

EASO Annual General Report



2020

EASO Annual General Report 2020



This annual general report describes EASO's activities in 2020 and is prepared in accordance with Article 29(1)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 establishing a European Asylum Support Office.

This report was adopted by the EASO Management Board on 11 June 2021, and 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.

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Content

List of abbreviations	04
Foreword	05
1. Operational support	07
1.1 Greece	09
1.2 Italy	11
1.3 Cyprus	13
1.4 Malta	15
1.5 Spain	17
1.6 External dimension	19
2. Operations planning, evaluation and support tools	25
2.1 Operational support and operational tools	26
2.2 Planning, monitoring and evaluation of operations	27
2.3 Operational training	28
2.4 Quality support to operations	31
3. Asylum Knowledge	33
3.1 Country of origin information	34
3.2 Medical country of origin information	35
3.3 Country guidance	37
3.4 EASO data hub	40
3.5 Research programme on early warning and root causes	42
3.6 Strategic analysis	44
3.7 Information and documentation system	46
3.8 EASO Asylum Report	48
4. Asylum Support	50
4.1 Asylum processes	51
4.2 Thematic cooperation	53
4.3 Cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals	57
5. Training	59
5.1 EASO Training curriculum	60
5.2 Certification and accreditation	64
5.3 e-Learning and client relations management	66
5.4 Other training support	67
6. Horizontal activities	68
6.1 Cooperation with European and international partners	69
6.2 Consultative Forum and civil society	70
6.3 Communication and Events	71
7. Governance	73
Annexes	75
A.I. EASO organisational structure	76
A.II. EASO budget in 2020	77
A.III. EASO staff	79

List of abbreviations

AST	asylum support team
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
COI	country of origin information
DGMM	Directorate-General of Migration Management (Turkey)
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EAIP	EASO asylum intervention pool
EMN	European Migration Network
EPS	Early Warning and Preparedness System
EU	European Union
EU+	Member States of the European Union and associate countries
EUAA	EU Agency for Asylum
eu-LISA	European Agency for the Operational Management of Large- Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
Europol	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GAS	Greek Asylum Service
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IDS	Information and Documentation System
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
MedCOI	medical country of origin information
NAC	National Asylum Commission
NCP	national contact point
UAM	unaccompanied minors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Foreword

This year marks the 10th anniversary since the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became fully operational. The agency has come a long way in delivering on its mandate to enhance practical cooperation amongst the EU+ countries in the field of asylum and reception, deliver operational support to the Member States of the European Union facing particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems, and helping them fulfil their European and international obligations to give protection to people in need.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented worldwide challenges, not least on the thousands of migrants that head to our borders for refuge. As an agency, we needed to act fast and diligently in the interest of those we seek to protect. Innovative and safe working modalities were rapidly implemented across all areas of EASO's activities to ensure business continuity. At the operational level, planning and coordination continues to be carried out in close cooperation with the national authorities, and within the frameworks of the COVID-19 directives issued and updated nationally.

Whilst remaining heedful of the challenges that lie ahead, I am very proud of the results achieved. Needless to say, this is not a unilateral effort. As an agency, we continue to rely on the expertise and guidance of the EASO management board, and on the close cooperation of our key stakeholders.

Since being appointed Executive Director of EASO in June 2019,



I have had the immense satisfaction to witness EASO grow not only as a centre of support and expertise but as a trusted partner to its stakeholders. And here, I am also pleased to report on the decision of the European Parliament to grant the EASO discharge in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial years 2018 and 2019.

The new EASO organisational structure, which took effect on 1 January 2020 and further amended on 4 September 2020, is modelled on a needs-based approach to planning, including the human and financial resources needed to reinforce EASO's internal governance and help prepare for the agency's increasing role in the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). In 2020 alone, and despite the procedural challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, EASO's staff complement grew by 28%, reaching 380 staff members by the close of the year.

In the field of operational support, despite the challenges in 2020, EASO not only effectively sustained its operations in Italy, but dramatically upscaled its operational presence and support to Cyprus, Greece, and Malta. A first-ever operating plan was also agreed between EASO and Spain, expanding EASO's operations in 2021 to all major EU countries of first arrival. Adapted capacity development support in light of the COVID-19 pandemic was also provided to priority partner countries with a focus on the Western Balkans, Turkey, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. New roadmaps for cooperation were agreed with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

To mitigate the shortage of EU+ countries experts, EASO also embarked on a major project to identify new complementary deployment mechanisms for experts across the Member States where EASO provides direct operational support.

The agency has gained increasing recognition for its knowledge base on asylum and reception in EU+ countries, serving as a regular reference point for decision-makers and policymakers seeking reliable, evidence-based, and timely information in the field of asylum and reception. Experts employed in the provision of technical support provide a valuable source of output, including through the publication of key reports on country guidance, country of origin information (COI), medical country of origin information (MedCOI), and the annual EASO Asylum Report. Here, I would like to note that a four-year project was also concluded last year,

which saw the transfer of all MedCOI services to EASO. Monthly updates are also provided on the latest asylum trends in EU+ countries. Since 2020 was largely affected by COVID-19 and related emergency measures implemented in EU+ and third countries, EASO also released two special reports, in May and June 2020, on 'Asylum Trends and COVID-19'.

In 2020, EASO continued to consolidate and restructure its training curriculum for officials working in the field of asylum and reception, ensuring that training remains relevant to the duties and tasks of asylum and reception officials. Participation in the EASO training curriculum increased by 5% in 2020 compared to 2019, with over 4,000 individuals following the EASO Training Curriculum in 2020.

Meanwhile, the agency awaits the approval of the proposal to update its mandate and transform it into the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA). Amongst other things, the new mandate will have a significant impact on enabling the agency to provide more flexible, effective, and timely operational support to the Member States. In doing so, the EUAA will become even more operative in contributing towards national and EU migration management.

Nina Gregori
EASO Executive Director

1. OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

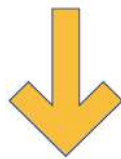


Findings released by EASO on [asylum trends in 2020](#) reveal a 31 % drop in applications for international protection lodged in the EU+ countries¹, compared to 2019 figures. Data suggests that this decline in applications – the lowest level on record since 2013 – was largely a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak, and the restrictions introduced by countries in order to curb transmission, including limitations on mobility.



In 2020, some 461,300 applications for international protection were lodged in EU+ countries.

In 2020, applications decreased by 31 % compared to 2019.



Some 4 % of all applications for international protection in 2020 were lodged by self-claimed unaccompanied minors (UAMs).

EU asylum decisions exceed applications for first time since 2017 due to COVID-19, 18 February 2021.

Despite the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, EASO effectively sustained its operations in Italy, and significantly upscaled its operational presence and support to Cyprus, Greece, and Malta. In terms of first instance status determination, which remains under the responsibility of the host country, EASO actively supported

Cyprus, Greece, and Malta in the interview procedure and in the drafting of concluding remarks. In Italy, 2020 saw a considerable shift from support to national authorities responsible for first instance decisions to support for the second instance authorities.

The support activities planned in the mutually agreed 2020 Operating Plans were primarily implemented by temporary agency workers (interims) and/or EASO's own resources, complemented where possible by Member State experts (the deployment of Member State experts was suspended for a significant period of 2020).

In the context of the ongoing pandemic, EASO also contributed to the preparation of the European Commission's [Guidance on the implementation of relevant EU provisions in the area of asylum and return procedures and on resettlement](#), and published [Practical recommendations on conducting the personal interview remotely](#).



1.1

Greece



Despite the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, EASO delivered full-scale support to Greece through the deployment of multi-disciplinary teams, adapted workflows, and flexible modes of intervention, across more than 40 different locations on mainland Greece and its islands.



Support was provided to the Reception and Identification Service through the establishment of a Queries Helpdesk on the islands and in mainland Greece.



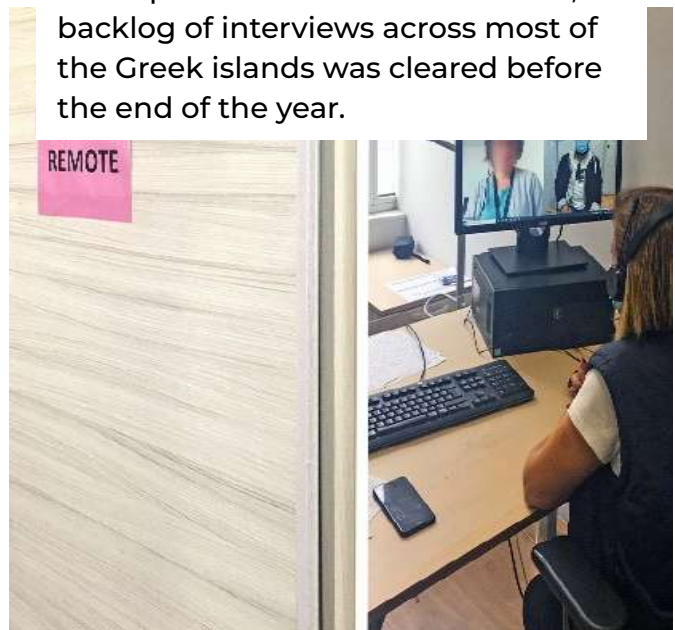
EASO played a leading role in the coordination of the new voluntary scheme for the relocation of UAMs, vulnerable children, and their families.

The outbreak of COVID-19, in addition to other contributing factors, greatly impacted the number of new arrivals in Greece. This led to an approximated 50% drop (40,500 applications) in the number of new applicants for international protection compared to 2019 figures. Despite the decrease in the number of new applicants, EASO supported over 5,000 outgoing Dublin requests and assisted in the preparation of 3,400 files for appeals (second instance).

Indeed, in 2020, EASO dramatically increased its operational support and presence in Greece when compared to 2019 levels. This had a significant impact on the implementation of the [2020 Operating and Technical Assistance Plan for Greece](#). In total, 639 distinct experts with different profiles were deployed in Greece in 2020.

The new asylum law, which was adopted by the Greek government in 2019, brought a major change of scenery for the operational coordination and the role of EASO's asylum support teams (ASTs). Following this change, and in line with the new operational modalities, the ASTs worked under the direct supervision of the responsible Greek authorities.

EASO also worked closely with the national authorities to reduce the backlog of applications in the north of Greece (Project North). Almost 18,500 interviews were conducted as part of this effort, and 16,400 concluding remarks were drafted by EASO personnel. At the same time, the backlog of interviews across most of the Greek islands was cleared before the end of the year.



Specific attention was also given to the planning and management of the national system supporting the Greek Reception Service.

To this end, EASO deployed multi-disciplinary teams - vulnerability, reception, and experts on UAMs - to all Reception Identification Centres (RICs) on the islands and in mainland Greece to take over the management of 32 different sites.

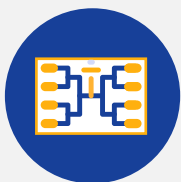
As of June 2020, EASO also began assisting in the new voluntary relocation scheme for UAMs, vulnerable children, and their families. A total of 4,627 interviews were conducted by EASO and more than 4,440 assessments were concluded. This facilitated the support of more than 3,352 individuals under this scheme using established criteria to determine to which relocating Member State an applicant for international protection could be transferred. By the end of 2020, more than 1,850 transfers were carried out from Greece to 10 participating Member States.



1.2 Italy



Italy remained the second largest beneficiary of EASO operational support in 2020.



Sustained support to quality and standardisation of asylum procedures was ensured through the implementation of coaching missions, the setting up of a helpdesk service for remote immigration offices, and the deployment of Reception Information System officers to the prefectures mostly affected by the increase of arrivals in 2020.



The successful implementation of a pilot project in support of six tribunals at the beginning of 2020, resulted in the extension of the support measure to 26 Specialised sections of the tribunals as well as to the Supreme Court of Cassation and its General Prosecutor's Office.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 and the introduction of temporary restrictive measures in Italy, all face-to-face activities were suspended in mid-February 2020, considerably impacting the implementation of measures under the [2020 Operational and Technical Assistance Plan for Italy](#). The situation led to the adoption of contingency plans in March 2020, and a subsequent [amendment](#) to the 2020 plan, reflecting innovative and safe working modalities



Photo Beto: iStock

in the interest of EASO personnel and applicants for international protection, particularly in the reception centres.

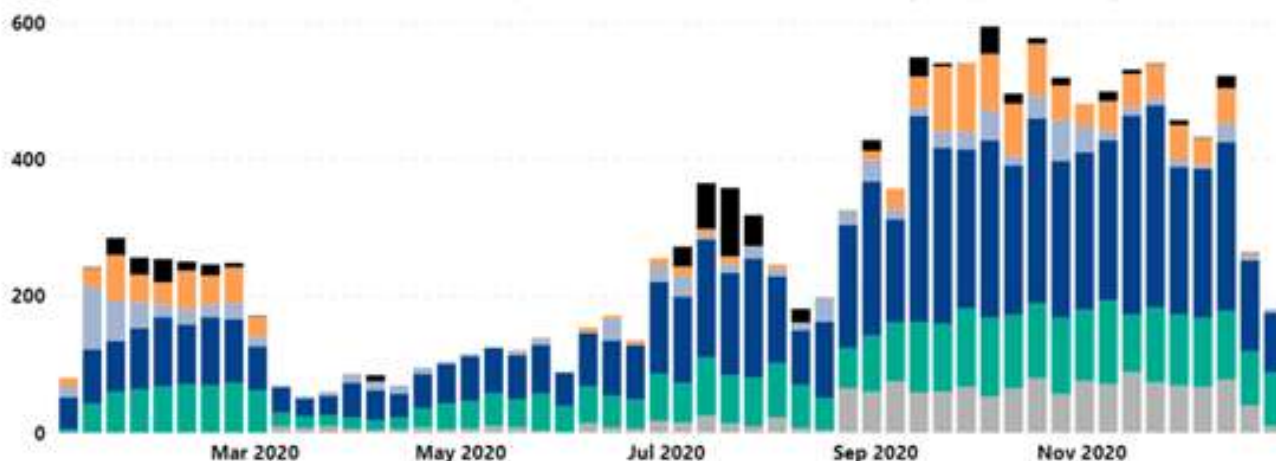
EASO support at first instance was scaled down in 2020, and efforts increasingly shifted in support of 21 ad hoc disembarkations and voluntary relocations in line with standard operating procedures (100% of all requests by Member States and the European Commission).

In January 2020, a pilot project was launched under the [2020 Operational and Technical Assistance Plan for Italy](#) in support of specialised sections of the Italian tribunals and the reduction in the backlog of cases at second instance. The deployment of 55 Research Officers ensured the processing of appeals at second instance of more than 10,000 persons (mostly through the preparation of files for judicial hearings, preliminary study of cases, judicial research, and scheduling in preparation of hearings).

In October 2020, EASO also began supporting the Supreme Court of Cassation and its General Prosecutor's Office, focusing mainly on file preparation.

Evolution of EASO support to Specialised Sections of Tribunals in judicial hearings

● File prep - interview prep ● File prep - report ● File prep - study ● File prep - verification ● Participation to hearings ● Support to scheduling



Support towards the strengthening of the internal procedures and case management of the National Asylum Commission (NAC), under the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, was facilitated by EASO through enhanced quality of COI research and the development of operative tools for the quality management of financial and procurement procedures.

The sustained deployment of EASO experts in the Dublin Unit contributed to the processing of 1,883 Dublin outgoing requests, and the development of informative material and tools in support of Dublin procedures.

Targeted support towards the improvement of quality and the standardisation of registration procedures continued in 2020.

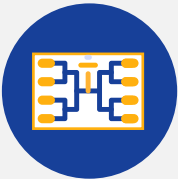
The establishment of an enhanced self-assessment methodology, the development of ad hoc monitoring tools and the implementation of ad hoc coaching missions contributed significantly to this.

EASO continues to build on these efforts under the [2021 Operating Plan for Italy](#), with a focus on the implementation of remote registration workflows. The 2021 plan also confirms EASO's continued support in reception management and self-monitoring activities; dataflows on disembarkation and reception allocation; the continuous support to second instance procedures (both in tribunals and at the Court of Cassation) and search and rescue disembarkation events, in coordination with the Italian authorities and the European Commission.

1.3 Cyprus



EASO initiates support for the second instance authorities.



