



External evaluation of the EUAA-Malta operational plan 2022-2024

Ex post evaluation report

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Acronyms and definitions

Term	Definition
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
ARC	Assessment of reception conditions
AST	Asylum support teams
AWAS	Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
COI	Country of origin information
C3	Asylum Knowledge Centre
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	International protection
IPA	International Protection Agency
OP	Operational plan
QAT	Quality assurance tool
SOP	Standard operating procedures
SW	Social workers
TP	Temporary protection
TPD	Temporary Protection Directive
UAM	Unaccompanied minors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VSM	Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism



Executive summary

Between 2022 and 2024, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) provided operational support in Malta, specifically in the area of asylum, reception and temporary protection. The EUAA-Malta operational plan (OP) 2022 – 2024 aimed to:

- Enhance the capacity of the Maltese authorities to ensure swift access to the international protection procedure and reduce the backlog at first instance;
- Enhance the capacity of the Maltese authorities in relation to quality in reception;
- Enhance the capacity of the Maltese authorities to effectively implement the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD).

Overall, the implementation of the OP was effective, albeit with differing degrees of achievement across the measures. The EUAA's support was particularly effective at increasing access to asylum and reducing the backlog at first instance, enhancing the capacity of the national authorities in relation to quality in reception and at effectively supporting temporary protection applicants.

- In relation to measure 1, the EUAA had a positive and practical impact in reducing the backlog at first instance and enhancing national capacity in various aspects. In 2024, the EUAA increased its support on relocation activities, including onboarding of personnel from the International Protection Agency, support which will end in December 2024.
- In relation to measure 2, key achievements could be identified in the areas of vulnerability assessment, social work, information provision and quality in reception.
- Regarding measure 3, support provided to temporary protection applicants was crucial to enhance the national capacity to implement the Temporary Protection Directive.

Across the three measures, effectiveness was facilitated by the good working relationships that the EUAA has developed with staff at the International Protection Agency and the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers. The support provided by the EUAA boosted capacity and knowledge within the Maltese system, as the authorities benefitted from methodologies and standards, templates, workflows, training and capacity-building activities. On the other hand, the EUAA and national institutions continued to face challenges with recruitment of new personnel, and high employee turnover resulting from challenging working conditions. These issues were further compounded by the new demands brought about by the invasion of Ukraine. Overall, the EUAA was able to respond effectively to the requests of national counterparts in line with what was originally agreed and to changing priorities.

In relation to the **priority question**, the EUAA's phase-out strategy in Malta demonstrated a concerted effort to plan a smooth transition in partnership with Maltese authorities. However, the implementation diverged from the original plans, mostly due to human resource issues, and more specifically the national capacity issues in scaling up their resources in a timely manner.

In terms of the **coherence of the OP**, the evaluation found that the three measures were **complementary and that coordination between actors and strategies was key to their implementation.** The OP was designed to ensure complementarity and synergy across the measures, creating an integrated approach to asylum and reception. A needs assessment process laid the



foundations for internal coherence, where measures across these domains were perceived as mutually reinforcing. Of note were the seamless coordination achieved between the different sectors of the Agency, and the role played by the EUAA in facilitating coordination between national authorities. The coordinated collaboration with international organisations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, indicated a shared goal of enhancing access to asylum and reception conditions.

The efficiency of the intervention was considered to be fair. While the overall OP budget was considered sufficient, efficiency in achieving its targets was hampered primarily by staffing issues at the level of the EUAA and its partner institutions. A small portion of the budget remained unutilised, potentially due to human resource challenges. The turnover of main and often senior counterparts impacted the development and implementation of the OP, leading to gaps in knowledge transfer and efficiency. Issues related to temporary workers and the inability to form full teams contributed to operational challenges that were mitigated by reviewing the budget and reallocating resources to address emerging needs. The phased deployment of resources and re-deployment of internal resources from measure 1 to measure 3 showcased the EUAA's ability to adjust its approach based on evolving needs.

The EU added value of the OP was rated as very good. The EUAA's support was highly valued by the national authorities; while changes would have eventually taken place without the support of the EUAA, they would have been done at a slower pace and could have been less in line with European standards. The EUAA significantly enhanced Malta's capacities in relation to the asylum system and quality in reception, providing support which went beyond personnel deployment and front-line support, extending to a more structural level. Furthermore, the EUAA facilitated capacity building and skill transfer, ensuring a sustainable impact beyond the immediate scope of the OP.

The relevance of this OP was considered very good. The support provided by the Agency addressed the needs and responded to the challenges faced by the Maltese asylum and reception system. The EUAA's capacity to adapt to changes in priorities was visible, as well as its rapid and effective response to the requests expressed by the authorities. This was seen, for instance, with the inclusion of measure 3 to address the challenges of implementing the Temporary Protection Directive. In addition, the fact that the OP built on the EUAA-Malta OP 2021 contributed to its relevance and allowed for the incorporation of lessons learned from previous collaborations. The three-year OP framework provided a more extended and strategic outlook, enabling stakeholders to engage in comprehensive, phased, and sustained interventions, which contribute to a more stable and continuous operational environment. On the other hand, the OP remained very flexible. The EUAA was able to adjust to the emerging needs by reviewing and amending the OP and/or the phase-out plan because of delays.

Recommendation 1. Ensure future relevance of the phase-out implementation plan

The EUAA established and implemented comprehensive phase-out strategies and implementation plans by activity, ensuring clear milestones and timelines. In view of potential further requests for operational support by the Maltese authorities, the EUAA could:

- Regularly revisit and refine the phase-out plan in consultation with national authorities to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities, allowing for enough flexibility in case of political agreement to sign another OP in the future.



1. Introduction: purpose and scope

The ex post evaluation of the operational plan (OP) agreed between the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and Malta focused on the period January 2022 to December 2024 (hereinafter 'EUAA-Malta OP 2022-2024'). This report presents the findings of the evaluation carried out between September 2023 and December 2024 by Ramboll Management Consulting Belgium.

The aim of the evaluation exercise was to provide a summative ex post evaluation of the EUAA-Malta OP 2022-2024. The temporal scope of the study covered the implementation of the OP, from January 2022 to September 2024.

In line with the [European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines](#), the ex post evaluation aimed to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, and European Union (EU) added value of the EUAA-Cyprus OP 2022-2024 in a proportionate manner (see Annex 3: Evaluation matrix). Aside from the general evaluation questions associated with these criteria, the following priority evaluation question was addressed in particular:

Priority question: *To what extent has the EUAA phase-out strategy in Malta been effectively planned and implemented? Will it ensure an effective handover to the Maltese authorities and contribute to the sustainability of the system once the OP comes to an end? What more could be done and what lessons can be learned for other OPs?*

To answer this question, the evaluation combined evidence from secondary data with primary data collected through stakeholder interviews with the national authorities, international organisations and EUAA personnel (see Annex 1: Methodology and analytical models used).

2. Intended results of the action

2.1. Description of the action and its intended results

The OP covering the period 2022-2024 was signed by the EUAA and Malta in December 2021. The OP was then firstly amended in April 2022 to include a measure addressing the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in response to the invasion of Ukraine launched by Russian armed forces. On 15 May 2023, the OP was amended again to respond to the needs identified in the prioritised needs assessment conducted in 2022 and delineated the planned phase-out, including the gradual reduction of the deployed asylum support team (AST). The OP was amended again in June 2024 to reflect the decreased pressure on the Maltese asylum and reception system and the complete phase out from measures 2 and 3. The main national counterparts were the Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment, the International Protection Agency (IPA), and the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS).

As stated in the OP, the EUAA aimed at phasing out its support in Malta by the end of 2024. In 2022, the EUAA initiated its phasing out strategy with the progressive reduction of reception support. By 2022, the Agency faced out of vulnerability, social work, and information provision in reception.



Amendment 2 delineated the planned phase-out, including the gradual reduction of the EUAA's resources until the end of 2024. This encompassed a gradual phase-out from digitisation, country of origin information (COI), and information provision activities in the area of asylum by 2023, as well as full phase-out from remaining activities outlined in the OP, accompanied by a gradual reduction in human resources. Additionally, following consultations with national authorities, specifications for a sustainable exit strategy and handover of activities were agreed upon, with a focus on retaining lessons learned and good practices resulting from the EUAA's operational support.

In 2024, the EUAA continued to gradually decrease its resources at frontline level (registration, casework and others), while keeping central level support. On the other end, the Maltese authorities scaled up their internal resources. The EUAA and Malta further redefined and agreed on priority actions and the adjustment of the technical support provided. On 28 March 2024, the Maltese authorities expressed the need for the continuation of the EUAA's support through a formal request for support sent to the EUAA. In particular, the Maltese authorities expressed the need for support for the implementation of the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism (VSM), through the deployment of ASTs, including flow management support officers and interpreters as well as support with the deployed casework team leaders. This would allow the IPA to finalise the recruitment of their senior protection officers in 2024 and the onboarding of the IPA's team leaders, ensuring business as usual and a proper hand-over. The third amendment of the OP marked the phasing out of the EUAA's support to the Maltese authorities under measures 2 and 3.

