EASO Strategy on Reception

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMF	Asylum and Migration Fund
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
COM	European Commission
CSO(s)	Civil society organisation(s)
DCLI	Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration – within the Italian Ministry of Interior
DG	Directorate-General – within the European Commission
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
DGMM	Turkish Directorate General of Migration Managmeent
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EPS	Early Warning and Preparedness System
ESQF	European Sectorial Qualification Framework
EU	European Union
EU+ countries	Member States of the European Union and associated countries
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
IDS	Information and Documentation System
IOM	International Organization for Migration
Member States	Member States of the European Union
NCP(s)	National Contact Point(s)
NFI	Non-food item

NGO	Non-governmental organisations
RCD	Reception conditions directive. Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)
RIC	Reception and Identification Centre
RIS	Reception and Identification Service
SOP(s)	Standard operating procedure(s)
UAM(s)	Unaccompanied minor(s)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1 INTRODUCTION

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO), established by Regulation (EU) No 439/2010[1], has a mandate to strengthen practical cooperation on asylum and reception among the Member States of the European Union (EU), to enhance the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and to support Member States whose asylum and reception systems are under particular pressure. The successful implementation of the CEAS primarily depends on the EU Member States and their asylum and reception systems, which EASO continuously supports in line with its mandate.

This Strategy forms part of a comprehensive effort to enhance the effectiveness of the CEAS, notably the recast Reception Conditions Directive[2] (RCD). It complements the efforts of EU+ countries[3] as well as EASO's existing support to the implementation of the CEAS.

The current EASO Strategy on reception was presented to the EASO Management Team in September 2020 and to the EASO Reception Network in December 2020, followed by a written consultation of the National Contact Points (NCPs) from EU+ countries in the EASO Network of Reception Authorities, the European Commission (COM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). All feedback was duly taken into consideration and to the extent possible implemented in the current version. Following discussions in the Management Board Preparatory Group and a pre-Management Board brief in February-March 2021, the Strategy was endorsed by the EASO Management Board on 18 March 2021. Reception is of central importance as a building block of the CEAS. The RDC provides for further harmonisation of standards for the reception of applicants for international protection in the EU. Reception conditions, however, continue to vary considerably between Member States both in terms of how the reception system is organised and in terms of the standards provided to applicants.

The 2015 European Agenda on Migration underlined the importance of a clear system for the reception of applicants for international protection as part of a strong, common European asylum policy. The lack of harmonisation of reception conditions across Europe has an impact on the viability of the Dublin system, on secondary movements, as well as on the EU public opinion and media. In 2016 and 2018, a reform of the CEAS was proposed by the Commission, including a proposal to amend the RCD and a proposal for a new regulation establishing the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). The requirement to have national contingency plans in place for sufficient reception capacity at all times, including in times of disproportionate pressure, would support adequate reception conditions across the EU. Building on these proposed reforms, a New Pact on Migration and Asylum was presented by the Commission in September 2020, with additional elements for a common asylum and migration framework. Immediate

[1] Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 establishing a European Asylum Support Office (OJ L 132, 29.5.2010, p. 11).
[2] Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast) (OJ L 180, 29.6.2013, p. 96).
[3] EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

priority is given to the adoption of the revised RCD and the new EUAA Regulation, based on the provisional agreement already reached. Amended and new regulations have been proposed, notably on screening[4], and are expected to have an impact on reception.

EASO, in line with its role as a centre of expertise on asylum and reception, shall implement its strategy in view of increased solidarity and sense of responsibility among EU+ countries as well as between the EU+ countries and third countries[5], in the spirit of partnership and mutual exchanges of expertise and experience.

2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In line with EASO Regulation, the implementation of EASO's Strategy on reception shall be governed by the following principles.

Protection-sensitive approach

EASO's Strategy on reception shall take a protection-sensitive approach, in line with the EASO Regulation. Such an approach will take into account the protection and reception needs of applicants for international protection and the duty of states to ensure an adequate standard of living and comparable living conditions in all Member States for all applicants (Article 11 RCD). The reception of persons with special reception needs should be a primary consideration to ensure that reception is designed in a way that meets their special reception needs. These should be properly identified, assessed and addressed without prejudice to the assessment of international protection needs pursuant to Directive 2011/95/EU. Special focus should be given to the reception of unaccompanied children. Protection of their fundamental rights and human dignity will be of primary consideration.

Coherence with European legislation and policies

EASO's Strategy on reception shall be in line with the standards set within the CEAS. EASO shall promote, throughout its reception strategy, the legal standards of the CEAS and the operational standards and indicators it has developed with the purpose of supporting Member States in the full and coherent implementation of key provisions of the RCD.

Sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of the support

[4] Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL introducing a screening of third country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817 (COM/2020/612 final).

[5] EASO Regulation (Art. 7) Support for the External Dimension of the CEAS: "Pursuant to its mandate, and in accordance with Article 49, the Support Office may cooperate with competent authorities of third countries in technical matters, in particular with a view to promoting and assisting capacity building in the third countries' own asylum and reception systems and implementing regional protection programmes, and other actions relevant to durable solutions."

EASO is committed to ensure the sustainability of its impact through the provision of effective and efficient reception support. EASO activities on reception shall be planned based on needs or feasibility assessments and on a clear results framework to measure and monitor impact. These will follow results-based and theory of change management approaches as outlined in the EASO Operations Manual[6] and will be in line as appropriate, with this EASO Strategy on reception.

Partnership, cooperation and complementarity

EASO's Strategy on reception shall be further developed and implemented in consultation and close cooperation with the EU+ countries, COM, and, where relevant, in partnership with UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other relevant actors, such as civil society organisations (CSOs)and local authorities, when collaboration and complementarity can improve the outcome of activities planned or carried out in the field of reception.

EASO's Strategy on reception shall provide added value and not duplicate efforts made by other partners and stakeholders. Appropriate information-sharing and communication channels will be used to ensure complementarity and to capitalise on already developed methodologies, including by EU+ countries, COM and other stakeholders. EASO's Strategy on reception will be developed in a spirit of mutual interest with the EU+ countries and third countries concerned to tackle common challenges, while ensuring compatibility with EU external policies.

3 VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

EASO's Strategy on reception defines the general framework within which EASO will develop its work related to reception in EU+ countries and in the external dimension[7] of the CEAS.

To this end, EASO's reception strategic objectives are:

- Strengthen and/or when necessary establish reception systems in EU+ countries that protect applicants for international protection and ensure their adequate standard of living and well-being according to their needs, and, when possible, a meaningful occupation and/or self-sufficiency.

[6] The EASO Operations Manual was designed in a context of transition whereby operational support has evolved from demand-driven emergency response to a more structured and results-based approach enhancing predictability in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It aims at contributing to a coherent and reflective planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of EASO operations, with close involvement of the key stakeholders, including national counterparts and EASO Units and Sectors involved in the implementation of the planned support.

[7] The EASO Strategy on reception is complementary to the EASO *External Cooperation Strategy* adopted by the EASO Management Board in February 2019. The latter provides strategic direction for the EASO external actions and sets priorities and focus for the planning of future activities, detailing the type of support EASO can provide as well as the geographical priorities.

- Provide assistance on reception in EU+ countries under specific and disproportionate pressures on their asylum and reception systems, in particular due to their geographical position and/or demographic situation.
- Enhance the implementation and effectiveness of the CEAS, and notably its reception component developed through EASO's standards and indicators, guidance and practical tools, among EU+ countries to ensure adequate and comparable living conditions in all Member States and to limit the secondary movements of applicants.
- Establish and/or strengthen reception systems in EU+ countries and/or third countries along the migratory routes that are adequately equipped and prepared to deal with pressure from a high influx of applicants or other circumstances that require flexible systems that can be adapted to changing needs.
- Enhance the coordination mechanisms (governance mechanism), practical cooperation between competent authorities under a coordinated multi-stakeholder approach. Exchange of information, experiences and best practices related to reception between EU+ countries and/or third countries, at management, technical and operational level.