Development and implementation of remote workflows for the interview procedure, alongside a full digitalisation of EASO asylum files.



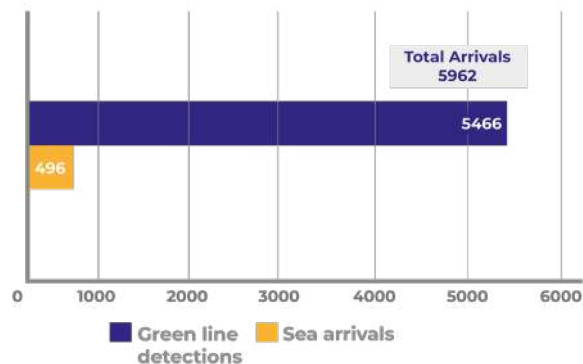
Support to the Cypriot authorities in the ad hoc relocation of 30 vulnerable individuals (14 UAMs and 16 members of single-parent families) from Cyprus to Finland.

In the first two months of the year, prior to the temporary suspension of registration activities due to the COVID-19 outbreak, migration pressure on the Cypriot asylum system remained high.

EASO provided support to the Cypriot national authorities in the registration of 75 % of all applications lodged in 2020. The share of applications supported by EASO continued to increase compared to previous years (55% in 2018 and 70% in 2019), affirming the key role of EASO in supporting the Cypriot registration capacity. More than two-thirds of all registrations carried out by EASO personnel related to persons who had entered Cyprus illegally.

Consistent with previous years, the majority of arrivals in Cyprus were detected at the Green Line (92%), and close to 500 migrants arrived by sea.

Total number of illegal border crossing detections by type, 2020



EASO continued to support the Cypriot Asylum Service (CAS) in both the management and reduction of the backlog of first instance cases. In response to the COVID-19 restrictions, EASO quickly explored alternative solutions to efficiently process applications for international protection. From April 2020, EASO case officers successfully conducted asylum interviews remotely, with other face-to-face interviews conducted in full adherence to national social distancing frameworks. With the deployment of additional EASO case officers, the number of interviews conducted during the summer increased significantly, declining later in November 2020 due to the second wave of the pandemic. By December 2020, the numbers gradually increased again when remote working modalities were fully reintroduced.

EASO also supported the CAS in improving reception conditions through community and social work activities in Kofinou.



In 2020, EASO initiated support to second instance authorities - the International Protection Administrative Court - to reduce the backlog and improve the quality of file preparation through the secondment of research officers, peer-to-peer information exchange, and judicial professional development activities.

In December 2020, a new [Operating Plan for 2021](#) was signed, confirming the continued and strong focus on backlog reduction at first and second instance. The Plan focuses particularly on the digitalisation of asylum files, with particular attention paid to quality assurance and vulnerability, together with support for the development of a comprehensive national strategy and plan for reception management.



1.4 Malta



Operational support to Malta was significantly increased in 2020, with EASO deployed experts registering over 90% of all applications lodged.



EASO initiated support to the national reception authorities in the field of age assessments, which will continue in 2021 under the agreed Operating Plan signed between EASO and Malta.

EASO's support to Malta was stepped up during the second half of 2020, following the gradual easing of restrictive measures imposed during the early months of the year as a result of

COVID-19. Support in addressing the backlog of applications at first instance resulted in eight out of 10 decisions being supported by evaluations carried out by EASO case officers.

EASO also provided support to the Malta Dublin Unit in the evaluation of procedures and other related activities, including the carrying out of all take charge requests to EU+ countries. Towards the end of 2020, EASO extended its support to include the drafting of appeals submissions to the International Protection Appeals Tribunal, which will continue in 2021.

In June 2020, EASO facilitated the establishment of a COI helpdesk in Malta, with the recruitment of dedicated personnel to work on queries received from the field. The helpdesk also delivered country briefings on Bangladesh, Libya, and Venezuela.



Eight new office containers were set up towards the end of 2020 in an effort to increase EASO's capacity to run registrations and conduct interviews.

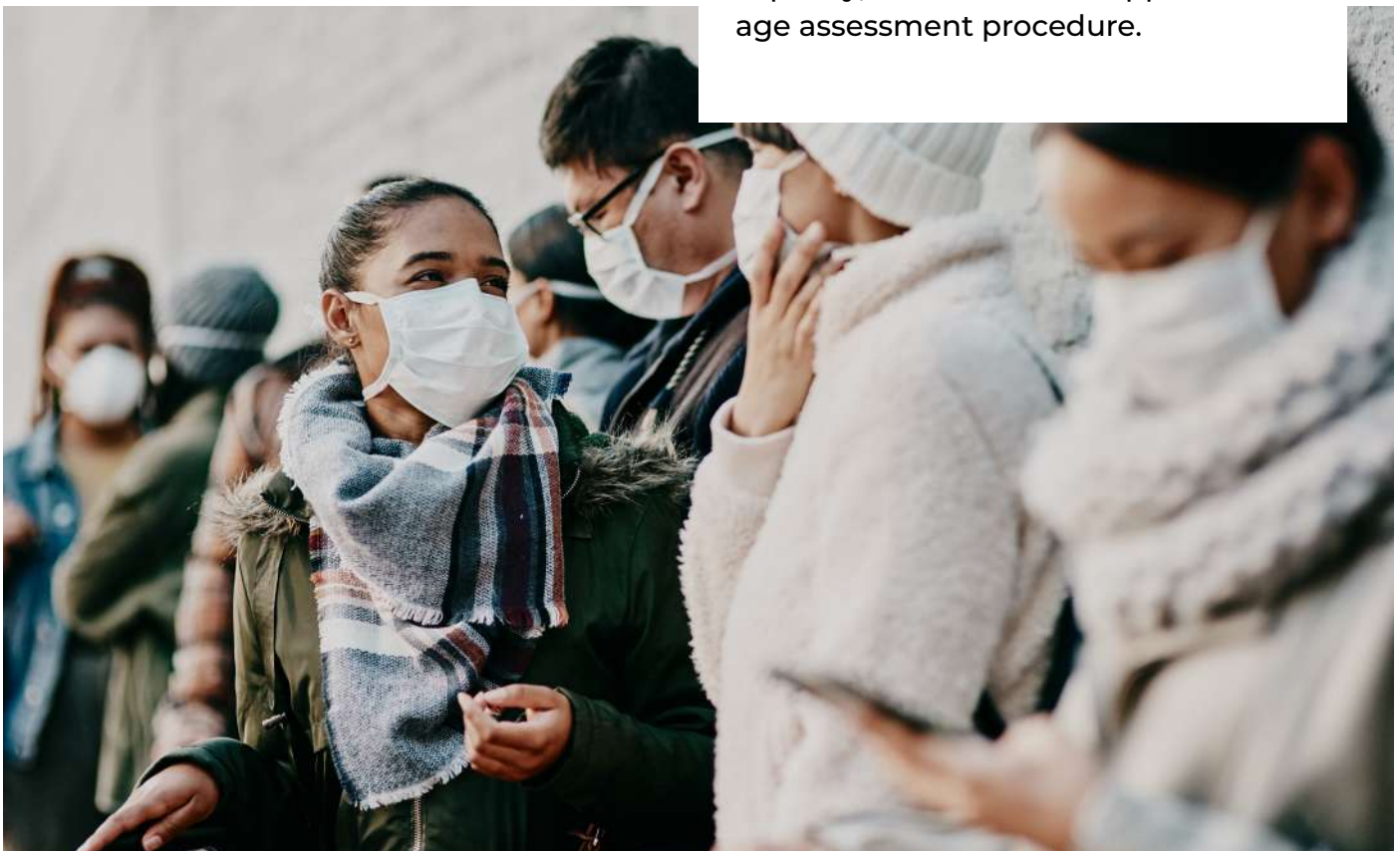
As part of the planned support to the Maltese authorities in the management of the reception system, EASO experts also started conducting vulnerability screening of the resident population in open centres. This measure resulted in the completion of over 200 vulnerability assessments by the end of the year. On 10 September, EASO and Malta signed an Amendment to the Operating Plan, which included, amongst other measures, support to the reception authorities in devising and undertaking age assessments. By the end of the year, the age assessment standard operating procedures were drafted,

with the first field support activities planned to commence in 2021.

In December 2020, the [Operating Plan for 2021](#) was agreed between EASO and Malta with focused support on asylum (improved access to the asylum procedure in Malta and increased capacity to manage the asylum backlog at first instance determination) and reception (enhanced capacity to implement reception standards in line with the CEAS).

In addition to the continuation of support activities from 2020, the 2021 plan provides for EASO support in the digitalisation of the existing asylum paper files, the development of a business case for a case management system for Malta's International Protection Agency and the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), the enhancement of the social work capacity, and increased support in the age assessment procedure.

EASO also supported the national authorities in six voluntary relocation exercises, involving arrivals from 16 SAR events.



PeopleImages: iStock

1.5

Spain



Joint Rapid Needs Assessment concluded with the Spanish authorities in the field of reception.



First Operating Plan – Special Support on Reception signed by EASO and Spain in December 2020.

In response to an initial request from Spain, EASO and the Spanish authorities agreed to conduct a joint rapid needs assessment of the national reception system, in conjunction with the Ministry of Inclusion. This exercise was conducted throughout September and October 2020 and closely followed with an agreement and signature of an [Operating Plan – Special Support on Reception](#) in December 2020.

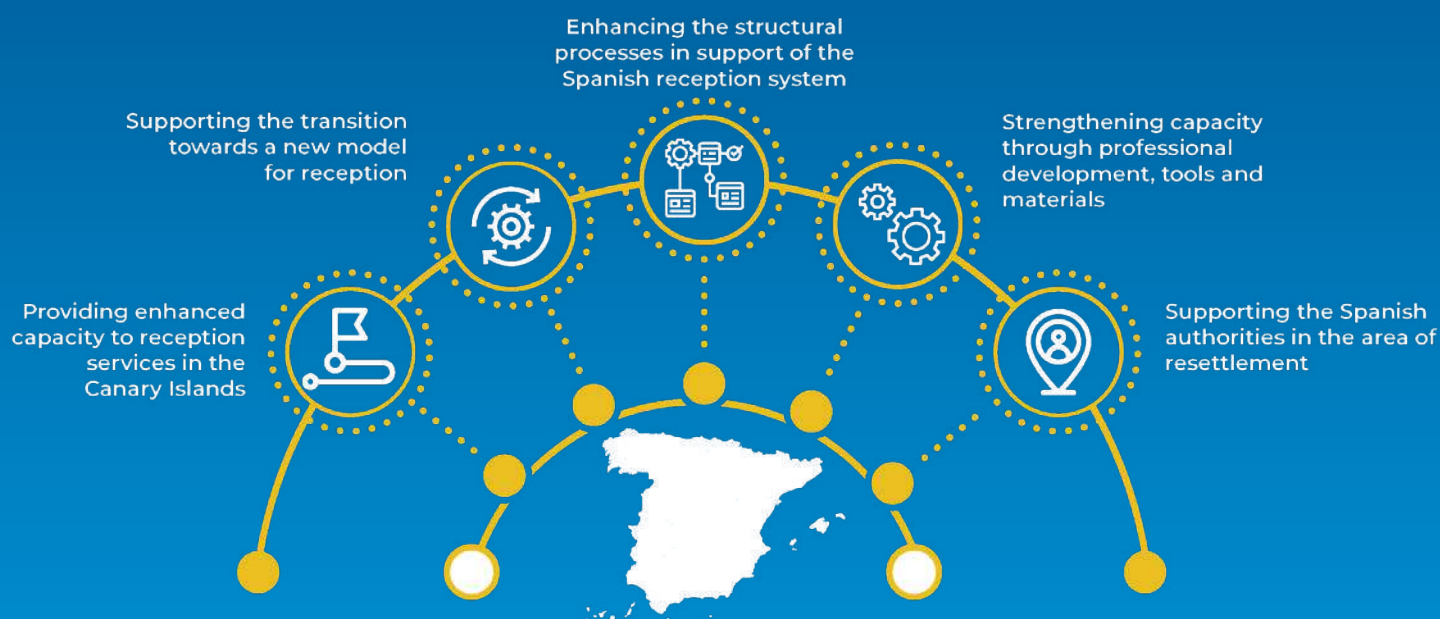
The Operating Plan, to be implemented in 2021, is built on five specific measures (four in the field of reception and one on resettlement):

- i. Facilitated support to the Spanish authorities in the transition towards a new model for reception.
- ii. Organisational structures and related systems to be developed in order to implement the new reception model for the Spanish reception system.



- iii. Strengthened capacity within the Spanish reception system through professional development, tools, and materials.
- iv. Enhanced capacity to offer reception services in locations subjected to particular pressure (with a firm focus on the Canary Islands).
- v. Inception of support for the Spanish authorities to facilitate the fulfilment of their resettlement pledges.

EASO support to the Spanish reception authorities becomes fully operational



1.6 External Dimension



Third Country Cooperation Network and Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network established and active.



In response to COVID-19 restrictions, the Resettlement Support Facility in Istanbul provided adapted support to EU+ countries resettling from Turkey.



COVID-19 adapted capacity development support provided to priority partner countries with a focus on the Western Balkans, Turkey and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

EASO plays an important role in the External Dimension of the CEAS by supporting the establishment of asylum and reception systems and/or strengthening them. EASO support to EU+ countries in their resettlement efforts is also integral to this work. In 2020, EASO took steps to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its activities. The use of online modalities and innovative solutions facilitated the effective continuation of EASO's work in the External Dimension field.

Relevant developments included the active start of the Third Country Cooperation Network and the Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network; an adaptation of the work and support provided to EU+ countries at the Istanbul-based Resettlement Support Facility as a response to COVID-19; and the COVID-adapted capacity development support to third countries.



Resettlement and complementary pathways to international protection



Support to EU+ countries through the Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network.



Continuation of Resettlement Support Facility operations in Istanbul.



Establishment of the Working Group on Community Sponsorship.



Picture: iStock

EASO supports the implementation of EU+ countries' resettlement efforts in the framework of European resettlement schemes, in cooperation with the European Commission, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other relevant actors. This facilitates EU+ countries' efforts in providing access to the EU for persons in need of international protection with a focus on resettlement and other legal pathways to international protection.

Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network



The EASO Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network was operationalised in 2020 through the organisation of 12 activities throughout the year. The role of the network became increasingly relevant in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, with network activities encouraging the continuation of resettlement operations through innovative solutions, such as remote processing and/or dossier submissions.

Resettlement Support Facility pilot project



EASO supports EU+ countries' resettlement operations from Turkey through the Resettlement Support Facility (RSF) based in Istanbul. EASO provides a range of logistical services based on EU+ countries' selection and cultural orientation /pre-departure orientation resettlement processes. These could include the transport and accommodation of refugees, rooms for interviews and training, and childcare amongst others, subject to the needs of the EU+ country.

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the RSF adapted its infrastructure and operations to support remote processing. This resulted in the continuation of resettlement operations from Istanbul following an initial interruption at the onset of the pandemic.

Complementary pathways/ Community Sponsorships

The European Commission Recommendation on legal pathways to international protection in the EU, issued in September 2020, calls for the promotion of an EU approach to Community Sponsorship, building on existing EU+ countries' experience and involving EASO. Based on this recommendation, EASO convened a meeting on 25 November 2020 where it was agreed to establish a dedicated Working Group on Community Sponsorship. The Working Group's main objectives are to further contribute to the EU approach, identify good practices and follow the progress of relevant projects in this field, funded through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.



FatCamera: iStock

Third country support



Four roadmaps for cooperation with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia agreed.



Continued cooperation with the Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM).



A regional pilot project for North Africa and a roadmap for cooperation with Egypt.



Alicia_Garcia: iStock

EASO's third country support contributes to the establishment of asylum and reception legal frameworks and systems and/or the strengthening of these as well as promoting protection-sensitive migration management in key partner countries. Capacity development interventions are tailored to be context and country-specific and are facilitated by EASO specialists or through peer-to-peer support provided by EU+ country authorities. Interventions include training, workshops, study/work visits, on-the-job coaching, and more, across identified asylum and reception themes. Throughout 2020, EASO supported three geographical priorities: Western Balkans (WB), Turkey, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

In the Western Balkans, EASO continued its cooperation with all six WB partners, under the framework of the IPA II Regional Project² and through new Roadmaps for Cooperation with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia. EASO also initiated needs assessments for possible Roadmaps with Montenegro and Kosovo³. In 2020, EASO delivered over 40 capacity development activities, which

helped strengthen the asylum and reception systems in the WB.