The OP consists of three measures with the following intended outcomes (objectives) and outputs (see Annex 2: Intervention logic).

Measure 1: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities to ensure swift access to the international protection procedure and reduce the backlog at first instance

Specific actions under this outcome included the provision of support for the finalisation of the information provision package and the development of new material and dissemination tools; support with the asylum procedure first instance processes, including referral of vulnerable cases; support concerning the registration, matching and drafting of relocation lists; first instance interviews and drafting of assessment reports; support to the Quality Control Unit and the asylum procedure quality control mechanism; support in the use of COI and in the digitalisation of asylum files; support to the Maltese Dublin Unit; and training provided to Maltese national personnel, members of the EUAA's AST, and interpreters, as required.

Measure 2: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities in relation to quality in reception

In the first OP, the EUAA focussed its support in the area of social work, vulnerability assessment, information provision, and reviewed standard operating procedures (SOPs) (e.g. age assessment). After the amendments, this outcome involved supporting the design of the AWAS quality assurance framework and devising a comprehensive implementation plan, and the coordination of thematic online meetings and study visits with reception authorities from various Member States. Efforts are also directed towards promoting cohesion within the organisation. This involved supporting the harmonisation of workflows and procedures, as well as facilitating internal cooperation and information sharing. Quality assurance extended to self-assessment surveys and internal audits, as deemed necessary. This outcome also foresaw the update and development of guidelines and practical integrated tools to provide clear and effective guidance for ASTs. Furthermore, the role of the EUAA



included providing interpretation services, as required, to facilitate the activities of the ASTs. Finally, the measure included the provision of training to Maltese national personnel, members of the EUAA's AST, and interpreters, as required.

Measure 3: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities to effectively implement the TPD

This measure was introduced in April 2022 as part of the first amendment to the OP. Actions under this outcome included the provision of information on the TPD in an understandable language, support with the registration of applicants for temporary protection (TP) and the assessment of eligibility criteria, support with the issuing of TP decisions and the delivery of TP certificates, and support to the Maltese authorities in information provision. Additional support for the implementation of TP activities was also envisaged.

2.2. Points of comparison

This section outlines the situation prior to the implementation of the EUAA-Malta OP 2022-2024 (i.e., prior to January 2022) to highlight the points of comparison related to the current state of play presented in Section 3.

Bilateral cooperation between the EUAA and Maltese authorities started in 2017, when the Agency provided training for case officers from the Office of the Refugee Commissioner (today the IPA). In early 2019, the EUAA started providing support for *ad hoc* voluntary relocations in Malta, which included support on the registration and lodging of international protection (IP) applications, information provision, and the Dublin Unit. In June 2019, the EUAA and Maltese authorities signed their first OP which aimed to ensure that persons in need of protection in Malta had swift access to the IP determination procedure, to increase Malta's capacity to deal with the pending cases at first instance, and to enhance the capacity of the Dublin Unit. This was followed by a second OP signed in December 2019, which focused on four measures: (1) improving access to the asylum procedure; (2) increasing the national authorities' capacity to manage and reduce the asylum backlog; (3) enhancing the Dublin Unit's capacity; and (4) enhancing the capacity of the national authorities to implement reception standards in line with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

The asylum landscape in Malta witnessed significant developments between 2020 and 2021, providing a crucial backdrop for understanding the context preceding the initiation of the current OP. The number of asylum applications lodged in Malta peaked in 2019 and then decreased over the 2020-2021 period,¹ which correlates with the decrease in migrant arrivals in 2020 and 2021. During the first half of 2021, the first instance decisions, along with closed cases and withdrawn applications, consistently exceeded the number of incoming applications. This resulted in a noticeable decrease in the backlog that had been accumulating since January 2021. In the reception area, at the end of 2021, 1 214 persons were hosted in reception centres.²

To help mitigate pressure on the Maltese asylum and reception systems, in December 2020, a new OP was signed for 2021, whose objectives related to two measures: (1) improving access to the asylum

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/mt/figures-at-a-glance>

² https://www.unhcr.org/mt/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2022/02/Malta-Sea-Arrivals-and-Asylum-Statistics_UNHCR_Dec2021.pdf



procedure and increasing capacity to manage the asylum backlog at first instance determination, and (2) enhancing the capacity of Maltese authorities to implement reception standards in line with CEAS. In addition, the EUAA offered support on cross-cutting areas such as information provision, interpretation, training, IT-related projects, and logistics.

The evaluation of the EUAA-Malta OP 2021,³ concluded that the intervention was very relevant and effective. National institutions and stakeholders clearly required support in reducing the backlog of asylum applications following some years of increased arrivals, and in implementing reception standards in line with the CEAS. Besides a significant decrease in the backlog of applications, the EUAA significantly enhanced Malta's capacities to maintain an asylum system and to, in some respects, improve reception conditions. The recommendations arising from the evaluation are presented below.

- Recommendation 1: Work with the national institutions to develop an enhanced contingency plan for an increase in migrant arrivals to Malta.
- Recommendation 2: When implementing further support to the Maltese authorities, prioritise capacity building which enhances exit preparedness.
- Recommendation 3: Address and mitigate the challenges in recruitment and retainment of personnel.
- Recommendation 4: Re-assess how targets are set.
- Recommendation 5: Clarify training priorities and promote training for Agency personnel, and for staff from the IPA and AWAS.

3. Implementation of the action: current state of play

This section explains what happened during the implementation of the OP and presents the state of play. The monitoring data contained target values per output for each of the three years under observation. Targets were set on a quarterly and annual basis and were progressively monitored over the three years. The data reported in this section compared the values achieved with the targets, thus providing a quantitative overview of what was achieved during the evaluation period.

For 2024, the internal monitoring data presented in this report compare the actual outputs with the progressive targets (where applicable) at the end of September 2024. This implies that at the time of writing it was not possible to assess whether the annual targets would be met or even exceeded at the end of the year. Nevertheless, this had a minimal impact on the results of this evaluation, as in most cases the annual targets were already overachieved (or at least met) by the end of September 2024. The reasons for under or overachievement of the planned targets are set out in Section 4 on evaluation findings.

³ <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/external-evaluation-easo-malta-operating-plan-2021>



Table 1. Overview of asylum applications, backlog, and TP decisions in Malta during the period 2022 - 2024

	Asylum applications ⁴	Pending asylum applications ⁵	TP decisions ⁶
2022	915	2 975	1 630
2023	490	1 980	570
2024 (up to quarter 3)	340 ⁷	1 600	290 ⁸

Source: Eurostat data (date of extraction 20/12/2024)

Measure 1: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities to ensure swift access to the international protection procedure and reduce the backlog at first instance

At the end of 2022, the backlog at first instance was reduced from 3 265 to 1 757 cases. At the end of 2023, the backlog at first instance was reduced to 833 cases⁹. By July 2024, all the backlog assigned to the EUAA was finalised (except for cases which the IPA kept on hold).

In relation to support to **asylum procedure first instance processes**, in 2022, the EUAA supported the lodging/registration of 876 applications (at the IPA headquarters and field location) against a target of 900. In 2023, 405 applications were lodged by the EUAA compared to a target value of 330. In 2024, 89 applications were lodged by the EUAA compared to a target value of 50.

In 2023, with support provided to front desk activities, 3 290 **asylum seeker documents were issued with the support of the EUAA** compared to a target of 3 400, while in 2024 the number of documents was 371 versus a target of 500.

In 2022, the EUAA provided support to the **digitisation of the existing paper-based individual asylum files**, partially meeting targets (1 562 against a target of 4 500) and overachieving them in 2023. In fact, in 2023, the EUAA supported the digitalisation of 1 272 paper-based files (compared to a target of 675). In 2024 this activity was not foreseen.

The EUAA also provided guidance and knowledge for the **establishment of a COI unit** but this was ultimately not implemented by national authorities (see Section 4.1). In 2022, five COI **country briefings** were delivered by the EUAA’s Malta operations team with horizontal support from the COI Sector (while three were planned). In 2023, two additional country briefings were delivered achieving the target and in 2024 the target of one country briefing was also achieved. All **COI requests/queries**

⁴ ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza/default/table?lang=en&category=migr.migr_asy.migr_asyapp

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyenctzm_custom_14768348/default/table?lang=en

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpfa/default/table?lang=en&category=migr.migr_asy.migr_asytp

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctzm_custom_14768501/default/table?lang=en

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpfq/default/table?lang=en&category=migr.migr_asy.migr_asytp

⁹ The backlog data reported exclude cases pending closure.



were replied to by the EUAA's COI helpdesk in 2022, well above its target of fielding 75 % of the queries for that year.

In 2022, EUAA caseworkers delivered 931 **assessments reports of first and subsequent applications** compared to a target of 1 080. In 2023, the EUAA delivered 544 assessments compared to the 545 planned, thereby achieving the target. In 2024, the target was almost achieved with 106 out of 130 assessments.

