



EASO Annual General Report 2018



June 2019



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SUPPORT IS OUR MISSION

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List of abbreviations

AIP	Asylum Intervention Pool
AST	asylum support team
CAWG	Certification and Accreditation Working Group
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
COI	country of origin information
CSO	civil society organisation
DGMM	Directorate-General of Migration Management (Turkey)
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EMN	European Migration Network
EPRA	European Platform of Reception Agencies
EPS	Early Warning and Preparedness System
EU	European Union
EU+	EU Member States and associate countries
EUAA	EU Agency for Asylum
eu-LISA	European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GAS	Greek Asylum Service
IDS	Information and Documentation System
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
JHA	justice and home affairs
MedCOI	medical country of origin information
NCP	national contact point
PSP	private sponsorship programmes
SOP	standard operating procedure
SSP	special support plan
UAM	unaccompanied minors
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Introduction

EASO's mission

The European Asylum Support Office's (EASO) mission is to contribute to the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) by enhancing practical cooperation, stimulating information exchange, ensuring convergence in the assessment of protection needs in the Member States and providing operational and technical assistance to Member States subject to pressure on their asylum and reception systems.

EASO's principles

In fulfilling its mission, EASO observes the following principles:

- stimulating quality and efficiency of the asylum procedures, reception conditions of Member States and the assessment of protection needs across the EU through the promotion of EU law and development of operational standards;
- ensuring greater convergence in the assessment of protection needs across the EU;
- acting as an independent and impartial centre of expertise;
- ensuring the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and principles, as enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in the implementation of asylum-related activities;
- enhancing practical cooperation and information exchange among Member States in the field of asylum;
- providing timely and up-to-date data, analysis and early warning of sudden arrivals of large numbers of third-country nationals;
- providing comprehensive and timely operational and technical support to Member States on asylum and reception;



- providing operational and technical assistance to support Member States in taking up their responsibilities in the field of asylum and in showing solidarity with Member States whose asylum systems are under pressure;
- providing support to third-countries' asylum and reception systems, as well as support related to resettlement, in close cooperation with the relevant EU institutions and international organisations;
- providing evidence-based input to EU policymakers on asylum;
- cooperating with EU institutions, EU agencies and bodies, international organisations and civil society.

The EASO annual general report

The annual general report describes the agency's achievements in 2018 and is prepared in accordance with Article 29(1)(c) of the EASO regulation ⁽¹⁾. The report is adopted by the EASO Management Board and is sent to the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Internal Audit Service and the Court of Auditors. The annual general report is a public document and is translated into all the official languages of the EU.

EASO produces a separate annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union in accordance with Articles 12(1) and 29(1)(d). Further information on this report can be found in Section 4.3.7, together with a link to the online publication.

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU) 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. Setting the scene: developments in 2018

In 2018, there were four times as many applications for asylum than there were detections of illegal border crossing at the external border. This demonstrates the sustained pressure on Member State asylum and reception systems, and justifies a fully implemented CEAS. Furthermore, in 2018, applications for international protection in the EU Member States and associate countries (EU+) fell by just 11 % compared to 2017, whereas detections of illegal border crossings fell by a much larger 27 % compared to the previous year ⁽²⁾.

EASO continued to deliver on its mandate in facilitating the implementation of the CEAS and, in doing so, supporting Member States in translating the key principles of the CEAS into practice. As in previous years, a number of measures were implemented to strengthen practical cooperation amongst Member States on asylum matters and to provide operational support to those Member States whose asylum and reception systems were under particular pressure.

By way of renewed operating plans, EASO maintained its support to national authorities in Greece, Italy and Cyprus.

- Following an amendment to Greek asylum legislation, EASO initiated its support to the examination of applications for international protection within the framework of the regular asylum procedure with caseworkers present first in Lesbos and later in Thessaloniki.
- The operating plan concluded with the **Italian** authorities provided for additional responsibilities in terms of supporting the handling of registrations of applications for international protection and significant additional support for the regular procedure.
- **Cyprus** experienced a substantial increase in asylum applications lodged, a 69 % increase compared to the

⁽²⁾ Frontex, *Risk Analysis for 2019*, February 2019: https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis_for_2019.pdf



previous year. A number of experts were deployed throughout the course of 2018 to provide support in backlog management, reception and registrations.

- In November of the same year, EASO successfully concluded its operations in **Bulgaria**, in place since 2013. This came as a result of the reduced pressures on the country's asylum and reception system but was also enabled by stronger capacities to manage its asylum and its reception systems.

EASO also delivered on its other core business activities including in the provision of information and analysis, training and in the area of external dimension.

- EASO continued to consolidate its role as a clearing house for national **country of origin information (COI)** with a view to contributing to greater convergence in asylum decisions across the EU.
- In response to the European Council conclusions of 21 April 2016, the first EASO country guidance note was endorsed by the EASO Management Board in June 2018. The guidance note was the result of a pilot process coordinated by EASO, together with national authorities, that led to a joint assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. This also contributed to the agency's preparedness for its future new mandate.

Throughout 2018, EASO also supported Member States' national administrations, associated states and third countries in the field of asylum through the **provision of training** in line with the agency's core training tool, the EASO training curriculum. Since its launch in 2012, almost 30 000 officials have been trained in the EASO training curriculum across the EU and beyond, a figure which reflects the successful implementation of EASO's training and learning strategy.

In **third countries**, EASO provided building support towards the strengthening of asylum and reception systems within the framework of the EASO external action strategy. A key focus was the work undertaken with the western Balkans region and Turkey while ad hoc support was also provided to countries in the Middle East and the north Africa region. In the context of resettlement, EASO launched the preparatory work

for a pilot for a resettlement support facility in Turkey following its endorsement by the management board.

In terms of **governance**, 2018 saw changes in EASO's management. On 6 June 2018, the EASO Management Board appointed Mr Jamil Addou as interim Executive Director of EASO following the resignation of the former executive director. On the basis of a governance action plan, which was put forward by the interim executive director and endorsed unanimously by the management board in September 2018, the new management adopted a number of measures to reinforce EASO's internal governance structures while also rebuilding internal capacities and restoring trust in the agency, both internally and externally. A strong effort was made to boost recruitment following the slowdown that was registered during the first half of 2018.

The recruitment procedure for the new Executive Director of EASO was launched in the same period and formally concluded in April 2019 with the appointment of Ms Nina Gregori.

At **EU level**, migration policy remained high on the agenda during 2018. The European Council conclusions of 28 June 2018 reconfirmed the need for a comprehensive approach to migration, combining external and internal aspects as a precondition for a functioning EU policy. While recognising the progress achieved on the reform of the new CEAS, the European Council underlined the need for a speedy solution to the whole CEAS reform package ⁽³⁾.

In the summer period, a number of **ad hoc measures for the disembarkation** of migrants in the Mediterranean were put in place.

The European Commission presented targeted amendments to the original proposal for a regulation on the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) on 12 September 2018. The proposal, which builds on the provisional political agreement reached between the co-legislators in June 2017, would further expand the agency's operational role in supporting Member States in managing efficient and resilient asylum procedures.

Meanwhile, EASO continued to **build its preparedness** for the new mandate to ensure it is operational once the regulation on the EUAA enters into force.

⁽³⁾ European Council conclusions 28 June 2018: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/06/29/20180628-euco-conclusions-final/>

3. EASO's priorities in 2018

EASO defined its priorities for 2018 in the 2018 work programme, adopted by the EASO Management Board on 27 November 2017. The work programme was amended on 31 July 2018 and 16 November 2018 by the EASO Management Board. The first amendment was required mainly to address the increase in demand in operational support in Italy and Greece, and also due to the delay in the adoption of the regulation on the EUAA. The second amendment was related to procurement and budgetary procedures.

EASO's priorities in 2018 were as follows.

Operational support, planning and evaluation

- Further develop operational support based on the identified and emerging needs of Italy, Greece and Cyprus, as well as other potential front-line Member States.
- Provide operational and technical support to Member States to assist them in implementing the new CEAS proposals in a timely and effective manner.
- Support capacity building in key EU neighbouring third-countries' asylum and reception systems, namely in the western Balkans region, Turkey and north Africa.
- Strengthen the EU's role in the area of resettlement, in cooperation with the European Commission, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other implementing partners, including the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).
- Make use of and further develop a number of tools to implement its operational activities.
- Implement specific support activities for the relocation and operations in the hotspots.
- Implement a pilot project on private sponsorship schemes, in close coordination with the Commission, and fully participate in the parallel Commission study.
- Continuously improve the planning of operational support and further develop working methodologies to draft operating plans.
- Enhance capacity to monitor and evaluate operational activities, with a major focus on the results from the implementation of operating plans, and to improve their effectiveness and efficiency.

Information, analysis and knowledge development

- Develop a comprehensive EU COI system, raising and harmonising standards of COI together with EU+ countries and other key stakeholders, as well as strengthening EASO's role as a 'clearing house' of national COI.
- Foster the creation of an effective situational picture on asylum-related migration, as well as an early warning functionality, through the further development of Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS) data collection and the integration of findings of the research on activities on early warning and understanding root causes.
- Establish the Information and Documentation System (IDS) as the basis for operational analyses to be provided on current challenges and areas of potential crises.
- Further integrate the Asylum Information System, focusing on improving the functionalities of individual entities and creating additional interlinkages between constituent parts.
- Foster convergence in applying assessment criteria by coordinating efforts among Member States to engage in and develop a common analysis providing guidance on the situation in specific countries of origin.

Asylum support

- Consolidate EASO's training curriculum by keeping its existing training material abreast of new developments and continue to organise train-the-trainers sessions.
- Provide learning and training opportunities to improve the knowledge, skills and competences in relevant authorities and of experts to be deployed in asylum support teams (ASTs).
- Further continue and enhance practical cooperation activities for the collection and exchange of information on Member States' current practices and policies in relation to the CEAS.
- Further develop the dedicated Network of Reception Authorities in line with the European agenda on migration.
- Continue to mainstream aspects related to vulnerable groups in all activities to encourage policy coherence

in this field, including in the context of operational support, training and other asylum support activities.

- Advance the joint preparation of professional development materials for members of national courts and tribunals, as well as their subsequent dissemination to identified partners.
- Continue to enhance the activities of the Dublin Network and reinforce the cooperation, information sharing and exchanges of best practices between the participating national Dublin units.
- Continue to enhance the activities of the EASO Exclusion Network and reinforce the cooperation, information sharing and exchange of best practices on exclusion-related issues between the participating EU+ states.

Horizontal activities

- Further promote the participation of representatives from civil society, strengthen the quality and

effectiveness of consultations and explore direct involvement of civil society in EASO's support activities through the implementation of pilot activities.

- In line with the draft new EUAA regulation, make a proposal for the setup (composition and working methods) of the revised Consultative Forum based on lessons learnt.
- Promote multidirectional synergies with all relevant stakeholders of EASO's cooperation network and strengthen coordination, flow of information, convergence and coherence of policies and practices related to EASO's mandate.
- Continue to increase the availability of information and communications technology systems and technical solutions in the field of asylum for the EU+, and further improve systems to support EASO's internal operations to meet the demands of growth in size as well as the increase in tasks and responsibilities.

4. EASO's achievements in 2018

4.1. Operational support

Within the framework of its mandate ⁽⁴⁾, EASO provides tailored operational support to Member States subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems.

At the request of a Member State, coordination and support efforts are administered on the basis of agreed measures and deliverables, contributing towards the implementation of the CEAS.

4.1.1. Italy

EASO's main achievements in 2018
1 operating plan implemented and 1 new operating plan signed
22 821 registrations of applicants for international protection completed with EASO's support
151 experts deployed (implementation of operating plan measures)
94 training sessions delivered with a total of 2 256 persons trained in asylum determination procedure (extensive training programme), registration, Dublin regulation, reception of unaccompanied minors (UAMs), interpreting in the asylum context and guardianship

EASO has been providing support to the Italian authorities since 2013, at first in the context of the special support plan (SSP) for Italy, which operated until the end of March 2016. Under the EASO hotspot-relocation operating plan to Italy, signed on 17 December 2015, EASO's operational activities in Italy were further extended in line with the European agenda on migration to include special support measures for front-line Member States within the hotspot approach and relocation.

In December 2016, EASO and Italy agreed on an operating plan for Italy, defining the areas of technical and operational support envisaged for 2017. This plan was amended in July 2017 to include cooperation between EASO and the Italian Ombudsperson for Children and Adolescents.