In Turkey, EASO continued to support the DGMM through the implementation of the EASO-DGMM Roadmap (September 2019-August 2021).

EASO delivered 23 capacity development activities under six pillars: COI, training, quality assurance, information analysis and management, persons with special needs, and contingency planning.

In the MENA region, EASO laid a good basis for increasing cooperation in the coming years. EASO established a regional pilot project for North Africa (co-funded together with Denmark and the Czech Republic) which will be implemented under the umbrella of the Regional Development and Protection Programme for North Africa (RDPP NA) until 2023. Additionally, EASO and Egypt completed a pilot cooperation project (2019-2020), leading to the establishment of a Roadmap (co-funded together with Denmark) to be initiated in February 2021.

Finally, EASO established the Third Country Cooperation Network in early 2020 and organised eight activities throughout the year. The Network aims to facilitate and strengthen cooperation, coordination, and knowledge sharing among the competent authorities of EU+ countries, EASO, the European Commission, and other relevant stakeholders in view of cooperation with partner countries in the asylum and reception field.



artist: iStock

2- EU-funded project "Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management in Western Balkans and Turkey" phase 2

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

2. OPERATIONS PLANNING, EVALUATION AND SUPPORT TOOLS



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2.1

Operational support and operational tools



A full review and assessment of possible complementary deployment mechanisms (CDM) for the deployment of ASTs to Member States supported by EASO Operations was carried out.



The EASO Asylum Intervention Pool System (EAIPS) – a web-based system for the management of operational resources – was further enhanced.



The requirements for knowledge management digital platforms in support of EASO operations and networks were further developed and implemented.

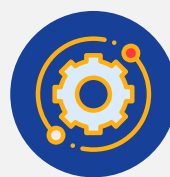


EASO embarked on a major project to identify new complementary deployment mechanisms (CDM) for the deployment of experts across the Member States where EASO provides direct operational support. EASO has often found it challenging to mobilise sufficient human resources to meet foreseen and unforeseen operational needs in the Member States. Therefore, to ensure the continued delivery of the required support, a full review and assessment of possible CDMs for the deployment of ASTs to Member States has been carried out. The identified priority options have been analysed extensively and are being developed for implementation in mid-2021.

The EASO Asylum Intervention Pool System (EAIPS) has been further developed into a dynamic system with enhanced functionality to support the management of personnel deployed as part of the ASTs, and which are involved in EASO operations. The EAIPS provides real-time and reliable data and information on EASO operations in the different Member States where it is present. Any needs deriving from complementary deployment mechanisms will also be considered.

Further knowledge management platforms to support the Networks related to EASO Operations were developed and launched as Country Operations and External Dimension online platforms. These will contribute to the fulfilment of EASO's mandate to facilitate collaboration between Member States. They will also facilitate and foster the promotion of good practices and the overall implementation of the CEAS.

2.2 Planning, monitoring, and evaluation of operations



Formalisation of EASO design, planning, and evaluation framework.



Internal and external evaluations of EASO operational interventions, supported by feedback loops and response mechanisms.

EASO continued its multi-year effort to put into place a robust project management framework and methodology. Throughout the year, the design, programming, planning, and evaluation methodologies were formalised, building on the experience and best practices from similar exercises carried out in previous years.

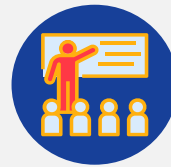
EASO continued to ensure accountability and to promote the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of its operations. Through the work of its Programming, Monitoring and Evaluation Sector, EASO facilitated three external evaluations (for the three full-year 2019 Operating Plans for Cyprus, Greece, and Italy), further strengthening response mechanisms,

good practices, and lessons learned. Internal evaluations of other operational interventions were also conducted, as necessary.

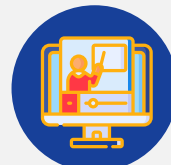
Making use of its established methodology, EASO, together with the Spanish authorities, carried out a comprehensive needs assessment of both the national reception system and the situation in the Canary Islands and developed a first-ever Operating Plan with this fifth Mediterranean country receiving EASO support. This process was significantly facilitated by the Agency-led programming framework.

EASO also supported the development of EASO's first-ever Reception Strategy by again providing a methodological framework for this strategic development. Further support will also be provided for the development of an implementation plan for this strategy.

2.3 Operational training



133 training sessions delivered under the 2020 Operating Plans (OPs), with 633 individuals trained and a total of 1,493 participations - OP Greece (824), OP Italy (296), OP Cyprus (195), OP Malta (178).



Despite the challenges imposed on the delivery of training due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EASO Training and Professional Development Centre fully implemented a new methodology for the virtual delivery of training sessions, and ensured the uninterrupted training support to EASO operations.

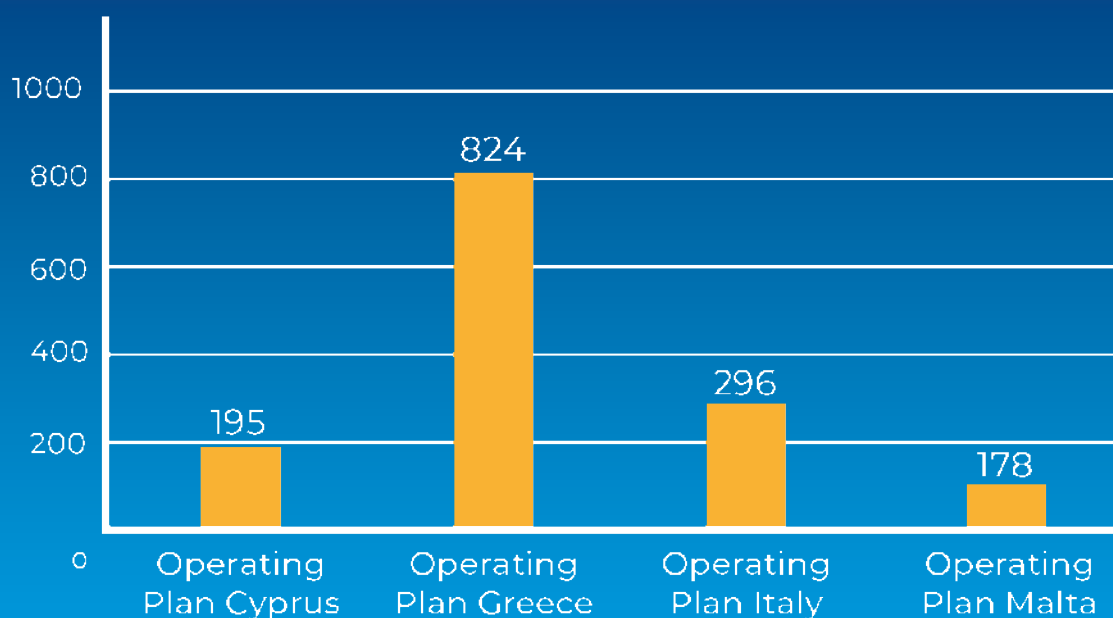
During 2020, 43 new case officers were trained through three extensive training plans delivered within the framework of the [2020 Operating Plan for Cyprus](#). The second largest target group was interpreters, with 23 interpreters trained in the training module on Interpreting in the Asylum Context.

In the framework of the [Operating Plan for Greece](#), 824 participations were recorded. The main target group was EASO interim case officers, followed by asylum administration officials, reception officials, and EASO Team Leaders.

Under the [Operating Plan for Italy](#), 296 participants received training.

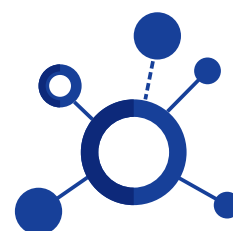


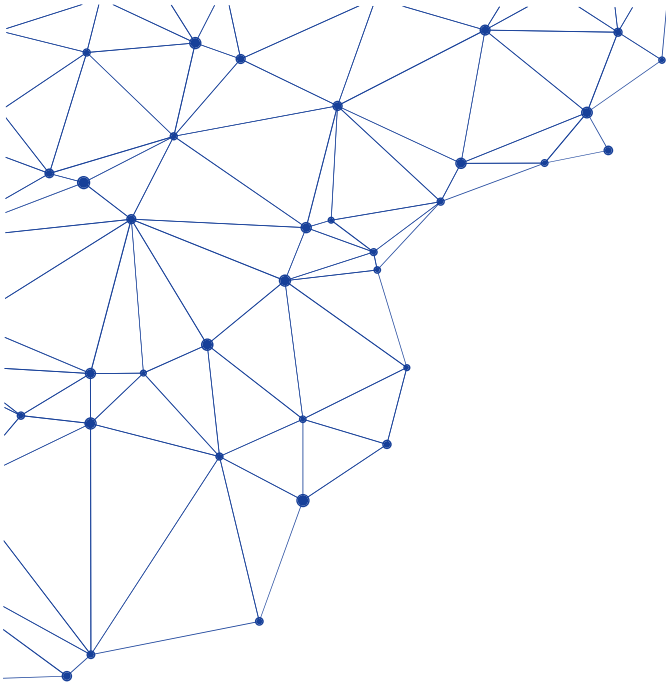
Participations per operating plan in 2020



The largest target groups were EASO research officers and asylum administration officials, followed by EASO interim case officers and registration officers.

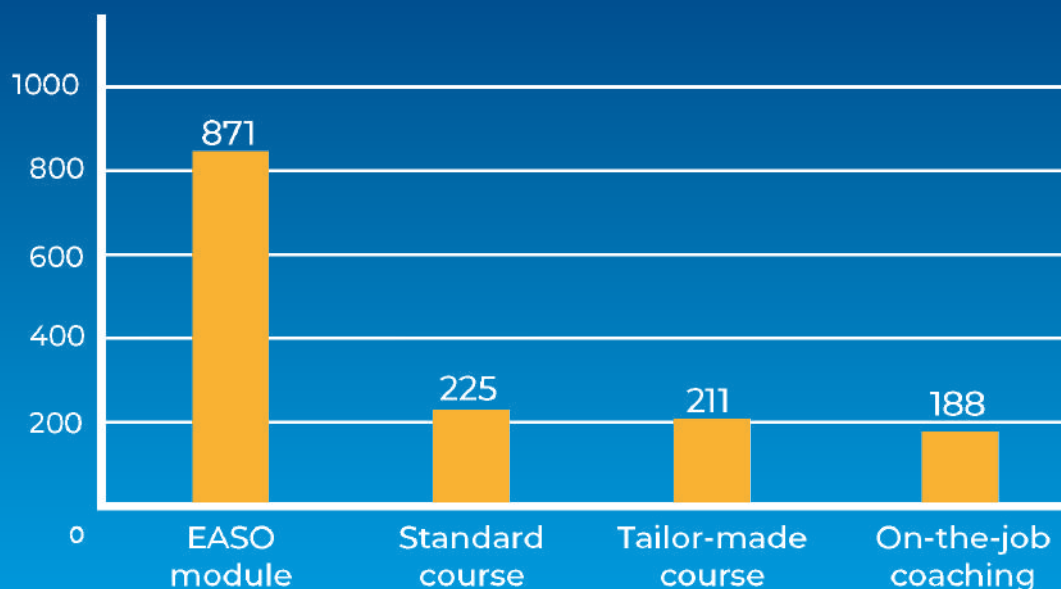
2020 saw a sustained commitment by the national Italian asylum authorities to strengthen capacity in terms of national trainers. 20 Italian officials participated in regular train-the-trainer sessions, through which officials from the NAC and Territorial Commissions were trained as trainers. Nine officials from the Italian Department of Public Security (DPS) also followed the training path developed by EASO, with the aim to create a pool of national trainers and enhance the training capacity of the DPS.





In the context of EASO's support to Malta, specific training paths were developed for both staff members as well as EASO interims, in the field of asylum and reception. Overall, 178 participations were recorded in EASO's training sessions, which were organised in the framework of the [Operating Plan for Malta](#). The highest number of trainees were interim case officers, followed by EASO registration assistants and EASO interim vulnerability experts. EASO was also involved in the delivery of training sessions as part of the onboarding programme for the Maltese Border Guards.

Participations per type of training in 2020

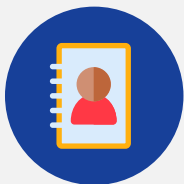


2.4

Quality support to operations



Reinforcement of the Quality Unit within the Greek Asylum Service, and the integration of the EASO Quality Assurance Tool into their daily work, in line with common European standards.



EASO assisted the Italian authorities in the development of a self-assessment system for the registration process of applicants for international protection in the main police offices, based on EASO guidance.

In Greece, EASO implemented measures to strengthen the capacity of the Quality Unit under the Greek Asylum Service, which included the development of guidance and workshops for both EASO and the Greek Asylum Service case officers. More concretely, this entailed the development of thematic guidance on safe countries of origin; the delivery of advice on standard operating procedures and templates for the border and the regular procedure; the quality review of asylum interviews and decisions in the islands, the promotion of the [EASO Quality Assurance Tool](#); and the development of a depository of good decisions.



Joel Carillet: iStock

In Italy, EASO supported the enhancement of the quality and standardisation of the registration of applications for international protection. Checklists and questionnaires for the collection of data on the quality of the registration were developed, based on procedural standards defined in the EASO [Guidance on asylum procedure: operational standards and indicators](#). Coaching missions for data collection were supported and tools for data analysis were elaborated. A report with the findings and recommendations was shared with the national authority in December 2020.

In Cyprus, quality support to operations involved the development of templates for asylum interviews and recommendation reports; the quality review of asylum interviews and decisions; the utilisation of the EASO Quality Assurance Tool; and the development of guidance for the determination of international protection processes conducted by EASO experts.

EASO advised the International Protection Agency in Malta on the set up of a Quality Unit and drafted a guidance note on minimum standards and conditions for assessing applicants originating from safe countries of origin. A practical guide on the identification and definition of material facts in the context of the risk assessment was drafted and shared with case officers, and a thematic workshop on this topic was organised.



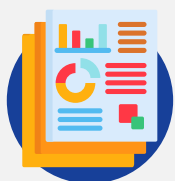
3. ASYLUM KNOWLEDGE



Ruslanshug: iStock

3.1

Country of origin information



17 COI reports and 32 COI query responses published on various countries of origin. All products can be viewed on the [EASO COI Portal](#).



41 country-specific webinars, briefings, strategic and methodological workshops organised.

COI supports decision-makers and constitutes evidence in international protection procedures.

In 2020, EASO further streamlined its COI production capacity, in cooperation with EU+ countries' COI teams. This resulted in the publication of 17 COI reports and 32 COI responses.

A substantial amount of COI material was developed to establish the factual base for EASO's country guidance developments on Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Another important part of the production was COI query responses in support of EASO's operations in frontline Member States. Examples include responses in relation to [Libya](#), [Mali](#), [Pakistan](#), [Sudan](#), and [South Sudan](#).

EASO continued to facilitate cooperation between EU+ countries in the field of COI through its network approach. Due to the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, EASO had to shift from in-person to online meetings and implemented a new virtual collaborative platform. This course of action allowed for continued cooperation in 11 country-specific and one strategic COI network, as planned.



© Mondalawry, Demonstrators in Iraq, 1 November 2019, url (CC BY-SA 4.0)

3.2

Medical country of origin information



With the finalisation of a four-year project, all MedCOI services have been fully transferred to EASO, and integrated into EASO's organisational structure and business process.



EASO established a team of specialised staff members to provide the required MedCOI services to EU+ countries.



1,217 responses to individual requests on the availability or accessibility of medical treatments were provided to EU+ countries.

The transfer of the MedCOI project to EASO was completed in 2020, providing for the exchange of healthcare information on COI between EASO and EU+ countries. The EASO MedCOI team was strengthened with the onboarding of a head of sector, and a full complement of researchers and medical experts.

This dedicated sector in EASO offers enhanced access to MedCOI to all EU+ country migration and asylum authorities, to support accurate and fair decisions in international protection and other migration procedures.



