of Interior however, controlled and managed by ANCI, which is the national association of municipalities (<http://www.anci.it/>).

### 3.3.3. Evaluation criteria

As mentioned above none of the planned activities were done, thus the evaluation is not possible.

Relevance	Effectiveness	Impact	Sustainability
-	-	-	-

### 3.3.4. Key recommendations

**Short-term recommendations:**

- To diagnose the current needs for support in the area of reception together with all important stakeholders since the situation in this field is dynamic and complex - improvements and changes are taking place constantly. With regard to above mentioned system, the relevant target groups for support should be identified;
- Ensure that the EASO activities will be complementary to support currently provided or planned by various actors in the field such as UNHCR, UNICEF, Save the Children, FRA. It is important to avoid duplication in order not to lose the credibility of EASO actions;
- Identify the areas of reception that are less supported by other actors, where EASO can play a leading role (as in relocation) and support Italy in a specialised way;
- All materials and tools provided to Italian stakeholders should be translated into Italian.

#### **Medium and long-term recommendations:**

- Support the strengthening of cooperation between central bodies (Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Interior) and local bodies (municipalities represented by ANCI);
- Organise mainly train the trainer sessions;
- The future EASO experts who will support Italy in reception area should be familiar with the current situation in the country as Italy makes constant progress in the reception area.

#### **3.3.5. Conclusions**

Based on interviews with the relevant Italian authorities, there is still a need to support the reception area in Italy. The responsible authorities confirmed their interest for participation in the activities organised by EASO. The content of activities should be reviewed together with all main Italian stakeholders, including: state institution, decentralized level, international and nongovernmental organisations.

### **3.4. EASO Support Measure IT 4 - Support the capacity building in COI Unit**

#### **3.4.1. Short description of context and activities**

Capacity-building support was given under this measure aimed to improve the performance of the COI Unit, which was established in late Autumn 2014 as a result of Special Support Plan to Italy Phase 1.

Five activities were foreseen under the measure IT4:

1. COI Unit mission statement drafted, including a clarification of tasks and services provided (e.g. query responses, factsheets, analytical reports and translations, maintaining COI databases);

2. Support delivered for the development of a system for timely and efficient provision of information on countries of origin, fulfilling the needs of caseworkers;
3. Capacity development delivered for the regular updating of COI factsheets and the drafting of new ones based on the COI needs identification system (cf. objectives);
4. Enhancement of the in-house COI database in several phases;
5. 20 Italian COI experts in NAC and Territorial Commissions attending EASO COI specialised seminars.

Some activities were very closely implemented together with the activities under the measure IT1 (Support capacity building of TCs) due to a similar target group.

The following deliverables were expected at the end of the SSP Phase 2:

- COI Unit mission statement;
- Several (no precisely defined) COI factsheets;
- Revitalisation or revamp of in-house COI database;
- 20 Italian COI experts attending EASO COI specialised seminars.

### 3.4.2. Results achieved and lessons learned

#### Results

Following the support given by EASO deployed expertise in NAC, a fully operational COI Unit named 'Unità COI' was set-up, its mission statement was drafted and the following guidance and templates made available:

- Formato comune risposte Unità COI - documento tipo.docx (A standard template for responses to COI queries);
- Guidance to the COI Unit - Internal guidance for the COI unit on COI methodology and modus operandi, including a mechanism for quality assurance and a clearance process;
- Guidance to the TCs and the NAC itself on how to approach the COI unit and the way of asking information;
- Guidance for the so-called short interviews format for 'manifestly founded' cases from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia and Syria, developed in conjunction with UNHCR was drafted;
- A general functional email ([unicoi@interno.it](mailto:unicoi@interno.it)), now the main contact point for the unit, is running.

In 2015, 7 Italian COI experts attended 5 different COI meetings in Malta:

- 18-19 March 2015: Practical Cooperation Workshop on Afghanistan (1 person);
- 28-29 April 2015: StratNet COI Meeting (2 persons);
- 19-20 May 2015: COI LGBT workshop - Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, RF, Cameroon (1 person);

- 5-6 October 2015: Practical Cooperation Workshop on Nigeria (COI, policy and Trafficking in Human Beings) (2 persons);
- 2-4 December 2015: Practical Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and COI Specialist Network on Afghanistan Session (1 person).

In 2016, 4 Italian COI experts attended 5 different COI meetings in Malta:

- 17-18 March 2016: Annual Meeting for National EASO COI Portal Administrators (NCPAs);
- 11-12 May 2016: Eritrea COI Specialist Network Meeting in Malta;
- 21-22 May 2016: EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Strategic Network meeting;
- 25 and 26 October 2016: a workshop on Female Genital Mutilation.

As part of the practical support provided by EASO in the support measure IT4, 40 Italian officials working with the NAC and its subordinated TCs were trained on EASO COI Module. In the Spring 2015, four experts from CH, RO, FI and PT delivered a COI training based on EASO Training module. The on-line phase was performed in May 2015 and the face-to-face part was delivered between 3-6 June 2015 in Rome.