This EASO Strategy on reception is in line with EASO's mandate. It will be implemented according to EASO internal planning cycle through EASO Single Programming Documents (SPD) and Annual Work Programmes (AWP).

The following circumstances will trigger a revision of this strategy, either at the request of EASO (including its Network of Reception Authorities) or the EASO Management Board and in coordination with COM:

- adoption of new legislative and policy instruments impacting the work of EASO, including the legislative proposals for establishing a fully-fledged European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA);
- significant changes in the international migration and asylum context, having an impact on Member States' priorities and EU priorities in third countries, when initiatives target third countries.

4 RECEPTION AS A PILLAR OF THE CEAS

Reception plays a fundamental role in the efficient implementation of the CEAS. From a practical and political point of view, the challenges to provide reception conditions in line with the European standards have a severe detrimental effect on the integrity of the CEAS. Indeed, inadequate reception conditions have a direct negative impact on the fundamental rights of applicants for international protection. They negatively affect their immediate needs, their health, their safety, and their future prospects. They lead to legitimate humanitarian concerns from CSOs and international organisations, to a lack of support from host communities located near informal settlements or camps managed well above capacity, to concerns about health, safety and public order, and to secondary movements.

Reception facilities can be categorised in different ways, such as[8]: arrival centres, meant for quick processing and transition to a more permanent structure; accommodation centres where residents wait for a decision on their application; integration centres, where they are prepared for a likely future in the host country. These are often also the first stable point for applicants since they began their journey. It is where they start their integration process: they learn about the host country, learn a new language, new skills, and build their first social bonds within the host society. This process is actively supported by reception authorities, in partnership with all stakeholders involved in integration activities, be them volunteer groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local and regional authorities or the national administration.

Reception facilities are also increasingly involved in activities preparing applicants with a final negative decision for the possibility of voluntary return. In several EU+ countries, reception staff play a role of 'return counsellor', or work alongside the staff of dedicated return agencies or departments.

Even if reception should by nature be temporary and length of stay is primarily linked to the asylum procedures, reception facilities are not merely a temporary place of accommodation that provides material reception conditions in line with standards. They are at the crossroad between the asylum procedure and what comes next: integration, relocation to another Member State, or return.

A comprehensive data collection and exchange of information on reception capacity and occupancy across the EU+ is yet to be achieved. EASO is exchanging reception data under the Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS) (see section 7.1), but not all EU+ countries are contributing yet.

Considerable discrepancies between material reception conditions across Member States contribute to fragmentation and lack of trust between Member States This is also shown in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)[9] and Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)[10], and the subsequent decisions taken by some Member States to suspend Dublin transfers[11] to Member States where reception conditions were deemed to amount to 'ill treatment'. Article 2 RCD places a positive obligation on Member States to ensure that material

[8] National authorities use different wordings, EASO refers here to the terminology used within its Network of Reception Authorities.
[9] ECtHR, judgment of 4 November 2014, *Tarakhel* v *Switzerland*, No 29127/12, ECLI:CE:ECHR:2014:1104JUD002921712. Summary available in the EASO Case law database. ECtHR, judgment of 21 January 2011, *M.S.S.* v *Belgium and Greece*, No 30696/09, ECLI: CE:ECHR:2011:0121JUD003069609. Summary available in the EASO Case law database.
[10] CJEU, judgment of 21 December 2011, joined cases C-411/10 and C-493/10, *N. S.* v *Secretary of State for the Home Department* and *M. E. and Others* v *Refugee Applications Commissioner and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform,* ECLI:EU:C:2011:865. Summary available in the EASO Case law database. ECR I-13905, para 94.
[11] CJEU, judgment of 19 March 2019, C-163/17, *Abubacarr Jawo* v *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, ECLI:EU:C:2019:218. Summary available in the EASO Case law database.

reception conditions are provided in line with the standards laid down by the directive.[12] Reception for specific categories of applicants has to be ensured in line with relevant European and national case law.

The 2015 Agenda on Migration highlighted the need for further guidance to improve the standards on reception conditions across EU Member States and gave an explicit **mandate to EASO to work on actions related to reception.** Upon COM's request, EASO started implementing key measures for the development of a more coherent approach to reception conditions in the EU.

5 LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR EASO ACTIVITIES ON RECEPTION

The RCD states in its 6th recital that

> 'The resources … of the European Asylum Support Office should be mobilised to provide adequate support to Member States' efforts in implementing the standards set in the second phase of the Common European Asylum System, in particular to those Member States which are faced with specific and disproportionate pressures on their asylum systems, due in particular to their geographical or demographic situation.'

While the 2010 regulation establishing EASO[13] gives a clear mandate to the agency to support Member States at operational level in terms of asylum procedure, it also opens possibilities of playing **an active operational support role to Member States 'subject to particular pressure on their reception system'** (Article 2(2)) and of **coordinating and supporting 'common action assisting …reception systems of Member States subject to particular pressure which places exceptionally heavy and urgent demands on their reception facilities'** (Article 8).

These actions can include coordinating '**action designed to ensure that appropriate reception facilities can be made available by the Member States subject to particular pressure, in particular emergency accommodation, transport and medical assistance**' (Article 10(b)).

It also gives to EASO a mandate to manage and develop a European Asylum Curriculum and to offer specific thematic training activities in knowledge and skills regarding asylum matters, **including on 'reception conditions, including special attention given to vulnerable groups and victims of torture'** Article 6(4)(f)).

[12] For further commentary see EASO, *Judicial analysis on the reception of applicants for international protection, (Reception Conditions Directive 2013/33/EU)*. The analysis includes how to 'assess the level of severity of ill treatment' in case of inhuman reception conditions or total absence thereof.
[13] Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 establishing a European Asylum Support Office (OJ L 132, 29.5.2010, p. 11).

Article 2 of EASO Regulation states that the Support Office 'shall be fully involved in the external dimension of CEAS' (). This support includes, with the required agreement of COM, to 'cooperate with competent authorities of third countries in technical matters, in particular with a view to promoting and assisting **capacity building in the third countries' own asylum and reception systems** and implementing regional protection programmes, and other actions relevant to durable solutions' (Article 7).

6 CURRENT PROPOSALS FOR A REVISED LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Bearing in mind the need to reach a political and technical agreement on a proposed reform of the CEAS, EASO is mindful of the potential impact of reforms on its mandate and on the scope of its activities.

The EUAA Regulation proposal (2016)[14] goes further than the EASO regulation, opening the possibility for a possible future agency to

- 'at the request of Member States, assist them to apply the operational standards, indicators**,** guidelines and best practices to their asylum and **reception systems by providing the necessary expertise or operational and technical assistance**.' (Article 12(3))
- and to 'monitor the operational and technical application of the CEAS in order to prevent or identify possible **shortcomings in the asylum and reception systems of** Member States and to assess their **capacity and preparedness to manage situations of disproportionate pressure** so as to enhance the efficiency of those systems.' (Article 13(1)).

Furthermore, Article 16(1) of the proposal tasks the agency with:

- providing operational and technical assistance to Member States at the request of the Member State to the Agency where its asylum or reception systems are subject to disproportionate pressure (a), upon the initiative of the Agency where a Member State's asylum or reception systems are subject to disproportionate pressure, and with the agreement of the Member State concerned (d) and where the Agency provides operational and technical assistance in accordance with Article 22(e).