Quality-related activities were launched in early 2022, focusing on sustainable quality components within the IPA (i.e., review of templates, pilot exercise of the EUAA's quality assurance tool (QAT), conducted jointly with staff from the Training and Professional Development Centre and the Asylum Knowledge Centre (C3)). In 2022, 430 out of the 800 planned **quality checks of asylum assessments** and interviews for applications for IP were completed. Additionally, in 2022, the presentation of the EUAA's QAT to the IPA took place, two quality thematic review reports were drafted, and two workshops were organised and delivered with the support of C3 staff, on themes agreed upon with the IPA. In 2023, 232 second level quality checks were completed compared to the 370 foreseen.

In 2023, the EUAA developed eight (out of seven) quality assurance-related products that include the following: a tool on the exhaustive breakdown of backlog at the Quality Unit level; a scheduling request workflow; a thematic workshop on personal interviews; an overturning workflow; two thematic workshops with the Agency's Operational Quality Procedures and Tools Sector; a new interview template in cooperation with the Operational Quality Procedures and Tools Sector/Asylum Processes Sector; and work instructions for the quality assurance officer position. Following the completion of the QAT exercise during the second quarter of 2023, the quality feedback report was presented by the Operational Quality Procedures and Tools Sector in collaboration with C3 to all ASTs and IPA protection officers in July 2023. Moreover, in 2023, on average the EUAA amended 66 % cases which were assigned by the Quality Unit, compared to an 80 % target. By quarter 2 of 2024, 41 out of the 90 planned quality checks of asylum assessments and interviews for applications for IP were completed. The target was revised in quarter 3 of 2024 (to 44 checks) and fully achieved.

In 2022, the EUAA conducted 961 **personal interviews**, compared to the 1 080 planned. In 2023, the EUAA supported 595 personal interviews compared to a target value of 575. In 2024, interviews carried out were 93 out of 140.

In the evaluation period, the EUAA supported the IPA's Dublin unit and processed 100% of outgoing Dublin requests and procedures. The tasks of EUAA personnel included, amongst others, supporting outgoing Dublin requests (take charge, take back, information requests and re-examination requests, conducting information sessions on transfers).

Following the Solidarity Declaration of 22 June 2022, the EUAA started supporting the VSM in several stages of the process. Planned activities in the evaluation period included support provided by the EUAA to the identification of potential relocation candidates, information provision and collection of consent, matching applicants, and preparation of redistribution lists to be submitted to pledging Members States. All final consents of applicants to be voluntarily relocated from Malta were provided by candidates who were matched with the support of the EUAA (the target of 100 % was therefore met).



Training and capacity development initiatives related to asylum topics were rolled out with 16 different EUAA training modules during 2022, reaching the yearly target. In 2023, 21 (out of 22) modules were organised for both EUAA ASTs and national administration officers, while in 2024, 10 out of 12 training sessions were delivered.

In addition, the EUAA provided support with physical and remote **interpretation**.

The horizontal information provision team focused on content development (e.g. an information provision package on asylum procedures). In the second half of 2022, the translation of the IPA information sheet into 11 languages was finalised and the documents shared with stakeholders. An asylum information provision package was developed in 2023 by the EUAA for the IPA¹⁰ that included 10 items out of the eight planned. It included comprehensive information on IP, rights and obligations of IP applicants, procedural steps, and possible outcomes of an asylum application that was translated into 11 languages printed in 2 000 copies and disseminated through multiple channels. In addition to the package, the EUAA delivered one video and one animation for unaccompanied minors on the asylum procedure in Malta (developed by an external contractor and available in English, French and Arabic) and one video produced in-house on the rights and obligations of asylum seekers upon lodging (available in English, Spanish, and French). No further activities were conducted in 2024 due to the phase out in December 2023. In addition to the tools developed for the national authorities, emphasis was placed on the EUAA's information provision tools developed under the umbrella project 'Let's Speak Asylum', available through the 'Let's Speak Asylum' platform.

Measure 2: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities in relation to quality in reception

The EUAA's vulnerability response team conducted 291 **vulnerability assessments** in 2022 (out of a target of 400). In the second quarter of 2022, a revision of the special procedural guarantees form and guidelines (workflow) documents took place. The new workflow was agreed and implemented between the EUAA, IPA and AWAS, thus fostering communication between national authorities and improving related workflow. Moreover, the EUAA revised the vulnerability SOPs, finalised a new **special needs and vulnerability assessment report template** and created a template for vulnerability assessment, with a list of vulnerability-related interview questions. Handover to the AWAS was initiated in the last quarter of 2022, concluding with all vulnerability-related files, documents, and tools being handed over.

The **EUAA social workers (SWs) team** initiated individual supervision and managed a caseload in line with the OP (99 % in 2022). Activities included the development of the SWs' case management tool for all AWAS SWs and the finalisation of the Malta operations social work Power BI dashboard at the end of 2022. In June 2022, the EUAA presented a case management tool to all AWAS SWs to enhance their capacity in identifying, prioritizing, and supporting asylum applicants in Malta. This tool was tested by EUAA SWs in late 2021 and implemented in early 2022. The timeline of related activities was:

¹⁰ It included the following five materials (out of the ten planned): 1) Flowchart on the asylum procedure in Malta; 2) Booklet for general population on the asylum procedure in Malta; 3) Booklet for unaccompanied minors on the asylum procedure in Malta; 4) Brochure on refugee status; 5) Brochure on subsidiary protection.



- First quarter of 2022: the EUAA delivered monitoring and reporting tools for social work and initiated individual supervision for SWs.
- Second quarter of 2022: EUAA SWs participated in three thematic meetings organised by the AWAS to develop/update SOPs for intake procedures, mapping, emergency response, social work interventions, and available assessment tools.

In relation to **unaccompanied minors** (UAMs), 90 % of UAM cases assigned to the EUAA SWs team were handled for follow up actions in 2022. Activities included the delivery of intake sessions to new UAM applicants, accompanying UAMs AWAS age assessments, and the reunification of one UAM with family members in an EU Member State.

The **AWAS quality assurance framework** was endorsed by AWAS at the end of 2022 and was revised and finalised in January 2023. A team for **quality assurance in reception was created**. Throughout 2023, 16 quality assurance tools were developed (compared to the eight planned) with the EUAA's support. These were: adaptation of the **assessment of reception conditions** (ARC) tool indicators to the Maltese context; observation checklist; desk research checklist; interview with centre coordinator; interview with medical staff or welfare officer; interview with SW; interview with security staff; interview with information provider; interview with resident(s); ARC indicators triangulation checklist; announcement of visit letter; quality assurance framework questionnaire; quality assurance methodology; analysis of AWAS documents; and ARC summary report template. In 2024, seven out of six tools were developed, overachieving the target. These tools included the AWAS complaint form and the complaint and response mechanism SOP and related recording and monitoring tool.

Three technical exchanges on reception quality assurance were organised in 2023. In addition, the **ARC tool** was piloted at the end of 2023, while its roll-out was carried out during the first half of 2024. In the second quarter of 2024, the ARC tool was employed with the EUAA's support in two (out of two) reception centres.

The EUAA provided support with physical and remote interpretation in 2022. An **interpreters' pool** was created, and an interpreters' performance feedback questionnaire developed by the EUAA's Malta Operations team and implemented in the first quarter of 2022.

Training modules and coaching sessions attended by the EUAA's and/or national authorities' personnel were organised in the evaluation period (all nine foreseen for 2022, five in 2023 and two in 2024). These included different reception related topics, such as training on the IP legal framework and communication with children. Moreover, ASTs attended the EUAA's training on reception of vulnerable persons, applicants with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sexual characteristics, communication with children, as well as training on the use of the EUAA's ARC tool in 2023.

The **horizontal information provision team focused on content development** (e.g. AWAS leaflet, one video and animation development for AWAS). In the second half of 2022, the translation of the AWAS leaflet of services into 11 languages was finalised and the documents shared with stakeholders.



Measure 3: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities to effectively implement the TPD

The output foreseen under this measure was fully achieved in the evaluation period. The EUAA supported the national authorities in the implementation of the TPD by providing support to all TP applicants assigned to the EUAA. Between 2022 and mid-2024, the EUAA supported 100% of the TP applications assigned by the IPA to the EUAA. The numbers of applications registered are presented below.

At the end of June 2022, the **registration team at the IPA registered a total of 981 TP applications**, of which 799 were processed by EUAA personnel. In the second half of 2022, the number of TP registrations significantly decreased compared to the first half of the year due to a decreasing influx of new arrivals from Ukraine. Moreover, 1 264 TP applications and TP certificates were supported by EUAA personnel in 2022 (out of a total 1 636 in Malta), as of 31 December 2022. In the last quarter of 2022, in light of the progressive reduction in the number of TP registrations, the EUAA reduced the number of resources supporting TPD implementation at the IPA headquarters.