EASO's operational support to Italy was extended under a new operating plan for 2018. The plan, signed on 15 December 2017, builds on the support provided by EASO to Italy in 2017 in the areas of: information provision to and registration of potential applicants for international protection; support in the processing of Dublin cases; strengthening of Italy's reception capacity, particularly with regard to UAMs; support to the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration within the Italian Ministry of Interior; activities relating to COI; and support to the Italian Ombudsperson for Children and Adolescents in the implementation of protection measures for UAMs.

The 2018 plan also introduced a new and enhanced role for the agency in the handling of registrations of applications for international protection, including in the preparation of files under the national asylum procedure. Over the course of 2018, 375 AST members were actively engaged deployments of varying duration in the deliverables foreseen under the 2018 operating plan for Italy. This number consisted mainly of interim staff (221), whose numbers gradually increased throughout the year. Member States supported with 139 experts originating from 19 countries (excluding Italy), in addition to nine EASO staff and six individual experts. EASO statutory staff was primarily working in Rome and Catania, whilst Member States' experts and interim staff were spread across several locations in Italy.

From a total of 56 161 asylum applications lodged in Italy in 2018 (first instance), EASO assisted with 22 821 files of applicants (41 % of the total number). Over the same year, EASO experts also supported 28 468 actions linked to information provision to potential applicants for international protection in Italy. Information was provided in the context of the national asylum procedure, as well as the Dublin procedure. In 1 598 cases, there was a pre-identification for vulnerability or the Dublin procedure.

Information was provided in locations across the Italian territory, albeit mostly concentrated in the southern part of the country during disembarkations or in second-line reception centres. To improve its outreach, EASO also relied on mobile or roving teams. Approximately 84 % of the support was delivered in Taranto, Reggio Calabria and Trapani, with two mobile teams deployed in Rome and Sicily.

⁽⁴⁾ 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.



Support under the 2018 plan was also provided in the regular procedure to the National Asylum Commission and the Territorial Commissions. EASO's actions under this measure were tailored to the needs of each relevant location, with support provided in the preparation of files; preparation of interviews; COI; and in the preparation of files for the response of the Territorial Commissions to second-instance appeals procedures. In what concerns support to the Dublin Unit, measures were mostly concentrated around capacity building, relocation or Dublin outgoing procedures. Support provided in the context of final outstanding cases under the relocation procedure resulted in 2 504 actions.

An extensive training programme continued to be delivered under the 2018 operating plan for Italy. The programme was delivered by the EASO Training Unit for interim caseworkers deployed with the Italian authorities to assist in the asylum process, in particular in registration (at the level of the *Questure*) and status determination (Territorial Commission). In addition,

EASO trained the Italian Immigration and Border Police in a set of training sessions organised in the second half of 2018, which were focused mostly on access to the asylum procedure.

Following a request for further support from the Italian authorities, a single operating plan for 2019 was signed by EASO and Italy on 19 December 2018. Under this plan, EASO will maintain its support to Italy in the processing of applications for international protection, as well as in enhancing its capacity to absorb the backlog of cases accumulated during the spike in arrivals in recent years. The agency will continue to support the Italian authorities in the processing of Dublin procedures and the strengthening of the Italian COI Unit, and will continue to provide support to the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration within the Italian Ministry of Interior, including the office responsible for the monitoring of the reception system. Furthermore, EASO will continue to support the Italian Ombudsperson for Children and Adolescents with capacity-building activities for volunteer guardians.

4.1.2. Greece

EASO's main achievements in 2018
1 operating plan implemented and 1 new operating plan signed
15 876 registrations and 1 878 pre-registrations completed with EASO's support
8 958 interviews conducted and 953 vulnerability assessments carried out under the implementation of the EU–Turkey statement
841 interviews conducted under the regular procedure
20 542 questions addressed by the EASO hotline located in Athens
248 on-site visits by EASO mobile information teams and 8 645 questions answered
Active participation in the technical assistance project for reception and extended support for reception of UAMs
45 operational training sessions delivered for different target groups (EASO experts, staff of the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) and Greek Reception and Identification Service, interpreters and team leaders); a total of 642 people trained

At the request of the Greek government, EASO has continued to strengthen its support to Greece in line with agreed measures since 2011.

Based on a renewed operating plan for 2018, EASO continued to deliver support to Greece on the basis of existing measures, including support to the GAS in the asylum border procedure on the Greek islands under the EU–Turkey statement and to the Reception and Identification Service. EASO also supported second-instance activities through the secondment of legal rapporteurs to assist judges in the appeals committees. Efforts were also deployed towards capacity-building activities, particularly in the area of the reception, identification, assessment and referral of vulnerable applicants, and in project management. In the same year, EASO extended its support to the GAS in the regular procedure.

The quality of EASO's support to the border and regular procedures is ensured by team leaders stationed in the hotspots or work locations, and by the helpdesk, which was established for this purpose in Athens. A second-line quality assurance is being ensured by EASO headquarters. To this end, standard operating procedures (SOPs) were drafted for EASO's support to the regular procedure, whilst another set of SOPs were reviewed for the border procedure. In 2018, eight quality feedback reports on the output of EASO experts were



drafted, and 27 queries related to procedural issues were addressed by the EASO Helpdesk.

Operational support continued to be delivered in the five hotspots on the Aegean islands, together with Athens, Thessaloniki and other locations on the mainland. Whilst all applicants registered in the mainland had their applications examined under the regular procedure, registrations on the islands were carried out under both the border and regular procedures.

In 2018, close to 67 000 asylum applications were lodged in Greece, representing a 14 % increase compared to the annual total recorded for the previous year (58 724 in 2017). In terms of first-instance decisions, the outflow increased by close to one third compared to 2017, with 32 452 decisions reported in 2018 (24 611 were reported for 2017). With an exception in mid-2017 — when processed applications surpassed lodged applications for several months — the processing capacity of the determining authority (GAS) had been insufficient to match the steady high levels of asylum applications received. Despite the increase in decisions and withdrawals that became evident after May 2018, close to 20 000 more applications were received than those resolved during that same year.

A constantly increasing trend in the stock of pending cases awaiting a first-instance decision was observed in Greece since the end of the relocation programme in September 2017. Despite the ongoing support provided by EASO in the context of deployed experts and interim caseworkers to the asylum procedures, the continuous increasing rate of the backlog (close to + 1 900 pending applications a month on average in 2018) emphasised the need for additional efforts and resources in the framework of the enhanced cooperation between EASO and the GAS.

On 27 August 2018, EASO began to support Greece in the regular asylum procedure, following an extensive training programme for caseworkers delivered over the course of 8 weeks. The decision was taken following a request by the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy, and an amendment to the Greek asylum legislation. EASO deployed a first wave of locally recruited and trained interim caseworkers in Lesbos in August 2018, with a second group stationed at the regional asylum office in Thessaloniki towards the end of the year. EASO's support in the regular procedure helped to allay some of the interviewing tasks from GAS caseworkers, which was meant to have a knock-on effect on the number of pending asylum claims under the border procedure.

During 2018, EASO's experts provided information to applicants for international protection on access and the

framework of the asylum procedures in Greece, as well as the progress of their individual cases through mobile information teams and a dedicated hotline. Over that same year, almost 26 000 questions were answered by EASO experts. Most of these questions were addressed to the hotline located in Athens. In addition to the EASO information hotline, two mobile teams regularly visited the reception sites on mainland Greece. Altogether, both teams carried out 248 on-site visits and answered 8 645 on-site questions.

EASO also contributed to the enhancement of the processing capacity of the Greek Dublin Unit through the secondment of interims responsible for the preparation and sending of Dublin requests to the responsible Member State. In the context of support to the Appeals Authority, EASO seconded legal rapporteurs to Greece to assist with the preparation of files and other tasks regarding the examination of lodged appeals against first-instance decisions by the competent independent Appeals Committees. In addition, tailored workshops were organised for staff from both the GAS and the Appeals Authority in Greece, covering various areas of international protection.

In 2018, EASO continued to deliver on a regular basis its operational training to Member States' experts deployed in the hotspots. Tailor-made training was also delivered for EASO team leaders.

Furthermore, over the summer, all the interpreters deployed by EASO in Greece (via service providers) were trained in the EASO new training module 'Interpreting in the asylum context'.

A new operating plan for Greece was signed on 19 December 2018. The 2019 plan continues to build on EASO's existing operational support to Greece, including support in the processing of applications under the border and the regular asylum procedure, information provision, the handling of outgoing Dublin take-charge requests, the training of Greek personnel and support to the Greek asylum and reception system.



4.1.3. Bulgaria

EASO's main achievements in 2018

1 SSP implemented

EASO's support to Bulgaria started in 2013, and was later extended under an SSP agreed on 5 December 2014 covering capacity building in the context of UAMs; vulnerability assessment; reception; quality of the asylum procedure; COI and support in the asylum decision process. The SSP was amended and extended three times over a period of 4 years, with the latest special operating plan covering activities until the end of 2018.

EASO's long-standing support to Bulgaria was formally concluded following an agreement with the Bulgarian authorities on 27 November 2018. The successful conclusion of EASO's operations in Bulgaria came about as a result of the reduced pressure on its asylum and reception system, as well as the notable improvement registered in the country's capacity to manage its asylum and reception systems.

4.1.4. Cyprus

EASO's main achievements in 2018

3 SSP measures implemented (backlog, reception and contingency/registration)

731 interviews conducted

724 concluding remarks drafted

2 287 registrations carried out

3 training sessions delivered for EASO deployed experts and registration assistants (14 persons trained)

Operations resumed in Kofinou reception centre

In 2018, 7 791 applications for international protection were lodged in Cyprus, marking a 74 % increase from 2017. Notwithstanding the increasing numbers of applications, the number of processed cases remained somewhat stable and in line with the previous year, despite the slightly increased output in the second half of 2018.

The agency has provided support to Cyprus since 2014 under an SSP. An amendment to the plan was adopted in December 2017, extending the timeline of EASO's support to the Cypriot authorities until 31 January 2019.

In 2018, EASO's support in terms of backlog management continued to be addressed through the



deployment of ASTs, and through assistance provided in the enhancement of the asylum service's capacity to both manage and improve its reception facilities in accordance with its international obligations regarding the reception of asylum seekers. Throughout 2018, close to 2 500 decisions were issued to applicants for international protection. Of those, 1 217 were positive decisions granting either refugee status (16 %) or subsidiary protection (84 %). The average recognition rate for 2018 stood at 49 %, which was almost unchanged from the 50 % recognition rate observed the year before.

During 2018, EASO supported the asylum service in Cyprus in the processing of asylum cases at first instance to alleviate the increase in backlog. In this context, EASO deployed experts who conducted 731 interviews concerning 27 distinct citizenships in Nicosia. Some 724 concluding remarks were also drafted by EASO deployed experts over the same period.

EASO also provided targeted support to the reception centre in Kofinou by way of capacity building in camp management, planning and social work support. While this activity was suspended for a period between July and September, the work resumed in the last quarter of the year following agreement in respect of pre-conditions and a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities.

In terms of expert deployments, EASO deployed 49 experts to support the implementation of the activities outlined in the SSP for Cyprus. Of these, 25 % (12) were Member State experts and 37 were interim experts. In recognition of the increased arrivals and at the request of the Cypriot authorities, EASO provided interim registration support from late July onward. By the end of the year, six EASO registration staff, situated in four locations (immigration police district offices), had carried out 2 287 registrations.

In December 2018, EASO and the Cypriot authorities agreed on a new operating plan for 2019, which will see the expansion of EASO's technical and operational support to Cyprus across all existing measures. In addition, EASO will support the Cypriot authorities in the area of data management and coordination.