Article 16(2) lists operational and technical measures which, as far as reception is concerned, '**may** entail taking one or more' measures, such as setting up reception facilities, identifying applicants with special reception needs or assisting Member States in ensuring that safeguards for unaccompanied children are in place.

The EUAA Regulation proposal also mandates the Agency to 'organise and coordinate activities promoting a correct and effective implementation of Union law on asylum, including through the

[14] The legislative references are based on the text of the proposal for a EUAA Regulation from December 2017, as negotiated by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

development of **operational standards, indicators, guidelines or best practices** …' (Article 12(1)).

At the request of Member States, the Agency would also '**assist** them to apply the operational standards, indicators, guidelines and best practices to their asylum and reception systems **by providing the necessary expertise or operational and technical assistance**' (Article 12(3)).

Finally, the proposed EUAA regulation further develops modalities of cooperation with third countries, including on reception issues (Article 35).

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum, presented by the Commission in September 2020[15], supports the provisional agreement reached in 2017 on both the EUAA Regulation and the revised RCD.

7 OVERVIEW OF PAST AND CURRENT EASO SUPPORT IN RECEPTION

Based on the outlined legal framework, EASO has been conducting extensive work in reception since 2016. In order to facilitate the reading, EASO's activities will be presented below under three main categories[16], namely

- EASO permanent support
- EASO training support
- EASO operational support

Nevertheless, it is important to underline the countless synergies existing between these categories, which often align in joint interventions toward common intended results.

7.1 EASO PERMANENT SUPPORT

EASO was tasked in 2015, as a priority, to undertake a comprehensive mapping of the situation as regards reception in EU Member States, before developing reception standards and 'clear and measurable indicators upon which the standards may be monitored in a uniform manner'[17].

To that effect, in 2016 EASO and COM launched a call to EU+ countries to nominate national contact points to form the 'EASO Network of Reception Authorities' (EASO Reception Network),

[15] COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, (COM(2020) 609 final). Related documents available at url.
[16] While a summary of the main highlights is included hereafter, a comprehensive description of activities undertaken within each category is included in the separate Annexes 1, 2 and 3 to this document.
[17] A European Agenda on Migration, 13.5.2015, (COM(2015) 240 final), available at url.

which EASO has been coordinating for the past years. The network has been providing an operational framework for the activities of the EASO Reception Network, including information sharing, development of practical tools and practical cooperation with Member States.

Since then, an EASO Reception Team has been coordinating the development of operational standards, indicators, guidance, and practical tools[18] to support Member States in the full and coherent implementation of the RCD. These also lay the basis for the operational activities established by EASO in support of Member States. These are complemented by the growing body of work developed by the EASO Reception team and the EASO Reception Network since 2016, through queries, surveys, thematic meetings, collection of best practices and comprehensive mapping reports.[19]

As a cross-cutting issue, vulnerability is mainstreamed within all EASO's activities, including Training and Operations. The EASO Vulnerability Team facilitates practical cooperation and exchange of best practices related to vulnerable groups within reception systems, and works on developing various practical tools[20] to support asylum and reception authorities and practitioners.

Exchange and analysis of reception data, through the Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS) reception indicators (stage III)[21] developed in 2017 also plays an important role in EASO's permanent support on reception. Analyses are also shared and discussed with the EASO Reception Network.

EASO's permanent support on reception is also reflected on the Information and Documentation System (IDS) platform a comprehensive source of up-to-date information on legislation, policies and practices related to the implementation of CEAS in 30 EU+ countries, including their reception system. The platform is accessible for registered users from national authorities and gathers information based on a wide range of sources, mostly of which are also publicly available. When suitable, information from EASO networks, including the EASO Reception Network, is incorporated. The EASO Case law database (publicly available and including

[18] *EASO Guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators*, September 2016; EASO, *Guidance on reception conditions for unaccompanied children: operational standards and indicators*, December 2018; *EASO guidance on contingency planning in the context of reception*, March 2018; EASO Assessment of Reception Conditions (ARC Tool), 2021. Practical tools currently under development focus on information provision.

[19] Practical cooperation activities on topics such as: the impact of long stays in reception; information provision in reception; quality assessment of reception conditions; prevention, sanctions, reduction and withdrawal of reception conditions; reception of unaccompanied minors; reception and society; the role of reception agencies in the transition from reception towards integration; reception capacity management and contingency planning.

[20] See for example: EASO tool for identification of persons with special needs; EASO practical guide on family tracing; animation on age assessment for practitioners and children). Resources under development: vulnerability assessment tool; referral tool; tailored, gender and age-appropriate information materials, etc.

[21] The reception data collected from (most) EU+ countries consist of: 1) number of persons in reception; 2) capacity of the reception system; and 3) number of persons in detention.

jurisprudence related to reception) and the EASO Query System (including the EASO Reception queries) form part and feed into IDS. Information on reception is updated and validated in a joint process with the EASO Reception Network. In this context, members are contacted directly for the review process, while keeping the IDS advisory group members involved and informed.

7.2 EASO TRAINING SUPPORT

Article 6 of the EASO Regulation mandates EASO to establish and develop training available to members of all national administrations and courts and tribunals, and national services responsible for asylum matters in the Member States. Such training shall be developed in close cooperation with Member States' asylum authorities. Article 7 of the draft EUAA regulation further strengthens the training provisions, including specific reference to reception matters.

The EASO Training Curriculum has initially been established to support Member States in fulfilling their obligations deriving from the EU asylum *acquis*. In line with the RDC, Member States are obliged to take appropriate measures to ensure that officials have received the necessary basic training with respect to the needs of applicants. Alongside the Reception Team, EASO's Training and Professional Development Centre (TPDC) plays a major role in building capacity in reception. In the last years it has developed training activities targeting Member States' national reception authorities, also in the framework of EASO's operational support (see section 7.3).

In line with the EASO Training and Learning Strategy (2019), an EASO module on reception, has been developed. The module is delivered in the format of train-the-trainer sessions, national sessions as well as tailor-made trainings and has been a core part of EASO's operational support to Member States, including those subject to particular pressure. In the context of training development, EASO has actively collaborated with Member States experts and maintained an open dialogue with civil society organisations and has actively collaborated with the relevant stakeholders through the Training Reference Group.

Following guided group discussions with various stakeholders, EASO has recently developed a European Sectorial Qualification Framework (ESQF) for asylum and reception officials. The ESQF provides comprehensive guidance on what asylum and reception officers should know and be able to do, under a specified degree of responsibility and autonomy, in order to perform their duties and tasks. The framework is structured according to the different competence areas and has assisted EASO in identifying the occupational standards in the area of reception and in matching these standards with the educational standards. This exercise has provided the basis for the development of various learning paths in the area of reception.

The **Reception learning path** will consist of two essential sets of modules**:**

1) **Horizontal modules**, relevant to all asylum and reception officers, which will include
   - ethical and professional standards;

- legal framework (CEAS and fundamental rights);
- communication for asylum practitioners;
- introduction to vulnerability;
- professional wellbeing.

2) **Reception-specific modules,** comprising:
   - introduction to reception;
   - health, safety and security in reception;
   - technical reception standards;
   - psychosocial support and guidance;
   - reception of vulnerable persons;
   - conflict management and mediation in reception.

The Reception learning path will be strengthened in the coming years and will also target managers in the field of reception, to support them in dealing with the daily and long-term challenges in reception.

7.3 EASO OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

EASO has been playing an increasingly important role in reception matters as part of its technical operational assistance to Member States framed within the implementation of Operating Plans and Special Support Plans. EASO has equally been promoting and assisting capacity building in the third countries' reception systems. The following sections provide a brief overview and practical examples of support provided to Member States, such as Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Spain, and third countries, notably Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo[22] and Turkey.