As of 30 September 2023, the registration team at the IPA had registered a total of 2 121 TP applications (of which 1 800 were processed by EUAA personnel) after the invasion of Ukraine launched by Russian armed forces and issued the same number of TP certificates. In the fourth quarter of 2023, the number of EUAA-supported TP registrations reached 63, a further decrease compared to the first (149), second (114) and third quarter (64). In total, since the beginning of the crisis, and as of 30 June 2024, the registration team at the IPA registered a total of 2 390 TP applications, of which 1 693 were processed by EUAA personnel (roughly 71 % of the total) and issued the same number of TP certificates.

Apart from TP applications, the EUAA supported the Maltese authorities in lodging (regular) applications for IP for Ukrainians not qualifying for TP, from the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict. As of June 2024, a total of 102 new applications for IP related to the war in Ukraine were lodged, as well as 27 subsequent applications.

The EUAA also supported the management of TP cases and establishment of workflows. Moreover, the EUAA supported in 2022 the dissemination of two campaigns related to TPD activities¹¹. The EUAA also supported the delivery of information provision for TP applicants prior to TP registration, including by handing out the IPA's information leaflets on TP in Malta.

The EUAA provided support in relation to **information provision on the TPD**. In 2024, the EUAA continued supporting IPA in onboarding newly recruited staff members, including five IPA registration officers, who were coached while being shadowed during registration, front desk, and TPD implementation activities.

Overall across all measures, in 2022 there were 433 participations in 96 training modules and/or sessions/webinars organised by the Training and Professional Development Centre, with 167 individuals trained (satisfaction rate of 95 %); in 2023 the participations were 206 in 65 sessions with

¹¹ Survey of Asylum-related Migrants Project, and awareness on trafficking by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.



90 individuals trained (satisfaction rate of 90 %); and up to the third quarter of 2024 there were 96 participations in 34 sessions with 52 individuals trained (satisfaction rate of 90 %).

4. Evaluation findings

This section presents the findings stemming from the analysis of the five evaluation criteria, including the answer to the priority question.

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

Overall, the implementation of the OP was effective, albeit with differing degrees of achievement across the different measures. The EUAA's support was particularly effective at increasing access to asylum and reducing the backlog at first instance, as well as enhancing the capacity of the national authorities in relation to quality in reception and at supporting TP applicants.

Across the three measures, effectiveness was facilitated by the good working relationships that the EUAA has developed with staff at the IPA and AWAS. According to the national authorities and EUAA staff, the support provided by the Agency boosted capacity and knowledge within the Maltese system, as the authorities benefitted from methodologies and standards, templates, workflows, training and capacity-building activities. On the other hand, the EUAA and national institutions continued to face challenges with recruitment of new personnel, and high employee turnover resulting from challenging working conditions on the job. Moreover, knowledge of the phase-out had a negative impact on the temporary workers, who started looking for other job opportunities in other operations.

While the EUAA contributed to reducing the backlog of pending asylum cases, external factors (both positive and negative) need to be taken into account such as the broader decrease in migrant arrivals during the evaluation period. Isolating and measuring the specific impact of the EUAA's intervention became challenging amidst the dynamic variables influencing migration realities in Malta. Nevertheless, qualitative feedback from stakeholders spanning various perspectives partly shed light on the extent to which outcomes could be linked to the EUAA's support. Interviews, for instance, pointed to the critical role of the EUAA's support during the evaluation period in ensuring business as usual.

Concerning efficiency, the evidence suggested that the relationship between inputs (i.e., costs, human resources, and time invested) and outputs was positive, as the benefits of the OP compensated for any potential investments made. The EUAA's support to the national authorities came at a cost of an estimated EUR 4 915 102 for its operations in Malta in 2022, less than the annual planned budget of EUR 5 374 723. In 2023, the budget amounted to EUR 2 514 319, which was under the annual planned budget of EUR 2 407 671. In 2024, the budget amounted to € 1 025 886, of which EUR 828 487 were allocated for the first three quarters of 2024.

The overall budget allocated for OP implementation was considered sufficient based on interviews with EUAA personnel. As discussed in detail below, the EUAA's efficiency in achieving its targets in the evaluation period was hampered primarily by temporary worker issues at the EUAA and within its partner institutions, the IPA and AWAS, rather than budget constraints. The budget figures provided



insights into the budget allocations and consumption rates, indicating that a portion of the budget remained unutilised, potentially due to the human resource challenges (e.g., turnover, delays with recruitment).

Turnover among main and often senior counterparts posed challenges, impacting the development and implementation of the OP and thereby its efficiency. Frequent changes in national level personnel, particularly in key roles, led to gaps in knowledge transfer and efficiency which were addressed thanks to good coordination between the AWAS and EUAA. Issues related to the EUAA's temporary workers and the inability to form full teams contributed to operational challenges and the ability to meet targets, as explained further below under measure 1. Challenges were mitigated by reviewing the budget and reallocating resources to address emerging needs. For example, the internal re-deployment of internal resources from measure 1 to measure 3 showcased the EUAA's ability to adjust its human resources approach based on the evolving needs. Despite the challenges, the overall benefits of the intervention in Malta were deemed to outweigh the costs.

The OP was designed to ensure complementarity and synergy across the measures, creating an integrated approach to asylum and reception. A comprehensive needs assessment process laid the foundations for internal coherence, where measures across these domains were perceived as mutually reinforcing. This was consistently affirmed by EUAA personnel who highlighted the seamless coordination achieved through regular meetings and communication, joint reporting, and strategic planning between the different EUAA sectors. An example suggested during interviews was in relation to the synergies in the areas of interpretation, information provision and vulnerability activities.

The **collaboration with international organisations**, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), also exemplified a commitment to a coordinated approach. Regular inclusion of these organisations in needs assessment processes and regular updates indicated a shared goal of enhancing access to asylum and reception conditions. Feedback from interviews suggested that collaboration with these organisations was overall positive. As for **coordination/interaction with national authorities**, the EUAA facilitated stakeholder coordination by employing mechanisms such as regular meetings, joint initiatives, and effective communication channels. Furthermore, the EUAA's support through interpretation services was complemented by the interpretation support provided through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) National Programme, in 2024.

The level of effectiveness of each measure is discussed below.

Measure 1: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities to ensure swift access to the international protection procedure and reduce the backlog at first instance

While achievements were notable as reflected in Section 3, the EUAA's effectiveness on several of the targets under measure 1 was limited by challenges in relation to lack of human resources, recruitment-related workload which impeded progress on several activities, and high turnover rate among EUAA temporary workers, driven by increased living costs and attractive contracts elsewhere. The IPA faced similar recruitment and retainment challenges, limiting their ability to deploy staff: indeed, the IPA acknowledged that without the EUAA's support, it would have been more difficult for them to operate.



Despite the EUAA's efforts to support the IPA in developing its Quality Unit, the latter's limited resources delayed progress in strengthening the unit's workflows and processes.

In terms of the **priority question**, feedback from interviews suggested that the phase-out strategy, which was outlined in the second OP amendment, planned to take into consideration both the national authorities' and the EUAA's needs. The exit strategy also included a tentative plan for the phase-out with gradual reduction of resources dedicated to the respective activities. This scaling down plan initially foresaw a gradual decrease of the EUAA's resources every six months, starting as of the third quarter of 2023. However, the implementation of the phase-out strategy was delayed in practice due to the challenges encountered, mostly in relation to recruitment delays on the IPA's side. This raised questions about sustainability: feedback from EUAA interviewees suggested that the implementation of the phase-out strategy would have been effective only if the Maltese authorities had enough capacity. Nevertheless, in 2024, the IPA continued to recruit, hiring a fair number of resources which, according to interviewees, seemed sufficient to take over most of the activities. Finally, training and on-the-job coaching were very important activities in order to prepare the national authorities for the handover.

Registrations, interviews, and assessment reports

In 2022, the EUAA provided a high degree of support to **registration/lodging** of IP applications, reflecting the significant efforts of EUAA personnel in clearing the backlog, but also the decrease in migrant arrivals in Malta in 2022. In 2023, the EUAA continued supporting the registrations/lodgings despite challenges associated with personnel turnover. IPA and EUAA personnel confirmed the significant contribution the EUAA made to decreasing the registration backlog, thus ensuring a more effective (and timely) access to the asylum procedure. Feedback from interviews with EUAA personnel suggested that they were able to prioritise some cases which were pending for a long time, working together with the IPA.

Finally, the EUAA fully phased out from this activity by June 2024, in line with the third OP amendment. By then, the IPA had deployed a team of sufficient resources and was actively enhancing its capacity to take over registration activities from the EUAA in a smooth and timely manner.

In their efforts to reduce the backlog, the EUAA caseworkers conducted a high number of **interviews** in the individual asylum determination procedure and submitted a fair number of **assessment reports** in the evaluation period, almost achieving the targets. In relation to cases amended by the EUAA caseworkers assigned by the Quality Unit, the IPA's policy of sending cases back to the caseworker's team for amendments in large batches and requesting retroactively amendments for cases (following changes in policies and guidelines) added pressure and disrupted established workflows. As a response, in 2023, the EUAA and IPA agreed to develop a workflow to return cases in a more efficient manner. Overall, issues at the IPA and EUAA (mostly related to a lack of capacity and high turnover rate within the casework team) were a significant factor hindering the achievement of yearly targets, although recruitment efforts contributed to ensuring business continuity.