The in-house COI database was not renewed, for several reasons (see below); this activity was replaced by a more intensive use of the EASO COI Portal and the platform within the MoI intranet.

### *Lessons learned*

Although the Italian COI Unit was established in 2014, it did not have a specific name, nor a mission statement. Additionally, its activities were unknown to some TCs. There was an urgent need to increase visibility of the COI Unit, also in order to avoid overlapping in COI work. The main activities of the COI Unit were still focused on answering COI queries, predominantly for courts and tribunals, but not so much for territorial commissions.

One of the activities described in the SSP Phase 2 was to write a COI mission statement. However, during the evaluation process, it was found that a lot of activities which were supposed to be conducted by deployed teams of experts from the Member states, were actually performed by a Member state expert who was deployed directly to NAC in the course of the implementation (e.g. COI Unit mission statement, COI templates). The idea to deploy a knowledge manager specialised in COI was the result of the 5-days mission in Rome conducted in May 2015, by a team, who was primary assigned to write a mission statement. Even if such a support in a form of direct deployment at NAC was not foreseen in the initial support plan, it turned to be a very effective suggestion. It was confirmed by several Italian counterparts that the performance of the deployed expert for the duration of 122 days was a considerable asset to the new established COI Unit.

One of the results related to the direct support in NAC is that COI Unit's activities are now more visible. In

addition, one Italian COI expert was able to participate in the drafting process of the EASO report on Nigeria entitled '*Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women*' launched in October 2015. As the report was also translated into Italian and is publically available on the EASO website, the effectiveness of such a measure is eminent.

Despite the initial plan to revamp SIPO (Service of Information on Country of Origin) to a more user-friendly platform, and after the mapping exercise done by EASO, it was decided that the maintenance of this database was no longer efficient. Furthermore, it was considered that SIPO had benefited from an important previous investment. Finally, the SIPO platform was administered on the Intranet of the Ministry of Interior; thus courts and tribunals under the Ministry of Justice had no access to this platform. Therefore, the use of the EASO COI Portal to share Italian COI products and access available COI was suggested. However, the high workload with limited capacities in the COI Unit presents an important challenge for the regular sharing dissemination of COI.

The most important challenge in the field of COI seems to be a huge number of ad-hoc COI queries from the second instance (courts and tribunals). Joint COI trainings and/or common meetings could help to increase understanding and potentially also to avoid duplication, e.g. by making COI products available through the platform (for NAC and TCs) or by uploading them on the EASO COI Portal.

### 3.4.3. Evaluation criteria

Measure IT 4 : Support the capacity building in COI Unit	
<b>Relevance</b>	Though the COI Unit was established at the end of 2014, it did not have a specific name, mission statement and its activities were not known to some TCs. There was an urgent need to increase visibility of the COI Unit, also in order to prevent overlapping in COI work. Therefore, a further enhancement of the COI Unit was requested.
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Although the deployment of the Member states assigned to draft COI Missions statement did not result into the expected product, it brought several recommendations, among other a knowledge manager specialised in COI who was deployed to NAC in Rome during 15/07-7/08/2015, 24/08-11.09/2015, 21/09-16/10/2015 (3 periods of 3 weeks, each time followed by 1 week in the UK); later twice extended (for 5 weeks during 9-13/11/2015, 14-18/12/2015, 11-15/01/2016, 8-12/02/2016; 7-11/03/2016 and during 22/11-06/12/2016 - an activity, which was not initially foreseen).

	The support given by this deployed expert considerably enhanced the workflow in the COI Unit. In addition, his coaching and advising had an important impact for the new Head of the Italian COI Unit.
<b>Impact</b>	<p>Knowledge increased through the participation in different EASO COI seminars has an impact on the COI quality.</p> <p>Drafted COI Unit mission report together with other strategical documents, including templates contributed to the unification of COI products.</p> <p>Four national trainers on EASO COI Module can provide further training.</p> <p>Although no COI factsheet was drafted, due to the huge workload related to COI queries, one COI expert took part in EASO Joint drafting on a report on Nigeria ('Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women').</p>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>In order to maintain high performance of the COI unit, it will be necessary to increase the human resources within the COI Unit, allowing more focus on COI production.</p> <p>A deeper cooperation and exchange of COI with TCs and second instance decision makers is necessary in order to stabilize the number of ad-hoc queries.</p> <p>It is also of outmost importance that the second level stakeholders (judges) could participate in common sessions of COI training with NAC and TCs.</p>

#### 3.4.4. Key recommendations

It is recommended and, it was also requested during the evaluation mission by Italian authorities, that EASO continues to support the COI Unit in order to consolidate the processes put in place.

Short-term recommendations:

- Short-term deployment of experts to NAC in order to provide for administrative support (COI products management including uploading of COI documents) and focus on COI production, namely COI factsheets on selected countries of origin, not covered by EASO COI reports.