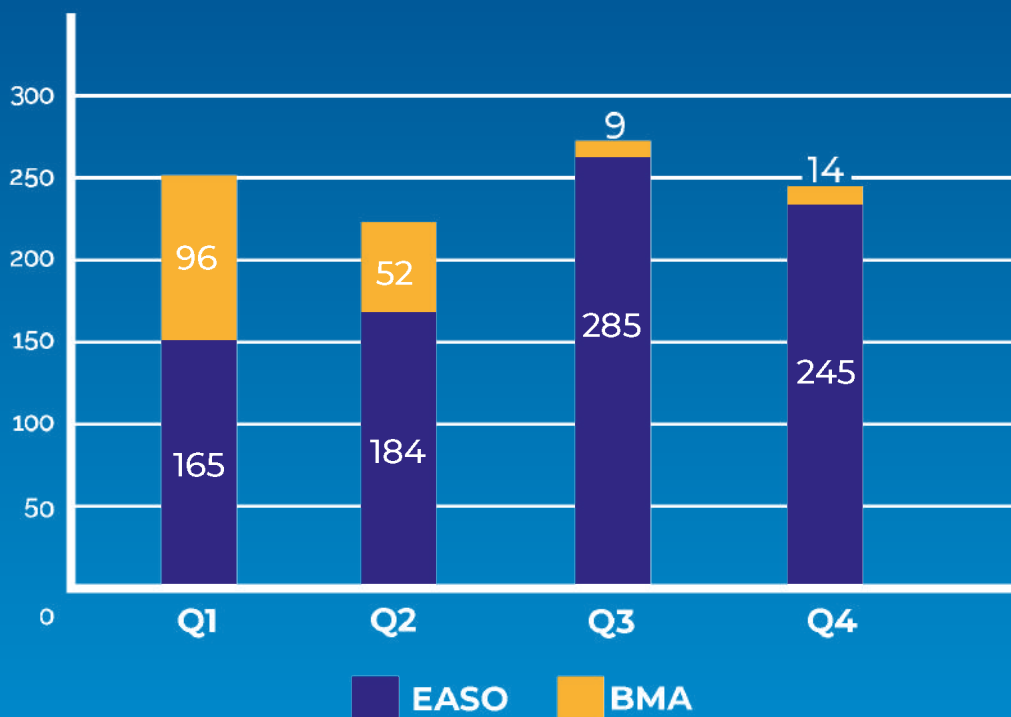
PeopleImages: iStock

EASO has a worldwide network of local medical experts providing information on the availability and accessibility of medical treatment possibilities in COI.

The MedCOI services are now subject to quality assurance, through activities such as validations, audits, and peer reviews. Training activities, workshops, and network meetings have been maintained despite challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In December 2020, EASO published a [Medical Country of Origin Information Report on the Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\)](#).

Responses on the availability of medical treatments in countries of origin



Production of availability responses, 2020: EASO gradually took over the responsibility from the Dutch BMA team for responding to requests from EU+ countries on the availability of treatments in countries of origin.

3.3

Country Guidance



The new 'Country Guidance: Syria' was published in September 2020.

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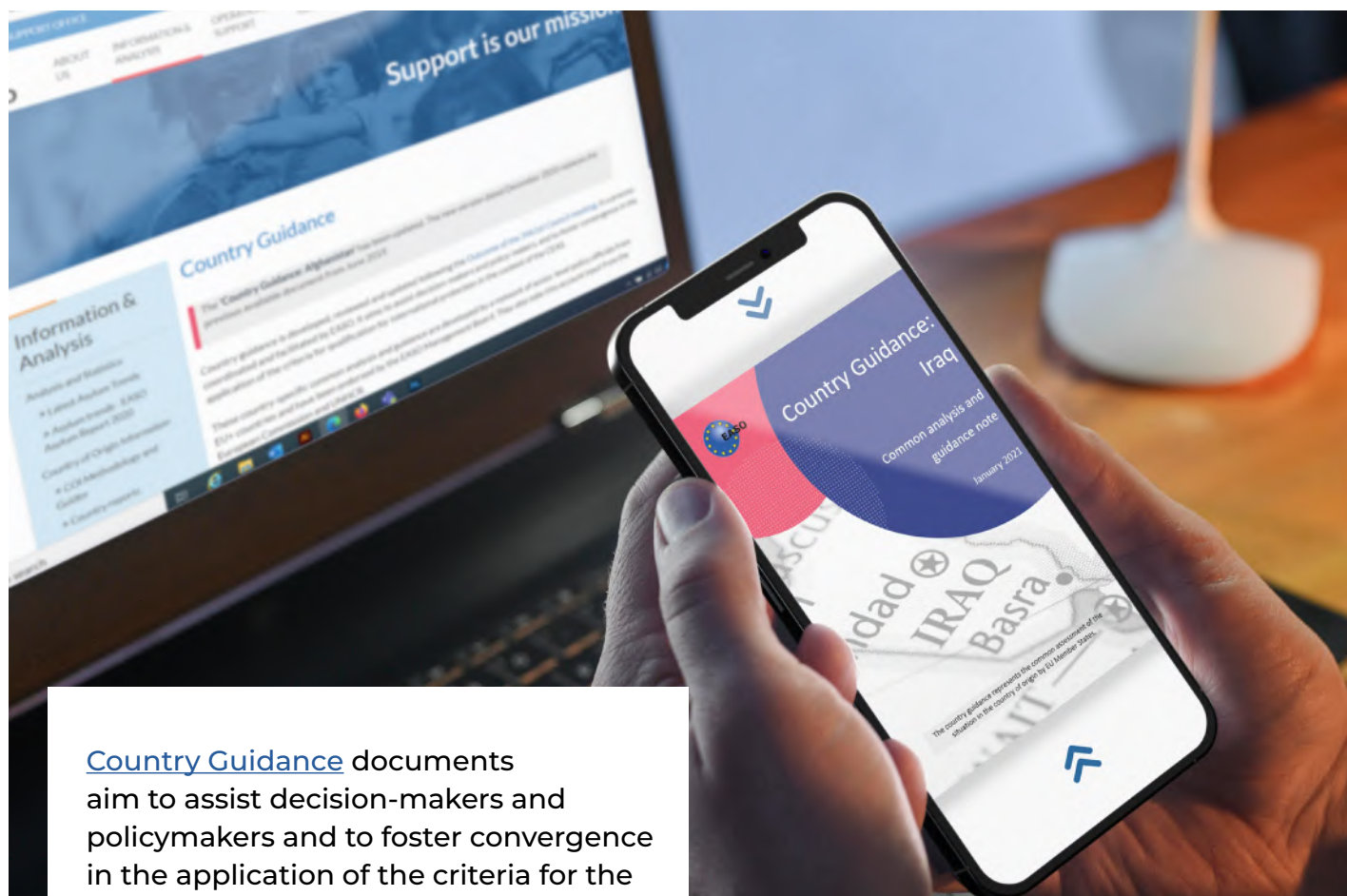
The update of the 'Country Guidance: Afghanistan' was agreed by the Country Guidance Network in December 2020. It was endorsed by the EASO Management Board and published shortly thereafter, in January 2021.

.....



The Country Guidance Network held its final meeting on the update of the 'Country Guidance: Iraq' in December 2020. The text was confirmed by the network in January 2021, endorsed by the Management Board, and published shortly thereafter.





Picture: Freepik Mockup

Country Guidance documents aim to assist decision-makers and policymakers and to foster convergence in the application of the criteria for the qualification for international protection in the context of the CEAS.

In its work on country guidance, EASO coordinates and facilitates Member States' efforts in jointly assessing the situation in main countries of origin. Each country guidance document examines all key elements concerning qualification for international protection in line with EU and international law.

In 2020, EASO's work on country guidance focused on the development of a common analysis and guidance note on Syria and on the update of existing documents concerning Afghanistan and Iraq.

The year kicked off with a thematic meeting on the topic of membership of a particular social group, organised jointly by the Asylum Processes Network and the Country Guidance Network. It was followed by the initiation of three country-specific processes concerning Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (see next page). Due to measures related to COVID-19, these processes took place almost entirely remotely, engaging stakeholders in online meetings and written consultations. The development of 'Country Guidance: Syria' was completed in September 2020. In December 2020, the Country Guidance Network held its final meetings on Afghanistan and Iraq.

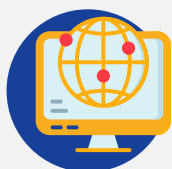
- **SYRIA**
New development
(March-September '20)
- **AFGHANISTAN**
Second Update
(September-December '20)
- **IRAQ**
First Update
(September 20'-January '21)

	Preparatory Surveys	Country Guidance Network video-conference meetings	Drafting Team Video-conference meetings	Written Consultations
	1	3	6* * plus 1 meeting in Malta	4
	1	2	4	2
	1	2	4	2

2020: Country guidance processes in numbers

3.4

EASO Data Hub



In the interest of stimulating an informed public discourse, EASO's [Latest Asylum Trends page](#), informing on EU+ country trends, was updated on a monthly basis throughout 2020, while the [2019 asylum situation overview](#) provided an end-user friendly snapshot of the key official asylum statistics for 2019 at country level.



EASO information exchanges on its operations were significantly overhauled to cover new support activities such as voluntary relocation, adhoc disembarkations, and reception.

The EASO Data Hub manages a wide range of strategic, operational, and open-source data and information, allowing EASO to monitor and analyse the asylum situation in EU+ countries, as well as operational support provided by EASO.



EASO more than doubled operational productivity in 2020



EASO Press Release, November 2020 providing key operational figures

3.5

Research programme on early warning and root causes



EASO further developed the use of machine learning for early warning and forecasting and the Push Factor Index to monitor migration drivers in countries of origin and transit.



First joint analysis on early warning and forecasting in the EU+ countries bringing together experts on the topic to predict the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on asylum-related migration.

EASO's research programme continued developing the use of machine learning to monitor the situation in countries of origin and transit.

By combining internet search terms with negative and disruptive events to model individual displacement events, EASO was able to forecast the arrival to EU+ countries, of populations seeking international protection. In 2020, EASO further developed the Push Factor Index, aggregating data on migration drivers in countries of origin.



In January 2020, EASO participated in the [International Forum on Migration Statistics](#) on data innovation and early warning, and in July, at the [Migration 4.0](#) event, EASO presented its work on Migration Forecasting.

At the [National EMN Conference 2020](#) held on 29 September 2020, EASO presented 'The EU's Efforts in Providing up-to-date Forecasts for Policy Making', which later featured as a topic in the journal on [Migration Policy Practice](#).

In 2020, EASO contributed to the IOM publication on [Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean](#) with a [chapter](#) on 'Using big data to estimate "push factors" in Africa', published in September.

The first 'Joint Analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on Early Warning and Forecasting asylum-related migration until the end of 2020', with the participation of EU+ experts, was disseminated in September to EU+ country experts, Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies, and the European Commission. This was followed, in October, by the 'Compendium of early warning and forecasting systems in the EU+', describing the systems in place in various EU+ countries.

The three tiers of data used by EASO to model and forecast asylum-related migration to the Member States, Norway and Switzerland

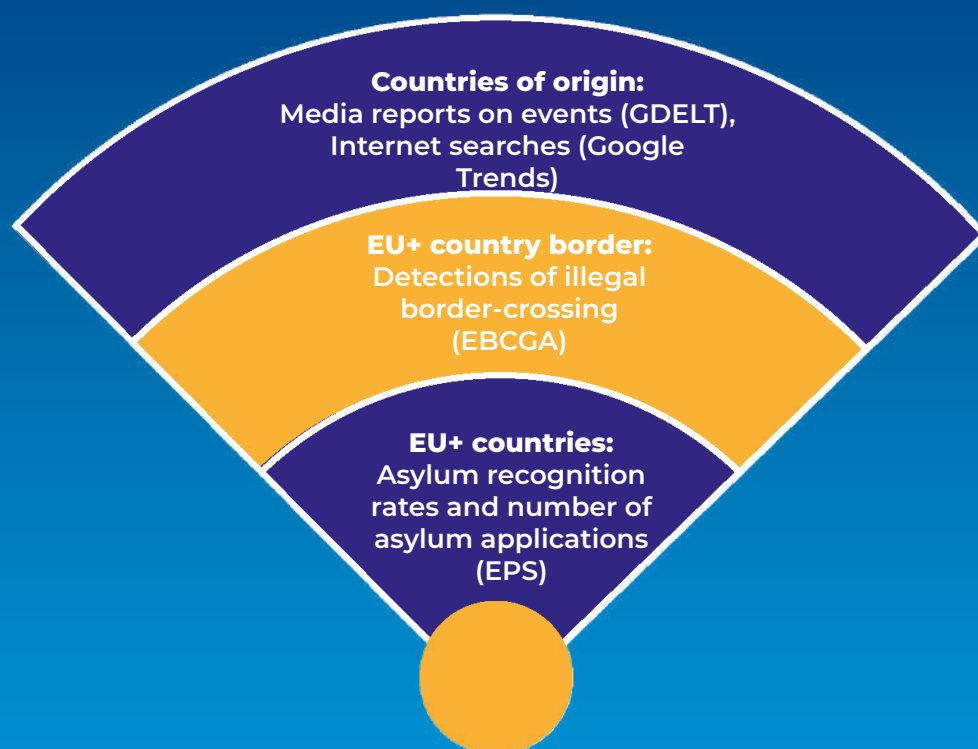


Image taken from the journal on *Migration Policy Practice* published in January 2021: 'Forecasting asylum-related migration to the European Union, and bridging the gap between evidence and policy'.

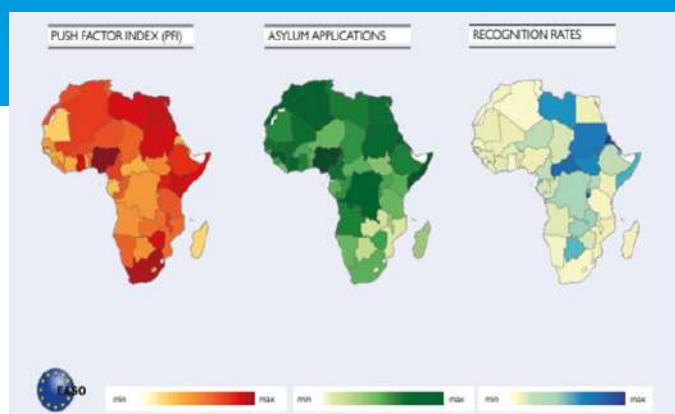


Image from the IOM chapter on 'Using big data to estimate "push factors" in Africa', published in September 2020, showing the EASO Push Factor Index, the number of asylum applications in the EU+ country by nationals of African countries, and the recognition rates for these nationals in 2019.

3.6

Strategic analysis



EASO publishes two Special Reports: Asylum Trends and COVID-19 (May and June), presenting up-to-date insights into asylum trends across the EU+ countries and situations in countries of origin in the context of a pandemic and emergency measures.



Strategic analyses on the asylum situation in EU+ countries and asylum-related migration from third countries prepared for a variety of stakeholders, including monthly analyses for EASO's Latest Asylum Trends page aimed at informing the general public.



Cooperation with partner institutions on different pertinent questions in the context of asylum related migration.



EASO strategic analysts have the task of sieving through all available data and information to fully understand the asylum situation and the implementation of the CEAS, and then deliver clear concise messages to a broad range of stakeholders. To encourage an evidence-informed public discourse and ensure that journalists, researchers, and citizens have up-to-date information, EASO continued publishing each month the widely read [latest asylum trends](#) and contributed to data analyses in the [EASO Asylum Report 2020](#).

To support evidence-informed policy making, EASO's team of experts also prepared reports on specific topics and analytical briefs for relevant stakeholders, including for officials in national asylum authorities and EU institutions. EASO analysts continue to

work together with their counterparts in national asylum authorities and partner EU agencies. An example of such collaboration is the EASO-Europol-Frontex chapter on 'An Integrated Asylum-Migration Picture', published in the Frontex [Annual Risk Report 2020](#).

Since 2020 was largely affected by COVID-19 and related emergency measures implemented in EU+ countries and third countries, EASO released two special reports specifically dealing with Asylum Trends and COVID-19, in [May](#) and [June](#) (issue 2). These reports provide the latest asylum trends in EU+ countries in a changed context, along with analyses of countries of origin on topics such as risk factors, pandemic effects on push and pull factors, and food insecurity, amongst others.