Moreover, requests from the IPA to prioritise applicants from safe countries of origin, often with unattainable deadlines for completion, created major challenges at field -level (e.g. including by not allowing sufficient time for preparation). At the same time, no structural efforts were implemented to process those cases being the longest delay pending a review by the Quality Unit. Based on the



analysis, the IPA's emphasis on prioritising the claims it deemed manifestly unfounded under the accelerated procedure might have added to the time that asylum applicants, with manifestly founded claims (especially vulnerable applicants), spent awaiting a decision. To mitigate this situation, a scheduling workflow was developed by the EUAA and jointly implemented in 2023, which reduced the impact on the schedule and *a fortiori* on caseworkers. Between 2023 and 2024, resource management underwent significant adjustments to align with the phase-out plan for support in these activities and, despite human resource challenges especially on the IPA's side, the EUAA fully phased-out from this activity by June 2024. The IPA's development of a dashboard, similar to the EUAA's, reflects their commitment to improving case management capabilities.

Support to the IPA's Quality Control Unit

In 2021, the EUAA notably supported the establishment of a Quality Control Unit at the IPA, with development of related internal guidelines and tools. In the evaluation period, the EUAA provided a high degree of support to the Quality Control Unit, including by conducting quality checks and drafting thematic review reports, partially achieving the targets.

Quality-related activities stood out as one of the main focus areas of measure 1, with the aim of sustainably building a quality component within the IPA. For example, in 2022, the EUAA's QAT was presented to the IPA and two workshops were organised and delivered, with the support of C3 staff, on themes agreed upon with the IPA. In 2023, significant efforts were directed towards further enhancing the IPA's quality assurance procedures, with the EUAA doubling resources at the quality level. Additional notable quality-related activities were the case overturning workflow and the scheduling request workflow. By June 2024, the QAT exercise was fully completed.

Feedback from interviews with EUAA personnel suggested that the **EUAA was able to effectively mainstream quality across all activities that the IPA carried out** (e.g., from the time of registration lodging throughout the first instance interviews to the review). This was the EUAA's legacy to the IPA, to enable it to manage its backlog efficiently in the future. On the other hand, EUAA personnel and the national authorities noted that activities in relation to quality had been hampered by capacity challenges within both the IPA and EUAA. The IPA started scaling up their senior resources as of mid-2024 (and junior resources in 2023), however there were delays and difficulties in filling positions internally. Phase-out from these activities was completed by June 2024.

Country of origin information

The EUAA did not meet its target of supporting the establishment of a COI unit at the IPA in 2022, because the IPA decided to deprioritise this activity. COI related activities were officially phased out by the end of July 2023. However, the EUAA and IPA personnel continued receiving support in 2023 for COI queries through the EUAA horizontal COI helpdesk.

Dublin support

The EUAA processed 100% of outgoing Dublin requests throughout the evaluation period, which reflected the effectiveness of the EUAA's operation. Phase-out from these activities was successfully completed by June 2024.



Digitisation

Building on the support provided to the authorities in 2021, the EUAA worked on the digitisation of paper files, partially achieving the target for 2022 and overachieving the target in 2023. The partial achievement in 2022 was due to the fact that the project was deprioritised by the national authorities, because of staffing issues. In 2023, the EUAA digitisation team further supported the IPA in updating SOPs, surpassing the target as a result of the successful staffing and stabilisation of the team during January to September 2023. The EUAA phased-out from this activity in July 2023, as agreed with the IPA, following the latter's decision to deprioritise this activity and not build up a digitalisation team.

Information provision

A number of information provision materials related to asylum that exceeded the target were developed in 2023 with the EUAA's support; EUAA and national interviewees considered them particularly useful for the national authorities.

Support for relocation activities

In the third quarter of 2022, relocation efforts gained momentum under the VSM. Coordination meetings were held, and the EUAA supported the matching process, creation of the redistribution list, the consent to be obtained from potential candidates, and information provision. Relocation activities continued in 2023, remaining integral to the EUAA's efforts. Nonetheless, challenges persisted in 2023, with difficulties in matching candidates to pledges and formulating redistribution lists, due to minimal arrivals and a low number of eligible applicants in Malta. Despite the hurdles, EUAA ASTs provided crucial support at various stages of the relocation workflow, according to EUAA personnel. In 2024, the EUAA increased its support on relocation activities, including the onboarding of IPA personnel (e.g. on the VSM relocation notification tool), scheduling of asylum and VSM-related appointments, and interpretation support to VSM. The EUAA maintained the organisation of information sessions and overall coordination of VSM-related activities in Malta until December 2024. Overall, despite the challenges in relation to the matching of candidates with pledging Member States and the expansion of the candidates' relocation pool, the EUAA was effective in supporting this activity.

Training and capacity development initiatives

The capacity of national authorities was increased through the organisation or facilitation of training sessions on European Asylum Curriculum modules, tailor-made training and on-the-job coaching activities. Among others, training covered the following topics: communication and information provision, legal framework on IP, ethical and professional standards, trafficking in human beings, management in the asylum context, registration of IP applications, vulnerability, and identification of Dublin cases.

Measure 2: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities in relation to quality in reception

Building on the support given to AWAS since 2020, **positive progress was made in enhancing the capacity of the national authority to address vulnerabilities, ensure information provision, and in contributing to the overall quality of reception services.** Throughout the evaluation period, the EUAA focused on supporting AWAS to develop systems and structures, tools allowing for better monitoring and planning, positively influencing AWAS's working methods.



In 2022, implementation challenges included lack of office space especially for SWs, and high turnover and recruitment challenges, while in 2023 challenges mostly related to recruitment, resource deployment and changes in AWAS leadership. These issues were addressed to ensure the continuity of activities, and substantial groundwork was laid in 2023 for a successful transition and collaboration between the EUAA and AWAS. Notable examples of this groundwork include quality assurance activities, such as adapting the ARC tool to the Maltese context, the self-assessment of reception conditions, and the information provision package on reception translated in several languages. In 2024, support to reception reached the target of 100 % in all areas, and the phase out was successfully completed in June 2024.

In relation to the **priority question**, the phase-out strategy proved effective despite several challenges affecting its implementation in practice. While the phase-out faced challenges related to AWAS deployment timelines, the collaborative efforts between the EUAA and AWAS aimed at ensuring a successful transition. More specifically, the **EUAA was able to phase-out from three areas, namely vulnerability, information provision and social work** as of 31 December 2022. Examples of collaboration efforts in these areas included tailored onboarding processes and the creation of comprehensive materials, such as the vulnerability assessment template with interview questions, and vulnerability SOPs. On the other hand, feedback from EUAA staff highlighted that the time allocated for the handover was insufficient, necessitating the condensation of all handover activities within a very short period. Concurrently, national authorities faced challenges related to resources and capacity.

During interviews, the capacity of national authorities and their sense of ownership and commitment were identified as examples of critical factors for the effectiveness of the phase-out strategy. This was particularly evident in areas like information provision, where national authorities were still in need of additional resources to continue without the EUAA's support. The extension of support to quality assurance until June 2024 indicated a continued partnership between the entities beyond the original timeline, reflecting a mutual commitment to collaboration in critical areas such as quality assurance in reception.

Vulnerability assessors and social workers

In 2022, the EUAA partially achieved the target in relation to vulnerability assessments, mostly due to no-shows of applicants and reduced boat arrivals, which maintained low numbers throughout the evaluation period.

The EUAA SW team initiated individual supervision and managed a caseload in line with the OP despite AWAS staff changes. In relation to UAM cases assigned to the EUAA SW team for follow-up actions, examples of support included accompanying UAMs during IPA asylum-related procedures or AWAS age assessments, the reunification of one UAM with family members in an EU member State at the end of 2022, and delivery of intake sessions to new UAM applicants.

The horizontal **information provision** team focused on content development (i.e., AWAS leaflet), and on video and animation development for AWAS, following the EUAA's *'Let's Speak Asylum'* methodology. As confirmed by EUAA personnel and national stakeholders during interviews, these activities contributed to increasing the national authorities' capacity to inform applicants in multiple languages and with formats easy to be understood.



The phase-out plan from the abovementioned three activities faced several challenges, in relation to the fact that the deployment of AWAS team was delayed, forcing the EUAA to constantly readjust the planned handover. AWAS confirmed the EUAA's phase-out from support to vulnerability activities, social work and information provision as of 31 December 2022. With the aim of developing national capacity on reception and handover vulnerability-related activities, the newly deployed AWAS assessments team underwent a tailored and comprehensive onboarding in late 2022. This included inductions and presentations on relevant workflows and procedures, shadowing activities and on-the-job coaching. As part of this phase-out and handover, more than 40 hours were dedicated in the form of presentations, capacity building sessions and shadowing activities. With the support of vulnerability and reception focal points from C3, the team of measure 2 updated vulnerability SOPs, finalised a new SVNA report template and created a template for the vulnerability assessment, with a list of vulnerability-related interview questions. All materials developed were included in the handover package, which included the handover of the SWs case management tool and Power Bi dashboard, among others.