4.1.5. External dimension

EASO's main achievements in 2018
<p>Western Balkans:</p> <p>National roadmaps with Serbia and North Macedonia under implementation</p> <p>The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II programme 'Regional support to protection-sensitive migration management in the western Balkans and Turkey' under implementation</p> <p>30 capacity-building activities implemented</p>
<p>Turkey:</p> <p>5 capacity-building activities implemented under the pilot EASO–Directorate-General of Migration Management (DGMM) roadmap</p> <p>3 EASO–DGMM meetings organised for the review and evaluation of the pilot EASO–DGMM roadmap and for the definition of the new roadmap documents</p> <p>13 capacity-building activities implemented under the second EASO–DGMM roadmap</p>
<p>Middle East and north Africa region:</p> <p>2 regional development and protection programmes for north Africa-related activities</p> <p>1 fact-finding mission to Egypt</p> <p>2 capacity-building activities in support of Egypt</p> <p>Participation in the Khartoum Process thematic meeting on the protection of women and girls on the move from Africa to Europe in September 2018, presentation of the EASO Tool for Identification of Persons with Special Needs</p>
<p>Resettlement:</p> <p>Feasibility assessment for operational support to Member States resettling from Turkey</p> <p>2 sessions of the resettlement training module</p> <p>1 pilot project initiated on private sponsorship programmes (PSPs)</p>

The political debate in the EU on asylum and migration has increasingly gained importance in the context of the EU's external relations. In accordance with the EASO external action strategy and EASO single programming documents, EASO delivered capacity-building support in 2018 to improve the protection afforded to asylum seekers and refugees in priority third countries, and to

facilitate EU+ countries' efforts in providing access to the EU for persons in need of international protection.

Third-country support

In 2018, EASO worked primarily with the western Balkans region and Turkey. Capacity-building activities in third countries include training, on-the-job coaching, conferences, workshops and other types of technical assistance in the field of international protection.

As a key partner in the implementation of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II programme 'Regional support to protection-sensitive migration management in the western Balkans and Turkey' since 2016, EASO provides regional and national support in view of strengthening the national asylum and reception systems and promoting regional cooperation and protection-sensitive migration management systems in the western Balkans and Turkey.

It is worth highlighting that in February 2018, EASO hosted a pilot adaptation workshop on EASO tools and practical guides for **western Balkans administrations** on the quality of translations and on adaptation to national contexts. EASO also organised two **scoping missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina** to assess potential future support in light of Bosnia and Herzegovina's emergency action plan sent to the European Commission in May 2018.

As agreed in the national roadmaps for Serbia and North Macedonia, EASO provided technical support in the different stages of the asylum procedure, in particular on contingency planning, reception, registration and examination procedures.

Regionally, EASO supported the migration, asylum, refugees regional initiative through discussions on its potential role in asylum regional training activities and on regional practitioners' networks, including on COI. EASO also translated and introduced regionally the EASO–European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) practical tool for first-contact officials on access to the asylum procedure (November 2018). This intends to ensure that asylum seekers have sound access to international protection.

In 2018, several activities were organised in **cooperation with Turkey** to support the DGMM of the Turkish Ministry of Interior. The EASO–DGMM pilot roadmap (September 2017-February 2018) was completed.

A second EASO–DGMM roadmap runs from March 2018 to June 2019 and is composed of key areas of cooperation for the enhancement of DGMM staff capacities in the assessment of applications for international protection: enhancing the capacity of the

COI Unit in DGMM, providing capacity building to staff in DGMM and strengthening the capacity of staff working with vulnerable groups.

In 2018, EASO participated in a fact-finding mission to Egypt in the context of the EU–Egypt migration dialogue to discuss possible avenues for cooperation between Egypt and EASO in 2019. EASO also provided expertise in the Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding training course on ‘Combating human trafficking and smuggling of migrants’ in July and September 2018.

In the follow-up to the Valletta summit, EASO presented its Tool for Identification of Persons with Special Needs in a Khartoum Process thematic meeting on the protection of women and girls on the move from Africa to Europe.

Resettlement

Building on a mapping exercise of Member States’ resettlement processes conducted in 2017 in Turkey, during the first half of 2018, EASO undertook a feasibility

assessment exercise to define possible actions to be taken, with a view to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the resettlement processing from Turkey, based on needs, challenges and opportunities identified with the Member States, in consultation with the European Commission (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs), UNHCR and other stakeholders. The results of the feasibility assessment were presented to EASO’s Management Board in September 2018. EASO’s Management Board endorsed the proposal to launch an 18-month pilot project for a resettlement support facility in Turkey. EASO subsequently started preparations for this pilot project.

As partner to the EU action on facilitating resettlement and refugee admission through new knowledge project, EASO supported throughout the year the development of a training module on resettlement as part of the EASO training curriculum, which was piloted in December 2018.

In the Commission communication on the delivery of the European agenda on migration of 27 September 2017, the Commission encouraged Member States to explore ways to establish private sponsorship schemes, where



the settlement and integration support for persons in need of protection can be provided by private groups of civil society organisations (CSOs). To this end, EASO was invited to coordinate a pilot project on PSPs with interested EU+ countries, engaging a variety of relevant organisations and actors in cooperation with the EU Member States. In 2018, EASO piloted a platform for exchange and discussion among Member States and relevant stakeholders on the challenges and lessons learnt during the planning and implementation of PSPs. EASO was also actively engaged in the work of the Steering Committee on the study launched by the European Commission on the feasibility and added value of sponsorship schemes as a possible pathway to safe channels for admission to the EU, including resettlement.

EASO External Dimension Network

On 3 May 2018, EASO hosted the EASO External Dimension Network meeting in Malta. The meeting aimed at providing an opportunity for information exchange between EU+ countries and EASO on ongoing and future activities.

In the same context, EASO organised a negotiation skills workshop on 4 May 2018, providing participants with a good understanding of negotiation techniques and their application.

4.2. Planning, evaluation and support tools

4.2.1. Support activities and tools for operation

EASO's main achievements in 2018
Launch of EASO's Asylum Intervention Pool System
2 meetings of the Asylum Intervention Pool (AIP) national contact points (NCPs) held
Needs assessment user guide developed
7 harmonised templates for drafting operating plans and measure-based financial planning developed
Development of multiple cost-saving budget scenarios for the 2018 operations in Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Bulgaria in the first half of the year
Technical assistance to the plan design of 3 multi-annual roadmaps, 3 operating plans and 1 EASO resettlement project
Technical support to 3 comprehensive and prioritised needs assessment exercises in Italy, Greece and Cyprus

In 2018, efforts continued towards the enhancement of EASO's planning and evaluation in the context of its operational support. The agency set out to further develop its working methodologies for the drafting of operating plans.

A number of support tools — accompanied by technical assistance — were designed in 2018. These included dedicated templates for planning, monitoring and evaluation. Innovative approaches were developed to better equip EASO to respond to operational demands. A highlight was the design and validation of a dedicated needs assessment user guide, which informed the planning and design of EASO's 2019 operating plans and multiannual roadmaps for Cyprus, Greece and Italy.

This guide represents a crucial step in the direction of the preparation of an EASO operations manual which will provide a structured methodology to the implementation of the project cycle management approach in its different stages. In this context, in 2018 the first steps were taken to develop a monitoring user guide, which is expected to be concluded by mid-2019. Additional user guides dedicated to the other project cycle management stages are foreseen for 2019 and 2020. Another milestone was the design of a fit-for-purpose internal evaluation methodology, which was piloted and consolidated in Italy, Greece and Bulgaria.

On 13 March 2018, the EASO Asylum Intervention Pool System was officially launched. This integrated web-based system is designed to manage operational resources pooled in the EASO AIP and deployed through the ASTs by EASO during its operational support activities in Member States. The new system allows for better support for planning and reporting on deployments. Targeted training was also delivered to NCPs on the functionality and features of the tool, whilst providing practical support on the use of the system. Further improvements to the system are scheduled for 2019 when it comes to reporting on deployments, visualisation of shortages for NCPs and a mobile application, amongst others.

Two practical cooperation meetings of AIP NCPs took place in 2018, with participation from EU+ countries, the Commission and UNHCR. The discussions focused on EASO's operational support activities in 2017 and 2018, the deployment of experts, the management of the AIP under the current legal framework and changes foreseen under the future EUAA regulation. The discussion also targeted security, health and safety in EASO's operations and an assessment of deployed experts' feedback.

Further efforts were also made towards improving contingency planning and preparedness, and to build on EASO's resilience and capacity to intervene rapidly in response to changes in migratory flows. Following the

release of the EASO guidance on reception conditions in 2016, the agency issued guidance on contingency planning in the context of reception in March 2018. Contingency planning ensures a rapid, deliberate and well-thought-out response to any extreme situation or event that requires special contingency measures. This context had also led the European Commission to make proposals to adapt the CEAS and to change the legal framework. The recast reception conditions directive would require EU+ states to have national contingency plans that would be better prepared in the event of a sudden high influx.

The IDS operational platforms for Greece and Italy were both updated to reflect activities, locations and guidance relevant to 2018 plans. The platform for Cyprus was maintained with limited use due to withdrawn deployments. Additional resources on operational COI queries were made available for Greece, Italy and Cyprus.

4.2.2. Operational training and quality support

EASO's main achievements in 2018
10 training programmes developed for experts working in the field
38 training programmes delivered
160 training sessions organised
3 219 participants in operational training sessions
2 train-the-trainers sessions delivered under operational training (on the Dublin III regulation in Rome and on the module 'Interpreting in the asylum context' in Athens)
93 quality reviews undertaken for Greece (76) and Cyprus (17)
10 quality feedback reports prepared for Greece (8) and Cyprus (2)

In terms of operational training activities, EASO developed a total of 10 training programmes in 2018, and delivered 160 training sessions to over 3 219 participants. Interim caseworkers and experts deployed in EASO operations continued to receive specialised training focused on their tasks as well as the operational context. This training also included a coaching element. Furthermore, interpreters deployed by EASO were trained in the new EASO training module on 'Interpreting in the asylum context' (Greece) and cultural mediators were enrolled in tailored operational training sessions addressing their training needs (Italy). The operational training material was further developed and updated.

EASO also continued to develop tools and support processes for use in the hotspots and

for relocation-related activities. The SOPs for the implementation of the border asylum procedures in the context of the EU–Turkey statement were revised in 2018, and new SOPs prepared in cooperation with the GAS, for EASO's participation in the regular asylum procedure in Greece.

The templates used for conducting interviews and drafting opinions in the border asylum procedures in Greece were revised, and new templates were prepared for conducting interviews and drafting opinions in the regular asylum procedures in Greece.

Two new guidance documents were developed to assist caseworkers in conducting interviews of applicants with specific profiles from selective countries of origins. A quality check of 76 cases was carried out (both interview and opinion) and eight quality feedback reports were drafted and shared with the case officers in the hotspots in Greece. Moreover, 27 queries were addressed by the EASO helpdesk in Greece.

With regard to EASO's operations in Cyprus, a quality check of 17 cases was undertaken, with the use of the EASO Quality Assurance Tool, and two quality feedback reports were drafted.

4.2.3. Monitoring and evaluation of operations

EASO's main achievements in 2018
Design of an operational evaluation methodology (to form part of a dedicated user guide on evaluations)
Management of 3 internal evaluations in Italy (2017 operating plan) and Greece (2017 operating plan and mid-term review of the 2018 operating plan)
Design of a results-based monitoring methodology and tools as part of a draft EASO monitoring user guide
Technical support for <i>ex post</i> monitoring indicators and databases in Italy, Greece and Cyprus

EASO's operations and activities within the Member States and in the area of external dimension are continuously being monitored in terms of budget, resource allocation and performance, through a process of mid-term reviews and final evaluations. In 2018, five sets of periodic/mid-term monitoring reports were issued on current operating plans, including:

- regular monthly monitoring reports as of May 2018 on the operating plan for Greece;
- regular monthly monitoring reports as of May 2018 on the operating plan for Italy;

- quarterly monitoring reports on the operating plan for Italy;
- mid-term review report on the operating plan for Greece; and
- reassessment of the operating plan for Italy (measure IT1, methodological support).

An internal operations monitoring system was introduced in 2018 to provide for the regular monitoring of performance indicators and data for periodical reporting on the implementation of operating plans.

4.3. Information, analysis and knowledge development

4.3.1. Country of origin information (COI)

EASO's main achievements in 2018
23 new COI reports produced
2 EASO COI Strategic Network meetings
20 thematic meetings on countries of origin
40 809 visits on the EASO COI Portal (internal EASO visits excluded)

The provision of COI on a wide range of third countries and themes is imperative for well-informed, fair and well-reasoned asylum decisions and evidence-based policy development. On the basis of the European agenda on migration (2015) and subsequent Council conclusions of 21 April 2016, EASO continued to reinforce its role as a clearing house of national COI. EASO has continued to gather targeted, relevant, reliable, accurate and up-to-date COI according to an established methodology. In 2018, within the context of the EASO COI network approach, EASO produced a number of COI reports, accessible on the EASO COI Portal: <https://coi.easo.europa.eu/>

The Commission proposal on the EUAA, which at the time of writing is still under negotiation at EU level, calls for the coordination of national COI production initiatives through the establishment and management of COI networks among Member States. To this end, coordination could be enhanced through the effective sharing of national production plans on a dedicated platform, and by boosting the joint production of EASO COI products. The creation and sharing of COI was thus further rationalised and harmonised via the network approach adopted by EASO. In order to improve stakeholders' access to COI, EASO continued to improve on its COI Portal.