7.3.1 ITALY

EASO has been providing support to the Italian authorities in the field of reception since 2013. In the course of these seven years, EASO's technical and operational assistance to Italy has been focusing on the following areas of support: support for building national reception monitoring systems and their subsequent implementation, strengthening reception capacity especially with regards to unaccompanied minors (UAMs); supporting the Italian Ombudsperson for Children and Adolescents in the implementation of Law 47/2017 (till 2019); strengthening the quality management of the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration (DCLI), within the Ministry of Interior.

[22] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Since 2017 these interventions have been sided by a line of action specifically designed to support the quality monitoring of the Italian reception system with specific attention to the first line reception system for applicants for international protection. Great attention has also been dedicated to national authorities' multi-stakeholder and multi-level coordination in the field of UAMs reception, through the organisation of the three webinars covering stakeholders and authorities/shelters working at local level in order to gather and share best practices in the field of UAMs national reception systems.

Overall, through these years, EASO deployed 20 Asylum Support Team (AST) members at DCLI working in areas spanning from legal, policy and financial management support, to statistics analysis, and monitoring.

7.3.2 GREECE

EASO has been providing support to the Greek authorities in several reception-related areas since 2011, for instance the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) to manage first and second line reception in the framework of the embedded model. Member State experts, interim staff, and interpreters deployed by EASO support RIS headquarters and regional coordination units and, more recently, the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs both at strategic level and with hands-on support. Their tasks include the development and implementation of tools and guidance for reception management, including inflows and outflows, transfers between first and second-line facilities, referral mechanisms for persons with special needs, reception of unaccompanied minors and information provision and communication with residents. EASO also supported the authorities in planning and designing the safe zone of the new Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Samos.

EASO has been supporting the coordination mechanism of the Greek reception authority between the central level and the local level through different activities. Strategic-level support to the Greek Reception authority was deployed in the framework of the UNHCR Technical Assistance Project funded by COM.

In the framework of the Operating Plan for Greece 2018 and the SRSS Technical Assistance Project, EASO started a project for the provision of technical assistance to RIS for the development and implementation of a national reception monitoring framework.

EASO Greek operations have been supporting the Greek reception authorities in the identification, assessment and referral of vulnerable persons with several interventions, including on UAMs. In the framework of the Samos UAMs pilot-project, within the emergency package of the intervention, EASO provided non-food items (NFIs) to the minors' section of the RIC of Samos, including hygiene kits, winter clothes and shoes, but also beds, mattresses and bed linen. In the framework of the Operating Plan for Greece 2021, EASO will also support the Greek authorities with the implementation of the National Strategy on Unaccompanied Minors.

7.3.3 CYPRUS

EASO has been supporting Cyprus' reception system since May 2014. The technical and operational assistance focused on several areas, in both strategic and hands-on support.

Among other things, EASO contributed to the design of strategies and workflows on allocation of reception accommodation, including entry-exit and residence badge systems. EASO developed templates and guidance to ensure standardised reporting and efficient flow, management and analysis of information and guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the management of open reception facilities, including on 'safe zones' which can also be used in Cyprus. EASO also contributed to an exercise launched by COM for the development of SOPs applicable to first reception. The deployment of interim staff and experts allowed training and coaching of Cypriot staff and hands-on support in reception facilities, including on the design and implementation of educational, recreational, social and psychosocial support activities. EASO was also responsible for developing SOPs, guidance, templates and checklists for applicants with specials needs as well as direct support through deployed vulnerability experts and interim staff for identification, assessment, referral and access to services.

7.3.4 MALTA

Operational and technical support to the reception system in Malta is relatively recent and was first formalised within the framework of EASO 2020 Operating Plan to Malta with the aim of enhancing national capacity to implement reception standards in line with CEAS. EASO's interventions focus on elements such as enhancing the referral system of the Maltese Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) and supporting age assessment processes. EASO has also supported the preparation and installation of an ICT system (entry/exit) for reception management.

7.3.5 SPAIN

A rapid needs assessment was conducted jointly by EASO and the Spanish Secretary of State for Migration (SEM) in September-October 2020. The exercise resulted in a Joint Rapid Needs Assessment report followed by an Operating Plan Special Support on Reception, which was signed in December 2020. Measures in the Operating Plan for 2021 include: facilitated support to the Spanish authorities in the transition towards a new model for reception; organisational structures and related systems developed to implement the new reception model for the Spanish reception system; strengthened capacity within the Spanish reception system through professional development, tools and materials; enhanced capacity to offer reception services in locations under particular pressure.

7.3.6 THIRD COUNTRIES

Within the framework of its work with third countries, EASO has been providing capacity building to reception systems including in Turkey through consecutive roadmaps signed with the

Turkish Directorate General of Migration Managmeent (DGMM). EASO also assisted DGMM with the development of a contingency plan, which is currently in its final review and expected to be adopted. The plan should help DGMM and other stakeholders improve their response to situations of mass influx. In Western Balkan countries such as Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo[23], EASO, in the framework of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) projects, implemented multiple activities on reception, including assessment of reception conditions in Serbia, support to contingency planning in North Macedonia and several need assessment missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Reception activities in third countries are fully in line with the already approved EASO External dimension strategy.

8 COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES ACROSS EASO'S ACTIVITIES ON RECEPTION

As described, EASO's work on reception has been exponentially growing on a wide range of fronts, for example: country operations (e.g. Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta) with an increased number of dedicated reception staff working in country offices; in reception centres in direct contact with residents (e.g. reception coordinators, social workers, community engagement workers, reception workers, vulnerability assessment officers, etc.); in third countries. Despite existing synergies between different parts of EASO, **a single EASO Strategy is needed for closer and systematic cooperation and coordination on reception related activities**. This will ensure a consistent implementation framework that avoids unnecessary duplication of work and allows for coherence between various objectives.

Coordinated quality support and technical guidance[24] to EASO reception operations could in fact be conducive to achieve the following goals:

- Following a joint needs assessment with Member States, provide a clear framework for the work carried out under multiannual roadmaps, annual operating plans and special project plans with the EASO guidance tools and training developed to support the full and coherent implementation of the CEAS. The quality support can back up efforts at operational level to ensure that operational engagements under reception measures are **sustainable** and that national reception authorities are equipped to take over and manage their reception systems effectively.

- Convergence between the EASO practical cooperation and information sharing activities, and the EASO technical and operational support to specific Member States.

[23] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.
[24] Guidance and quality support from Asylum Knowledge Centre can either be provided directly or through relevant national experts. Additional training methods such as on-the-job coaching and training and complementary to the operational trainings offered by the Training and Professional Development Centre will be essential components in building capacity and ensuring sustainability of outcomes.

- Harmonised activities linked to guidance and quality support across all operations in order to ensure predictability and a more structural availability.

- Strengthening the competences of reception officers, and, in the middle term, of reception managers, in order to build capacity in accordance with the legal reception framework and the reception standards.
- Harmonised approach to reception activities and capacity building in third countries in line with EASO External cooperation strategy.

Based on EASO's current, and possibly future, mandate, and the extensive work done by EASO since 2016 on reception standards and indicators, measures can be taken to ensure that reception related activities implemented by EASO fall within a common framework effectively reflecting these standards and indicators. Pursuing the vision and strategic objectives outlined in this document, EASO's strategy on reception entails two complementary approaches: a scenario-based approach and a building blocks approach that encompasses reception as a process.

These approaches are used complementarily in order to develop coherent intervention logics behind EASO operational and technical assistance to Member States and cooperation with third countries in reception, and to harmonise the various activities undertaken by different parts of EASO.