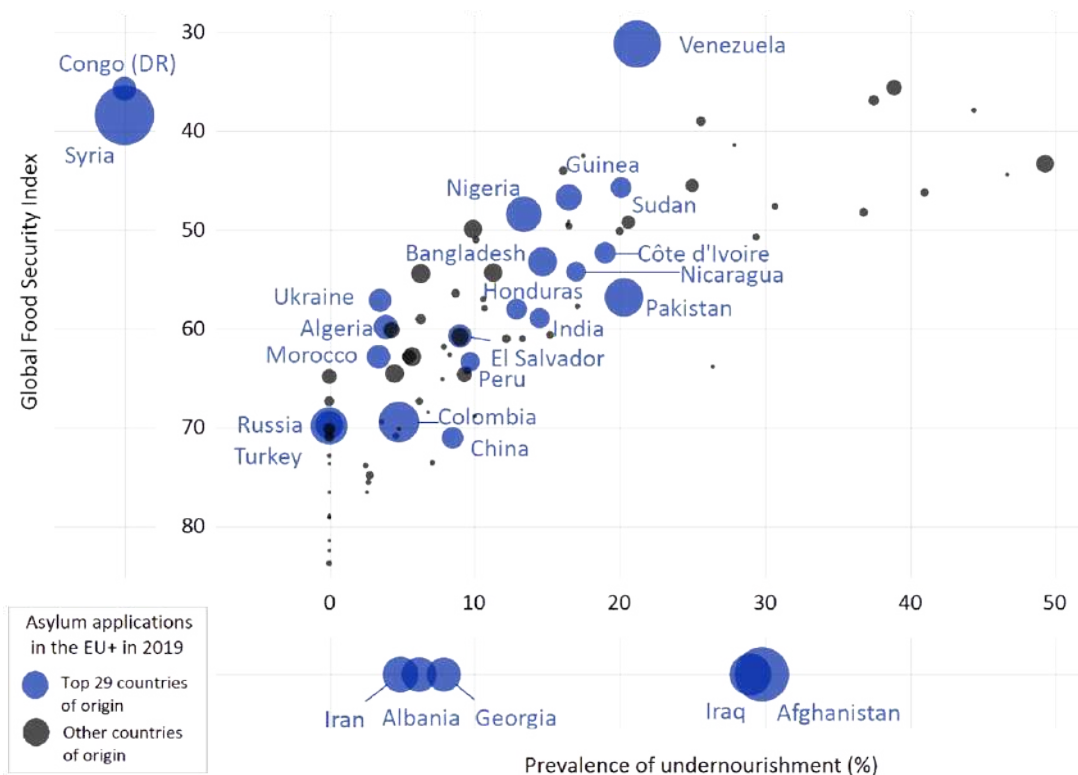


Figure from EASO Special Report II: Asylum Trends and COVID-19, published in June 2020, showing the relationship between food insecurity (Global Food Security Index 2019 edition, available via The Economist Intelligence Unit, shown on the vertical axis), prevalence of undernourishment (available via the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, shown on the horizontal axis) and asylum applications in EU+ countries (EASO data, shown in the bubble size) for top countries of origin.

3.7

Information and documentation system



A new section on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on asylum and reception systems was introduced in March 2020 and updated daily in the Information and documentation system (IDS). The information covered policies and practices adopted by EU+ countries to mitigate the spread of the virus.



The first EASO Newsletter on Asylum Case Law was published in December 2020, covering main jurisprudence between September and November 2020.



Training sessions were provided to the IDS Query Network in preparation for the launch of the new, automated EASO Query System.



cloverphoto: iStock

The IDS offers a comprehensive overview of asylum policies and practices in 30 EU+ countries, with accurate and comparable descriptions of key stages of the asylum procedure. The content for each country was systematically updated by EASO's Information and Analysis Sector using referenced sources. The information was reviewed and validated by Member States. The IDS is currently accessible to registered users from 99 asylum authorities.

In 2020, a new 'Coffee Briefing' format was established to discuss specific topics proposed by the IDS Advisory Group.

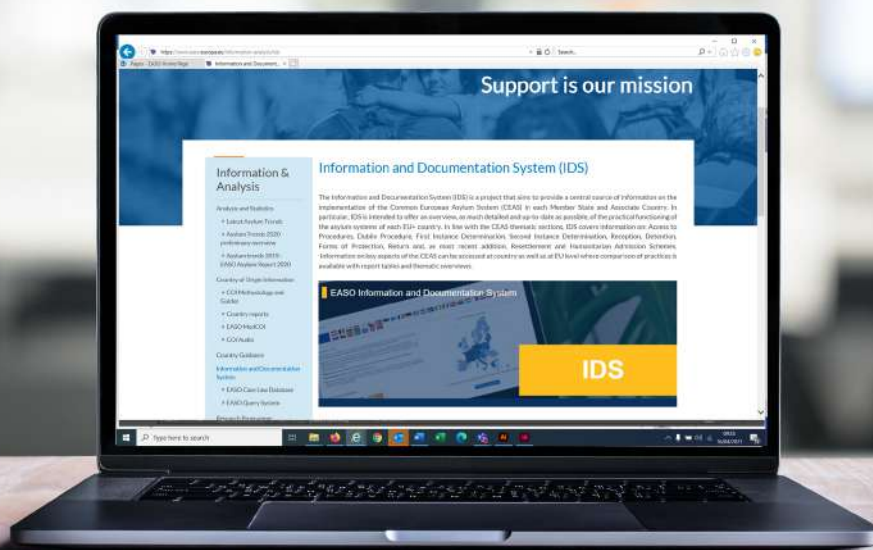
A new section to map asylum and reception practices, policies, and legislation during the COVID-19 pandemic was introduced in March 2020, along with a series of three reports outlining emergency measures adopted by EU+ countries. In addition, a new page on the application of the *non-refoulement* principle was developed in the IDS.



Approximately 350 new jurisprudence items were published in the [EASO Case Law Database](#) in 2020. In addition, the first newsletter covering the main decisions from September to November 2020 was issued.



In 2020, the preparatory work for the launch of the new EASO Query Portal continued. New functionalities to automate the procedure of requesting and replying to a query were developed. Training sessions on the use of the tool were also delivered to experts involved in managing policy-related queries.



3.8

EASO Asylum Report



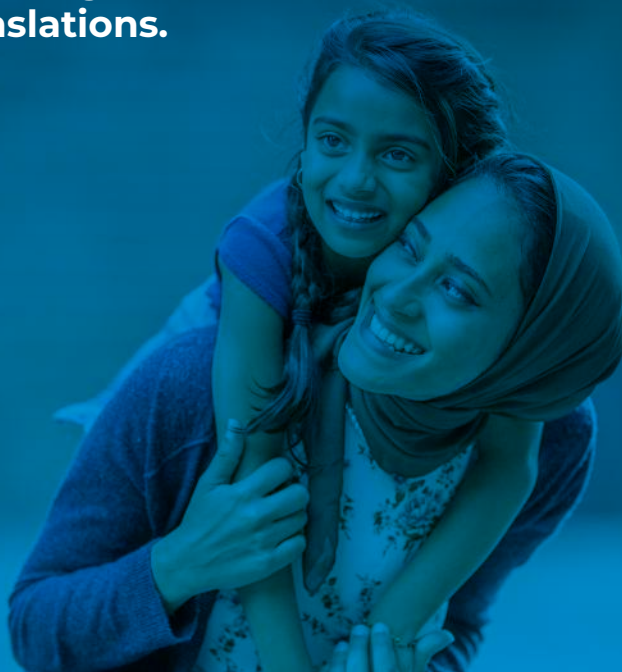
The online version of the EASO Asylum Report 2020 was consulted by a total of 11,404 readers from across the world.



Over 750 sources were consulted for the drafting of the report and included in a categorised bibliography.



For the first time, the Executive Summary was translated into five non-EU languages, resulting in a total of 29 available translations.

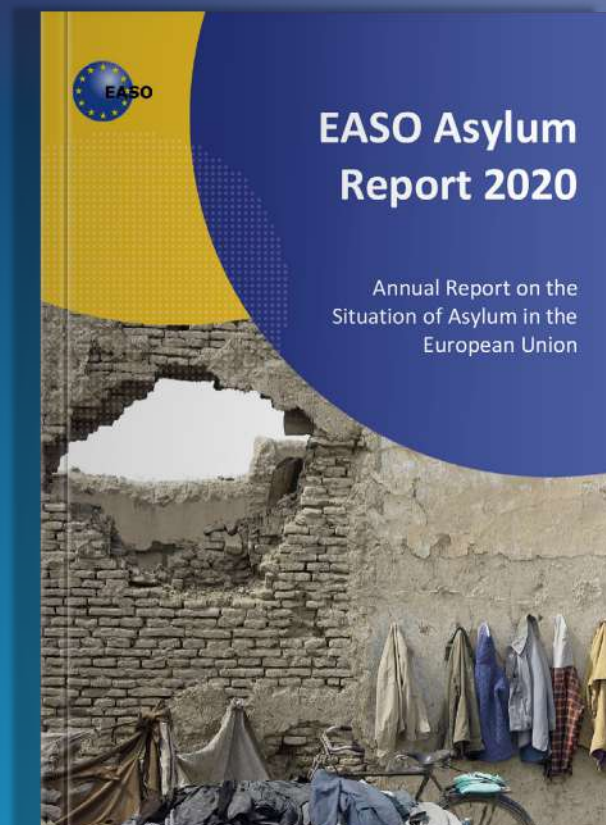


The [EASO Asylum Report 2020](#) was adopted by EASO's Management Board in June 2020 and launched during an [online event](#) with the participation of the European Commissioner for Home Affairs.

The report provides a comprehensive overview of developments in asylum and reception at the European and national levels in 2019. Based on various sources from key partners, including UNHCR, the European Migration Network (EMN), academia, think tanks, and 26 different civil society organisations, the report analyses changes in legislation, policies, practices, data trends, and jurisprudence in EU+ countries

The [digital version](#) of the report can also be consulted online in HTML, an online reader, or PDF. The executive summary of the main findings is available in 24 EU languages and, for the first time, in five non-European languages.

The report is accompanied by a new [database](#), where the main legislative, institutional, and policy developments in the EU+ countries can be consulted. Information can be searched by country, year, type of development and each asylum procedure.



4. ASYLUM SUPPORT



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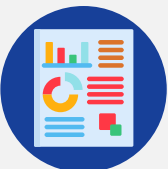
4.1 Asylum processes



Quick response to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic through practical cooperation meetings on how personal interviews can be conducted remotely, which resulted in the publication of practical recommendations.



For the first time, EASO addressed the topic of the role of determining authorities in the litigation process during a thematic meeting of the Asylum Processes Network. This led to fruitful discussions on possible interactions and synergies between the first and second instances and the legal counsellors.



The EASO Guidance on membership of a particular social group, published in March 2020, laid out the different components of this ground for international protection as defined in the recast qualification directive. This provided a clear structure for the legal analysis of this ground during the examination process.

Three thematic meetings were organised with the EASO Asylum Processes Network in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions focused on how personal interviews can be conducted remotely, and on ways to facilitate remote and/or online registration of applicants for international protection. In the

follow-up to these discussions, two complementary EASO practical recommendations were published. The [EASO Practical recommendations on conducting the personal interview remotely](#) (May 2020) delivers guidance for practical and technical arrangements, ensuring security and confidentiality, legal considerations, quality assurance, and information on the interviewing of vulnerable applicants. EASO [Practical recommendations on conducting remote/online registration \(lodging\)](#) (June 2020) provides recommendations on how to increase efficiency through the introduction of online/IT elements while respecting procedural safeguards.

The [EASO Practical guide on the use of country-of-origin information by case officers for the examination of asylum applications](#) was published in December 2020. The guide offers case officers useful information for their daily work on COI, including quality standards, where to find COI, how to formulate research questions, and how to integrate COI into the steps of the examination process.

Following the thematic meeting on the topic of membership of a particular social group on 21 and 22 January 2020, the [EASO Guidance on membership of a particular social group](#) was published in May 2020, providing guidance on the legal analysis. This was complemented with practical illustrations of how the analysis can be applied to some commonly encountered profiles.

Two thematic meetings were organised on core aspects of the asylum procedure. A meeting on the

management of litigation processes by determining authorities (1 - 2 October 2020) discussed practices of the determining authority on handling litigation at the appeal stage, the role of litigation officers in the appeal, flow-back of jurisprudence into the decision-making processes of the first instance, and coordination between first and second instance. A meeting on the topic of religious persecution (12-13 November 2020) explored the complexity of religion and the credibility assessment of claims based on religion. Particular attention was given to conversion, religious minorities, atheism, and the link between religious persecution and gender.

The EASO Exclusion Network organised a meeting on the detection of potential

exclusion cases (22 - 23 September). The participants discussed ways to improve the organisation of the screening process, the sources of information for detection and the available guidance at national level. To further support this process, in July 2020, EASO issued a Screening Tool for detecting potential exclusion cases for a specific country or origin for use by the asylum authorities.

A Quality Matrix report on content of protection was shared with the asylum administrations in May 2020. An update of the Quality Matrix report on the personal interview was shared in September 2020 providing an overview of national guidance, policies, and practices in place in EU+ countries on these matters.



JannHuizenga: iStock

4.2 Thematic cooperation

In accordance with its overall objective to support Member States in enhancing their capacity to implement the CEAS and to achieve convergence in the application of common standards, EASO continued to support EU+ countries' practical cooperation through its Networks of Reception Authorities, Heads of Dublin Units and Vulnerability Experts (VEN). Drawing on the priorities for 2020, EASO published a number of practical tools to support the daily work of vulnerability, reception and Dublin officers: two videos on age assessment and registration of persons with special needs; a report on the mental health of applicants for international protection in Europe; five query reports on COVID-19 related responses in reception; guidance on the Dublin procedure; additional recommendations on Dublin transfers during the COVID-19 pandemic; recommendations on the use of DubliNet; and a report on information provision in the Dublin procedure.

In 2020, practical cooperation activities were encouraged through the organisation of thematic meetings on various topics, including: female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/cutting) and child marriage; sexual orientation and gender identity; mental health; reception capacity management and contingency planning; the impact of COVID-19 in reception; safely conducting Dublin transfers during COVID-19; good practices in organising Dublin transfers; DubliNet and Dublin technical

systems. Thematic sessions on current issues of importance in the field of Dublin focused on: Dublin aspects of relocation of UAM applicants from Greece; information provision in the Dublin procedure; Dublin liaisons; and contingency planning for Dublin units. The thematic meetings served to identify good practices and common challenges, and to streamline efforts for improvement across EU+ countries.

Quarterly periodic reports were shared with the networks of Reception Authorities, Dublin Units, and Vulnerability Experts, providing updates on changes in legislation, case law, organisational matters, and data analysis in the area of reception, vulnerability, and the implementation of the Dublin III Regulation.



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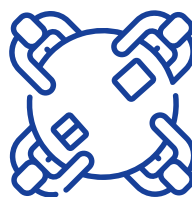
EASO Vulnerability Experts Network



Two practical tools were produced. The EASO [video animation on Age Assessment for Children](#) equipping national authorities with a visual tool to use with child and youth applicants. The tool provides these applicants with information on age assessment and what to expect when asked to undergo an age assessment procedure. The EASO [video animation on Registration of Persons with Special Needs](#) points to basic safeguards and guarantees that are to be provided during registration. The tool is to be used for information sharing purposes, as well as during training courses as a discussion trigger with staff working for asylum authorities



EASO published a mapping report on the [Mental health of applicants for international protection in Europe](#) (July 2020). The report is part of EASO's efforts to support EU+ countries in enhancing their identification of and response to mental health concerns of applicants for international protection in the reception context and the asylum procedure. It provides an evidence base for the development of an EASO tool on psycho-social programming in asylum and reception settings.



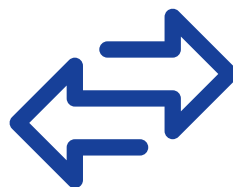
EASO supported discussions among EU+ countries by facilitating a series of webinars on child marriage and FGM/cutting, and on applicants with diverse sexual orientations and gender identity. Discussions identified common challenges and good practices to ensure that applications are treated individually, objectively, and impartially.