Medium and long-term recommendations:

- Strengthen the COI Unit with new staff;
- Continuous participation in EASO COI specialised workshops and/or training together with the members of the second instance;



- Analysis the need to restructure the in-house COI database.

### 3.4.5. Conclusions

The COI Unit was considerably enhanced mostly due to the direct deployment of an EASO Member state expert. Currently, the Unit, while understaffed, is fully functional and more visible than in the past. Further strengthening of the cooperation between NAC and TCs, but also with the second instance is necessary in order to avoid duplication in COI work. The use of EASO COI portal as SharePoint of Italian COI products seems to be an acceptable solution considering its accessibility to all COI stakeholders as well as time and eventual financial burden related to the development of the SIPO platform. EASO support, mostly in the field of COI production (factsheets available in Italian), is still necessary.

## 3.5. EASO Support Measure IT 5 - Professional development activities and study visits

### 3.5.1. Short description of context and activities

The importance to increase the knowledge of the senior management in the international protection field was already underlined in EASO Special Support to Italy Phase 1. However, because of the extremely heavy workload during the Italian Presidency of the European Council in the second semester of 2014, some activities were postponed.

SSP Phase 2 aimed to enhance the capacity of NAC and TCs by the professional training in EASO Training Curriculum modules, ultimately contributing to the implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

The following deliverables were expected:

1. One Professional Development Seminar on presenting the best practices and the challenges in implementing the newly adopted instruments in the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), as well as the working instruments developed by EASO in support of the practical implementation of CEAS;
2. One study visit in a Member State;
3. 50 Italian experts trained in the EASO Training Curriculum modules;
4. EASO Training Module on CEAS translated by EASO in Italian language.

### 3.5.2. Results achieved and lessons learned

### Results

- 26 out of 35 initially planned members of NAC and TCs experts participated in the professional development seminar in Malta in 2016;
- 12 Italian experts out of 50 have been trained in Malta in 5 different EASO modules since January 2015 (Evidence Assessment, Interview Techniques, Inclusion, Country of Origin Information, Dublin Regulation), followed by the national trainings targeting over 500 Italian experts;
- Study visit to Germany for 12 Italian experts was completed;
- EASO Training Module on CEAS is currently translated by EASO in Italian language.

### Lessons learned

- The presence of the Italian EASO National Contact Point for Training had significantly contributed to the swift professional development activities in the NAC and TCs. It has also a considerable impact on the improvement of the cooperation between NAC and TCs in identifying the needs for training. As a result, the national training plan was drafted.
- This can be considered as a major improvement taking into account that the trainings were previously organised on ad hoc basis.
- The activities under the measure IT5 were assessed positively by the Italian stakeholders; 166 persons were trained internally in 2015 and 400 persons were trained internally in 2016. In order to maintain this high numbers, it is vital to have EASO training modules translated into Italian.
- The study visit to Germany was a unique opportunity to strengthen the cooperation with other Member States and to learn from a different experience about international protection issues.

#### 3.5.3. Evaluation criteria

Measure IT5 : Professional development activities and study visits	
<b>Relevance</b>	The trainings were relevant for the needs and priorities of IT stakeholders. The trainings on EASO Training Curriculum modules were identified as the most relevant from all the activities in this measure.
<b>Effectiveness</b>	The trainings were very effective especially when it concerns the number of Italian experts trained during the national training (more than 500), although the number of Italian trainers trained in EASO (Malta) was lower than planned (12 out of 50). A high attendance in the national trainings seems to be possible also thanks to the translation of the training modules into Italian.

<b>Impact</b>	The impact was important. Due to the trainings for trainers, in total 566 participants could attend different national trainings in 2015 and 2016. The training has contributed to the improvement of the cooperation between NAC and the members of the TCs, including better assessment of the needs for future trainings. Another important impact was the uniformity in applying the international protection procedure throughout the different TCs.
<b>Sustainability</b>	12 national trainers could be a guarantee for sustainability. Nevertheless, more national trainers and more EASO training module translated into Italian are necessary in order to maintain professional development.  The knowledge acquired during the training sessions will contribute to high quality output of the international protection procedure as well as better understanding of CEAS.

#### 3.5.4. Key recommendations

Short-term recommendations:

- Organise study visits to different Members States;
- Translation of EASO Training Curriculum modules in order to enhance the knowledge of the international protection acquis of TCs and NAC staff.

Medium and long-term recommendations:

- Continue the national trainings according to the National training plan;
- Maintain exchange on the needs between TCs and NAC (National contact point for trainings).

#### 3.5.5. Conclusions

The trainings that were performed have proved to be useful, effective, having a positive impact and will ensure sustainability in the future. Train the trainers' activities show to be a guarantee for sustainability to the most extent. To overcome the language barrier, and thus ensure even higher participation, more EASO Training Curriculum modules should be translated into Italian.