Quality assurance in reception

Quality Assurance in reception focused on the drafting and development of the AWAS quality assurance framework in 2022, which was finalised and endorsed in the first quarter of 2023. The formation of a team for quality assurance in reception was noteworthy and support to quality assurance was extended until 2024. In March 2023, AWAS indicated an interest in requesting the EUAA's support on quality assurance beyond 2023, to allow more time for the implementation of quality activities and receipt of the EUAA's guidance on the establishment of the Agency's quality assurance and monitoring framework. This extension of the support was formalised through a second amendment to the OP, signed on 15 May 2023. In the first half of 2024, the EUAA dedicated significant effort towards improving the capacity of the authorities and facilitating the daily transfer of technical knowledge, expertise, workflows and operational tools. The EUAA successfully supported the employment of the ARC tool in two AWAS reception centres, developed a complaint and response mechanism along with a recording and monitoring tool, and contributed to the development of SOPs and guidelines. In line with the third OP amendment, reception activities were fully handed over to AWAS in June 2024.

Training and capacity development activities

The capacity of national authorities was increased through the organisation or facilitation of training sessions, thematic sessions, and coaching activities. **Training sessions** were organised in the evaluation period, for instance on legal framework on IP, and communication with children. Moreover in 2023, ASTs attended the EUAA's training sessions on reception of vulnerable persons, applicants with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sexual characteristics, communication with children, and on the use of the EUAA's ARC tool. A training session on the ARC tool module was organised and delivered in September 2023, within the framework of the OP, with participants from AWAS and the EUAA. Finally, the establishment of an **interpreters pool** and the implementation of an interpreter performance feedback questionnaire were key achievements in the first quarter of 2022.



Measure 3: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities to effectively implement the TPD

The support provided by the EUAA contributed to the effective implementation of the TPD to the consistent satisfaction of the IPA. Throughout the reported period, the EUAA played a crucial role in supporting TP registrations, managing cases efficiently, and providing additional assistance related to the Ukrainian conflict. Challenges, including waiting times and high turnover among temporary workers, were addressed, leading to a smooth and effective collaboration between the EUAA and IPA. The progressive reduction in TP registrations was managed by adjusting resources, and overall, the measure's implementation demonstrated positive outcomes. Initially, applicants faced waiting times due to the need to book registration appointments in advance, but the IPA's capacity to provide TP registration appointments constantly improved, going from an initial average of two weeks to an average of 7-10 days by June 2022. As of 2023, all TP cases were processed on the same day.

The EUAA registration team at the IPA provided great support to the registration of TP applications and to the management of TP cases. The established workflow was also satisfactory for the Maltese authority, ensuring smooth cooperation and addressing initial cooperation challenges.

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

There was a unanimous consensus among stakeholders that the EUAA's support through the OP 2022-2024 brought about significant **added value**: the EUAA in fact significantly enhanced Malta's capacities in relation to the asylum system and reception.

The EUAA's support in Malta went beyond personnel deployment and front-line support, extending to a more structural level with the development of tools, methodologies, SOPs, workflows, amongst others. For instance, the EUAA's contribution to the implementation of a quality assurance framework in the IPA and AWAS represented a tangible investment in the long-term sustainability of Malta's asylum and reception systems, therefore beyond the immediate timeframe of the OP. Another example was the development of material for information provision for the asylum and reception authorities and workflows/tools for vulnerability, which further standardised critical aspects of the asylum process and reception, ensuring a cohesive and EU-aligned approach.

Furthermore, the EUAA facilitated capacity building and skill transfer, thereby ensuring a sustainable impact beyond the immediate scope of the OP. The EUAA's support enabled the implementation of comprehensive training plans and the provision of specific expertise, through on-the-job coaching and onboarding of new personnel. This human resource-focused approach contributed to the development of internal capacities and capabilities, ensuring long-term sustainability.

The EUAA's contributions, especially in the form of resources and personnel, enabled the implementation of actions that would have been difficult to carry out by the Maltese authorities alone, such as in the areas of registrations, vulnerability assessment, or support to TP applicants. There was general agreement across the stakeholders consulted that, in the absence of the EUAA's support, changes would have taken place, but at a slower pace and they would have potentially been less in line with European standards.



4.3. Is the action relevant?

The support provided by the Agency was **relevant** to address the needs and respond to the challenges faced by the Maltese asylum and reception system. The participatory approach of the OP design contributed to the relevance of the three measures as they responded to pre-identified needs as well as to the priorities that emerged during its implementation. During interviews, several stakeholders recognised that this was largely a consequence of the fact that the needs assessment preceding the OP was carried out jointly by the EUAA with the Maltese authorities. In addition, the fact that the OP 2022-2024 built on the OP 2021 contributed to its relevance and allowed for the incorporation of lessons learned from previous collaborations.

The OP was a **flexible tool** to respond to fluctuating needs. The needs that the OP sought to address constantly evolved during the evaluation period. The OP was adapted multiple times to reflect these changes, which exemplified the ability of the Agency to swiftly adapt to emerging needs. For example, the first amendment introduced a measure supporting the authorities to effectively implement the TPD following the invasion of Ukraine. A prioritised needs assessment was then conducted in the second half of 2022, to review the EUAA's support based on the evolving needs and the OP was amended accordingly in May 2023 to reflect the identified needs and challenges.

On the other hand, during interviews, EUAA personnel noted certain limitations on the areas of intervention due to the obligation to respond to requests for support from the Maltese authorities rather than being able to identify areas of operation.

Several benefits were associated with the move from a one-year to a three-year OP in Malta. One of the most significant benefits underscored by most stakeholders was the opportunity for long-term planning: indeed, the three-year OP framework provided a more extended and strategic outlook, enabling stakeholders to engage in comprehensive, phased, and sustained interventions, which contributed to a more stable and continuous operational environment. A longer timeframe however did not imply more rigidity, as the OP remained very flexible as specified in the paragraph above. This flexibility ensured that the OP remained responsive to dynamic challenges and evolving priorities, contributing to its overall effectiveness.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This section presents the main conclusions, highlights good practices and lessons learnt, and proposes recommendations that could be useful for the EUAA's interventions in other countries.

5.1. Conclusions

The effectiveness of the intervention in Malta was overall good, albeit with varying degrees of achievement across the measures. Considerable progress was made across the three measures despite the human resource challenges and the new demands brought about by the invasion of Ukraine. The EUAA and national authorities continued to face challenges with the recruitment of new personnel,



and high employee turnover resulting from challenging working conditions, awareness of the phase-out and job opportunities in other operations.

Overall, **the EUAA was able to respond effectively to the requests of national counterparts in line with what was originally agreed and to changing priorities.** In relation to measure 1, the EUAA had a positive and practical impact in reducing the backlog at first instance and enhancing national capacity in various aspects. In relation to measure 2, key achievements could be identified in the areas of vulnerability assessment, social work, information provision and quality in reception. Regarding measure 3, support provided to TP applicants was crucial to enhance the national capacity to implement the TPD. This support provided by the EUAA boosted capacity and knowledge within the Maltese system, as the authorities could benefit from methodologies and standards, templates, workflows, training and capacity-building activities. Across the three measures, effectiveness was fostered by the good working relationships that the EUAA has developed with staff at the IPA and AWAS.

In relation to the **priority question**, the EUAA's phase-out strategy in Malta demonstrated a concerted effort to plan a smooth transition in partnership with Maltese authorities, although the implementation diverged from the original plans, mostly due to human resource issues, and more specifically the national authorities' issues in scaling up their resources in a timely manner. In terms of measure 1, training and on-the-job coaching were identified as crucial components for the success of the phase-out, emphasising the need for the commitment and capacity of Maltese authorities. In relation to measure 2, the phase-out strategy faced challenges related to AWAS deployment timelines, but collaborative efforts between the EUAA and AWAS ensured a successful transition. Comprehensive materials, such as vulnerability assessment templates and onboarding processes, facilitated a thorough understanding of workflows. Feedback highlighted that the allocated time for handover was often insufficient, posing challenges for both the EUAA staff and national authorities dealing with resource and capacity issues. Critical factors for the effectiveness of the phase-out strategy included the capacity and commitment of national authorities, for example in areas like information provision.