EASO Network of Dublin Units



EASO organised a series of online information sessions on current issues of importance in the field of Dublin. This included the Dublin aspects of relocation of UAMs from Greece, information provision in the Dublin procedure, Dublin liaison officers, DubliNet and Dublin technical systems.



EASO supported EU+ countries in sharing information and identifying challenges and recommendations on the operational and technical use of DubliNet; and recommendations for conducting Dublin transfers during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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EASO Network of Reception Authorities



The [EASO Strategy on Reception](#) reflects EASO's vision on the general framework within which the agency will develop its reception support to EU+ countries and in the external dimension of the CEAS (following several rounds of consultation, the Strategy was adopted by the EASO Management Board in March 2021).



Continuous technical advice was delivered in relation to EASO operational activities in the field of reception, including vulnerability.

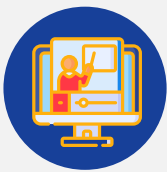


Through a series of recurrent queries and a dedicated thematic meeting, EASO consulted the Network of Reception Authorities on challenges encountered, good practices, and lessons learned in reception in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This covered, testing; the prevention of coronavirus infections in collective reception facilities; the improvement of the mental wellbeing of residents; new reception accommodation or self-isolation facilities for applicants; and 'exit strategies' in reception.



4.3

Cooperation with members of the courts and tribunals



Successful transformation of EASO professional development activities for members of courts and tribunals into online webinars, in response to the pandemic and related restrictions.



First meeting of the EASO Judicial Trainers' Pool, bringing together 40 of its members from 14 EU+ countries.



New judicial analysis and compilation of jurisprudence addressing the topic of vulnerability in the context of applications for international protection.

EASO develops judicial professional development materials and activities for members of courts and tribunals, which aims at fostering the effective and consistent implementation of the CEAS. To this end, EASO is responsible for the coordination of the Courts and Tribunals Network. EASO also produces high-quality tools designed to support judicial practitioners in their daily tasks and to conduct professional development activities, with the overall aim of stimulating dialogue with and between judicial stakeholders.

EASO continued to advance the Professional Development Series (PDS) in 2020, under the terms of a contract concluded with the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges:



- ◆ Publication of judicial analysis and related judicial trainers' guidance note on [Reception of applicants for international protection](#).
- ◆ Publication of judicial analysis, the compilation of jurisprudence and related judicial trainers' guidance note on [Exclusion from international protection, 2nd edition](#).
- ◆ Completion of the development of judicial analysis, the compilation of jurisprudence, and related judicial trainers' guidance note on [Vulnerability in the context of applications for international protection](#).

EASO continued to support the professional development of members of courts and tribunals in the field of international protection despite the COVID-19 outbreak by switching to an online format from March 2020 onwards.



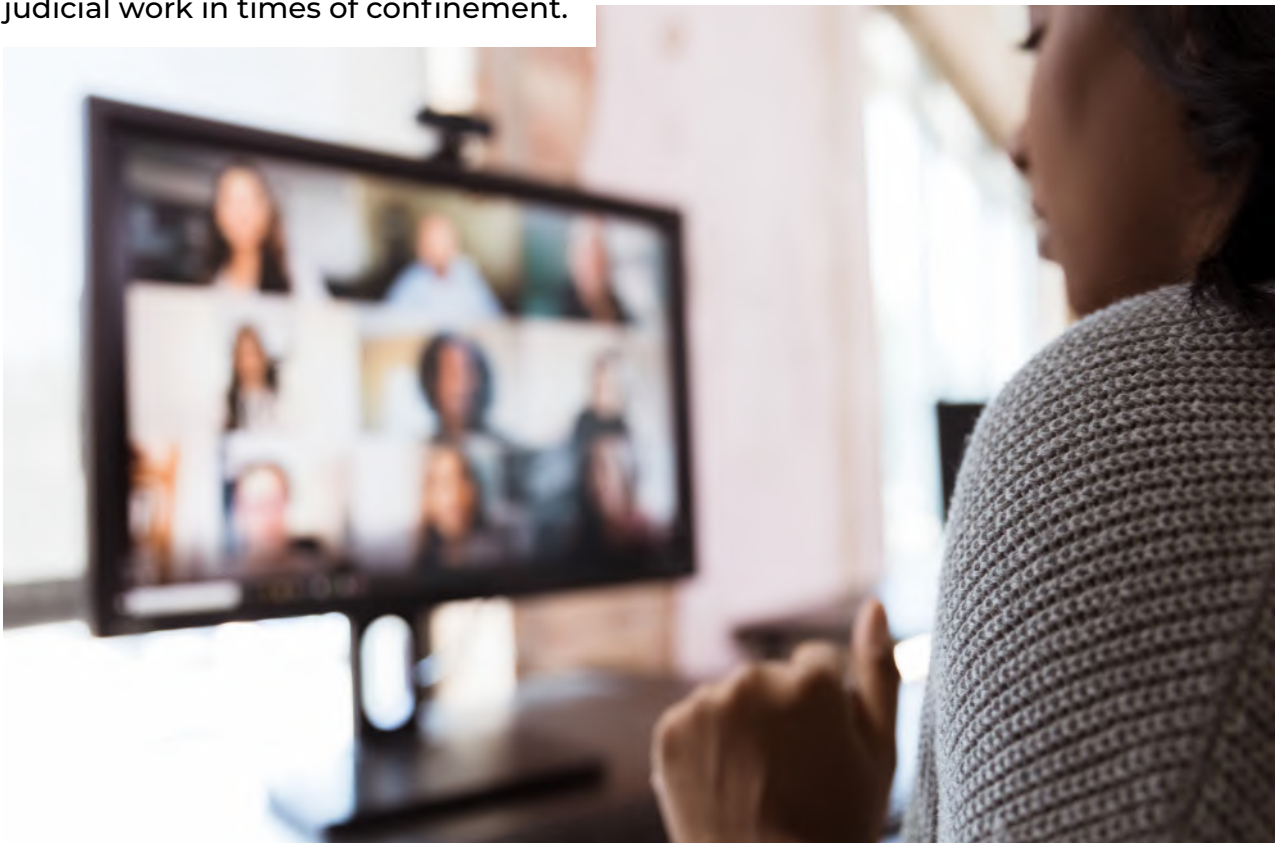
- ◆ A total of 218 participants took part in eight professional development workshops, five of them organised remotely (Professional Development Webinar Series), including focused presentations by judicial trainers, interactive exercises, and case studies. Among them was the first webinar developed by EASO jointly with the European Judicial Training Network.

To identify common challenges and exchange good practices, EASO also organised on 8 May 2020 a thematic meeting gathering 24 judges from the EU+ 'countries and beyond on the organisation of court hearings' and judicial work in times of confinement.



- ◆ On 2 July 2020, the EASO Network of Courts and Tribunals held an online meeting to take stock of the new remote activities designed for members of courts and tribunals. Priorities for 2020 and beyond were also discussed in light of COVID-19 developments.

On 1 December 2020, EASO organised the first meeting of the EASO Judicial Trainers' Pool, bringing together 40 judicial trainers from 14 EU+ countries. EASO discussed with participants the impact of the PDS on national judicial training as well as innovative techniques for supporting the quality and outreach of EASO professional development activities



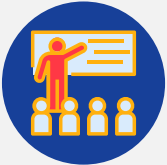
5. TRAINING



Drazen Zigic: iStock

5.1

EASO Training curriculum



Participation in the [EASO Training Curriculum](#) increased by 5 % in 2020 compared to 2019.



Overall, 4,276 individuals followed the EASO Training Curriculum in 2020, representing a total of 6,967 participations⁴, of which 79 % were EU+ countries officials, 17 % EASO staff and 4 % third-country nationals.



39 train-the-trainer sessions were delivered (545 participations) together with 467 national and other training sessions (6,236 participations).

The COVID-19 pandemic affected various facets of EASO's training activities. Around mid-March 2020, all face-to-face training activities were suspended as a mitigating measure. EASO proceeded to perform a rapid assessment and testing of remote technical solutions and features to support the delivery of virtual synchronous training in the form of webinars. This included the development of a new trainer's manual, along with technical guidelines for both trainers and trainees.

Despite the difficulties and varying conditions arising from the adaptation from face-to-face to the virtual context,

the training experience amongst participants remained highly positive (84 % satisfaction rate).

Confirming the trend of previous years, participation was predominantly in the Core modules (Inclusion, Interview Techniques, Evidence Assessment) for asylum case officers (51 % of participations in 2020). This was followed by participation in the Reception module (434; -7 % vs 2019) and modules with a focus on Persons with Special Needs (Interviewing Vulnerable Persons) (412; +46 %), Gender, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation (409; +10 %), Interviewing Children (328; -13 %) and Trafficking in Human Beings (249; +37 %).

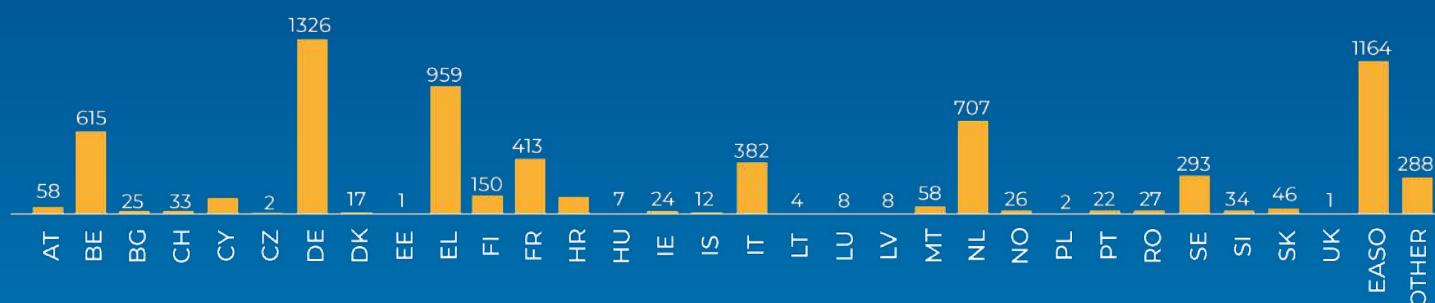


New modules were introduced in 2020 covering: Reception of vulnerable persons Block A and Block B; Identification of potential exclusion cases; and Registration of applications for international protection.

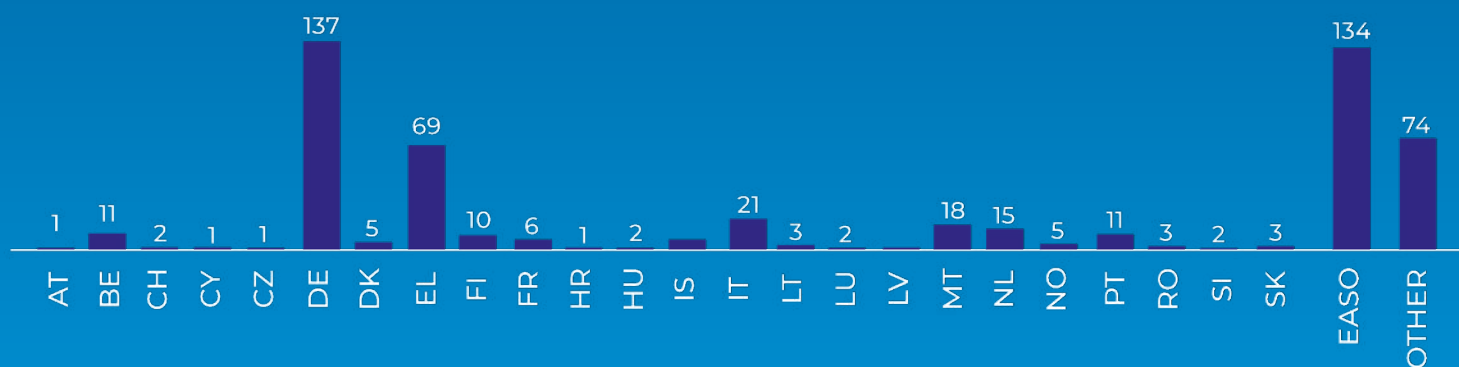
The pandemic did not significantly impact the use of the EASO Training Curriculum at the national level. France (+40 %), followed by Belgium (+13 %) and Greece (+7 %), increased their use of the EASO training curriculum modules, whereas Finland (-7 %), Germany (-13 %), the Netherlands (-16 %), Italy (-20 %), and Sweden (-31 %) followed less modules.

⁴- One individual may attend several training sessions.

Participations in EASO Training Curriculum modules in 2020

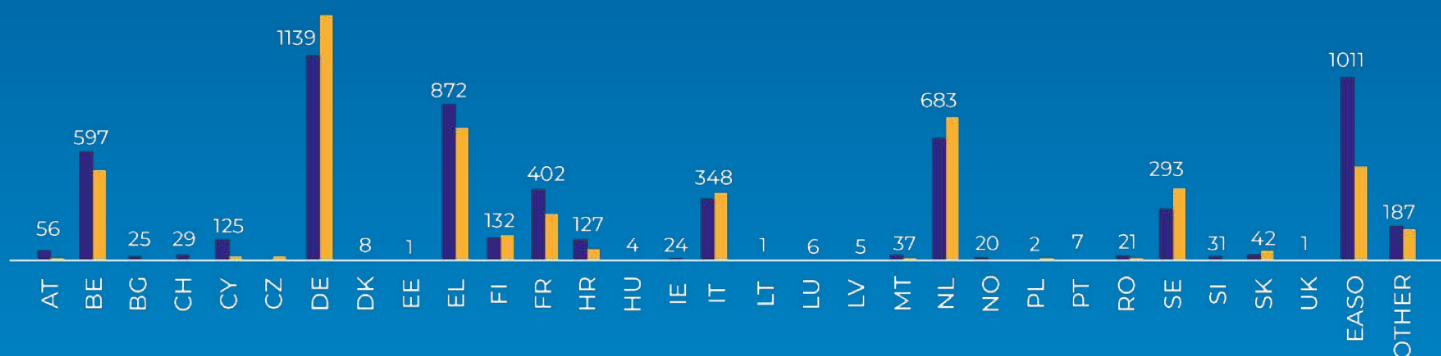


Participations in EASO Curriculum: train-the-trainer sessions in 2020



Number of participations in national and other sessions, 2020 vs. 2019

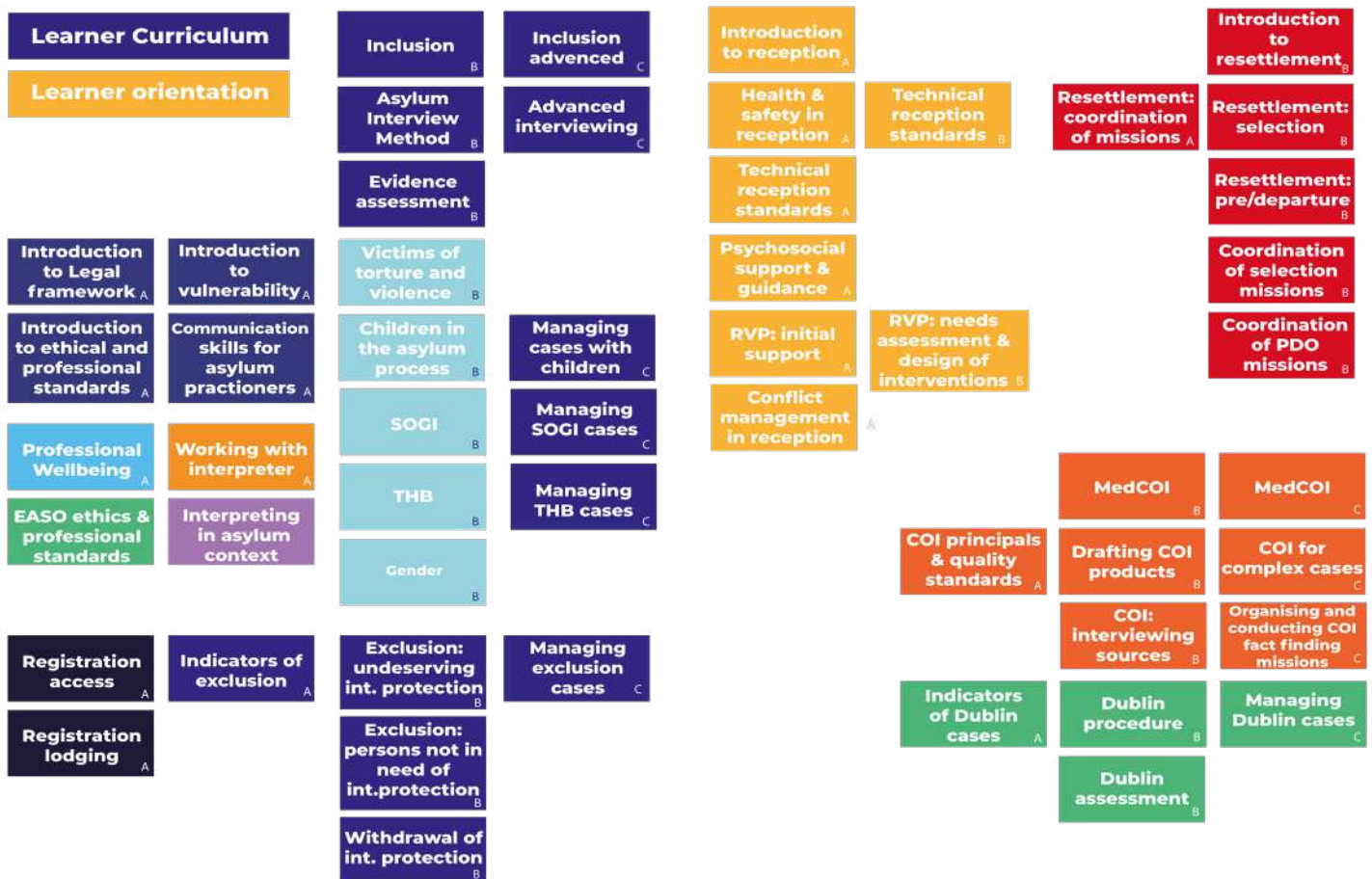
■ 2020 ■ 2019



Expanding the EASO Training Curriculum

In 2020, EASO continued to consolidate and restructure its training curriculum to cover more modules for officials working in the field of asylum and reception. This new structure involves the establishment of clear learning

outcomes aligned with the European Sectoral Qualifications Framework (ESQF) and ensures that learning is relevant to the duties and tasks of asylum and reception officials.