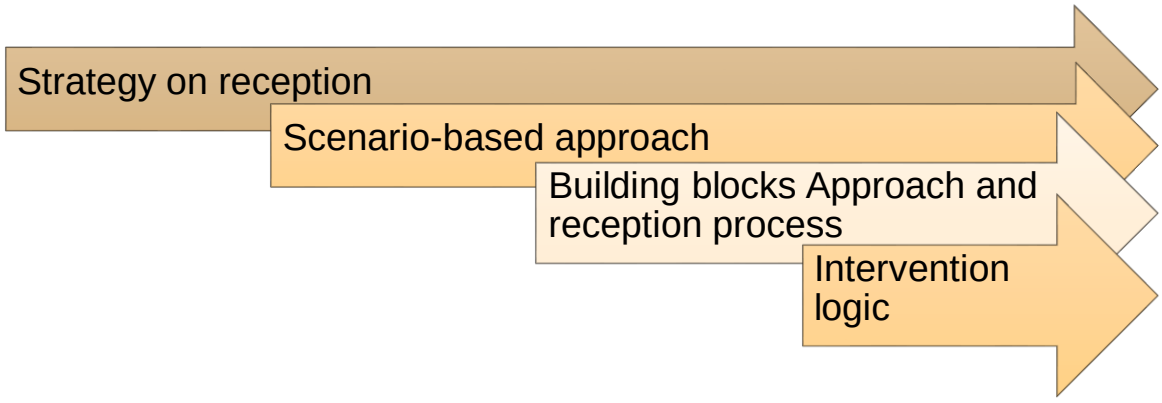

Figure 1 shows the relations between the EASO Strategy on reception, the two approaches and the intervention logic behind technical and operational assistance.

The implementation of the intervention logics should benefit from adequate financial, human and logistic resources, in order to meet the overall objective of the strategy. Resources should be made available as soon as possible especially in situations requiring immediate intervention. While outside the scope of this strategy, these requirements entail a strengthening of EASO current procurement staff deployment and logistics procedures, including the possibility to access specific funding sources including through mutual coordination between EASO and COM and complementarity with AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund)/AMF (Asylum and Migration Fund) funding (notably under the National Programmes).

8.1 SCENARIO-BASED APPROACH

In the middle and long term, at least **three scenarios for an EASO operational approach to reception can be built**, depending on the degree of support needed, the capacity available in EASO, and the absorption capacity of the host Member State. Each of the scenarios is to be further elaborated by applying building blocks as relevant, such as contingency planning and service delivery. From there, an **intervention logic**[25] can be designed. Identifying the **priority needs** and the **most appropriate scenario and inputs, activities and outcomes** (and the causality between them) will be highly dependent on a comprehensive understanding of the situational context.

An essential precondition for this will be to ensure that needs are assessed using a validated methodology, with an agreed plan in place and an effective monitoring and evaluation framework. This will occur in full consultation with COM to mitigate the risk of double funding, and all other relevant stakeholders, including those ready to provide support, so that roles are clearly distributed and response is coordinated, in order to ensure complementarity and best use of resources. The needs assessment would build on information already available through EASO's Information and Documentation System (IDS) and EASO's Information and Analysis Sector would further support the process with information management activities, gathering and presenting additional information when required. This could include comparative overviews, the identification of similar models in various countries and offering further insights and experience sharing based on these similarities. Information with sufficient level of detail would then feed back into IDS, to ensure that the presentation of the reception system is kept as up to date as possible.

Irrespective of the scenario type, the intervention should be guided by the building block approach to reception (both at managerial and service delivery levels) and focus on achieving a long-term impact, namely ensuring that a **flexible reception system is in place with reception conditions that meet EU standards**. Achieving such ambitious objectives requires multi-year strategic planning from the onset of an intervention, ready to be adapted to any new needs or changes in the operational environment. EASO's user guide on the design and planning of operations[26] provides detailed guidance on linking multi-annual planning to the development of an intervention logic and results matrix. It also describes the process of plan revisions and amendments.

Furthermore, the three scenarios will facilitate developing strategic planning documents that take into consideration different phases of deployment, as recommended in the cross-country analytical report of the external evaluation of implementation of EASO Operating Plans for 2019. Certain areas of an EASO intervention may focus more on emergency support, others more on

[25] Intervention logics will be jointly elaborated by the three EASO's Centres, based on EASO planning and evaluation methodologies.
[26] Part of EASO's Operations Manual; there are also User guides on needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

creating a stable transition, and yet others on preparing the gradual exit of EASO's intervention. In light of the recommended phases of deployment, differentiated approaches may be chosen for certain areas of the intervention (e.g., sub-measures), choosing types of action and/or outputs depending on the phase of deployment.

Ideally, EASO's intervention is requested to address needs which can be covered in scenario 1, and to avoid more elaborated interventions envisaged in scenario 2 or 3. Whenever emergency situations require scenario 2 or 3, a gradual phasing out and exit strategy will be part of the intervention logic. Scenarios and interventions by EASO will follow the agreed timelines of the requesting Member State.

As for EASO's cooperation with third countries, not all scenarios might be applicable given the limitations of EASO's mandate.

8.1.1 SCENARIO 1: CAPACITY BUILDING FOR RECEPTION AUTHORITIES AND STAFF

In this scenario, EASO provides **technical advice and training** and facilitates bilateral exchanges and information sharing in order to help a Member State or third country build up its own reception system or address any shortcoming of capacity and preparedness. This can be done through the regular activities of the **Training and Professional Development Centre** and through the **EASO Asylum Knowledge Centre** and the **EASO Reception Network,** and, depending on the extent of technical support needed, jointly with or through a response led by EASO's Operational Support Centre.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- The Member State or third country receiving support has full responsibility and ownership and shows full commitment to implementation of agreed activities.
- EASO provides support based on a needs' assessment[27], through a **model of technical advice complemented by training and or increased coaching** that facilitates building the capacity of the Member State or third country and ensures sustainability. This is done through short deployment of experts (e.g., 1-2 weeks) who deliver a training or organise a workshop, followed by on-the-job coaching.
- Member States contribute with expertise while EASO ensures predictable resources.

Sustainability:

- The Member State or third country is committed to continue using the tools developed by EASO and allocates sufficient human and financial resources to ensure sustainability, including by making use of EU funds, where applicable.
- Comprehensive plans for monitoring and evaluating the use and long-term impact of deliverables (including training and coaching) are put in place.

[27] In this and other scenarios: in line with the methodology outlined in EASO`s user guide on needs assessment.

Risks (e.g.):

- Lack of Member States experts or Member State to engage.
- Insufficient business continuity at the level of reception authorities, resulting in lack of ownership.
- Legislation, policies and administrative practices contrary to the CEAS.

8.1.2 SCENARIO 2: TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

In this scenario, EASO provides direct targeted technical and operational support within an existing reception model, through interim staff, experts, own reception staff, interpreters, training and technical support and advice, in the framework of agreed **reception measure(s)** part of a **multi-annual roadmap and annual operating plan or special support plan. EASO's Operational Support Centre, Asylum Knowledge Centre and Training and Professional Development Centre** work in coordination with the Member State in the framework of **an agreed-upon set of activities** delivered annually. The response is led by the Operational Support Centre. Achieving the results under scenario 3 will allow transition towards measures from scenario 2.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Needs are assessed in consultation will all relevant stakeholders ready to provide external support.
- The overall response is coordinated by the Member State, jointly with EASO and other stakeholders, depending on their mandates. A coordination mechanism is put in place and roles are clearly assigned.
- The Member State receiving support has full responsibility, while EASO acts on its behalf in certain agreed-upon activities.
- EASO provides technical and operational support through a mixed model of engagement and ownership of activities that facilitates building the capacity of the Member State to allow gradual handover and sustainability:
    - Technical support at central level to facilitate strategic planning, strengthening coordination and harmonisation of procedures.
    - Strategic and practical on-the-job support in the day-to-day management and operation of reception facilities, coordination of local teams and facilitation of workflows (1st and 2nd line reception).
    - Direct provision of activities at reception facilities, by carrying out specific functional tasks under the responsibility of the host country, such as social work, vulnerability assessments, case management (1st and 2nd line reception).
- Member States contribute with expertise while EASO ensures predictable resources and has the logistical means or can rely on logistics made available by others to provide direct support. Other Member States contribute with expertise and know-how in the shortest possible time. Other stakeholders provide operational support as per their mandate, expertise and capacity.