In 2018, two meetings of the EASO COI Strategic Network took place, providing strategic input to the development of EASO's work plan for COI. During the same year, EASO hosted 22 meetings on countries of origin or COI topics, including:

- four practical cooperation meetings on Afghans in Iran, on Iraq, on Bangladesh and on Mali and the Ivory Coast;
- four COI Specialist Network meetings on Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan and west Africa;
- seven kick-off meetings of the drafting teams regarding reports on Mali, Nigeria (COI report), Russia, Iraq, the Ivory Coast, the key socioeconomic indicators report on Afghanistan and the security situation report on Iraq;
- one national common portal administrator meeting on the EASO COI Portal;
- one meeting of the COI methodology working group;
- one evaluation meeting on joint COI production on Afghanistan;
- one medical country of origin information (MedCOI) Accessibility Network meeting;
- one MedCOI user event;
- one workshop on Somalia; and
- one conference on Iraq.



© Utenriksdepartementet UD, Banki IDP camp, Borno state, northeast Nigeria On 9 November 2016, women and children collect water from a borehole in Mafa IDP Camp, Borno State, northeast Nigeria.

Within the specialist networks, national COI researchers share information on COI needs, on recent and upcoming national COI products and on fact-finding missions, in order to avoid duplication and overlapping of efforts. The networks also offer a framework for joint COI production and jointly provide answers to COI queries. In 2018, EASO received and responded to 137 COI queries.

EASO continued to develop its MedCOI transfer project. MedCOI is a project initiated in 2010 with the aim of improving access to medical COI for national migration and asylum authorities in Europe. The project is implemented by the Netherlands (Dutch Medical Advisors Office — BMA) and Belgium (Belgian Desk on Accessibility — BDA), together with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. During EASO's 12th management board meeting in 2013, EASO committed to take over the activities of the MedCOI project in accordance with an action plan agreed to with Member States. The transfer of the project to EASO started with a kick-off meeting in October 2017 and is expected to run until 2020 when EASO is envisaged to have the full capacity to deliver the MedCOI services as part of its daily operations. During 2018, EASO organised several meetings for the development of a training module on MedCOI. Furthermore, EASO participated in the delivery of the MedCOI service of responding to individual requests and organised a user event in Malta.

In terms of COI production, EASO produced 23 new COI reports in 2018, including a pilot factsheet on Ukraine in the framework of MedCOI, and 10 reports

for the European Commission (limited distribution) on the concept of 'safe third country'. In August 2018, in response to a request from the Commission, the agency provided information relevant for an assessment of the concept of 'safe third country' for the western Balkan countries (six), Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

Cooperation with civil society experts in the field of COI has also been strengthened throughout 2018, with the involvement of CSOs in several COI-related meetings, workshops and conferences. Civil society actors specialised in the field of COI were consulted on methodologies and have been invited to contribute to EASO COI production as drafters or reviewers. In addition, informal consultation sessions are also being organised on an ad hoc basis with civil society actors in the field of COI.

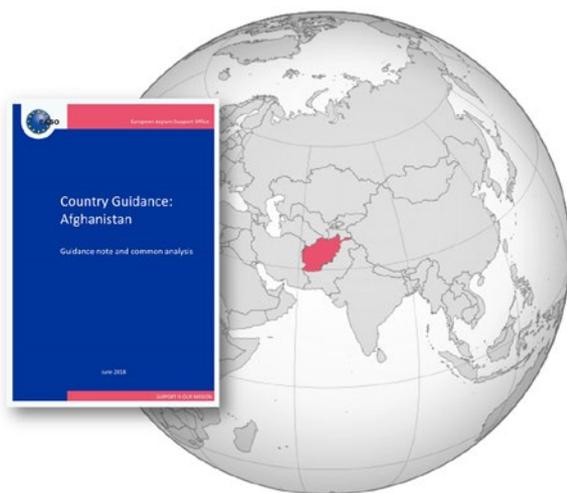
4.3.2. Country guidance

EASO's main achievements in 2018
1st country guidance note and common assessment published on Afghanistan (June 2018)
Evaluation of the pilot country guidance process completed (November 2018)
5 meetings of the Country Guidance Network
3 meetings of the Drafting Team on Afghanistan
3 meetings of the Drafting Team on Nigeria
1 meeting of the Drafting Team on Iraq



In June 2018, EASO published its first country guidance, *Country guidance: Afghanistan*. The guidance is the result of a pilot process initiated on the basis of the Council conclusions of 21 April 2016. With the aim of fostering convergence in asylum decision-making in the EU, EASO has been working with senior policy officials from EU+ countries, to develop common assessments and guidance on main countries of origin. The development of country guidance is supported by drafting teams of national experts and takes into account the valuable input of the European Commission and UNHCR.

Following the successful completion of the pilot exercise on Afghanistan, in 2018 EASO launched the development of country guidance on Nigeria and on Iraq. As a starting point to understanding current needs and national policies and practices, EASO relies on EU+ countries' input to dedicated surveys. In 2018, three such surveys were launched, in preparation of the COI production and the development of country guidance on Nigeria and Iraq. A total of 22 responses were received from EU+ countries on Nigeria, which were compiled and analysed in preparation of the terms of reference for COI production. In the initial survey on Iraq, 19 responses were received from EU+ countries, which were analysed in preparation of the launch of the relevant COI production; and 16 responses from EU+ countries were received to a follow-up survey in preparation of the work on country guidance on Iraq. Country Guidance Network meetings, written consultations and drafting team meetings took place in the second half of the year in the framework of these developments.



An evaluation of the pilot process on Afghanistan was also conducted by means of surveys, a Country Guidance Network meeting and focused interviews involving key stakeholders. A comprehensive evaluation report

was shared with the Country Guidance Network in November 2018.

The work on country guidance will continue in 2019, with the endorsement and publication of the *Country guidance: Nigeria* (February 2019) and with the development of country guidance on Iraq and the update of the country guidance on Afghanistan, expected later in 2019.

4.3.3. Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS)

EASO's main achievements in 2018
2 EPS plenary meetings in June (Rome) and December (Belgium)
3 Group for the Provision of Statistics Advisory Group meetings
51 weekly reports on the situation of asylum in the EU+
12 monthly trend analysis reports
7 EASO analytical briefs
4 reports on the implementation of the Dublin regulation
10 country intelligence reports

In accordance with Article 9 of its founding regulation (439/2010), EASO oversees an information exchange scheme with EU+ countries known as EPS. The system is designed to gather information against a set of indicators focusing on the key stages of the CEAS. Monthly data are shared with EASO by 30 EU+ countries, which feeds into the early warning, preparedness and crisis management mechanism provided for in Article 22 of the Dublin III regulation ⁽⁵⁾.

In 2018, EASO continued to collect and analyse data to describe access to procedure, reception, Dublin, first-instance determination and resettlement. A pilot to also exchange data on second and higher instances was launched in 2018, resulting in a preliminary analysis which was produced and presented to the EPS Network in December 2018.

In 2018, EASO continued to focus its efforts on delivering an analytical portfolio to support decision-making in Member States' asylum services and policymakers in Brussels. To this end, EASO continued to produce analytical reports on a weekly and monthly basis to either describe the asylum situation (Article 9) or the implementation of the CEAS (Article 11.2a). In 2018, EASO produced 51 weekly reports with up-to-date

⁽⁵⁾ Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast), OJ L 180, 29.06.2013, p.31.

information on the situation of asylum in the EU+, which were developed as part of the EU-wide crisis management mechanisms. These reports continued to be shared with EU+ countries in a restricted format, together with the Commission integrated political crisis response as input to the integrated situational awareness and analysis reports. Twelve monthly trend analysis reports were also published along with interactive data visualisations on the restricted area of the EASO website, together with seven EASO analytical briefs, which were disseminated at the justice and home affairs (JHA) Council meetings. These high-level strategic products describe the asylum situation in easy-to-understand, non-technical language with visual aids.



Operational analysis was developed considerably in 2018, including a series of dashboards for EASO staff for monitoring purposes, including in its regional offices. Several meetings also took place in the context of operational monitoring and evaluation. The dashboards constitute electronic products, which are used to support monitoring. Other products include a bimonthly operational analysis for Greece, and slide presentations that are produced every fortnight for biweekly briefings.

EU+ countries voluntarily provide monthly operational data to EASO. Whilst countries retain ownership of the information supplied at country level, all participating countries in the network have consented for EASO to disseminate aggregated figures at the EU+ level in order to provide the general public with an overview of some key indicators. These include the number of asylum applications, the main countries of origin of applicants, the number and outcome of examinations of asylum applications at first instance and the stock of pending cases awaiting a first-instance decision.

Other relevant productions included four reports on the implementation of the Dublin regulation and four reports on reception, which were drafted in close cooperation with the Dublin and Reception Networks. An analysis of secondary movements was also published and presented to the EASO Management Board and the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum.

In 2018 alone, 10 country intelligence reports were published, namely on: Iran, Turkey, Niger, Georgia, Venezuela, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Russia, Myanmar/Burma and Pakistan.

4.3.4. Information and Documentation System (IDS)

EASO's main achievements in 2018

1 436 IDS users

57 504 views across IDS platforms

EASO's IDS aims to provide a central source of information on the implementation of the CEAS in EU+ countries. It is a searchable knowledge base that provides a comprehensive overview of each of the key stages of the asylum process and of the practical functioning of the asylum systems of each EU+ country, as detailed and up-to-date as possible.

The system is mirrored on the strands of the CEAS to cover information on: access to procedures, the Dublin procedure, first-instance determination, second-instance determination, reception, detention, forms of protection, return, resettlement and humanitarian admission schemes. Information on key aspects of the CEAS can be accessed at country level or at EU level, where report tables and thematic overviews offer a comparison of practices. There are currently 30 EU+ countries in the IDS network. All information provided on the platform is only accessible to national administrations, EASO staff and ASTs deployed by EASO in its operational activities.

EASO acts as a central management point for the system, coordinating, researching and updating in real time the content uploaded on the platform. An IDS Advisory Group of nominated EU+ countries' representatives contributes to the development of the database. Network members regularly and swiftly validate the information uploaded, confirming that the overviews provided on the IDS platform accurately reflect the functioning of each national asylum system in all its key stages.

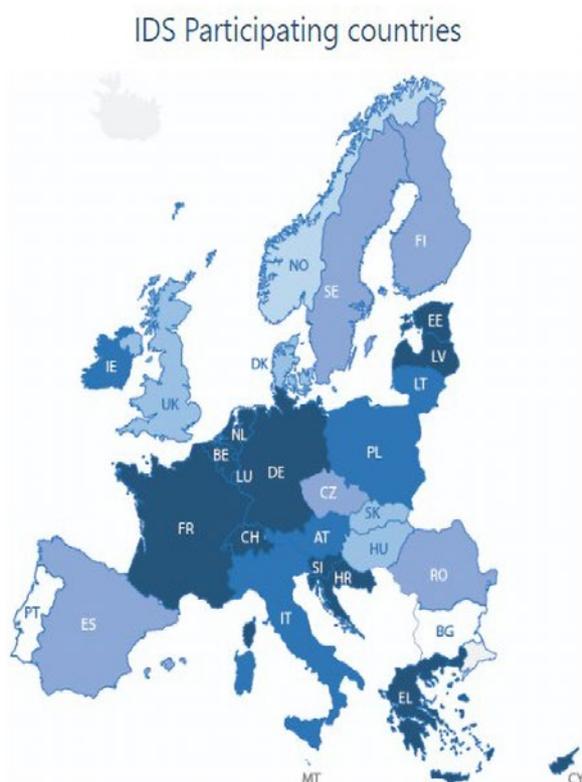
Accurate descriptions of asylum practices in the 30 EU+ countries on IDS are completed with relevant information on legislation, statistical data and jurisprudence. Statistical visualisations based on Eurostat data add concrete numbers to the context of asylum systems in each country, providing, for example, insights on workloads at national level. All information on IDS includes comprehensive and standardised references to the source materials serving as a library for all relevant documentation, enabling quick search and retrieval. IDS has significantly increased its number of users and has increasingly become the reference and starting point for EASO staff and national authorities

on questions related to the legislative framework and practical functioning of the CEAS at EU and EU+ country level. [IDS on Case Law](#) was developed in 2018, with the aim of creating a publicly available electronic platform to register case-law related to the CEAS. IDS on Case Law covers jurisprudential developments at European (Court of Justice (CJEU), European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)) as well as national level (EU+ countries). As of the time of writing, 300 cases have been published.