Four training modules were completed in 2020 as part of the restructuring and consolidation process:

- ◆ Reception of vulnerable persons: identification of vulnerability and provision of initial support.
- ◆ Reception of vulnerable persons: needs assessment and design of interventions.
- ◆ Identification of potential exclusion cases.
- ◆ Registration of applications for international protection.

The upgrading processes of the training modules on Evidence Assessment and the modules on the Application of the exclusion clauses to persons undeserving international protection (formerly 'Exclusion') were finalised. The EASO Training Reference Group contributed to the design, development, and upgrading of the processes through consultations and a review of the training material.

The restructuring of the training modules on Inclusion, Asylum Interview Method (formerly 'Interviewing Techniques'), and Evidence Assessment was initiated in 2020, in preparation for the launch of certified training sessions in 2021.



5.2

Certification and accreditation



Validation of occupational and educational standards for asylum officials.



EASO Training Needs Assessment Tool completed and piloted.



Quality enhancement in relation to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

Validation of occupational and educational standards for asylum officials

Significant achievements on the ESQF were registered in 2020.

- ◆ Finalisation of the ESQF. The process of validating the ESQF, in particular, the occupational and educational standards for asylum and reception officials, by asylum and reception authorities in the EU+ countries (launched in 2019) was undertaken by a reference group composed of the UNHCR, the Fundamental Rights Agency, and Frontex, in 2020. The input provided was analysed by the Certification and Accreditation Working Group, who was involved throughout the process, thereby finalising the ESQF.

- ◆ Translation of the ESQF. The occupational and the educational standards for asylum and reception officials were translated into all EU languages.
- ◆ Development of ESQF principles and terminology. A document supporting the ESQF users in understanding the structure of the matrices of occupational and educational standards and clarifying the meaning of the terminology was developed. This document was translated into all EU languages.
- ◆ Production of an ESQF information video. The video explains what the ESQF is and how and why it has been developed. The video also shows how occupational and educational standards for asylum and reception officials are linked and demonstrates the application of the ESQF in designing and developing relevant training and in setting up learning paths for asylum and reception officials.
- ◆ Preparation of the ESQF information package. An information package and toolkit are being prepared to offer guidance to the EU+ countries in the application of the framework in their training environment.

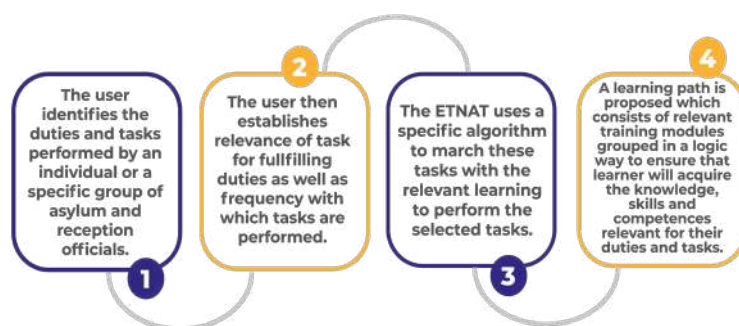
EASO Training Needs Assessment Tool completed and piloted

The ESQF has been used to build an interactive and user-friendly Training Needs and Assessment Tool (ETNAT). The tasks performed by asylum and

reception officials and the learning needed to carry out the tasks effectively in line with the CEAS constitute the algorithm of the EASO ETNAT.

The objective of the ETNAT is twofold: it ensures that asylum and reception officials can perform their tasks by providing tailor-made learning paths; and helps the administrations of EU+ countries to identify gaps in training required by asylum and reception officials to perform their tasks efficiently, consistently, and in line with CEAS implementation.

ETNAT- Four steps to establish a fit-for-purpose learning path



Quality enhancement in relation to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance

During 2020, EASO worked extensively with national contact points (NCPs) and with the Certification and Accreditation Working Group to further define and develop the quality assurance system for EASO training activities. The result of this work is a draft Training Quality Assurance Framework (TQAF) which outlines the main guiding principles of this quality assurance system. The TQAF is intended to ensure full alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area,

whilst taking into consideration EASO's specific mandate and mission.

In parallel, EASO devoted considerable efforts to developing detailed processes to implement the TQAF in day-to-day training activities, as well as in its contacts with learners and external stakeholders. These detailed rules are being compiled into a Training Quality Assurance Handbook (TQAH), which will be kept under review and adapted in the light of lessons learned, particularly in the initial stages of implementation.

EASO has also developed a Transition Plan to lay out in detail the steps needed to implement the TQAF and the TQAH. This Transition Plan includes a communication plan to ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed and are supported throughout the process. In the next year, EASO will focus on the formalisation of the TQAF and the TQAH, as well as the gradual implementation of the main building blocks of this enhanced quality assurance system.



5.3

e-Learning and client relations management



Roll out and support to e-learning tools and modalities to effectively replace face-to-face training with virtual sessions in train-the-trainer programmes and operational training.



Full upgrade and revamping of the EASO Training Platform.



Over 8,500 enrolments in online training sessions processed and supported, whilst the total number of unique registered users to the EASO Learning Management System exceeded 14,000.

2020 was a particularly difficult year globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented challenges brought about by the introduction of restrictive measures. In the area of training delivery, this created a pressing need to identify and utilise new products and processes to support the implementation of the EASO Training Curriculum, creating a growing need for e-learning modalities for training.

Considering the increasing demand for online training following the interruption of face-to-face sessions, EASO performed a rapid assessment and testing of remote technical

solutions and features to support the delivery of virtual synchronous training. From March to June 2020, EASO produced a training package containing important guidelines for the virtual facilitation of webinars, aimed at in-house and external trainers, and organised a series of training sessions for staff.

During 2020, EASO also intensified efforts towards improving its main online platform for the EASO Training Curriculum - the EASO Learning Management System (LMS). More specifically, to improve efficiency, security, and flexibility, the LMS was onboarded to EASO's ICT infrastructure.

Furthermore, EASO completed and launched two important open procurement procedures involving the Helpdesk and Maintenance Services of the LMS and the development of e-learning content (content authoring services). Moreover, during the last quarter of the year, EASO kick-started a major upgrade of its Training

Registration System aimed at training NCPs in EU+ countries and EASO internal users, further automatising the administrative processes of training participation.

5.4 Other training support

EASO provided Continuing Professional Development for experienced asylum and reception officials, by ensuring that officials are furnished with the latest upgrades and updates to training modules.

In this framework, in 2020, EASO delivered seven training sessions qualified as Continuing Professional Development, with a focus on Remote Personal Interviews, as well as Communication and information provision for applicants for international protection.



FG Trade: iStock

6. HORIZONTAL ACTIVITIES



6.1 Cooperation with European and international partners



A Hosting Arrangement between EASO and Greece was signed in January 2020. This Hosting Arrangement, together with the Hosting Arrangement between EASO and Cyprus (signed in September 2019) was ratified and entered into force in 2020.



On 15 September 2020, EASO and the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA) signed a [Cooperation Plan](#) for the period 2020-2022. Under the overarching framework of the 2014 Working Arrangement between EASO and eu-LISA, the Cooperation Plan operationalises joint activities between EASO and eu-LISA for this period.



In November 2020, an Exchange of Letters was completed between EASO and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), reiterating their mutual commitment towards close cooperation and setting out a joint framework to structure cooperation in matters of common interest.

Throughout 2020, EASO continued to strengthen relations with its stakeholders at both political and technical levels. EASO's engagements covered all aspects of its mandate, including both the internal and the external dimensions.

To this end, EASO actively contributed to debates held in the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, and the European Commission. Bilateral discussions took place, including with Member State authorities, enabling the agency to promote its work and raise awareness of challenges encountered. EASO also maintained close coordination with relevant stakeholders across the implementation of its core business activities.

EASO actively participated in several other meetings and events, including conferences and seminars organised by different entities on subjects related to EASO's mandate. Cooperation with the EMN also continued.



Active engagement was maintained with other EU agencies through the sharing of best practices within JHA Agencies Network and the EU Agencies Network. EASO continued to collaborate with other JHA agencies through consultations on and contributions to documents, products, and joint reports.

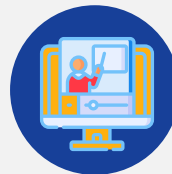
Continued engagement with international organisations (UNHCR, IOM, IGC, ICMPD) was also maintained. In particular, regular meetings and exchange of information between the UNHCR's liaison office and EASO's headquarters in Malta were ensured. An Exchange of Letters was concluded with the ICMPD, following consultations with the European Commission.

EASO also continued to engage with third countries (see Section 1.6). Discussions with the European External Action Service on a Working Arrangement and Administrative Arrangements for co-location in two EU Delegations were advanced.

6.2 Consultative Forum and civil society

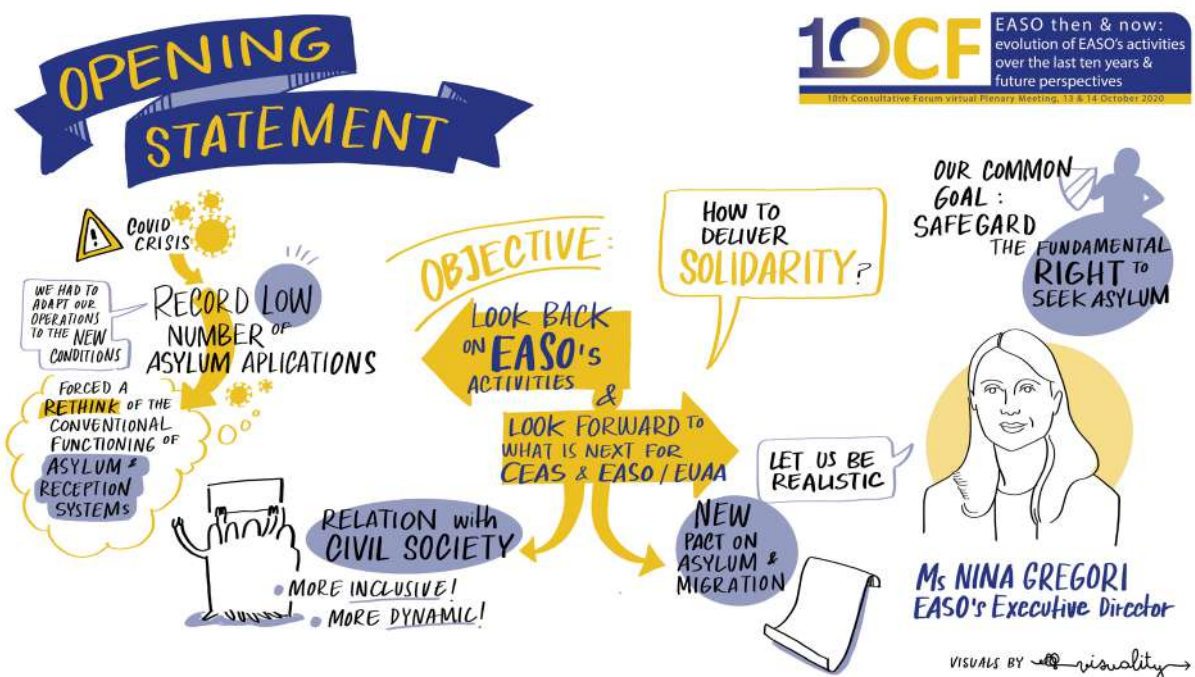


Thematic webinar on the impact of COVID-19 on asylum in the EU hosted on 23 July 2020.



10th Edition of the EASO Consultative Forum online plenary meeting on 'EASO then and now: Evolution of EASO's activities over the last ten years and future perspectives' hosted on 13 and 14 October 2020.

EASO continued to engage in close dialogue with civil society through its Consultative Forum, EASO's civil society platform.



The Forum held two online meetings in 2020. A [thematic webinar](#) was organised in July on the impact of COVID-19 on asylum in the EU, with more than 80 civil society organisations (CSOs) participating. The [10th edition of the annual plenary meeting](#) was subsequently organised online in October 2020, gathering around 200 participants.

CSOs further provided 244 contributions in response to consultations launched by EASO on key documents, including the 2018 EASO Annual Report on the situation of Asylum; the EASO 2021 Work Programme; the 2019 Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum; the EASO Annual General Report 2019; the Survey on the Consultative Forum plenary meeting 2020; as well as input to the early drafting phase of the Annual Asylum Report 2020.

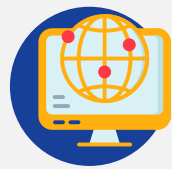
Numerous CSOs also continued to participate directly in various EASO meetings and activities, for example through the reference groups for training and practical tools, via their membership in the Vulnerability Expert Network, and their expert participation and contributions to different COI meetings, workshops, conferences, as well as COI products and reports.



6.3 Communication and events



EASO's social media presence continued to grow. A notable increase was registered in social media followers: +42 % percentage change on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube, and a +113 % percentage change in the monthly average reach.



EASO recorded a doubling in its press audience reach for a third consecutive year. The reach of EASO's press presence reached 16.2 billion, fits up from 8.2 billion in 2019 (+ 97 %). Over three years (reach in 2017 was 2.1 billion), the audience reach of EASO in the press has increased by 671 %.



Significant increase in audio-visual capabilities. Given that the public consumption of information is increasingly dependent on professional-level audio-visual content, EASO carried out eight digital campaigns, including 'We are what we do' and 'Did You Know?'. Two animations were prepared, together with EASO's first-ever corporate video. The agency also updated its corporate identity.

EASO continued to effectively communicate clear and understandable information on the agency's activities to make EASO more relevant to public discourse. Communication activities

were aligned with developments in EASO, as well as those within the EU's broader policy narrative on migration and asylum.

The widespread use of tools such as audio-visual, succinct, and comprehensible content combined with equal use of social and mass media (particularly news wires) enabled EASO to reach a larger audience. As such, EASO recorded yet another strong improvement in the reach of its communication products including EASO's operations and its asylum trends/data products. Press audience reach for 2020 was 16.2 billion (8.2 billion in 2019).