In terms of the **coherence of the OP**, the evaluation found that the three measures were **complementary and that coordination between actors and strategies was key to their implementation.** The OP was designed to ensure complementarity and synergy among its measures, creating an integrated approach to asylum and reception. A needs assessment process laid the foundation for internal coherence, where measures across these domains were perceived as mutually reinforcing. This was consistently affirmed by interviewees who highlighted the seamless coordination achieved through regular meetings and communication, joint reporting, and strategic planning between the different EUAA sectors. As for the coordination between national authorities, the EUAA played a facilitator role in coordinating stakeholders, employing mechanisms such as regular meetings, joint initiatives, and effective communication channels. The collaboration with international organisations, including UNHCR and IOM, exemplified a commitment to a coordinated approach. Regular inclusion of these organisations in needs assessment processes and joint initiatives indicated a shared goal of enhancing access to asylum and reception conditions.

The efficiency of the intervention was considered to be good. While the overall budget allocated for implementing the OP was considered sufficient by interviewees, efficiency in achieving its targets in the evaluation period was hampered primarily by the low number of arrivals in Malta. Moreover,



staffing issues at the EUAA and national authorities had an impact, although there was no evidence of budget constraints. The budget figures provided insights into the budget allocations and consumption rates, indicating that a small portion of the budget remained unutilised, potentially due to the challenges in human resources.

The turnover among main and often senior counterparts posed challenges, impacting the development and implementation of the OP. Frequent changes in personnel, particularly in key roles, led to gaps in knowledge transfer and efficiency. In addition, issues related to temporary workers and the inability to form full teams contributed to operational challenges. Such challenges were mitigated by reviewing the budget and reallocating resources to address emerging needs. The efficiency of all measures was rated as good. The phased deployment of resources and internal re-deployment of internal resources from measure 1 to measure 3 showcased the EUAA's ability to adjust its human resources based on the evolving needs.

The EU added value of the OP was rated as very good. The EUAA's support was highly valued by the national authorities who agreed that, while changes would have eventually taken place without the support of the EUAA, they would have done so at a slower pace and would have potentially been less in line with European standards. The EUAA significantly enhanced Malta's capacities in relation to the asylum system and quality in reception, providing support which goes beyond personnel deployment and front-line support, extending to a more structural level with the development of tools, methodologies, SOPs and workflows, amongst others. Furthermore, the EUAA facilitated capacity building and skill transfer, ensuring a sustainable impact beyond the immediate scope of the OP.

The relevance of this OP was considered very good. The support provided by the Agency was relevant to address the needs and respond to the challenges faced by the Maltese asylum and reception system. The EUAA's capacity to adapt to changes in priorities was visible, as well as its rapid and effective response to the requests expressed by the authorities. This was seen, for instance, with the inclusion of measure 3 to address the challenges of implementing the TPD. Overall, the analysis confirmed the need for and relevance of the EUAA's operation in Malta in the evaluation period, which built on lessons learned from previous OPs. The three-year OP framework provided a more extended and strategic outlook, enabling stakeholders to engage in comprehensive, phased, and sustained interventions, which contribute to a more stable and continuous operational environment. On the other hand, the OP remained very flexible. The EUAA was indeed able to adjust to the emerging needs by reviewing and amending the OP and/or adapting the phase-out plan because of delays on the national authorities' side.

The table below presents a scoring for each criterion and each measure, formulated on the basis of the results presented in this report. The ratings cover the spectrum from fair to very good.



Table 2. Scoring of achievements of the Malta OP 2022-24 (during the evaluation period) based on the achievement of targets

	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3
Effectiveness ¹²	Good	Good	Very good
Coherence	Very good	Very good	Very good
Efficiency	Good	Good	Good
EU added value	Very good	Very good	Very good
Relevance	Very good	Very good	Very good

5.2. Good practices and lessons learnt

The following **good practices** were highlighted during the implementation of the Malta OP 2022-2024:

- The development and translation of information provision material was identified by most stakeholders as a good practice as the materials can be used by the national authorities after the phase out;
- In the area of reception, the development of guidelines and templates contributed to a methodology on vulnerability assessment and social work;
- Data visualisation (e.g., statistics) was considered a good practice to be able to understand and visualise trends, such as the number of arrivals or number of cases;
- The collaborative approach across the EUAA’s centres played a pivotal role in maintaining coherence between the measures. This cross-centre collaboration facilitated effective solutions to the multifaceted challenges encountered during implementation;
- Good working relationship between the EUAA, AWAS and IPA proved productive in the evaluation period.
- The development of a comprehensive phase-out strategy, agreed upon with authorities and followed up with consistent planning, ensured a common understanding of the targets, thereby contributing to a smooth and successful phase-out.

The following **lessons learnt** were particularly relevant:

- Phasing out earlier than originally planned might have a negative impact on the effective handover to the national authorities;
- Collaborative planning with the authorities is key at every stage of OP implementation. Informed planning, realistic expectations, and concrete engagement with authorities mitigate risks and contribute to a successful phase-out;
- High turnover rates and challenges with recruitment within the EUAA, as well as at the IPA and AWAS, highlighted that effective recruitment processes and retention of personnel were key to address shortages having the largest negative impact on performance;

¹² The rating is mainly based on the degree to which activities were completed at the time of writing, coupled with judgements about the degree to which non-implementation was caused by factors outside of the control of the Agency.



- Acknowledging staff contributions, implementing strategies to retain knowledge and skills, and investing in training and development were crucial elements for a sustainable phase-out.

This evaluation also takes note of **horizontal considerations** which can be taken forward by the EUAA's senior management:

- **The EUAA could continue developing long-term OP plans to promote the retention of human resources and knowledge.** Continue establishing robust long-term planning for resource engagement, knowledge and skills retention, and ongoing professional development and training for EUAA personnel to ensure continuity and sustainability in future operations. The EUAA could address challenges related to recruitment and resource retention, focusing on developing targeted retention efforts, considering strategies to encourage personnel to stay;
- **In order to promote sustainable operations and effective transitions, it is crucial to assist authorities in finding the optimal balance between ongoing permanent support and capacity building efforts.** To support this objective, the EUAA could:
 - Collaborate with national authorities to assess their current capacity and identify areas where additional support may be necessary;
 - Provide targeted assistance and training programmes to enhance the capacity of local institutions and personnel (e.g. train the trainer, etc);
 - Encourage the gradual transition towards self-sufficiency while maintaining a level of ongoing support to address evolving needs and challenges;
 - Elaborate on comprehensive risk mitigation strategies, identifying potential challenges and implementing measures to address them proactively.

5.3. Recommendations

This section builds on the findings and the conclusions drawn during the evaluation of the Malta OP 2022-2024 and offers recommendations for future endeavours.

Recommendation 1. Ensure future relevance of the phase-out implementation plan

The EUAA established and implemented comprehensive phase-out strategies and implementation plans by activity, ensuring clear milestones and timelines. In view of potential further requests for operational support by the Maltese authorities, the EUAA could:

- Regularly revisit and refine the phase-out plan in consultation with national authorities to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities, allowing for enough flexibility in case there is political agreement to sign another OP in the future.



Annex 1: Methodology and analytical models used

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach, combining the use of existing sources of evidence with primary data collection, notably through interviews.

Desk research included the Agency's monitoring data, the OP document itself, the needs assessment, and to a lesser degree statistics on asylum and reception which were used as contextual background information. As explained previously in Section 3, the cutoff data for this evaluation (end of September 2024), did not allow an assessment of the annual targets for 2024. Nevertheless, this had a minimal impact on the results of this evaluation, as in most cases the annual targets were already overachieved (or at least met) by the end of September 2024.

In terms of **interviews**, the evaluation made use of evidence collected through a total of 20 interviews. The consulted stakeholders include relevant staff members from the EUAA, Maltese authorities as well as international organisations.

The collected primary and secondary evidence underwent a process of **triangulation and synthesis**, with a view to derive robust, evidence-based answers to the evaluation questions, and formulate conclusions and lessons learnt for the future on that basis.

The **conclusions and lessons learned**, as well as **recommendations** resulting from them, were validated with the Agency's personnel after the submission of the draft report to ensure they were valid and appropriate, and workable given any contextual constraints faced by the Agency and/or other stakeholders.



Annex 2: Intervention logic¹³

Needs/problems	Expected objectives
<p>Need to improve the access to the asylum procedure in Malta and increase the capacity of the Maltese authorities to manage the asylum backlog at first instance determination.</p> <p>Need to enhance the capacity of the Quality Assurance Unit of the AWAS.</p> <p>Need increase the capacity of the Maltese authorities to manage the implementation of the TPD.</p>	<p>Provide effective operational, technical and emergency support effectively through implementation of the annual measures in the agreed OP and in line with the Agency’s mandate to enable Malta to respond to particular pressure on its asylum and reception systems, and to implement its obligations under the CEAS and the TPD.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Result impact</p> <p>Implementation of CEAS obligations in the field of asylum and reception.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Result outcomes</p> <p>Expected outcome 1: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities to ensure swift access to the international protection procedure and reduce the backlog at first instance</p> <p>Expected outcome 2: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities in relation to quality in reception</p> <p>Expected outcome 3: Enhanced capacity of the Maltese authorities to effectively implement the TPD</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Result outputs</p> <p>Expected outcome 1</p> <p>Support provided to the finalisation of the information provision package on asylum in Malta and to the development of new information provision materials covering various procedural steps, with simple and clear content, appropriate for the age and level of understanding of the applicants, in a language that the applicant is reasonably supposed to understand;</p>	

¹³ The intervention logic here reflects the latest amendment of the OP (April 2023). Therefore, the intervention logic displayed in this table lists outcomes, outputs and activities as they are in their final form after the latest amendment, consistently with the way the implementation of the action and the evaluation findings are presented in Sections 3 and 4 of the report.