In 2018, EASO continued developing its **operations platforms**. IDS platforms are stipulated in the operating plans for Italy, Greece and Cyprus as a tool to provide practical information for deployed ASTs. A new IDS platform was also developed for external dimension activities (focusing on western Balkan countries). The structure is made available to the EASO external dimension sector, to be extended to Member States in the External Dimension Network. A dedicated platform has also been created for COI operational queries.

4.3.5. Further development of a central Asylum Information System

The centralisation of asylum information systems is instrumental in providing a holistic situational picture of the situation of asylum in the EU. In 2018, EASO continued to work on further developing and integrating its asylum information systems, including on COI (COI Portal), the IDS and the EPS. Based on feedback received from users and stakeholders, a number of additional functionalities and improvements continued to be identified in 2018 as part of this activity.



Extending the functionalities of the **COI Portal** is a key feature in the consolidation of the cooperation platform. In 2018, efforts materialised in the consolidation of the platform for COI specialists, with its launch date planned for 2019. Five EU+ states were connected to the platform in 2018. News content on COI is also mirrored on the EASO website and the EASO COI Portal. Monthly updates on the latest asylum trends are also publicly available on the EASO website, including dynamic visualisations containing maps and charts. Press releases are communicated on a monthly basis to promote the use of the tool.

In 2018, EASO also continued to develop its **IDS**, upgrading the system to the latest version and introducing improvements to its interface and functionalities. New features were added to provide a consolidated insight into the functioning of the CEAS and to address information needs of EU+ countries.

In addition, the IDS administers the **queries system**, which is sought to address specific information needs of national asylum administrations and EASO within a short deadline, enhancing the baseline information available within the country overviews on IDS. A total of over 40 queries were processed in various thematic areas in 2018, 29 of which were policy-related queries.

EASO also continued developing a centralised platform for the management of EASO queries throughout 2018, which will allow for full automatised and professionalisation of the process, whilst keeping the underlying methodology and the procedural workflow. EASO also took the lead in fostering cooperation among existing query systems relevant for migration and asylum within the so-called Query Systems Cluster, with the aim of avoiding duplication of effort. The cluster represents partners from the European Migration Network (EMN), the General Directors of Immigration Services Conference and the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees.

In 2018, EASO also continued to develop the **analytical area of the EASO website** with the objective of producing a single repository of analytical products which seek to explain either the asylum situation (where applicants are lodging or withdrawing their applications) or the implementation of the CEAS (decision-making by Member States). Most of the analyses are underpinned with data shared by Member States under the EPS. Access is restricted to a limited set of stakeholders, mostly Member State asylum authorities, plus analytical staff in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs and partner JHA agencies. The most utilised material includes PDFs of the latest trends and also interactive maps containing weekly and monthly information.

4.3.6. Research on early warning and understanding root causes

In its communication on a European agenda on migration, the European Commission emphasised the necessity in ‘identifying risk trends [...] for effective operational preparedness.’ To this end, it noted that ‘the relevant agencies should develop an effective situational picture to feed into policy-making and response preparation at national and European levels.’ This call is also reflected in the Commission’s proposal for a regulation establishing the EUAA.

As part of its work on early warning and preparedness, EASO has continued its pilot project on using **big data to understand and predict asylum-related migration**, with the aim of creating an empirically-validated migration model for typical types of flows. In the context of early warning, EASO applies mixed methods in its evaluation of vulnerable communities prior to their arrival in the EU. The research builds on collaboration with, and exploits expertise of, other actors such as the Joint Research Centre, the Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography, Frontex, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Commission’s Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Eurostat, the IOM, UNHCR, Member States’ asylum authorities and several universities.

In the context of EASO’s early warning system, early means as early as possible. It is easy to predict a crisis once it has already begun but the real challenge is to foresee the arrival of affected populations before they arrive in the EU. To this end, the EASO big data project extracts events from the Global Database of Events,

Language, and Tone in order to create EASO’s Push Factor Index, which provides early warning of asylum applications lodged in the European Union.

Working with big data adds a lot of value but there is broad recognition that this approach needs to be complemented with testimonies provided by applicants themselves. Hence, in 2018, a business case for a pilot project plan for surveying asylum seekers was adopted. The project plan was discussed at a meeting of the Advisory Group in September 2018, which brought together Member States with an expressed interest in hosting the pilot activity.

The activities of the research programme underpin the information exchange and analysis performed under the EPS, and build on the data produced within the EPS to produce enhanced understanding as well as operational and strategic forecasts. In turn, the insights gained with the research will contribute to the quality of the EPS analytical products.

4.3.7. Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU

EASO’s main achievements in 2018

Publication of the EASO Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union 2017

Public launch event organised in Brussels

The EASO Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union 2017 was adopted by EASO’s Management Board in June 2018. The report provides a comprehensive overview of developments at European level and the level of national asylum systems. Based on a wide range of different sources, the report looks into main statistical trends and analysis changes in EU+ countries with regard to their legislation, policies and practices, as well as national case-law. Whilst the report focuses on key aspects of the CEAS, it often makes necessary references to the broader migration and fundamental rights context.



Contributions to the annual report were specifically sought from civil society, resulting in contributions from 27 organisations — slightly above the number received the previous year. The annual report was further enhanced with contributions from UNHCR, academia and think tanks.

On 18 June 2018, EASO organised the official launch event for the *EASO Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union 2017* in Brussels. The event was live-streamed, and included an ensuing discussion on national perspectives with regard to the management of asylum processes. The report can be consulted online at <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-Annual-General-Report-2017.pdf>, including an executive summary of the main findings available in 24 European languages.

4.4. Asylum support

4.4.1. Training

EASO's main achievements in 2018
<p>Ongoing consolidation of the EASO training curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6 modules initiated for development, upgrade or update; - 7 modules concluded.
<p>2 meetings of the Certification and Accreditation Working Group (CAWG)</p>
<p>457 national training sessions were administered by EASO</p> <p>524 persons participated in train-the-trainers sessions</p> <p>7 104 persons participated in national training sessions</p>
<p>29 language translations of modules</p>
<p>5 training sessions for EASO staff members were delivered (151 EASO staff trained)</p>

Under Article 6 of the agency's founding regulation, EASO is to provide support to Member States' national administrations and national services responsible for asylum matters through the establishment and provision of training. To this end, since its inception in 2010, the agency has continued to provide high-quality common training on asylum and migration across the EU. EASO's training activities are carried out within the framework of the agency's work programme and its training strategy, which was developed in 2012. The agency's

core training tool is the **EASO training curriculum**, a common vocational training system designed mainly for case officers and other asylum officials throughout the EU. The curriculum covers core aspects of the asylum procedure by means of a number of interactive modules. A blended learning methodology, combining an online e-learning format and face-to-face sessions, allows for both a theoretical and practical approach to training.

In 2018, EASO continued to develop its training curriculum by updating existing material to respond to new developments and changes in the EU asylum field. In this regard, modules within the training curriculum continued to be updated and upgraded in 2018, whilst ensuring that issues related to vulnerable groups and child protection were streamlined across its training material.

EASO maintained close consultations with EU+ countries in order to monitor and analyse their training needs and training plans. The agency also ensured training for its own staff on international protection and related matters.

Over the course of 2018, seven modules were reviewed and completed as part of the consolidation process — namely, the modules on interview techniques, interviewing vulnerable persons, interviewing children, CEAS, end of protection, interpreters and resettlement. The latter two modules were also piloted. In terms of its ongoing work, the agency was engaged in the development of new modules on reception of vulnerable persons and MedCOI, and the upgrading and updating of the modules for managers, COI, evidence assessment and exclusion.

Through the work of the CAWG, which met for the first time under its new terms of reference on 19 and 20 July 2018, EASO continued to develop a European sectorial qualification framework. Two meetings of the CAWG were organised in 2018, which mainly focused on the development of occupational standards for asylum officials and the viability and potential structure of a mobility programme. CAWG members agreed to focus on the development of the Training Governance System prior to the organisation of a mobility programme.

In 2018, EASO continued to deliver train-the-trainers sessions. In total, 34 sessions were delivered and 524 trainers were trained ⁽⁶⁾, including seven regional train-the-trainers sessions organised by EASO in Greece (three), Vienna (two), Rome (one) and Tallinn (one), and six regional train-the-trainers sessions delivered by Germany in the modules covering evidence assessment, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, and interview techniques.

⁽⁶⁾ The following modules were covered: interview techniques, exclusion, reception, inclusion, inclusion advanced, interviewing vulnerable persons, interviewing children, evidence assessment, fundamental rights and international protection in the EU, interpreters, the Dublin III regulation, module for managers, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, end of protection, COI, CEAS, trafficking in human beings and resettlement.

EASO also further improved on its e-learning experience by taking into consideration new IT developments and enhanced learning methodologies. A dedicated space was created on the e-learning platform for NCPs with added functionalities for collaboration, such as document sharing and a forum and online chat, together with an e-learning platform for trainers on didactics.

EASO officials also participated in joint training activities organised by Frontex and training courses organised by the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL). In October 2018, the EASO Training Unit, together with UNHCR, participated in the Frontex Consultative Forum where a discussion took place on streamlining the topic of fundamental rights in Frontex's training material.

4.4.2. Asylum processes

EASO's main achievements in 2018
1 Quality Assurance Tool published
1 EASO practical guide published on qualification for international protection
3 thematic reports issued for consultation
1 annual meeting of the EASO Asylum Processes Network
1 thematic meeting of the EASO Asylum Processes Network on the content of protection — integration
1 thematic meeting of the EASO Asylum Processes Network on identification

In accordance with its overall objective of supporting Member States in achieving common standards and high-quality processes within the CEAS, EASO continued to effectively support and improve on practical cooperation between the agency and the Member States in all activities relevant to the work on asylum processes, including through the work of the EASO Asylum Processes Network.

To this end, EASO makes use of practical tools, which aim to support the daily work of asylum and migration officials by providing common guidance on the achievement of common standards by means of various user-friendly formats. In 2018, practical cooperation activities were encouraged through the organisation of various thematic meetings. On 23 and 25 May 2018, a practical cooperation meeting on the identification of applicants for international protection was held in Nuremberg, Germany. The meeting was hosted by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, with representatives from 17 EU+ countries, UNHCR, FRA and Frontex. Participants considered the latest trends on the

identification of applicants for international protection and the impact of specific identification tools on the examination process. Building on the outcome of this meeting, EASO continued to explore further avenues to support the registration and identification processes of applicants for international protection within the EU.

The agency continued to develop common practical tools and guidance intended to support the daily work of policymakers, case officers and other relevant target groups in 2018. To this end, the EASO quality matrix activities, launched in 2012, provide a comprehensive mapping of the practices across EU+ states in implementing the common legal framework, and draw together examples of good practices, quality tools, mechanisms and relevant project initiatives. This mapping of Member States' practices and policies also feeds into the collection of information on the CEAS implementation.

In the context of the quality matrix process, EASO held a thematic meeting on the content of protection on 27 and 28 September in Malta. Within the content of protection, the focus of the meeting was on the integration of beneficiaries of international protection. Participants explored in particular the nexus between the asylum procedures and reception systems on the one hand and integration measures on the other.

In April 2018, EASO published a **Quality Assurance Tool on examining the application for international protection**. The objective of this tool is to provide EU+ states with a common framework for internal quality assessment and assurance, such as on performance assessment, periodic quality review and thematic audits. It is an online tool that can be accessed through EASO's website. An **EASO practical guide on qualification for international protection** was also published in April 2018, as part of the EASO Practical guides series. It provides practical guidance to case officers on inclusion and also contains a decision tree in poster format. EASO practical guides and tools can be consulted online at <https://www.easo.europa.eu/practical-tools>

Preparations were also underway for the development of a practical guide on operational standards and indicators for the asylum procedure, together with guidance on membership of a particular social group. Together with the Asylum Processes Network, consultations during the drafting phase were carried out with a reference group composed of representatives from the European Commission, UNHCR, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles and the Odysseus Network. Both practical guides will be published in 2019.

In addition to the practical guides, three thematic reports were in the processes of being finalised in 2018 on quality management, the content of protection and the withdrawal of international protection.