Sustainability:

- The Member State commits to gradually take over full ownership for managing capacity and other reception aspects (including training of own staff) as soon as possible, and allocate sufficient human and financial resources, including by making use of available EU funds (where applicable).
- A comprehensive plan for monitoring and evaluating the use and impact of deliverables (including training) on long-term is put in place.

Risks (e.g.):

- Insufficient business continuity at the level of reception authorities, resulting in lack of ownership.
- Possible liability issues (security, health and safety) to be clearly addressed in the hosting arrangement document.
- Limited capacity available from the deployment of Member States' experts.
- Overlapping with activities implemented by other stakeholders or from other funds, due to lack of information and external coordination on complementarity of activities.
- Legislation, policies and administrative practices contrary to the CEAS.

8.1.3 SCENARIO 3: EMERGENCY DIRECT OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

In this intervention scenario, at the request and under the responsibility of a Member State, and in the framework of an agreed plan, EASO can set up and/or reinforce reception capacity at local and/or national level and support the management thereof. EASO can directly provide material (housing, clothing, food and non-food items, financial allowance) and other (social work, protection, health care, education, etc) reception conditions before a planned handover to national authorities, or a transition towards activities from scenario 2 and/or scenario 1. This handover can be facilitated by training interventions. Depending on the needs, activities from scenario 3 (direct material support and management support) can be combined with activities from scenario 2 (operational support which does not consist of material resources).

While *ad hoc*, small-scale examples exist of past EASO operational support activities falling under scenario 3 (e.g. Samos' safe zone pilot), a more larger-scale and structured roll-out of support activities under scenario 3, following a step-by-step growth model, would be possible only in the longer term, as it requires the necessary reflection and preparations, including with regard to fast procurement (e.g. preparation of stand-by contracts), and contingency planning. Therefore, EASO's capacity to implement scenario 3 activities is to be built up gradually, in parallel with the further development of 'building blocks' (see section 8.2) and within the limitations of available resources.

Roles and responsibilities:

- The Member State has full legal responsibility and retains full authority and ownership but is in need of immediate direct material support due to specific and disproportionate

pressures on its reception system and exceptionally heavy and urgent demands on ensuring access to certain basic needs.

- The overall response is coordinated by the Member State, jointly with EASO and other stakeholders, depending on their mandates.
- Needs are assessed in consultation with all relevant stakeholders ready to provide external support, roles are clearly distributed, and response is coordinated. The Member State agrees on the preconditions and commits to establish and co-facilitate a coordination mechanism with all relevant stakeholders.
- EASO provides operational support to urgently fill in gaps in an emergency situation. EASO support is provided through a mixed model of engagement, combining direct provision of material resources and setting up/supporting the management of reception facilities while building the capacity of the Member State through technical support to allow gradual fade-out and sustainability.
- Member States contribute with expertise while EASO ensures predictable resources and has the logistical means, or can rely on logistics made available by others, to provide direct support.
- Other Member States contribute with expertise and know-how in the shortest possible time. Other stakeholders provide emergency support as per their mandate, expertise and capacity.

Sustainability:

- The Member State fully commits to gradually take over ownership for managing capacity and other reception aspects in a long-term perspective as soon as possible, and allocate sufficient human and financial resources, including by making use of available EU funds (where applicable).
- A comprehensive plan for monitoring and evaluating the use and impact of deliverables (including training) on long-term is put in place.

Risks (e.g.):

- Liability risks in terms of security and safety in the reception facility where EASO directly delivers management support, for which specific agreements would need to be put in place with the host authorities, which go beyond the current general framework of the hosting arrangements.
- Risk of Member State's full dependency on EASO, which may be difficult to reverse within a short timeframe (clear exit scenario needed).
- Risk of double funding, due to overlaps with EU funding either directly to the Member State or via international organisations.
- Legislation, policies and administrative practices contrary to the CEAS, and reduced or no EASO leverage to bring change.

8.2 BUILDING BLOCK APPROACH AND RECEPTION PROCESS

Irrespective of the type of technical and operational support requested by a given Member State or third country or the specific needs identified (scenario-based approach), the enhanced coordination and collaboration between all three EASO Centres will envisage intervention logics based on **a building block approach that encompasses reception as a process**.

This model would be based on the comprehensive corpus of standards and indicators developed by EASO, the accumulated knowledge on good practices, its continuous work with the EASO Network of Reception Authorities and its operational experience.

The **building block approach** follows **the logic of the reception process from in-take to out-take** and focuses on different aspects of both managing an overall reception system and practical aspects of running a reception facility and ensuring ongoing processes.

The **reception process** can be divided into **three phases (arrival in the reception system, stay, and end of reception) with a service-oriented approach** which can be linked to the asylum procedures, including Dublin, and can be summed up as follow:

- The arrival phase includes the start of many of the various processes that are linked to both procedural and reception aspects, such as registration, medical screening, age assessment, vulnerability assessment, etc.
- The phase of stay will involve a more tailor-made approach addressing the individual reception needs and have a stronger focus on the well-being and resilience of the applicants. Applicants have the time to prepare themselves to the possible outcomes of their asylum application and are supported in this process.
- The end phase focuses on leaving the reception facility. This can include the transition to the integration pathway for those granted a form of international protection or to immigration procedures, such as return, for those who receive a final negative decision.

This strategy identifies several non-exhaustive **building blocks** or reception-related areas[28], clustered in four main categories:

1. **Processes, procedures and standards**
2. **Monitoring and reporting quality management, coordination**
3. **Governance**
4. **Vulnerable Persons**

The building blocks become integral components of the reception process: specific activities will vary from one phase to another, while monitoring and coordination will ensure the management of the overall reception process.

With the reception process in mind, the building blocks are to be used within a specific scenario and serve as frames for specific intervention logics behind EASO's technical and operational support. While some building blocks are already available, others need to be designed, further fine-tuned or fully established, following a gradual, planned incremental approach, in collaboration with COM, the Member States represented within the relevant EASO networks and other relevant stakeholders.

8.2.1 PROCESSES, PROCEDURES AND STANDARDS

Contingency planning, preparedness measures and emergency support

- Develop and test contingency plans and preparedness measures based on the EASO Guidance on contingency planning in reception. Design integrated approaches and multi-stakeholders coordination mechanisms. Study visits to other Member States, capacity building activities, developing and testing scenarios, evaluation and update of plans.

Management of reception systems (incl. reception places, inflow/outflow, infrastructure, equipment, human resources, funding and procurement)

- Support strategic planning of reception capacity at central level and policy development. Develop risk registers. Design strategies on allocation of reception accommodation. Design workflows and deploy (ICT) systems for efficient management of reception capacity, including entry-exit and residence badge systems. Design comprehensive human resources strategies. Design strategies for allocation of resources. Develop databases and data management systems shared/coordinated at inter-departmental level. Training, coaching or direct support (through deployed experts and interim staff) to develop multi-annual funding

[28] Each area includes a non-exhaustive list of possible activities to be undertaken by EASO.

and procurement strategies, including preparing proposals for relevant funding sources, managing tenders, project management and monitoring of funded projects[29].