In addition to a marked increase in reach on social media (+113 %), the growing recognition of EASO was also manifested in an increase in press requests and queries from the general public.

EASO also organised a thematic workshop with other EU agencies to ensure a synergistic approach to video production.

To ensure a smooth transition to its new mandate and to keep connected

with its audiences in a more visually effective manner, EASO underwent an informal rebranding process throughout 2020. The new visual elements contained dynamic circles and lines representing EASO's colours and the connection with its stakeholders, symbolising interaction, and connection.

In terms of event organisation, EASO quickly adapted to the realities of COVID-19, resulting in minimal disruption to service provision and delivery. Major examples include the launch of the EASO Asylum Report 2020, which was the most successful to date both in terms of attendance and media reach, the Consultative Forum, and numerous webinars.

Concerning internal communications, EASO staff members were kept up to date on developments in the areas of asylum and migration in the EU as well as on developments, instructions, or advice in light of the continued spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this latter regard, dedicated internal communication tools were deployed to ensure that all staff were kept fully informed.



7. GOVERNANCE



In 2020, EASO continued to take the necessary actions to ensure the strengthening of its internal governance and management systems. The new EASO organisational structure, which entered into force on 1 January 2020 and was amended on 4 September 2020, represented a decisive step in preparing for the agency's bolstered role in the implementation of the CEAS.

Essentially, the new structure also factored in the human and financial resources required to reinforce the internal governance of EASO. To this end, a targeted effort was made to substantially strengthen the sectors responsible for corporate planning, monitoring, and reporting; internal and ex-post controls, risk management; legal affairs; and quality management.

On 3 February 2020, an Executive Director Decision was adopted on the establishment of the internal controls and the ex-post controls function in EASO. The main role of this function is to advise on the state of play of internal control systems of EASO by issuing reports with recommendations for improving processes and procedures and promoting sound financial management. A Manual for Fraud Risk Management was also published in April 2020, serving as guidance on

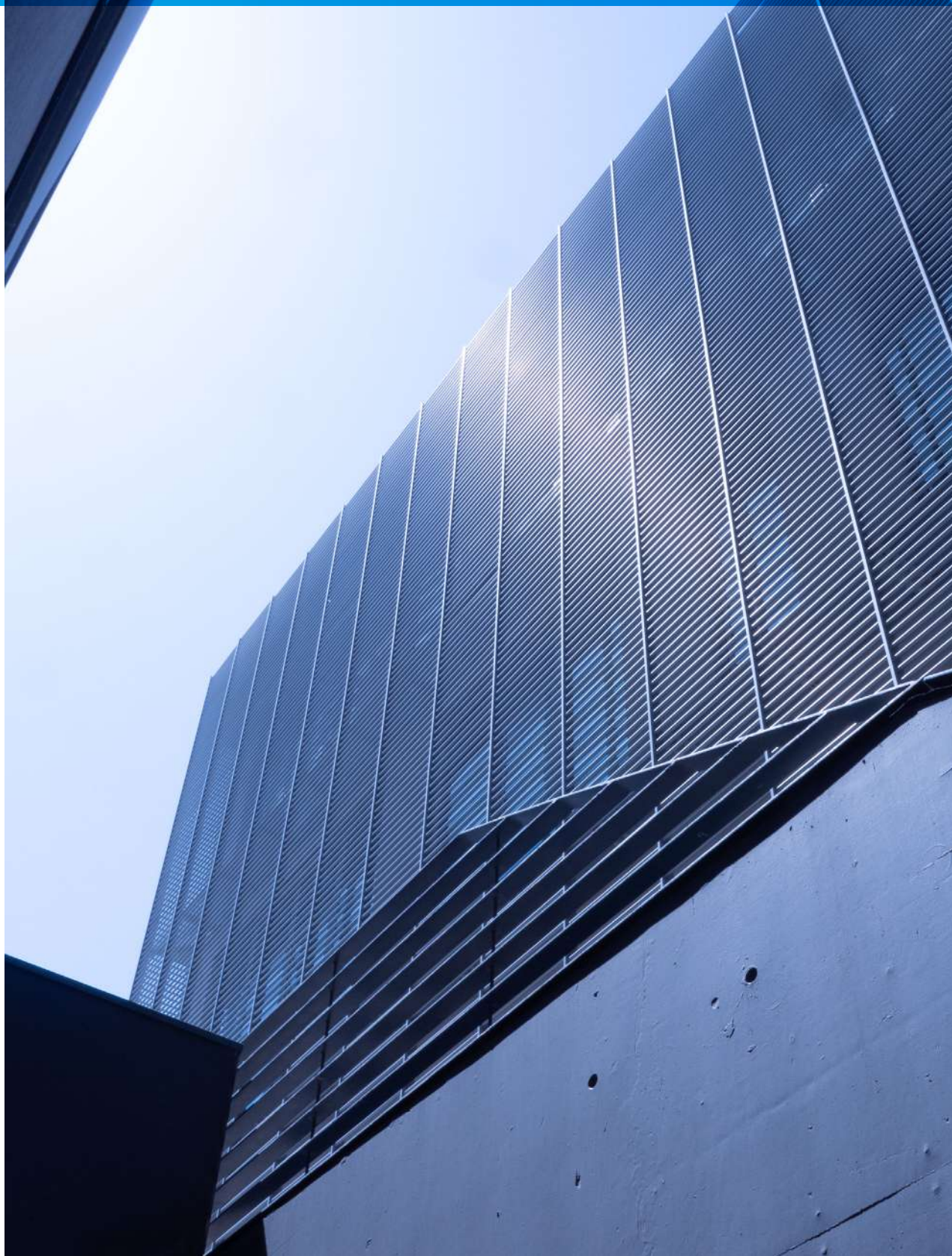
the identification and assessment of fraud risks. It set the scene for the development of the EASO Anti-Fraud Strategy 2020-2022, including the Fraud Risk Register Action Plan, which was adopted by the Management Board on 6 July 2020.

On 26 October 2020, the Internal Control Framework Monitoring Criteria and Internal Control Self-Assessment Methodology for 2020-2021 was also adopted. A revised Risk Management Manual was also introduced on 15 December 2020. The manual carefully outlines the roles, responsibilities, and necessary steps required for running an effective risk management procedure, covering all domains and aspects of management.

Several important procedures were also adopted during the year, notably the EASO Internal Structure and Rules of Procedure and the standard operating procedure on drafting, reviewing and approving governance and decision-making documents, together with an Executive Director Decision on the use of the Paperless System and Electronic Signatures. This is an important step in improving on administration practices in EASO and efficiency gains.

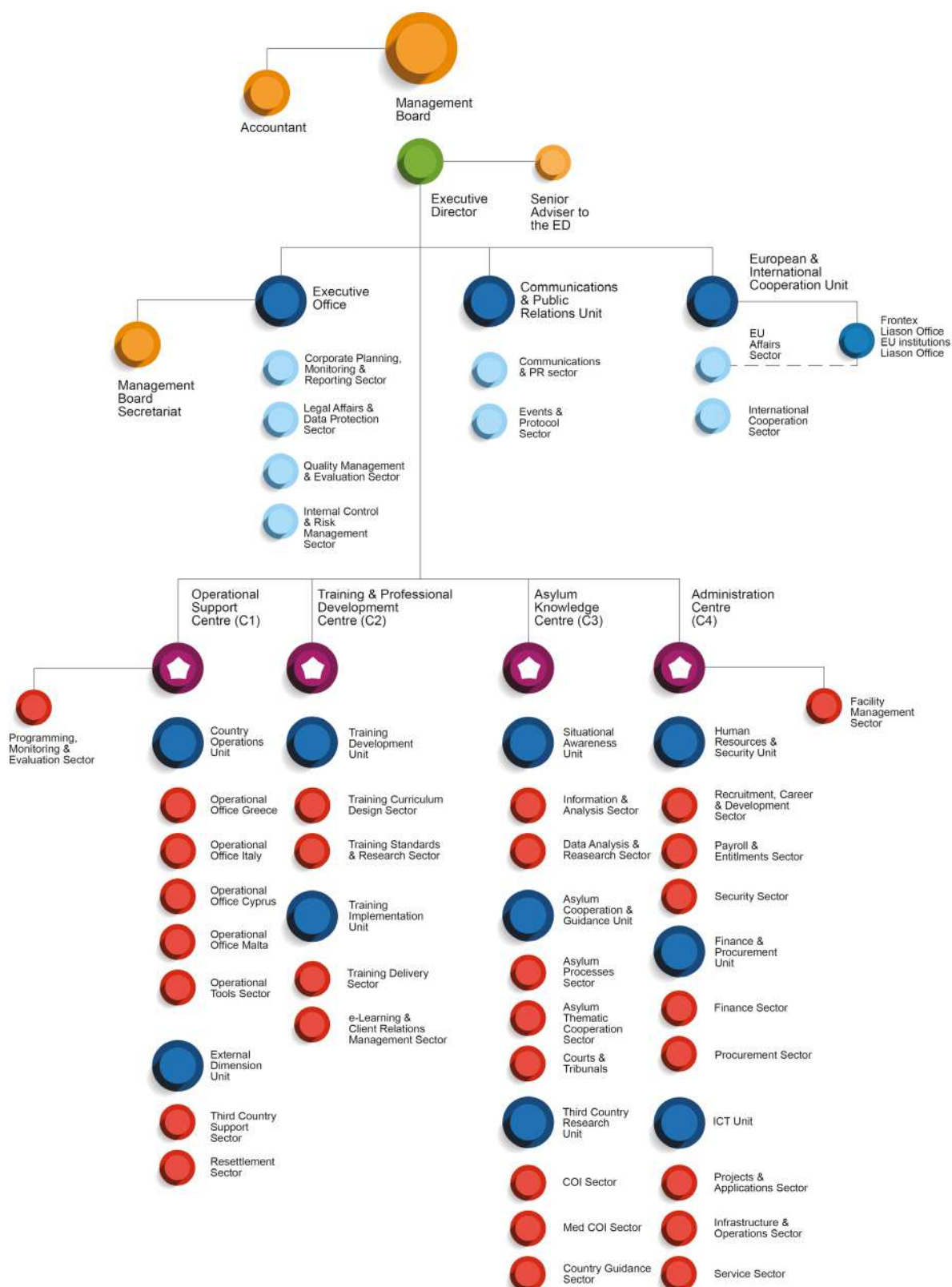


ANNEXES



A.1

EASO organisational chart



A.2

EASO budget in 2020

Table A.1: Budget execution of Commitment Appropriations (CA) per fund source

Budget Title	Fund Source	CA budgeted (€)	CA implemented (€)	CA (%)
Title 1 -Staff expenditure	C1	33,731,661.00	31,068,444.16	92.10
	C4	15,291.24	13,526.50	88.46
	C5	2,986.73		0.00
	C8	1,950,030.02	1,253,972.46	64.31
Total Title 1		35,699,968.99	32,335,943.12	90.58
Title 2 – Infrastructure and operating expenditure	C1	14,514,869.00	13,442,931.63	92.61
	C4	19,880.33		0.00
	C8	4,193,989.34	3,729,866.49	88.93
	R0	10,213.40	1,000.00	9.79
Total Title 2		18,738,952.07	17,173,798.12	91.65
Title 3 – Operational expenditure	C1	75,826,470.00	73,533,607.97	96.98
	C4	39,426.00	20,168.00	51.15
	C5	7,631.33	6,499.00	85.16
	C8	17,143,871.66	14,676,419.45	85.61
	R0	17,176,950.94	2,160,470.17	12.58
Total Title 3		110,194,349.93	90,397,164.59	82.03
Title 4 – Other external projects	R0	1,146,996.52	1,120,368.90	97.68
Total Title 4		1,146,996.52	1,120,368.90	97.68

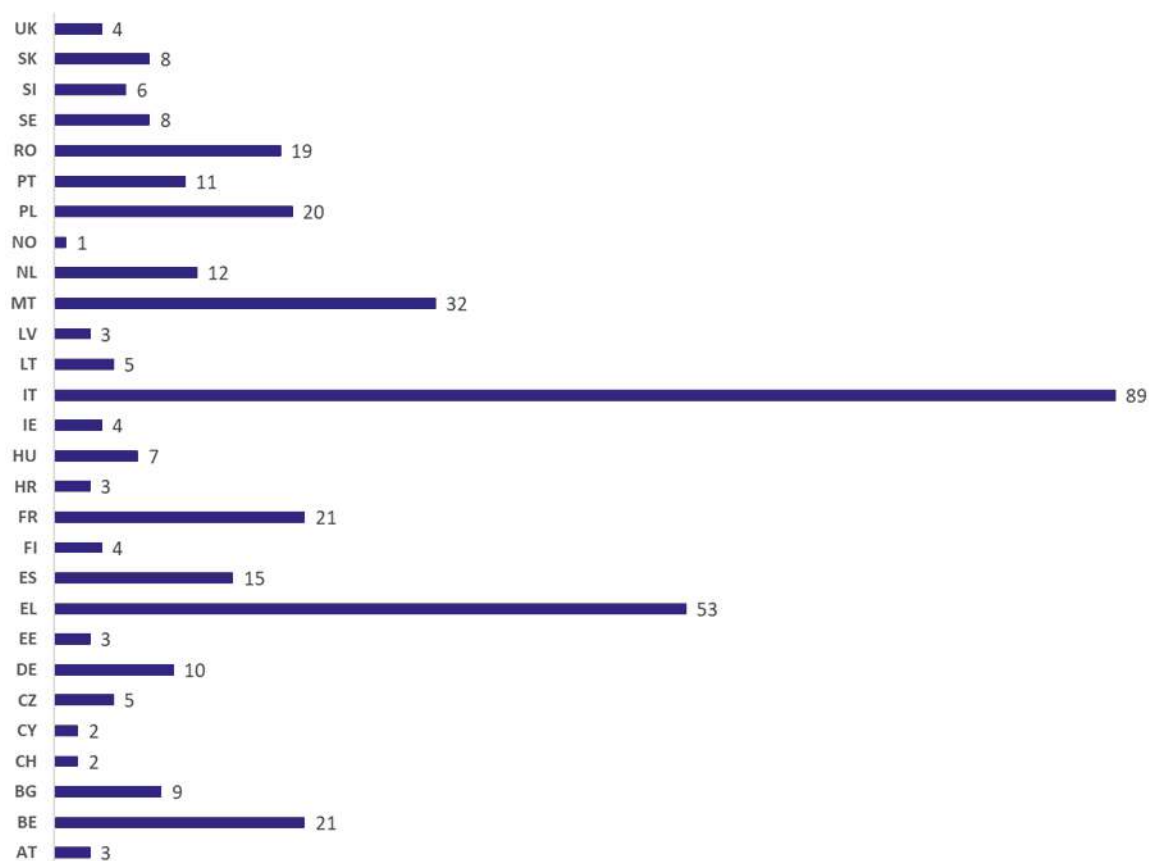
Table A.2: Budget execution of Payment Appropriations (CA) per fund source

Budget Title	Fund Source	PA budgeted (€)	PA implemented (€)	PA (%)
Title 1 -Staff expenditure	C1	33,731,661.00	29,881,136.19	88.58
	C4	15,291.24	13,348.92	87.30
	C5	2,986.73		0.00
	C8	1,950,030.02	1,253,972.46	64.31
Total Title 1		35,699,968.99	31,148,457.57	87.25
Title 2 – Infrastructure and operating expenditure	C1	14,514,869.00	7,903,171.55	54.45
	C4	19,880.33		0.00
	C8	4,193,989.34	3,729,866.49	88.93
	R0	10,213.40		0.00
Total Title 2		18,738,952.07	11,633,038.04	62.08
Title 3 – Operational expenditure	C1	75,826,470.00	62,602,122.17	82.56
	C4	39,426.00	20,168.00	51.15
	C5	7,631.33	7,599.00	99.58
	C8	0.00		0.00
	R0	17,176,950.94	860,287.74	5.01
Total Title 3		93,050,478.27	63,490,176.91	68.23
Title 4 – Other external projects	R0	1,146,996.52	479,464.45	41.80
Total Title 4		1,146,996.52	479,464.45	41.80

A.3

EASO Staff

Graph A.1: National representation of EASO staff as of 31 December 2020



Graph A.2: Distribution of EASO staff as of 31 December 2020 by gender