An evaluation of the extent of the use of practical guides and tools was conducted in 2018 through a series of surveys and case studies involving Member States. The outcome of the evaluation contributed to a set of recommendations which were discussed during the meeting of the Asylum Processes Network in November 2018. This exercise would feed into an action plan intended to improve the relevance, format and dissemination of EASO practical tools.

The annual meeting of the Asylum Processes Network, which took place in November 2018, was dedicated to the evaluation of practical tools, the development of the electronic version of the Quality Assurance Tool, a thematic focus on subsequent applications and a look at the network's priorities for the year ahead.

4.4.3. Reception

EASO's main achievements in 2018
1 EASO Network of Reception Authorities meeting
1 plenary meeting of the Reception Network
2 thematic workshops
3 periodic reports for 2018 shared with the network
2 EASO practical guides published as part of its Practical guides series:
- <i>EASO guidance on contingency planning in the context of reception (March 2018);</i>
- <i>EASO guidance on reception conditions for unaccompanied children: operational standards and indicators (December 2018).</i>

In close cooperation with the European Platform of Reception Agencies (EPRA), EASO furthered the work of the Network of Reception Authorities in 2018, in line with the European agenda on migration. Through this dedicated network, EASO fosters the exchange of information and best practices on reception systems, brings together expertise and develops specific tools and guidance, including enhanced data collection in the field of reception within the framework of the CEAS.

Taking stock of its achievements in 2017, and setting out its work programme for 2018, the EASO Network of Reception Authorities met in Malta on 6 and 7 March 2018 to discuss, amongst other topics, the different methodological options for its first pilot exchange programme with EPRA on 'Prevention measures and sanction regimes in reception centres — Reduction and withdrawal of material reception conditions in practice'. Twenty-four NCPs and experts from across 21 Member States were joined by representatives from

the European Commission, UNHCR and EPRA to discuss the latest developments at national and European level in terms of provision of reception conditions to asylum seekers.

Two separate thematic workshops were organised on prevention and sanctions (Warsaw) and quality management of reception conditions (Dublin) in 2018, together with four working group meetings on the development of practical tools and guidance. The outcome of the two thematic workshops was captured in mapping reports shared exclusively with the Reception Network. Exchange programme visits were also organised to Czechia, Belgium, Sweden and Norway. In addition, three periodic updates were shared with the network in 2018.

A plenary meeting of the Reception Network was held in Brussels in December 2018 composed of 30 participants, including representatives from across 19 EU+ countries, Serbia, the European Commission and UNHCR. The agenda of the plenary meeting included a review of the achievements in 2018; information on the advancement of the work on a practical tool for quality management of reception conditions, to be finalised in 2019; and a discussion on themes to be addressed in the network's work programme of 2019, including the provision of information and arrival centres. The plenary meeting was organised back to back with the closing conference of EPRA. EASO will take over its activities as this project funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund is concluded.

EASO also published the *EASO guidance on contingency planning in the context of reception* in March 2018. This guidance focuses on key aspects of contingency planning in the field of reception, through an integral approach, notably on monitoring and evaluation, risk analysis, management and the decision-making process. In December 2018, EASO issued the *EASO guidance on reception conditions for unaccompanied children: operational standards and indicators* as part of its Practical guides series. In line with the reception conditions directive, the scope of the document is to provide guidance for reception conditions for unaccompanied children who are applying for international protection and/or are staying in reception facilities.

The EASO reception team was also active in supporting EASO operations and external dimension activities, for example through dedicated workshops (contingency planning in Turkey, Serbia and North Macedonia; reception of UAMs in Italy), ad hoc visits to reception facilities in Greece, Bosnia and Cyprus, or targeted support on quality management of reception conditions (Greece).

4.4.4. Activities on vulnerable applicants

EASO's main achievements in 2018
Vulnerability Experts Network launched and 3 events held
1 EASO practical guide on age assessment published
1 EASO practical guide on the best interests of the child in asylum procedures finalised

Since its inception, EASO has been supporting cooperation and the sharing of information between EU+ countries and other relevant experts on matters relating to vulnerable experts. Practical cooperation activities continued to be implemented towards greater convergence in line with EU standards on matters concerning the identification and support afforded to vulnerable applicants in the asylum and reception systems of the Member States.

In 2018, the agency continued to focus its activities on children, including unaccompanied children, and the link between asylum and trafficking in human beings. In so doing, the agency sustained its cooperation with the European Commission and sister agencies, including CEPOL, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, FRA and Frontex, together with UNHCR and the IOM amongst others, in relation to vulnerable applicants.

The identification and response to the special needs of vulnerable applicants has been mainstreamed in all EASO activities, in particular in the areas of training, quality support and COI, as well as in operations. Given the horizontal character of actions related to vulnerable persons (identification, special needs assessment, referral, etc.) and that persons in need of international protection frequently present more than one vulnerability, EASO superseded the EASO Network on Activities on Children and the EASO Expert Network on Trafficking in Human Beings with a single Vulnerability Expert Network. The purpose of this network is to improve the identification of and response to the special needs of vulnerable persons by reinforcing practical cooperation between members, including CSOs, on issues related to vulnerable persons in need of international protection.

On 25 and 26 April 2018, the EASO Vulnerability Expert Network met in Malta to discuss the concept, purpose, structure, membership and activities of the new network. The network is made up of representatives from EU+ states, the European Commission, EU agencies, international organisations and representatives of civil society. In line with the EASO single programming document for 2018-2020, the network is to serve as a platform for the exchange of best practices between its members, and is to facilitate

the provision of expertise and guidance on vulnerability-specific issues (such as identification, assessment of special needs or referral to adequate support) in the context of international protection.

To launch the Vulnerability Experts Network, two back-to-back meetings were organised by EASO from 5 to 7 November 2018. The first meeting of the Advisory Group took place on 5 November 2018, with the participation of 20 representatives from international organisations and CSOs. A first annual conference of the Vulnerability Experts Network was also held in Malta on 6 and 7 November 2018. During this annual event, the terms of reference and the strategic planning of the network for 2018 were adopted. The meeting was attended by 42 participants, including 19 representatives from across 16 EU+ countries.

EASO continued to develop practical support tools in 2018, such as the *EASO practical guide on age assessment*, published in March 2018. The new EASO practical guide provides further guidance, key recommendations and a set of tools on the implementation of the best interests of the child when assessing the age of a person. It also provides up-to-date information on the methods applied across EU+ countries and on new prospective methods. The *EASO practical guide on the best interests of the child in asylum procedures* was also completed in 2018 (published in February 2019).

4.4.5. Cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals

EASO's main achievements in 2018
1 annual coordination and planning meeting
1 high-level judicial round table organised at the Palais of the CJEU, bringing together more than 80 members of courts and tribunals from across 29 countries
13 professional development meetings
2 publications as part of the Professional development series

EASO cooperates with courts, tribunals and other relevant bodies under the framework of its mandate. The cooperation consists of, inter alia, producing professional development materials for subsequent implementation in judicial training activities; collecting and exchanging jurisprudence and providing support to Member States within the context of special and emergency support operations; and other measures as required on an ad hoc basis.

On 18 and 19 January 2018, the **EASO Network of Courts and Tribunals** held its sixth annual coordination and

planning meeting in Malta, during which it took stock of its achievements in 2017 and set out its work plan for the rest of the year. The EASO Network of Courts and Tribunals is composed of judges and representatives of courts and tribunals from all EU+ countries (EU Member States, together with Norway and Switzerland), the CJEU and the ECtHR, together with representatives of the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges, the Association of European Administrative Judges, the European Judicial Training Network, the Academy of European Law and the European Law Institute, together with UNHCR.

In line with the methodology agreed with relevant stakeholders but primarily with members of national courts and tribunals in 2015 (as amended since), EASO continued to advance the joint preparation of professional development materials in 2018, as well as their subsequent dissemination to relevant partners. In pursuance of its work in this area, efforts continued towards the development and advancement of materials for use in professional development activities for members of courts and tribunals.

Three publications were finalised over the course of 2018 as part of the EASO professional development series. A judicial analysis on *Detention of applicants for international protection in the context of the Common European Asylum System* was completed in 2018 (published in April 2019). This publication is intended to serve as a tool for courts and tribunals in their dealings with cases relating to international protection. A *Judicial practical guide on country of origin information* was produced with the objective of assisting judges and decision-makers in ensuring that their use of COI in decision-making complies with the common criteria for qualification for international protection in the recast qualification directive and the requirements for fairness and effectiveness in the recast asylum procedures directive. In addition, under the terms of a contract

concluded with the International Association of Refugee Law Judges, a judicial analysis was published on *Evidence and credibility assessment in the context of the Common European Asylum System*. All three publications are accompanied by compilations of jurisprudence.

Throughout 2018, 264 members of the courts and tribunals participated in EASO professional development meetings, with representation from across 12 countries. This includes **12 professional development meetings** dealing with:

- asylum procedures, pilot session (February 2018);
- evidence and credibility assessment (March 2018);
- country of origin information, pilot session (March 2018);
- exclusion (May 2018);
- Article 15(c) of the qualification directive (June 2018);
- country of origin information, support to EASO's Department of Operations (July 2018);
- regional seminar western Balkans, support to EASO's External Dimension Sector (July 2018);
- introduction to the CEAS (September 2018);
- evidence and credibility assessment, support to Irish judges — session I (September 2018);
- evidence and credibility assessment, support to Irish judges — session II (September 2018);
- ending international protection (October 2018);
- qualification for international protection (November 2018).



On 22 and 23 November 2018, a high-level judicial round table was hosted at the Palais of the CJEU. The event was organised by EASO in cooperation with the CJEU, the ECtHR and the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges, bringing together more than 80 members of courts and tribunals from across 29 countries, together with representatives from UNHCR. The meeting identified key challenges in the CEAS, and specific challenges faced by the CJEU and ECtHR in dealing with international protection cases. On day two of the conference, participants discussed challenges linked to the safe country concepts, non-refoulement and the assessment of evidence and credibility, together with potential gaps in protection in the context of effective remedies under the Dublin regulation. Participants were also invited to attend a court hearing on which a prior detailed briefing was delivered.

4.4.6. Dublin Network

EASO's main achievements in 2018
1 thematic expert meeting of the EASO Network of Dublin Units on Dublin transfers
1 thematic expert meeting jointly organised with eu-LISA on DubliNet
1 working group meeting on the development of the EASO practical guide on the Dublin regulation: interview and evidence assessment
1 working group meeting on the development of the EASO recommendations on Dublin transfers
2 Steering Group meetings of the EASO Network of Dublin Units
4 quarterly reports published on the EASO Dublin Network platform

Being directly applicable in all Member States, the Dublin III regulation should be implemented in full. As stated in the European agenda on migration, Member States are particularly responsible for allocating adequate resources to increase the number of Dublin transfers and reduce delays in the transfer process. Member States should also consistently apply the legal clauses related to family reunification and make broader and more regular use of the discretionary clauses intended to relieve the pressure on Member States situated at the EU external border.

Pursuant to the European agenda on migration, the **EASO Network of Dublin Units** was set up in February 2016. The network provides a forum for discussions on current needs and priorities within the Dublin context, pooling together expertise on Dublin-related issues. It also

provides a platform for enhanced practical cooperation and communication between national Dublin units, and facilitates their access to relevant information. It also serves as a pool of expertise on Dublin-related issues to enhance practical cooperation.

Following through on its work programme for 2018, the network continued to organise discussions at senior and expert levels, issued four quarterly update reports within the network, and facilitated the communication of specific Dublin-related queries through the dedicated electronic platform of the network. The network continued the development of practical guides to support the Member States.

Support in the implementation of Dublin transfers

In February 2018, the EASO Network of Dublin Units, composed of experts from 20 EU+ countries, together with representatives from the European Commission and UNHCR, discussed the challenges and possible solutions to improve the communication exchange between Member States during the daily operationalisation of Dublin transfers. In order to help Member States in the implementation of transfers and in their communication with each other, a practical tool was developed, which contains the transfer-related information of Member States.

The fourth Steering Group meeting of the EASO Network of Dublin Units in June 2018 devoted a thematic session as a follow-up on Dublin transfers. Participants acknowledged that there is a need to agree on recommendations based on common standards. The option for a working group was discussed. Later that year in October, based on the conclusions of the previous events, a working group of four experts from Member States put on paper the EASO recommendations on Dublin transfers. The recommendations propose practical suggestions to better implement transfers and to improve communication between Member States. The recommendations are to be published in 2019.