Medical screening and provision of health services

- Assistance to EU+ countries or direct provision by EASO of medical services to ensure effective health screening (COVID-19, tuberculosis, and other contagious diseases, vaccination, etc.) upon arrival and/or general health services during stay, through doctors and other healthcare professionals, and generally meeting the provisions of Article 19 RCD and linked EASO standards and indicators.

Provision of material reception conditions (based on standards and indicators, provision of NFI)

- Design material reception conditions in accordance with EASO standards and indicators. Develop guidance and SOPs on procurement and distribution of food and non-food items, etc. Training, coaching or direct support (through deployed or seconded personnel).

Security and safety

- Develop guidance and SOPs on measures for the security and safety of both residents and staff, inside and around reception facilities. Design preventive measures, sanction regimes and complaint and response mechanisms. Special attention on the security and safety of vulnerable persons[30], including sexual and gender-based violence and traffic of human beings prevention, identification and response. Develop coordination and referral mechanisms.

Provision of information on all reception related aspects

- Develop and carry-out information and communication needs assessments. Develop information and communication strategies and campaigns, information products and communication channels (including helplines), methodologies, SOPs, templates and workflows to ensure that applicants are provided with accurate information on all aspects related to reception conditions in a timely and easy-to-understand manner, adapted to their needs. Direct/active provision of reception-related information through deployed experts, interim staff and interpreters, including operating helplines or through roving teams. Provision of operational training, including on communication for asylum practitioners.

Coordination/facilitation of community involvement and participation, feedback/complaint and response mechanisms, community-based initiatives

- Develop SOPs, strategies and community activities to allow the active participation of residents in the management of aspects of life in the reception facilities, and activities to foster relations between residents and host communities. Support with developing

[29] Similar to EASO support and on-the-job coaching on AMIF-ISF funding and procedures provided in Greece.
[30] Article23(2) on minors wellbeing, safety and security considerations.

feedback/complaint and response mechanisms. Direct/active provision of community activities through social workers / community development workers.

Detention and alternatives to detention for applicants for international protection

- *[Note: Part of an integrated approach to reception is prioritise building open reception facilities and implementing alternatives to detention. When detention is assessed as a measure of last resort, conditions in closed/detention centre shall meet international and EU standards]*. Technical advice on legal framework, standards, organisational aspects, SOPs, design based on standards and indicators. Support to setting up counselling, coordination mechanisms between detention, asylum and reception systems. Vulnerability assessment and referral mechanism to adequate support and services, including asylum processes. Deployment of national detention experts to facilitate transfer of experience and know-how on designing and implementing a detention type centre. Study visits at detention/closed centres operating at high standards and to countries with good practices on alternatives to detention.

8.2.2 MONITORING AND REPORTING QUALITY MANAGEMENT, COORDINATION

Reporting and information flow on the reception system for timely and evidence-based decision-making

- Build reception data collection and analytical capacity, including through statistics and information technologies, also linked to information systems on asylum procedures and Dublin procedures, to support evidence-based decision-making and strengthened reception management at central and local level. Build early warning and forecasting systems. Develop templates and guidance to ensure standardised reporting and efficient flow, management and analysis of information.

Monitoring and quality self-assessment of reception

- Support with developing national reception monitoring frameworks, including templates, checklists, guidance and assessment methodology based on EASO standards and indicators and the EASO Tool for Assessment of Reception Conditions, to complement provisions taken by the Member State to fulfil the obligations under Article 28 RCD. Conducting reception centre specific monitoring, if mandated. Direct support for carrying out assessments through deployed or seconded personnel. Provide capacity building (training, coaching) to ensure sustainability of the established quality/monitoring framework.

8.2.3 GOVERNANCE

Coordination mechanisms at/between central and local level and stakeholder management[31]

- Strengthening communication and coordination between different stakeholders at central and local level. Develop guidance and SOPs on central/local coordination among different actors active on the ground, communication flows, roles and responsibilities. Develop terms of references and set up working groups or task forces. Develop synergies with civil society groups and NGOs active in the operational environment. Set up helpdesks for first and second-line reception field staff to improve harmonised procedures and coordination.

Design of reception facilities.

- Redesign or design reception facilities based on EASO standards and indicators. EASO will develop to this effect its 'modular approach to reception' to lay down its vision of the functionalities of a reception facility and how such a centre can be designed and managed. Complement with technical support with daily running of reception facilities through the development of operational manuals laying down the reception process.

Management of reception capacity (incl. building reception capacity, infrastructure, equipment)

- Build (through training, coaching, shadowing) administrative and managerial capacity at reception facilities. Develop guidelines and SOPs for the management and operation of reception facilities. Training, coaching or direct support (through experts and interim staff) with day-to-day operation of a reception facility. Such responsibilities would also require EASO to establish effective monitoring systems and processes to ensure that services delivered by EASO meet minimum standards.

Managing outflow from reception system

- Design and set up efficient outflow strategies and referral mechanisms of beneficiaries of international protection to integration support services. Support for building national allocation systems. This can include support for or direct organisation of transport services by EASO for beneficiaries to or from accommodation facilities, including for transfers between facilities or to private accommodation, medical appointments, education for children.

8.2.4 VULNERABLE PERSONS

Reception conditions adapted to the special needs of vulnerable persons

- Design reception centres or component parts of reception centres to adapt to specific needs, in line with EASO standards and indicators and best practices. Design and set up new or

[31] Recital 27 RCD: 'Appropriate coordination should be encouraged between the competent authorities as regards the reception of applicants, and harmonious relationships between local communities and accommodation centres should therefore be promoted.'

adapt reception places that meet special needs ('safe zones'[32]). Design SOPs and other tools for managing the adapted reception facilities. Training, coaching or providing direct support (through experts and interim staff) with day-to-day operation of 'safe zones'.

Identification, assessment and referral of vulnerable persons

- Develop SOPs, guidance, templates, checklists etc. convergent with EASO tools developed for applicants with specials needs. Including procedures for medical and psychosocial screening. Set up referral systems and pathways and case management systems. Provision of interpretation to facilitate workflows and ensure communication with applicants. Training or on-the-job coaching. Direct support through the deployment of vulnerability experts or interim staff, for identification, assessment, referral and access to services.

Protection of unaccompanied children and alternative care arrangements (special reception needs and best interests assessments)

- Develop guidance, SOPs, templates, checklists etc. and deliver capacity building (training, on-the-job coaching) on the reception of unaccompanied children adapted to their needs, including on the roles and responsibilities of guardians, coordination between stakeholders, assessing best interests of the child linked to reception. This includes direct provision of activities and support services such as age assessment procedures through the deployment of child protection experts or interim staff. Direct support, either together or separate from guidance, for setting up and running 'safe zones' for unaccompanied children[33] (see above building block on 'adapted reception conditions').

Psychosocial support

- Design and support implementation of educational, recreational, social and psychosocial support activities. Training and on-the-job coaching. Direct provision of activities through deployed social assistants and social workers.[34]

9 COOPERATION WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

9.1 COOPERATION BETWEEN INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

This EASO Strategy on reception has been drafted as a common effort by the three EASO Centres (Operational Support, Training and Professional Development, and Asylum Knowledge).