Registration of applications for international protection, as well as registration of applications in the implementation of the technical non-binding SOPs;

Referral to the relevant Maltese authorities of vulnerability indicators recorded during the asylum procedure;

Support to the Maltese Dublin Unit with regular Dublin procedure cases and Dublin procedure cases in the implementation of the technical non-binding SOPs;

Personal interviews in the individual asylum determination procedure conducted;

Assessment reports delivered to support the IPA asylum decision making processes;

Support provided to enhance the IPA's capacity on asylum quality assurance mechanisms;

Support in the use of high-quality COI for the asylum decision process and promote COI methodology;

Support for the development and/or updating of guidelines, guidance and practical tools, when necessary;

Support for the development, testing and implementation, where relevant, of related IT practical tools;

Training sessions and capacity building sessions, delivered to enhance the capacity, knowledge and skills of the trainees in specific areas of expertise.

Expected outcome 2

Support to AWAS in designing and implementing quality assurance measures in the context of reception;

Update and/or development of SOPs, guidelines, and practical tools, when necessary;

Enhanced capacity, knowledge and skills of the personnel in specific areas of expertise through the delivery of training and coaching sessions;

Expected Outcome 3

Delivery of information provision on TPD supported;

TP registrations and assessment of the eligibility criteria supported;

Early identification of vulnerabilities of applicants applying for TP supported, when necessary;

Provision of reception services by Maltese authorities to TP beneficiaries supported, when necessary.

Activities

Support the finalisation of the information provision package on asylum and the development of new materials and appropriate dissemination tools and implementation procedures;

Support with referral of vulnerable cases;



Support to the asylum procedure first instance processes – registration, Dublin procedure, personal interview, drafting of assessment reports – to improve access to the asylum procedure, decrease the processing period at first instance and reduce the existing backlog;

Support the registration, matching, drafting of the relocation distribution list, information provision on relocation and the file processing as per the technical non-binding SOPs;

Support the Quality Control Unit and the asylum procedure quality control mechanism, including through the drafting of relevant guidance/SOPs, as needed;

Support in the use of high-quality COI for the asylum decision process and promote COI methodology;

Support the digitisation project of the existing paper-based individual asylum files;

Development and testing of relevant tools, as needed;

Complementary support with physical and remote interpretation, whenever needed in addition to the cultural mediators recruited under the AMIF National Programme;

Training of Maltese national experts, members of EUAA ASTs, as well as interpreters recruited with the support of the AMIF National Programme, as required.

Support the design of an AWAS quality assurance framework and of the related implementation plan;

Support the organisation of thematic online meeting(s) and/or study visit(s) with the reception authorities of different Member States to foster the exchange of knowledge, information and good practices in relation to reception standards and quality in reception;

Support the harmonisation of workflows and procedures, internal cooperation and information sharing;

Support the roll out of self-assessment surveys and internal audits, when necessary;

Support the update and/or development of guidelines and practical integrated tools, when necessary;

Interpretation as needed for the activities of ASTs, complementing interpretation provided with the support of the AMIF National Programme;

Training of Maltese national experts, members of the EUAA's ASTs, as well as the interpreters, as required

Support information provision on the TPD in a language likely to be understood;

Support TP registrations;

Support the assessment of eligibility criteria for TP applications;

Support the issuing of TP decisions;

Support the issuing and the delivery of TP certificates;

Support the drafting of leaflets/information material in a language likely to be understood, when necessary;



Additional support for the implementation of TP activities, conditional upon agreement between the EUAA and the Maltese authorities.

Inputs

Human resources: various, including ASTs, registration/front-desk personnel, data entry personnel, coordination assistant, case workers, Dublin procedure personnel, quality assurance, COI assistant, information provision personnel, interpreters, etc.

Material resources: e.g. equipment, services, communication/promotional material, infrastructure items, IT equipment, office supplies and printing.

Financial resources invested from the EUAA's budget.

External factors

Specific circumstances on the ground; national and international rules/laws; availability of financial and human resources; other actions by authorities, IOM, UNHCR, other international organisations, civil society organisations; humanitarian crises.



Annex 3. Evaluation matrix

Evaluation criterion	Operationalised questions	Interviews	Desk research
<p>Effectiveness: To what extent have the expected outcomes of the EUAA-Malta OP 2022-2024 been achieved? Where expectations have not been met, what factors have hindered their achievement?</p>	<p>To what extent was the intervention implemented as envisaged? Which activities were and were not implemented and why?</p> <p>Were there any problems related to the implementation and application of the OP? If so, which ones and why?</p> <p>Priority question: To what extent has the EUAA phase-out strategy in Malta been effectively planned and implemented? Will it ensure an effective handover to the Maltese authorities and contribute to the sustainability of the system once the OP comes to an end? What more could be done and what lessons can be learned for other OPs?</p> <p>To what extent were the expected <u>outputs</u> achieved? If there were shortcomings, what (internal and external) factors caused these?</p> <p>To what extent were the expected <u>outcomes</u> achieved? If there were shortcomings, what (internal and external) factors caused these?</p> <p>To what extent has progress towards the overall aim (intended impact) of the intervention been made? To what extent can this progress be linked to the OP?</p> <p>Can any (unintended) social or environmental impacts be observed that are linked to the EUAA's intervention?</p>	✓	✓
<p>Efficiency: Have the outcomes of the EUAA-Malta OP 2022-2024 been achieved at the best relationship between resource inputs (costs, human resources, time) and outputs?</p>	<p>What inputs (costs, full-time equivalents, time investments) were associated with the implementation of the OP? How did these inputs compare to what was planned?</p> <p>Were these inputs sufficient to achieve the intended outputs/outcomes? Why or why not?</p> <p>To what extent has the governance structure of the Agency supported its ability to perform its tasks, having regard to its size, composition, organisation and work processes?</p> <p>Have there been any challenges to the efficient implementation of the intervention? If so,</p>	✓	✓



Evaluation criterion	Operationalised questions	Interviews	Desk research
	<p>which (internal or external) factors affected its efficient implementation and how did the EUAA mitigate them?</p> <p>Have any inefficiencies been identified? If so, how could these be addressed to increase the efficiency of the intervention / of future interventions?</p> <p>How timely and efficient was the intervention’s administrative process (e.g., for reporting and monitoring)? Were there any inefficiencies associated with these processes?</p>		
<p>Coherence: To what extent was the EUAA-Malta OP 2022-2024 coherent with the EUAA’s actions more generally and with other interventions which have similar objectives? To what extent has the OP proved complementary to others in the field?</p>	<p>What other interventions, implemented by the EU, national authorities, international organisations, or civil society organisations existed in Malta that had similar objectives to the OP?</p> <p>To what extent was the intervention coherent with other <u>EU interventions</u> that had similar intended results? Were synergies actively sought to promote the ‘Team Europe’ approach and were possible overlaps avoided?</p> <p>To what extent was the intervention coherent with other <u>national interventions</u> that had similar intended results? Were synergies actively sought and possible overlaps avoided? Why or why not?</p> <p>To what extent was the intervention coherent with other <u>interventions implemented by international organisations or civil society organisations</u> that had similar intended results? Were synergies actively sought and possible overlaps avoided? Why or why not?</p>	✓	✓
<p>Relevance: To what extent was the EUAA-Malta OP 2022-2024 significant to the needs of the Maltese authorities?</p>	<p>To what extent was the intervention in Malta relevant to meet the needs of authorities and organisations? How well has the EUAA been able to respond to their needs?</p> <p>To what extent did the scope and intended results of the intervention in Malta remain relevant over the implementation period? If the needs changed over time, was the intervention adapted accordingly?</p> <p>To what extent do the needs/problems addressed by the intervention in Malta</p>	✓	✓



Evaluation criterion	Operationalised questions	Interviews	Desk research
	continue to require action by the EUAA? Will the intervention continue to be relevant in the foreseeable future?		
<p>EU added value: What is the additional EU added value resulting from the EUAA activities in Malta, compared to what could be achieved by the authorities alone?</p>	<p>What has been the EU added value of the EUAA's intervention compared to those of other actors?</p> <p>Could the intended results of the intervention have been achieved sufficiently by Maltese authorities acting alone?</p> <p>Were the intended results met more efficiently by the EUAA than they would have been met by Maltese authorities (e.g. larger benefits per unit cost stemming from economies of scale)?</p> <p>It is still valid to assume that the intended results of the intervention can best be met by action by the EUAA? What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the EUAA's intervention?</p>	✓	✓