Support in consistently applying the Dublin III regulation

A third working group meeting on the practical guide on the implementation of the Dublin regulation: interview and evidence assessment was held in Malta in May 2018. The guide is being finalised and will be published in 2019.

In order to support Member States in the use of DubliNet — the official encrypted communication channel of Dublin units — a follow-up meeting was jointly organised with eu-LISA in October 2018 where the participants discussed challenges and good practices.

Support to family reunification and the use of the discretionary clauses

On 14 and 15 November 2018, a fifth meeting of the Steering Group of the EASO Network of Dublin Units was hosted in Malta. The thematic focus of the meeting was the implementation of Article 17 of the Dublin regulation on discretionary clauses. EASO presented the results of the survey on Article 17 and Member States discussed their practices and challenges in the use of sovereignty and humanitarian clauses. During the meeting, the EASO recommendations on Dublin transfers were also presented to the network.

4.4.7. Exclusion Network

EASO's main achievements in 2018
1 NCP meeting of the Exclusion Network on the cooperation of the asylum, judicial and police authorities on exclusion cases
1 thematic meeting of the Exclusion Network on 'Exclusion and Iraq'
4 quarterly reports for 2018 shared with the network

In 2018, EASO fostered the activities of its Exclusion Network, with the participation of EU+ experts dealing with situations relating to exclusions from international protection. To this end, the network focuses in particular on the implementation of Article 12(2) and (3), together with Article 17 of the qualifications directive⁽⁷⁾, including the withdrawal of international protection on the basis of these provisions.

In keeping with its work programme for 2018, EASO organised two meetings of the Exclusion Network of varying formats; facilitated the participation of the network in activities relating to the exchange of best practices; shared relevant periodic update reports for 2018 with network members; and addressed and shared four specific exclusion-related queries with the network. The topics addressed in the queries referred to the handling of cases of judges at the revolutionary courts of Afghanistan, the national application of Article 1 Fb, cooperation of the asylum, judicial and police authorities on exclusion cases, and exclusion indications and considerations in the caseload of applicants from Iraq.

In March 2018, an NCP meeting of the Exclusion Network was hosted by the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service in The Hague. The agenda focused on the cooperation of asylum, law enforcement and judicial authorities in cases of exclusion and international crimes. Avenues for reinforced cooperation were considered in the presence of representatives from the International Criminal Court and from the Secretariat of the EU Genocide Network in The European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit. The Exclusion Network convened again later in November to discuss 'Exclusion and Iraq'. After the discussions and information gathered via the Exclusion Network, a new Exclusion Screening Tool on Iraq was initiated (to be finalised in 2019).

Similarly, as follow-up to the joint meeting of the COI Specialist Network on Afghanistan in November 2017, an Exclusion Screening Tool on Afghanistan is being developed.



⁽⁷⁾ Directive 2011/95/EU on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast).

4.5. Horizontal activities

4.5.1. Civil society and Consultative Forum

EASO's main achievements in 2018
<p>3 Consultative Forum meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34 participants in the Consultative Forum thematic meeting on access to information; • 170 participants in the annual plenary meeting on reception; • 35 participants in the Consultative Forum informal side meeting linked to the launch of the 2017 annual report.
<p>Publication of a briefing paper on <i>Access to information: exploring existing resources, good practices and ways forward</i> after consolidating the output of the thematic meeting on the provision of information</p>
<p>6 electronic consultations with 121 contributions</p>
<p>Extensive involvement of CSOs in EASO's training activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 CSOs involved in the development/upgrade/update of EASO training curriculum modules and/or operational training programmes: 2 CSOs as part of the reference group and 9 additional specialised CSOs upon invitation; • 85 trainers and 353 trainees from CSOs implemented/participated in operational trainings in Italy (concerning e.g. reception of UAMs, volunteer guardians, interpreting in the asylum context, implementation of the Dublin regulation, as well as the training programme for EASO caseworkers); • 2 trainers from CSOs implemented operational trainings in Greece (trafficking in human beings session for the training programme for vulnerability experts as well as the training programme for EASO experts for the border procedure).
<p>More than an estimated 250 CSOs participated in Consultative Forum meetings/electronic consultations, as well as horizontally across various different EASO activities (training, Vulnerability Expert Network, COI, etc.)</p>

EASO continued to engage in a close dialogue with civil society through the framework of its Consultative Forum and the agency's civil society platform. Cooperation took place on the basis of Consultative Forum meetings, electronic consultations on key EASO documents, as well as by inviting selected CSOs to take part in various areas of the agency's work (training activities, activities related to vulnerable groups, asylum processes, COI, etc.).

To increase the focus and strategic cooperation with civil society, EASO adopted a more thematic approach to Consultative Forum meetings in 2018, including for its annual plenary meeting, which greatly helped to increase the level of detail of discussions and outputs. In March 2018, a thematic meeting was organised at EASO headquarters on 'Access to information'. A total of 34 CSOs specialised in the provision of information to applicants and beneficiaries of international protection participated. Outcomes of discussions were summarised in a briefing paper titled *Access to information in the context of asylum: exploring existing resources, good practices and ways forward*⁽⁸⁾.

The eighth edition of the Consultative Forum plenary meeting on 5 December focused on reception. It gathered over 170 participants and the results from the evaluation showed high satisfaction from participants. CSOs had contributed to the agenda during a Consultative Forum informal side meeting held in June.

EASO continued to consult CSOs on key documents via electronic consultations. Six electronic consultations were carried out with 121 contributions received. The consultations concerned the *Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union 2017*; the draft EASO 2019 work programme; the *EASO annual general report 2017*, as well as the draft EASO judicial analysis on *Detention of applicants for international protection in the context of the Common European Asylum System*. In addition, to inform its research activities, EASO asked civil society for input on the situation of applicants from Bangladesh in the EU+ via an online survey. Finally, an open survey on CSOs' information activities fed into the Consultative Forum thematic meeting on access to information as well as the resulting briefing paper.

Continuous cooperation with civil society further took place across many different EASO activities. CSOs were involved in the reference groups on training and practical tools, and 32 CSOs were selected to sit in the Advisory Group of the Vulnerability Expert Network. Several selected CSO experts participated in COI meetings on Iraq, Iran, Mali, Nigeria and Somalia and also revised COI country focus reports on Iraq, Mali and Nigeria.

In particular, involvement of CSOs in training activities increased considerably, with representatives from CSOs not part of the reference group contributing to the development/upgrade/update of the training curriculum modules and operational training programmes. Civil society was further extensively involved in the implementation of operational trainings, especially in Italy. In the context of EASO's support to strengthen the capacity for reception of UAMs, as well as support

⁽⁸⁾ <http://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-Briefing-Paper-Access-to%20Information—in-the-context-of-Asylum.pdf>

measures to the guardianship system, representatives from CSOs implemented and participated in trainings.

Finally, EASO also actively participated in the activities of the Frontex Consultative Forum as well as the Network of Practitioners on Civil Society Dialogue organised by the European Economic and Social Committee in cooperation with the Commission.

4.5.2. Communication and stakeholders' relations

EASO's main achievements in 2018
Annual journalist network meeting and launch of the <i>Annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union 2017</i>: ninth most trending story on the day, reaching an audience of 500 million
Potential reach of press audience increased by 115 %, from 1.9 billion (2017) to 4.1 billion
47 weekly, 8 analytical, 5 thematic and 5 ad hoc social media monitoring reports
150 new EASO publications and 200 translations of EASO publications
22 380 followers on the EASO Facebook page 8 830 followers on the EASO Greenline Italy page on Facebook 179 680 followers on the 'Journey to Europe' page on Facebook
19 500 EASO Twitter followers
11 issues of the EASO newsletter

EASO intensified its efforts in managing and maintaining relationships with stakeholders and the media in 2018, in line with the objectives set out in its communications and stakeholders plan for 2018.

EASO's engagement with stakeholders and its communication activities contributed to the successful delivery of EASO's work programme and to supporting EASO's strategic priorities in 2018. Throughout all of its communication activities in 2018, EASO further enhanced and sought to strengthen its credibility with its stakeholders and the general public.

Engagement with stakeholders

EASO continued in 2018 to engage with all its stakeholders in order to take well-informed decisions and ensure that stakeholders are informed of, and have the opportunity to provide input to, EASO's work.

To this end, EASO held approximately 140 meetings with key stakeholders and hosted 20 visits of high-level delegations

at its headquarters. EASO also participated in numerous external meetings. Its interlocutors included directors, high-ranking officials, ministers, ambassadors, Member State permanent representatives and representatives from EU agencies, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the Permanent Representatives Committee, national parliaments and key national and local authorities in Member States as well as in non-EU countries.

EASO also continued to join efforts with UNHCR, and in particular with the latter's EASO liaison office in Malta. Monthly bilateral meetings, operational coordination meetings, ad hoc thematic meetings and a senior management meeting were held in 2018. These meetings allowed the discussion of plans and challenges in Europe, increased coordination and strengthened existing cooperation. EASO also continued to increase its cooperation with the European Migration Network through its active participation in the EMN NCPs and Steering Board Meetings, engagement in advisory groups for various EMN studies and regular contributions to the EMN workshops and conferences.

Collaboration with other EU agencies

EASO also plays an active role in the network of JHA agencies. EASO actively contributed to the discussions at eight meetings with the other JHA agencies, notably network meetings and thematic meetings on training, information and communications technology and the external dimension. Such contacts led to the development of stronger working relations, closer cooperation and greater collaboration between the agencies, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

EASO participated in the meetings of the EU agencies network, chaired by Frontex and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in 2018. This allowed EASO to benefit from best practices shared by other agencies, in particular related to administration, performance development and communication.

In touch with the media

EASO organised a video production workshop, which was held on 28 and 29 May 2018. The event aimed at supporting EU agencies' video production teams to respond adequately to the ongoing video revolution. The programme covered different modules, such as building fundamentals for social media videos, and providing one full day of professional training, explaining the right techniques for producing videos within a short time frame, as well as providing more information on how to create digital engagement.

The launch of the EASO annual report, which was held on 18 June 2018 in Brussels, had a high turnout and the

press material disseminated was the ninth most trending story in the world on the day, reaching an audience of 500 million, a fivefold increase compared to the previous year. Throughout the year, EASO welcomed the press at its offices in Greece and Italy. The executive director and other staff were interviewed a total of 150 times in 2018, reflecting the importance of and increasing interest in EASO's work. Furthermore, through targeted press outreach in 2018, EASO more than doubled the potential reach of audience of press reporting from 1.9 billion (2017) to 4.1 billion.

EASO Info Day

As in previous years, EASO organised its annual Info Day in 2018 in the majority of Member States and the European Parliament. The core theme was 'the role of information and analysis in the Common European Asylum System'. EASO also participated in the EU Open Day in Brussels for the second time since 2015.

Community of practice for asylum communicators

For the sixth consecutive year, EASO organised a 'communication multipliers' meeting in Malta which focused on communication campaigns in countries of origin and transit. EASO also organised the fourth Social Media Intelligence meeting, which was highly attended by participants.

EASO on social media

A key part of its engagement with stakeholders since 2018 is through EASO's interactivity with followers on social media. EASO is present on social media with several Facebook pages and profiles on Twitter. These social media platforms were used in 2018 to promote EASO's meetings, news, events and publications amongst others. By the end of the year, the EASO follower base reached over 22 380 people for the EASO Facebook page; 8 830 for the EASO Greenline Italy page; 179 680 for the 'Journey to Europe' page; 19 500 for EASO's profile on Twitter; and 1 676 for the EASO 'Journey to Europe' profile on Twitter.

EASO's pilot social media campaign to inform migrants or potential migrants from Nigeria about asylum in the EU, which started in October 2017, was evaluated and extended in 2018, having exceeded all its benchmarks. EASO also expanded its social media monitoring programme, both by adding languages and by developing additional report types (thematic and ad hoc). The specialised team in EASO produced 47 weekly reports, eight analytical reports, five thematic reports and five ad hoc reports.

Publications and EASO newsletter

In 2018, EASO produced and published 150 new EASO publications and provided 200 quality translations of EASO publications. Eleven monthly newsletters were published in 2018.

4.6. Governance

During 2017 and 2018, the agency experienced serious governance and management-related problems, which led to the resignation of the former executive director and had a direct impact on the agency's work, reputation and staff. An investigation by the European Anti-Fraud Office was launched in October 2017. The agency did not succeed to get its budget discharge for the year 2016.

