

EASO support on the Sea Watch 3's disembarkation



In the framework of the long-time cooperation between EASO and the Italian authorities, at the beginning of this year, EASO was deployed to provide a support during the Sea Watch 3 disembarkation operation.

On 31 January, the NGO ship was authorised to enter the port of Catania and disembark the 47 migrants on board, of which 32 were men and 15 unaccompanied minors. The minors were immediately transferred to specific reception centers across Sicily, whereas the male adults were moved to the Hotspot of Messina.

Seven countries – France, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Romania – offered their help and made pledges to receive potential applicants for international protection.

Upon a specific request for support expressed by the Italian authorities, the European Commission mandated EASO to facilitate the entire operation. Within 24 hours, the Agency establishes a support team made up of three experts, led by a

coordinator, and deployed them in the Messina hotspot.

The team immediately began assessing the languages spoken by the migrants and providing the required cultural mediators. With the help of the interpreters, the experts explained to the potential applicants all the phases of the procedure ahead and dispensed useful information on the seven receiving Member States. They then conduct pre-registration and pre-screening interviews to develop a proposed list for the distribution of the potential candidates for each Member State, in cooperation with the Italian Dublin Unit and according to a set of matching criteria previously established by EASO in agreement with the European Commission.

At the same time, the Agency and the Commission organised different coordination meetings in Rome, also attended by UNHCR, FRONTEX and EUROPOL representatives, in order to share decisions and updates with the appointed Member States' Contact Points, and to accompany the seven national delegations in planning and running the interviews of candidates, where requested.

This effective coordination amongst the different interested stakeholders, the long experience of experts and cultural mediators, the solid relationship already existing between the Agency and the local authorities – both at a central and regional levels – all allowed EASO to ensure a proper management of operations. The process also established a potential reference model that is now available and can be implemented again in future occasions.