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The Agency has established an evaluation framework to enhance the overall relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and added-value of its programmes and actions. This reflective approach contributes to institutional learning, evidence-based change management, accountability and transparency.

In line with Article 16(4) of the EUAA Regulation, evaluations were undertaken once operational plans were concluded. In 2023, the Agency completed two internal evaluations of its operational support in Bulgaria and Lithuania for the period 2022-2023. In addition, it commissioned an external evaluation of the operational plan in Spain, covering the period January 2022 to June 2023. By the end of 2023, the Agency started the evaluation of its operational support in Czechia. Ongoing operational plans agreed with Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovenia and the Netherlands were not due for evaluation.

Under the **operational plan with Lithuania**, which ran from July 2022 to June 2023, the Agency provided support with the reception of asylum seekers. The plan envisaged support with operational activities, capacity-building and technical advice on the creation of a new national reception agency. Implementation took place in a rapidly changing environment, which saw a gradual reduction in the number of asylum seekers and shifting responsibilities at the national level in a controversial legal setting. The EUAA effectively provided most of the planned activities but faced delays with the creation of the new national reception agency. Despite some structural challenges, such as those encountered in the deployment of experts, support was provided efficiently, resulting in improved workflows. The Agency’s flexibility contributed to the relevance and added-value of the activities. Structured communication flows with internal and external stakeholders supported the coherence of the operational plan. The evaluation included a number of horizontal considerations that can be taken forward in future operational activities in other geographical settings. In addition, it made recommendations related to the need to reassess the type of Agency support that could be provided to the Member State, hand-over of interpretation support, embedding of workflow management in capacity-building and the application of preconditions in operational plans.

The 2022-2023 **EUAA-Bulgaria operational plan** initially supported the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive and, in a later stage, reception and asylum processing. Its

intended results were relevant, although there was little uptake of the planned activities in the field of temporary protection. The Agency tailored activities to specific needs, delivering training sessions, interpretation support, workshops and a study visit. The provision of interpretation and training in Bulgarian were particularly appreciated by the national counterparts. Challenges in implementation were due to internal delays, limited capacity, language barriers and changes in the national context. The deployment of external experts was particularly arduous due to a shortage of experts who were proficient in Bulgarian. As a result, some activities could not be achieved by the end of the operational plan. From a wider EU perspective, the support with migration management was timely in view of the enhanced efforts for Bulgaria to access the Schengen zone. Despite this, the added-value to Bulgaria's temporary protection, asylum and reception systems was limited to varying degrees. The evaluation concluded that a longer-term presence would bring additional benefits to Bulgaria. This experience allowed the Agency to draw lessons for future initiatives. In addition, the evaluation recommended improvements in results-based planning, collaboration with external entities, the establishment of an in-country presence, and the mobilisation of local experts.

During the 18 months up to mid-2023, the **EUAA-Spain operational plan** provided support with reception, resettlement and temporary protection. The external evaluation observed significant progress across the four measures of the plan. It noted that implementation was efficient, due to the Agency's capacity to adapt to new needs and priorities. The relevance of the operational plan was confirmed as its next iteration provides continuity for most of the measures. The majority of consulted stakeholders highlighted the complementarity of the plan with coordination between actors and strategies, particularly with activities of other international actors in fields such as information provision. Finally, the EU added-value of the plan was considered very good and the EUAA's support was valued by the authorities. It allowed proposed changes to be implemented faster and more in line with EU standards. The evaluation made recommendations for the EUAA's work in the short, medium and long term, including the need to ensure better alignment between the measures in the operational plan and the time for their implementation and the opportunity to promote a knowledge management model. It also suggested a change management approach and the expansion of the pool of external trainers.

The **EUAA-Czechia operational plan** provided support from June 2022 until the end of 2023 following a high influx of arrivals from Ukraine. The Agency provided interpretation, ICT and training support. The training provided by the Agency was expected to have positive effects beyond the plan's duration. Delays were faced in the provision of interpretation support and temporary housing. The planned delivery of 200 container units for temporary accommodation was ultimately suspended due to the decrease in arrivals. Despite this, work in the field of reception was a learning opportunity for the Agency in view of future requests. The evaluation recommended follow-up on training achievements.

In 2023, the Agency undertook for the first time an internal **meta-evaluation** that reviewed follow-up actions and findings from three horizontal reports relating to 12 operational plans implemented in 2019, 2020 and 2021, as well as horizontal conclusions from six internal evaluations conducted between May 2022 and August 2023. The meta-evaluation identified clusters of follow-up actions that required additional attention and made recommendations on the horizontal findings of the six internal evaluations. These recommendations related to the complementarity between emergency, long-term and permanent support, including with AMIF

support, and enhanced preparedness for new (start-up) operational plans. In addition, it recommended improved planning and better articulation of the Agency's support through interpretation activities. It also suggested a revisit of the deployment mechanism for asylum support teams. The meta-evaluation emphasised the need for enhanced data collection and reporting of training outputs, considering the many achievements in this field.

Selected highlights from the EUAA's operational support in 2023

- Under the Spain 2022-2023 operational plan, 1,803 stakeholders participated in training sessions with high rates of satisfaction. This was a significant increase compared to the 2021 plan, when 280 individuals were trained. In addition, the Agency contributed to the design and implementation of the temporary protection information hotline in the Centres for Reception, Attention and Transfers (CREADEs), considered by the authorities as a good practice.

- In Bulgaria, interpretation and capacity-building activities were small in scale. However, since 2023 these became more relevant from a wider EU perspective, given the prioritisation of EU migration management in Bulgaria in view of its accession to the Schengen area.

- In Lithuania, the Agency delivered 11 training sessions involving 197 participations. In addition, it provided interpretation services and vulnerability support in five reception centres. The gradual use of the special needs and vulnerability assessment (SNVA) tool and information desk by national counterparts may last beyond the duration of the operational plan.

- The Czechia plan boosted CEAS-related training. The growing collaboration generated 24 training sessions involving 214 individuals, covering topics such as the legal framework, ethics and professional standards, vulnerable groups and interpretation.

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