On 27 February 2018, the management board instituted interim measures with regard to the former executive director through management board decision No 35 in the areas of recruitment and procurement, restricting the discretion of the executive director in these areas.

On 6 June 2018, upon taking up duty, the interim executive director elaborated a governance action plan and presented it to the management board in September 2018. The overall aim of this plan is to bring the agency back to normal functioning by restoring trust internally and externally, reinforcing the governance structure and rebuilding internal capacity.

Updates to the governance action plan were made in November 2018 and January 2019. The action plan now includes 61 actions. To date, all measures have been actioned, 30 actions have been completed and 31 are ongoing.

The findings and recommendations of recent audit reports from the Internal Audit Service, preliminary findings of the European Court of Auditors on 2017, the staff engagement survey, and the recently conducted internal control self-assessment on the year 2017 by the interim executive director have all been taken into consideration. The action plan is a living document and will be updated as necessary.

The agency is investing heavily in ensuring the full implementation of the action plan within the indicated time frames. The management board will be requested to adopt key documents, where required. Updates on progress made will be provided to the management board at regular intervals.

Annexes

A.I. EASO's organisational structure

The internal governance and administrative structure of EASO comprises a management board and an executive director.

The **management board** is the agency's planning and monitoring authority established in accordance with EASO's founding Regulation (EU) 439/2010. It is composed of one expert representative from each EU Member State (except Denmark) and the European Commission. Denmark, together with representatives from Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and UNHCR, are invited to participate as observers in the management board.

The **executive director**, in exercising the responsibilities laid down in Article 31 of the EASO regulation, is supported by the Executive Support Office, the Liaison Officers to the EU institutions and Frontex, and the Communications and Stakeholders Unit. On 6 June 2018,

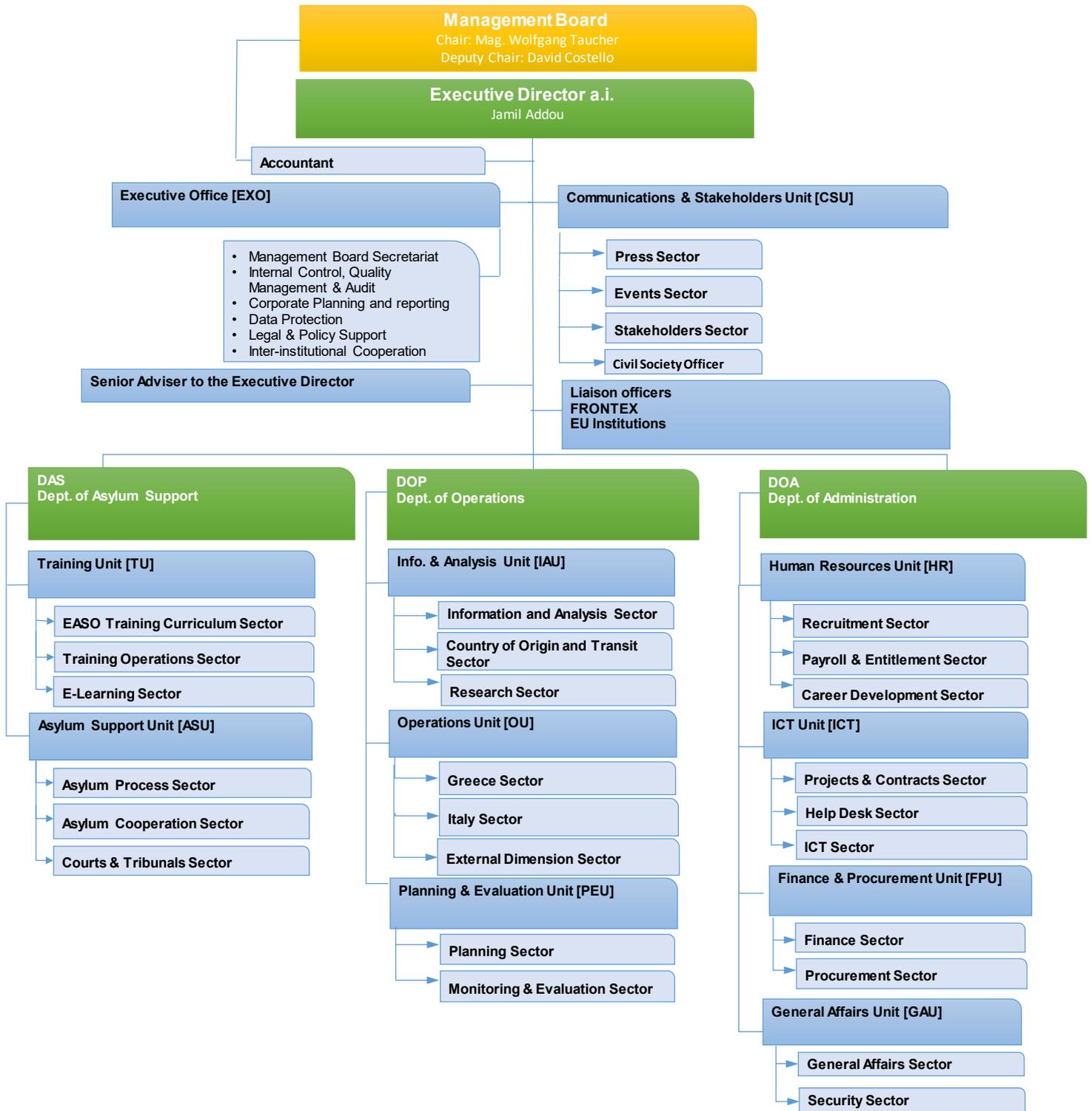
EASO's Management Board appointed Mr Jamil Addou as interim Executive Director of the agency.

The **Department of Asylum Support** contributes to the implementation of the CEAS by providing support with the aim of enhancing the capacities of EU+ countries to implement the CEAS through common training, coordinated practical cooperation and through the development and monitoring of operational standards and guidance.

The **Department of Operations** develops and implements a comprehensive approach for EASO activities in the field of operations, bringing together situational and country of origin information and intelligence, operational planning and intra- and extra-EU operational support under one coordinated framework. Operations are underpinned by operational protocols and tools and a continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure optimal results.

The **Department of Administration** provides a support system and services to the core areas of work.

Figure A.1: EASO’s organisational chart



A.II. EASO budget in 2018

Table A.1: Budget execution of commitment appropriations (CA) per fund source

Commitment appropriations				
Budget title	Fund source	CA budgeted (€)	CA implemented (€)	CA (%)
Title 1 — Staff expenditure	C1	20 336 982.00	19 314 071.60	94.97
	C4	4 266.30		
	C8	972 033.18	868 759.38	89.38
	R0	54 747.48	54 747.48	100.00
Total Title 1		21 368 028.96	20 237 578.46	94.71
Title 2 — Infrastructure and operating expenditure	C1	12 184 500.00	9 746 175.94	79.99
	C4	4 135.43	-	-
	C5	78.16	-	-
	C8	2 740 398.30	2 530 533.51	92.34
	R0	708 406.25	698 192.85	98.56
Total Title 2		15 637 518.14	12 974 902.30	82.97
Title 3 — Operational expenditure	C1	59 449 518.00	58 327 219.14	98.11
	C4	21 082.00	-	-
	C5	7 938.30	7 938.30	100.00
	C8	22 663 826.55	19 363 813.26	85.44
	R0	9 355 454.40	5 478 759.22	58.56
Total Title 3		91 497 819.25	83 177 729.92	90.91
Title 4 — Other external projects	R0	380 091.28	334 338.73	87.96 %
Total Title 4		380 091.28	334 338.73	87.96 %
Total CA		128 883 457.63	116 724 549.41	90.57 %

Table A.2: Budget execution of payment appropriations (PA) per fund source

Payment appropriations				
Budget title	Fund source	PA budgeted (€)	PA consumed (€)	PA (%)
Title 1 — Staff expenditure	C1	20 336 982.00	17 937 211.82	88.20
	C4	4 266.30		
	C8	972 033.18	868 759.38	89.38
	R0	54 747.48	54 747.48	100.00
Total Title 1		21 368 028.96	18 860 718.68	88.27
Title 2 — Infrastructure and operating expenditure	C1	12 184 500.00	5 592 660.49	45.90
	C4	4 135.43		
	C5	78.16		
	C8	2 740 398.30	2 530 533.51	92.34
	R0	708 406.25	698 192.85	98.56
Total Title 2		15 637 518.14	8 821 386.85	56.41
Title 3 — Operational expenditure	C1	59 449 518.00	57 475 191.06	96.68
	C4	21 082.00		
	C5	6 059.25	6 059.25	100.00
	R0	9 355 454.40	273 646.32	2.92
Total Title 3		68 832 113.65	57 754 896.63	83.91
Title 4 — Other external projects	R0	380 091.28	229 270.60	60.32
Total Title 4		380 091.28	229 270.60	60.32
Total PA		106 217 752.03	85 666 272.76	80.65

A.III. EASO staff

On 31 December 2018, EASO had 219 **staff members** appointed and in service (includes also offered positions), of which 151 were Temporary Agents, 64 were Contract Agents and 4 were Seconded National Experts.

Chart A.1: Distribution of EASO staff on 31.12.2018 by gender

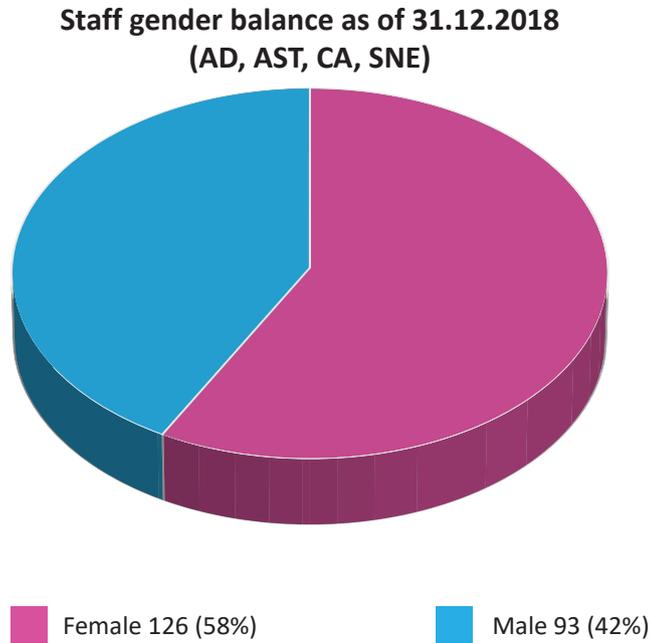
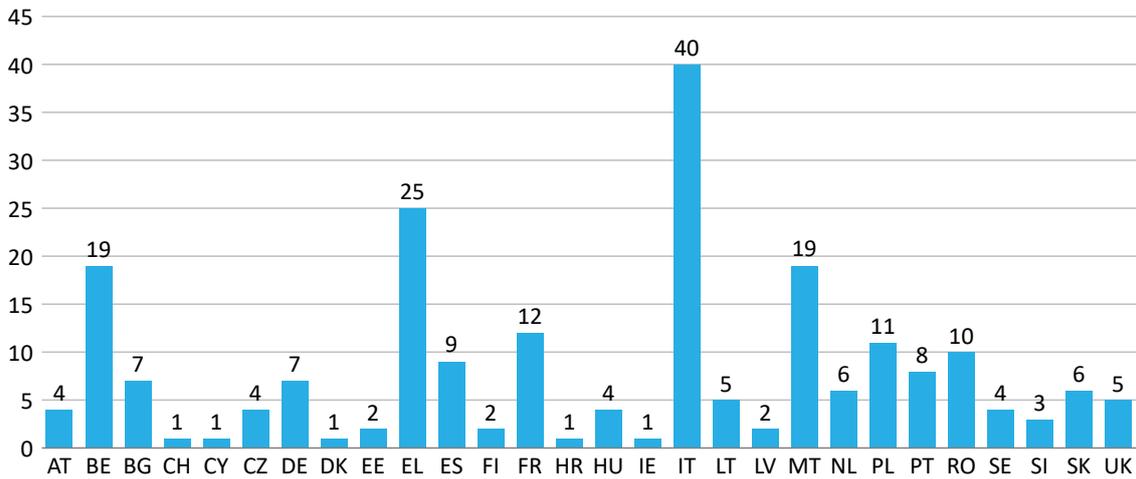


Chart A.2: Distribution of EASO staff on 31.12.2018 by nationality



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