EASO has been playing an increasingly important role in reception matters in operations. In turn, this was sustained by an increased support to operations units and country offices from the

[32] Similar to EASO support for 'safe zones' in Greece (Samos) and in Cyprus (Pournara centre, planned).
[33] Similar to EASO support for 'safe zone' in Greece (Samos).
[34] Proposed Art. 12(3) of the EUAA regulation opens many possibilities. It states that the Agency can assist Member States to apply the operational standards, indicators etc. **by providing the necessary expertise or operational and technical assistance**.

Training and Professional Development Centre and the Asylum Knowledge Centre (through its reception team). Such support focused on training, awareness-raising of EASO reception products, recruitment, planning, induction of new reception staff and monitoring (for more details, see section 7.3 on EASO operational support).

The implementation of the EASO Strategy on reception calls for an even closer and systematic cooperation and coordination between all EASO internal stakeholders to ensure a consistent approach that avoids unnecessary duplication of work and allows for convergence between national practices.

To that effect the Asylum Knowledge Centre, the Operational Support Centre and the Training and Professional Development Centre in EASO have agreed on a general framework of cooperation and communication on reception activities in order to strengthen coordination, the flow of information, and the convergence and coherence of activities. This framework outlines the following elements:

- regular communication and coordination and close involvement of all parties;
- closer involvement of EASO reception team with country offices' staff;
- systematic approach in the use of EASO reception-related expertise and practical tools in Operations;
- systematic approach and close cooperation between all Centres and other relevant parts of EASO in the areas of programming/planning, monitoring and evaluation of EASO reception activities.

9.2 COOPERATION BETWEEN EASO AND EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND PARTNERSHIP WITH UNHCR, IOM AND OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FIELD OF RECEPTION

EASO's work with all the external stakeholders mentioned below will follow the guiding principles of partnership, cooperation and complementarity described in section 2 of this Strategy. Where applicable, other stakeholders can be engaged as appropriate in the implementation of EASO's strategy on reception when it comes to support activities in third countries[35]. EASO will build on what international organisations and Member States have already developed, building on the existing literature, practices and know-how and avoiding overlaps.

EU+ countries

The EU+ countries' commitment to EASO's Strategy on reception is imperative for the success of its work to further harmonise the implementation of the RCD, including through the deployment of national reception experts for EASO's technical and operational support, and involvement through the EASO Network of Reception Authorities as an expert pool, reference point on evaluation and source of information and expertise. To streamline and facilitate open

[35] Such as DG International Partnerships (INTPA), DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), European External Action Service (EEAS), DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR).

communication, EASO will involve the EASO Network of Reception Authorities to provide updates on operations and inform on new developments.

European Commission

The Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) is a key partner for EASO in its work to enhance the coherence and the implementation of the RCD. DG HOME is a member of the EASO Management Board, an active member of the EASO Reception Network and is part of the Reference Group consulted when developing guidance documents and practical tools. It ensures synergies/cooperation in the management of situations of crisis/migratory pressure and supports the development of operating plans, support plans and roadmaps. The Commission also ensures coherence and complementarity of EASO support with AMIF/AMF funding in the area of reception. Other Directorates-General[36] can be engaged as appropriate in the implementation of EASO's strategy on reception when providing operational support.

Justice and Home Affairs Agencies and their network

The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) will be engaged in the implementation of EASO's strategy on reception were relevant to their respective mandates and in line with the Working Arrangements signed between the Justice and Home Affairs agencies.

International organisations

UNHCR is a key partner for EASO in its work of supporting EU+ countries in fulfilling their asylum and refugee obligations under EU and international law. UNHCR has a mandate under Article 35 of the 1951 Refugee Convention to supervise the implementation of the Convention. This is underpinned by Article 78 TFEU and each of the legislative instruments of the CEAS. The Working Arrangement between EASO and UNHCR establishes the framework for cooperation between the two organisations, including exchange of information and best practices. UNHCR is also informed of all the activities of the EASO Reception Network, is invited to attend practical cooperation activities and is part of the Reference Group consulted when developing guidance documents and practical tools.

The International Organization for Migration (**IOM**) is also a key stakeholder for EASO in reception, within and outside the EU where both agencies are operational. The recent Working Arrangement between EASO and IOM underlines reception as one of the areas of mutual cooperation and coordination where synergies and complementarities should be enhanced. Besides close cooperation in the field, IOM's participation in and contribution to the EASO network meetings, as relevant and appropriate, and reference groups is envisaged.

[36] Such as DG International Partnerships (INTPA), DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), European External Action Service (EEAS), DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR).

The UN Children's Fund (**UNICEF**) is another key stakeholder, in particular on reception of children.

Red Cross EU Office and national Red Cross societies in EU+ countries

In many EU+ countries national Red Cross societies are directly involved in reception through strong partnerships with national reception authorities. EASO will engage the Red Cross EU Office and Red Cross societies where necessary for the implementation of its Strategy on reception.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

EASO cooperates with NGOs and CSOs in the framework of the EASO Consultative Forum and the EASO Vulnerability Expert Network. Where relevant for the implementation of its Strategy on reception, EASO will further engage with NGOs and CSOs which have specific experience and/or operational expertise in the field of reception, and/or are directly engaged in providing assistance and services in countries where EASO provides capacity building and/or operational support.

10 IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE EASO STRATEGY ON RECEPTION

While EASO has been thriving for several years to support EU+ countries to bring their reception systems in line with the Common European Asylum System and EU *acquis*, much should still be done as important discrepancies and gaps remain.

This strategy outlines EASO's vision of how it can better contribute to strengthen and harmonise reception conditions across the EU and beyond. The document will be made public on EASO website and promoted at national level.

To make this vision a concrete reality, the gradual formulation and implementation of targeted interventions in line with EASO Strategy on reception will happen in close coordination between the three EASO Centres, the EASO Reception Network, the EASO Management Board, COM and other relevant stakeholders, as outlined in the general framework of cooperation.

The Strategy will need to be implemented within the limits of available budgets and human resources, but should also be supported by fast procurement processes, especially where immediate intervention is needed. This requires a rethinking of current procedures, for the Strategy to have the intended impact.

The activities carried out in the area of reception will be monitored and evaluated by EASO to ensure high quality results. Monitoring and evaluation will be conducted according to EASO`s established methodology and standard procedures – both at centralised level (EASO Malta) and

decentralised level (EASO country support/project teams). Particular attention will be paid to guarantee quality and consistency of EASO activities in reception, in line with the objectives of a consolidated EASO Strategy on reception. The outcome of monitoring and evaluation exercises will be taken into account, the lessons learned will be identified and measures will be taken to improve future actions. EASO will also encourage the experts participating in its reception activities to provide formal and informal feedback to all relevant parties concerning possible areas of improvement.

The EASO Network of Reception Authorities will play a key role in the follow-up and concrete implementation of the EASO Strategy on reception, notably through its involvement in defining priorities for the development of practical tools and nominating experts to relevant working groups, but also through its facilitation of the deployment of reception national experts in EASO operations, in cooperation with the Asylum Intervention Pool (AIP) NCP network, and nomination of national expert for development of training modules, and through the dissemination and promotion of the reception strategy at national level.

In line with and aiming to put in practice the EASO Strategy on Reception and support the Common European Asylum System with durable solutions, EASO will launch regular calls for experts with the EASO Network of Reception Authorities for the constitution of working groups aiming at developing the relevant 'building blocks'. A call of this kind was launched in December 2020 for the development of a 'modular approach to reception capacity for EASO permanent and operational support', aiming at developing the 'hardware' and 'software' building blocks relevant to the setting up and management of an arrival centre. Using the same methodology, EASO will follow a step-by-step approach over the coming years to develop all relevant building blocks. **New activities related to the implementation of the strategy will be part of the Single Programming Document of EASO.**